



Gurinder Chadha In Conversation

Presented by the Runnymede Trust in partnership with the BFI

Monday, 15 December 2008
NFT1 at the BFI Southbank, London SE1 8XT
6:30pm followed by a reception

Provisional Programme

- 18.30 Welcome
Dr Samir Shah OBE, Chairman, Runnymede Trust
- 18.35 Gurinder Chadha In Conversation
moderated by Shami Chakrabarti, Director, Liberty and BFI Board of Governors
- 19.15 Questions from the floor
- 20.00 Reception
- 21.30 Close of evening

Gurinder Chadha

Gurinder Chadha was born in Kenya and came to Britain with her parents in 1961. She grew up in Southall, London and studied at the University of East Anglia. After working as a broadcast journalist, her first directorial venture was *I'm British But...*, a documentary made for *Channel 4* and the *BFI* in 1989. The film uses the phenomenon of bhangra music to explore issues of identity and belonging among young British-born Asians.

In 1990 *Chadha* made her first dramatic short film, *Nice Arrangement*, concerning a British-Asian family on the morning of their daughter's wedding. This was followed by another documentary, *Acting Our Age* (1991), in which elderly Asians living in Southall recount their experiences of living in Britain. These various concerns came together in *Chadha's* first feature film, the comedy-drama *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993). The film centres on the experiences of a group of Asian women from three generations on a day trip to Blackpool. As *Chadha* has said, in the film "You have tradition on the one side and modernity on the other, Indianness on the one side, Englishness on the other, cultural specificity and universality - but in fact there is a scale between each of these polarities and the film moves freely between them."

After a two-part drama for the *BBC*, *Rich Deceiver* (1995), and a number of television documentaries, *Chadha* went to Los Angeles to make her next feature film *What's Cooking?* (2000), a series of overlapping stories involving four families (Hispanic, Vietnamese, African-American, and Jewish), all preparing for Thanksgiving dinner. Once again the film stresses diversity over difference through an increasingly adept mix of drama and comedy. *Chadha* has said that "For me the whole point of the film is that the four families mirror each other and as you become emotionally invested you forget about where they come from - you stop seeing difference and realise they all want the same thing, to keep their families together."

Chadha's most accomplished and commercially successful film to date is *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). This story of a young Asian woman trying to pursue her ambitions as a footballer while accommodating the demands of family and tradition may seem familiar territory. However, the fact that the film is set in Southall, where *Chadha* grew up, enables her to present a subtly nuanced picture of a very specific community. The film makes the point that British Asian experiences are as diverse as those of any cultural or ethnic group, thereby emphasising the universality of those experiences, a point that is all the more powerful for being quietly made.

Bibliography

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National Asian American Telecommunications Association (NAATA), 'Filmmaker of the Month October/November 2002: Gurinder Chadha and Paul Berges',

www.naatanet.org/community/archives/arch_filmmaker/gurinder_chadha.html

Wambu, Onyekachi and Kevin Arnold, *A Fuller Picture: The Commercial Impact of Six British Films with Black Themes in the 1990s* (London: BFI, 1999).

Taken from: Martin Hunt, Reference Guide to British and Irish Film Directors (found on and copyrighted to BFI Screenonline, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/502103/index.html>)

Shami Chakrabarti

Shami Chakrabarti has been Director of Liberty (The National Council for Civil Liberties) since September 2003. Shami first joined Liberty as In-House Counsel on 10 September 2001. She became heavily involved in its engagement with the "War on Terror" and with the defence and promotion of human rights values in Parliament, the Courts and wider society.

A Barrister by background, she was called to the Bar in 1994 and worked as a lawyer in the Home Office from 1996 until 2001 for Governments of both persuasions.

Since becoming Liberty's Director she has written, spoken and broadcast widely on the importance of the post-WW2 human rights framework as an essential component of democratic society. She is Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University, a Governor of the London School of Economics and the British Film Institute, and a Visiting Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford and a Master of the Bench of Middle Temple.

She is thirty nine years old and lives with her husband and five year old son in London.

About Runnymede

The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships, and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship. Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.

About the BFI

The BFI promotes understanding and appreciation of Britain's rich film and television heritage and culture. Established in 1933, the BFI runs a range of activities and services including BFI Southbank which screens over 1,000 films a year, from rare silent comedies to cult movies and archive television screenings. The venue hosts previews and gala screenings as well as events and on-stage interviews with film-makers, actors, producers, critics and writers. The BFI National Archive is the largest archive of moving image material in the world. Started in 1935, the collection includes over 275,000 films, 210,000 TV programmes, seven million photographs and 15,000 posters. Archived material is accessible via curated exhibitions and screenings in cinemas. The BFI Library offers access to the world's largest collection of information on film and television. Its holdings include over 46,000 books, 5,000 periodical titles and over two million newspaper cuttings.