

FC2 talks movies with the organisers and filmmakers presenting
at the PSBT film festival of documentaries

OPEN FRAME

The Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) is holding its annual festival, Open Frame, from September 9 to 13 this month. In its eleventh year, this year the festival is screening films that have been produced by PSBT in the last year, as well as a retrospective of PSBT films through the years. In addition, workshops, talks and discussions with filmmakers, critics and theorists will take place through the five days, and an intensive film making workshop, with modules on screenwriting (by Paromita Vohra), camera (by Avijit Mukul Kishore), sound (by Suresh Rajamani) and editing (by Sankalp Meshram) will take place from September 13 to 17.

We speak to Ridhima Mehra, the Senior Programme Manager at PSBT, who has helped make many of these films and who talks of the aim behind the festival. "Our aim is three fold. Firstly, we want to support independent voices of film makers in India. Secondly, we want to bring to light issues of human rights, environment etc. Film is a great medium to put across messages of social change, and if people watch these films and are somehow affected to think more about or do something towards these issues, then we feel that we have achieved something. Thirdly, and in the same vein, we want to explore how film as a form can be used for various purposes, and how the language of film is different from other media."

Paromita Vohra's film, *Morality TV and the Loving Jihad* (2007), revolving around the reportage of Operation Majnu in 2005, is one of the films to be screened at the festival as



A Drop of Sunshine

part of the retrospective (September 11). She tells us, that while the incident the film covers was many years ago "the analysis and conclusions drawn from them are very relevant today". She elaborates, "That is the power of a documentary film, since it isn't informing people of the news, but rather analysing it, it remains relevant for a long time. I chose to do this film because I was interested in the language and aesthetics of reality television and sting operations; the economic angles, and the prejudices that come into news reportage. And I still find that they are very similar today. If I look at the reporting of Operation Majnu and of Anna Hazare's campaign today, I don't see much of a difference." In addition to the screening of her film, Paromita will also be



Morality TV and the Loving Jihad



Roots of Love

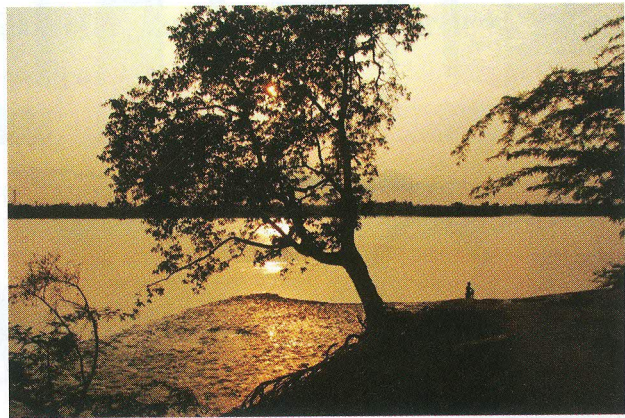
conducting the screenwriting module during the intensive film making workshop.

The screenings of films made in 2010-2011 include, among many others, *A Drop of Sunshine* by Aparna Sanyal (screened on September 12), *Roots of Love* by Harjant Gill (screened on September 9), and *Online and Available* by Samreen Farooqui and Shabani Hassanwalia (screened on September 12). *A Drop of Sunshine* deals with schizophrenia, charting the life of those suffering from the disease. Aparna talks of her experiences of making the film, and the conclusions she has reached, "My experiences, through the making of the film, have me convinced that just a psychiatric diagnosis of something like schizophrenia is inadequate to both understand and treat the condition. I have come to believe that a very thin line separates sanity from insanity. That there is a tipping over point for each of us - in varying degrees, and it is reached for different reasons. Healing and recovery too, therefore, is a different process for each person."

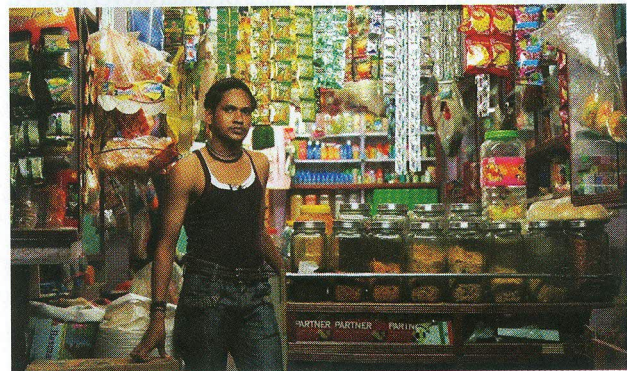
Harjant Gill's film deals with the connection between Sikhism and hair, and how it has long been one of the symbols of the community. The trend of Sikh men cutting their hair, then, has impacted not just individuals and families, but the entire faith. Harjant's film is born out of personal experience. Though he was re-inspired to make the film after reading a *New York Times* article, the desire to explore this phenomenon had been with him for some time, especially since he had experienced it himself. He elaborates, "I can relate to the topic, because I was born and grew-up in Chandigarh, with unshorn hair, in a traditional Sikh family. I didn't cut my hair until I was 14, when my family was getting ready to migrate to California. Because I was so young, when I cut my hair, for me personally the transition was not as emotionally traumatising. However, my grandfather who is a turbaned Sikh felt betrayed by the act, and never fully forgave me (and my brother) for cutting our hair. In his mind, we are no longer full Sikhs. But my parents knew that upon arriving in California, we would have problems assimilating in high school, and we might get bullied if we kept our turbans."

Samreen Farooqui and Shabani Hassanwalia's *Online and Available* deals with questions of social networking and connectivity. The two directors tell us about their reasons behind making the film and the Facebook phenomenon, "When Facebook took over our lives, we were a bit taken aback by the exhibitionism and voyeurism of the medium. We were sceptical. We thought 'this is unnatural'. Unreal. We wanted to know why we do what we do online." The documentary, we learn, was two years in-the-making, "While we were shooting, everything changed. How we experienced technology, and how we lived it. *Online and Available* tries to capture that seamlessness between our online and offline lives." ■

(Open Frame 2011 will take place from September 9 to 13 at India International Centre. The intensive film making workshop will take place from September 14 to 17 at the same venue. Turn to Daily Listings, pages 135 to 154 for more details. Nearest Metro Station: Jor Bagh, Yellow Line.)



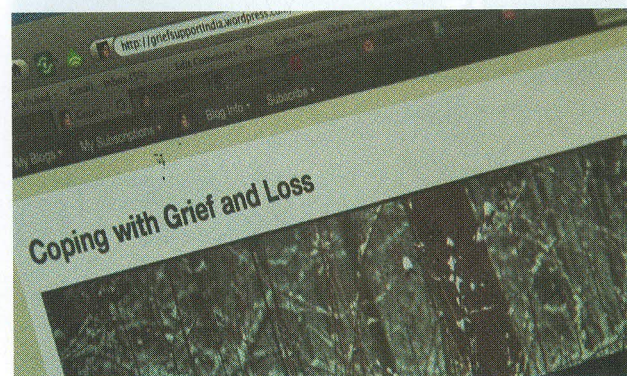
Earth Witness



Vertical City



The Ghetto Girl



Online and Available

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