



Split Wide Open

Dev Benegal

INDIA, 1999

104 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Tropicfilm/**

BMG-Crescendo

Producer: **Anuradha Parikh**

Screenplay: **Farrukh Dhondy, based on an original story by Dev Benegal and Upamanya Chatterjee**

Cinematographer: **Sukumar Jatania**

Editor: **Renu Saluja**

Production Designer: **Anuradha Parikh**

Sound: **Resul Pookutty**

Music: **Nitin Sawhney**

Principal Cast: **Rahul Bose, Laila Rouass, Shivaji Satham, Ayesha Dharker, Kiran Nagarkar**

Print Source/Foreign Sales Agent:
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Dev Benegal's sexy, fast-paced comedy of class conflict and capitalism in full bloom is an absolute delight. This is no surprise, as the film reunites the team of *English, August*, a major sensation in our *India Now!* programme a few years ago. It pits the new India of cell phones, fancy cars and a burgeoning middle class against the better-known India of impoverished and exploited street urchins and caste strictures. *Split Wide Open* is also a boisterous love letter to Bombay, the crazy Manhattan of the sub-continent, in which anything and everything happens at a deliriously fast pace. Yet, at every turn, the film examines the (often horrifying) moral conundrums rapid social change engenders.

KP is a hustling small-time businessman working for the local mafia as their water man. He unlocks the taps for the city's poor (for a price) and sells questionable Evian water to the wealthy. He is devoted to Didi, his adopted ten-year-old sister, who earns a meagre living selling flowers at traffic lights. He gets advice and love from a gay Christian Brother who brought him up and taught him English.

Nan has just returned to India from London, where she was raised. She is the new host of an American-style talk show called "Split Wide Open," in which people, in darkness, confess to their secret sexual lives. The show becomes a big hit but Nan feels it lacks something that would give the show greater authenticity.

When KP crosses the Water Godfather, he is beaten and thrown out of work. In the meantime, Didi has disappeared. While searching for her, KP meets Nan and they begin an odd courtship that could never have happened in the India of the recent past.

While it deals with some pretty heavy issues, *Split Wide Open* retains a resolutely light and graceful pace. Rahul Bose, back from *English, August*, brings a sweet, cheeky sexuality to this film that celebrates life, love and the characters that make life worth living.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Dev Benegal was born in Delhi, India. After making several award-winning documentaries, he made his first feature, *English, August* (94), which won the Special Jury Award at the Torino film festival. Filmography: *English, August* (94) and *Split Wide Open* (99).

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