



Lagaan

Ashutosh Gowariker

INDIA, 2001

224 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Aamir Khan Productions Ltd.**

Executive Producer: **Reena Datta Khan**
Producer: **Aamir Khan**
Screenplay: **Ashutosh Gowariker, Rumar Dave, Sanjay Dayma**
Cinematographer: **Anil Mehta**
Editor: **Ballu Saluja**
Production Designer: **Nitin Chandrakant Desai**
Sound: **Nakul Kamte**
Music: **A.R. Rahman**
Principal Cast: **Aamir Khan, Gracy Singh, Rachel Shelley, Paul Blackthorne, Shuasini Mulay**

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This genuinely warm and enormously pleasing film is the first to be produced by Indian superstar Aamir Khan, the handsome lead-acting man of Deepa Mehta's *Earth*. It slyly marries the conventions of commercial Indian cinema with a Hollywood-style narrative structure. But make no mistake – it still possesses the fabulous songs, crazy comedy and bladder-busting run time that make Indian cinema its own special animal.

Khan and director Ashutosh Gowariker set their story during British colonial rule in Champaner, a small farming village in central India. Its population is poor but happy; their only complaint concerns the "lagaan," a "protection" tax levied by the British through the local rajahs. On the outskirts of the village stands a British fort, commanded by the capricious and arrogant Captain Russell. Despite a lack of rainfall that has made it difficult for the farmers to make ends meet, Russell decides he has been too lenient on the village and forces the Rajah to collect a double lagaan for that year.

The villagers protest wildly, knowing that this will mean starvation and penalty for them. They go to the fort to petition the Rajah but are stopped because a cricket match is taking place. Bhuvan (Khan) makes fun of the game right to Russell's face and, in a rage, the captain forces Bhuvan into a wager: He will cancel the tax for five years if the Indians can beat his British squad in a cricket match. But if they lose, they must pay triple lagaan.

Bhuvan assembles a squad of lovable misfits and, with the help of Russell's kind sister Elizabeth – who has a mammoth crush on Bhuvan – they prepare for the fateful match.

Khan is enormously magnetic as the angry young man fighting imperialism in his own way. The film moves along swiftly, with a final confrontation that is tense, funny and moving. And, while I suppose one might call *Lagaan* a cricket-musical, it requires no actual knowledge of the bizarre game.

■ Noah Cowan

Ashutosh Gowariker began his career as an actor in film, television and commercials, making his first big appearance in Hindi cinema as the protagonist in Ketan Mehta's *Holi* (84). After numerous acting appearances, he directed his first feature, *First Love*, in 1993, followed by *Baazi* in 1995. *Lagaan* (01) is his third film as a director.

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