

Indian Panorama

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Indian Panorama of the International Film Festival of India at Goa showcased feature films and non-feature films. The films fluctuate between cities and villages, open spaces and forests, and... carry an atmosphere of India. The visual of Indian Cinema, is the best of what one can find. A car drives through the forests of the Doars in Saibal Mitra's "*Songshoy-The Dilemma*" (Bengali, colour, 136 minutes). Dr Shyamal Sen (Kunal Mitra), sitting in front, chats with Anita (Rituparna Sengupta), on the rear seat with son Bubai. There are sharp cuts on the car in motion, speeding through tea garden land. There is a Tea break at a roadside 'dhaba'—hotel. Dr Sen is the family physician for Bubai, who occasionally keeps ill health. Anita has lost her husband Aranya, who was a poet. The mother-in-law who suffers from violent mood swing and was under medication, has given threatening looks to Anita, just before departure from Kolkata. A young girl, Maitreyi (Sudipta Chakraborty) walks up to Anita, recognizing her, but Anita fails to recognize Maitreyi. Conversation on Ananya is revived. He had progressive political ideas, and died of a heart attack while walking in a procession. Maitreyi was working in a NGO preoccupied by forest conservation.

Dr Sen is hostile towards Maitreyi, and feels she could be part of a terrorist organization. A young man in the jungles, spots Dr Sen's car and alerts an armed group in black fatigues. Dr Sen's car reaches the tourist bungalow, across a hanging bridge. It is a scenic paradise, but Bubai wants to go home. He is indifferent to Dr Sen. Dr Sen stays in one cottage, while Anita and her son reside in a separate cottage. The caretaker Bahadur Thapa arranges for food. Anita is displeased when Thapa informs that Dr Sen was a frequent visitor, with his patients. Dr Sen gifts Anita an expensive dress. He grabs Anita and says that he has staked his career and life for her and her son. Bubai watches sternly from behind the curtains, as Dr Sen and Anita hug. From the view point, Dr Sen the bachelor, feels that he is the monarch of all he surveys. Binoculars help in spotting rhinos. Dr Sen supports modernization and the breaking down of traditions. Anita cries at the dining table. When Bubai is asleep, she meets Dr Sen in the garden. She does not ring up home, and feels not clear whether coming on the trip, was right or wrong. Dr Sen finds his work of looking after patients, firesome. Anita and Dr Sen walk through new leaves of spring. There are fears of wild animals, before they cross a stream. Anita remembers Aranya's political poems on changing the world and government. She was an orphan. Dr Sen points to her beauty in bondage, and she was fighting a losing battle.

In the darkness, the rebels watch the couple, Dr Sen offers to enclose Anita and her son, in his world. While the dinner is cooked in open air, Dr Sen picks up a drink, and offers Anita, her first drink. She gups and coughs, sighting lighted torches in the forests. Dr Sen observes that resistance has no future. Anita dances to flute music in the background. The couple embrace, and Dr Sen insists that Anita should forget about all traditional beliefs. Bubai makes up and leaves his room. When Dr Sen returns to his cottage to fetch cigarettes, he finds that Bubai has urinated on his bed and pillow. He abuses and beats up Bubai. Why was Bubai so disobedient to him? Bubai remains silent. Anita reminds Bubai that the doctor had saved his life. She also hits Bubai, expresses wish of marriage, and pleads with Bubai to accept Dr Sen. She tells Bubai how does one live without a husband. One requires money to live. Tears accompany Anita's Rabindra Sangeet on the Varandah.

Next day at a road junction, Dr Sen meets a forest department official. While Anita and Bubai are sitting on a bench, Maitreyi joins in. Bubai recognizes Maitreyi. On Maitreyi's mobile phone, Anita speaks to her maid in Kolkata, but the mother-in-law declines to speak. Maitreyi takes them to the river bend, and compliments Anita, on her singing. She suggests re-printing of Aranya's poems. Poetry was like property and could be lost. Anita informs that books have been returned by publishers, without royalty. Shyamal calls Maitreyi a terrorist and fundamentalist. He has had enough of revolutions, splits and historical blunders. Back in the cottage Bubai stares as Anita applies lipstick. He cries and pulls his mother's hair. Bubai walks off outdoors. The adult couple make love within the cottage. Running out in the rains, Anita finds Bubai missing, and screams "Bubai must stay". Next morning the rains stop, and through the mists, Bubai is discovered in a grove of trees, unconscious, with Maitreyi and a rebel group, dressed in black fatigues. Dr Sen thanks Maitreyi, but Anita declines to take her phone number.

