NEW DELHI -- Harvey Keitel will star in his first Indian film, *Against Itself*, portraying a secular expatriate American schoolmaster in India who struggles to protect his students and school from anti-Gandhian forces. The film will be in English which will be possibly dubbed in Hindi and begins shooting in mid-March.

“The film deals with religious intolerance that’s one of the core issues of contemporary society. And I believe that art can sometimes more effectively deliver a message, than politics,” said Keitel in a statement.

*Against Itself* is produced by Sanjay Singh whose latest film *Udaan* (directed by Vikramaditya Motwane) has collected 14 trophies sweeping India's awards season after the film screened at Cannes last year in the Un Certain Regard section.

*Against Itself* is written and directed by Kranti Kanade whose award winning 2007 feature debut *Mahek* premiered at the London Film Festival while his 2002 graduation film *Chaitra* won India's National Award for best short film.

The screenplay for *Against Itself* won the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles Film Fund development grant whose jury included screenwriters Gill Dennis (*Walk The Line*), Anurag Kashyap (*Dev D, Black Friday*) and Sooni Taraporevala (*Salaam Bombay, Mississippi Masala, The Namesake)*.

Keitel was approached by Singh during a trip to Los Angeles last December after which both met in New York.

“He’s a westerner, yet more Indian than any Indian,” said Singh adding that Keitel loved the philosophy inherent to the script “being a keen believer in Gandhian values and inspired by Sufi poets like Kabir, Meera, Rumi and Hafiz.”

Keitel then flew down to Mumbai last month and over six days the 71-year-old veteran attended script reading sessions, wardrobe tests, interacted with the cast and crew and even went location hunting. “He was excited to see that most people in India spoke English and was impressed with the theatre talent we have here, some of whom will be part of my cast,” added Singh.

Keitel visited India 15 years ago and sharing his exposure to Hindi films and movies based on India, said, “I like Mira Nair’s films. *Salaam Bombay* was terrific. I also liked *Slumdog Millionaire.*”

One of the child actors of *Slumdog Millionaire*, Ayush Mahesh Khedekar will also star in *Against Itself*.

Keitel's credits include Jane Campion’s 1999 film *Holy Smoke* which was partly filmed in India starring Kate Winslet as a young Australian girl who follows an Indian religious cult and is “deprogrammed” by an American “exit counselor” portrayed by Keitel.