

# MOVING C I N E M A

It is not everyday that you get to see sensitive and moving portrayals in film - images that move and haunt you long after darkness falls on silver screens. The Toronto International Film Festival is an annual opportunity to view eclectic talent from around the globe. This year, the 30th edition of the fest featured 335 films over nine frenzied days of movie buzz and movie buffs! While many international entries like *L'Enfant*, *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, *Capote*, *Proof*, *North Country*, *Sa-Kwa*, *Mrs. Henderson Presents*, *The History of Violence*, *Where Truth Lies* and *Cache* received critical applause, two Indian features tugged at the heart and soul of film connoisseurs. Shonali Bose's *Amu* and Buddhadeb Dasgupta's *Memories in the Mist* stood out for their sensibilities.



**S**honali Bose's *Amu* is a poignant effort to capture the massacre of the Sikhs in 1984 following the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. A series of chilling facts come to light through the personal journey of Kajju (Konkana Sen Sharma) who is visiting India from the States in search of her roots. There she meets Kabir (Ankur Khanna), the son of an upper class bureaucrat. In her search for the soul of India she discovers disturbing facts about her own life. Noted activist and central committee member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Brinda Karat agreed to play the role of Kajju's mom (Keya) in the film. With admirable performances from the whole cast including Konkana and Brinda, the film struck a chord with Toronto audiences.

Shonali Bose was in the first year of college at Miranda House in Delhi University when the 1984 riots happened. She herself spent time at the relief camps and was haunted



by the grief and the sounds of the wailing Sikh women. "The entire system is responsible for the 1984 carnage, the entire system is culpable for the fact that for 21 years justice has been denied." This was Bose's response when queried if having a Sikh Prime Minister in India now would change anything in regards to this issue, "One Sikh Prime Minister cannot do much to change that, he apologized but what can an apology do? The matter of fact is that the 11th Commission of Enquiry - the Nanavati Commission of Enquiry has let everyone off scot-free. The Government's own action committee, all they've done is that Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar have been made to resign but it's not a matter of one or two ministers. It's a matter of the culpability of the entire Indian state, every state organ was involved."

Bose had to face some resistance from the Censor Board of India and was asked to remove a line from the film in which the widows tell Amu that the whole system (politicians, police, government) was involved in the mass killing. Bose feels that with the widows being 'silenced' the impact was even more chilling. However she did fight the Censor Board's decision to give the film an 'A' certificate because it restricted her audience. The rationale from the board, as she quotes it, was, "Why should young people know history that is better buried and forgotten!" And Bose's answer was, "That's why I made the film." She took it to young people, to schools and colleges and found the experience to be very rewarding.

*Amu* hit national headlines when it was released in India because not many films have been made on the 1984 riots. All stories used in *Amu* are true 1984 stories that Shonali heard



at the relief camp. However she feels that the film captures so much more, "The immigrant yearning for your motherland, a mother-daughter relationship, people rising at the time of crisis and helping others, the upper class society..."

Shonali's mother died when she was in the final year of college and it was as if the collective grief of '84 and her own personal grief coalesced in her with *Amu*. Even to think or write about a mother brought tears to her eyes but she needed to do it to give the film the ring of honesty and truth. "The person who plays Keya (Brinda Karat) is my mother's sister and is like an adopted mother to me. In that way the film is very much a personal journey. Keya, the character, is very much my life. (Keya) says, 'I breathe differently when I am in India and I never want to come back.' It's the same for me," says Bose.

Bose plans to make her next film on the revolutionary women in the Indian struggle for freedom. "It will be a mainstream film with stars and quite different from *Amu*," she says with a smile.

**Buddhadeb Dasgupta** is recognized as a Master at the Toronto film fest and this year he was back again with yet another intriguing and sinuous tale. Starring Rahul Bose, Mithun Chakraborty and Sameera Reddy, *Memories in the Mist* explores the relationship between a father and son. The film constantly traverses between the real and the unreal. It leads the viewer's imagination to delve beyond the mist and rhythmically drifts between the past and the present. Sumonto (Rahul Bose) portrays the common man who lives in a world of his own. As the film zooms into his childhood, the circumstances of his separation from his father (Mithun Chakraborty) become evident. As destiny has it, father and son can never meet again yet the film sets out to make the impossible, a surreal possibility. Sumonto is married to Supriya (Sameera Reddy) however they hardly have a relationship, let alone intimacy. Sumonto's two kids are the only delight from this marriage and he spends most of his time with them.

*Memories in the Mist* effectively challenges the notions of success and failure and what they mean in real life contexts. Sumonto is happy not being "somebody" in life. On the contrary, his wife, Supriya is over-ambitious and consistently labels him a failure. The film takes a dig at the rat race for achieving so-called greatness and on what greatness truly is.

Talking about the choice of his cast for the film, Dasgupta says, "Rahul is a very sensitive actor and this is his best performance so far. Mithun has acted with me before and he has contributed to the film. I picked Sameera because her face has the ambition I was looking for." Dasgupta weaves images into the film which belong to his own life. The flute player and his son appear at significant moments in Sumonto's life and the timing symbolically contrasts with his own relationship with his father. The image of the flute player is one Dasgupta has carried from his own childhood.

Talented actor, Rahul Bose tried his very best to get the character right. "It was tough because this guy is nothing like me," he says, "His socio-cultural background, his physicality is not so like mine, his humanism. By all outward parameters, he is a failure. He is such a different person." But on the same note he felt very safe and secure as an actor with Dasgupta, "When you have a director who has written about the character straight from his soul-I think a part of Sumonto is him-you know you cannot go wrong."

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