

STAFF REPORTER

New York

The 7th Annual Sikh Film Festival and Heritage Gala enveloped Manhattan with festivities and celebration for three days at the Asia Society, the Indian Consulate in New York and the New York Public Library, last month.

The film festival saw the premieres of Vikas Khanna's "Holy Kitchens - A true business", "Harvest of Grief" and "The Rebel Queen." Khanna explained that his film was "the work of love" and made not only to increase knowledge about Sikhism but as a message to his mother about his love for Amritsar - his birthplace.

For Amrita Basu and Rekha Basu it was voicing their mother, Rasil Basu's message to the world through "Harvest of Grief." Both reiterated the deepening experience that transformed them completely while making the movie and also moved the government to look into the plight of farmers in Punjab more seriously.

Tejinder Singh Bindra, President of The Sikh Art and Film Foundation, stressed at the meet how a "picture equals a thousand words" and can influence decisions towards the benefit of a community.

The biggest challenge for Michael Singh, the filmmaker of "The Rebel Queen", was to work on a film about Maharani Jindan, of whom no visuals apart from portraits of models posing as her existed.

Bollywood actor and producer and parliamentarian Raj Babbar congratulated all the filmmakers for their choice of subjects and the courage they have exhibited in making these films.

The celebrations moved to the New York Public Library where a grand gala ended the annual Sikh Film Festival. The minister of state for external affairs Preneet Kaur, who was to be chief guest at the gala,

could not make it to the event due to a family emergency. She however, complimented the Sikh Art and Film Foundation for their excellent accomplishment in achieving their mis-

Annual meet showcases Sikh art and culture



L-R: Raj Babbar, Tejinder Singh Bindra and Michael Singh.



Arpana Caur and Ajay Banga in front of Arpana's "Sachcha Sauda."



Padamshree Vikramjit Singh Sahney thanks the foundation after receiving his award as Tejinder Singh Bindra (left) and Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri look on.



Sukhbir performing at the gala.

Kaur inaugurates exhibition at Consulate

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To mark the International Year of Biodiversity, Preneet Kaur, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, inaugurated an exhibition of photographs from the book "Tryst with Trees-Punjab's Sacred Heritage" by D S Jaspal, at the Consulate of India in New York.

The exhibition, which was organized by the Consulate, in collaboration with the Sikh Art and Film Foundation, attracted a large gathering of nature lovers and environmentalists from the Tri-state area.

Also present were the Indian Ambassador to the United Nations, Hardeep Singh Puri; Consul General Prabhu Dayal; Deputy Consul General Dr. A M Gondane; Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations Manjeev Puri; former Member of Parliament Sardar Tarlochan Singh; and President of the Sikh Art and Film Foundation, Teji Bindra. The book highlights a unique feature of the Sikh religion—the naming of sacred shrines named after species of trees.

In his book, Jaspal, a senior civil servant of Punjab, has documented more than 58 sacred and historical Sikh shrines in India and Pakistan named after 19 species of trees, including Gurudwara Tahli Sahib; Gurudwara Imli Sahib; Gurudwara Ber Sahib; Gurudwara Amb Sahib; Gurudwara Pipli Sahib; and Gurudwara Nim Sahib. Although love and respect for na-

ture are common to every religious faith, the naming of sacred shrines after trees is unique to the Sikh religion.

Through striking pictures, the book depicts the sanctity in which devotees respect trees, and the central role of nature in religious preaching and practices.

The book includes a description of the botanical features of the tree with its health status as well as the relationship between the tree and the historical and religious background of the shrine. In a larger context, the book tries to explore the profound impact of Nature and the environment on the spiritual, social and cultural evolution of Sikhism.

Describing Jaspal's book as "a work of unique environmental significance," Kaur said that "love and respect for nature are a part of India's spiritual and cultural tradition and even to this day trees, plants, leaves form a part of every sacred ceremony or auspicious occasion."

The eminent Pakistani documentary film maker, Dr. Farooq Beg, of Serendip Productions, Islamabad, is producing a documentary on Tryst with Trees - a proof that nature and environment are bonding factors of civilization.

Speaking on the occasion, Jaspal hoped that his work would "send a strong and positive message not only for peace and religious harmony, but also for nature and the environment and, in particular, of the relevance of religion in promoting conservation efforts worldwide."

sion and raising awareness about Sikhism in a video message. Her participation and encouragement was evident in her presence during

the first two days of the event.

At the event Tarlochan Singh, Member of Parliament, awarded Raj Babbar for his contribution in Vision. Padamshree Vikramjit Sahney was awarded by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri for his contribution in Leadership. While presenting the award Puri said "I am privileged to be given the opportunity of honoring the best in the community."

Arpana Caur was awarded for her contribution in Art by the Consulate General of India, Ambassador Prabhu Dayal, who underlined the importance of community and team work while explaining how each finger by itself was weak but greatly strengthened a packed fist.

Commenting on the occasion, the Film Chair Paul Johar brought to notice "not only the diverse range of films but the filmmakers from all walks of life behind them."

The esteemed panel of judges comprised Amrita Basu, Rekha Basu, Dr. Balbinder S. Bhogal, Aseem Chhabra, Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, Robert Lupone, Vicki Mabray, IJ Singh and Safina Uberoi. The coveted Best Documentary award went to "Khanabadosh" while "Nothing Is Impossible" won the Best Short Film.

The judges, however, made a special mention to "Riding the Tiger" under the category of shorts. The Live auction saw immense excitement and participation from the guests. Ajay Banga, CEO of MasterCard, won the bid to Arpana Caur's "Sachcha Sauda" at \$16,000 and faithfully paid for it with his MasterCard.

A cricket bat signed by the Indian cricket team was auctioned for \$11,500, half the proceeds of which went to the charity 'Khushi'. The Prince of Bhangra, Sukhbir performed at the gala and the after-party.

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