

GURINDER CHADHA

Already in 1989, when G.C. directed her earlier documentary *"I'm British, but..."* she opposed to conventional thinking and taboo subjects; allowing a wider world into the interior lives of British Asian women.

She says that she has always been interested in marginalised people and that she also knew that there was another England than the one seen in the average British film. There was, for instance, this vibrant Indian community which offered her wonderful, at times sad, but always intriguing, stories.

Her films share in common that all of them present a very subtly nuanced picture of a very specific community and their way of coping with everyday life and dealing with problems. She demonstrates the diversity of experiences made by Asians in a foreign country; emphasizing especially on women.

Quote:

"All of my three films share a lot in common. The South Asian community in England is a very strong community. It's not just Indian, but a part of everything around it, so coming from Britain and esp. West London gives you a strong sense of who you are and where you are and that's portrayed in my work. Britain is not cut off from other cultures; it's an island and you are constantly coming into contact with everyone and everything that goes on cross-culturally."

All of her films maintain a strong feminist message. This way of filmmaking has its roots in the 1980's, when issues such as cultural activism, dilemmas of identity and feminism arose. Politically aware female filmmakers like G.C. emerged who explored these issues through the process of filmmaking.

Today G.C. is considered one of the most successful and commercially viable filmmakers in Britain.

Chadha says that this had nothing to do with the fact of being Indian or a woman but rather because she's made a film that made a lot of money.

GURINDER CHADHA

Born in Kenya, Chadha is an Englishwoman of Indian descent. She began her career as a news reporter with the BBC, and went on to direct several award-winning documentaries.

She began working on the big screen in the early '90s with the short, **Acting Our Age**. This was soon followed up by an award-winning full-length feature, **Bhaji on the Beach**, and two more short films. **Bhaji** also received a BAFTA nomination for Best Film of 1994 and Chadha won the Evening Standard Award for Best Newcomer to British cinema.

In 1995, she directed *Rich Deceiver*, a two-part drama for the BBC, watched by eleven million viewers. After writing **What's Cooking?**, the script was invited to the Sundance Institute's Writer's Lab. It went on to be the opening night film at Sundance Film Festival.

Filmography (director):

Bend It Like Beckham (2003)
Are You Experienced? (2001)
What's Cooking? (2000)
A Nice Arrangement (1994)
What Do You Call an Indian Woman Who's Funny (1994)
Bhaji on the Beach (1993)
Acting Our Age (1992)

Filmography (writer):

What's Cooking? (2000)
A Nice Arrangement (1994)
Bhaji on the Beach (1993)

Check out these movies by Gurinder Chadha:

1. [BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM](#), 2003
2. [WHAT'S COOKING?](#), 2000

www.tribute.ca

Till *Beckham* became the sleeper hit of the year, films made by Asians living abroad seldom created ripples at the box-office in India. That, says Chadha, " is primarily because overseas Indians have common problems, common aspirations, common jokes and a kind of a common culture and language. Mainstream Indians in India cannot relate to these. But now with the people travelling more frequently all these things are changing and even Indians are whole-heartedly supporting my kind of films."

So, being an Indian settled in England did not mean that she would keep repeating the theme concerning Asians marginalized in western cultures. That's when she started exploring a Mumbai kind of a potboiler with a Hollywood studio to be made in English. And the result is *Bride And Prejudice*.

(...)

An Indian born in Kenya, Chadha migrated to England where she has spent all her growing years. In a way she belongs to the fast growing hyphenated generation of Indians living in different parts of the world.

Her first film *Bhaji on the Beach*, was a metaphor for the lives of South Asian women living in England. It was a race-sensitive entertainer which not only examined the cross-cultural conflicts but also aspirations and dilemmas of a generation of west-born Indians teetering between two cultures - that of India and of their adopted homeland. The film took a hilarious look at the first generation migrants from India and their desperate attempts at protecting their Indianness.

" I grew-up in an environment where my family wanted me to be Indian while I was inclined to adopt a British way of life. So I've experienced the dilemma faced by thousands of Asians born in the West. When I decided to make a film the issue that was closest to my heart came first in mind," says Chadha.

Bhaji On the Beach won numerous awards and was nominated for the BAFTA for the Best British Film of 1994. Chadha won the prestigious *Evening Standard British Film Award* for the Best Newcomer to British Cinema. For a film that had a non-descript cast it did well not just among the British-Asians but also among British cine-goers.

Critical Success

Buoyed by its success, Chadha made *What's Cooking?* The film, though a critical success, was a commercial disaster. " The mistake I made was to shoot it in America. I feel my way of looking at things is different from American and British directors," says Chadha.

Which explains why in *Bend It Like Beckham* she went back to her first love - speaking about the cultural isolation of British-Asians that is resulting in break-up of families and other serious emotional problems.

But with *Bride And Prejudice* she has gone beyond that theme. "Thanks to *Bend It Like Beckham* I now have a platform. My endeavour here is to tell the world - and especially America - that there is lot more to India than just the Taj Mahal and a place to go for a karma break." Film aficionados are hoping that her new film will transform Chadha from a chronicler of marginalized Indians into a global filmmaker.

www.the-south-asian.com

In Britain, I'm seen as one of the most commercial directors that Britain has now," she laughs. "When I made *Bhaji on the Beach*, I was kind of an ethnic little something on the side."

www.gaycitynews.com

The montage of her cross-cultural experiences has undoubtedly shaped Chadha's filmmaking style. Born in Africa and raised in England with a few years of India stay thrown in, Chadha grew up in London's Southhall on a staple of Hindi movies and parents' sermons on 'how good Indian girls behave' even as she was exposed to cross cultural influences at school and university. She absorbed all these influences — within and outside the home — acquiring multiple identities in the process and chartering her own course.

