Dear All,

This is our third and final issue for the year 2013. We are elated to share news of four successful shows of our travelling exhibition, ‘Lived Stories Everyday Lives’ and also present vignettes from the recently concluded Film South Asia, the biennial documentary film festival that showcases work from the region.

The first show of the Hri travelling exhibition opened in July 2013 at Punjab Kala Bhawan in Chandigarh. Travelling to the hinterland from the capital city it experienced a warm reception in Daudpur, a village in the heart of Ludhiana district. From Panjab, the exhibition travelled east to Kathmandu, and then to Dhaka. The exhibition witnessed more than six hundred visitors and our visitors’ book recorded more than 350 enthusiastic responses in English, Panjabi, Nepali and Bengali. Encouraged by the response, plans to host these exhibitions in other cities in Nepal and Bangladesh are underway. We are also planning to take this exhibition to Sri Lanka and Afghanistan in the coming months.

With the arrival of the new year, we hope to kick off the next phase of Archives Southasia and also begin work on new projects.

The Hri Team
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Everyday Extraordinary</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archivists take centre-stage</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southasia comes to Daudpur</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counting them in</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memories in Black and White</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hri at the Mini Recreatrale in Ouagadagou, June</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FILM SOUTHASIA 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young Southasian Dreamers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie Music</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Host a TFSA Package</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
July 2013 saw an interesting show come to Chandigarh in the form of *Lived Stories, Everyday Lives: Images from Private Collection across Southasia* held at the Punjab Kala Bhavan. The exhibition, a joint venture of the Hri Institute for Southasian Research and Exchange, Kathmandu (Nepal), and Panjab Digital Library (PDL), Chandigarh, showcased some 30 digital image reproductions of photographs, prints and artefacts from various private and institutional archival collections to present us with an idea of the range of archival enterprising coming into being in the region. Not only this, what the exhibition also sought to convey through its careful curation was the range of trajectories of Southasian histories captured in the images as well as of the inexhaustible potential of the archival idea to collect, collate and document virtually anything. A highlight of the exhibition was the selection of images exclusively dealing with life in Panjab brought in by the PDL, a pioneering archival enterprise in India dedicating to digitizing vast swathes of Panjabi history in print, the scale of which belies the fact that the archive is the labour of love of only a handful of passionately dedicated individuals.

Collision with history

To shape the infinite ideas that could inform archival practices, the curators focused on images that conveyed a sense of everyday lives from various parts of Southasia. This ‘everyday’ sought to be conveyed in the images however was not restricted to one register of life; not just the urban everyday but also the ‘timeless’ everyday of the Vedda in Sri Lanka from the Threeblindmen Collection, Colombo, or John Claude White’s famous photographs of the Tibetan everyday captured during the Younghusband Expedition to Lhasa at the turn of the century and much more. My personal favourite in this regard was an extraordinary photograph of a young Mukti Bahini (Bangladeshi Liberation Army of 1971) soldier gun in hand at dawn peacefully smoking away on the bank of river contemplating the day/life/history/destiny ahead. Suddenly history and the everyday collide in the most astonishing manner that leaves us wordless about the poetics of the sudden eruption of the ordinary in the extraordinary. At the other end of the spectrum, was the image of ‘Rehana’s vest’ from the Liberation War Museum in Dhaka which sought to convey the brutality of the everyday during the events of the Bangladeshi Liberation War (Rehana, a daughter of Mukti Bahini warrior, had been killed by Pakistani soldiers). Here is when the ordinary can be continuously extraordinary.

A considerable part of the exhibition was dedicated to images from Southasian middle class lives archived mainly by the families themselves depicting rituals of childhood play or more centrally variants of that important rite-of-passage of social mobility in the colonial and early postcolonial period in South Asia – higher education, going abroad to study and women’s education. Such images form part of the ‘canonical’ narrative about modernity in Southasia – colonial or state-sponsored modernity aimed at creating ‘apt’ modern or...
national subjects through education. From within the ‘domestic’ or ‘private’ sphere of images a set of photos depicting Panjabi girls holidaying in hill stations in the c.1960s stands out for going against the ritual ceremonialism and formality of the other images. These images digitized by the PDL from a private collection catch the everyday in moments of leisure, gendered leisure, gendered exotic leisure that always carries with it a hint of romance and mystery. The images of girls holidaying in the hills move back and forth between the ‘forensic’ evidence of the ‘Real’ in the photograph on the one hand and the fantasy imagery of Bombay films of the 1960s onwards featuring many Panjabi girls holidaying and romancing in the hills on the other.

