

D8 ★ TORONTO STAR ★ FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2007

# Opening Today

## Cabbies a driving force

Support from Canada's Punjabis helps film on 1984 New Delhi riots get released here

PRITHI YELAJA  
STAFF REPORTER

Shonali Bose's film garners critical acclaim at the Toronto film festival in 2005. Then the Berlin film festival. And after packing theatres for three months in India, it wins the National Award for best picture. Fade out.

Fade in. Despite the buzz created by *Amu* — a movie about the 1984 riots in New Delhi, where thousands of Sikhs were killed in retaliation for the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards — Bose can't find a Canadian distributor.

"We had high hopes it would get picked up because it was so well-received. It had been such a struggle to get the film made, we thought, 'We can't give up now,'" said Kolkata-born Bose, 42, who is based in Los Angeles.

With the help of cabbies in Toronto and Vancouver, they didn't.

She and husband Bedabrata Pain, the film's producer, believed so fiercely in the movie's message that they decided to release it themselves.

*Amu* opens today in theatres in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, and in April in the U.S., where a distributor has picked it up.

Bose made three trips to Toronto and Vancouver last year to raise money for the Canadian release, including hosting radiothons on Punjabi shows and meeting with Sikh community leaders, particularly the Ontario Sikh Gurdwara Council.

"I'm indebted to them because they were the organizing force behind the grassroots fundraising effort," said Bose.

"Really, this film is releasing because of the taxi drivers of Toronto and Vancouver," she said. Hundreds of them had not yet seen the movie but donated \$50, \$100 or \$200 each, said Bose.

"It was so moving, I literally felt like crying over the love and support of ordinary people. In small increments we raised \$50,000 in Toronto and \$20,000 in Vancouver, which was just barely enough to make our prints, book our theatres (five in Toronto, two in Vancouver and one in Montreal) and do the bare minimum advertising."

The movie is in English, but the Woodbine cinema in Etob-



Shonali Bose and her husband, producer Bedabrata Pain, brought *Amu* to the Toronto International Film Festival in 2005 for its North American premiere. Local cabbies helped it get into theatres today.

icoke will run it dubbed in Hindi (India's official federal language), something Bose produced especially for the Punjabi community here.

"I got such an overwhelming response from them. They had raised most of the money, but they said they couldn't follow the English, so I dubbed it in Hindi last year."

A typical response was that of the woman sitting beside Bose at a preview screening in Toronto this week.

Bose asked: "What did you think? I'm the one who made it." "She just grabbed me and squished me to her bosom and started howling."

Persuading Indian television to show the film is a tougher fight. Government censors there wanted to cut 15 minutes, essentially every mention of the riots. Bose and Pain refused.

"We were not going to show it on TV butchered like that. It's

worst than banning. What is mind-blowing it's been 23 years and they still want it covered up," Bose said.

Though the plot of *Amu* is fictional, it is inspired by true stories Bose came across when she worked in relief camps in Delhi after the riots, incidents of what she calls "state terrorism."

"Nineteen eight-four is not about the past. It's about the present, because it brought into India a brand of politics where those who are in power could organize such a massacre and get away with it. In spite of numerous commissions of inquiry, nobody has been punished."

In 2005, after the ninth inquiry, government minister Jagdish Tytler was forced to resign, though he is still a member of parliament.

*Amu* is not anti-India, Bose insists. "Until we deal with this openly, it is an open wound. India can never be shining or move

ahead if we don't come to terms with it.

"It was not an issue of Hindu/Sikh hatred. I was an eyewitness. I lived through it. All I heard were stories of courage — how Hindu neighbours hid Sikhs to save them. India is shining in the strength and beauty and courage of its people, whereas you have those in power who can carry out and get away with massacres."

The issue is one for all Indians, not just Sikhs, said Pain, a NASA scientist whose \$50,000 (U.S.) royalty cheque for imaging technology he invented provided seed money for the movie.

"We are Bengalis. We made this film because we feel for this issue, as any Indian should, because it's Indian blood that has been spilled and Indians' rights that have been violated. Every condition exists today for a similar massacre to happen, so long as injustice carries on."

## A politically charged lesson

Amu

★ ★ ★ (out of 4)

Starring Konkona Sen Sharma, Brinda Karat and Ankur Khanna. Written and directed by Shonali Bose. 102 minutes. At Carlton, Empire at Empress Walk, Kennedy Commons and Rainbow Woodbine. PG

SUSAN WALKER  
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

Within hours of the death of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on Oct. 31, 1984, marauding gangs of armed men swiftly sought revenge.

Her Sikh bodyguards were blamed for the assassination, and in remarkably short order the avengers located Sikh households in New Delhi and burned or slaughtered their innocent inhabitants.

As panic swept through the slums where many Sikhs lived, police and politicians stood by, denying help to stricken citizens and doing nothing to stop the rampage. The death toll in Delhi rose to 5,000; thousands more were injured.

With her film *Amu*, director Shonali Bose hoped to do what numerous inquiries have failed to: tell the story of the massacre to the world and obtain justice and reparation for the families of the dead and injured victims.

A film so heavily freighted with a political purpose might not have succeeded in raising awareness were it not so well-constructed. Bose was a 19-year-old student in Delhi at the time of the assassination and subsequent massacre. She worked in the relief camps that

were set up afterwards and one of her jobs was writing postcards for widows who were informing their relatives of the horrors they had survived.