So, instead of devoting herself to mastering the culinary art as her mother hoped or becoming a doctor that her father wished her to be, she opted for broadcast journalism. And though the Bollywood influence does permeate her filmmaking, her films are not an imitation of its fare. As she remarked about *Bride and Prejudice*, which had western actors like Martin Henderson, Naveen Andrews and Daniel Gillis, dancing to Hindi songs, 'everything about this movie is a blend of East and West. I can't take pure Bollywood and I can't do pure Hollywood. I have to combine them.' The biggest challenge, according to her, was to fuse Bollywood and Hollywood traditions. 'At the same time,' she adds in her clipped British accent, 'I wanted to make sure that I was not making fun of Bollywood.'

Chadha's tryst with the camera began after a stint as a broadcast journalist with the BBC. Her debut directorial venture was *I'm British But...*, a documentary which uses the phenomenon of bhangra music to explore issues of identity and belonging among young British-born Asians.

In 1990 Chadha made her first 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.'

And then ensued her most commercially successful film to date, *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). The partly autobiographical story revolves around a young Asian woman trying to pursue her ambitions as a footballer while accommodating the demands of family and tradition. Chadha masterfully weaves a nuanced picture of the South Asian community in the narrative driving the point home that the British Asian experiences are as diverse as those of any cultural or ethnic group, thereby emphasising the universality of those experiences. She said in an interview, 'what I wanted to show was the fact that the community is not often what you think it is. As we move from generation to generation, both parents and the kids change and adapt. All of my three films share a lot in common. The South Asian community in England is a very strong community. It's not just Indian, but a part of everything around it, so coming from Britain and West London gives you a very strong sense of who you are and where you are and that's portrayed in my work.'

www.khaleejtimes.com

Amazon.co.uk Review

Bhaji on the Beach is the directorial debut of Gurinda Chadha, which--like her next film, *What's Cooking*--features women as the central characters and seems to involve food at every turn. It's an ensemble piece, which takes a while to establish the characters' relationships with each other. But eventually the focus of the film--based on a story by Meera Syal--gets distilled to a group of women taken on a day trip to Blackpool by a progressive thinking "sister". The skies are suitably grey as they arrive in the English resort town, with the amusement arcades, takeaways and shop fronts looking tacky and run down. There's Ginder (Kim Vithana), who has run away from her violent husband, Hashida (Sarita Khajuria), who has a major decision to make and conservative aunties Asha (Lalita Ahmed) and Pushpa (Zohra Sehgal), not to mention youngsters Ladhu (Nisha K Nayar) and Madhu (Renu Kochar) who are just along for the excitement. As the day wears on, tension mounts between the different generations as secrets come out into the open. It matters little that the plot feels a touch contrived--particularly the convergence of significant characters towards the end--as there's a lot of energy in the performances. The result is a bit rough around the edges, but there's a lot to amuse here, not least in the colourful nod to Bollywood contained in Asha's many dream sequences. --Emma Perry --This text refers to the [VHS Tape](#) edition.

Synopsis

An acclaimed comedy in which a group of Asian women set out on a harmless day trip to

Blackpool to get away from everyday routine. What they experience will change their lives forever.

[<http://uk.imdb.com/M/title-exact?Bhaji+on+the+Beach+\(1993\)>](http://uk.imdb.com/M/title-exact?Bhaji+on+the+Beach+(1993))

A review by Damian Cannon.

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http://www.film.u-net.com/Movies/Reviews/Bhaji_Beach.html

A fairly humourous compendium of the troubles affecting today's Asian woman, **Bhaji on the Beach** also spotlights a number of serious issues. On a typical grey Birmingham morning, Asian families all over the city are preparing for the day ahead by opening shops, cooking breakfast and bickering. However, the "Saheli Asian Women's Group" are off to Blackpool, giving everyone some breathing space away from the men. The organiser Simi (Shaheen Khan) manages to gather everyone together, scarcely guessing at the range of problems shunted onto the minibus. The most obvious of these concerns Ginder (Kim Vithana), who's living in a refuge with her young son after leaving her husband Ranjit (Jimmi Harkishin), a move widely condemned.

With so much parental pressure to return, as a "good wife" should, Ginder is caught in a trap of indecision. She feels that Ranjit may be worth another chance, especially as her son needs a father, but then the memories of abuse re-surface. The older folks, Asha (Lalita Ahmed) and Pushpa (Zohra Segal), simply fail to understand the situation, despairing of the moral rot that they seem to see around them. In their day the wife obeyed the husband absolutely, whatever her wishes (although Asha is having second thoughts on this front). Heaven knows what they'd make of Hashida (Sarita Khajuria), generally considered the prodigal daughter because she's set to become a doctor. Instead she's got a black boyfriend, Oliver (Mo Sesay), and has, this very day, discovered that she's pregnant.

Rounding out the tour party are Ladhu (Nisha Nayar) and Madhu (Renu Kochar), a pair of excitable and adolescent sisters who are on the hormone-driven prowl for seaside romance. Making their way onto the M6 for a trip of sand and surf, what they don't realise is that a number of people are in hot pursuit. Ranjit has been forced into trying to drag her back so, accompanied by his nice and nasty brothers, he follows. This is very much a face saving measure but it could so easily turn into something unpleasant. Also on the way is Oliver, brought to his senses by his father he'd now got the near impossible task of tracking down Hashida and gaining her forgiveness. It looks as though Blackpool is in for a certain amount of conflict!

