



Now showing: From left, Japanese Wife, Cooking With Stella and Memories of March will be featured at the film festival

Celebrating the many avatars of Indian cinema

Arthur J Pais on a decade of the Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival

In between the opening film, *Shor*, which looks at how Mumbai impacts a handful of people and how they leave a mark on the city and the closing movie, *Cooking with Stella*, about a lovable but wily woman, the best known Indian Diaspora film festival in North America offers plenty of variety for moviegoers.

Now in the 10th year, the Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival is taking place November 10 to 14.

The reputation of the festival is evident in some of the landmarks films that had their New York premieres here: Oscar-nominated *Water*, the multiple Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* and the acclaimed *The Namesake*.

The festival, which draws hundreds from New York tri-state area and cineastes from across America, has inspired several festivals across the country. "I have been coming to the MIAAC film festival for several years and have learned a lot about organizing a film event," says Ketki Parekh, who organized the first South Asian Film Festival in Chicago

recently.

"We have come a long way from the inception of this festival in 2001, when we screened six feature films of the Indian Diaspora," says Aroon Shivdasani, the festival's founder. "The festival has morphed into a movement and it can boast of feature films, documentaries and shorts that are not easily seen in movie theaters."

The center piece of the festival this year is *Memories in March* by Sanjay Nag. The film, which is in

English, Hindi and Bengali, tells the story of a 28-year-old man killed in an accident. When his mother comes to Kolkata to collect his belongings, she discovers her son has a life she had not known existed. The film is based on a screenplay by National award winning-filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh, who also acts in the film alongside Deepti Naval and Raima Sen.

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Remembering Smita

An actress whose talent attracted some of India's most notable filmmakers, including Shyam Benegal, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and G Aravindan. Smita Patil will be remembered in a special way at the Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival.

A retrospective titled *Bhumika: The Roles of Smita Patil* will be held in conjunction with the Film Society Lincoln Center, November 11 to 18. It is supported by Manya Patil Seth and the Smita Patil Foundation. Smita's sister Manya is also organizing an exhibition honoring the actress at the Furman Gallery, New York.

The event is expected to feature discussion with directors Benegal and Ketan Mehta, and co-artists Girish Karnad and Mohan Agashe.

Among the films being screened at the retrospective is Aravindan's *Chidambaram*. It is the story of a farm laborer who kills himself after he



Smita Patil

finds his wife (played by Patil) in the arms of another man. Wracked with guilt, the man leaves the farm, takes to drink, and eventually turns to spirituality. Finally in the temple town of Chidambaram, he meets the last person he ever expected to find there.

Benegal's 1976 art house hit *The Churning (Manthan)* showcased Patil as a Dalit girl, opposite Karnad, as a young veterinary surgeon who comes to a village to set up a dairy cooperative. He not only upsets the middlemen, who had been exploiting the villagers, but also challenges the feudal structure of the village.

Also showing at the retrospective are the 1981 *Deliverance (Sadgati)*, is one of only two Ray films he did not make in his native Bengali (the other was *Shatranj Ke Khilari*) and Mehta's *A Folk Tale (Bhavni Bhavai)*.