



Big Screen Classics

Bhaji on the Beach

Bhaji on the Beach

Directed by: Gurinder Chadha

©: Channel Four Television Corporation

Production Company: Umbi Films

For: Channel Four

Presented by: Film Four International

Produced by: Nadine Marsh-Edwards

Line Producer: Paul Sarony

Production Co-ordinator: Felicity Newton

Production Accountant: Andy Hennigan

Location Manager: David Pinnington

Post-production Co-ordinator: Shad Ali

1st Assistant Director: Howard Arundel

2nd Assistant Director: Gavin Alexander

Script Supervisor: Danuta Skarszewska

Casting Directors: Suzanne Crowley, Gilly Poole

Written by: Meera Syal

Story by: Gurinder Chadha, Meera Syal

Director of Photography: John Kenway

Steadicam: Jan Pester, Alf Tramonton

Focus Puller: Rob Southam

Clapper Loader: Adam Coles

Gaffer: Kenny Sykes

Grip: Mark Scrivens

Stills Photographer: Christine Parry

Model Makers/Sculptures: Simon Bradley,

Robert Williams, Michael Carter

Edited by: Oral Ottley

Assistant Editor: Tim Vine

Production Designer: Derek Brown

Art Director: Helen Raynor

Scenic Artist: Paddy Hamilton

Production Buyer: Gina Cromwell

Property Master: Mike Malik

Costume Designer: Annie Symons

Costume Design Assistant: Clare Ditchburn

Wardrobe: Sabine Kumeling

Wardrobe Assistants: Karin Donaldson,

Katherine Fanthorpe

Make-up Supervisor: Julie Van Praag

Make-up Artists: Jackie Hodgson, Liz Davies

Titles/Opticals: Optical Partnership

Film Stock: Fuji Photo Film (UK) Ltd

Processed by: Metrocolor (London)

Music Composed/Arranged by: John Altman,

Craig Preuss

Additional Music by: Kuljit Bhamra

Music Engineer: Christoph Bracner

Sound Mixer: Ronald Bailey

Boom Operator: Ken Lee

Dubbing Mixer: Paul Carr

Supervising Dubbing Editor: Glen Freemantle

Assistant Dubbing Editor: Michael Rodman

Dialogue Editor: Eddy Joseph

Dialect Coach: Penny Dyer

Unit Publicity: Patric Scott

Cast:

Kim Vithana (*Ginder*)

Sarita Khajuria (*Hashida*)

Lalita Ahmed (*Asha*)

Zohra Segal (*Pushpa*)

Renu Kochar (*Madhu*)

Nisha Nayar (*Ladhu*)

Shaheen Khan (*Simi*)

Jimmi Harkishin (*Ranjit*)

Mo Sesay (*Oliver*)

Amer Chadha-Patel (*Amrik*)

Surendra Kochar (*Bina*)

Souad Faress (*Rekha*)

Tanveer Ghani (*Balbir*)

Akbar Kurtha (*Manjit*)

Peter Cellier (*Ambrose Waddington*)

Rudolph Walker (*Leonard Baptiste*)

About a third of the way through *Bhaji on the Beach*, one of the film's most dayglo characters, the Bombay-based, Chanel-clad Rekha, clammers down from the coach, totters around the corner on her pink high heels and is confronted with her first, unforgettable glimpse of Blackpool. The sight is so gloriously gaudy, and above all familiar, that her awe-filled response is almost involuntary: 'It's Bombay!' she exclaims.

It is a moment that *Bhaji's* director, Gurinder Chadha, feels sums up the film. 'I do think that Blackpool, when the Illuminations are on, is where England meets India. I bet that if the film goes out in India there will be directors who will want to come and film here.'

Sometimes home is not as far away as it seems. And it is these issues of home, hybridity, identity and belonging that preoccupy Chadha in *Bhaji*, the first feature film to be directed by an Asian woman in Britain. 'What I've tried to do with all my work is to open up all that stuff – what it is to be British. What I'm doing is making a claim, as well as documenting a history of British Asian people.' In his collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie makes it clear that 'laying claim' is not a pursuit without pitfalls. How do you preserve cultural values without falling into a ghetto mentality? How do you discuss the need for change without playing into the hands of the enemy? It is a question that transcends politics, nationality, even race. 'It is a question,' he remarks, 'of how to be in the world.'