The other pole of such intimate domesticity is captured by the reproduction of fragments of a letter the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote to his wife Alys from the Hyderabad (Sind) jail where he was incarcerated in the early 1950s for his role in Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. As usual the trope of ‘man of history writing informally to family’ is invoked where the letter veers between Faiz speaking about history, never forgetting his role as man of historical destiny, and informal address to his near-and-dear ones. Here, the domestic is anything but leisured bearing the twin burden of historical fame and political tensions. Ironically, if Faiz is under the spell of the star of History, the girls, Panjabis like Faiz, are under the spell of another kind of stardom – both enchantments add a swagger to these diverse protagonists of modern Panjabi history.

Challenging hegemony

Beyond this, the exhibition is dotted with unusual gems. The one that caught my eye again came from Panjab – an advertisement about the appearance in Lahore of the female wrestler Veeran Bai and her claim to defeat all male wrestlers (the advertisement appearing in the Panjabi literary magazine Phulwari in its July 1937 issue). Read against some of the images mentioned above and against images advertising fashionable ladies footwear, film posters, of women graduating in higher education and Sikh masculinity in war and engineering an image such as this does end up providing us with glimpses of a very rich cultural matrix through which Panjab emerged into modernity in the early twentieth century. Parallaxes challenging hegemonic commonsense about cultural norms abound (for example, in the case of Veeran, between gender, profession, subalternity to name just three axes of identity amongst many others), but one thing shines through cutting across the Panjab images – the foci from which individuals with a sense of public presence and visibility-worthiness were emerging with full-on onset of modernity were many and challenged earlier grids of the ways in which individuals could accumulate public worth – gender-wise or otherwise.
And this then leads us to the crucial issue of an archival project such as the one undertaken by the Hri Institute to document private collections and institutional collections of a non-hegemonic nature – that in the presence of the images today, in the early twenty-first century, one cannot help but feel the launch way back in time, of trajectories of the desire to be seen and be considered worthy of being seen and appreciated. They might have remained hidden for so long but something tells us that such desires are fast breaking through the cracks of the ‘official’ vision of history and historicity and we are on the verge of being flooded by a tsunami wave of such desires coming our way from all directions.

One congratulates the curatorial team for the craft of their image selection which although relatively ‘superficial’ at first glance in that there is only a handful of images from each archive, they nevertheless manage to convey the richness of the particular collection, that of the richness of visual data available today for the diversities of Southasian histories as well as the rich veins of material that are still to come.

Kaushik Bhaumik is Associate Professor, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

READ ONLINE: http://www.hrisouthasian.org/initiatives/archives-southasia/403-the-everyday-extraordinary-.html?section_id=&category_id=&article_id=403%3Athe-everyday-extraordinary-
"Archivists do the thankless job of keeping the important resources available to researchers. Now it is time to acknowledge their role in knowledge production”, said Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, chief guest at the inauguration of Lived Stories Everyday Lives. Showcasing images from different private collections in Southasia, the exhibition Lived Stories Everyday Lives, brought together images captured by common people, others by amateurs, and some by professionals.

Jointly organised by Hri Institute for Southasian Research and Exchange, Kathmandu (Hri) and Panjab Digital Library (PDL), Chandigarh, the exhibition opened to an enthusiastic response at Punjab Kala Bhawan in Chandigarh. Prof Dhillon lauded the efforts of Hri at co-ordinating of archives in Southasia and PDL of digitization manuscripts and rare books. Remarking on the showcasing of the common thread of lives of ordinary people across Southasia, Prof Dhillon underlined the importance of sharing experiences as preserved in personal archives. He pointed out that history should also be understood beyond iconic events and personalities as common people need to be acknowledged for shaping our culture and lives. He added that archivists seldom come to the forefront as compared with historians, who enjoy the limelight.

