

A FEATURE FILM DIRECTED BY RICHIE MEHTA



# AMAL

SOMETIMES THE POOREST OF MEN  
ARE THE RICHEST

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# "AMAL"

## MEDIA KIT

"SOMETIMES THE POOREST OF MEN ARE THE RICHEST"



## *FULL SYNOPSIS:*

On the streets of New Delhi, every day is a struggle to survive. But *AMAL*, a simple, humble autorickshaw driver, is content with the small but vital role he plays — to drive his customers throughout the city as efficiently and safely as possible.

Meanwhile, an eccentric old billionaire, G.K. JAYARAM, is burdened by his failing legacy — his children are ungrateful spoiled brats and his colleagues are corrupt money-sucking leeches. Despite all his wealth, Jayaram wanders the city masked as a vagrant searching to find the two things his money has never brought him – hope for humanity and peace for his soul.

Following a tragic incident with a young beggar girl (PRIYA), Amal's purpose is thrown into disarray. Compelled by his kind nature, Amal struggles, alongside the lovely merchant POOJA, to do whatever it takes to raise enough money to save the child's life. This leads him to a chance encounter with G.K. Jayaram in his rickshaw, a drive which restores the old man's faith. Days later, Jayaram passes away, and his children are shocked to discover the benefactor to their father's fortune is the autorickshaw driver, Amal. As Jayaram's lawyer, MS. AGARWAL, desperately tries to find Amal within the fixed timeframe in the Will, the children do everything in their power to prevent Amal from discovering and claiming the inheritance. VIVEK, Jayaram's dangerously volatile son, and SURESH, his estranged best friend and long-term assistant, form a bond to intercept, and obliterate Amal's chances of claiming the riches, leading each other down their own path of corruption.

As Amal continues to struggle, chaos ensues in G.K.'s upper caste family - the implications of which threaten to unravel his life and those around him. But just as destiny led Amal astray, it allows him to re-discover his purpose and find peace - something all the riches in the world could never have brought him.



## *SHORT SYNOPSIS:*

*AMAL*, a multi-layered portrait of contemporary India, follows an auto-rickshaw driver in New Delhi (Amal) who is content with his small, but vital role in life. One day he drives an eccentric billionaire (G.K. Jayaram) who, disguised as a vagabond, is searching the streets for the last morsel of humanity, and someone he can leave all his money to, and Amal's life may change forever. *AMAL* serves up a visual feast for audiences. Filmed on location in New Delhi, India, this modern day fable asks the important question of what success means to each individual and ultimately reveals that the poorest of men are sometimes the richest.

## *PROJECT HISTORY:*

"Amal" originated as a short story in 2002 by author Shaun Mehta, and was published a year later. His writer/director brother Richie Mehta adapted it into a short screenplay, gathered a small cast and crew together, and shot the film guerilla-style on the streets of New Delhi in December 2003. The film was completed in April 2004, and premiered at the Telluride Film Festival that September to much acclaim. The short film has enjoyed a very healthy film festival run - even to this day. In early 2005, Richie and Shaun set out to adapt the short story into a feature-length screenplay. Within the course of a year, the feature film *AMAL* has gained an incredible amount of support in the Canadian, U.K. and Indian film industries. The feature length version of the film went to production in the Fall of 2006 and was completed in the Fall of 2007. *AMAL* will have its World Premiere at the 2007 Toronto International Film Festival.



## CAST:

### RUPINDER NAGRA – AMAL KUMAR

Rupinder Nagra has worked on popular Canadian Television series such as Alliance Atlantis's *THE ASSOCIATES* and CBC's *SPY NET*. He has also worked with prestigious directors Deepa Mehta and Eleanor Lindo. Spending most of his time In London, England and Mumbai, India he recently finished shooting for Sony Television's C.I.D. - India's top cop drama where he plays the role of a wanted terrorist Karun. He was also part of the live sketch comedy series *MIXED NUTS* in London, England. He is scheduled to begin filming the UK Independent feature *LITTLE INDIA*, to be directed by Dishad Hussain. He will be playing the lead role of Rohan opposite Bollywood Star Jackie Shroff. Later this year the film *MITSEN* is expected to release on the international film circuit in which Rupinder plays the role of "Kaal". The film is directed by Aparna Malladi and also stars the popular independent film actor from India Smirti Mishra

