



JioCinema



Press release

British Council launches 7th edition of Five Films for Freedom, world's largest LGBTIQ+ digital campaign

Indian short film part of the watchlist, screenings and workshops across India

- Global partnership with BFI Flare: London LGBTIQ+ Film Festival
- Indian film in global British Council / BFI London programme, *Bodies of Desire* directed by Varsha Panikar, Saad Nawab
- Partners with The Queer Muslim Project in India to hold Covid-sensitive community screenings in multiple Indian cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Guwahati and Bhubaneswar
- Films also available on Jio Cinema
- Local language subtitles introduced for engaging greater audiences across the world, including Hindi
- Skill-building workshop with LGBTIQ+ participants from **across India and Nepal** on using digital storytelling as a tool for creative self-expression and community building

19 March 2021: British Council brings the seventh edition of **Five Films For Freedom**, the **world's largest LGBTIQ+ digital campaign**. Audiences everywhere are invited to watch the five films online in solidarity with LGBTIQ+ communities in places where freedom and equal rights are limited, and to spread the word using the hashtag **#FiveFilmsForFreedom**. Self-expression, homophobia in rural communities, coming out as a teenager, and finding love later in life - this year's short films look at an intersection of LGBTIQ+ perspectives to explore love and acceptance.

Broadcasting five brand new LGBTIQ+ films to countries around the world, this year's programme showcases queer storytelling from India, Spain, Sweden, USA and the UK. The festival's short film selection includes an Indian film this time. Titled, *Bodies of Desire*, and directed by Varsha Panikar and Saad Nawab, the movie uses Panikar's work as the basis for a visual, poetic film capturing four sets of lovers in a sensual celebration of genderless love and desire.

Over **15 million people from more than 200 countries have viewed the Five Films For Freedom programme** since its launch in 2015. This continues to include online engagement in countries where homosexuality can be prosecuted and, in some cases, punishable by death. Especially for Indian audiences, the Five Films will also be streamed on Jio Cinema, one of India's leading video on-demand streaming services. This year, the campaign further addresses the language barrier typically associated with international content, by providing subtitles in local languages such as Hindi.

In India, British Council has partnered with [The Queer Muslim Project](#), South Asia's largest virtual network of queer, Muslim and allied individuals, to celebrate and amplify LGBTIQ+ stories, voices and people. This year's programme will also feature a community video from one of India's largest youth multimedia platforms, [Yuvaa](#) and a podcast on the Five Films For Freedom by [Bi Collective Delhi](#).

In addition, a series of **COVID-sensitive community film screenings** and curated online or offline engagements will be hosted by **10 LGBTIQ+and allied communities, collectives and organisationsacross India**. Varsha Panikar, Director (Bodies of Desire) will be part of several community engagements.

The 2021 programme plan also includes an **Online Digital Storytelling Workshop** for young LGBTIQ+ artists and creators based in India and Nepal. The 2-day online Digital Storytelling workshop is designed to equip participants with the skills needed to tell their stories in a digital format. The workshop will explore a range of themes from online security and safety to creating shared community spaces, and learning the basic elements of a script, writing practice, and narration. Participants will be provided with technical support so that they are able to produce their own digital story (in the form of a 3-minute long film) either during or after the workshop.

At the launch, **Jonathan Kennedy, Director Arts India, British Council, said**, "The Five Films For Freedom campaign continues to gather a wider audience and deeper engagement with people across the world. We are glad that we have partners with whom we share our purpose of achieving greater inclusion and solidarity for the LGBTIQ+ community. We are excited about an Indian film being part of the lineup this year as it will take the perspective of the Indian LGBTIQ+ individuals to global audiences and connect them with people across borders. The range of emotions across this year's lineup underlines the need for more love and togetherness in the world."

Rafiul Alom Rahman, Founder & Director of The Queer Muslim Project adds, "The Five Films For Freedom programme of the British Council has been a catalyst in promoting nuanced and intersectional representations of LGBTIQ+ stories and people from diverse cultures around the world. We are truly honoured to be collaborating with the British Council to create a space that celebrates community, creativity, self-expression and love. We have put a lot of thought into the curation for this year, and have an exciting range of community screenings and creative engagements planned across India, which we hope will encourage discussions among all audiences, and open possibilities for more explorations of queer issues and experiences in the world of cinema and art."

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Five Film For Freedom programme 2021:

- ***Bodies of Desire*** (India/Dir. Varsha Panikar & Saad Nawab/3 mins), directed by Varsha Panikar and multi-award-winner Saad Nawab, uses Indian poet Panikar's work as the basis for a visual, poetic film capturing four sets of lovers in a sensual celebration of genderless love and desire.
- ***Land of the Free*** (Sweden/Dir. Dawid Ullgren/10 mins) - Ullgren's tense Swedish drama follows the fictional David and friends as they celebrate his birthday with a nightly swim at the beach. The good mood swiftly changes after two straight couples walk by and laugh – was the laughter directed at them, or something else? Who owns the truth of exactly what happened?
- ***Pure*** (USA/Dir. Natalie Jasmine Harris/12 mins) is the fictional debut from 2020 Directors Guild of America Student Film Award winner Natalie Jasmine Harris, centring on a young Black girl grappling with her queer identity and ideas of 'purity'. The film is written, produced and directed by Harris - a filmmaker passionate about the intersection between filmmaking and social justice.
- ***Trans Happiness is Real*** (UK/Dir. Quinton Baker/8 mins) – a moving documentary from first-time filmmaker Quinton Baker - sees transgender activists take to the streets of Oxford, England to fight anti-trans sentiments using the power of graffiti and street art.
- ***Victoria*** (Spain/Dir. Daniel Toledo/7 mins) follows a bittersweet reunion between a trans woman and her ex, sparking tension and long buried resentment. Directed by award-winning filmmaker, Daniel Toledo, *Victoria* also features acclaimed trans actress, writer and director Abril Zamora (*The Life Ahead, The Mess You Leave Behind*).

