



THE WEEKLY

VOICE

May 3 - 9, 2002

Vol. 6 No. 18

website: [www.weeklyvoice.com](http://www.weeklyvoice.com)

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## Documentary Highlights Bollywood-Bound South Asian Canadians

By Preeti Thandi

'Bollywood' is certainly the buzzword in filmmaking today. As savvy cameras roll towards India's fantasyland, Toronto-based director Nisha Pahuja takes an insightful journey to Mumbai in her debut venture 'Bollywood Bound'. Nisha's very first documentary is making news at the Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival with Canada's very own Ruby Bhatia, a celebrity in fantasyland.

The film pursues the glittering aspirations of four young Canadians who set out for Bollywood in the hope of living their dreams - Ruby Bhatia from Ajax, Ontario, Neeru Bajwa from Vancouver, Vikram and Vekeana Dhillon from Alberta. Selected as the closing night film at Hot Docs, Bollywood Bound screens on Sunday, May 5, 6:30 p.m. at the Bloor Cinema.

An English Literature graduate from

Bollywood Bound Actress  
Vekeana Dhillon

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# Nisha effectively captures the sense of alienation and emotional turbulence in foreign homeland.

the University of Toronto, Nisha started off as a researcher for documentaries working with various filmmakers including her mentor, Ali Kazimi. The idea of making *Bollywood Bound* was personal to the extent of commenting on the biggest influence for a child growing up. "Every child has a fantasy of a heroic figure," says Nisha who

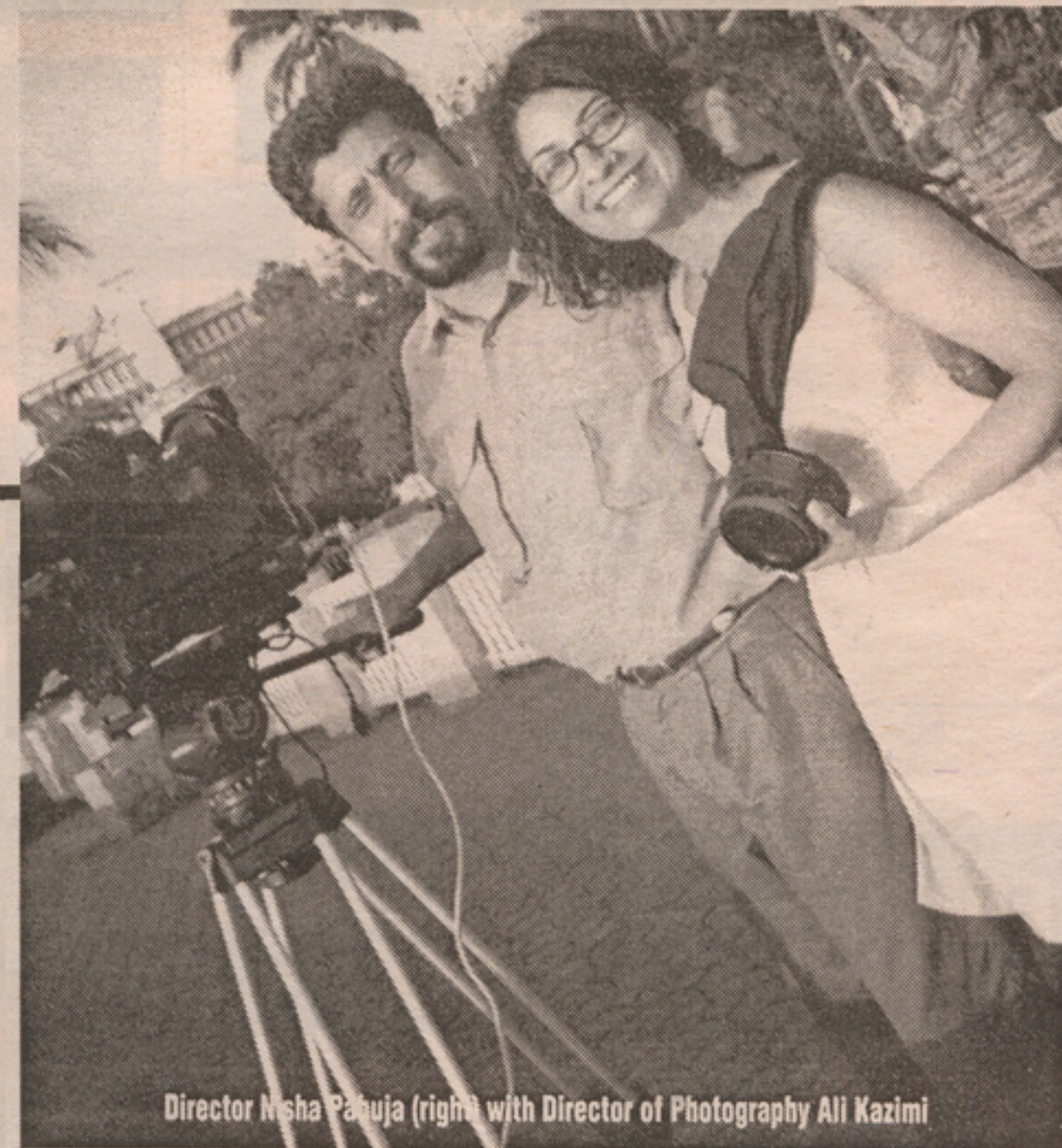
as four Canadians express their immigrant experiences in India - the famous Ruby perceived as the girl from Canada and the not so famous Vekeana, Vikram and Neeru who continue their struggle to make it big.

