

# A SUITABLE GIRL

World Premiere in the World Documentary Competition at the  
2017 Tribeca Film Festival

Directed by Sarita Khurana & Smriti Mundhra



RT: 90 minutes  
2017  
India/USA

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### **Short Synopsis**

A Suitable Girl follows three young women in India struggling to maintain their identities and follow their dreams amid intense pressure to get married. Documenting the arranged marriage and matchmaking process in vérité over four years, the film examines the women's complex relationship with marriage, family, and society.

### **Long Synopsis**

A Suitable Girl follows three young women in India struggling to maintain their identities and follow their dreams amid intense pressure to get married. Ritu, Dipti and Amrita represent the new India. Educated, financially stable and raised with a mix of traditional and contemporary values in the urban cities of Mumbai and New Delhi, they have access to the world in ways their mothers did not. Yet their lives take a dramatic turn when the pressure to settle down and get married hits. Career aspirations become secondary to the pursuit of a husband, and the women struggle with the prospect of leaving their homes and families to become part of another.

Documenting the arranged marriage and matchmaking process in vérité over four years, the film examines the women's complex relationships with the institution of marriage and the many nuanced ways society molds them into traditional roles and makes it nearly impossible to escape.

### **Director's Statement**

Many young women in India today have one foot on the side of traditional gender roles – daughter, wife, mother – with the other planted on the side of 21st century opportunities – education, career, financial independence – while the crevice between them getting wider by the minute. Figuring out on which side she will land – or, ideally, how to bring the two together – is what preoccupies women of this generation.

Despite the opportunities, once a woman reaches a certain age, the choices narrow to just one: find a husband, settle down. How do these young women navigate societal expectations of marriage with their own desires for agency, identity, and ambition? What impact do these seemingly conflicting paths have on their relationships with their families? And what does the institution of arranged marriage reveal or conceal about the real opportunities women actually have in a democratic India?

In September 2010, we arrived in Mumbai looking for answers to those questions. Over the next three years, our subjects Amrita, Dipti and Ritu – three young women who exemplify the modern Indian woman – allowed us to follow them on their journeys to matrimony. Their stories provide the narrative structure of the film, as well as an intimate entry into the world of arranged marriage. We hope the extraordinary access our subjects provide reveal a new complexity around the subject of arranged marriage.

We wanted to question the fairytale that is marriage, and to re-contextualize the pomp and circumstance of the Indian wedding as a painful rite of passage for brides who are literally shedding one identity for another, often losing a piece of themselves in the transition. As our subject Dipti so perfectly says, "I can't say that it is fair or unfair, but girls have to take it like this only."

This is an extremely intimate view of the everyday Indian woman and her relationship to her family and culture—something never before seen in documentary. It's not a film about child brides, female infanticide or slum life, but rather the deep-rooted, systemic and nuanced sexism a woman faces from the day she is born. The film puts the

narrative in the hands of the subjects themselves, as told to two women who can relate to their story at every step.

In screening the film for diverse groups of women, we've learned that the pressure to get married and the struggle to find balance between what we want for ourselves and what society expects from us is a universal theme. The story connects with people across many ages, races, socioeconomic classes and ethnic backgrounds. Through the extremely personal journeys of our characters, we are able to tap into something that nearly everyone who watches this film can identify with: deciding how to navigate the nuanced ways society molds us into traditional roles, and the ways we resist, conform, and modify our lives accordingly.

Finally, a note about the process behind-the-scenes: In making a film about the intimate lives and dreams of young women, we wanted our creative team to reflect that. We're incredibly proud to say that our core team, from the directors and producers to our editor, composer, cinematographers and graphics artist, is nearly 100% women of color. That is truly very rare in documentary filmmaking (indeed, filmmaking in general) and we have been honored to work with so many talented women on this journey.

Sincerely,  
Sarita Khurana & Smriti Mundhra

Bios

**Sarita Khurana (Director/Producer)**



Sarita Khurana is a Director, Producer, and Educator based in Brooklyn, New York. Her feature-film documentary debut, *A Suitable Girl*, is an official selection of the 2017 TriBeCa Film Festival.

Khurana's critically acclaimed work in narrative, documentary and experimental film has been screened and exhibited internationally. Her work often focuses on South Asian stories, and explores female subjectivities. Migration, memory, marginality, community, territory, and sexuality are common themes in her work.

Sarita Khurana was born in London in 1970, immigrating with her family to New York City six years later. She has lived and worked in NY since then, in addition to frequently working in India and the U.K.

