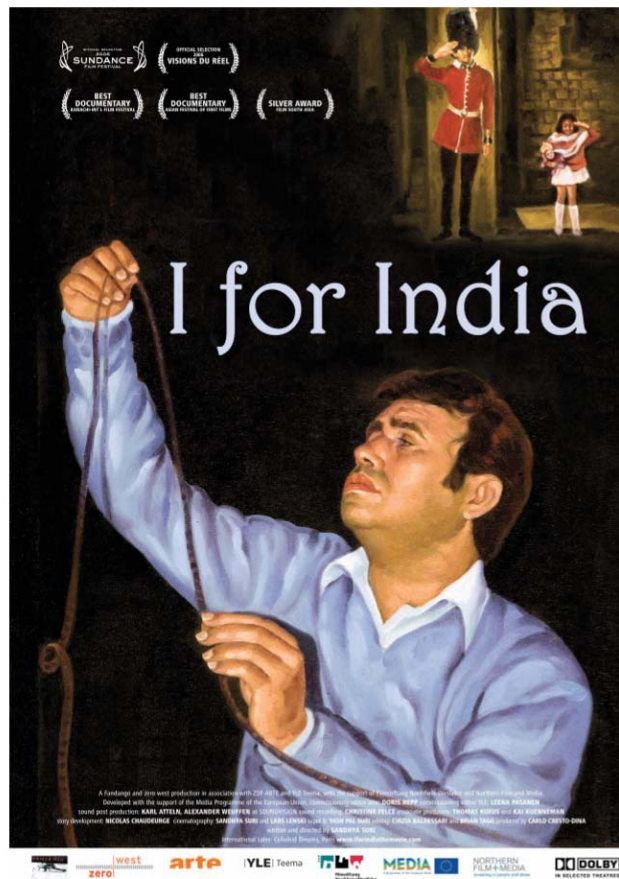


I for India

A Film by Sandhya Suri



A FANDAGO AND ZERO WEST FILM

2005 / Color and b&w / English / Hindi with English subtitles

ICARUS FILMS

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SYNOPSIS

I FOR INDIA is a chronicle of immigration in Britain, from the Sixties to the present day, as seen through the eyes of one Asian family and their movie camera.

In 1965 Yash Pal Suri, a young doctor, left India for the U.K. with hopes of improving his family's life. The first thing he did upon arriving in England was to buy two Super 8mm cameras, two projectors and two reel-to-reel tape recorders. He sent one of each to his family in India, and kept the others for himself.

Over the next forty years, through regular mailings of his filmed and taped thoughts and observations, he shared his new life abroad with family members back home, providing a unique record of the eccentricities—and occasional racism—of his new English hosts. Back in India, his relatives, in turn, responded with their own “cine-letters,” sending tales of weddings, festivals and village life, along with impassioned pleas for his return.

In addition to home movies, I FOR INDIA, directed by one of Suri's three daughters, uses archival and contemporary footage and excerpts from BBC TV programs (including *The Dark Million*, *The Immigrant Doctors*, and *The End of the Line*), which chart the changing national mood about immigration over the decades, from bemusement at the strange customs of the South Asian newcomers, to fears of British culture being “swamped,” to right-wing protests demanding the expulsion of “colored” immigrants.

By the end of the film, as Suri and his wife communicate today via webcam with a daughter who has relocated to Australia, I FOR INDIA becomes not only a bittersweet time capsule of cultural alienation, discovery, racism and belonging, but also a contemporary exploration of universal, emotionally compelling themes of family separation and the quest for personal happiness, wherever it may take you.



* high-resolution versions available at www.IcarusFilms.com

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Like so many families, lacing up our ancient projector and replaying our favourite Super 8 home movies was something we used to do with routine nostalgia. Only years later, as an adult, when I came across a box of audio reels, did I realize that the films were part of a much bigger story. Over weeks I sat down and listened to over 100 reels of audio letters, which my father had recorded and exchanged with his family back home in India — the most intimate thoughts and observations of our lives in England over a period of forty years. At the same time as he was recording Super 8 films of birthday parties, new houses and our successful lives abroad, the audio tapes were telling a more complex story. The familiar home movies took on a whole new meaning for me.

I inherited my father's passion for documenting and I knew that he had given me the greatest gift I could have wished for as a documentary-maker — real, long-term development. For me the challenge was a big one. Could I structure such a huge amount of personal archive, in the space of a 70 minute film, and give it an emotional coherence that would truly represent the lives of my family over 4 decades? As a second-generation immigrant could I convey the complex, bitter-sweet yearning for home which had simultaneously plagued and comforted my father for so many years? And most importantly, did I have the skills to recreate the true richness and complexity of my parents' experience of immigration and set it within a wider historical context? I wanted to make a sincere, personal film, which was creative and ambitious in its form, and which would touch those who watched it.