Studying Philosophy at the University of Toronto, Ruby Bhatia, a winner of the Miss India Canada Beauty Pageant,

aspect in Ruby's life and at her deeply personal realization that fame is an illusion. According to Nisha, the film contrasts fantasy and reality. Footage of Ruby in a temple chanting 'hare krishna' depicts that she is searching for something deeper in life.

In contrast this popular figure revered by millions in one part of the globe is just the Indian girl next door visiting home in Ajax, Ontario. As the camera zooms into the Bhatia household Ruby watches her mother fry snacks and sits down with her dad to watch her own video, where she interviews superstar Amitabh Bachan. Later in an insightful comment Ruby reveals that she is playing different parts expected of her in life.

*Bollywood Bound* begins with images of the Mumbai railway station where hundreds arrive everyday in search of stardom. A face in that crowd is Vikram Dhillon who travels all the way from Alberta, Canada with his father, convinced that fame and stardom in the city was his to take. Interestingly, the very first impression of Mumbai throws him off as the much expected glamour is not apparent and Vikram keeps hoping for the nicer part to emerge.



Director Nisha Pahuja (right) with Director of Photography Ali Kazimi

*Bollywood* churns out more than 300 films annually and Vikram realizes that it is not going to be an easy ball game. His sister Vekeana and mother soon follow leaving Canada far behind.

Cold realities emerge as Nisha documents the struggle of Vekeana and Vikram in tinsel town as they continue to send their portfolio to key industry players. Slowly the Canadian dollars disappear and the two are left in dire straits when their mother becomes very sick.

Much persistence from Vikram's agent lands him into a brief dancing sequence in a Govinda movie even as Vikram finds it a challenge to keep in tune with the filmy dance steps.

Later he manages to stick his foot into the door of director Ken Ghosh's office. The screen test however does not go too well and Vikram's own immaturity at acting becomes apparent. Then a call from Shahrukh Khan's office sets hopes surging. Both brother and sister get very excited as Vikram goes in for the much awaited interview for a role in *Asoka*. His gut feel about the film and the role is negative.

Nisha came across the story of Vikram and Vekeana in the *Society* magazine and followed it up in *Bollywood Bound*. Vekeana shares her brother's tribulations. She discovers that despite talent and good looks she would be expected to 'com-



Neeru Bajwa - Bombay glamour in Canadian climate

wanted to comment on that fantasy and the whole sense of how movies rooted to India are a huge influence. Nisha wanted to approach *Bollywood* and also say something about Canada.

The film impacts meaningfully

had no idea that a beauty pageant would change the course of her entire life. Ruby shot to fame as a VJ on Channel V, a music channel. Interestingly, *Bollywood Bound* takes a look at the spiritual





Vikram and Vekeana Dhillon,  
a brother-sister team who went in  
search of fame



## Bollywood Bound takes a look at the spiritual aspect in Ruby's life and at her deeply personal realization that fame is an illusion

largest documentary festival. In its ninth year Hot Docs 2002 runs from April 26 - May 5 in Toronto, with over 100 of the year's most compelling and provocative nonfiction films from around the world.

As Bollywood Bound catches the media spotlight at Hot Docs, director Pahuja is a little nervous even as she enjoys the fantastic feeling of being there. Nisha is scheduled to leave for New Delhi where a screening of her documentary will take place on May 9. □

promise' for the role, which, amongst other things implies revealing outfits. Vekeana however does not take that route to success.

Eventually, Vekeana gets selected as VJ for Channel V. She will be appearing as Delnaz in SNIP, her very first English feature film directed by Sunhil Sippy, grandson of G.P.Sippy.

The story of Neeru is the most realistically felt, as director Nisha takes the journey to India with her. Neeru is star struck as a kid. A runner-up at a Miss India Canada beauty pageant Neeru drops out of school to realize her dreams. Her screen test for a film is pre-arranged from Canada, ironically when she arrives in Mumbai, it keeps getting postponed and actually never hap-

pens. After several phone calls she gets to meet and introduce herself to a producer but has to rush back to Canada when she learns that her grandmother is sick. Nisha effectively captures the sense of alienation and emotional turbulence in foreign homeland. Neeru has returned to Mumbai and continues her strife. Vikram is now getting into a directing project. Bollywood Bound closes on a positive and philosophic note as the four aspirants carve their own destiny in fantasyland.

Produced by Karen King-Chigbo, Bollywood Bound is part of the National Film Board's Reel Diversity Program, which encourages first time filmmakers.

Hot Docs is North America's



Ruby Bhatia