Khurana holds a B.A. from Oberlin College, an Ed.M from Harvard University, and an M.F.A. in Film - Directing, from Columbia University's School of the Arts. In 2009, she was named as one of NY Women in Film & Television's "Emerging Female Directors." She has been a film fellow at NALIP-Diverse Women in Film, Art in General, the National Film Development Corporation of India, Women in Film, and Film Independent. Khurana is also the co-founder of Cine Qua Non Lab, an international development lab for narrative feature films, based in Mexico and the U.S.

Her experimental narrative short "What Remains" was a collaboration with artist, Chitra Ganesh, and has screened at festivals internationally and at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Goteborgs Konsthall in Sweden. Khurana's 2004 documentary Bangla East Side won a New York Times production grant, and was later distributed by Third World Newsreel.

#### **Smriti Mundhra (Director/Producer)**



Smriti Mundhra has been working in the film and television industry for over ten years. With partner Ben Rekhi, she produced *Bomb the System*, a 2004 Independent Spirit Award nominee for Best First Feature, and the award-winning feature film *Waterborne*. She also co-produced *Punching at the Sun*, an official selection of the 2006 Sundance Film Festival, as well as over one dozen award-winning short films, including the 2010 Sundance Film Festival official selection and Women In Film award-winner *New Media*.

Her other production credits include Oliver Stone's *Wall Street 2*, Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich*, Neil LaBute's *Nurse Betty* and both the Coen Brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*. Her writing has appeared in *Filmmaker Magazine*, *Latina*, the *New York Daily News*, *Esquire* and *Vogue India*. She is a regular culture contributor to *BET.com* and *Global Grind*.

Smriti holds an MFA in Film from Columbia University. In 2009, she was given the Mira Nair Rising Female Filmmaker Award by the Harlem Film Festival. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, screenwriter Christian Magalhaes, and their daughter Isabel.

**Jennifer Tiexiera (Editor/Producer)**



Jennifer Tiexiera is a Los Angeles based film editor and producer. She most recently edited and produced the documentaries *A Suitable Girl* and *Waiting for Hassana*, official selections of the 2017 TriBeCa Film Festival and 2017 Sundance Film Festival, respectively. Her previous editorial work includes the documentary *Salam Neighbor*, the narrative film *Road to Paloma* and the 2011 SXSW Documentary Grand Jury Prize Winner, *Dragonslayer*.

Her television credits include the Emmy-nominated ESPN film, *The Marinovich Project*, and short film *Woinshet*, directed by Marisa Tomei and Lisa Leone.

Tiexiera's docu-series work has appeared on CNN, A&E, VH1, History, NatGeo, Travel Channel, OWN, and SundanceTV, and her films have been official selections at numerous film festivals, including TIFF, LAFF, AFI, HotDocs, CPH:DOX, and BFI.

## ADDITIONAL KEY TEAM MEMBERS

### **Andre de Alencar Lyon (Cinematographer)**

Raised primarily in Thibodaux, LA, André Lyon graduated from Stanford in 2006, where he studied creative writing and photography. In 2011 he completed an MFA in Film at Columbia's School of the Arts, where he first collaborated with Smriti and Sarita. In 2014 two of his photography collections, *Akrotiri* and *Sunseekers*, were published by Santozeum, a museum and residency in Firá, Santorini. *A Suitable Girl* is his first feature as cinematographer. He's currently directing his own feature documentary, *Split Tide*, set in south Louisiana.

### **Naiti Gamez (Cinematographer)**

Naiti Gámez is a NYC-based filmmaker from Miami/Cuba. She has worked as a cinematographer & director on award-winning films and television series. Film highlights include *Captivated: The Trials of Pamela Smart* (Sundance 2015), *Kiki* (Sundance Selects), and *Newtown* (Sundance 2016). Her directorial debut, *Love, Sadie*, screened at the Festival de Cannes Short FilmCorner. TV credits include work for HBO, Showtime, PBS, ESPN, MTV/MTV2, Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, & NOVA.

As a youth-media educator, Naiti has also collaborated with young people to produce videos about social, cultural, and political issues that affect them. She holds a B.A. in Latin American Studies from Smith College, and an M.F.A. in Film Production (Cinematography concentration) from the University of Texas at Austin.

