

FILM

PADAKHEP

Abhijit Ghosh Dastidar

Suman Ghosh's "PADAKSHEP-Footsteps" (Bengali, colour, 93 mins) announces the backdrop Kolkata, behind the opening credits, as a train passes along an underground metro station. Elderly, Sasanko (Soumitra Chatterjee) has just retired as Manager of a Bank. Besides a lake, he plays chess with another old man (Bibhas Chakravarty). They discuss the share market, and recite from Sambhu Mitra's "Raja". Overhead shots encompass other old men doing physical exercises in open spaces. As Sasanko's daughter, Megha (Nandita Das) enters her slick office, wearing modern clothes, her manager calls, regarding a deal with a client. A maid, Sabita (Sabitri Chatterjee), attached to the family for several years, looks after Sasanko's household, when actress Kusum on the T.V. screen dies, Sabita cries.

Megha finds time to have coffee with an office friend, Rezwan (Ashok Sharma). They have applied for a job in Bangalore. The interiors of father and daughter's residence are panned with Sasanko's morning shave, food on the table, and morning TV serials disturbing Megha's sleep. In the residential apartment block, soon arrive Debojit (Tota Roy Chowdhury), and his wife, Seema (June Maliah), along with their little daughter, Trisha. The couple have returned to India, after spending ten years in Ohio, USA. Sasanko and Megha gather friendly acquaintance with the new entrants in the building. Trisha spends a lot of time with Sasanko. She switches the T.V. channel from news on Bihar to cartoons. Trisha draws and paints, and sketches portraits of Sasanko, who merrily plays a kind grandfather, with Trisha's parents out on business. On the terrace, Trisha plays around, when the maid is hanging washed clothes to dry, and Sasanko is watering plants.

One day, Debojit gives a ride to Trisha, when she is on her way to offer, in an exclusive Information Technology park. Sasanko assumes the responsibility of dropping Trisha to school, and fetching her back. The city is documented with the Victoria Memorial maidan, and passing trams and cars, and the bustling people. At the doctor's chamber, Sasanko is upset with the photograph in a magazine of a mentally retarded child and a medical article on an-eight-year-old child, suffering from accelerated aging. Flashbacks inform the viewer that Sasanko's wife had died in a road accident, three years ago. Returning home, Sasanko browses through a photo album, and stumbles on the photo of a tree with red fruits; but he is unable to remember the name of the fruit. When Megha is in Bangalore, sleeping in a hotel with Rezwan, Sasanko rings up; but the mobile is answered by Rezwan. Sasanko is shocked, but soon stumbles on photographs of Megha with Rezwan, a Muslim. Besides the daily irritations of staying under the same roof, this relationship becomes another conflict issue. The doctor (Jagannath Guha) advises Sasanko on his weak cardiac state.

Irritations and frictions continue between father and daughter. Megha accuses her father for not removing her mother to Vellore, Sasanko is seized by a nightmare. One day Trisha fails to board a metro train with Sasanko. She sits on weighing scale, in the station platform, till Sasanko returns to fetch her, Trisha's parents bully their daughter, and extract information on the incident. Debojit accuses Sasanko of neglect, as Sasanko explains that balancing Trisha's water bottle in the jostle to enter the coach, he lost control of Trisha, Megha defends her father. Job offers from Bangalore are confirmed for

Megha and Rezwan. But two arteries of Sasanko are blocked, and Megha is upset when she discovers her father has been smoking secretly. Sasanko lies on the floor and studies the movement of ants. Trisha comes along with a self portrait and a sketch of Sasanko. The two families reconcile, and they go for a picnic on the banks of a lake. Debojit discloses that he left USA, as he was out of a job. Now a job offer has arrived, and they would be returning soon. As Sasanko wanders with Trisha, he stumbles on a tree with red fruits, similar to the photograph in his album. The recognition brings Gregorian chants, but Sasanko falls on the grass. As the camera backtracks from a hanging bridge, Trisha runs to her parents Sasanko is admitted in the ICU of a hospital. His condition is deteriorating. At the hospital, Trisha gives him her book of drawings.

In spite of the drudgeries and pressures of daily life, there is no cynicism in Suman Ghosh's narrative. Samiran Dutta's camera with numerous close-ups and overhead shots, steadily builds up the climaxes of human reactions. But the blow-up from video footage to 35 mm format, leaves a dark shade, throughout the film. The script does not have any set-piece dialogue. Mausumi Bhaumik's ballad has a choral uplift on the lake picnic sequence. Trisha, the child, provides hope in the grim tensions created by pursuit of careers, globalisation, a fatal accident not fully forgotten, and forebodings on illness.

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