

AMU

a film by
shonali bose

102 minutes
Currently unrated

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SYNOPSIS

What starts out seeming like a standard “back to the roots” story, becomes a mystery of both personal and political implications in Shonali Bose’s feature debut, *Amu*.

Amu is the journey of Kajori Roy, a 21-year-old Indian American woman who has lived in the US since the age of 3. After graduating from UCLA Kaju goes to India to visit her relatives. There she meets Kabir, a college student from an upper class family who is disdainful of Kaju’s wide-eyed wonder at discovering the “real India”. Undeterred Kaju visits the slums, crowded markets and roadside cafes of Delhi. In one slum she is struck by an odd feeling of déjà vu. Soon after she starts having nightmares. When Kabir discovers that Kaju was an adopted child, he gets drawn into her personal mystery.

Meanwhile Kaju’s adoptive mother – Keya Roy, a single parent and civil rights activist in LA, arrives unannounced in Delhi. She is shocked to discover that Kaju has been visiting the slums. Although Kaju mistakes her mother’s response to a typical Indian over-protectiveness – Keya’s fears are deeper rooted.

Slowly Kaju starts piecing together what happened to her birth parents. Mother and daughter clash as Kaju discovers she has been lied to her whole life. What was the truth? Why was it suppressed? As Kaju and Kabir undertake this quest they both discover their families involvement with a man-made tragedy of immense proportions which took place twenty years before in the capital city of India: the massacre of thousands of people of the Sikh faith. In a searing climax the young people are forced to confront the reality of the past and how it affects the present.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I was a 19 year-old student in Delhi when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated at the end of October 1984. In the days and nights that followed, thousands of Sikhs were massacred. The city burned. Like many other people, I worked in the relief camps, transcribing postcards from widows to their relatives, writing down their stories of the horrors that had taken place. It was unforgettable.

In 1987, due to a personal tragedy, I left India and came to America as a graduate student. There I got involved with an Indian organization, spearheaded by my future husband, that organized around the issues of the denial of rights. The state terrorism unleashed in 1984 was a subject we particularly felt strongly about and kept alive. Because "1984" was a watershed in the Indian polity.

Many years later, after graduating from film school when I was ready to write my first feature film we knew that this was the story I had to write, the film I had to make and show, to a world that didn't know the suppressed history of that genocide.

Working as an activist outside my home country one of the issues I became acutely aware of was the painful questions of identity that affect second-generation youth: their yearning to be accepted both here and there, to know their history, to place themselves. *Kaju*, my protagonist, was created out of my empathy with young people facing this poignant crisis.

By the final draft of the screenplay much more had happened. India and the world had gone through Godhra, Gujarat, 9-11, Afghanistan, Iraq -- and I wanted to incorporate it all. In finalizing the shooting script, though, I had to whittle away many side plots. That's why I am glad that Penguin approached me to convert the screenplay into a novel and I could put into the book the thoughts, events and complexities that the 100-minute film had to sacrifice.

Amu was born because of the collaboration of many people. She is the child of a collective. Perhaps that was the biggest learning experience for me, since I came from the trenches of documentary filmmaking, where I shot, interviewed, edited, and was more or less the entire crew! To then lead a team of nearly a hundred people, with all their

personalities and opinions, and to make sure the vision was one... I think more than film school, my training came from mothering two boys!

When I first came up with the idea for *Amu*, our older son had just started kindergarten. As the film is finally ready for release, he is in fifth grade! It's been a long, hard, eye-opening battle to raise the money and get the film made. A battle I could never have fought without my husband, who is also the executive producer of the film. *Amu* has been our most difficult child together. We would have given up long ago if it weren't for the pain of Shanno Kaur and her many sisters, a pain that is very much alive today, since not a single perpetrator has been punished *twenty years later*.

I can still hear the angry voices from the relief camp echoing across the years: "*Minister hee to thhe. Unhee ke shaye pe sab hua*" (It was a Minister. It was all done at his direction). "*Saare shamil thhe... police, afsar, sarkar, neta, saare*" (They were all involved ... the police, the bureaucracy, the government, the politicians – all). If I ever had doubts that a cover-up of history had taken place, they were set to rest when the Censor Board removed these two lines of dialogue along with other politically motivated cuts and gave the film an "A" certificate, because "why bring up a history which is best buried and forgotten?" I accepted the cuts and thought it an even more powerful indictment for audiences to see the widows silently moving their lips. Silenced, even after twenty years...