### **Gingger Shankar (Composer)**

Gingger Shankar is a singer, violinist and composer, and was born into one of the world's most acclaimed and influential musical families. Her accomplishments include working with top producers and film composers including Mel Gibson, The Smashing Pumpkins, Trent Reznor, Mike Nichols, Mike Myers, and James Newton Howard. An accomplished artist and performer, Gingger is the only female in the world that has mastered the 10- string Double Violin, an instrument that covers the entire range of the orchestra's double bass, cello, viola and violin, and of which there are currently only two in existence. She debuted with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as a soprano in Osvaldo Golijov's opera "Ainadamar" and later performed it at Carnegie Hall. Gingger then toured with the Smashing Pumpkins as a special guest on their 20th Anniversary tour.

Gingger's music can be heard in Mel Gibson's blockbuster "Passion of the Christ" and Mike Nichol's "Charlie Wilson's War". Her multimedia project 'Himalaya Song' premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was named one of the '10 Best Music Films at Sundance 2012' by Rolling Stone. Her film 'Monsoon Shootout' premiered at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival.

She guested on the new Katy Perry album 'Prism'. She recently debuted her multi-media project 'Nari' at the Toronto International Film Festival and the Sundance Film Festival. She is currently working on a new film called 'Heartbeats' directed by Duane Adler with Jay-Z and Roc Nation, as well as composing music for First Lady Michelle Obama's 'We Will Rise' for the First Lady's 'Let Girls Learn' Initiative which will air on CNN in October.

### **Saul Simon MacWilliams (Composer)**

Saul Simon MacWilliams is a Los Angeles based film composer, music producer, songwriter and music sound designer from York, Maine.

He has produced and written music with numerous indie and major label artists such as Chris Garneau, Joy Ike, Jenny Owen Youngs, Greg Holden, A Great Big World, Sawyer Fredricks and Ingrid Michaelson, whom he also tours with as her multi-instrumentalist and music director.

As a film composer and music sound designer, Saul has worked closely and extensively with composer and producer Dan Romer on recent films including his Oscar nominated feature 'Beasts of the Southern Wild', 'Digging for Fire', 'Finders Keepers', 'Mediterrania' and as the music sound designer for the Netflix original 'Beasts of No Nation'. Saul

co-scored and music sound designed two documentaries, 'Gleason' and 'Jim : the James Folly Story' which premiered at 2016's Sundance Film Festival, as well as scored the 2017 Sundance Film Festival Audience Award winning documentary 'Chasing Coral.'

#### FULL CREDIT LIST

Directed by Sarita Khurana & Smriti Mundhra

Producers Jennifer Tiexiera  
Sarita Khurana

Produced by Smriti Mundhra

Edited by Jennifer Tiexera

Executive Producers Caleb Amir  
Kenneth Castelino

Co-Executive Producers Devang Doshi  
Mamta Mertner

Cinematographers Andre de Alencar Lyon  
Naiti Gamez

Original Score by Gingger Shankar

Additional Music Composed by Saul Simon Macwilliams

#### Featuring (In Order of Appearance)

Dipti Admane  
Ritu Taparia  
Seema Taparia  
Amrita Soni

Sneha Admane  
Anup Taparia  
Krishna Devi Soni  
Kailash Soni  
Ghanshyam Ji Jhanwar  
Nathubhai Patel  
Keshav Jhanwar  
Kartik Thiyagarajan

Nandkishore Admane  
Mridu Taparia  
Ram Niwas Soni  
Khushi Soni  
Tara Devi Jhanwar  
Neha Marda  
Aditya Bagree  
Nishu Jindal Jain

Additional Photography by Malini Dasari  
Naiyer Ghufan  
Vishal Joshi  
Shivani Khattar

	Elena Pardo Dani Sanchez-Lopez Shrihari Sathe Viraj Singh
Sound Recording	Chirag Cama Abhinav Joshi Gaurav Kapadia
Associate Producer	Antara Bhardwaj
Post Production Supervisor (India)	Aikeshwar Choudhury
Assistant Editor (India)	Najid Surve
Post Production Assistant (India)	Yashwant Mundhra
Assistant to the Filmmakers (India)	Kishori Rajan
Main Title & Graphics	Matt Zell Brandon Graham EUX Media
Sound Facility	Skywalker Sound
Supervising Sound Editor/ Re-Recording Mixer	Dmitri Makarov
Digital Editorial Support	David Peifer
Engineering Services	Brian Long
Post-Production Sound Accountant	Jessica Engel
Colorist	Beau Leon
Color Assistant	Jonah Braun
Color Producer	Andrew McLintock
Color Assistant Producer	Tiana Petru
Translation/Subtitles	Tanmay Chatterjee Ali Hussain Mir Monish Kaushal Nikhil Kulshrestha Blossom Lalwani Yashwant Mundhra Vasant Muni Nagesh



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