Bubai is down with high fever, and Dr Sen diagnoses as infection in upper respiratory tract system and asthma. Hot milk and medicines are provided, and arrangements made for an ambulance to shift the child to Siliguri. Anita cries, and discards coloured dresses. Dr Sen collects medicines from a village shop. Anita and her son are alone in the cottage. The sound of wild animals frightens Anita. Stay is extended, and Maitreyi visits Anita. Maitreyi suggests in examination by Dr Rakhit. But this annoys Dr Sen. There is a growing feeling in Anita that it is the mother's sins, visiting the son, Dr Sen meets Dr Rakhit, and finds he is the shopkeeper of the chemist shop. Dr Rakhit puts medicines in strategic location fever boxes, for helping the locals to survive malaria. He is a people's doctor, and diagnoses Bubai's fever as mild malaria. Dr Sen denounces him. Soon Bubai is no more and his dead body is carried by the forest labourers on their shoulders. Anita is in a daze—was she a good mother or a bad mother?

Even though Dr Rakhit is full of statements on recent politics and the social condition, and Anita is engulfed in anxieties "*Songshoy*" is far from a morality tale. The occurrences remain more conceptual, and spontaneous. The egocentric behaviour of the protagonists hinders adaptation to love. But this leads to foolish annoyance and hysterical tears. In spite of the splendid Doars Nature, '*Songshoy*' fails to rise above invented melodrama. Asok Das Gupta's camera loses mobility whenever the protagonists descended from their car.

JOYMATI

Manju Borah's "Joymati—The Saviour" (Assamese, colour, 95 minutes) depicts the Mongoloids from west China, settled in Ahom, by 1681 AD. Two elephants are part of a procession, and the various tribals are settled on either side of the Brahmaputra river. As a beheaded chicken spills blood, the defence of Guwahati from the Monghols begins. Under the command of Lt Lachit Borpukan, the Assamese army defeat invaders. There are folk music and dances during the royal dinner. A noble, Meehua Barbaruah becomes the target of the intrigues at the ministers' conclave. He is deprived of royal status, as a commoner is not permitted to marry royalty. Aton Buragohain has absolute power, as the king's counsellor. Miscreants have entered the palace thrice, to kill the teenaged king, Sulit Chulikta.

There is a proposal to give up Guwahati to the Moghuls, 10,000 soldiers have been lost in a day. The princes from other royal clans are trying to seize power. Attackers are

chopping off the right hand of princes in the lineage, or killing them, as a maimed royal prince can never become king. A noble, Godapani (Rohan Doley) wants to restore law and peace. Joymati (Nita Basumatary) tells her husband, Godapani to flee. If people rise against tyranny, the sovereign rule will perish. The juvenile king is indifferent, and plays with a small wooden wheel, tied to a string. Chased by armed soldiers of Laluksola Borphukan, Godapani escapes through fields and forests. As swords and spears cover the skyline, Godapani wants to defend his family and motherland. Some villagers give him shelter, and there are romantic affairs with village women. The king's forces torture the rustic folk. Joymati is dragged through the fields, tied to a tree, and whipped. Godapani trecks through darkness and rain. Joymati embraces death, while Godapani ascended the throne in 1681.

“Joymati” conveys the violence and intrigues of the medieval times. But the small plots and episodes appear unrelated, and far from simultaneous. This disjuncture in the narrative leads to theatricality and contrived effects. Raju Mishra's camera takes on indoors is excessively static, and becomes a passive recorder of courts and hovels. The historical events of atrocity and plots, allow a flow of images full of swords and spears. The visuals do not recount history, as the narrative lacks historical composition. The cliché of arms makes the characters remote. ✍