



'The Widow Colony' Premieres near Washington

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MARYLAND, USA - The AFI Silver Theatre in downtown Silver Spring will screen a documentary Saturday about the survivors of pogroms that took place more than two decades ago and half a world away, and still affect a community that lives in the Washington metro area.

"The Widow Colony - India's Unsettled Settlement" is a 73-minute film about the widows and their children who survived the pogroms that took place in New Delhi in 1984, a day after the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on Oct. 31 by her Sikh bodyguards. According to court affidavits, more than 5,000 men, women and children were massacred in the four-day pogroms.

"There are those who would be content to have this erased from the pages of history," said Mirin Kaur, president of Kaur Foundation, a Sikh women's organization from Montgomery County that is organizing the screening. "An act of politically motivated organized aggression against a community must be brought to the attention of the world."

Approximately 12,000 Sikhs live in the suburbs of Washington, local community members said.

The film conveys the pogroms in the form of historical record through testimonies of the widows who witnessed the slaughter of male family members, including their sons. They live with those memories in colonies created for them by the government and shunned by the outside community. The widows talk of their struggle for survival, for them and their children, and their struggle for justice that has eluded them for more than 21 years.

The context of the pogroms is provided by subject experts such as Rajinder Sachar, former Chief Justice of Delhi, Harvinder Singh Phoolka, a human rights attorney who has been seeking judicial action on the survivor's cases since 1984, Kuldip Nayar, a journalist and former member of parliament, and Patwant Singh, an author and historian.

The film was directed by Harpreet Kaur, no connection to Mirin Kaur or the foundation. 'Kaur' is a common surname among Sikh women. After graduating from Pennsylvania State University in 1999, Kaur began working as a broadcast news reporter in the Washington metro area. She also produced a show with County Cable Montgomery, which she hosted and directed. She and husband, producer, Manmeet Singh, began filming the 'The Widow Colony' in 2003. The couple moved last year to Texas where they finished the film.

Editing was done by Shootz Productions, a Texas studio that had worked with Director Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation on award-winning Holocaust documentaries created from the multitude of video testimonies. "'The Widow Colony' has the same feel as the Holocaust documentaries," Kaur said. It won a best documentary award at Toronto's Female Eye Film Festival in June.

The screening in Silver Spring will be followed by a panel discussion that includes Kaur, Singh, Mary Donahue, an executive producer from the Discovery Channel, Jackie Simon, a local civil rights and human rights activist, and T. Sher Singh, a lawyer and columnist for the Toronto Star, not related to Manmeet Singh. 'Singh' is a common surname for Sikh men.

"The film is a metaphor for neglect of human rights," said T. Sher Singh, who visited the colonies in India a few months ago. "In developing a healthy relationship with India, the United States should address the reality of human rights violations of its ally," he said.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, also a Sikh, made a formal apology in August 2005, but did not acknowledge the State's responsibility for the pogroms. The three main accused in the pogroms became cabinet members in the Indian government in May 2004, although one of them, Jagdish Tytler, resigned after a heated confrontation with Phoolka on Indian television.

"If they [Indians] do not deal with their skeletons, they will keep repeating history with consistent and predictable frequency," said T. Sher Singh. He pointed to the Gujarat pogroms of 2002.

Twenty-one years and eleven commissions later, the widows said in the film that all they want is to see the killers brought to justice.

Film: The Widow Colony – India's Unsettled Settlement

Time: Sept. 9, 1 p.m.

Location: AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center

8633 Colesville Road

Silver Spring, MD 20910

Phone: 301.495.6720

Admission: \$20 at the door.

Contact: Kaur Foundation at 301.983.1153 for information or www.thewidowcolony.com.

By Anju Kaur

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[Click here to see the event story in a local Maryland paper: "Sikhing" Justice Through Documentary Filmmaking"](#)

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