



سالگرہ مبارک

AKS

INTERNATIONAL  
MINORITIES  
FESTIVAL

20<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup>  
March '20

[www.aksfestival.com](http://www.aksfestival.com)

moviesthatmatter



## SUB RANG SOCIETY

The main objective of the Sub Rang Society (SRS) is to bring change into the attitude of mainstream society towards transgender people. For doing so, the organisation supports them to realize their potential and advocate for their rights. The organisation also realises that there is a need to create awareness and educate the society as well as the transgender community to build a bridge for a common ground of understanding to demand basic rights in a peaceful manner.

Currently, SRS has focus on empowering transgender and other sexual minorities on local level with programmes like building capacity and developing young leaderships from the community. SRS has also focus on eliminating issues of discrimination, violence and harassment faced by the transgender people from the main stream society, their homes and the law enforcement agencies as well.

In 2015, Sub Rang Society opened its doors to Aks International Minorities Film Festival in Karachi. For Subrang it is important to provide safe space, community building and networking. The organisation believes that this kind of initiative may help strengthen the community and will continue to do so, reflecting in the integrity of diversity.

In Pakistan, the Aks International Minorities Festival: Film, Art, and Dialogue was held for the first time at the end of December 2014 till the beginning of January 2015. Ever since the organization has delivered a festival almost every year and to date, the festival is completely independent and non-commercial committed to the core values of solidarity, community building and pushing forward the agendas, which are most likely to be ignored or forgotten in the mainstream world. We have been successfully organising big and small events taking no care for hurdles and negative forces on our way, this may have only been possible because of the love, hard work and support of our strong and determined team of festival volunteers, our partners, who have strong faith in us and most importantly our audiences who share their love and quality time with us and become members of Aks family every year.

Our journey started in a small living room at Olomopolo with some 20+ audience in Lahore. Today, We are proud to say we are the longest-running, widespread and most inclusive non-commercial festival in Pakistan. In 2018, we covered 5 different cities across Pakistan and took films into the areas and spaces where this kind of setups are usually unimaginable.

We have also had the honor of bringing alternative and international cinema to our audiences. We also hosted international artists and activists in Pakistan in a very grounded manner without any superficial protocols. We introduced Pakistani independent filmmakers and artists across the globe. We have had the honor of representing Pakistani films in our "Made in Pakistan " programs in more than 30 countries.

We are celebrating our 5th Anniversary, and the main theme of the festival this year is to celebrate diversity within our society. The festival will take place in Lahore and Karachi from 20th - 31st March 2020 with a parallel programme of Aks OUTREACH that has already been initiated since November 2019 and will end in April 2020. The main purpose of Aks OUTREACH is to host film screenings for educational purposes not only in public spaces but also in private houses, we screen films with debates at universities, colleges, and schools but also encourage people to host a screening in their private circles.

This year, we have introduced some new initiatives to encourage local artists and activists to participate in our festival via submitting their literal work to our festival catalogue or simply by sharing their ideas for future films by entering the Aks Pitch Competition.





FRIDAY, 20/03/2020

VENUE: HRCF, LAHORE  
6:00 p.m. Opening Ceremony  
6:30 p.m. Glimpse of past Aks festivals in a video  
7:00 p.m. **Janu Kapatti**, a play by Nautanki  
7:30 p.m. Performance by Reema Jaan  
8:00 p.m. Performance by Alina  
8:30 p.m. Awards and Closing Remarks

SATURDAY, 21/03/2020

VENUE: OLOMOPOLO, LAHORE  
5:00 p.m. Aks Dialogue - **Sona Chandi** by Moin Ulhaq  
6:00 p.m. Aks Shortfilms: **Dhuan** + talk with Ali Asgher on Child protection  
6:30 p.m. Aks Film: **O Meri Amo** + talk with Faseeh bari khan on the representation of minorities in film and TV  
8:00 p.m. Aks Shortfilm: **Banality of evil, Roshan & Mani, One More Please, Fuggiro Tanto Amore**  
+ Talk on The Greater Political environment with Ali Asghar

SUNDAY, 22/03/2020

VENUE: OLOMOPOLO, LAHORE  
2:00 p.m. Aks Film: **José + the Last Romantic** and Talk on Hypersexuality with Ali Asghar  
4:00 p.m. Aks Dialogue: **Liar, Lawyer and Law** by Moin Ulhaq  
5:00 p.m. **Aks Pitch Competition** Lahore  
6:30 p.m. Aks Shortfilms: **Made in Pakistan: Shanakhat, Sooud, Vadhai, Trans-lit, Shehr-e-Tabassum**

MONDAY, 23/03/2020

VENUE: COMMUNIYSPACE (LAHORE@AKSFESTIVAL.COM)  
6:30 p.m. Aks Documentary: **"Normal"**  
7:45 p.m. Aks Dialogue: **What is Normal, a discussion about gender identity with HOPE**

TUESDAY, 24/03/2020

VENUE: MOCCA COFFEE, PHASE 5, DHA  
6:00 p.m. Aks documentary: **Call her Ganda**  
7:45 p.m. Aks Dialogue: **Anti-Trans Violence and Transphobia** with Rooh-e-Khalida, Justice Project Pakistan

FRIDAY, 27/03/2020

VENUE: HOPE (FOR INFO EMAIL: HOPE.POSITIVE.EXPECTATIONS@GMAIL.COM)  
6:00 p.m. Aks Shortfilms: **Unheard Stories Part 2 by Kashish**  
6:15 p.m. Aks Film: **A Woman is a Woman**  
8:00 p.m. Aks Dialogues; **Challanegs of Trans Feminine identity**

SATURDAY, 28/03/2020

VENUE: HOPE (FOR INFO EMAIL: HOPE.POSITIVE.EXPECTATIONS@GMAIL.COM)  
6:00 p.m. Aks Shortfilms **Unheard Stories part 1 by Kashish**  
6:15 p.m. Aks Documentary **Man Made**  
8:00 p.m. Aks Dialogue: **Visibility of Trans masculine identities in Pakistan**

SUNDAY, 29/03/2020

VENUE: HOPE (FOR INFO EMAIL: HOPE.POSITIVE.EXPECTATIONS@GMAIL.COM)  
4:00 p.m. Sunday Hang-OUT with HOPE  
6:00 p.m. Aks Film: **Kattumaram**

FRIDAY, 20/03/2020

VENUE: Q KARACHI (FOR INFO EMAIL: KARACHI@AKSFESTIVAL.COM)  
6:00 p.m. Aks Episodic: **BrownGirls** + Event with Q-Karachi

SATURDAY, 21/03/2020

VENUE: SUB RANG SOCIETY (FOR INFO EMAIL: KARACHI@AKSFESTIVAL.COM)  
6:00 p.m. Aks Film: **Fireflies** + Event with SubRang Society

SUNDAY, 22/03/2020

VENUE: SUB RANG SOCIETY (FOR INFO EMAIL: KARACHI@AKSFESTIVAL.COM)  
6:00 p.m. Aks shortfilms: Best of Kashish: U for Usha, The Booth, A Little More Blue, Ladli

FRIDAY, 27/03/2020

VENUE: COMMUNITY SPACE, (FOR INFO EMAIL: KARACHI@AKSFESTIVAL.COM)  
5:00 p.m. Opening Ceremony (Hosting by Romaisa William and Syeda Zehra Shah)  
5:30 p.m. Performance by Ahmed Baloch  
6:00 p.m. Neeli Rana and Hina Pathani Performance  
6:30 p.m. Theater play: Meri Shankht  
7:00 p.m. Performance by Osama Ahmed  
7:30 p.m. Award Ceremony and Closing Remarks

