

# the LunchBOX

a film by  
*Ritesh* BATRA

  
SEMAINE  
DE LA CRITIQUE  
CANNES 2013





## Cast & Crew

Saajan – Irrfan Khan · Ila – Nimrat Kaur  
Shaikh (Saajan's Colleague) – Nawazuddin Siddiqui · Mr. Shroff – Denzil Smith  
Mrs. Deshpande – Bharati Achrekar · Ila's Husband – Nakul Vaid  
Yashvi – Yashvi Puneet Nagar · Ila's Mother – Lillete Dubey

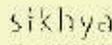
Written & Directed by – Ritesh Batra · Cinematography – Michael Simmonds  
Editor – John Lyons · Production Designer – Shruti Gupte  
Sound – Michael Kaczmarek · Music – Max Richter

Produced by – Guneet Monga, Anurag Kashyap, Arun Rangachari

Co Produced by – Nina Lath Gupta, Shanaab Alam, Vivek Rangachari,  
Sunil John, Nittin Keni, Karsten Stöter, Benny Dreschel, Cedomir Kolar,  
Marc Baschet, Danis Tanovic

Executive Produced by – Lydia Dean Pilcher, Irrfan Khan, Ritesh Batra

Production companies – Sikhya Entertainment (India), Dar Motion Pictures (India),  
NFDC (India), ROH Films (Germany), ASAP Films (France), Cine Mosaic (USA)



## Synopsis

Huisvrouw Ila is aan een nieuwe poging begonnen om wat meer pit in haar huwelijk te brengen. Ze volgt een tip van haar buurvrouw en bereidt de lekkerste maaltijden voor de lunchbox van haar echtgenoot. Per ongeluk belandt deze op het bureau van de ongelukkige en eenzame kantoormedewerker Saajan (Irrfan Kahn, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Life of Pi*).

Als Ila dit ontdekt, stopt ze een briefje in de trommel. Het is het begin van een lange lunchtrommel-correspondentie, die de twee gebruiken om hun hart te luchten. Er groeit iets moois.

**The Lunchbox** was dé vrolijke verrassing van het programma Semaine de la Critique van Filmfestival van Cannes dit jaar. De film werd door het publiek van WORLD CINEMA AMSTERDAM verkozen tot beste film

## THE DABBAWALLAHS

Mumbai's Dabbawallahs are a community of 5000 dabba (lunchbox) deliverymen. It is a hereditary profession. Every morning the Dabbawallahs deliver hot meals from the kitchens of housewives to the offices of their husbands, and then return the empty lunchboxes back to the housewives in the afternoon. For 120 years they have provided the people of Mumbai with a taste of home in the office. They navigate through the overcrowded local trains, and chaotic streets. The Dabbawallahs are illiterate; they use a complex coding system of colors and symbols to deliver lunchboxes in the labyrinth that is Mumbai. Harvard University analyzed their delivery system, and concluded that just one in a million lunchboxes is ever delivered to the wrong address. THE LUNCHBOX is the story of that one lunchbox.

## MUMBAI'S PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mumbai is a city where the people are like their lunchboxes. The city ferries millions from their homes to their place of work and then back with the evening commute that moves them along like items on a conveyor belt. In a constant race that Mumbai imposes upon its residents, they can never stop to ponder their dreams or what became of them. However, the big city that can be so cruel can also be benevolent. This story evolved from the story of the one in a million wrongly delivered lunchbox to the story of how hope can sometimes come from quarters we least expect. Through this journey and a small miracle of the big city, the characters become something other than lunchboxes.

## SOMEONE TO SHARE THINGS WITH

I find myself drawn to stories that have a sense of how ridiculous life can be at times, and on finding something interesting in the mundane. There is a strong resonance of this in THE LUNCHBOX where the characters find out that they have forgotten many of the things that have happened to them because they didn't have anyone to tell them to until now. The subtle magic realist elements in the story question the audience about their own faith in all that is fantastical.

## LIVING IN PRISONS

Both of the main characters in THE LUNCHBOX live in a prison. Ila, in the prison of her marriage and Saajan in the prison of his past. The story is as much about the hand of fate that guides our life as it is about the choices we have to transform our lives when we so wish. A pivotal character in the story is Shaikh, Saajan's new office colleague and someone who he has to train to be his replacement. Shaikh is a survivor, he is an orphan who has kept his own name and made his way through life in a tough city. Shaikh seems naïve but he is not a victim of his circumstances. Over time a father-son relationship develops between the older Saajan and the young Shaikh, as Saajan emerges from his prison.

## DIFFERENT WORLDS

Ila lives in Kandivili, the conservative middle class Hindu enclave. And Saajan lives in Ranwar village, Bandra, an old Christian neighborhood. It was important to the story that these two characters would have never crossed paths if it were not for this lunchbox delivery mistake or miracle of the big city. There are many Mumbai's within Mumbai. Their disparate worlds and backgrounds also make this the story of hope that can sometimes come from the most unexpected quarters. Beneath the locale that surrounds us and is imbibed in them, there is an old worldliness about these characters. They do not fit into the present times, they both love the old TV shows from the 80s, and the old Irani cafes of Mumbai. The device of letters between the two characters that moves the story forward also has an old worldliness and nostalgia about it. This movie is really infused with my nostalgia for the early 80s when I was growing up in Mumbai.

