

'What Will People Say' - a film that resonates close to home

By Sophie Braccini

The second movie by Norwegian director of Iraqi origin, Iram Haq, "What Will People Say" ("Hva vil folk si") is a suspenseful drama, sometimes difficult to digest, that shows how social pressure and traditional thinking of the Pakistani community living in Norway can push people to terrible extremes, such as kidnapping or forced marriage. It is also Haq's autobiography, told through Nisha, the heroine of the film who tells her own story and how she lived the same ordeal when she was 14 years old.

Nisha (Maria Mozhdah) lives a split life with her traditional family on one side – exemplified by the all-powerful figure of her father – and her Norwegian friends on the other side. There is no understanding between both lives, no possible compromise. Haq shows the prejudices of this ordinary Pakistani family that does not accept the "white's" way of life; these degenerate

people who they believe will end up alone and dishonored. Nisha lives by the laws of a country she had never seen, while being well integrated into the Norwegian society yet acutely aware of its conflicts with her family values. More than the mandatory virginity for girls before marriage, what is of primal importance in this microcosm is one's reputation. So when Nisha sneaks a boyfriend into her room, the catastrophe unfolds.

Haq shows with precision the slow downward spiral of a young girl who has done nothing wrong. As Nisha is thrown into situations she cannot evade, Haq draws a portrait of Afghanistan where the rights of women are definitely not the first priority. She nonetheless shows that love and beauty can be found even in the worst situations.

In an interview given during the Toronto International Film Festival where the movie was presented, Haq explained that her main point is that it is important for people

to be allowed to live free of social pressures. She said that she would like families to see the film together so that both teens and parents can have a better understanding of what each are going through.

This is certainly the most thought provoking aspect of the movie: to understand that all the bad treatment inflicted on Nisha by her family, and her own father, are perpetrated for her own good. Everyone is certain that what they are doing is done to give Nisha the best future possible. The love-hate relationship between the father and daughter is filmed beautifully by Haq through Nisha's eyes. How can she love a father who does to her what the story tells? The power of the film resides in the moral ambiguity of the relationship between a father and daughter who love each other, but whose conception of the world differs radically.

Haq, now 42 years old, said that it took her years before she was able to write the film, before the angry teenager had given way to a wiser person who also understood the pressure on her parents. She added that she was able to talk about the movie with her own father before he died, and that he apologized and encouraged her to complete her project.