SATURDAY, 28/03/2020

VENUE: T2F, KARACHI  
5:00 p.m. Aks Shortfilms: **Made in Pakistan: Shanakhat, Trans-lit, Shehr-e-Tabassum, Sooud, Vadhai**  
6:00 p.m. **Aks Pitch Competition, Karachi**  
6:45 p.m. Aks Shortfilms: **A Monsoon Date from Best of Kashish**  
7:15 p.m. Aks Film: **The Garden Left Behind**

SUNDAY, 29/03/2020

VENUE: T2F, KARACHI  
5:00 p.m. Aks Documentary: **Yours in Sisterhood**  
6:00 p.m. Aks Dialogue: **Women's Rights; where do we actually stand today?** with Q Karachi and women with diverse minority backgrounds.  
7:00 p.m. Aks Documentary: **Room for a Man**

TUESDAY, 31/03/2020

VENUE: NCHR (FOR INFO EMAIL: KARACHI@AKSFESTIVAL.COM)  
6:00 p.m. Aks Shortfilms: **The Rogers**  
6:30 p.m. Aks Dialogue: **Talk by Veteran Trans\* Activist (Bindiya Rana, Neeli Rana, Chandni Shah and Hina Pathani)**  
6:30 p.m. Aks Documentary: **Changing the Game** + Transgender Visibility Day with Sub Rang Society

Lahore

Karachi



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

Since 2018, the Aks festival is proud to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of individuals and/or organizations in promoting and protecting human rights and freedom. The Aks Human Rights Award gives us a unique opportunity to share the stories and shine a light on the remarkable achievements of individuals and/or organizations. Its aim is to celebrate the hard work, inspiration, and dedication of those who champion the rights of ordinary people.

This year, we are absolutely proud to announce the 2 winners of the Aks Human Rights Award. The award will be shared between two brave individuals, **Neeli Rana**, Trans\*activist and founder of Rooh-e-Khalida and **Wajid Ali**, civil society activist and social worker, for their outstanding services in the field of human rights activism.

### NEELI RANA

It won't be false to call Neeli the brain-child behind the Aks International Minorities Festival. Because she was the one who uttered the desire to have a film festival for and by minorities in Pakistan when she was attending a film festival with her documentary film "Chuppan Chupai" in Copenhagen in 2012. Neeli is a multi-talented person who almost champions in every discipline of activism, from performing art to protesting for trans\* rights in the streets, from being a media spokesperson for the Khawja Sira community to educating police and law enforcement agencies about the transgender rights. Neeli is probably the most prominent personality when it comes to advocating for minority rights in Pakistan. Neeli has recently started her own non-profit organization "Rooh-e-Khalida" to provide 24/7 help in cases of violence, crimes and police brutality for minorities across Pakistan.



### WAJID ALI

Wajid Ali is a veteran civil society activist, drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation expert and an HIV prevention specialist. Wajid holds extensive experience and expertise in the developmental sector, particularly in Drug abuse and HIV prevention. To date, he has helped hundreds of thousands of people and alleviate their suffering. He has counseled thousands of drug addicts, empowered thousands of Transgender people to stand up and demand their rights and assisted thousands of People Living with HIV & AIDS to access lifesaving medicaments. He is a founding member of 3 CBOs on HIV and PLHIVs.



# PITCH Competition

Are You a Filmmaker?

Got an idea for a film on minorities or marginalization?

Need Guidance, Resources to start your projects?

Aks International Minorities Festival is back for its 5th edition from 20th-30th March 2020. To mark this important event of the 5th Anniversary, we launched a Pitch Competition for the filmmakers.

This exhilarating and unique event will allow contestants 5 minutes to pitch their best ideas to a panel of judges made up of professional filmmakers, writers, and producers.

**The winner will receive Rs.50,000/ in Cash prize and free Mentorship opportunity from a renowned production house.**

The pitch session will take place both in Lahore and Karachi with the chosen projects and the winner of this competition will be announced after the festival.

*Aks Pitch Competition is sponsored by GagaOOLala.*

GagaOOLala is Asia's first queer streaming platform. With more than 1000 films, shorts, series, and our own original content, GagaOOLala is the home for the best queer cinema from around the world.

Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore

Saturday: 28/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: T2F, Karachi

GagaOOLala



Interviewed by  
Kami Sid,  
and summary  
transcription by  
Syed Ali Asghar,  
film critic,  
and festival curator.

# POWER WOMEN

*Kami meets the inspirational Sana Fakher to talk about  
Pakistani cinema, womanhood, and independence...*

# S

Sana Fakher, an esteemed actress of the Pakistani film industry, started her career off with director Shahid Rana in the movie *Raja Sahib* in 1997. She is one of the few veteran artists who has worked in the old Lollywood environment and the modern-day Pakistani film industry. Recently, our own Kami, the superstar from *Aks* festival had a chance to interview the Pakistani iron lady, Sana Fakher. The two powerhouse girls shared moments of joy and had a heart to heart conversation. Here is a short summary of what that all was about...

While talking to Kami, Sana described the transition from Lollywood to modern-day filmmaking as a journey. She emphasized how it's important to embrace change and be involved in the process to help yourself grow and evolve. It's important to embark on this journey instead of remaining stagnant and clinging on to the past. Sana recounts how not much in the industry has really changed, much of the same people who worked in Lollywood have transitioned into the new filmmaking industry. However, she stated how the newer industry operated much more professionally and the work environment was more formal than before. The industry as a whole has seen a shift from its foundations, newer talent in the industry are now either child of veteran actors or hail from elite theater circles from Islamabad, Lahore or Karachi. The Pakistani film industry needs to be more inclusive of talent that comes from all socio-economic classes from cities all around Pakistan.

Sana went on to talk about her various other initiatives besides acting. She talked about how she was always an athletic girl ever since she was a child, she has been very conscious of sustaining a healthy lifestyle and thinks it's important to be a positive role model to promote exercise and athleticism especially amongst the women of Pakistan. Furthermore, Sana has gained notoriety after she has been spotted multiple times riding heavy bikes across Karachi. Sana recounts how she started riding bikes at a fairly young age of around 11 years old. She talks about how she used to sneak out with her cousin's motorcycle and would teach herself to start the bike and then eventually learned to ride it. She maintains that biking has been a hobby of hers since her childhood and is glad she still gets to indulge herself.

Finally, Kami asked Sana about what she thought of the transgender representation in the Pakistani film industry and about the feminist wave in general, to which Sana responded. She said that it was quite heartening to see transgender people being represented in the film industry, although she talked about how it was essential that society and their mindset needed to be reformed. The stigma attached to gender minorities needed to be addressed and Sana claimed that it needed to be addressed by our representatives in government. Sana said that she believed that it was the responsibility of every Pakistani to educate themselves on the political workings of the country and to be politically involved, holding our representatives accountable. No longer can we shy away from being politically active, now is the time to be more aware and take charge of our political destiny as it affects us all. She went on to talk about how she believed that the general public also misunderstood feminism. Feminism is considered to be a man-hating ideology whereas Sana said that she personally believes that feminism is a movement to make women more aware of their rights and to help them live their lives on their own terms. Feminism is to empower individuals and not to tear anyone down. She said that this was part of becoming politically active and reforming the country we live in to see a better tomorrow and to reflect that better tomorrow in the Pakistani film industry.