The most interesting facet of **Bhaji on the Beach** is that it deals with people who rarely get time on the silver screen - Asian women. As a growing segment of the British population, the cultural tenets and community standards of Asian families are important. Inevitably though there is change and confusion on many fronts (race, age and sex), where the ideals of the past crash into the pragmatism of the present. **Bhaji on the Beach** paints a balanced portrait of racism, attributing these qualities to members of all races alike (perhaps the major unifying factor). The shock is just how vitriolic and ingrained some of this bigoted attitudes are. However, the younger folk do tend to be more open (or right at the other end of the extreme and quite violent), which leads to fraught arguments with their elders, especially when the topic of marriage arises.

By feeling that she has to pack so many storylines into **Bhaji on the Beach**, Gurinder Chadha makes the mistake of not developing any of them fully. It's almost as if she felt that there was only one chance to make such a film and hence squashed everything in, and perhaps she's

right. Nevertheless, with such a dense script, characters and motivation are inevitably sketchy. The cast do a reasonable job of sorting everything out, though none of them displays exceptional talent. What really helps is that they could all fit into the story in real-life, so that helps to cover most of the flaws. On the whole, **Bhaji on the Beach** is a moderately funny getting-to-know-each-other movie which covers a wide range of topics. It'll be interesting to see how Chadha handles her next film, when the pressure's less intense.

IndiaStar--A Literary-Art Magazine

Bhaji on the Beach

A film by Gurinder Chadha, 1994, 100 minutes

<http://www.indiastar.com/bhaji.html>

Reviewed by Julian Samuel

Bhaji on the Beach is an energetic, race-and-sex-relations comedy that is a must see for anyone who thinks that putting these issues-of-the-epoch in the mass media is a nice way to deal with the traumas plaguing South Asian women.

Community-orientated films are a superb way to dramatize, confront, and to come to terms with interracial sex and pregnancies, and other configurations that are a source of endless trouble for South Asian parents who just can't forget India, Pakistan, Kenya, Uganda etc.

Bhaji follows hot on the heels of but does not go beyond other "Black," (in the UK, South Asians are classified as "Black") British masterpieces such as Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and *The Buddha of Suburbia*; and Isaac Julien's gay landmark, *Young Soul Rebels*. (an independent film, made in London, circa 1991) Bhaji's plot does not strain the imagination. Here's a part of it: a South Asian community leader/political activist takes an all-ages-all-classes group of South Asian women to Blackpool. In the old days, before we all got to England and improved the English diet it was a white holidaying spot. But UK immigration changed all that.

The insertion of these splendidly dressed women on the beach include a battered wife who during the trip makes up her mind to leave her husband forever; a teenage couple who, one gets the impression, are sexually involved; a shilvar kamees clad granny who is mechanical scripted in to contrast old-world values with "English" ones. Chastity, obedience to Gods, and a reverent respect for the family bread-winner are up for gentle feminist review. The granny stereotype has to act shocked most of the time. Boring. The biggest shock for her is the pregnancy of one of the young Asian women by her African boyfriend. This dilemma is elegantly solved, as the rest of the group drive back to town, with a tender lingering kiss during an interracial sunset. Thank god this scene will bother some Asians.

At Blackpool, sexually explorative members of the outing meet English cowboys who work at a hot-dog stand. One of the women gets into a bit of interracial necking, but before anything exciting happens her protective about-to-de-cloak lesbian friend pulls her back into the virginal harem of the Asian

community.

The acting is earnest cardboard stereotyping au maximum. No one evolves, everyone stays in the same character rut, and the story is as tense as watching Rajiv Gandhi have tea and biscuits at a press conference on the Tibet question.

However, it is stereotyping with a huge difference: it is brown stereotyping.

Bhaji is more than mundane; check this for excellence: "I just needed you to be there" says the pregnant woman. And there are hundreds of lines like this. But even at that, Bhaji is saved by being more or less a first of its kind, and it does not grind on inexorably. It is ultra light race-sensitive entertainment, for the lily-livered.

Notwithstanding the simplistic editing -- there is not one unpredictable cut-- this film is brilliant even if the South Asian in-jokes will pass over the heads of both white Canadian tribes. British audiences, however, are hip to all this post-colonial modernity, so they will get most of the culturally anchored funnies.

Bhaji is better than most films made in Canada in the last five years. Quebec films don't even come close, and of course, Quebec lives in mortal fear of black actors, artists, intellectuals and directors and therefore does not encourage them. Director Gurinder Chadha is lucky to have generous film funders who take her so very seriously.

Imagine the National Film Board or the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation putting bucks into such a film without getting utterly terrorized by the racegender questions. Forget it. Canada will not catch-up, not even by the time Hong Kong slips into Beijing control.

A warning: there are hectares of songs and dances:
You can take the Asian out of Asia but you can't take the Bollywood out of the Asian.

Bhaji on the Beach

A Film Review by James Berardinelli

<http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/b/bhaji.html>

United Kingdom, 1993

U.S. Release Date: varies (7/94)

Running Length: 1:40

MPAA Classification: No MPAA Rating (Mature themes, language)

Cast: Kim Vithana, Jimmi Harkishin, Sarita Khajuria, Mo Sesay, Lalita Ahmed, Shaheen Khan

Director: Gurinder Chadha

Producer: Nadine Marsh-Edwards

Screenplay: Meera Syal

Cinematography: John Kenway

Music: Craig Pruess, John Altman, and Kuljit Bhamra

U.S. Release Date: First Look Pictures

Bhaji is an Indian snack food whose identity has been "Westernized" in the British Isles. Director Gurinder Chadha has chosen bhaji as a metaphor for the lives of the women in this, her first feature film. Although Indian by birth, the characters -- especially those of the younger generation -- have been in large part shaped by the culture of England, the country in which they live. *Bhaji on the Beach* not only examines this cross-cultural conflict, but looks at sexism and the generation gap, as well.