Countries in Southasia not only share borders but also histories. Moving beyond borders, unique different images came together in this single exhibition. Over 25 images from different private collections in Southasia were showcased, along with a special section on Panjab, which was curated by the Panjab Digital Library. Through a series of pictorial and textual vignettes—be they graduation photos or studio portraits, post cards or holiday photos—this exhibition attempted to present an understanding of how the past around us. The events and the activities that have shaped our collective consciousness—the so-called big moments of history—are understood here in terms that are accessible to people in a language and framework of their own. This is a tiny effort to look at how everyday lives have been lived, and how they have been chronicled. It is the “small voices of history” that are sought to be brought to the fore here: people who have elided the ‘great’ narratives of history offered through history books, national dailies and the media. Here, postcards, advertisements, calendars, letters, family albums and studio photographs told the stories of everyday lives as well as extraordinary events in the lives of ordinary people.

Sarita Ramamoorthy is the Program Manager, Hri

READ ONLINE: http://hrisouthasian.org/initiatives/archives-southasia/400-archivists-take-centre-stage.html?section_id=&category_id=&article_id=400%3Aarchivists-take-centre-stage
Southasia comes to Daudpur
18-20 July 2013, Daudpur

By Daljit Ami

The old, disused granary of my ancestral home buzzed with activity in the third week of July. Having long been lying empty and decrepit, a fresh coat of paint did wonders to the godown which suddenly became a gallery. The inauguration, with renowned artist Malkit Singh, was an event marked by respect for local elders and their wisdom. With the summer sun dancing on the images, stories of ordinary people from across Southasia came alive in Daudpur. The steady stream of curious visitors was ample evidence of continuing interest, with growing numbers converging on Daudpur, after the word went around.

The septuagenarian artist Singh pointed out that his generation aspired to take exhibitions to villages and with this initiative, it has become a reality. He stressed that this is an historic event happening in rural Panjab. Laxmi Murthy, Director, Hri Southasia for Research and Exchange and Davinder Pal Singh, Executive Director of Panjab Digital Library (PDL) pondered over the idea of bringing such exhibitions to rural areas. Laxmi said that Hri has desired to bring Southasia to common people and in Daudpur, it has succeeded in its pursuit. Davinder shared that PDL has organized different exhibitions in urban areas but this exhibition offered the opportunity to reach out to more people.

It was the first time that such an event was held in our village. Of course, there have been religious and political exhibitions on several occasions. With so many people keen to see it, we were asked to extend the time of exhibition. We screened three documentaries in the evening from 8:00 pm, and the audience made a beeline to the exhibition soon after the screening.

Many visitors had never seen such an exhibition. For me, it was truly encouraging that people from all sections visited, and the repeated visits of cattle-shed cleaners and dish washers was touching as they spent time with every exhibit. They made someone or the other read out the stories for them. The curiosity level of people cutting across ages was remarkable. Right from an octogenarian home-maker to young school drop-outs, it was an attraction which become the talk of the village. A particularly poignant connection forged was that of Navjot Kaur with Vidya Pradhan. Navjot, a graduate from the village, had few job prospects. She had come to the exhibition hall to mop and clean, and was struck by Vidya’s story of struggle for higher education.

For Daudpur, which has been somewhat prosperous but resembles a ghost settlement of fancy houses but sharply reduced population due to out-migration, it was a much-needed cultural boost. Once the traditional method of propaganda -- the Gurudwara loud-speaker - came into use, people from nearby villages poured in to visit exhibition and attend screenings. Some travelled more than 100 kms to be part of the experience, which soon became a community effort. Chairs for the screening were contributed by the neighbourhood, and many people sat on cots. The second and third day saw some people standing in the courtyard and on an adjacent roof top. It seemed like the people of Daudpur could simply not get enough of Southasia.

Daljit Ami is a Chandigarh-based journalist, researcher, filmmaker.


[L] Navjot Kaur, a recent graduate, helping clean the venue against the image of Vidya Pradhan in the background, [R] Visitors at Daudpur
Visited by more than 250 people, the Kathmandu exhibition was held at the Nepal Art Council, one of the busiest galleries in the city, established by the government in 1963. Several people (including media persons) braved the bandh to be present for the inauguration by Hon’ble Chief Election Commissioner Neel Kantha Uprety.