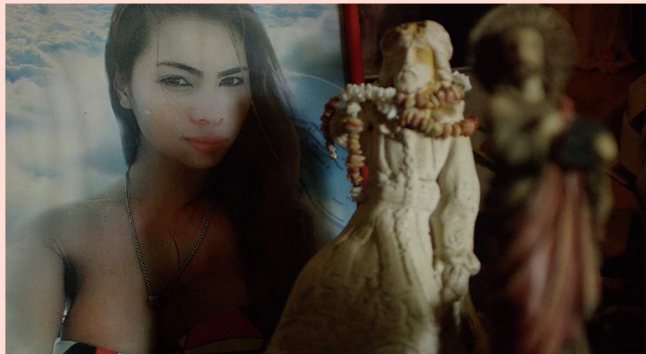
Anthony Chidiac  
**ROOM FOR A MAN**



Sunday: 29/3  
7:00 p.m.  
T2F, KARACHI

*Country: Lebanon and USA | Year: 2018 | Duration: 77 min | Language: Arabic, French with English subtitles*  
The first thing Anthony says about himself is that life scares him, and he is paralyzed by fear. He lives with his mother, a French teacher, in Beirut, and rarely leaves the house. His home is a refuge, but in some respects also a prison. "Room for a Man", an intimate documentary about a memoir of Lebanese filmmaker Anthony Chidiac himself, explores identity and family history, first through discussions with the Syrian builders refurbishing the Beirut apartment he shares with his mother; then by traveling to Argentina with his formerly estranged father. Favoring artful, static camerawork and a yearning voiceover, this hypnotic personal essay meditates on masculinity, sexuality and a lifelong quest for acceptance.

PJ Raval  
**CALL HER GANDA**



Tuesday: 24/3  
6:00 p.m.  
Mocca Coffee,  
DHA phase 5,  
LAHORE

*Country: USA & Philippines | Year: 2018 | Duration: 93 min | Language: Filipino, Tagalog, English with English subtitles*  
The 2014 murder of a transgender Filipino woman by a US Marine provides the jumping-off point for this potent and eye-opening documentary, which delivers history lessons about America's presence in the Philippines, the latter country's transgender community, and the rise of dictator Rodrigo Duterte. The movie isn't overwhelmed by any of these subjects; director PJ Raval fluidly interweaves them into an effective nonfiction legal drama that charts the fallout of the murder and the Marine's subsequent trial. Raval also paints a commanding portrait of Meredith Talusan, a transgender Filipino-American journalist who devoted years to report on the case. Her tireless efforts to make the world know about the murder—and what it reveals about unchecked American privilege—prove her to be an exemplar of journalistic integrity. In English and subtitled Tagalog.

Irene Lusztig  
**YOURS IN SISTERHOOD**



Sunday: 29/3  
7:00 p.m.  
T2F, KARACHI

*Country: USA | Year: 2018 | Duration: 101 min | Language: English with English subtitles*  
Irene Lusztig's performative, participatory documentary is inspired by the breadth and complexity of letters that were sent in the 1970s to the editor of Ms.—America's first mainstream feminist magazine. The film documents hundreds of strangers from around the U.S. who were invited to read aloud and respond to these letters written by women, men, and children from diverse backgrounds. Collectively, the letters feel like an encyclopedia of both the 70s and the women's movement— an almost literal invocation of the second-wave feminist slogan "the personal is political." The intimate, provocative, and sometimes heartbreaking conversations that emerge from these performances invite viewers to think about the past, present, and future of feminism.

Adèle Tulli  
**NORMAL**



Monday: 23/3  
6:00 p.m.  
Community  
Space, LAHORE

*Country: Italy and Switzerland | Year: 2019 | Duration: 70 min | Language: Italian with English subtitles*  
Adele Tullis's formally straightforward but aesthetically convincing documentary examines rigidly defined gender roles and the uncritical submission to the dictates of (hetero)normativity. Turning her camera's gaze on everyday actions, rituals, and scenes, the director makes some of the situations she records seem disconcerting by juxtaposing sounds and images in a contradictory montage. In long, static shots she depicts girls being made up to look like princesses; a father accompanying his son to a motorcycle race, and a group of screaming teenage girls having their photos taken with an idolized YouTube star. She also shows boys playing first-person shooter games and Gotcha; she follows the photoshoot of a newly married couple, watches hen nights getting out of hand, films a course designed to show young men how to become alpha males, and another in which women learn how best to serve their husbands in marriage. Tulli remains consistently observant, almost distant, throughout. But in the end, we realize that this succession of countless uncommented stereotypical actions does contain a commentary after all.



Michael Barnett  
**CHANGING THE GAME**



Sunday: 31/3  
6:00 p.m  
Venue: NCHR  
(for info email:  
karachi@  
aksfestival.com)

Country: USA | Year: 2019 | Duration: 82 min | Language: English with English subtitles  
For young transgender athletes, the sport they love often turns into a minefield of controversy. Either decried as cheaters if they excel, or barred from competing among the gender they identify with, positive outcomes are rare. But when a sport is a lifeline, what is fair? This exceptional film mines that question through intimate portraits of three trans athletes. Mack isn't allowed to wrestle boys in his home state of Texas, leaving him to demolish the competition as he wrestles girls. Sarah nordic skis in New Hampshire with the girls she identifies with but admits that she holds herself back. And Andraya runs track with girls in Connecticut but has to fend off brutal criticism when she prevails. For these athletes, media attention and ugly remarks only fuel the fire of confusion that is teenagehood.

T Cooper  
**MAN-MADE**



Saturday: 28/3  
6:15 p.m  
HOPE, LAHORE

Country: USA | Year: 2018 | Duration: 93 min | Language: English with English subtitles  
T Cooper, a trans\* activist, and filmmaker take us into the heart of transgender male (FTM) culture, revealing unexpected truths about gender, masculinity, humanity, and love. Four trans men take a variety of life paths toward stepping on stage at Trans FitCon, the only all-transgender bodybuilding competition in the world. Rese is a young father struggling with periods of homelessness; Dominic seeks out his family of origin, confronting an alternate history for himself; Kennie admits to himself and his loved ones who he is for the first time in his life; and Mason, a loving husband who struggles with mental illness, works daily to be the man he always wanted to be on both the inside and out. We follow their emotional and physical journeys as they navigate lives as the men they are, despite very real risks inherent in the current social and political climate. For them, it's not about winning, it's about being seen.  
"Man-Made" is a character-driven, intimate, and riveting verité-style competition film, but also a unique social justice narrative. It speaks to the ways in which we all choose to define and reshape ourselves, both figuratively and literally.

INTERVIEW

*An Interview with*  
**Faseeh Bari Khan**



Faseeh is no new name to any TV drama lover and being a storyteller myself I have always admired his plays. So when I was told that I have to interview him I almost find it hard to believe and couldn't find courage enough to do it on my own. Finally my fellow reporter Bakhtawar set up a time for the interview.

We went to meet Faseeh Bari Khan amid a confusion and chaos of social media discussion about Pakistani TV dramas and their writers and directors. We were polarized in our opinions and honestly didn't know what we would talk about, but what we were sure about was that many of our selective favorite dramas were all written by this same person. Our only describable feelings at that moment were that we were excited.

Welcoming nervously into his artistic world, he opened his house for us. As soon as we entered we were comfortable perhaps in awe feeling of the filmy and artistic interior of his living room. We talked about his work, his politics and his perspective of life. He has been working in the industry for about 15 years now. He told us how the TV drama industry has evolved over time. There was a time, when the censorship was very minimal and TV channels had quality, now it seems like quantity over quality, TRP and sensationalism over quality. He explained how infotainment used to be a thing and the audience loved it.

Further talking about the current state of the TV dramas, he shared his thoughts on how it all fall back on the writers, their politics, their experiences and honesty to their business. If the writers are not good in their research or observant enough in the collective memory of the story, they are writing, they end up making caricatures and stereotypes that eventually affects the art of storytelling.

Talking about storytelling we all went into an excited spree of talking about our experiences and memories and importance of storytelling. He told us how storytelling evolves over generations in its expression. Now it's time for the online streaming based platforms, he confirms. "If the censorship board and PEMRA don't change their policies, people will go to other markets' ". "It's high time for platforms like Netflix, Amazon and iflix in Pakistan.