My only hope for *Amu* is that she make us think.

CAST

Kaju	Konkona Sensharma
Keya	Brinda Karat
Kabir	Ankur Khanna
Tuki	Chaiti Ghosh
Grandmother	Aparna Roy
Uncle	Ashish Ghosh
Aunt	Ruma Ghosh
Gobind	Yashpal Sharma
Leelavati	Lovleen Mishra
Chachaji	Brajesh Mishra
Arun Sehgal	Bharat Kapoor
Meera Sehgal	Lushin Dubey
KK	Rajendra Gupta
Shanno Kaur	Ganeve Rajkotia
Gurbachan Singh	Kuljit Singh
Amu	Ekta Sood
Arjun	Harshit Sood
Durga	Mohini Mathur
Shanti Kumar	Kirandeep Sharma
Widows	Amita Udgata Kusum Haider
Neel	Avijit Dutt
Lalitha (L)	Subhashini Ali
Siddharth	Susmit Sarkar
Stephanians	Lara Ahsan Chandni Maxwell Chhetry Subhashish Mukherjee

Gobind's children Bublee
Salmaan
Pappu..... Sanjay Kumar
Train passengers..... Charu Kasturi
Sunil Pandey
Nitin Gupta
Ravishankar
Vimala Ramkrishnan
Sikh with haircut.....Inderpal Singh
Mob leaderSantosh Kumar
Man with radio.....Vijay Kaliya
Child Tanya
Salsa partyKajori Dasgupta
Monish Dasgupta
Bejoya Pain
Bela Sadhna Bannerjee
Ramu Narendra Chauhan
Sehgal Lunch guests..... Anjali Malik
Jasbir Malik
Gaurav Raina
Veena Sawhney
Indira Dayal
Indu Wahi
Ashok Gupta
Meera Juneja
Ranjit Das
Anjali Chawla
Kavita Das
Vijay Sawhney

Mala Gupta
Vaishnavi
Workers LeaderBijju Naik
Sexologist..... Bikramjeet Kanwarpal
Miranda House girl Surkh Raj

FILMMAKERS

Writer/Director/Producer..... Shonali Bose
Director of Photography Lourdes Ambrose
Production Designer Ayesha Punvani
Film Editor Bob Brooks
Sound Recordist and Sound Design Resul Pookutty
Assistant Director.....Neelima Goel
Line Producer Sanjay Bhattacharjee
Script Supervisor Shubha Ramachandra
Costume Designer..... Sujata Sharma
Music Nandlal Nayak
Executive Producers Bedabrata Pain
Gudip Singh Malik
Associate Producers Geetha Ravishankar
Uma Chakravarthy
Co-Producers..... Aidan Hill
Atiya Bose

FILMMAKER BIOS

Shonali Bose – Writer / Director / Producer

Shonali Bose was born in 1965 and grew up in Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi. She has been an activist since her student days at Miranda House College, Delhi University (BA History Honours) and Columbia University, New York (MA Political Science). Bose was also passionately involved in theater throughout school and college. In 1984 she co-wrote and acted in a street play on the Delhi Riots which was performed in relief camps, riot-affected areas, markets, schools, and colleges across Delhi.

Shonali worked for a year as an organizer at the National Lawyer's Guild, and directed live community television in Manhattan before embarking on the MFA Directing Program at UCLA's School of Theatre, Film, and Television. Her short narrative films (*The Gendarme Is Here* and *Undocumented*) and her feature-length documentary (*Lifting the Veil*) have screened throughout the world.

Bose lives in Los Angeles with her family, where she produces and hosts a monthly radio show about South Asia on KPFK. *Amu* is her feature film debut and is written, produced and directed by her.

Dr. Bedabrata Pain – Executive Producer

Bedabrata Pain or Bedo as he is commonly called has been critically involved with the creative, political and financial aspects of *Amu* right from its inception. Married as he is to Shonali Bose, the film is a product of a truly joint effort. Having consistently organized conferences and campaigns on the issue of injustice of 1984 and for the affirmation of rights, he played a critical role in giving final shape to the screenplay.

