

## Article Details

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### Review: Cooking with Stella

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Cooking With Stella – Dilip Mehta Stirs up a Spicy Stew



For his first feature, well known photographer, Dilip Mehta has come up with quite a delectable entrée. *Cooking with Stella* is a light hearted social satire which had a gala premiere film at the Toronto International Film Festival 2009. Collaborating on the script with his celebrated sister, Deepa Mehta, the film has interesting observations on the master-servant hierarchy in India. Flipping the pan, Mehta also brings out the gullibility of westerners when they visit India.

The film is as appetizing as it sounds to begin with but becomes predictable towards the end. *Cooking with Stella* may not appease to the same segment of people who were of the view that *Slumdog Millionaire* made India look bad. But in his support Mehta makes every attempt to bring Delhi alive. Parts of the film were actually shot in the compounds of the Canadian High Commission. In the same instant Mehta captures the pulse of high profile parties and also the sizzle of the Delhi dhabas (road side eateries).

The film is based on the events that ensue after Maya, a Canadian diplomat (Lisa Ray) is posted at the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi, India. Eagerly awaiting their arrival is their cook, Stella (Seema Biswas) who is ready to show "diplomat sir, madam and baby" their new home. Little does Stella know that her perception of a traditional diplomatic family is going to be completely transformed. When morning dawns, Sir stays home to take care of the baby and it is Madam who is heading to work! Not only that Michael (Don McKellar), Maya's husband, is also ready to encroach on Stella's domain, her kitchen. The family on their end are not used to having help around the house and try to adapt to their new life.

Soon it becomes apparent that Michael and Stella do have something in common – a love for cooking. An avid chef, Michael asks Stella to be his guru. After initially refusing Stella eventually agrees. As the curries thicken, it becomes apparent that Stella is actually stirring up saucy schemes of her own quite oblivious to her naive master. The film takes a twist when the family hires a nanny (Shriya Saran) to take care of their little baby girl.

Like always, Seema Biswas gives an amazing performance especially as she diligently remembers Mother Mary after every sin she commits. Lisa Ray is in command as a Canadian diplomat with mixed Indian roots. Shriya Saran appears fresh as a seemingly coy nanny. Don McKellar tries to be a passionate cook and shares a good peppery chemistry with his guru Biswas. However even though he lays out a fine table, it's Seema Biswas who steals the whole cooking show!