While talking about censorship, we ended up on the topic of "Zindagi Tamasha" and the recent controversy attached to the release of this much awaited Pakistani film. He shared his feelings, how sad he feels for the artist community and supports Sarmad Khoosat in freedom of artistic expressions, but also the right of living by choosing not to release the film.

Faseeh last worked on "Jeevan Hathi" and "7 Din Mohobat In", but he has been on a break since. He talked further about his upcoming projects; he has written a drama (Meri 4 Shadiyan) for ARY network, which will soon go on air. He is also writing for online streaming media, but said it may be irrelevant to talk about them right now as they are in a very initial stage right now.

After all this he served us with refreshments. Faseeh being a writer has always been an aspiration for us but his openness and gesture moved us even more and we respected him for that.

*Interviewed Bakhtawar with co-interviewer and summary transcriber Syed Ali Asghar, film critic and festival curator.*

*During the Aks festival, we will invite Faseeh himself to sit on our sofa for a chat with us and our audience and we will also be screening some of his greatest hits.*



## O MERI AMMO

**SATURDAY: 21/3 @ 6:30 P.M. - VENUE: OLOMOPOLO, LAHORE**

O meri Amo is a film made for a private TV channel that Fasi wrote for the Mother's day. The story revolves around 4 women; a failing actress and her young daughter whom she is trying make an aspiring child star, a nosy neighbor who digs her nose into everything that may never be her business and Amo a noble elderly transgender person who self-described herself as eunuch. The tale is about love and society. It sheds light on the unacceptable and judgmental nature of society.

## Maisy Goosy Suen A WOMAN IS A WOMAN

**Friday: 27/3  
6:15 p.m  
HOPE, LAHORE**



*Country: China | Year: 2019 | Duration: 93 min | Language: Cantonese with English Subtitles*

For 10 years, Sung Chi Yu kept a secret from her husband Chi-Hung and step-daughter Lai Kei that she is a transwoman. Everything seems to fall apart in her married life when this secret is blown. Meanwhile, Lai Kei has a crush on her male classmate Chiu Ling Fung, who too is hiding his own secret and battles with his gender identity. He dares not to reveal this to his conservative parents who want him to act like a perfect man. In his teenage years, he finds himself exploring the notion of love and identity with the help of an imaginary ideal feminine image named Rose.

"A Woman is a Woman" is a family drama about a battle that both Sung Chi and Chiu Ling has taken against societal prejudices to find real happiness within themselves.

## Li Cheng JOSÉ

**Sunday: 22/3  
2:00 p.m  
Olomopolo,  
LAHORE**



*Country: Guatemala | Year: 2019 | Duration: 86 min | Language: Spanish with English Subtitles*

Young José lives with his mother in Guatemala City in a typical lower-class existence in one of the world's most dangerous, religious, and impoverished countries. She never married, and José is her youngest and favorite child. Her life is her church and selling sandwiches at a bus stop. José spends his days on cramped buses, fighting traffic as he runs food to waiting drivers. Aloof and resigned to things as they are, he fills his free moments playing on his phone and arranging random hook-ups on street corners with dating apps. When he meets Luis, a migrant from the rural Caribbean coast, they pursue an unexpected relationship and José is thrust into passion and pain and self-reflection that was previously unimaginable.



Flavio Alves  
**THE GARDEN LEFT BEHIND**

Saturday: 28/3  
7:00 p.m  
T2F, KARACHI



*Country: USA, Brazil | Year: 2019 | Duration: 88 min | Language: English and Spanish with English Subtitles*  
Driving a cab through the lonely streets of New York, Tina struggles to provide for herself and her grandmother. Being undocumented makes work difficult to come by, and to add more stress, Tina has decided to begin transitioning. While her doting Abuela endeavors to understand, Tina finds warm support in a group of trans activists that take her under their wing. Tina waits impatiently for her doctor to sign off on her transition so she can begin taking hormones, eager to join her trans sisters. But mounting medical costs, her rocky relationship with the man she's been seeing, and her legal immigration status all become daunting obstacles to Tina's pursuit of happiness. The filmmaker Flavio Alves crafts a compassionate but unsentimental portrait of a trans\* immigrant in the streets of New York played by the first-time actress Charlie Guevara who gives a captivating and raw performance as Tina.

Prakash Deka  
**FIREFLIES**

Saturday: 21/3  
6:00 p.m  
Sub Rang Society  
(for info email:  
karachi@  
aksfestival.com)



*Country: India | Year: 2019 | Duration: 92 min | Language: Assamese with English Subtitles*  
Jahnu lives in a remote village by the banks of the river Brahmaputra in Assam of rural India. The villagers mock him for the femininity that he proudly wears on his body. Jahnu dreams of getting an operation and becoming a woman. Jahnu's sister 'Jumu', who has decided to never come out as a queer woman to protect her parent's reputation in the village, worries that Jahnu might also have to live a painful life like her, although both the siblings have never spoken about their struggles aloud. Jahnu and Jumu's elder brother 'Baba' is extremely unhappy about his gender nonconformist siblings who he thinks have made their family notorious in the village. Jahnu's life takes a drastic turn when his romantic relationship with Palash catches the attention of the villagers. With Palash refusing to acknowledge the relationship, Jahnu has to decide if he would continue living a life hiding or let himself walk forth with his truth.

Swarnavel Eswaran  
**KATTUMARAM**



Sunday: 29/3 - 6:00 p.m - HOPE, LAHORE

*Country: India | Year: 2018 | Duration: 73 min | Language: Tamil with English Subtitles*  
In a small village ravaged by a tsunami, Singaram works as a fisherman to care for his orphaned niece and nephew. Despite her uncle's tireless bids to find a groom for her, Anandhi rejects all efforts to get her married off, instead of focusing on her work as a schoolteacher. When a new photography instructor named Kavita arrives at the school, Anandhi finds an instant connection with her. As their friendship begins to blossom into something more, Anandhi must face her feelings and the consequences they will bring in this conservative society. Kattumaram is a heartfelt look at the strength of community in rural India, showcasing the importance of tradition along with the need for evolution.

*This is film is presented by Kashish Mumbai International Queer Film Festival*





# SHORT FILMS

**SHEHR-E-TABASSUM** by Arafat Mazhar (short Fiction)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:30 pm - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore  
Saturday: 28/3 @ 5:00 pm - Venue: T2F, Karachi



Country: Pakistan | Year: 2020 |  
Duration: 8 min | Language: Urdu with  
English Subtitles

In a futuristic animated world of the year 2071, where Pakistan's Amir-e-Mumlikat (president of the country) has ushered an era of peace, stability, and prosperity after a civil war that lasted three decades. There has been no war or violence in almost 20 years now. The cost for this newfound peace: constant surveillance and a world in which the only expression citizens are allowed is a smile.

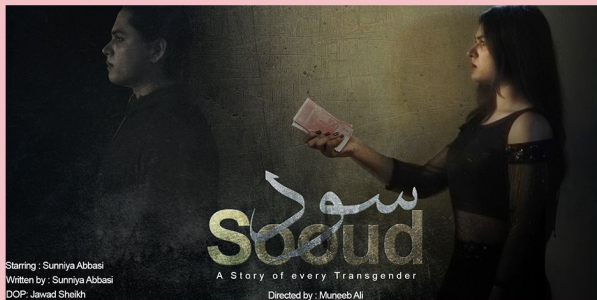
**VADHAI: A GIFT** by Claire Pamment with co-directors  
Malik Ammar and Umar Jilani (short Documentary)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:30 pm - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore  
Saturday: 28/3 @ 6:00 pm - Venue: Community Space, Karachi



Country: Pakistan | Year: 2020 |  
Duration: 20 min | Language: Urdu with  
English Subtitles

Khwaja sira performances of vadhai, the repertoire of devotional prayers, songs, dances, and comic repartee, to celebrate weddings and births, have long been recognized as vital to these communities' identities. We follow Guru Amber's toli group as they bring music and movement to their neighborhood streets in Lahore, and take an intimate look at the kinship, beliefs, pleasure, and economics that drive these performances.