As much as the audio letters and Super 8 films are moving, they are also incredibly funny. Along with the questions of displacement and belonging, I wanted to share with my audience the fun. How did a young Indian doctor, arriving in England in the mid-sixties view his strange new hosts? What did he find funny about them, what did he admire in them and what did he despise?

Listening to my father's audio letters, to the mike clicking on and off, us as children playing in the background, his breath as he struggles to find the right words, or the barely concealed anger or puzzlement in his voice, you can really picture him sitting in front of his tape recorder, documenting his life. In this film, I've tried to give shape to the reality, which he documented so passionately. 'I for India' started with some Super 8 movies and a box of audio reels but grew into much more than I could have expected.

ABOUT SANDHYA SURI



After graduating with a first class honours degree in Mathematics and German, Sandhya received a scholarship to study documentary at The National Film and Television School. Her graduation film "SAFAR" was shown at a number of international film festivals, receiving the Jury's special mention at Cinema du Reel and the award for Best Short Film at the British Film Institute's Imagine Asia festival. Currently based in London, she has lived in Germany, India and Japan and worked on documentary projects in Africa, South America and Polynesia. *I for India* is her first feature length documentary.

FESTIVALS & AWARDS

Charles C. Guggenheim
Emerging Artist Award
Full Frame Documentary Festival
2006

Official Selection
Sundance Film Festival
2006

Silver Award
Film South Asia
2005

Golden Pram
For Best Documentary
Zagreb Film Festival
2006

Official Selection
Visions du Reel
2006

Audience Award
River to River Festival,
Italy, 2006

Best Documentary
Karachi International Film
Festival, 2005

Best Documentary
Indo-American Arts Council
Film Festival, 2006

Jury's Honourable Mention
Mumbai International Film
Festival, 2006

Best Documentary
Asian Festival of First Films
2006

Best Documentary
Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles
2006

It's All True Film Festival, Brazil, 2006
Melbourne International Film Festival, 2006
CPH: Dox Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival, 2006
New Zealand International Film Festival, 2006
EIDF – EBS International Documentary Festival, Korea, 2006
Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival, 2007
Seattle International Film Festival, 2006
Boston International Film Festival, 2006
Newport Beach Film Festival, 2006
Cleveland International Film Festival, 2006

REVIEW EXERPTS

“A profound and profoundly moving film that any director could be proud of; as a debut, it’s formidably accomplished.”—Sight & Sound

★★★★ “A miraculous mini-epic... terrifically warm, watchable film-making.”—The Guardian

“Intimate and rewarding...almost unbearably moving.”—Justin Chang, Variety

“Emotionally gripping... smartly crafted and affecting.”—Anthony Kaufman, indieWIRE

★★★★ “A compelling piece of social history that is also a deeply moving domestic melodrama” —Empire

“A remarkable meditation on the agonies and enigmas of migration” —Sukhdev Sandhu, The Daily Telegraph

★★★★ 1/2 “A fascinating, heartrending, beautifully compiled glimpse into one expatriate family's filmed self-portrait” —Film 4

★★★★ “Delightful, seductive, a lovely and thoughtful film” —Wally Hammond, Time Out (Critic's Choice no. 1, Film of the Week)

★★★★ “A picture of cultural displacement and Anglo-Indian rapprochement almost worthy of EM Forster; warm, insightful and tragicomic” —Financial Times

“A cinematic journal spun tight with drama and intrigue – a rare and precious insight into the immigrant experience” —BBC

“Penetrating and powerful” —Total Film

CREDITS

Commissioning editor ARTE: Doris Hepp
Commissioning editor YLE: Leena Pasanen
Online editors: Andreas Froehlich, Oliver Kenneke
at ACT, Cologne
Sound design: Karl Atteln and Markus Loebel
at Soundvision, Cologne
Sound mixing: Alexander Weuffen
Sound recordist: Christine Felce
Associate Producers: Thomas Kufus and Kai Kuenneman
Story Development: Nicolas Chaudeurge
Camera: Sandhya Suri and Lars Lenski
Super 8: Yash Pal Suri
Editing: Cinzia Baldessari and Brian Tagg
Producer: Carlo Cresto-Dina
Director/script: Sandhya Suri

Production companies: Fandango, zero west
International sales: Celluloid Dreams

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