'I hate to say this – people always raise their eyebrows when I do – but I was quite lucky,' Chadha says as we discuss her rise in the film business in her north London living room. Her career started when her first short film, *I'm British But...*, was accepted for the pilot intake of the BFI's New Directors scheme. The shot of a sari'd Chadha clutching a British bulldog summed up what the television executives were looking for. 'It was the first offering by a second-generation Asian, and Channel 4 was interested to explore this new sense of British and Asian identity.' On the strength of *I'm British But...* Chadha submitted the treatment for *Bhaji*, but Channel 4 and her producer Nadine Marsh-Edwards persuaded her to develop her skills with an 11-minute film for the *Short and Curlies* season: *A Nice Arrangement*. They were happy with the result, and *Bhaji* got the green light. The process of making the film was gruelling, Chadha recalls, with endless meetings, rewrites and rethinking. 'I reckon I learned three years of film school in the time of *Bhaji's* development,' she laughs.

Bhaji was inspired by an idea brought to her by actress/writer Meera Syal about a group of Asian women who go to the seaside for the day. But Chadha was insistent that she didn't want the film to be 'just a comedy. So I picked the two most taboo subjects within the Asian community – mixed relationships and separation and divorce – and threw them in as well.' The day trip is organised by Simi, who works for the Saheli Asian Women's Centre. She is a feminist, socialist activist who nonetheless has to negotiate a careful path between the traditional views of the 'aunties' and the younger women like Madhu and Ladhu who just want to chase boys. The other women on the outing are as much at odds: Ginder, who wants time to think through her broken marriage; Asha and Pushpa, who want to get out from behind their husbands' shop

Fraser James (*Joe*)
Dean Gatiss (*Paul*)
Martin Greenwood (*Ray*)
Shireen Shah (*Hashida's mother*)
Gurdial Sira (*Hashida's father*)
Adlyn Ross (*Ranjit's mother*)
Moti Makan (*Ranjit's father*)
Badi Uzzaman (*uncle*)
Bharti Patel (*refuge woman*)
Hugo Speer (*Andy/white youth*)
Judith David (*cafe owner*)
Karen Montero (*Balli*)
Rod Woodruff (*stunt double*)
Ash Verez (*Prem*)
Shad Ali (*Raman*)
N.J. Willow (*Leena*)
Neera Sharma (*Madhu and Ladhu's mother*)
David Tse (*Chan*)
Phil Croft (*Steve*)
UK 1993©
101 mins
Digital

The screening on Wed 15 Jul will be introduced by
Bhavini Goyate, BFI Inclusion Manager

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counters; and Hashida, who is involved in a clandestine affair with a young
West Indian. Like so many journeys, the trip becomes a turning point, a
moment of choice, from which they will not return unchanged.

With its picaresque coach journey, stops at motorway cafes and Punjabi
version of 'We're All Going on a Summer Holiday', *Bhaji on the Beach* presents
a world in which *Carry On up the Khyber* meets Cliff Richard. When I ask
whether the film was a deliberate attempt to invade white-only spaces, Chadha
bristles. 'I don't like the word invade. It implies a traditionally European view of
history: them and us, they are taking our land, that sort of thing. What I am
saying is that there is no such thing as ours and theirs. There is no part of
Britain or England that I can't lay claim to.' Born and bred in Britain, Chadha
points out that she has been very much influenced by 'the look of England, as
I've experienced it in things like *A Taste of Honey*, *Up the Junction* and the
Carry On films, which have a very constructed sense of Englishness.' She
continues: 'I think of *Bhaji* as a very English film.'

'The premise of the film is based on all our lives, all our experiences – writer,
director, producer, actors, everyone.' What has pleased her about the
performances of her large ensemble cast, despite a too short rehearsal time, is
that 'they brought a real complexity to the characters, to the sort of cross-
referenced identities we all share.' Yet *Bhaji* is not as seamless a product as the
statement implies. From its very inception the film was part of two very different
traditions. On the one hand there is Syal, a veteran television writer with credits
that include *Black Silk* and *Tandoori Nights*. And on the other is Chadha,
whose politics have emerged out of the polemical tradition of Black British art
cinema exemplified by Sankofa, where producer Marsh-Edwards established
herself.

Chadha, who has a degree in politics and economics and a work background
dominated by television journalism, says of herself: 'I came to this work as
someone who was very conscious of how the media constructs images of
Black people. What I'm interested in doing is counteracting those images of
how I – as a Black woman – should be, rather than looking at the multiplicity
and complexity of what I actually am.'

Andrea Stuart, *Sight and Sound*, February 1994