**SOOD** by Muneeb Ali (short Fiction)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:30 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore  
Saturday: 28/3 @ 5:00 p.m. - Venue: T2F, Karachi



Country: Pakistan | Year: 2020 | Duration:  
3 min | Language: Urdu with English  
Subtitles

A trans woman is about to face her extended family at her sister's wedding. Will she keep the family pride for being the only earning hand in the house and paying for the wedding arrangements or bring shame to them for being who she really is.

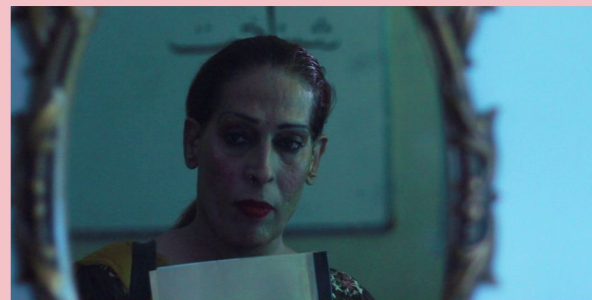
**TRANS-LIT** by Umar Saeed (Short Documentary)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:30 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore  
Saturday: 28/3 @ 5:00 p.m. - Venue: T2F, Karachi



Country: Pakistan | Year: 2020 |  
Duration: 35 min | Language: Urdu with  
English Subtitles

"Trans-lit" revolves around Khursand, a theater producer and activist, who is preparing for a play with her four friends, to address the trans\* issues and will highlight the newly implemented transgender rights bill by the government of Pakistan through their performances. The passionate filmmaker, Umar Saeed, builds a strong connection with the subjects of his experimental yet intimate documentary "Trans-lit". His close camera captions are quite distinct and ultimately makes one feel like partaking in the on-screen conversation of activism (art+activism) for transgender rights.

**SHANAKHT** by Hamza Ifikhar (Short Fiction)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:30 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore  
Saturday: 28/3 @ 5:00 p.m. - Venue: T2F, Karachi



Country: Pakistan | Year: 2019 | Duration:  
1 min | Music only

A film school project by Hamza Ifikhar is a 1-minute short film motivated to create focus about improving transgender rights for basic education. As a tagline written on the book-cover "Aggy barhna ha tu mujh par yaqeen rakhna ha (you may find success if you believe in me)" symbolizes the intentions behind this short but aesthetically creative film.

**U FOR USHA** by Rohan Kanawade (short Fiction)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: Sub Rang Society  
(for info email: karachi@aksfestival.com)



Country: India | Year: 2019 | Duration:  
22 min | Language: Marathi with English  
Subtitles

Usha, an illiterate single mother who works as a farm laborer in rural India, finds herself drawn to a female teacher of local primary school, in ways she never knew possible. This attraction plays an important part in firing her passion to read and write as she hopes to be as good as the teacher one day. U Ushacha is a subtle portrayal of sexual awakening, as well as a story of how a naïve attraction can empower a woman to take control of her life, and make each day something to look forward to.

This film is presented by Kashish, Mumbai International Queer Film Festival



# SHORT FILMS

**THE BOOTH** by Rohin Raveendran (short Fiction)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: Sub Rang Society  
(for info email: karachi@aksfestival.com)



Country: India | Year: 2018 | Duration: 15 min | Language: Hindi with English Subtitles

A female frisking booth inside a crowded shopping mall stands as a silent ally to a forbidden romance. Hidden from the view of the passing shoppers, the two women – customer and guard – share a moment of intimacy, but can a burgeoning romance survive beyond the kiosk's curtains? This deceptively subtle short film transforms an everyday moment in modern India into a moving story that transcends time and place. This film is presented by Kashish, Mumbai International Queer Film Festival

**LADLI** by Sudipto Kundu (short Documentary)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: Sub Rang Society  
(for info email: karachi@aksfestival.com)



Country: India | Year: 2018 | Duration: 39 min | Language: Hindi with English Subtitles

Ladli's life has become a quest for a semblance of meaning in the world. Her tender hopes for social acceptance have been met with harshness and unkind words. She yearns for a companion who can accept her soul along with her body. Many ups and downs have taught her that love, though, does not come without judgments and conditions. When it does come, however, she finds it hard to accept. This film is presented by Kashish, Mumbai International Queer Film Festival

**A LITTLE MORE BLUE** by Sugandha Bansal (short Fiction)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Sub Rang Society  
(for info email: karachi@aksfestival.com)



Country: India | Year: 2018 | Duration: 4 min | Language: English with English Subtitles

A Little More Blue is the story of a girl, trapped inside the body of a boy. Since childhood, she knew she was a girl and that someday she will have to break off her shackles and tell the truth to everyone. This film is presented by Kashish, Mumbai International Queer Film Festival

**A MONSOON DATE** by Tanuja Chandra (Short Fiction)  
Friday: 28/3 @ 6:45 p.m. - Venue: T2F, Karachi



Country: India | Year: 2019 | Duration: 21 min | Language: Hindi with English Subtitles

On an eventful, rainy evening a young woman is on her way to see a young man she is dating. Along the way, she experiences bittersweet moments with a series of strangers, even as a storm brews inside her. Today, she has decided to reveal to the young man a heart-breaking truth about her past.

This film is presented by Kashish, Mumbai International Queer Film Festival

**#UNHEARD STORIES PART 1** by Sonal Giani (Short Documentary)  
Saturday: 28/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: HOPE, Lahore



Country: India | Year: 2019 | Duration: 6 min | Language: Hindi with English Subtitles

The film explores the issues that transmen face in Indian society, through the personal experiences of Sadhya, a young Trans-man living in Maharashtra.

This film is presented by Kashish, Mumbai International Queer Film Festival

**#UNHEARD STORIES PART 2** by Sonal Giani (Short Documentary)  
Saturday: 28/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: HOPE, Lahore



Country: India | Year: 2019 | Duration: 8 min | Language: Hindi with English Subtitles

The film explores the issues that trans-women face in Indian society, through the personal experiences of Sonali, a young hijra person living in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

This film is presented by Kashish, Mumbai International Queer Film Festival



# SHORT FILMS

**THE ROGERS** by Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson (Short Documentary)  
Tuesday: 31/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: NCHR  
(for info email: karachi@aksfestival.com)



Country: USA | Year: 2019 | Duration: 16 min | Language: English with English Subtitles

An intimate glimpse of the first visible group of transgender men in the Pacific Islands -the Rogers of Samoa. From the loneliness of family rejection and homelessness to the camaraderie of church, cooking, and dance, their stories reveal the challenges and possibilities of life in an island society rooted in culture and tradition.

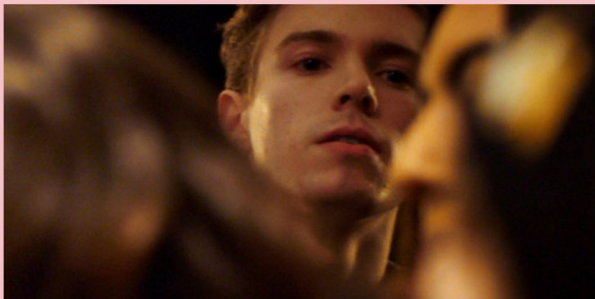
**FUGGIRO TANTO AMORE** by Raúl Lorite (short Fiction)  
Saturday: 21/3 @ 8:00 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore



Country: Spain | Year: 2019 | Duration: 10 min | Language: Spanish with English Subtitles

Diana and Álex are two music students in a conservatory. One afternoon they meet at her place to prepare for an audition. The unexpected presence of Diana's boyfriend, Héctor, is disturbing for Álex.

