

TIFF 2012 Film Review: *Midnight's Children*

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By Preeti Thandi.



Four years ago **Deepa Mehta** took up the formidable task of filming a book that was considered “impossible” to film. The massive task of adapting, Salman Rushdie’s celebrated prize winning novel, *Midnight’s Children* was a **challenge** in every sense of the word and **epic** in it’s scope. It involved converting a deeply layered complex story with multiple characters, laced with magic realism. It meant trimming down a novel, spanning over four generations and five time periods, depicting three wars, creating 64 locations, casting 127 speaking parts, finding animals, babies and **maintaining the authenticity** of every time period! In view of that Mehta has accomplished a lot in the time frame of 148 minutes and deserves applause for her tremendous effort.

That said the struggle for the western audiences would be to get the historical context of the film, which maybe the reason for the somewhat mixed critical reviews the film has been receiving following it’s premiere at the Telluride Film Festival and it’s much anticipated Gala screening at Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) 2012.

Literally “**handcuffed to history**” the main protagonist of the film, Saleem Sinai (Satya Bhabha) was born at the same moment India gained independence. As Saleem “tumbles into the world” he is switched by a hospital nurse in her own act of **revolutionary rebellion** and a **twist of destiny**. The nurse switches Saleem, the son of a poor woman for Shiva (Siddharth), the son of a wealthy couple. The destiny of the two children also becomes interlinked with that of the country.

Rushdie has not only written the screenplay but also narrates the film in his witty style. Sprinkled with ready **humour**, juicy details and the true flavours of the book, Rushdie’s voiceover creates the right tone for such a mammoth production. The film was shot extensively in Sri Lanka under the cover of secrecy.

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Mehta uses a **rich palette** to create the deep earthy hues of Kashmir, vibrant shades of the magician’s carnival and the **dark ominous clouds** of the emergency period. Giles Nuttgens makes the film visually stunning. Dilip Mehta (Deepa’s brother) has done an outstanding job as a Production Designer to create the right feel for every scene and period in the film.

Featuring an ensemble cast with some of Mehta’s regulars, what works for the film are the **exceptional performances** of every actor. Each character stands out and doesn’t get lost in the multitude of events and changes of scenery. Satya Bhabha in the lead role of Saleem Sinai exudes the right virtue for his character. Mehta repeats actors who have featured in her previous films like **Seema Biswas** (Mary Pereira) who excels, **Shabana Azmi** (Naseem – Saleem’s grandmother) and **Anupam Kher** (Ghani, Naseem’s father) who are both hilarious and Khulbushan Kharbanda (Picture Singh, the snake charmer) who is ‘charming’ in every sense.

Other notable actors include Shahana Goswami (Amina Sinai, Saleem’s mother), Rajat Kapoor (Aadam Aziz, Saleem’s grandfather), Shriya Saran (Parvati, the witch), Siddharth (Shiva), Ronit Roy (Ahmed Sina, Saleem’s father) and Rahul Bose (General Zulfikar). The film also features **Canadian actors**, Anita Majumdar (Emerald, Saleem’s Aunt) and Zaib Shaikh (Nadir Khan). In fact all the actors are so good that you are left with the urge to see more of them.

It is uncertain if Mehta and Rushdie’s “**love letter to India**” will actually be released and seen in India as both the director and the author remain ‘controversial’ in their homeland but lets just hope some of the **magic** works for the film’s ‘destiny’.