### KOEL PURIE – POOJA SETH

Koel Purie has been working in film and television at an international level since 2000. Purie's work as an actor has ranged from Indian films such as *WHITE NOISE*, *MIXED DOUBLES*, *MERA DIL LEKE DEKHO* and *AMERICAN DAYLIGHT*, to U.K. productions such as films *DIRTY WAR* and *TRIALS & RETRIBUTION: SINS OF MY FATHER*, to Canadian films *BOLLY-DOUBLE* and now *AMAL* (as Pooja Seth). Purie has recently been tapped to play the lead in Oscar-nominated director Ashvin Kumar's new film *ROAD TO LADAKH*. Purie is currently shooting *LIFE MEIN KABHIE KABHIE*.

### NASEERUDDIN SHAH – G.K. JAYARAM

A graduate of the National School of Drama in 1973, Shah enrolled in the Film and TV Institute of India the same year. He won the Indian government's National Award for Best Actor in 1979 for his portrayal of a blind man in the film *SPARSH* (literally "Touch"). Following this, he was considered for the title role in Richard Attenborough's *GANDHI* but narrowly lost out to Ben Kingsley. Besides acting in over 100 mainstream Bollywood films, Shah has made a name for himself starring in international projects such as *MONSOON WEDDING* (2001), and starring alongside Sean Connery in a movie adaptation of *THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN* (2003), solidifying his position as a classic figure of the mainstream and his strong connection between east and west.



## ROSHAN SETH – SURESH

A native of New Delhi, India, Roshan Seth is a British character actor of theater and film. He honed his skills at London's Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in British Repertory Theater. His first break came in Peter Brook's production of *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* which toured in 1972. Seth entered feature films in Richard Lester's *JUGGERNAUT* (1974). In 1980, Richard Attenborough asked Seth to play Pandit Nehru in *GANDHI* (1982), after which a slew of roles came his way. Seth's movie career took off with roles in Steven Spielberg's *INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM* (1984) and David Lean's *A PASSAGE TO INDIA* (1984). Seth's subsequent film credits include *MISSISSIPPI MASALA* (1992), *SUCH A LONG JOURNEY* (1998), *MONSOON WEDDING* (2001), and *PROOF* (2005).

## SEEMA BISWAS – SAPNA AGARWAL

Seema's leap from theatre to the silver screen came in the form of the lead role Phoolan Devi in Shekhar Kapur's 1994 drama *BANDIT QUEEN*. Premiering at the Cannes Film Festival, the film was an instant success and launched Seema into the Bollywood mainstream, while garnering international acclaim. That role also landed her a "Best Actress" award at India's National Film Awards. Since then, she has won Screen Weekly Awards for "Best Supporting Actress" in *KHAMOSHI: THE MUSICAL*, *COMPANY* and *BHOOT*. Her most recent project was a starring role in Deepa Mehta's controversial epic *WATER*, in which she won the 2006 Canadian Genie for "Best Actress". Seema is expected to star in Deepa Mehta's next film, the Vancouver-filmed epic *KOMAGATA MARU*, guaranteeing her spot at the top of the Canadian limelight.

## VIK SAHAY – VIVEK JAYARAM

Vik Sahay has acquired some extensive credits in his relatively short career. While attending Theatre Performance at Montreal's Concordia University, Sahay began his foray into the professional world of acting. He can be seen in such feature films as Gus Van Sant's *GOOD WILL HUNTING*, Sidney Furie's *HOLLOW POINT*, Bob Hoskin's *RAINBOW & DAVID*, Cronenberg's, eXistenZ, *TIME BOMB* and of course *AMAL*. Sahay has appeared in many television movies and series including *IF YOU BELIEVE*, *FROM GARBAGE TO GRIDION*, *RADIO ACTIVE* (Lead), Bruce McDonald's *PLATINUM*, *ESCAPE FROM THE NEWSROOM* (with Ken Finkleman), and the hit Canadian television show, *THIS IS WONDERLAND*. Sahay also received much acclaim for his role in *OUR HERO*, the CBS Movie-of-the-week *MAYDAY*, and most recently starring as Lester in the forthcoming NBC Series *CHUCK*. In addition, Vik Sahay has performed extensively in theatres all across Canada and the United States.

