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CRITIC'S
CHOICE

Salaam Bombay!

Punjabi director Mira Nair (*Monsoon Wedding*)—who appears Saturday at the First United Methodist Church as part of the Chicago Humanities Festival—made her debut with this 1988 feature, and it shows a filmmaker less indebted to Bollywood melodrama than to Italian neorealism. An illiterate boy, banished from his home because he can't get along with his older brother, winds up fending for himself in a sooty Bombay ghetto, where he tries to rescue another kid from drugs and a coveted virgin from the whorehouse that dominates the block. Nair's muckraking script indicts the fat cats and

bureaucrats who perpetuate the caste system, but it's also fairly critical of the desperate addict, the whorehouse's selfish pimp, and the pliant prostitute who wants a better life for her daughter. Like Hector Babenco's *Pixote* the film is unsparingly gritty, but with a woman's tenderness it also grants the characters an occasional moment of grace. In Hindi with subtitles. 109 min. Facets Cinematheque, 1517 W. Fullerton, Friday, November 8, 7:00, 773-281-4114 or 312-494-9509.

—Ted Shen