There are so many stories that it's sometimes difficult to keep up with each one, especially in the beginning, when the characters are being introduced. If there's an obvious failing in Chadha's work, it's that she's too ambitious. She has a lot to say and, apparently, wants to say it all in one movie. The result is a controlled chaos that can, upon occasion, become confusing.

The main characters are three twenty-something Asian women who have grown up in England. There's Ginder (Kim Vithana), a young mother who is seeking a divorce from an abusive husband (Jimmi Harkishin), bringing scandal down on both families. Hasida (Sarita Khajuria) is a pre-med student engaged in a secret affair with Oliver (Mo Sesay), an African British man. This affair has resulted in an unexpected pregnancy that throws Hasida's entire future in turmoil, especially since Oliver won't commit to anything. Simi (Shaheen Khan), the third member of the trio, doesn't have a "story" of her own, but is instrumental in attempting to resolve everyone else's problems. She is the coordinator and the voice of reason.

There are other characters, as well. Asha (Lalita Ahmed) is a dutiful, middle-aged wife who is suffering from headaches and visions. There are a pair of teenagers looking to pick up white boys, and a geriatric lady who refuses to accept anything that threatens her strict, conservative views of morality.

All these women are participants in the "Saheli Asian Women's Group" outing to Blackpool. There, on the beach, each of these tales reaches some sort of crossroad.

Throughout much of the movie, Chadha keeps the tone light -- a demanding task considering the amount of material she's juggling. The final fifteen minutes, which include an overload of melodrama and a shocking display of violence, are not as well directed as the previous eighty-five, and the mood is at variance with what came before. Like her creative idol, Ken Loach, the director attempts to blend gritty realism with natural comedy, but her success is qualified. She has an accurate grasp of the little details of life, but sometimes the broader strokes elude her.

For the most part, the characters are richly drawn, and this helps to maintain balance among the different stories. Admittedly, certain subplots, such as Hashida's relationship with Oliver, are better-presented than others, but nothing stands out as being obviously superior.

There's a line of dialogue in *Bhaji on the Beach* that sums up the film: "It's not often that we women get away from the patriarchal demands made on us in our daily lives, struggling under the double yoke of racism and sexism." When Simi says this, she does so with a broad smile. It's a serious statement, but not one ponderously made. And that seems to be Chadha's view of filmmaking: explore themes, but let the philosophical issues blend into the story, not dominate it. If she continues to abide by this creed, it may not take many more films before she's turning out pictures to rival Loach's [Ruff-Raff](http://ruff-raff.html) and [Raining Stones](http://raining_stones.html).

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N.Y. TIMES REVIEW | 'BHAJI ON THE BEACH'

March 19, 1994

Review/Film Festival; Cultures (and Sexes) Clashing in England

By JANET MASLIN

http://movies2.nytimes.com/mem/movies/review.html?title1=&title2=BHAJI%20ON%20THE%20BEACH%20%28MOVIE%29&reviewer=Janet%20Maslin&pdate=19940319&v_id=131146

"This is your day!" exclaims the organizer of the bus outing seen in Gurinder Chadha's "Bhaji on the Beach," a thoughtful, warmly inviting film about Asian women adapting to life in England. "Have a female fun time!" That feeble nod to feminist solidarity avoids the fact that these women actually seem to have little in common. They range from boy-crazy teen-agers to old ladies in saris, with a stylish visitor from Bombay who waves a cigarette holder and wears a fuchsia suit. Their problems and prejudices are as different as their clothes. On an organized trip from Birmingham to Blackpool, for a day and night of sampling tacky seaside ambience and avoiding the men in their lives, these women provide this film's enterprising director with a colorful cross section of attitudes. Ms. Chadha, who has said that she thinks of this as a very English film and that the director she most admires is Ken Loach, weaves her characters' personal crises into a broader social portrait of their adopted homeland. She does this with impressive deftness and humor, even when addressing the ever-present matter of racism. "They Curried My Budgie!" reads a shrill tabloid headline on the morning when the film begins.

Ms. Chadha very successfully confines "Bhaji on the Beach" to the events of a single day. ("Bhaji" refers to a snack food that is itself an English-Indian hybrid.) It is the day when Hashida (Sarita Khajuria), the first person in her family to plan to go to medical school, discovers she is pregnant by Oliver (Mo Sesay), her boyfriend, who is black. It is also the day when Ranjit (Jimmi Harkishin), whose wife, Ginder (Kim Vithana), has run away from him, is goaded into trying to get her back. Ms. Chadha lets these and other developments emerge during the course of a busy morning, while she also depicts vibrant life in various other Asian households around Birmingham.