With the country geared up for the upcoming elections, the Nepal section of the exhibition aptly titled ‘The Election and the Referendum’ showcased campaign materials, flyers and pamphlets from the 1959 first general election and the 1980 plebiscite. The election material is a part of the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (MPP) collection. MPP is one of the oldest collections in Nepal that first began with the acquisitions of Kamal Mani Dixit, the founder and chairman of MPP. The materials showcased at the exhibition here were part of the ephemera. There are around 13,000 ephemera in the MPP collection.

As a travelling exhibition, the exhibits touched chords with the visitors. One of our visitors reminisced about the first general elections, when he was only eight years old and accompanied his father, who queued up to cast his vote. On the postcard of the Sikh Soldiers from World War I, an archivist from MPP mentioned that the same postcard was also a part of the MPP collection and had more information available. Referring to the photograph of a young child with her caretaker, Kanak Mani Dixit, Chair, Hri commented how the photo from 1986 AD is a window into the migration trend to the Kathmandu Valley, as the caretaker looking after a young girl in the Kathmandu Valley came all the way from Amlekhganj in South-eastern Nepal. It is the small connections, the little bonds and tiny threads that bind. It is organic connections such as these that the Hri travelling exhibition has begun to weave together, and we hope that a rich tapestry will emerge.
In Dhaka, the exhibition was inaugurated by a very special person - Md. Abdul Bari, the father of Shaheed Sheikh Mohammad Abdullahel Baqui, who like many young university students joined the Liberation War and fought valiantly, unto his death. The six day exhibition hosted in collaboration with the Liberation War Museum saw over 200 visitors including several young adults, and university students. Transcending geographical and cultural boundaries, the exhibition elicited a warm response and positive feedback from the visitors. We share some of the comments here.

“This was a very powerful exhibition. Each photo, in its own away speaks to the viewer. A tiny window into life in a different time.” - Farah Tarranum, Bengal Foundation.

“It is very interesting pieces of history written in the form of an exhibition. Acknowledging what would otherwise seem mundane talks a lot about the past. Thanks for making the effort.” – Saydia Gulrukh, Social Scientist and Activist.

“When we live our daily lives, we often forget the real heroes. The exhibition teaches us that the real heroes are ordinary people. Thanks to the real hidden hero, you and all the people.” – Ilwoo Park, South Korea.

The Bangladesh Special at the fourth show of our travelling exhibition ‘Lived Stories Everyday Lives’ in Dhaka, overwhelmed the audience with memories of 1971. Titled, ‘Portrait of a Martyr’, this section showcased nine family photos of Shaheed Baqui, who joined the liberation war as a university student and became a fighter before being captured and killed by the military. These photographs were preserved by Baqui’s family and donated to the Liberation War Museum. In preserving and archiving these unique family photographs, Baqui’s family has contributed to building the history of Bangladesh. Baqui is one of the few Freedom Fighters who had been photographed from his early years to his death. The visuals build a story that makes Baqui all too human and keeps alive the memory of young men like him. Umme Wara, a lecturer at Jagannath University writes, “This work touched me more than usual and the photographs of Shaheed Baqui moved me so much that I couldn’t stop crying. Bangladesh is the child of millions of martyrs.”
This year, the Prince Claus Fund Network Partners had the privilege of becoming part of a wonderful creative process in Burkina Faso. Hosted in the Bougsemtenga district of Ouagadougou, by Compagnie Falinga, one of the PCF Network Partners the “Mini Recreatrale” was conceptualised on the lines of the Recreatrales, one of the biggest and most unique theatre festivals in Africa. The vision was the same: to create theatres close to the citizens and help initiate a social dialogue. Each Network Partner brought with them their inimitable culture, art and literature. From Syria, Dox Box showcased documentary films and the Museum of Antioquia held a workshop with children who articulated their vision of what heritage meant to them. Alta Tecnologia Andina (ATA) from Peru created an installation of the sea and sea creatures, while San Art from Vietnam shared an audio installation of market sounds from across the globe. The family portraits put together by the Arab Image Foundation from Beirut had strong resonances with the local community. Likewise, the mini-library set up by International Alliance of Independent Publishers saw children from the community flocking to read, while workshops with them drew out their creativity. The Tirana Institute of Contemporary Art, Albania, had children using their creativity on gourds, to envision the “dream city” – on the clouds!