Six years ago, in 1999, in a coffee shop in Los Angeles, when they decided to make a film on 1984, they knew that it would not be an easy task – creatively or financially. There are so many things to say about 1984. What would be the key theme that *Amu* must highlight? Who would finance such a film?

From then it was an uphill battle to turn the idea into a screenplay and the screenplay into a film. There were many closed doors and rude rejections. In February 2003 one such rejection was from a professional production company in India that pulled out at the last

minute. On that very same day – coincidentally and magically Bedo received a royalty check from NASA for a path breaking invention of his that had got sold. Deciding between the children's education fund, mortgage debts and *Amu* – was easy for the couple. Although there were miles to go and many more hurdles before the rest (and bulk) of the money was raised at least *Amu* was on her way.

A NASA scientist by profession Dr. Bedabrata Pain is one of the inventors of the active pixel sensor technology that produced the world's smallest camera in 1995, and led to the digital imaging revolution in the world. This was the invention that provided the seed funding for *Amu*. In 1997 he was inducted to the US Space Technology Hall of Fame.

Growing up in Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray's Bengal, literature and music come naturally to Bedo. A playwright, singer and activist, he was also the principal researcher for their previous film – a documentary called "Lifting the Veil."

Bedabrata: *"The issue of Delhi 1984 remains very much alive because even after twenty years, it remains a matter of justice denied. It is not possible for India to move forward, if wounds like these are allowed to fester. And the political trend that was set in motion in 1984 continues to haunt the Indian polity."*

CAST BIOS

Konkona Sensharma – Kaju

Konkona is the rising young star of new Indian cinema. Her acclaimed performance in *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* won her the National Award for Best Actress in India in 2003. As a teenager she made a mark in Bengali cinema with *Titli* and *Ek je achey Kanya*. Her forthcoming releases are *Page 3*, *Amavas*, *Chaipani* etc. She is about to start shooting for Aparna Sen's *15 Park Avenue* and Mira Nair's *The Namesake*.

Konkona, *"I was very nervous when I went for the audition for Amu as I was dying to do the role. I had read and loved the script."*

Shonali, *"I had auditioned close to 50 Indian American actors in the US for Kaju as her authenticity as an Indian American was very important to me. Koko was by far the most superior actor of any Indian I knew or had come across of her age. She had to be Kaju. I took her to LA where she lived with us for a few weeks and trained in the American accent and got immersed in "Kaju's life" in Los Angeles."*

Brinda Karat - Keya

Amu is the first film Brinda has ever acted in. Her last contact with acting was in theater in the 1960's as a college student. Brinda has been a leading women and workers activist for the last 3 decades. She is a central committee member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). She worked in the relief camps in 1984. Brinda is also Shonali's aunt and has been like her adoptive mother.

Brinda, *"I agreed to play Keya because the script is so powerful and so rooted in reality. Furthermore it is not just dealing with an issue that I feel strongly about but is a beautiful mother daughter relationship. I relate to the character of Keya, to a mother who will do anything for a child even when she is not biologically her own."*

Shonali, *"I had heard from my mother that her sister was a very talented actor but had eschewed an acting career for politics. She also had the vulnerability and pain and depth in her eyes, in her face that I wanted for Keya. We did various screen tests before we both felt confident that she could pull it off. But I was terrified about how the flip of authority situation would go down! I needn't have worried. She took direction very well."*

Ankur Khanna - Kabir

Ankur is an actor and filmmaker. *Amu* is his feature film debut although he has done various short films and has a theater background from St. Stephens, Delhi University. His short film on football "*Bare*" has been selected for the Berlinale Talent Campus at the 2005 Berlin Film Festival.

Ankur, "When I read the script I found it incisive and the commentary layered but what really convinced me was Shonali herself. Her conviction and sheer sense of enterprise for, what at that time, seemed fairly daunting, almost impossible to do....."

Shonali, "Ankur is the first and last person I auditioned for Kabir. Because as soon as I saw him I realized he was everything I had written and more. So when he got hepatitis during pre production and I was urged to recast I refused to. Instead we completely reworked our schedule and put all his scenes at the end. It was very brave of him to do it when he was so weak."