A man who runs a newsstand washes racist graffiti off his door. When one young woman, who shares a crowded kitchen with members of her husband's family, is asked to name an American movie, she very pointedly mentions "Married to the Mob." The teen-agers Ladhu (Nisha Nayar) and Madhu (Renu Kochar) tote a boom box, which is one of many reasons they have their mother worried. Simi (Shaheen Khan), one of the story's cooler heads, has daydreams in the giddy, overblown style of Indian commercial movies, and fantasizes about ways in which traditional Indian culture is being demolished by everyday English realities. "This country has cost us our children," one of the story's older characters eventually says. "Bhaji on the Beach," which is to be shown tonight at 9 and tomorrow at 12:30 at the Museum of Modern Art as part of the New Directors/New Films series (and will open May 18 at the Film Forum), generates enough small culture clashes to remain bustling and energetic most of the way through. The touristy Blackpool setting is used well and provides its own set of distractions, from the foppish "actor, historian and ancient Blackpudlian" who tries to woo Simi (she has a hilarious Indian musical fantasy in which she tries to imagine him as a traditional suitor) to a restaurant where the women are gratuitously insulted. "The Khyber Pass is just around the corner," the proprietor sneers.

By the later stages of the story (the screenplay was written by Meera Syal), Ms. Chadha is forced into a certain amount of manipulation. She lets several of the film's male characters also turn up at the beach, most notably Oliver, who is played tenderly by Mr. Sesay and faces his own set of problems dealing with the bigotry of Hashida's elders. (Zohra Segal is memorably stubborn and testy as the most small-minded of the group.) Yet even when the film develops a case of third-act-itis, leaving Ms. Chadha too busy tying up loose ends, it sustains its intelligence and charm.

Among the actresses seen here, Ms. Khajuria does a fine job of registering Hashida's complex emotions, and Ms. Vithana brings Ginder both seriousness and glamour. Incidentally, Ginder's situation happens to reach the crisis stage at a male strip club where the dancers dress like American sailors and call themselves the Sons of Liberty. Blackpool makes the perfect melting pot for Ms. Chadha's entertaining story. **BHAJI ON THE BEACH** Directed by Gurinder Chadha; written by Meera Syal, based on a story by Ms. Chadha and Ms. Syal; director of photography, John Kenway; edited by Oral Norrie Ottey; music by John Altman and Craig Pruess; production designer, Derek Brown; produced by Nadine Marsh-Edwards. Released by First Look Pictures. At the Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters in the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53d Street, Manhattan, as part of the New Directors/New Films series of the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the museum's department of film and video. Running time: 100 minutes. This film has no rating. Ginder . . . Kim Vithana Ranjit . . . Jimmi Harkishin Hashida . . . Sarita Khajuria

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Bhaji on the Beach

(from <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/442547/>)

Director Gurinder Chadha
Production Company Umbi Films
Producer Nadine Marsh-Edwards
Script Meera Syal
Gurinder Chadha
Photography John Kenway
Editor Oral Ottley
Music John Altman
Craig Preuss
Cast: Kim Vithana (Ginder); Sarita Khajuria (Hashida); Lalita Ahmed (Asha); Zohra Segal (Pushpa); Renu Kochar (Madhu)

FULL cast and credits

Bhaji on the Beach (1992)

Cast Ginder VITHANA, Kim Hashida KHAJURIA, Sarita Asha AHMED, Lalita Pushpa SEGAL, Zohra Madhu KOCHAR, Renu Ladhu NAYAR, Nisha Simi KHAN, Shaheen Ranjit HARKISHIN, Jimmi Oliver SESAY, Mo Amrik CHADHA-PATEL, Amer Bina KOCHAR, Surendra Rekha FARESS, Souad Balbir GHANI, Tanveer Manjit KURTHA, Akbar Ambrose Waddington CELLIER, Peter Leonard Baptiste WALKER, Rudolph Joe JAMES, Fraser Paul GATISS, Dean Ray GREENWOOD, Martin Hashida's Mother SHAH, Shireen Hashida's Father SIRA, Gurdial Ranjit's Mother ROSS, Adlyn Ranjit's Father MAKAN, Moti Uncle UZZAMAN, Badi Refuge Woman PATEL, Bharti Andy/White Youth SPEER, Hugo Cafe Owner DAVID, Judith Balli MONTERO, Karen stunt double WOODRUFF, Roderick P. Prem VEREZ, Ash Raman ALI, Shad Leena WILLOW, N.J. Madhu & Ladhu's Mother SHARMA, Neera Chan TSE, David K.S. Steve CROFT,

Phil
Credits Director CHADHA,
Gurinder Script SYAL, Meera Sponsor Channel Four Production Company Umbi
Films Producer MARSH-EDWARDS, Nadine Script CHADHA,
Gurinder Photography KENWAY, John Editor OTTLEY, Oral Music ALTMAN,
John Music PREUSS, Craig Sound Recording BAILEY, Ronald Costume Designer SYMONS,
Annie Production Designer BROWN, Derek 1st Assistant Director ARUNDEL, Howard Assistant
Director ALEXANDER, Gavin Casting Director CROWLEY, Suzanne Casting
Director POOLE, Gilly Location Manager PINNINGTON, David Script
Supervisor SKARSZEWSKA, Danuta Art Director RAYNOR, Helen Wardrobe KUMELING,
Sabine Make-Up Supervisor PRAAG, Julie Van

SHORT synopsis

Gentle comedy about a group of Asian women from Birmingham who set off on a day trip to Blackpool. However it isn't long before the men are in pursuit of their joyriding spouses and girlfriends.

Bhaji on the Beach (d. Gurinder Chadha, 1994) was a surprise commercial and critical hit. It garnered numerous international awards, was nominated for a Bafta and won Chadha the Evening Standard Award for 'Newcomer to British Cinema.'