The Hri Institute’s oral history initiative “Love: The Stuff of Legends, the Stuff of Daily Life” was premised on the belief that everybody has a love story. Some keep it close to their hearts; some write about it; some sing; and some compose poetry. Some die with secrets, and their legends live on. Tales of overwhelming love thwarted by the forces of societal constraint and circumstance are a staple across Southasia, all the way from the mountains of Afghanistan to the coast of Sri Lanka. Even as the unrequited love shared by two individuals is the focal point of these stories, they can be read at a number of levels. To begin with, they contain a wealth of information on the cultural norms and compulsions of the times; ranging from the laws of inheritance, the societal view of outsiders, the nature of the people’s relation with their rulers, to the societal, community and familial hierarchy of the times, among other issues

At the Mini Recreatrale in Ouagadougou, we decided to create a space where people could come and tell their love stories – their own, or stories they have heard, stories that have gone down as legend. The stories were sung, narrated and performed, and the recordings (audio and video) were played back in the same space and well as documented for an archive. The vibrant story telling session began with Boukary Tarnagda related a Mossi story in French, about incestuous love between a brother and sister. The audience listened enthralled as Boukary’s lilting voice transported them to the burning
jungles where a defiant Sarata throws herself into the forbidden relationship that ultimately destroys her entire clan. Pascalina Ouedrago’s enchanting story in the Morey language about love that bloomed in the first days of the world had the listeners demanding more. And Ouedrago Wilfred’s timeless story of a wife’s unconditional love for her husband exposed fissures in the family that most of us are familiar with. What was striking was the universality of the narratives, the common threads that describe the human condition the world over. The expressions of love, longing, despair or jealousy might vary, but the identification with these emotions cut across cultural and national barriers. The process of playing back the narratives to the community on a TV screen in the courtyard of a house in Bousemtenga, was an exercise in simultaneously contributing to and deriving from the public and personal archive of memory.
Young Southasian Dreamers

By Mallika Aryal

In Afghanistan, young women who have been locked up in women’s cell dream of better lives beyond the walls. In Myanmar a group of young girls find an unconventional mentor and try to make it big as pop stars in a country that is just opening up. In Nepal, young boys put themselves through many rounds of a grueling recruitment process so they can join British Gurkha and make their lives better. In India’s Haryana young women fight the (in)justice of the Khap Panchayats. In Pakistan women try to rebuild their lives after acid is thrown in their faces.

That was just a sneak preview of this year’s festival of Southasian documentaries, Film South Asia (FSA). Film South Asia received almost 400 plus entries this and 35 are selected to be screened in a regular Kathmandu cinema hall from 3-6 October.

This year FSA’s filmmakers have tackled subjects that are daring and fresh. They shock us, entertain us and move us. Every festival year as the selection committee sits and watches hours and hours of brilliant work produced in the region the committee members are looking for themes, trends. What was often difficult to spot in other festival years was crystal clear this year. This FSA is about young Southasia—their lives, their past, their hopes, their dreams and their future.

In the last few years documentary film production has flourished in some countries. There was a time when the festival organizers used to struggle to get the word out to Sri Lankan filmmakers to submit their work. As the war ended we expected this to change. It has taken a few years, but the number of films submitted from Sri Lanka increased by many folds this year. And the films that are being produced and submitted to film festivals from Sri Lanka are not just about the war. Similarly, Myanmar and Afghanistan entries have increased while Maldives remains a big black hole when it comes to their documentaries showing up in Kathmandu at FSA.

There has been an interesting shift in documentaries from India as well. Filmmakers are daring to make films that are about more diverse subjects. They are experimenting with various styles of documentary filmmaking. More films are being commissioned and pitched away from the obvious hubs--Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Ahmedabad and filmmakers are going to Imphal, Varanasi, Kashmir, the little known island of Char (between India and Bangladesh border), and a remote corner of Northeast India bordering Burma. Meanwhile Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan’s entries have suffered a hit this year. In the past, 100 plus films produced by Nepali, Bangladeshi and Pakistani filmmakers were submitted. Filmmakers from these three countries have taken the Ram Bahadur Trophy for Best Film home many times. However, this year there was a significant decline in the entries from both these countries. Docu-watchers of the region attribute this to more documentary filmmakers going into feature film production (in Nepal and Bangladesh) and TV news production (in Pakistan).
Film festivals have always grappled with the challenge of reaching everywhere—getting the word out there; attracting filmmakers who haven’t submitted their works before; courting filmmakers who have, so that they continue to produce; preparing the next generation of filmmakers who understand what good documentary is all about. FSA has never compromised on quality and craft and the festival has done a good job in maintaining that since its launch in 1997. Now the next challenge for Film Southasia and other documentary film production/promotion companies is try to understand why documentary filmmakers move away from documentary and what can be done to encourage them to stay in documentary world and continue to inform, shock, move, expose injustices to our community in a 16:9 frame.

