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2007 South Asian International Film Festival Expansion to Seven Days Reels in a Record Breaking 8500 Attendees!

The festival concludes its seven-day run with a full house on Closing Night, consistently growing every year— this year with a 12% increase in audience participation since 2006!

New York, NY – October 18, 2007 – The Fourth Annual - 2007 South Asian International Film Festival presented by CONTINENTAL AIRLINES and by official ‘Founding Sponsor’ SANA, running a full week for the first time, concluded on Tuesday, October 9 with a full house turning out for the North American premiere of director Bhavna Talwar’s **DHARM**. Talwar’s directorial debut about the soul searching facing an orthodox Hindu Brahmin priest adopting a Muslim baby unbeknownst to him at the time drew wide praise from audience members.

“It is absolutely amazing how fast SAIFF has grown into becoming the international destination for emerging South Asian filmmakers here in New York City,” said Shilen Amin, SAIFF’s President. “Can you believe we are only 4 years old and we have already served over 27,000 guests! That is insane! The future is very bright for SAIFF and this is just the beginning of many great things to come, next year marks our 5th Year Anniversary and we can’t wait.”

The festival kicked off on Wednesday, October 3 with nearly 800 guests attending to watch the North American premiere of director Manish Acharya’s **LOINS OF PUNJAB PRESENTS** at the AMC/Loews Cineplex in Lincoln Square. The film is set over three days, in Edison, New Jersey, where five Indian-Americans and one Jewish Indophile participate in the first DESI IDOL, a Bollywood-style singing contest sponsored by a pork millionaire. At the premiere, the film’s director and the ensemble cast, including Ajay Naidu, Michael Raimondi, Seema Rahmani, Darshan Jariwala, Anuvab Pal, and Samrat Chakrabarti appeared for the screening and participated in a post-film question and answer session.

“Our Opening Night at SAIFF was a sold-out 700+ person screening,” said Acharya. “For a filmmaker, it is always great to see a packed and enthusiastic house, and SAIFF delivered. LOINS OF

PUNJAB PRESENTS is a huge success in India, and the American premiere at SAIFF has provided a wonderful platform for launching it in the United States. We look forward to continuing our relationship with this festival and its organizers in the years to come."

Before the screening, the festival presented its Lifetime Achievement Award to Shabana Azmi, who also appeared in *Loins of Punjab Presents*, for her commitment to independent cinema throughout her illustrious career. Through a video acceptance speech a week prior when receiving the SAIFF award due to a scheduling conflict which prevented her from being able to attend on Opening Night, Ms. Azmi graciously accepted the award and thanked and addressed the audience that evening for coming out to support her new project. She has not shied away from working with first time directors, and has advocated on behalf of working with young independent filmmakers to other professionals in the film industry, remarked on her part in the film and her regard for the immense talent of debut director Manish Acharya. "I've never done anything as crazy as *Loins of Punjab Presents*. It's quite a delightful film. Manish is an insanely talented filmmaker. He has talent in the same measures as Farhan Akhtar. I am really happy the film has been appreciated."

Festivalgoer Manjit K. Kalirao, Esq. saw eight of the almost 50 shorts, documentaries, and feature films from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. "I attended the South Asian International Film Festival this year for the first time this year. I thought it was very well organized. The staff was friendly and helpful. I went to only one after party at Opia but I had a good time," said Kalirao. "I also thought DHARM was fantastic. My friend said she was crying half the time. Good luck to them on their case. [Meanwhile] I look forward to next year"

That court case is the lawsuit filed by director Talwar in the Mumbai High Court alleging that the Film Federation of India's selection process for India's entry to the Academy Awards was "biased." DHARM lost by one vote in the FII jury voting process to director Vidhu Vinod Chopra's "Eklayva". Talwar, who was scheduled to be at the festival for a question and answer session could not attend as the court demanded the FFI respond to the allegations in a hearing scheduled for October 10 in Mumbai.