Chadha's earlier documentary *I'm British But...* (1989) used wry humour to examine notions of identity amongst Asians in far flung parts of the UK. It demonstrated a rare, quirky talent, bold enough to blow away conventional thinking, explore taboo subjects, and allow a wider world into the interior lives of British Asian women.

Bhaji on the Beach is a road movie, a form not particularly popular amongst British directors. On the road are a group of Birmingham-based Asian women, headed for Blackpool. The women are either running away from problems or in search of new possibilities. Hashida, secretly involved with a black boy, has just discovered she is pregnant. Ginder wants out of an unhappy marriage. Asha and Pushpa seek escape from the drudgery of corner-shop life. For each, the trip to Blackpool will be a journey of self-discovery.

The trip is also an opportunity to see their country, while confronting each other's values. The women come together when confronted by white racists, but the generations clash on the issue of traditional values. Hashida's pregnancy first provokes shock then a round of anti-black

prejudice from the older women. Ginder is blamed for the collapse of her marriage and urged to return home.

Commitment, duty, honour, sacrifice - all the fossilised values which they have carried around for years are mercilessly questioned. These entrenched attitudes contrast sharply with those of a visiting Bombay relative, all slick slacks and western attire, who seems freer and more modern than the older women in their drab Saris, who cling to the ideas of the India they left behind. The women do begin to loosen up - particularly in a comic scene at a male strip joint. Finally, the appearance of Ginder's husband, and his violent public attack on her, causes a major re-evaluation of values. At the end, new notions of solidarity and sisterhood across the generations emerge as the women make their way home.

Bhaji on the Beach's comprehensive success reflects its ability to deal with complex issues in a simple and conventional narrative. In the process, it opens up, with humanity and warmth, the closed world of Asian women.

Onyekachi Wambu

FULL Synopsis

Warning: *screenonline* full synopses contain 'spoilers' which give away key plot points. Don't read on if you don't want to know the ending!

Birmingham. The Saheli Women's Centre, run by Simi, organises a trip to Blackpool. Among the day-trippers are Ginder, a young mother who has taken sanctuary in Simi's shelter after being physically abused by her husband Ranjit; her six-year-old son Amrik; Hashida, a student about to start medical school, who has discovered she is pregnant; Asha, a middle-aged newsagent with a university degree, who feels neglected by her husband and children and frustrated by unfulfilled personal aspirations; Ladhu and Madhu, a pair of sexually inexperienced teenagers; Pushpa, an elderly Indian housewife and grocer; Rekha, a glamorous visitor from Bombay who has time to spare during her husband's business trips to London; and Bina, a shop assistant in Marks and Spencer.

Urged on by his parents, Ranjit sets off in pursuit of the Saheli minibus. He is accompanied by his two brothers, the aggressively macho Balbir (who procures Ginder's whereabouts by physically intimidating the other young wives at the Centre), and the more compassionate Manjit. Also chasing the minibus is Oliver, a West Indian art student, who has had a secret

sexual relationship with Hashida. Having originally rejected Hashida's pregnant plight, he has been urged on by his father and personal remorse to try and help her through the crisis. Meanwhile Asha continues to be troubled by visions, often of a religious nature, during which she loses track of time and place.

After a racist verbal attack at a motorway service station, the women arrive safely in Blackpool. However, when Hashida's pregnancy becomes an open secret, she abruptly separates from the group. Unable to contact Oliver, she visits an abortion advice centre. Ginder begins to relax, but her anxieties are reawakened when Amrik goes missing. Although she finds him relatively easily, unknown to her, Ranjit has caught up with them and is planning to confront her later in the day.

During one of her trances, Asha walks into the sea and is rescued by a charming Blackpool thespian, Ambrose Waddington, who takes Asha on a tour of the town, culminating in a visit to a vacant theatre. Ladhu and Madhu have a fling with a couple of burger-sellers, and the whole group (minus Hashida, who is reunited with Oliver) rendezvous at a nightclub where they find themselves part of the audience participation act of three male strippers. When one of them accidentally undresses Ginder and reveals her bruises, the women leave hastily, only to be confronted by Ranjit and his brothers. Failing to dissuade Ginder verbally, he is reduced to using physical force to abduct Amrik. When Manjit refuses to open the door of the getaway car, Ranjit is forced away by the women and Asha chastises him for his behaviour. When Balbir tries to intervene, Manjit floors him with a punch. Driving out of a nocturnally illuminated Blackpool, the women comfort Ginder and Amrik.

Sight and Sound

DIRECTOR: 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.

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Asian-British Cinema:

From the margins to mainstream

Lumping together filmmakers of any kind within a single cultural grouping is fraught with difficulty, so the term 'British-Asian' may, for example, fail to recognise individual artistic voices (such as those British-Asian filmmakers who are not making Asian-themed films). Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a notion of British Asian film, and these films do often have Asian themes and may be seen to share a number of features, including relatively low budgets.

It is clear that, over the last twenty years, attitudes in Britain towards Asian cultures have shifted, as has the taste of mainstream audiences for Asian-themed films such as *East is East* (1999) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). The latter became one of the most popular British films ever and was a far cry from the colonially-obsessed images of Asians depicted in mainstream British cinema and television in the 1980s and earlier.

