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SSAFF 2014 Awards Announced

Sri Lankan Filmmaker Receives Tasveer Emerald Award

First-Ever Jury Award to Cannes 2014 Selection *TITLI*

SEATTLE, WA (November 11, 2014) – The 9th annual Seattle South Asian Film Festival closed Sunday evening with a screening of *WITH YOU, WITHOUT YOU*, the latest award-winning film from Sri Lanka's pre-eminent filmmaker **Prasanna Vithanage**.

Vithanage was also honored for his contribution to Sri Lankan cinema during the Festival's Closing Night Reception, receiving the **Tasveer Emerald Award**. This occasional award is bestowed upon exceptional prolific and influential filmmakers and was first given in 2011 to the prolific and accomplished actress Deepthi Naval for her contribution to Indian cinema.

"I am proud to receive the Tasveer Emerald Award, and impressed with the richness and variety of films and filmmakers that Tasveer brings to Seattle," says Vithanage, who was unable to attend the Festival due to last-minute scheduling conflicts. "Through their organization, many important conversations are being brought to this community."

This year's Festival welcomed eighteen visiting filmmakers – more than any SSAFF in history. Along with 27 screenings, two educational panels, co-presented with Washington Filmworks and The Film School, brought the public together with attending filmmakers from a variety of countries and backgrounds to discuss the state of international filmmaking today.

"Throughout the Festival, audiences were enthusiastic and full of bold questions, actively participating in rich discussions with filmmakers from all over the world. We are so inspired by the support the Festival has received from the local film community, audiences, filmmakers, Washington Filmworks, and The Film School," says Festival executive director Rita Meher.

A special award for **Outstanding Film in a Social Category** was awarded during the Festival to SSAFF 2014 selection ***FANDRY*** by the Seattle chapter of **Pratham**, the largest education non-profit in India. Pratham is dedicated to improving the quality of education in India, ensuring access to all people regardless of caste – a subject eloquently addressed in the beautiful and gentle *FANDRY* through the story of a young lower-caste man in a small village.

"My time at SSAFF felt like an extended family, and that was truly heartwarming," says *FANDRY* producer Vivek Kajaria. "The Seattle film market is vibrant and inquisitive -- true players in the film scene. I'm honored

to be recognized for this important story on caste discrimination; it shows that the Festival and Pratham really have their heart and values in the right place.”

For the first time in 2014, a **SSAFF Jury Award** was given. The jury, staffed with local film scholars, critics, and writers, was commissioned to select the film with the best storytelling and strongest alignment with the mission of Tasveer. Indian director Kanu Behl’s feature-length debut **TITLI** (2014) was their selection, and so the SSAFF 2014 Jury Award will join the other accolades of this vibrant drama.

Says Behl, “It’s amazing to be given this honor. I had such a wonderful and fulfilling time at the Festival – attending screenings and participating on the educational panels – and hope the city welcomes me back next time, with as warm a hug as this one!”

“*TITLI* not only embodies Tasveer’s mission to engage and empower the community through thought-provoking art and conversation; it also clearly demonstrates SSAFF 2014’s theme of *Stories that dare . . .*,” according to a jury statement.

The **SSAFF 2014 Audience Awards** in three categories were also announced at the Closing Night Reception. Taking home the honor for **Best Narrative** is the Bengali mystery-drama **TEENKAHON** (“Three Obsessions”) from director Baudhayan Mukherji.

Says Mukherji, “SSAFF has been a dream. The ovation following our film was humbling, the Q&A exhilarating, and the praises heaped on *TEENKAHON* unexpected. A big thank you to the outstanding efforts of the SSAFF team. I have won a coveted award, but in a way I won much more: lovely friends, a new-found love for a new city, tremendous respect for a learned and a wonderful movie-going audience, memories to last a lifetime, and -- above all -- recognition of the people for an independently produced film. What more can a debutant filmmaker ask for?”

The beautiful and surprising **JAYA** from director Puja Maewal is the audience’s choice for **Best Short Film**. Director Maewal was in attendance at her screening and is currently developing *JAYA* into a feature-length film.

For **Best Documentary**, SSAFF audiences chose **ARE YOU LISTENING!** by director Kamar Ahmad Simon, which follows the struggles of a coastal Bangladeshi community as they strive to recover following the deadly cyclone of May 2009.

The 10th annual Seattle South Asian Film Festival is slated for autumn 2015. Information on Tasveer’s other annual arts and culture festivals can be found at <http://said.tasveer.org/> and <http://aaina.tasveer.org/>.

About SSAFF and Tasveer

Running Friday, October 31st through Sunday, November 9th, SSAFF 2014 included 24 feature films and 17 shorts representing nine countries to inspire, inform, and provoke audiences throughout the Festival.

For more information, please visit <http://ssaff.tasveer.org/2014/>.

Founded in 2002 by Rita Meher and Farah Nousheen, Tasveer strives to curate thought-provoking artistic work of South Asians through films, forums, visual art, and performances that engage and empower the community.

Tasveer presents three keystone events each year: AAINA, a women-focused arts gathering (spring); South Asian International Documentary Festival (spring), and Seattle South Asian Film Festival (fall).

The purpose of Tasveer is to increase awareness of South Asian countries and cultures from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; to provide a platform for South Asian filmmakers and artists; to initiate dialog that bridges communities; to provide an alternative to corporate media; and to employ independent South Asian film as a vehicle to give voice to marginalized communities.

For more information, please visit www.tasveer.org.