

# Maori-Indian bond explored in film

By ANNABEL SCAIFE

Filmmaker Mandrika Rupa portrays the close bond between her Indian and Maori ancestors in her latest documentary, *Taamara Sangam*.

The relationship between the two cultures began in the early 1900s with the arrival of a group of Indian men, including Ms Rupa's great-grandfather, to New Zealand. They settled in a tribal area in the Waikato, living alongside people of the Tainui.

Although they share a special connection, Ms Rupa says the situation is not unusual.

"Indian families that have been here a long time say they've been through the same thing. They evolve a different culture together," she says.

Her documentary gives the Maori account of how the Indian men became woven into the iwi and hapu up to the present generation. *Taamara Sangam* translates as the joining of two people.

Clips in the hour-long film show kaumatua

and kuia singing Indian songs, and pictures of Indian ancestors on the whareniui walls.

Ms Rupa says she wanted to illuminate the differences and similarities between the cultures. And how they learned to negotiate their disparities at weddings, funerals and other cultural events.

"We're going through a time when globally there's a lot of separatism. Each group is caught in their own dogma about what they believe is true. But we have to get along because we're sharing the same space."

Ms Rupa has been awarded a grant from Creative New Zealand's Screen Innovation fund to subtitle the classical Maori spoken in the film into English.

The work is a collaboration between herself, Miki Apiti and Claudette Hauti, and will premiere at the Lido in Epsom early next year for a one-week season.

She is now working on a feature film, *Samanta*, that considers Indian people immigrating to New Zealand to escape the Hindu hegemony.



**MOVIEMAKER:** Herne Bay's Mandrika Rupa specialises in films and documentaries about the Indian diaspora.

Photo: JASON OXENHAM