"Nothing needs to stand still," Haq observed. "Things

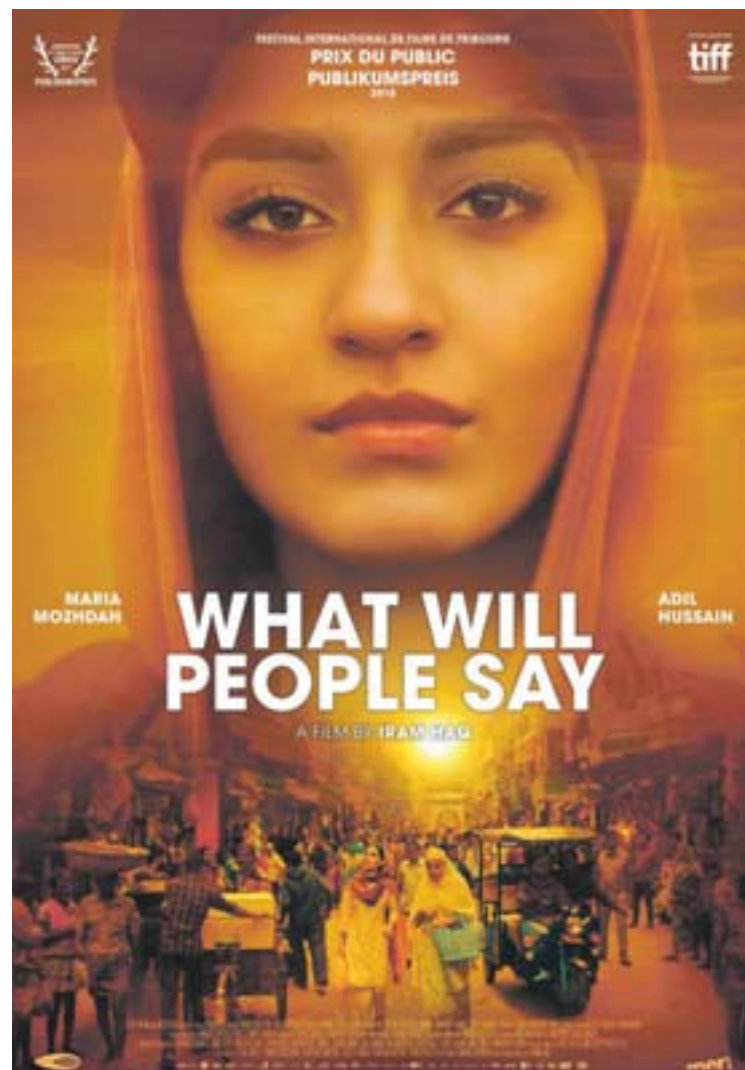


Image provided

can change."

"What Will People Say" will open at the Orinda Theatre on Feb. 8 for one week, followed by a week at the Rheem Theatre as part of the

International Film Showcase, which brings to Lamorinda notable international films recognized in festivals around the world and not yet released in the Bay Area.

Info: <http://internationalshowcase.org/>

Catherine Jolivet's legacy in the service of French culture



Photo provided

Testimony after testimony, a picture emerged of a fair, passionate and very direct woman, who called a spade a spade and that parents and their children could trust. One young woman explained how Jolivet literally saved her life in the metro in Paris when an evil person pushed her out of the metro car onto the platform as doors closed for departure. "Madame forcefully pried the doors open and retrieved me," remembered the grateful young woman.

Many talked about how Jolivet opened the hearts of the children to another country, another way of life and expanded their world vision from a very young age. Many traveled to France, with or without her and shared stories.

Parents and former students, sometimes together, followed one another to the microphone to express a mix of gratitude and sorrow.

But Jolivet was also a woman with tremendous will that confronted many difficulties in her life, from changing legislation that threatened her school, construction issues that forced her to move several times her Lafayette business, a difficult divorce, and finally a terrible battle with cancer that she fought until the end. One mother who visited her in Los Angeles where she moved for her last months to be close to her sons, recalled how she humanely talked about death with her and her daughter, giving a final lesson about the cycle of life.

In Lafayette Jolivet had been a strong supporter of the Chamber of Commerce, and Executive Director Jay Lifson says that "Madame Catherine" had a special spot in his heart, adding that her energy was boundless and her ability to connect people was remarkable. He says that he had the pleasure of working with her on re-establishing the Languac Society, Lafayette's sister city program with the village in France where the Marquis de la Fayette grew up. Jolivet spent her summer vacation in the French area of Auvergne where the city is set in 2015 and started to renew the ties between the two entities. Lafayette now needs to find a new "Madame" to pick up where she left off; it will not be easy.

and expression peppered conversations recalling some 35 years of memories.

Jolivet had come to the United States in the 1980s with only her passion for teaching and a child in tow. The beginnings were hard, and her second child told the surprised crowd that the future successful business woman started her life in the United States on food stamps.

The school was established in the 1990s and generations of children were educated by her, starting at just a few months of age. Even before total language immersion for small children became a proven benefit for childhood development, she started programs for very little ones where all they heard was French, in the form of stories, games, songs, acting, etc. As some of her former students recalled, she was about hands-on and multidimensional learning.

One former student explained that she believes that becoming bilingual as a preschooler was the reason why she is now a successful college student who speaks four different languages.

By Sophie Braccini

She was known simply as "Madame" to her students and their parents. Catherine Jolivet, a quintessential French woman who created and ran the French immersion school "French For Fun", recently died of cancer. Her family and friends organized a celebration of her life and legacy on Jan. 27 in Lafayette that highlighted the uncommon impact the woman had on her community.

Over 100 people of all ages came to the Lafayette Community Center where the gathering was held. "She was a life force and an amazing teacher," "she changed my life," "she taught us so much more than language," "she knew how to bend the rules when her students needed it," "she believed in children and their abilities." Those were a few of the comments made by parents and former students during the moving ceremony organized by Jolivet's son Robert Johnson for those who had loved Madame.

The crowd consisted mostly in English, but French words

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