## TANISHA CHATTERJEE – PRIYA

A native of New Delhi, Tanisha found acting as her passion, and has been studying it for sometime. Now starring in her debut role as young Priya in the feature film *AMAL*, Tanisha is quickly being recognized as a talent to watch out for in the near future.



## THE TEAM:

### RICHIE MEHTA – DIRECTOR / CO-WRITER

Richie Mehta has been solidifying his role as a serious up-and-coming filmmaker for years, and been mentored by industry legends such as Wim Wenders, Shekhar Kapur and Brian DePalma. Mehta's films to date - *AMAL* (the short film) and *SYSTEM OF UNITS* - have screened and garnered him much acclaim and numerous awards around the world at film festivals such as Telluride, Palm Springs International Film Festival, Montreal International Film Festival, and the London International Film Festival. These experiences, along with his travels to India and afar, have granted him access to a global filmmaking community and assisted in further nurturing his independent spirit and international perspectives.

### SHAUN MEHTA – CO-WRITER

Shaun Mehta spent a year in Southern India researching and writing his first novel Divya's Dharma. Mehta has also written a novel (*A Slice of Life*) comprised of short stories – including "Amal", which Mehta helped pen into a short film and now a feature entitled *AMAL*, directed and co-written by his brother Richie Mehta. Shaun is currently working on his third novel *Deceptive Shadows*, a contemporary mystery/medieval fantasy. Mehta has an International Masters in Business, Bachelors of Education and writes and teaches in Toronto, Canada.

### DAVID MILLER – PRODUCER

David Miller has worked as an independent producer for a number of years where he has garnered much success producing dramatic films and television. Miller is currently the producer on three dramatic features - *AMAL* by Richie Mehta, *THE INNOCENTS*, by Marcus Robinson, and *LOW LIFE KINGS* by Bruce McDonald. Miller has produced and executive produced a number of shorts films including, *ARUBA*, by Oscar® nominated director Hubert Davis (an official selection of *2006 Sundance Film Festival and Toronto International Film Festival*). In addition to producing and writing, Miller also specializes in Public Relations, where he has worked with several organizations in the film and television industry - including the National Film Board of Canada, where he orchestrated the campaign for the 2005 Oscar® award winning short animated film *RYAN*. Miller is currently Director of Creative & Business Development for Channel Zero Inc., and is a standing member of the Canadian Film & Television Producers Association (CFTPA).



## STEVEN BRAY – PRODUCER

For the past 10 years, Steven's work as a filmmaker has taken him to such distant locations as the indigenous mountain tribes of Mexico, to the urban streets of New Delhi, to the jungles of Cambodia. With a mandate to promote and support high quality dramatic films that speak to a diverse global audience, Steven's films have won awards in major film festivals in Los Angeles, Toronto, Cologne and Tokyo. His work with writer/director Richie Mehta on the acclaimed films *AMAL* (the short film) and *SYSTEM OF UNITS* have exposed him to many aspects of the international film markets in Toronto, Berlin, Banff, Palm Springs and Cannes. Bray's last short film, *YELLOW BIRD*, has been broadcast in four continents. He is currently producing a travel series entitled *DEPARTURES* while developing a second feature film *WIDOW'S ROW* with film director Jessie Wallace. Steven's goal is to help stimulate and advance Canadian films and filmmakers far into the International marketplace, for global audiences.

## PETER STARR – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Peter Starr's career with the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) spanned over 28 years, 50 films, national and international acclaim and numerous awards - including 4 Gemini award nominations, 2 Genie award nominations and most recently an Oscar® nomination in 2005 for *HARDWOOD* by Hubert Davis. Before leaving the NFB, Starr completed and oversaw several Canadian and international co-productions, one of them being *SHIPBREAKERS*, a visually stunning high-definition look at the vast Indian ship graveyards which also garnered Starr many international awards, and has made him an extremely valuable asset to the creation of *AMAL*.

