



*What happens when an independent-minded young girl is born into a centuries-old tradition of sanctioned prostitution?*



A WOMEN MAKE MOVIES RELEASE

Women Make Movies | 462 Broadway, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor | New York, NY 10013  
Tel: 212.925.0606 | e-mail: [webinfo@wmm.com](mailto:webinfo@wmm.com) | [www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com)

## Synopsis

### **What happens when an independent-minded young girl is born into a centuries-old tradition of prostitution?**

HIGHWAY COURTESANS chronicles the story of young women living in the Bachara community in rural India—the last hold-out of a custom that started with ancient palace courtesans and survives today with the sanctioned prostitution of every Bachara family's oldest daughter. Guddi, Shana and their neighbor Sungita serve a daily stream of roadside truckers to support their families. Their work as prostitutes forms the core of the local economy, but their contemporary ideas about freedom of choice, gender and self-determination slowly intrude on the Bachara way of life. Beautifully filmed and remarkably candid, this provocative coming-of-age film follows Guddi Chauhan from age 16 to 23 as she struggles to realize her dreams in a community caught between traditional and contemporary values.



## Festival Screenings

*For the most updated list, please visit [www.wmm.com](http://www.wmm.com).*

IDFA, International Documentary Festival Amsterdam  
South by Southwest Film Festival, US Premiere  
Chicago Int'l Documentary Film Festival, President's Jury Award  
IFP Market, Best of Fest, Berlinale Market  
Galway Film Fleadh, Best Feature Documentary  
Adelaide International Film Festival  
Hamptons International Film Festival  
Mill Valley Film Festival  
Hawaii International Film Festival  
Nashville Film Festival  
Women's Film Festival, Seoul, Korea  
Jerusalem International Film Festival  
Singapore International Film Festival  
Thessaloniki Documentary Festival  
Zagrebdox (Croatia)  
Belgrad Film Festival  
Tekfestival



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## Credits

2005 · 71 minutes · Color

Director

**Mystelle Brabbée**

Producers

**Mystelle Brabbée**

**Anura Idupuganti**

**Tom Donahue**

Co-producer

**Craig McTurk**

Camera

**Mystelle Brabbée**

**Craig McTurk**

**Todd Holmes**

**Purva Naresh**

Editing

**Todd Holmes**

Associate Producers

**Mary E. Waterworth**

**Deborah Taylor**

**Purva Naresh**

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## Press Quotes

"Courtesans' poignant, provocative...Brabbee's view is respectful. Despite the girls' nearly hopeless situation, she portrays them as hopeful, strong and surprisingly optimistic..."

-Rachel Mehendale,  
The Daily Texan

"15 films to watch from IDFA 2004..."

-Eugene Hernandez  
*indieWIRE*

"The prostitutes of Mystelle Brabbée's Highway Courtesans hold the audience enchanted with their strong characters and beautiful souls in the face of unfortunate circumstances..."

- Mark Fagan  
Austin Chronicle

"\*\*\*\*\*"(4 stars)...[a] thoughtful and sure-handed documentary... We follow Guddi for several years and learn about life in "the profession" and the extraordinary challenges she faces in leaving it... Finding ways to be ordinary in their world must take extraordinary courage."

-Sarah Lindner  
*Austin American-Statesman*

"Intriguing subject and revealing interviews..."

-Joe Leydon  
*Variety*

"Critics' Choice, Recommended"

-Chicago Reader

"...an incisive examination of a prostitution caste in India..."

-Galway News

"... a remarkable piece of ethnographic work."

- Michael Rabiger, author *Directing the Documentary*

"Brabbee's intelligent documentary...represent(s) the latest achievements in Asian and Asian American filmmaking."

-*Asiance Magazine*



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### Crew Biographies

#### **Mystelle Brabbée, Director/Producer**

Mystelle Brabbée produced, directed and photographed HIGHWAY COURTESANS, a documentary she has been working on since 1995. Brabbée is currently working on her second documentary about three Lottery winners in the US titled LOTTO. She also holds the position of Artistic Director for the Nantucket Film Festival, a festival for screenwriters and storytellers, where she has curated the film program for the past nine years. As Artistic Director, she is responsible for the programming line-up of 50 feature, documentary and short films, the NBC Universal Screenwriter Tribute, the Staged Readings Series, the Screenplay Competition, the Teen View on NFF Filmmaking program, the Official Jury and all New York City and Boston Special Programming events. Previously Brabbée was the Director of Acquisitions for article27, a London based firm known for obtaining rights to independent niche films, and syndicating them to Internet portals and video-on-demand providers. Mystelle Brabbée received a B.F.A. from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