**ONE MORE PLEASE** by Aleksei Borovikov (short Fiction)  
Saturday: 21/3 @ 8:00 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore



Country: USA | Year: 2019 | Duration: 6 min | Language: English with English subtitles

A young lonely man goes to a bar to get wasted on Valentine's Day. Besides forgetting that love is unavoidable. We may fall in love unexpectedly in the oddest situations and places, even when we give up on all our hopes.

**THE LAST ROMANTIC** by João Cândido Zacharias (Short Fiction)  
Sunday: 22/3 @ 2:00 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore



Country: Brazil | Year: 2019 | Duration: 12 min | Language: Portuguese with English Subtitles

Two young individuals share different points of view of the same sexual encounter in a public space. "The Last Romantics" is about the freedom of encounters and the liberty of unexpected connections. It is also about the sharing of experiences between marginalized people and the happiness of being what one is. In an ideal world, it would not be a political film, but a simple romantic comedy.

**DHUAAN** by Sahil Rakesh Grover (Short Fiction)  
Saturday: 21/3 @ 6:00 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore



Country: India, Year: 2019 | Duration: 10 min | Language: Urdu with English Subtitles

Inspired by Saadat Hassan Mato's short story with the same name "Dhuan" is about the psyche of a young boy, we can all relate to. Bewildered by the darker tone of our world, he struggles to understand the difference between the flesh of animals and humans. To him both occupy a similar space-time dimension, both have blood running under them. Sometimes the inquisitive side of children brings them face to face with the truth, a truth they are barely capable of understanding. His own body betrays the very foundation of his ethics and all that he is left with is frustration.

**BANALITY OF EVIL** by Julian iliev (Short Fictions)  
Saturday: 21/3 @ 8:00 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore



Country: USA | Year: 2019 | Duration: 12 min | Language: English with English Subtitles

In a world where the law is black and white and policed without leniency, an immigrant becomes the lowest commodity. Juan attempts to stand up to his interrogators while enduring mental and physical abuse to uncover his digital security; the results of which, give authorities full access to his private life. In this climate of Neo McCarthyism, immigrants endeavor to survive this new world doctrine, which is in direct violation of the 1948 Geneva convention.



# SHORT FILMS

**ROSHAN & MANI** by Rishaya Palkhivala  
 (Short Documentary)  
 Saturday: 21/3 @ 8:00 p.m. - Venue: Olomopolo, Lahore



Country: India | Year: 2019 | Duration: 20 min | Language: Gujarati and English with English Subtitles

Through the lives of two elderly Parsi (Zoroastrian) sisters who are living together, we experience an array of human emotions- love, anger, helplessness and the reality of 'growing old'. With equal portions of humor and despair, we see how humans cope with mortality.

# EPISODICS / WEB SERIES

Sam Bailey  
**BROWN GIRLS**



Friday: 20/3 @ 6:00 p.m.  
 Venue: Q Karachi (for info email: karachi@aksfestival.com)

Country: USA | Year: 2018 | Duration: 72 min (6 episodes) | Language: English and English with English Subtitles  
 The award-winning web-series, "Bwon Girls", written by Fatimah Asghar, an American-Pakistani poetess, and author, is based on the story of two young women of color. Leila is a South Asian-American writer just now owning her queerness. Patricia is a sex-positive Black-American musician who is struggling to commit to anything: job, art, and relationships. While the two women come from completely different backgrounds, their friendship is ultimately what they lean on to get through the messiness of their mid-twenties.



Aks would like to thank.





## LIAR, LAWYER, AND LAW

SUNDAY: 22/3 @ 4:00 P.M. - VENUE: OLOMOPOLO, LAHORE

*By Moin Ulhaq | Moin ul haq is a writer, who runs a blog and often contributes to various publications. He is also an activist and staunch supporter of liberal values in the sphere of life.*

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. During the Delhi rule of sub-continent, art, culture, religion, society, and economy transformed and cherished the new horizon of liberalization. However, at the same time sub-continent fell prey to East India Company and the process of making sub-continent a jewel in the crown of the superpower initiated.

Liars played a part in mending the norms, culture, and traditions of indigenous communities. Whereas lawyers were front foot soldiers for establishing the colonial writ of British Raj.

Anyhow British Raj fell victim to sands of time and the subcontinent gained its freedom. While leaving Britain left its colonial law, which is still implemented in states of sub-continent.

In this dialogue, we will talk about colonial laws related to LGBTQ+ individuals, amendments made in them and reforms that are needed.

Panelist: Waiza Rafique is a practicing lawyer and Founder of Waiza Rafique Advocates and Consultants (WRALC). She is the Additional Secretary-General of the Gender Equality and Diversity Committee, Lahore High Court Bar Association. She has done LL.B (Hons.), Post Graduate Diploma in International Affairs and in Banking Laws with distinctions. She regularly writes for different newspapers and online portals and is often invited by the media to speak on socio-political and legal issues. She has worked with various organizations like PILDAT, RSIL, Pakistan Consumers Bureau and international organizations for social welfare, gender equality and youth empowerment.

## SONA CHANDI

SATURDAY: 21/3 @ 5:00 P.M. - VENUE: OLOMOPOLO, LAHORE

*By Moin Ul Haq | Moin ul haq is a writer, who runs a blog and often contributes to various publications. He is also an activist and staunch supporter of liberal values in the sphere of life.*

A bitter reality is that in order to become an equally respected member of society, wealth plays a crucial part. However indigenous queer minorities were deprived of opportunities and economic platforms that provide earning prospects. Thus these precious members of society were left behind.

In this dialogue we will talk about, opportunities available in economic paradigm, how to in-cash them and further how to make a living from them.

Panelist: Sufyan Akhtar is an E-Commerce Professional, Digital Marketer, entrepreneur, Freelancer & Social Worker. He has worked with many well-reputed Organizations such as (E-lan, Alfatha, and Nishat). As a freelancer, he has provided his services to many international brands and organizations. As an entrepreneur he is currently working on 3 projects:

- First project is (E-Ticketing Platform for event Management/Buses/Air Tickets).
- Second is Blogger about Promoting E-Commerce Business in Pakistan.
- Third is Seller at Different Marketplaces (Daraz, Amazon & eBay)

Moreover, he is working on a project to promote education & entrepreneurship.

## ANTI-TRANS VIOLENCE AND TRANSPHOBIA

TUESDAY: 24/3 @ 6:00 P.M. - VENUE: MOCCA COFFEE, DHA PHASE 5, LAHORE

Transgender people face an epidemic of anti-trans violence. Whether it occurs on the streets, in public institutes, in our homes, or at the hands of law enforcement agencies, staggering levels of violence persist even as trans equality advances. The annual Transgender Day of Remembrance serves as a somber reminder of the losses suffered because of senseless and unjust acts of cruelty against transgender people. Transgender people also experience heightened rates of family and intimate partner violence and sexual assault and are frequently re-victimized when they seek help. Unfortunately, law enforcement is often part of the problem, discrimination, stigmatization and police violence are the reason that affects transgender people and mostly transgender people are uncomfortable seeking police assistance or seeking justice for their basic human rights. To address this topic in detail, we will host a panel discussion with the representative of law enforcement agencies, prominent transgender community members and the representative from judicial rights-based organization.

This will be co-host by Rooh-e-Khalida and Justice Project Pakistan (JPP).

Rooh-e-Khalida is a newly established non-profit organization, the main purpose of this organization is to help and prevent transgender people and other minorities from facing police and civil society violence and crimes.

Justice Project Pakistan is a non-profit organization based in Lahore that represents the most vulnerable Pakistani prisoners facing the harshest punishments, at home and abroad. JPP investigates, litigates, educates, and advocates on their behalf.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS; WHERE DO WE ACTUALLY STAND TODAY?