## ROBIN CASS/TRIPTYCH MEDIA – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Robin Cass' diverse background includes work in the visual arts and a decade of television experience with Global, CFTO and CTV, including the current affairs special *NO FIXED ADDRESS*. Robin began his career in film with the 1991 award-winning short drama *TEN WAYS TO ABUSE AN OLD WOMAN*. With co-producers Anna Stratton and Louise Garfield, Robin was associate producer on *ZERO PATIENCE, A MUSICAL ABOUT AIDS*. For Triptych Media, Robin co-produced *LILIES* (1996 Genie, Best Film), with producer Anna Stratton, and *FALLING ANGELS*, the 2003 Toronto International Film Festival hit, adapted from the novel by Barbara Gowdy, directed by Scott Smith and starring Miranda Richardson. Robin Cass is a member of the board of the CFTPA, a past chair of the Feature Film Committee, and a member of the advisory boards for Toronto's Inside/Out Film Festival and Crows Theatre.



## MITCHELL T. NESS - DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY (DGC, CSC)

Mitchell T. Ness has been a Director of Photography for nearly ten years. A very experienced cinematographer in all cinematic formats, Ness has grown and thrived in the industry and has been recognized as an expert in high definition. From television series such as *NATURALLY SADIE*, *BLACK HOLE HIGH*, *CATLIN'S WAY* and *GLIMMER*, to documentaries *UNTITLED PACKAGE* and *BLUEPRINT FOR DISASTER* to acclaimed dramatic films *PIGEON*, *NIGHT OF THE LIVING*, *SCREENING* and *AMAL*, Ness's range is an impressive one. In addition to the numerous accolades and knowledge that Ness has gained over the years, he is a recognized director by the DGC, an IATSE 667 Director of Photography and an Associate Member of the CSC.

## STUART A. MCINTYRE - EDITOR

Stuart A. McIntyre has more than six years of experience in editing both feature films, and television productions. In 2005, McIntyre co-founded his own post production facility, Bijou Media. McIntyre's innovative techniques in the area of HD editing and experimental film editing have garnered him national recognition. Among his film credits are the critically acclaimed shorts *TEN SECONDS* and *ALL ROADS LEAD TO HERE* for BRAVOFact!, *PLEASED TO MEET YOU* and *SYSTEM OF UNITS*. He also served as assistant editor for the popular cult film *WHITE KNUCKLES* with U.K. Director Leo Scherman. McIntyre was also a co-Director and Writer of *ALL ROADS LEAD TO HERE*. *AMAL* is McIntyre's third collaboration with Richie Mehta.

## DR. SHIVA - COMPOSER

Ramier Siva-Nandan (Dr. Shiva) has been an active singer and musician both on stage and studios since childhood. Hailing from a family of singers and musicians, he acquired Carnatak classical Indian music training early in childhood from the Shanmukananda Sangeeta Sabha. A year after immigrating to Canada in 1995, Dr. Shiva established himself quickly by creating and producing musical scores and vocal support for television, film and stage productions, etc. In August 1996, his company, Art-East, released its first audio CD album entitled "Anjali" and has since recorded five more since, including "Heart to Beat", "NAD", "Mala", "Discovery of India" and "Bahu-Rang".



## *DIRECTOR'S NOTES / PRODUCTION NOTES ON AMAL*

### *THE IDEA:*

*AMAL* began as a short story when my brother Shaun Mehta was completing his Masters studies in India. One night after months of taking autorickshaws to his destination, he encountered a driver that didn't rip him off and actually refused to take a tip! This instance so deeply moved my brother, that he sat down and wrote a short story about it.

India is a very unique country because it exposes you to so many extremes; you can witness people living in abject poverty and extreme wealth all within the span of one city block. *Amal* is mine and Shaun's attempt to understand what it means to live in another place where economic disparity is accepted as a fact of life.

We purposefully added fable like aspects to the story because we wanted people to identify that, underlying what is a seemingly simple story, are ideas that relate to some of the biggest questions affecting the development of the Western World. The short's themes seemed to resonate with people, and they encouraged us to develop a feature film version that would delve deeper into the motivations of the characters in the short film.