All films are available to view from 17 - 28 March 2021 via the [British Council Arts YouTube channel](#).

LINKS

British Council Arts: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCQmR1CnIr2j2GHqleu5F4Q>

British Council India Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/inbritish/?hl=en>

British Council India Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BritishCouncilIndia/>

The Queer Muslim Project Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/thequeermuslimproject/>

The Queer Muslim Project Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/thequeermuslimproject>

Hashtags: #FiveFilmsForFreedom #CultureConnectsUs

Details of the Covid-sensitive community screenings:

- Nazariya, a Delhi-based queer feminist resource group, will host a closed screening for lesbian, bisexual women and transgender individuals on March 21 at 4 PM IST. Additionally, they will host an Instagram Live Session with LGBTIQ+ activists and filmmaker Varsha Panikar on March 26 at 4 PM IST.
- The [Bi Collective Delhi](#), a volunteer-led collective working with bi, bi+, pansexual and queer individuals, is organizing an online screening for members of the community on **March 21 at 5**. They will also host podcast on Five Films For Freedom with filmmaker Varsha Panikar.
- [Orinam](#), an all-volunteer unregistered collective of LGBTIQ+ people and allies based in Chennai, is hosting a screening on **March 20 at 4 PM IST**. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion with activists and filmmaker, Varsha Panikar.
- [Harkat Studios](#), an international boutique arts studio based in Mumbai and Berlin, will host a screening followed by conversation with filmmaker Varsha Panikar on **March 27 at 7 PM IST** at their space in Versova.
- [Yuvaa](#), a socially conscious youth media, data insights and community engagement organisation, is producing a community video on the Five Films For Freedom. The video will be available for viewing post **March 25**
- [Anaajoree](#), a non-profit organization based out of Guwahati and [Poetry Couture](#), will organize a screening, followed by a discussion with queer activists from Northeast India and curated performances at *The Space, 53 Parag Das Path, Bamunimaidan, Guwahati* on **March 20 at 4 PM**.
- The [Kalinga Literary Festival](#) will host a screening, followed by panel discussion and a poetry session at Oxford Book Store, Bhubaneswar on **March 28 at 4 PM IST**. Speakers include renowned Olympian and sprinter Dutee Chand, among others.

ENDS

About Five Films For Freedom

Five Films For Freedom is the world's widest-reaching LGBTIQ+ online film campaign. The campaign has been run by the British Council, in partnership with BFI Flare: London LGBTIQ+ Film Festival, since 2015. www.britishcouncil.org/arts/fivefilmsforfreedom

Share online using **#FiveFilmsForFreedom** via: [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#)

About the British Council

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We work with over 100 countries in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Last year we reached over 80 million people directly and 791 million people overall including online, broadcasts and publications. We make a positive contribution to the countries we work with – changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust.

Founded in 1934 we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. We receive a 15 per cent core funding grant from the UK government.

britishcouncil.org

About The Queer Muslim Project

[The Queer Muslim Project](#) (TQMP) is South Asia's largest virtual network of queer, Muslim and allied individuals, with a growing global community of over 25K people. TQMP uses digital advocacy, storytelling and visual arts to create avenues for young people from underserved communities to express themselves, build community and forge creative collaborations. Over the past year itself, TQMP has reached over 400K people online and offline through creative partnerships with organizations such as Facebook, British Council and the US Embassy.

About Jio Cinema

JioCinema is a video on-demand streaming service now owned by Jio Platforms. JioCinema's content library includes films, TV Show & Web series, music video, and documentaries. The app is available in mobile phones/Television/iPad/tablets etc. that works on Android and iOS. JioCinema has 7% market share among many competitors like Netflix & Prime Video. Their unique visitors per month is around 8 – 10 million viewers and Jio Cinema is available on all Jio phones and Jio 4G phones used by about 400 million subscribers.

About BFI Flare: London LGBTIQ+ Film Festival

BFI Flare: London LGBTIQ+ Film Festival is the UK's longest running queer film event. It began in 1986 as Gay's Own Pictures. By its 3rd edition it was tagged the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and since then has grown to become the largest LGBTIQ+ film event in the UK, and its most anticipated. The Festival changed its name to BFI Flare in 2014 to reflect the increasing diversity of its films, filmmakers and audience. The festival is programmed by Jay Bernard, Michael Blyth, Zorian Clayton, Brian Robinson, Emma Smart and guest programmer Tara Brown, led by Festivals Director, Tricia Tuttle.

The 35th edition of BFI Flare: London LGBTIQ+ Film Festival will take place 17 – 28 March, available digitally UK-wide on BFI Player. Tickets go on sale via bfi.org.uk/flare on the 2 March.

About the BFI

The BFI is the UK's lead organisation for film, television and the moving image. It is a cultural charity that:

- Curates and presents the greatest international public programme of World Cinema for audiences; in cinemas, at festivals and online
- Cares for the BFI National Archive – the most significant film and television archive in the world
- Actively seeks out and supports the next generation of filmmakers
- Works with Government and Industry to make the UK the most creatively exciting and prosperous place to make film internationally

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter. The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Tim Richards.

www.bfi.org.uk