#### **Anura Idupuganti, Producer**

Anura Idupuganti's experience in the film industry ranges from studio feature films and television to independent feature films, documentaries and commercials. Idupuganti most recently line produced the Vagina Monologues documentary, UNTIL THE VIOLENCE STOPS, executive produced by Pat Mitchell and Steven Spielberg and featuring Eve Ensler, Rosie Perez, Salma Hayek and a highly acclaimed international cast. Other producing credits to Idupuganti's name include the MK2 feature production of APARTMENT 5C, SHOWTIME'S POPCORN SHRIMP, written and directed by Christopher Walken (THE OPPORTUNIST), starring rapper Master P and Ralph Macchio, and NEUROTICA starring Amy Sedaris (Upright Citizens' Brigade). As a DGA assistant director, Idupuganti has worked on numerous features and television shows, like "Sleepy Hollow" and "Sex and the City." Along with the feature film GUEST OF CINDY SHERMAN, Idupuganti is currently producing the feature film TUPPERWARE in association with Crossroads Films, as well as Alfredo de Villa's 1&9.

#### **Tom Donahue, Producer**

Most recently, Donahue produced and edited Alfredo de Villa's feature debut, WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, winner of five Best Picture awards at festivals around the world, the Audience Award at LAFF, and runner-up for the Jury Award at the TriBeCa Film Festival. Heights opened theatrically in 2003 to widespread critical acclaim and was one of five films to receive a 2003 Gotham Award nomination for the IFP Open Palm award for Excellence in Directing. Donahue has produced and edited numerous other award-winning features and documentaries that have screened at such major film festivals as Sundance, Cannes, Berlin, Venice, San Sebastian and TriBeCa (and won over twenty awards). Recent works include HELLO HE LIED (directed by American Splendor's Robert Pulcini & Shari Springer-Berman); the feature documentary, NAKED WORLD for HBO's America Undercover (the sequel to NAKED STATES, also edited by Donahue and one of HBO's highest-rated docs); KEEP THE RIVER ON YOUR RIGHT (Winner of the 2001 Gotham Spirit Truer than Fiction Award); and Raphael Nadjari's APARTMENT #5C (Official Selection, Directors' Fortnight, Cannes 2002). In 1999, he developed and co-executive produced the feature film, MEN OF MEANS, starring Michael Paré. Donahue is currently directing and producing the documentary GUEST OF CINDY SHERMAN. He is also producing de Villa's next film, 1&9, and a feature on the founding of Tupperware in association with Crossroads Films.



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## Highway Courtesans

### Todd Holmes, Editor

On HIGHWAY COURTESANS Todd Holmes served as editor, sound designer and went on location in India to shoot the final pick-ups for the film. Previously he was associate editor on Debra Granik's DOWN TO THE BONE, winner of the Dramatic Directing Award at Sundance 2004 and nominee in the 2005 Independent Spirit Awards. Additional projects include work as associate editor on Tim Kirkman's 2005 Sundance dramatic competition film LOGGERHEADS; editor for the European release trailer for *Down to the Bone*; and editor on promotional clips for "The Yes Men" as part of their "Yes Bush Can!" political activist tour of the US. Prior to embarking on his filmmaking career, Holmes worked for over 10 years in interactive media, including stints at Walt Disney Imagineering and Disney Online. He was also host and programmer for 12 years on the radio program "Sadayatana" on KXLU FM in Los Angeles, director and editor of the LA cable music program "Atomic TV", and founding member of seminal LA noise rock band "Slug". He is currently developing several projects of his own including a documentary.



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# Austin American-Statesman

Sunday, March 13, 2005

## SXSW FILM REVIEWS

### Normal tale of unusual culture rivets

#### 'Highway Courtesans'

★★★★

Mystelle Brabée's thoughtful and sure-handed documentary tells the story of Guddi, a young woman from rural India who is born into a village where prostitution has been a way of life for centuries. We follow Guddi for several years and learn about life in "the profession" and the extraordinary challenges she faces in leaving it. But we also see her in situations familiar to any young woman: giggling over a guy she likes, trying to get over a bad boyfriend, changing her hair-style. She and her friends are sad and pragmatic, but never defeated. Finding ways to be ordinary in their world must take extraordinary courage.

2 p.m. today, Austin Convention Center; 4:15 Thursday, Alamo Downtown...

— Sarah Lindner



In 'Highway Courtesans,' young women in a rural Indian village enjoy life the best they can despite everyday problems in addition to those that crop up in their profession, the world's oldest.



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