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Rajat Kapoor's Aakhon Dekhi kicks off Canada's top South Asian festival MOSAIC 2014

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By Nita Balani

TORONTO: The ninth edition of North America's largest multi-disciplinary arts and culture free annual festival, Mosaic 2014, kicked off with a fantastic film showcase under the Mosaic International South Asian Film Festival (MISAFF) banner on Aug 7 and will continue until Aug 16.

Raymond Ablack of *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, was the featured star of MISAFF.

The opening night feature film was the Canadian premiere of Rajat Kapoor's (of *Monsoon*, *Midnight's Children* fame) film "Aakhon Dekhi". It was extremely well received by the audience who were pleased to have the actor, director and producer in attendance.

The film is set in the crowded lanes of Old Delhi and is about the life, experiences and thoughts of the elder brother in a joint family. Rajat Kapoor plays the younger brother, and as he said in the Q & A which followed that much of the background and characters are from his childhood where he was brought up in similar surroundings.



Rajat Kapoor flanked by Film Festival co-director Anya Mackenzie (left) and Mosaic festival director Anu Vittal (right).

Rajat says “Although I am satisfied with the film’s success, Indian art film scene has a long way to go. The growth in that sector is minimal as far as box office collections go as compared to commercial Bollywood films. To me success means completing the film for the handful of people who are close to me and whose opinion matters the most; I am not in competition with any commercial film.”

The film has an unexpected and poignant ending and the characters are beautifully drawn out with very subtly woven traditional issues like the stress and strain of living in a joint family. It was Rajat Kapoor’s first foray into the Canadian film scene and we hope to see more of this promising actor/director’s works here in the future.



MISAFF director Arshad Khan in his element on the opening night.

Lakshmi, which won awards at the recently held Reel World film festival, is a movie on child prostitution and one girl's true story of not letting her spirit be broken by the system. It is based on an actual ground breaking case in the realm of Indian legal history and is an extremely inspiring story with great social value.

Other feature films included were Hank and Asha, a love story of cross cultural romance, Noor addressing Pakistan's transgender issues, Omar about a Palestinian man's love who lives across the forbidden wall and betrayal, Anima State – a film about contemporary Pakistan told through metaphors and symbols about a man trying to find his salvation, Heer Ranjha a romantic story of self-actualization of a young man in Pakistan, Gangs of Tooting Broadway about the Sri Lankan gangs of Tooting, London UK and more.



Ravi Patel, Arshad Khan and Anya Mackenzie 2.

The line-up of documentary films selected was wide ranging and impressive. Gemini award winning producer Cyrus Sundar Singh's hard hitting documentary, *The Conflicted Samaritan*, is a thought provoking account of a post earthquake Haiti narrated through the eyes of a tormented Samaritan, physiotherapist and emergency aid worker, Mike Landry. The film poses the question in our minds of whether the emergency aid workers who go in disaster zones have the right to play God or not often having to make split second decisions of who lives and who does not and the conflicting views on quality of life and end of life issues.

Other films included *Secret Trial 5*, a film by Indo-Canadian producer Amar, about the Canadian government's use of security certificates and detention without charges which is a highly controversial social issue here in Canada. It won Emerging Filmmaker of the Year award at its premiere recently at the Hot Docs film festival. Other films in the festival included *When I Walk*, *Nous Avions* about a Pakistani immigrant family and their crisis, and *Continuous Journey* about the Komagata Maru tragedy. In all there were more than 20 films showcased.



The Dr Cabbie actor Vinay Virmani (left) with Ravi Patel.

The closing night had a chat session with actor Vinay Virmani on his much anticipated upcoming movie Dr. Cabbie (also starring Kunal Nayyar of Big Bang Theory, Adrienne Palicki and Isabel Kaif- Katrina Kaif's sister) followed by the closing night delightful comedy based on true footage of Ravi Patel's journey in finding the queen of all his dreams. It was a modern day film with Ravi Patel's parents, sister and entire family involved in assisting him in his quest to meet his soul-mate. A universally appealing theme to parents anxious to get their 30 something children married. It was followed by a very lively Q & A session with Ravi.

The MOSAIC extravaganza continues with an exquisite art exhibition of famous artists, which was attended by both the consul-generals of India and Pakistan, and will conclude with the al fresco festival on Aug 15th and 16th at the Celebration Square in Mississauga with food, music and dance with several world class artists including Karsh Kale (who has performed at the White House) and Bollywood playback singer, Rekha Bharadwaj, who will be flying in from Mumbai. There will also be an indie music section Rock the Coliseum. Check out the website, www.mosaicfest.com for more details.

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