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pressroom.pbs.org/programs/independent_lens/lakshmiandme

For the program companion website, visit pbs.org/independentlens/lakshmiandme

“LAKSHMI AND ME” TO AIR NATIONALLY ON THE PBS SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON TUESDAY, March 24, 2009

***Filmmaker Nishtha Jain Explores Class and Caste in India With
LAKSHMI AND ME, a Provocative and Personal Look at Her Relationship
With Her Young Maid***

(San Francisco, CA)—An intimate examination of the relationship between filmmaker Nishtha Jain and her young maid, **LAKSHMI AND ME** offers an in-depth look at the enormous influence of class and caste in Indian society, where domestic workers are routinely underpaid and treated as social inferiors. Contrasting their very different homes and lives, filmmaker Jain follows Lakshmi through her difficult, tumultuous life and attempts to identify and question the divide that separates them. **LAKSHMI AND ME** will have its broadcast premiere on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Tuesday, March 24, 2009, at 10 PM (check local listings).

“What sin did I commit to be born a woman?” These chilling words, spoken by 21-year-old Lakshmi, reverberate throughout the film as Jain turns the camera on her maid and, in the process, illuminates the complex relationship between employer and servant as well as filmmaker and subject.

Says Jain, “Servants are around us all the time and yet, in a sense, are invisible. Though my relationship with Lakshmi was friendly, even warm, there was no denying its inherently exploitative nature. Yet she seemed to be accepting of her lot. She was completely without bitterness, though she had to work all day, every day. If this was her life at 21, what would her future be like?”

As an accomplished filmmaker living in Mumbai, Nishtha Jain did not have to spend her time on household chores. Like other women of her class, she had a maid, the young, uneducated Lakshmi, who cleaned Jain’s and other people’s lovely homes for 10 hours a day, seven days a week. Shy and unassuming, Lakshmi agrees to allow Jain to film her. The difference between the elegant households in which she spends her days and the tiny, overcrowded shanty where she lives with her many siblings and often-drunk father is startling.

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As the filming continues, Lakshmi begins to open up, and we, like Jain, are witness to the hard life she leads when not at work. We're there when Lakshmi falls ill with tuberculosis and then suddenly elopes. It's only when she returns after an unexplained absence of weeks that she confides in Nishtha: The elopement was spurred on because she is pregnant and because her father disapproves of the man she wanted to marry because he comes from a lower caste. As the film progresses, Lakshmi begins to stand up for herself and joins a group of maids who are organizing and demanding an improvement in working conditions as well as rights like leave, benefits and pensions.

This unflinching portrait of Lakshmi and Nishtha's relationship offers a critical yet deeply human depiction of Indian society at large as well as of the symbiotic roles of mistress and maid, filmmaker and subject, speaker and listener.

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for **LAKSHMI AND ME** at pbs.org/independentlens/lakshmiandme. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

About the Filmmakers

Nishtha Jain (Director)

Nishtha Jain worked as an editor in television before joining the Film and Television Institute of India, where she specialized in film direction. Since 1998, she has been making documentaries and shorts, and she briefly worked as commissioning editor for a documentary channel. Among her special interests are the individual and collective narratives that abound in photographic images. Her 2005 film *City of Photos* explored neighborhood photo studios, unearthing the fantasy worlds buried under gritty physical realities. In her current work, she moves closer to people who inhabit her immediate surroundings and whose lives and work profoundly, if implicitly, touch her own.

Smriti Nevatia (Executive Producer)

Smriti Nevatia has worked as a film and theater critic and has been associated with many independent documentaries as well as television shows in the various capacities of research coordinator, scriptwriter and director. Since 2002, she has collaborated with Nishtha Jain on several documentary projects and was associate director on *City of Photos*. She recently wrote the dialogue for a play by sex workers about their lives and is currently working on a feature film script.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers.

Independent Lens features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities and moments in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.