

## **‘Amu’: Midnight’s child**

*Protima Kar*

The film moves, with the protagonist, from Los Angeles to Delhi University and Chandni Chawk, right down to the narrow alleys of Trilokpuri. **“Amu” is the first such venture to focus on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, as well as the first feature film by Kolkata-born Shonali Bose.**

At the centre of the saga is Kajori Roy or Kaju (Konkona Sen Sharma), a sensitive, young Indian- American of liberal upbringing, who travels to Delhi to visit the family of her adoptive (single) mother, the USA-based Keya Roy (Brinda Karat). The drama may well have had a happy ending, but not before wrenching out much questioning and pathos, interspersed with light doses of dignified humour.

On a visit to a slum, Kaju is mysteriously overcome by a sense of *deja vu* and ends up unearthing a buried past. The horrifying genocide that took place 20 years ago holds the key to her origins. How were Kaju’s parents involved in the killings? Will it destroy her relationship with her mother? Will the identity question overpower her budding romance?

“Amu” is a director’s film. It is easy to see that it comes from the heart of an individual who has witnessed the horror and has waited for years to express the angst. Based in Los Angeles and with a fine back-ground in documentary filmmaking, Bose does justice to ‘Amu’, also written and produced by her. The purpose of the film never gets lost among the many characters and colours, nor do the fine points get buried under the presence of the creator. Bose’s latest film is also being published as a book by Penguin. Karat, an aunt of Bose, does a fine job, almost making one wonder if she weren’t made for the arc lights. Also featured is her comrade, Suhasini Ali, although for brief moments only. Yashpal Sharma and Loveleen Mishra, as the couple living in Trilokpuri slum, lend much authenticity to the narrative. Sen’s performance is restrained, leaving some scope for speculation on whether she could have done better. Perhaps her relationship with Kabir (Ankur Khanna), the son of a “bourgeoise” IAS officer, especially, when it reaches a turning point, ought to have been explored in greater detail.

“My only hope for “Amu” is that she makes us think”, says Bose. And that it does, even to the censor board. For the film was allowed] to pass only with an “P( certificate: and five audio cuts. **“Twenty years later, it’s amazing how the authorities are still silencing fictional widows in a film”.** “Why bring up a history which is best buried and forgotten?” is all the Board has to say. Does that make you think?

