

# Khanna's Holy Kitchens to premiere at NYIFF

## STAFF REPORTER

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God comes to the hungry in the form of food, said the 'Father of India' Mahatma Gandhi. It is this philosophy which has compelled Chef Vikas Khanna to explore the symbiotic intersection of food and religion in his documentary series Holy Kitchens.

"At any given time somewhere on Earth, people are gathering to share food in the name of God. This is spiritual sustenance, meant to bring us closer together and closer to the Creator," says Khanna. "This is the story of Holy Kitchens."

"Karma to Nirvana," the second installment in the series which focuses specifically on Hinduism, Lord Krishna's spiritual practices, and the principles of Karma and Nirvana as set forth in the Bhagavad-Gita, will premiere at the New York Indian Film Festival (NYIFF) on Saturday, May 7, at 12:30 p.m. in IMecca Cinemas' Theater Two, located at 54 Varick Street.

The film features interviews with Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Arun Gandhi, Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, Shaunaka Rishi Das, Aroon Shiv-

dasani, Lynn McGuire, Scott Carney and Anju Bhargava. It is written and narrated by Andrew Blackmore-Dobbyn, directed by Anubhav Bhardwaj, and co-directed by Francisco Aguila. "Karma to Nirvana" is a Junoon Hospitality presentation.

Khanna's journey in the documentary takes us right into the soup kitchens of Amma, Mata Amritanandamayi Devi's ashram in Kerala, where Amma blesses thousands of people daily with motherly hugs and serves them meals with her own hands. "We have to help the hungry as best we can," says Amma. "We have to see that feeding the hungry is no less than the worship of God."

Subsequently, the documentary highlights the magnanimous charity work of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Delhi and other parts of the world. Their "Food for All" programs feed hundreds of thousands of hungry children and adults, and Khanna personally cooks in the ISKCON kitchens in London, as a way for him to give back.

ISKCON's mid-day meal program in India provides free meals to children in schools, thereby helping



them get an education and ensuring a brighter future for them, as well as for India. According to the Bhagavad-Gita, "sharing food is the highest form of Karma." It is this selfless service to others that eventually leads Hindus to the path to higher spirituality and, thus, to Nirvana.

"True Business," the first film in the Holy Kitchens series focused on the

Sikh religion and how its temples provide free food through its kitchens, known as "langars," to everyone who comes, regardless of their beliefs. With commentary by Dr. Deepak Chopra, the film played to a sold-out audience at New York's Sikh International Film Festival in fall 2010. Next year's film is titled "The Moon of Eid" and will explore Ramadan in the Islamic faith from the Middle East to Europe and across the world.

"Our aim is to make people aware of this commonality of the world's religious traditions and to illuminate the differences in a way that will engender mutual tolerance and respect," says Khanna. "Taken together, these films are our offering to the dialog that is meant to create more peace and harmony in the world."

Khanna was raised in Amritsar, India, where he grew up surrounded by large family feasts, the seasonal produce fresh from the fields of Punjab, and of course, his grandmother's traditional home cooking. It was at his grandmother's side that he began to learn the intricacies of Indian cuisine. He started his own catering business, Lawrence Gar-

dens, at the age of 17.

Khanna has received rave reviews for his cooking in The New York Times and many other publications. His current restaurant work includes Junoon Restaurant, the Café at the Rubin Museum of Art, and Flavors and Feasts Catering. Upon his graduation from the Welcoming Graduate School of Hotel Administration, he went on to train under renowned chefs of Taj Group of Hotels, Oberoi, Leela Group, and many more. He has authored several books including "The Spice Story of India" and "Modern Indian Cooking." His next book, "Flavors First," will be published in 2011 by Lake Isle Press. His following book is titled "Return to the Rivers: A Culinary Pilgrimage Through the Himalayas," with a foreword by His Holiness, The Dalai Lama.

Khanna has also been a guest judge and chef on Gordon Ramsay's television shows for Fox, Hell's Kitchen and Kitchen Nightmares, Food Network and the Martha Stewart Show among others. He is the recipient of numerous national and international awards and is also an honorary member of many foundations, including the World Peace Society.