



The early 1990s was a dark time for the UK film industry. However, over the course of the decade, Film4, PolyGram and Working Title contributed to making British films appealing to international and domestic audiences.

Films such as Richard Curtis' 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' and 'Notting Hill' as well as Danny Boyle's 'Shallow Grave' and 'Trainspotting' transformed the fortunes of British cinema into an exciting and financially attractive industry.

The addition of National Lottery funding in 1994 helped raise investment in UK features from £169 million in 1992 to £560 million in 1996, when 128 UK films were produced compared with 30 in 1989.

Channel 4's 'Film on Four' series financed and produced several successful films during the 1990s all of which explored challenging subjects. In 1993 it funded 'Bhaji on the Beach' the directorial debut by British Asian female filmmaker Gurinder Chadha, co-written with actress/writer Meera Syal.

This is a comedy about a group of Asian women from Birmingham on a day trip via bus to the seaside resort of Blackpool determined to have "female fun time". The film examines notions of identity amongst British Asians, especially the lives of British Asian women.

The theme of cultural identity for second generation Asian immigrants was central to the film's commercial and critical success, which led to the popularity of more movies exploring cultural differences such as 'East Is East' in 1999. The cast of female passengers includes: judgmental conservative older 'aunties', a couple of teenagers keen to meet boys, a mother escaping from her abusive husband and seeking divorce, plus medical student 'Hashida', a second generation Indian woman, first introduced to us holding a positive pregnancy test, which seems to be unacceptable to 'the aunties' when they find out her boyfriend is West Indian.

The seaside setting appeals to the characters because of its potential for a collective, enjoyable experience that can blur individual identities and anxieties. In fact, the seaside that is represented produces conflict and serves to challenge or renew identities.

The notions of solidarity and sisterhood across the generations fully emerge later as the women make their way home to Birmingham. The women come together on what has become a journey of discovery when they are confronted by white racists. Although the generations clash on other issues of traditional values such as commitment, duty, honour and sacrifice., this incident unites them.

Three key themes dominate the film: food, family and living a double life... Food and its preparation and consumption link the scenes, stands for symbols of Indian culture and provides the film with part of its title. Several scenes in the film where eating together represents one of the major parts of Indian family life, also provides the viewer with an example of the changing attitudes of second-generation Indians in Britain.

The importance of family is hugely pronounced here with the group of women creating a (female only) extended family to each other, whose members are not blood relations but represent an inseparable part of Indian community.

There are several images of the main characters' attempts to create a hidden passage leading to their dreams and ambitions which might not be approved of by their relatives or even friends. These characters are thus forced to start living a second life, separated from the official one.

In attempting to bring the images of Indian society in Britain nearer to the wider public, Chadha has examined the cross-cultural conflict as well as the generation gap and sexism.

Chadha was moved to comment on the opportunity to examine the notion of spanning three generations of outsiders living in an ever-changing society. "There's been a history of seeing difference, in terms of culture and race, as problematic; for me, difference is celebratory."