British Asian filmmaking has its roots in the 'Black' politics of the 1960s and '70s, as two distinct communities, Asians and African-Caribbeans, were melded together through their common experiences as racial minorities within the UK, often living under the threat of poverty and social exclusion. The need to challenge this racism and create greater awareness inspired a new wave of politically active filmmakers, such as the Trinidadian (of 'African-Asian descent'), Horace Ové, whose seminal documentaries and features such as *Baldwin's Nigger* (1969) and *Pressure* (1975) pioneered new cinematic images of Britain. In the 1980s, a new generation of African-Caribbean and Asian filmmakers began to emerge, exemplified by the Black workshop movement (including the Asian film company Retake) and independent filmmakers such as Yugesh Walia and Ruhul Amin. Asian filmmakers at this time often explored - in low-budget independent productions - issues relating to cultural activism, the fight against racism and the dilemmas of identity created by living 'between' two cultures. As Retake's Ahmed Jamal explains, Asian filmmakers were "in a position of reacting, of feeling strongly about depicting the reality of our experiences and resisting what has been imposed on us".

A number of other issues concerned filmmakers in this period, and went on to flavour work in Britain and in the wider Black and Asian diasporas in later decades. These include the influence of lesbian and gay themes (reflecting the arts and politics of the 1980s). Feminism was another strong theme - women fighting injustice in the home and in the outside world.

Charged by feminist concerns, politically aware female filmmakers such as Pratibha Parmar and Gurinder Chadha emerged. Parmar's 1988 short *Sari Red*, a raw but disturbing docu-drama about an Asian schoolgirl who is run over and killed by neo-nazis at a bus stop, remains one of the most powerful pieces of early British-Asian film. Chadha's films, from *I'm British But...* (1988) to *Bride and Prejudice* (2004), have maintained a strong feminist message.

The 1980s also heralded the first British-Asian themed feature film to claim a mainstream market. As the director Udayan Prasad has observed: "*My Beautiful Launderette* showed that films with Asians in them could make money". This revolutionary film, with its mixed race, queer love story, was released in 1984. Its writer, Hanif Kureishi, went on to undertake a range of features and television drama about Asian experience throughout the 1980s and '90s, including *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987), *The Buddha of Suburbia* (BBC, 1993) and *My Son the Fanatic* (1997).

The late 1980s saw changes in public funding structures and cultural politics. As a result, Black politics and arts began to become more fragmented. Some Asian filmmakers were increasingly commercially orientated, concerned with depicting a vibrant and diverse British Asian experience as well as exploring mainstream themes. Chadha's commercial feature *Bhaji on The Beach* (1994), subverted the British stereotype of the passive Asian woman by depicting a group of Asian women who find empowerment in each other's company. Writer Harwant Bains' *Wild West* (1992) also challenged the traditional portrait of British-Asian youth experience by showing a gang of teenagers in love with country and western music. In the late 1990s, several British-Asian films managed to achieve limited commercial distribution while television and film developed ethnic feel-good productions. Film Four commissioned the screenplay of Ayub Khan Din's *East is East* (1999), a comedy about the experiences and conflicts of a working-class mixed-race British-Pakistani family. The film went on to become one of the most successful British films of the decade.

Asian-themed commercial films of the '90s have many similarities thematically with mainstream British features, not least feel good-comedy elements such as in *East is East* or *Bhaji on The Beach*. British notions of class and regionality are also played out, particularly a preoccupation with the post-industrial 'north' and all its incumbent stereotypes. Udayan Prasad's *Brothers In Trouble* (1996), for instance, depicts the troubled existence of illegal Pakistani immigrants in the early 1960s mill towns; *East is East* also delights in a romp through northern stereotypes. Another common feature of commercial Asian films of the '90s is an homage to Bollywood, perhaps in deference to its popularity with Asian audiences.

Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* has a surreal romantic interlude in which a White man and Asian woman dance Hindi-style around a tree. In *East is East*, the Khan family make a day trip to Bradford to catch a Bollywood movie, while the teenage daughter flounces around the backyard with a broom to the classic Bombay song 'Inhi logon ne' from *Pakeezah* (India, 1972; instantly recognised by Asian audiences around the world). Inter-racial romance is also a common narrative obsession, with cross-racial encounters in *Bhaji*, *Brothers in Trouble* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, while in Shani Grewal's *Guru in Seven* (1997), Sanjay (Nitin Chandra Ganatra) aims to score with a range of women. Today, 'Asian', once unfashionable, has become fashionable and almost 'sexy' in the Western media culture. In the USA, 1960s Swamis have been re-incarnated in the form of the 'life guru' Deepak Chopra. Madonna wears saris and mehndi, and calls to the youth accompanied by Hindi violins. Meanwhile, British-Asian musicians Nitin Sawhney and Talvin Singh are now established in the British music charts. The British film industry has gradually begun to wake up to the 'brown pound'. British Asians are watching so many Hindi films that since 1998 these films have regularly entered the British top ten box-office charts. Director Gurinder Chadha has noted the change in attitudes between the release of her first film, *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994), and her third, *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002): "People are much more aware of difference, what was once foreign is now familiar".

