



TIFF 2013 Film Review: Faith Connections

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Film Review by Preeti Thandi

Pan Nalin's **Faith Connections** plunges into the realm of devotion at the holy confluence of three rivers.



This **TIFF 2013** film is a documentary about the **Kumbh Mela**, a gigantic and unique religious event held **once in 12 years at the Triveni Sangam** which brings together 100 million people over 55 days and qualifies to be the biggest gathering on earth in the name of faith. It is believed that taking a dip at this Hindu pilgrimage can absolve one of sins and free one from the cycle of re-birth. Treading on holy waters, this India-France co-production merges five stories at the massive Kumbh Mela.



Nalin attempts to capture the enormous scope of the event by depicting overwhelming images from the fair – a never-ending milieu of people, pilgrims, sadhus, naked holy men, policemen, vendors and children just bustling with the dust, water and noise. Very much a scene from real India, the film at some level depicts both the agony and ecstasy of the characters on their spiritual journey.

At first, it is difficult to get a sense of the stories from the numerous scenes you see but the most resounding are the ones of **Kishan Tiwari**, a ten year old runaway kid who merrily chews tobacco and cheekily answers and questions people; **Hatha Yogi Baba**, a hermit who discovers a baby and takes over the role of parenting; and a family who loses their son **Sandeep** in the fair. As the camera follows these real life characters slowly the stories emerge.



The most ironic piece of Faith Connection is when faith is really put to test. Everyday at the fair, people are lost in the sea of millions and sometimes the spiritual journey of the pilgrims actually turns into a desolate search for their loved ones. Thousands of loudspeakers

blare out names of missing persons, posters are posted and yet after an agonizing search few are found.

The Kumbh Mela is also a confluence of Sadhus in all their varied forms - some who remain naked and are able to perform various feats, most can perform impossible bodily contortions and yogic postures, they offer blessings and cures to people and openly smoke marijuana and lead a stress free life. As a pilgrim in the film notes, Sadhus and Babas are also becoming contemporary and modernized and are known as iPad Baba and Visa Baba.



Nalin who is well known for films like **Samsara** and **Valley of Flowers** makes his own personal connection to the story but the film lacks a definite narrative and feels more like a touristy take on the subject. The cinematography of the film is worth a mention but the background score could be used minimally and the film could be edited to avoid repetition and keep the viewer's interest to the very end. Also it seems like Nalin takes the observer's view and doesn't go deep into the journey of faith and spirituality. It leaves the viewer hoping to find more.