SUNDAY: 29/3 @ 6:00 P.M. - VENUE: T2F, KARACHI

According to the website, Gender Concerns International, the status of women in Pakistan varies considerably across classes, regions and the rural/urban divide due to the uneven socioeconomic development and the impact of tribal and feudal social formations on women's lives. Overall, improvements in women's rights are spreading through Pakistan and an increasing number of Pakistani women are educated and literate. Religious groups and civil society are increasingly denouncing violence against women. The All Pakistan Ulama Council (the largest groups of religious clergy in Pakistan) have issued a Fatwa against honor killings. Courts have answered the call by women's rights advocates throughout the country and delivered harsher punishments for violent crimes against women.

To talk about women's rights status in Pakistan today, we will invite women from different minority groups and talk about women's rights and empowerment.

*This will be co-host by SubRang Society and Q-Karachi.*

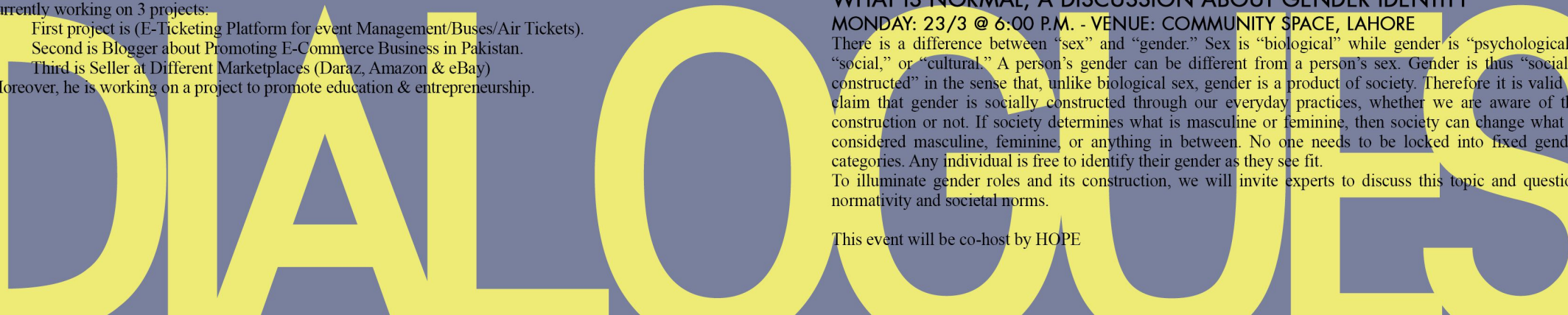
## WHAT IS NORMAL, A DISCUSSION ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY

MONDAY: 23/3 @ 6:00 P.M. - VENUE: COMMUNITY SPACE, LAHORE

There is a difference between "sex" and "gender." Sex is "biological" while gender is "psychological," "social," or "cultural." A person's gender can be different from a person's sex. Gender is thus "socially constructed" in the sense that, unlike biological sex, gender is a product of society. Therefore it is valid to claim that gender is socially constructed through our everyday practices, whether we are aware of the construction or not. If society determines what is masculine or feminine, then society can change what is considered masculine, feminine, or anything in between. No one needs to be locked into fixed gender categories. Any individual is free to identify their gender as they see fit.

To illuminate gender roles and its construction, we will invite experts to discuss this topic and question normativity and societal norms.

This event will be co-host by HOPE





## JANU KAPATTI

FRIDAY: 20/3 @ 6:00 P.M. - VENUE: HRCF, LAHORE

A theater play by Khursand Bayar Ali | Duration: 45 min  
| Country: Pakistan



*Noutankey Productions*  
Performing the Unperformed

Noutankey Productions is known for bold and unique theater plays with their DIY volunteer-based team of artists. "Janu Kapatti" is a play, specially made for the Aks festival, to celebrate and pay homage to Pakistani classic cinema and its openness towards minorities' representations. The cult classic film "Janu Kapatti" played by Munawar Zareef, was a satire of a gender bender character, yet it was so progressive in its tone and is still relevant and inspiring to date. The play is a modern-day reinterpretation of the classic Lollywood Film of the past. Janu Kapatti is a critique of gender, class, and society in general which has been adopted into a modern-day fantasy story by Khursand Buyar and the team.

## MERI SHANAKHT

FRIDAY: 27/3 @ 6:00 P.M. - VENUE: KARACHI

A theater play by Mistagh Foundation | Duration: 15 min  
| Country: Pakistan



Mistagh Foundation is a charity based organization that provides free education and a safer environment for young children especially children from minorities and marginalized communities. Meri Shankhat is a theater play produced by the students of Mistagh Foundation, through their performances they will highlight the issues impacting the transgender community.

## RAQS BY USAMA ABORO

FRIDAY: 27/3 @ 6:00 P.M. - VENUE: KARACHI

Usama is an emerging self-taught contemporary dancer and choreographer from Pakistan. His dance styles range from contemporary to kathak to funk. He believes that dance is one of the deepest forms of expression and it brings inspiration, beauty and hope to life. He has choreographed different dance projects in the past few years. For him, this journey of dance is the drive to the true essence of the goal. Dance is life and he always wants to remain true to the "grace" of dance. To add the extra spice Kami Sid will join him on stage for the performance.



## LITERARY

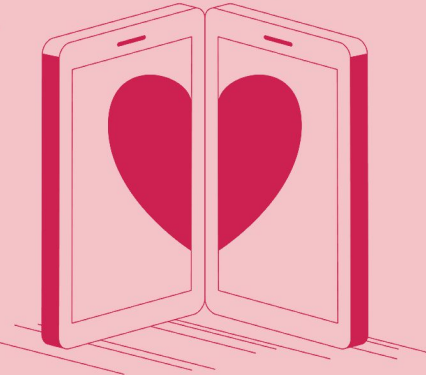
One of our main objectives is to promote local artists, activists and promote content made and produced locally. For doing so, Aks festival introduces this new section of literary contributions of writers, columnists, bloggers, debaters, poets, and storytellers and publishes their work into our annual catalog and website. We have had some amazing submissions of articles, poetry, thoughts, and blogs. Here are some of the chosen pieces.

### THE FASCINATING CONUNDRUM OF PAKISTANI DATING APPS

A new decade is upon us, and every day, more and more people are reaching the age where they start branching out and look for potential partners around them. And what better place to start than online dating apps? Whether it's Tinder, Bumble, or Grindr, there's a whole other world tucked away in our smartphones.

The average Pakistani grows up with a contrived perception of dating apps — dating is wrong, its haram, and so many apps that promote and encourage the behavior are by extension sinful too.

And here comes the distinct fear that laces every online 'romantic' interaction in the country; you make your profile anonymous, or put in as little information as possible. Perhaps you'll crop out your face so no one you know could recognize you. After all, what if a screenshot circulated by a predator reaches your family or social circle? And these fears are hardly out of the blue — in a country where honor killings are no departure from the norm, it is only fair for users to worry about their safety.



The taboo around dating apps is only compounded for queer people in the country. Not only is queerness as an identity inherently a political rebellion against the heteronormative societal structure, but it is also a core ingredient in the formula for loneliness. Every person you meet would find themselves growing up knowing well that the romantic idealism of finding a perfect soul mate is a journey laced with so many hurdles, it's a dream best left behind.

In recent years though, technology, society, and our spaces have evolved, and dating apps are no exception to this rule. With time, smaller communities have evolved, and every single dating app finds itself in a strange world of its own.