Cary Rajinder Sawhney

Female Protagonists

The changing images of women in fiction film

It is widely felt that female characters in film have been restricted to the easy categories that classical narratives and familiar genres demand of them (the typical complaint is that women in films are either 'virgins, mothers or whores'). There is certainly some truth in this view. However, across the history of British cinema we can see the development of an impressive variety of female characters and protagonists. One might even argue that by comparison with Hollywood, British cinema, with its perennial concern for realism, its desire to speak about ordinary lives and social concerns and its comparative lack of emphasis upon superficial beauty and glamour, has permitted a greater breadth of female representation. Thus today's British cinema finds a place for actors as varied as Helena Bonham-Carter, Kathy Burke, Judi

Dench, Jane Horrocks, Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Samantha Morton, Kristen Scott-Thomas, Maggie Smith, Alison Steadman, Emma Thompson, Julie Walters and Catherine Zeta-Jones. It's undeniable that, despite this variety, women on film have been more often restricted to familial or domestic roles than have men. While a number of famous female protagonists have been presented as strong models of motherhood (as in *Poor Cow* (d. Ken Loach, 1967) and *A Taste of Honey* (d. Tony Richardson, 1961)), we have rarely seen women whose priority is to pursue and develop their ambitions, talents or vocations (see, for example, *The Red Shoes* (d. Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, 1948), *Educating Rita* (d. Lewis Gilbert, 1983), and *Little Voice* (UK/US, d. Mark Herman, 1998)). Female characters who are uninterested in motherhood and domesticity are frequently depicted as lacking something or paying a price for their success. Those who do pursue larger ambitions are often portrayed as being in some sense naïve, manipulated by other (male) characters in the pursuit of their dreams.

As British cinema has developed, the number of female protagonists has increased, and female characters play a larger part in propelling the narrative forward. For example, where the British New Wave films of the 1960s largely confined their female characters to motherhood and domesticity, leaving the male protagonists to speak out about larger social concerns, many contemporary social realist films allow female characters greater power over their own destinies.

The representation of women in film depends as much on issues of production, institutions and genres as on social, political and historical contexts. Gainsborough melodramas, Carry On films, Hammer horrors, heritage films and recent 'Brit-grit' realist films all necessarily place limitations upon the kinds of roles open to female (and male) actors.

Yet even within the most conventional of studios and genres, and within the most unpromising films, it's possible to find women who offer alternative and positive representations: for example the powerful female characters played by Helena Bonham-Carter and Emma Thompson in 1980s and '90s heritage films, or the charismatic, if troubled, characters played by Julie Christie in earlier films like *Darling* (d. John Schlesinger, 1965). The situation for non-white women is slightly less rosy, in that fewer representations exist, but we still have the varied and careful characterisations found in *Burning an Illusion* (d. Menelik Shabazz, 1981), *Bhaji on the Beach* (d. Gurinder Chadha, 1993), *East is East* (d. Damien O'Donnell, 1999) and *Secrets and Lies* (d. Mike Leigh, 1996).

Sarah Cardwell

Further Reading

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Women and Film

Women on both sides of the camera

To look separately at the role of women in the fields of film, video and television in Britain is to recognise that the experiences of women in these areas are somehow different to those of men. The work by women in moving image production both reflects and informs the position of women within British society since the 1920s.

In the silent period, Mary Field and sisters Marion and Ruby Grierson took advantage of the camaraderie and pioneering spirit of the time by joining the British documentary movement, where they made opportunities for themselves and other women to enter the system of film production. Their influence and impact on the movement was significant: Field is noted for her work on the *Secrets of Nature* series (1922-33) and for her inauguration, in 1944, of the children's entertainment division of British Instructional Films.

During the Second World War, women were among many filmmakers employed to make films for the Ministry of Information. Muriel Box, once a continuity girl, began directing short documentaries. In the postwar period, there were great changes for women in society; women demanded more autonomy and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. In contrast, the film industry, unions and work conditions retained a rigid structure, and many women directors were rejected or moved to less influential roles.

By the 1950s, women already played a key role as audience members and consumers of film culture. Understanding female audiences became an important factor in the success or failure of a film. The melodrama genre is designed to appeal to a specifically female audience because of its emotional and sentimental content, and its depiction of femininity. Although great consumers of the film, few women directed during this period, although one notable exception is Wendy Toye.

The British new wave saw a new depiction of women and sexuality, in films like *Poor Cow* (d. Ken Loach, 1967) and *A Taste of Honey* (d. Tony Richardson, 1961), which departed from the romantic vision of melodrama. Female characters were seen to break moral codes and

defy expectations of how they should behave. But in the hands of male directors, the representation of women in these films tells us more about the position of men and their feelings about women than about the way women feel about themselves.

It was not until the early 1970s that feminism and women's consciousness began to influence the production, exhibition and distribution of film and television, as well as education and the emerging film theory. In 1972, the Edinburgh Film Festival included a women's section for the first time. Women began to engage in debates about their position in society and the ways women were represented in film, television and advertising. Using film and television as a communication tool to meet and educate women, groups like the London Women's Film Group began working within communities in regional locations.

The arrival in 1982 of Channel 4, with its remit to cater for 'minority audiences', brought some hope to women film and video directors. Although there was no specific remit to support women's work, a number of documentary series by women were commissioned, including the weekly current affairs programmes *20/20 Vision* and *Broadside*, and the magazine show *Watch the Woman*. The ACTT Workshop Declaration of 1984 offered further opportunities for groups of women filmmakers to break through the barriers that had previously prevented them entering the industry, and became the basis for Channel 4 commissions.

The 1980s brought increased awareness of discrimination against women technicians and pressure on institutions such as the British Film Institute to support women's work. Through the BFI's education department and production fund there was some temporary support for British feminist films and funding for feminist distributors.

During the 1990s, shifts in politics and a transformation of production and exhibition technologies allowed greater accessibility to the media, but the new market economy and a backlash against feminism contributed to a move away from overtly feminist practice.

Today, despite the successes of Sally Potter, Antonia Bird and Lynne Ramsay, there are still relatively few women directing, particularly in feature films; they are more commonly found in production roles. In the areas of documentary and experimental film, however, women have directed a substantial body of work. This suggests that away from the constraints of the commercial film industry, greater opportunities exist to explore the representation of women's lives and their subjective experience.

Emma Hedditch