



## UK ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL 2024

# Flight

### Flight

Director: Alex Pillai  
Production Company: Hindi Pictures  
Commissioning Company: BBC  
Executive Producer: George Faber  
Producers: Behroze Gandhi,  
Frances-Anne Solomon, Peter Jaques  
Casting Director: Puneet Sira  
Writer: Tanika Gupta  
Script Editor: Pier Wilkie  
Director of Photography: Michael Spragg  
Editor: Max Lemon  
Production Designer: Keith Khan  
Art Director: Eli Bo  
Costume Designer: Joey Attawia  
Music: Nitin Sawhney  
Sound Recordist: Giancarlo Dellapina  
Cast:  
Roshan Seth (*Baba*)  
Shaheen Khan (*Ma*)  
Mina Anwar (*Shikha*)  
Michelle Kent (*Indrani*)  
Adlyn Ross (*Rehana*)  
Sunatra Sarker (*Virinder*)  
Karuna Mohandas (*Surinder*)  
Gurdial Sira (*Pradip*)  
Kulvinder Ghir (*Anil*)  
Bhasker Patel (*Nitai*)  
Sarah Patel (*Shamila*)  
Meera Syal (*Tasleema*)  
Nina Wadia (*Sumita*)  
BBC2 tx 25.1.1998  
UK 1998  
74 mins  
Digital

+ intro and Q&A with director Alex Pillai, writer Tanika Gupta, actor Shaheen Khan, composer Nitin Sawhney and producer Behroze Gandhi. Hosted by Viji Alles.

The idea for the film *Flight* came out of writer Tanika Gupta's experience of working in an Asian woman's refuge in Manchester, as a counsellor, and dealing with all the women who sought shelter and help from there, each of whom had a very special story to tell.

Some women who went there were very young, some were escaping from violent partners, others from sexual abuse and unreasonable families. As Tanika says, 'it was a special, very supportive place. The sad thing was that in order for women to break free they had to break from their entire community. It isn't just about leaving home, it is about not having any contact with that community ever again.'

*Flight* is set in Accrington, a small village near Manchester. There are lots of villages near Manchester like Accrington with big Asian communities, whose families have lived there since the sixties when they came to work in the cotton mills. As Tanika explains, 'this story is quite particular to the north of England, where the Asian community is very concentrated. A lot of them have suffered from all sorts of health and safety problems of work conditions associated with the mills, like lung problems and disability.'

Tanika sees this story as not so much what happens to an Asian family, as what happens to dysfunctional families. 'It is much more about how a seemingly happy family can actually disintegrate, it is about the father/daughter relationship and how destructive that can be.' Frances-Anne Solomon (producer) adds, 'I see this as a story of betrayal on both sides. The central character, Shikha, feels betrayed but so does her father.' Alex Pillai (director) says, 'in Asian families it is very hard for a father to let go, they feel very protective of their daughters. I see this as a story about the inability to let go and to change.'

Tanika and Frances-Anne have collaborated together before on a short film called *Bideshi* which was about Tanika's father, which also starred Roshan Seth who plays Baba in *Flight*. Frances-Anne says of Tanika, 'she really manages to get under the skin of characters and tell stories that are very individual. She has a voice of her own.'

The appeal of working on the film for Alex Pillai was that 'it was a very recognisable family drama, and it was a way of making a film about an Asian subject that wouldn't have to be about an issue or have a political agenda.'

As Alex explains, the story in *Flight* is not untypical of the experiences of a young Asian girl living in Britain today. 'Asian families are very tight-knit, and every Asian child has to have a certain amount of parental approval about who they are romantically linked with. Even in the most liberal of families, children still feel a great responsibility towards their parents. However, everyone has secret boyfriends and girlfriends!'

The choice of Roshan Seth, to play Baba was 'key' to the film. The choice of who should play Shikha who is 17 was much harder. As Tanika says, 'The

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## UK ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL 2024

### New Writings from the UK Asian Film Festival

Sat 4 May 11:30 BFI Reuben Library

**Flight + intro and Q&A with director Alex Pillai, writer Tanika Gupta and cast members**

Sat 4 May 15:20

### UKAFF Short Film Showcase

Sat 4 May 18:10

## REGULAR PROGRAMME

### Families: **The Boy and the Heron**

Kimitachi wa do Ikiruka

Sun 5 May 12:30; Sun 12 May 12:00;

Sun 26 May 12:30

### **Projecting the Archive: For Them That Trespass + intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National**

**Archive Curator**

Thu 9 May 18:10

### **African Odysseys: Restored: Bushman + intro with Journey Mercies director Tomisin Adepeju**

Sat 11 May 14:00

### **Experimenta: Cinema Is Evil: Welcome to the World of Legendary, Queer Occult Filmmaker Kenneth Anger**

Sat 11 May 17:50

### **Seniors: Shakespeare Wallah + intro**

Wed 15 May 14:30

### **Families: Wonka**

Sun 19 May 12:50 (Funday)

### **Silent Cinema: Vagabond Queen + intro by BFI curator Bryony Dixon**

Sun 19 May 15:40

### **Relaxed Screening: The Magic Flute Trollflöjten + intro & discussion**

Mon 20 May 18:00

### **Restored: The Small Back Room + intro by the BFI Conservation team**

Tue 28 May 18:10

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problem with most 17-year-old actresses is they haven't gone through enough life experiences to be able to play this part. It was also very hard to find someone who could speak in an Accrington accent.'

The production was lucky to find Mina Anwar who not only comes from Accrington, but seemed ideal for the part. Alex Pillai says, 'she has so much energy and personality and presence. She must be quite an incredible character anyway to have left Accrington to go to drama school and become so successful. She has come a long way in her own life, and I think that energy is very important, because it is very similar to the character of Shikha.'

Mina says that she felt destined to play the part of Shikha. She was initially disturbed by it as she found the script very true to life; her own sister had run away to a refuge when she was very young, because she was seeing a man who her family disapproved of. Also, her own father was injured in an industrial accident like Baba in *Flight*. Mina sees the struggle that Shikha has with Baba in the film being rooted in his reluctance to let her find her own identity, to accept that she has a will of her own. Mina says, 'She embodies all the hope in his life, yet she eludes him, slips out of his grasp. He reacts badly to her independent streak, to the fact that she has a secret life and a will of her own. They have an obsessive relationship, and Baba almost becomes insane when he loses control. She runs away from these circumstances because she knows that her life will be hell otherwise.' Mina also feels that the film deals with the difficulties of living in a dual culture.

Roshan Seth says that 'there are umpteen reports of Asian parents taking the law into their own hands as far as their own families are concerned. In India people would sympathise with the father in this story.' Roshan found the part 'very challenging. It is one of the hardest roles I have had to play. Baba has worked in a Lancashire mill which is now closed, has had an industrial accident which has left him disabled and in a wheelchair. He is a tragic figure.' As Alex says, 'He was once a very loving father, who creates his own prison and is isolated as a result of his own actions. He digs his own grave and alienates his entire community and family.' Roshan says that, 'he tries to suffocate his family. The inability to change is at the centre of everything.'

BBC production notes