After winning the Telefilm Pitch Competition at the 2005 Toronto International Film Festival, we began looking for our key crew and then began casting.



## THE CAST:

I was very fortunate with the casting because I basically put together a wish list of actors that I would like to work with during my career, and sent them a copy of the script. I never imagined that I would be able to work with some of the biggest names in India on my first film.

In 2003, I met Rupinder Nagra by chance at an event in Toronto. We hit it off immediately, and his personality and his ideals mirrored Amal's character. So Rupinder was really there since the beginning, and helped shape the character that appears in the film. His presence on set was incredible. He brought both a sense of vulnerability and strength to the character, that I cannot imagine any other actor as Amal.

We were also very lucky in our casting of Koel Purie, who is new to North American audiences, but who has garnered critical acclaim in India and is set to make her mark in the U.K. and the U.S. later this year.

Working with Roshan Seth, Seema Biswas and Naseeruddin Shah was really a privilege and a dream come true. I remember one particular day, we were set to shoot a scene with Naseeruddin in Connaught Place in Delhi which is a very busy place, but we were to shoot very early and since Naseeruddin was dressed as a homeless man and looked rather unkept, I thought that we could pull it off with minimal disruption. Well, I don't know how word spread that he was there, but suddenly we had a crowd of 4000 people surrounding us. They all kept a respectful distance, but there were still 4000 people all trying to catch a glimpse of Naseeruddin in action.

Naseeruddin was the consummate professional, and in between shooting he would chat with the onlookers, but at the time I was a bit nervous to work with this film icon because my every move was scrutinized by 4000 people!

One of my favorite moments in the casting process was auditioning our children. We had a great casting director in India that brought me to a youth hostel for 'street' children called *Salaam Balak Trust*. There the children are encouraged to participate in the arts, and with their educators, we conducted a series of film workshops with them. Those few days spent with these remarkable children were one of the best experiences for me, and led to our casting two child actors from the Trust as a result of those sessions.



## *THE CREW:*

It's probably cliché to say that I had the most amazing crew that a director can ask for, but I'll say it anyway. I think what was a really exciting part of this process for me was to watch our Canadian crew of approximately 30 people experience living in India. We lived and shot this film purposefully in a section of Delhi that is almost a mini-community within the city. I didn't want to shoot the film and then have our crew go back to a big hotel that was isolated from the people. Although we were in a self-contained village, the crew had an opportunity to visit markets, speak to people and even take auto-rickshaws around town.

I know that for some people it was probably a culture shock, but ultimately I think that it helped foster a greater understanding of the film, and the crew was better prepared for on-location shoots.

Even though 30 people seems like a big crew, we were a really a lean group and were able to mobilize ourselves fairly quickly.

Sometimes though in an attempt to move quickly and shoot as much as we could, we wouldn't always brief the entire crew on upcoming shots or last minute decisions. So on one occasion Mitch Ness - our DOP - and myself decided to change shots and tethered ourselves to each other and suspended ourselves in the middle of a busy thoroughfare.

The crew immediately mobilized into action and someone was there to spot us, while others cleared traffic and made sure that we were respectful of the local merchants and people trying to get through their working day. Without planning every detail, the crew almost instinctively knew what we had to do, and I felt like everything ran like a well-oiled machine.

On that note, I also had a team of amazing producers (David Miller & Steven Bray) and executive producers (Peter Starr & Robin Cass). Steven and David were with me through it all in India. They would be negotiating deals, looking after the crew, and updating our distributors and funders back in Canada well into the night (every night), and the next morning would often come on set for a full day of shooting. They basically took care of the business of the film so that I was free to create the film. I feel it's as much their film as it is mine.

## *THE LOCATION:*

Delhi is very much a character in this film. Not only is it esthetically beautiful to shoot in such a soft-light environment (November-December in Delhi has this effect), but also because of the mystical qualities that India represents to North American audiences. The place is both familiar and foreign to me, and I wanted to share that part of my relationship and my heritage with audiences.

The strength of the film - I hope - is that it reveals that our ideals, our hopes and our joys are the same whether we are students, doctors, lawyers, mothers, fathers or even auto-rickshaw drivers making a living across the world.