Tinder, being the most popular is an app that gets the most attention — the global reach of the app has extended to Pakistan, and it happens to have the most attention too, garnering an audience of people from all over, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, and class. Interestingly, the app itself is hardly intersectional — being hesitant to accept gender non-binary individuals, even blocking users that don't use the gender assigned at birth. Other apps have also made it to the mainstream, such as Grindr, a dating app exclusively for queer men. Although Grindr and other sexuality-based apps are used in Pakistan, the environment they bring to the table can be highly toxic — cases of blackmail, violations of confidentiality, and even abuse by law enforcement are commonplace and continue to threaten the very lives of their users.

Interestingly, a demographic left uncaptured by the boom in dating apps is that of queer women. The continued denial of their existence in society is captured ever so perfectly with this gap — after all, Pakistani society has long had a memory lapse when it comes to prominent queer women. The few apps that can be used in the country are sparsely populated and hardly used.

Anywhere around the world, dating is no easy feat. The added complications of living in Pakistan, being a gender and sexual minority, and at risk of exposure make the complications all too real. After all, just swiping left or right can make the difference between safety and peril.

*By: Amal Awais Chughtai is a hardcore feminist, astrology enthusiast, and cat person, and is currently working at a local NGO for gender minorities.*



**NAUTANKEY PRODUCTIONS,  
A bold theater group that literally  
acts for minority rights.**



Theatre has been one of the most popular mediums of entertainment in Pakistan for decades. The play in theatres with their dramatic performances and racy dance numbers capturing the hearts of many people. Theatre has also largely been

oriented towards the fancy a largely male audience and any narrative emerging from these mediums is centered in patriarchal depictions of women. This however started to evolve in the '70s, when women's rights activism was at its peak in Pakistan, the nation saw one Madiha Gauhar and her theatre company Ajoka.

Ajoka was the first of its kind, it featured plays where the strife of women and social inequalities were the primary narrative. The theatre company toured all around Pakistan and performed in public spaces for people of socio-economic backgrounds to attend. Ajoka was a marker of a social movement and was a beacon of resistance towards the fundamentalist regime of Zia-ul-Haq.

Today we are faced again with challenges of inequalities and of social injustices. Activism has rekindled in the nation and more people than ever before have become politically engaged in reforming the system to benefit all peoples not only those in power. One of the socially marginalized is the transgender community, who in recent years have come further in acquiring equal rights under the law than most other nations.

One of the prominent figures battling for the rights and humanity of the transgender people is Khursand Bayar Ali and her theatre group by the name Nautankey. The theatre group has proven to subvert expectations with their raw dismantling of gender norms and patriarchal views on sexuality, Nautankey dares to be bold enough to insinuate that people we do not understand aren't any less human than us. Her theatre group has provided a platform for minorities to exhibit their narratives and share their perspectives with a broader audience. Not only do we see raw and unique stories from Nautankey but we also experience the talent from the transgender community. The Nautankey team is an inclusive space with individuals from the gender and sexual minorities part of the team. This representation behind the scenes translates into the work that we see the theatre group engage in.

Nautankey has depicted progressive stories and has focused on unique perspectives that highlight minorities and their struggles, this makes the theatre group unique and sets them apart from any of their contemporaries. The highlight of their tenure has been how they have addressed gender in a more fluid and malleable way, giving them more creative liberty to tell stories that may seem unorthodox. This has allowed fresh talent, that may not have the opportunity to share their stories, a chance to influence the entertainment sector.

The theatre group really has the opportunity to inspire the next generation of talent to be more inclusive and to aim to tell subversive stories in a new and fresh perspective. It is a dear hope to see Nautankey expand and grow into a well-established theatre house that produces the entertainers of tomorrow. If this is a prelude to the future of entertainment in Pakistan, then it might very well be a bright future for new and diverse talent to share the spotlight.

*By: Bilal Ahmed is a self-proclaimed writer who was an author on the mehtaab comics which he presented at the 2019 San Diego comic-con. He aims to one day be a screenplay writer for substantive stories to help entertain and motivate people alike. Bilal is also a staunch feminist and a grassroots organizer for feminist causes.*

**FEAR FACTOR**

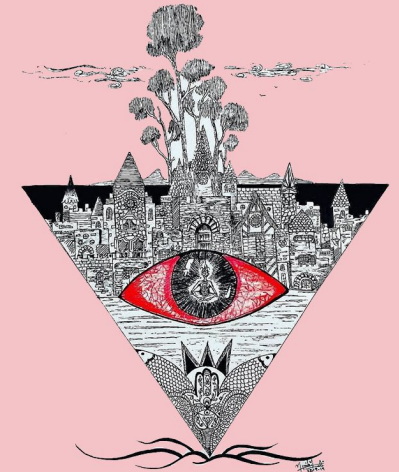
Analysis of history will depict one thing in particular and i.e. humans are a master manipulator. They have always figured out ways in which they can turn the course of time in their favor. Unfortunately, due to lack of knowledge and understanding, this fact is either hidden from masses or they don't have a lens that can depict its magnitude. Thus masters imply this technique so magnificently that masses can't decode it.

Masters use basic human instincts to manipulate masses. One of the most commonly used instincts is FEAR. Let's say fear of survival, when humans are left with only one option either to live or die, we have seen exceptional behavior, the most common example is of war.

In today's world masters govern through phenomena called the Nation States. Every nation has its own set of goals and for their achievement masters imply various manipulation techniques. The most common tool for these techniques can be of fear of "known" and it can be fear of "unknown".

Known, let's say in Pakistan known is Madho lal hussain (shah hussain) whose love for his disciple was very knowledgeable, such that he was named "Madho lal hussain". Moving on we have Amir Khusrow, who expressed his love for his teacher by writing following;

*Chhap tilak sab cheeni ray mosay naina milaikay  
Chhap tilak sab cheeni ray mosay naina milaikay  
Prem bhatee ka madhva pilaikay  
Matwali kar leeni ray mosay naina milaikay  
Gori gori baiyan, hari hari churiyan  
Bayyan pakar dhar leeni ray mosay naina milaikay  
Bal bal jaun mein toray rang rajwa  
Apni see kar leeni ray mosay naina milaikay  
Khusrau Nizam kay bal bal jayyiye  
Mohay Suhaagan keeni ray mosay naina milaikay  
Chhap tilak sab cheeni ray mosay naina milaikay*



Furthermore, we know Mir taqi mir, who wrote;

*Mir kya sada hain, bimar huway jis kay sabab  
Usi attar kay londay se dawa laitay hain*

One can debate the context of the above given examples, but one can't deny the element of pure love and its expression by one human being to another.

Unfortunately, love causes some sort of hindrance, in the goals of Pakistani masters. Hence they create fear by changing the narrative, such that literature is the work of the devil and love corrupts society.

Unknown or alien, anything is unknown is much easier to handle, the most common excuse used here is a foreign agenda. Hence we see movements like Feminism and LGBTQ+ are turned into taboo.

When it comes to the origin of ideas, it's a two-way process, sometimes its nature that ignites thought, other times its nurture that ignites thought. Unfortunately, we not only live in a managed state, rather a highly controlled state, were due to fear one has either gone through vasectomy or menopause hence the birth of ideas has come to an end. However rarely we have a miracle, and an idea is born, but it was either silence by state or buried alive by extra-state elements.

As mentioned above, when it comes to survival, humans are left with only one option either to live or die and at that time we have seen exceptional behavior. So hope for the best, because it's the only element that keeps one alive.

*By Moin Ul Haq | Moin ul haq is a writer, who runs a blog and often contributes to various publications. He is also an activist and staunch supporter of liberal values in the sphere of life.*



We are an inclusive festival and are completely free of cost. All we need from you is to Sign Up via email for the events you would like to join us.

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**Booking for Lahore events:**

lahore@aksfestival.com / hope.positive.expectations@gmail.com

**Booking for Karachi events:**

karachi@aksfestival.com

Upon receiving your email we will reply to confirm your reservation/booking and disclose the venue address.

*We would like to thank you on behalf of the Aks International Minorities Festival for your interest and support.*