"It is unfortunate that Bhavna Talwar or her producer could not attend the closing night premiere of DHARM, especially after the buzz her film generated by receiving critical acclaim from the closing night of the 2007 World Cinema of India presentation at Cannes to the prestigious GUCCI nomination at the Venice Film Festival this year," said SAIFF Festival Director, Manjri Srivastava. "However, we applaud her for standing up to the Federation and its practice of selecting mainstream Bollywood Hindi language films while ignoring independent films which deserve an equal chance in the selection process."

The festival's Thursday, October 4 feature film, John Jeffcoat's **OUTSOURCED**, a story revolving around a Seattle customer service manager's experience training his replacement when his department is outsourced to India, has been picked up as a half-hour sitcom pilot by a major television network station. Conceived by director John Jeffcoat, and co-written by Executive Producer George Wing, *Outsourced* is inspired by Jeffcoat's own experiences traveling in Nepal and India. "The terrific response to *Outsourced* at SAIFF tells us that we should seek a wider audience for this material, and we're thrilled to say we have an opportunity to do so on television – 'NBC' is developing it as a half-hour comedy. We hope to give our Indian call center characters room to explore their own storylines on this new show," said Wing.

On Friday, October 5, the festival commenced its award winning documentary series including a widely acclaimed film funded by 'SHOWTIME NETWORKS,' Mohammed Naqvi's **SHAME**.

The film documents the incredible true story of one woman who stood up to Pakistan's decaying judicial system after a group of tribal elders sentenced her to a gang rape as penance for her younger brother's misdeeds. Naqvi previously won a Special Jury Prize at the Durban International Film Festival and the Women in Leadership Award at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival. Naqvi, who was on hand for a question and answer session after the screening, commented on his experience at the festival. "I really enjoyed the selection of films at SAIFF this year- they demonstrated a cultural specificity that was somehow appreciated by all audiences, not just South Asian," said Naqvi.

On Friday, October 5 and Saturday, October 6, the festival was honored to present the North American premiere of two films directed by luminaries affiliated with the prestigious Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Tripurari Sharan's **WOH SUBAH KIDHAR NIKAL GAYI?(Whither the Dawn?)** and Somnath Sen's **DIPLOMA**. "SAIFF is the premier showground for cinema from South Asia thus it is an honor that our films are playing at SAIFF. Especially, since both the films were made for our acting students using resources of our film school (FTII)," said Sen. "It is thus an amazing opportunity for us to showcase the talent of these young actors at such a platform provided by SAIFF. New York City is the world capital of the arts and it is thus a perfect venue for the U.S. premiere of both these films."

Other highlights of the festival included Best Feature Film award winner at the 2007 New York International Independent Film and Video Festival, director Ashok Kumar Nanda's **RIVAAZ**, a film documenting a practice in some villages in India where women are routinely sold to men by their family members with a law and order system turning the other cheek by failing to consider this a major issue within the country. Also, legendary Bengali filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh's **DOSAR**, featuring three of the best in Bengali cinema in Ghosh, actor Prosenjit Chatterjee, and actress Konkona Sen Sharma, left audiences conflicted by their own reactions toward caring for an unfaithful spouse traumatically injured in an accident.

"Again this year the festival showcased many talented newcomers who have identified how instrumental the SAIFF platform has become in order to help them spring board their work into the mass South Asian and mainstream markets" said Asifa Tirmizi, SAIFF Chairperson. "With steady growth every year, filmmakers can rest assured that the right audiences are watching their films – a new generation that can actually create influence and help the filmmaker build greater word-of-mouth in promoting their upcoming projects."

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About SAIFF:

The South Asian International Film Festival is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to supporting established and emerging artists from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. With a focus on dynamic, visionary independent cinema, SAIFF aims to bring communities together

to support these artists and unite in celebration of a common spirit. For more information, visit: www.saiff.org

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About SANA:

America's first Arts, Lifestyle, and Entertainment organization dedicated to showcasing the best in emerging South Asian talent. Since 1998, the SANA brand has become synonymous with quality programming for urban professionals, attracting the "who's who" of their respective industries and providing members and guests alike with unparalleled access to freshest talent of upcoming filmmakers, fashion designers, visual artists, musicians, DJ's, and performing artists. For more information, visit: www.sanaonline.com.