Mallika Aryal is a print and video journalist and the former director of Film Southasia.
Southasian cinema, perhaps more than any other of the world’s great cinematic traditions, is inseparable from its music. Often the music seems to outlive, to transcend the films, with certain songs enduring in millions of minds and ears long after the movies they were written for are forgotten. These soundtracks are a large part of what makes Southasian film – Bollywood and beyond – distinctive. Yet for a music industry that matches the prodigious productivity of Southasian cinema, we have far too few icons.

In the centennial year of Southasian cinema, two films on the FSA 2013 selection try to do justice to this musical legacy. Director Rudradeep Bhattacharjee’s The Human Factor tells the history of the Lords family, unsung heroes of Bollywood music, and in the process uncovers the fascinating stories of people who shaped the sounds of black-and-white era Bollywood. What we find is a glorious mix of cosmopolitan and curious musicians who created a distinct new style by embracing the serendipitous arrival in Mumbai of new musical ideas and instruments from all over the world. It’s a perspective that encourages careful attention to the wealth of archival song sequences Bhattacharjee uses to illustrate this story, and also to the many songs presented in director Shivendra Singh Dungarpur’s Celluloid Man, an epic documentary history of Bollywood cinema that also features on this year’s programme.

But The Human Factor is not just a celebration. The title already hints that this is a film about the humans behind the music, about the large orchestras and complex compositions and sound technicians of a bygone age, and about how that human factor is being side-lined by the current fetish for synthesisers, digitised production and blaring dance hits.

Shazia Khan’s Sama: Muslim Mystic Music of India is a reminder of all the beauty that this current trend overlooks. Khan presents an hour-long series of full-length devotional songs by Sufi musicians in a staggering diversity of styles, spanning the entire length and breadth of India, all shot live on location with fine camerawork to create a trance of sights and sounds. Without voiceover or interruption, Khan lets the music speak for itself, and the story it tells is of the infinite variety and genius of human experience, both religious and musical, that offers hope against all the extremisms plaguing our days.

Perhaps the most important lesson that all these musical documentaries hold is that as the region’s popular music becomes increasingly frenetic and noisy, we need to make an ever greater effort to listen to the sounds that don’t often make it onto our TV and cinema screens.

Roman Gautam is an editor based in Kathmandu.
Film Southasia (FSA) is a biennial festival that was set up in 1997 with the goal of popularising the documentary so that it entertains, informs and changes lives. In addition to the festival that takes place in Kathmandu every two years, FSA organizes screenings, discussions and workshops across Southasia to promote Southasian non-fiction within the Subcontinent and around the world. Film Southasia believes that film is a powerful medium that helps to not only in better represent the region internationally, but also contributes immensely in introspection and initiatives to bring change at the local level. Eight editions of the festival have been held to date.

TRAVELLING FILM SOUTHASIA

After each FSA festival, about a dozen films are selected to travel across the Subcontinent and the world as the Travelling Film Southasia (TFSA) package. This mobile campaign to promote and popularise Southasian documentaries stops at more than 50 international venues between the parent FSA festivals that are held every two years in Kathmandu.

The process is simple.

To host a TFSA package in your city, university, cultural center, you need to;

STEP 1: Buy a license (Full package is $800)

STEP 2: Organize local venue, publicity and other logistics

STEP 3: We will send you a set of DVDs accompanied by catalogues and ask you to send it back to us within 3 weeks of your event

*The TFSA package is often provided free of cost to students groups, film clubs, activist platforms in Southasia to promote the documentary medium and better understanding within Southasia.

*We are happy to introduce you to the film makers should you want to invite them to your event/s. To discuss details, please email us fsa@filmsouthasia.org
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