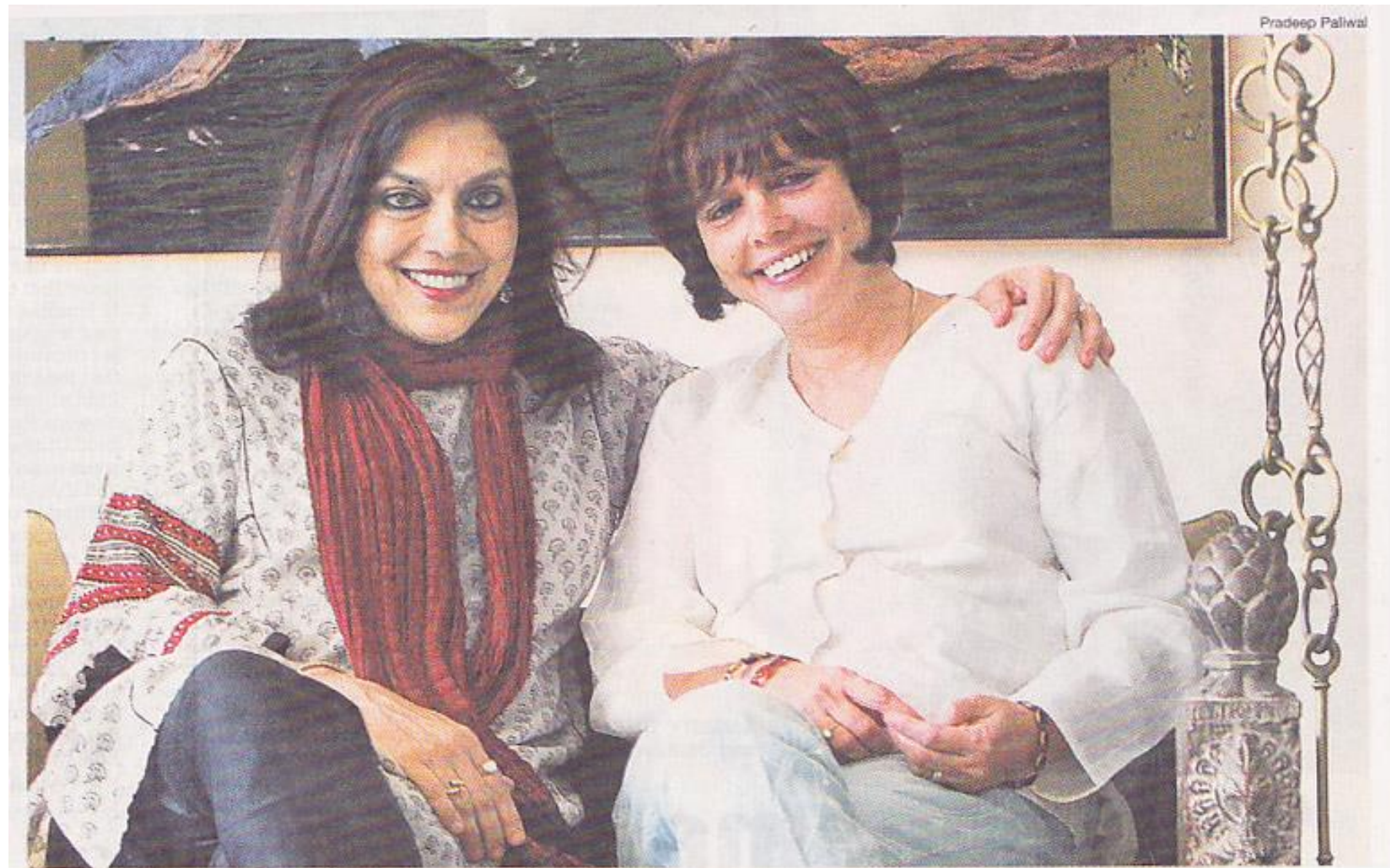


I Like Bums On The Seats

By Sharin Wader | Bombay Times | 15th March, 2009



Pradeep Pallival

YEH DOSTI...: Mira Nair and Sooni Taraporevala

'I LIKE BUMS ON THE SEATS'

... says Mira Nair, who flew down to be with friend Sooni Taraporevala on the eve of her directorial debut

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Times News Network

They've been friends for over 20 years. No wonder filmmaker Mira Nair flew down from the US for a day to be with scriptwriter Sooni Taraporevala on the eve of her directorial debut. Sooni's works directed by Mira include *Mississippi Masala*, *The Namesake*, and Oscar-nominated *Salaam Bombay..* and now her own film, a comedy on the Parsi community. "I don't grow nails or I would have given her mine," joked Mira because Sooni had been biting her nails in anxiety on Friday. "What do you expect from a 50-year-old debutant," laughed the Parsi scriptwriter who is fascinated by her community's fabled eccentrici-

ty. "Madness is in short supply in the world, so thank God for the Parsis," said Mira. "But it's a madness that you love," added Sooni who's called 'Loony Sooni' fondly by Mira.

"Sooni's not ambitious, but creative," said Mira of her friend. "I think it's a remarkable thing to not think of the reward but just go on your journey. That's the reason why her directorial debut happened after such a long time. I think she is uncompromisingly her own voice, which is rare. People imitate others but Sooni has her own ideas and luckily we managed to get the script financed." Sooni wrote the script with an ensemble cast in mind including her children Jahan and Iyanah Batlivala. "The roles are

tailormade for my kids, but yes, they improvised a lot too," said the proud mother. "People wondered why we were taking such a huge risk by casting young kids in *Salaam Bombay* and not actors. Didn't *Slumdog Millionaire* win hearts with no big stars," asked Mira.

The NRI filmmaker believes it's not the poverty of India that sells in the West, but the way a film is put across to audiences there. "You cannot also say that just because Danny Boyle had the finance and the backing of a huge studio, he managed to pull off *Slumdog*. That's sour grapes. You have to give credit to his craftsmanship. There's a feel good factor to the story especially now in times of recession," said Mira.

Sooni and she have never done a film thinking of awards. "I'm a shameless populist. I want bums on the seats. I make films for the audience so that I can transcend them into another world even if it is for a brief period," explained Mira whose next release (in October) is an epic called *Amelia* with Hillary Swank opposite Richard Gere. She's also doing the musical version of *Monsoon Wedding* for Broadway. Anything Sooni and she will do together again after *Salaam Bombay* and *The Namesake*? "Yes, we are going to celebrate our 50th birthdays properly," said Sooni. Mira had the last word, "If Sooni has any madness left to think of her next directorial venture, we will get rolling again!"