## WORKING WITH THE CAST

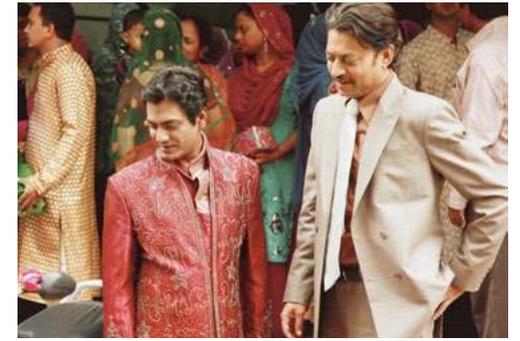
The process of working with Irrfan was very organic, he was there to discover the deeper meaning of the script and read between the lines, as I was. He was very invested in the script from our early discussions and we had several meetings before the shoot, I'd go home and rewrite after each discussion. He made this

*Comments from  
writer-director  
Ritesh Batra*

character his own in wonderful and unexpected ways. For the characters of Saajan and Shaikh, I always had Irrfan and Nawazuddin Siddique in mind and I was thrilled when they came on board. For the character of Ila, we had 4 months of auditions and meetings in Mumbai, and met a wonderful actress from the theater called Nimrat Kaur. Each actor had their own method of approaching the script. I often felt like three different directors in the body of one while directing this movie. Nawaz wanted to improvise to be in the moment because the character of Shaikh says unexpected things and is full of surprises, and so we improvised with great results. Nimrat lived the part of Ila for three months before the shoot. Her story is entirely set in a tiny Mumbai apartment, and we dressed up and rehearsed on location for three months with her and the little girl who plays her daughter.

## OFF-BOLLYWOOD

Yes it is difficult to make delicate cross genre movies in India because a majority of the audiences for off-Bollywood Indian movies are outside of India. I hope THE LUNCHBOX finds an audience in India as well. I hope the humor of the story brings the local audience in and they are happy to discover the underlying deeper story. But India is changing, and stories that truly reflect the Indian condition will find audiences in India sooner rather than later. I would love to make a genre movie, but for me to be invested in it creatively, I would need to infuse it with a strong emotional core. I would need to be able make it personal.



## **RITESH BATRA – WRITER-DIRECTOR**

THE LUNCHBOX is Ritesh Batra's debut feature. Shot on location in Mumbai, *The Lunchbox* makes its world premiere at the Semaine De La Critique (Critics Week) at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival.

Ritesh Batra's short films have been shown at many international film festivals and fine arts venues. His recent Arab language short *Café Regular*, Cairo, screened at over 40 international film festivals and won 12 awards including the International Critics Prize (FIPRESCI) at Oberhausen, and Special Jury Mentions at Tribeca and Chicago. *Café Regular*, Cairo was acquired by Franco-German broadcaster, Arte.



His feature script *The Story Of Ram* was part of the Sundance Screenwriters and Directors labs in 2009. He is currently working on his next film *Photograph* and a collection of short stories.

Born and raised in Mumbai, Ritesh now lives between Mumbai and New York with his wife Claudia and their daughter Aisha.

## **IRRFAN KHAN – AS SAAJAN**

Irrfan Khan is an award-winning actor who appears in film, television, and theatre. In India, Irrfan gained recognition from his roles in more than 30 Bollywood movies such as *The Warrior*, *Maqbool*, *Haasil* and *Rog*. He also hosted the TV show "Mano Ya Na Mano" and appeared in popular Vodafone commer



cials. In 2013, Irrfan won the National Film Award for Best Actor for his leading role in *Paan Singh Tomar*, a biopic about an athlete who became a notorious bandit. Irrfan is perhaps India's best known international actor due to the critical acclaim he has received for his roles in English-language films such as *The Namesake*, *A Mighty Heart*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Amazing Spider Man*, *The Life Of Pi*, and the HBO series *In Treatment*.

## **Director & Main Cast**

Irrfan has won three Filmfare Awards, a Screen Actors Guild Award, and an Independent Spirit Award nomination. He is also the recipient of 2011 Padma Shri award, the fourth highest civilian award in India.

## **NIMRAT KAUR – AS ILA**

Actress Nimrat Kaur was recently seen in the acclaimed film *Peddlers* (Cannes Critics Week 2012). She



also starred in 2012's widely popular Hindi film *Luv Shuv Te Chicken Khuranna*. A prominent theatre actor, Nimrat has been acting on stage for the past several years in popular productions such as *All About Women*, *Bombay Talkies*, *Baghdad Wedding* and *Red Sparrow*. A graduate from the prestigious Delhi University, Nimrat began her career with starring in music videos and commercials.

"Acting has been the greatest learning about life for me," says Nimrat. "To bring imaginary people and worlds to life and the places one sees and the people one meets along that journey have been the greatest gifts of this profession."



## **NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI – AS SHAIKH**

In addition to *The Lunchbox*, actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui also stars in two other films playing at the Cannes Film Festival 2013 – *Bombay Talkies* and *Monsoon Shootout*. Siddiqui is often referred to as the poster boy for the new wave of Indian Cinema. Having begun his career opposite Amir Khan in *Sarfarosh* in 1999, there has been no looking back for the actor since. He is credited with strong performances in films such as *Talaash*, *Gangs Of Wasseypur*, *Aatma*, *Peepli Live*, *Chittagong* and *Black Friday* amongst various others. A recipient of the Special Jury Award at the Indian National Film Awards for his role in *Talaash*, Siddiqui also won the Best Supporting Actor at the 7th Asian Film Awards held in Hong Kong and the GQ Man of the Year award for breakthrough talent for his work done in 2012.



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#### TECHNICAL INFORMATION

**Year: 2013**  
**Country: India/France/Germany**  
**Length: 104 Minutes**  
**Screening Format: DCP**

#### WORLD SALES

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