She subsequently moved to New York, earning a degree at Columbia and then enrolling in film school at UCLA. Her vivid memories of what she had seen and heard in 1984 are there to see on the screen in a first feature that is as psychologically true as it is politically charged.

Kaju (Konkona Sen Sharma) is an American, a recent university graduate who has travelled to India to acquaint herself with the country where she was born. Her mother, Keya, is opposed to the journey, but independent-minded Kaju has gone anyway, ensconcing herself with her mother's family in Delhi.

As her sightseeing trips take

her around the city, Kaju is sometimes overcome with an unpleasant feeling associated with particular locations, as if she had been there before. But in the village where she was told she lived until the age of 3, she remembers nothing. She's adopted, Kaju tells Kabir, a student from a privileged family who initially takes Kaju for a spoiled, materialistic American.

After Kaju's mother makes surprise visit to India, Kaju begins to question her about her adoption. She's been told that her family was wiped out in a malaria epidemic, but through Kabir's father, a government official, Kaju finds out that there was no outbreak. She knows nothing of her years in India.

"Whenever I try to talk to her about it," she says of Keya, "this wall comes down." Inevitably,

Kaju goes looking for her birth parents, enlisting Kabir to help her.

Keya's silence is a metaphor for the official silence that has surrounded the violence of those few days in 1984. Kabir grows interested in the massacre after he and Kaju meet people who lost relatives in the bloodshed. His parents are strangely reluctant to discuss the subject and wary of his interest in it.

Bose cast her own aunt, Brinda Karat, as Keya. Never having acted in films before, Karat, a leading woman's activist and member of the central committee of the Communist Party of India, slips naturally into her role. She plays a civil rights worker and single mother who apparently sacrificed a romance in India when she moved to the U.S.

Konkona Sen Sharma, who was named best actress in India in 2003, does amazingly well in her performance of a 21-year-old American. Ankur Khanna looks a bit too weak for his part as Kabir, but a typical Bollywood leading man was not called for in this role.

Bose embeds her history lesson in a drama with authentic emotional mother-daughter conflict. As Kaju finds out the truth about her past, and her connection to a story that has been suppressed, she is drawn closer to her mother. At the same time, this fictional account tells a truth about how mass violence and hatred leave scars that future generations must bear.



Konkona Sen Sharma plays Kaju, an American who travels to India against her mother's wishes to learn about where she was born.

**amu**

"I absolutely love AMU. A thoughtful and important film with a universal theme. AMU should be seen." *Deepa Mehta*

"Boldly rips away a tapestry of lies and cover ups... a first rate detective story." *Hollywood Reporter*

jonai productions PRESENTS a film by shonali bose

WINNER NATIONAL AWARD INDIA 2005 | WINNER PIPERESI Critics Award 2005 | OFFICIAL SELECTION BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL 2005 | OFFICIAL SELECTION TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL 2005 | OFFICIAL SELECTION AFI FILM FESTIVAL 2005

PG MATURE THEME WWW.AMUTHEFILM.COM

CINEPLEX ENTERTAINMENT CARLTON CINEMAS	AMC THEATRES KENNEDY COMMONS 20	EMPIRE THEATRES EMPIRE WALK	EMPIRE THEATRES STUDIO 10 @ SQUARE ONE
4:30, 7:00, 9:30 SAT/SUN MATS AT 1:30	4:30, 7:00, 9:30 FRI MAT #2 SAT/SUN MATS AT 11:30, 2:00	1:00, 4:00, 7:00, 10:00	1:00, 4:00, 7:00, 9:40

IN HINDI | RAINBOW CINEMAS WOODBINE

**STARTS TODAY!**

The Director/Producer will be doing Q&A's throughout the weekend at various theatres.

gabrielle union idris elba louis gossett jr. tracee ellis ross

**TYLER PERRY'S DADDY'S LITTLE GIRLS**

She needs a good man. He wants a smart woman. There are only three things standing in their way.

LIONSGATE maple

CINEPLEX ENTERTAINMENT SOUTHAMPTON THEATRE TORONTO	CINEPLEX ENTERTAINMENT QUEENSWAY	CINEPLEX ENTERTAINMENT SILVERCITY YORKVILLE	CINEPLEX ENTERTAINMENT COLISEUM
4:30, 7:00, 9:30	4:30, 7:00, 9:30	4:30, 7:00, 9:30	4:30, 7:00, 9:30

RAINBOW CINEMAS WOODBINE | RAINBOW CINEMAS FAIRVIEW

**NOW PLAYING!**

Check Directory or www.tribune.ca for Showtimes \*DIGITAL SOUND

**"SWEEPING EPIC. Partition is a labour of love."**

-Liz Braun, The Toronto Sun

**"Captures the unfathomable contrasts of India."**

-Susan Walker, Toronto Star

**"Kreuk and Mistry are outrageously beautiful!"**

-Alison Gilmour, Winnipeg Free Press

TWO FAITHS. TWO WORLDS. ONE LOVE.

JIMI MISTRY KRISTIN KREUK NEVE CAMPBELL

**PARTITION**

A FILM BY VIC SARIN

www.partitionthemovie.ca www.sevillepictures.com

CINEPLEX ENTERTAINMENT CARLTON CINEMAS	AMC THEATRES KENNEDY COMMONS 20	AMC THEATRES INTERCHANGE 30	EMPIRE THEATRES STUDIO 10 @ SQUARE ONE
---	------------------------------------	--------------------------------	---

**NOW PLAYING!**

CHECK THEATRE DIRECTORY FOR SHOWTIMES \*DIGITAL SOUND