

# Taamara Sangam and Laxmi

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By BERNADETTE RAE

The story of the Rupa family is not unique. But the history of early immigrant families to New Zealand, and their evolution, has been invisible for almost 100 years. Mandrika Rupa, filmmaker, is one of the first to tell the tale in her new film Taamara Sangam.

The title of the hour-long "subjective documentary crossed with an oral history" means "coming together or joining two people", expressed in Te Reo and Hindi.

Rupa's great-grandfather, Jaga Rupa, arrived in New Zealand in 1907, shortly after the law banning Indian and Chinese people from these shores was lifted. Even then only men were allowed to come. Their women were not accepted until the 1940s.

"Men like my grandfather left Gujarat and came here in search of political and spiritual freedoms that were not available to them at home," says Rupa. "They left their families. It was a sacrifice made but now we, the subsequent generations, are enjoying those freedoms."

The film is the story of two clans becoming one, "just being who we are". Told in classical Maori, with English subtitles, it focuses on the connections of genealogy; of births, deaths and marriages; of Indian lovesongs and waiata; of the Indian faces that still hang on the walls of a Waikato whareniui.

Rupa was driven to tell the story not just to satisfy her own curiosity, but to record the images of groups of people sadly missing from other historical archives. She also wanted to make the point that people can get along, grow together and love one another, in spite of and with respect for their differences.

It is a story, she says, which will resonate with and encourage new migrant people.

Jaga Rupa settled, with a group of other Indian men, in Waikato. He became a hawker of goods in the region, developing close ties with the Tainui people of the village of Aramiro. They invited him to store his goods there, giving him premises on their marae.

Two of Jaga's sons, one of them Rupa's grandfather, also came and settled and worked in Aramiro, and eventually Rupa's father Daya made the journey, as a teenager, following tradition by returning to India to marry.

Mandrika Rupa arrived in New Zealand with her mother and a brother in 1960, and her other six siblings were born here. She was a social worker until a trip back to India opened her eyes to the art and healing in life and the beauty in relationships.

At first she recorded things on film, increasingly depicting individuals from the South Pacific Indian diaspora, who create lives outside of traditional frameworks.

Taamara Sangam is her longest work. Her short film Poonam was shown in festivals in Europe and Australia, and Naya Zamana, a narrative drama about a working class girl's rebellion against cultural expectations, resulting in cross-gender antics, played in more than 25 festivals in Europe and the United States, receiving awards in Italy and France and going into the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Taamara Sangam premieres tomorrow at the Capitol Cinema in Balmoral, alongside another of Rupa's short film dramas, Laxmi. Laxmi portrays life in New Zealand during World War II, again seen through the eyes of an Indian girl, who realises why her family prefer the prejudices of a free country to the caste injustices they left behind.

\* Capitol Cinema, Balmoral; special premiere tomorrow at 6pm, then nightly until May 13

This story was found at: [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/6/story.cfm?c\\_id=6&objectid=3500614](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/section/6/story.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=3500614)

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Mandrika Rupa's film tells of two clans becoming one. Picture / Martin Sykes

## TAAMARA/SANGAM

### TAAMARA/SANGAM (THE JOINING OF TWO PEOPLES)

Maori document a time when a group of Indians settled and became woven into their hui over a period of time. A Maori/Indian collaboration between Mandrika Rupa, Miki Apiti and Claudette Hauiti. In classical Maori with English subtitles.



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