

## Indian Panorama

**Abhijit Ghosh Dastidar :**

With 21 feature films and 15 non-feature films, Indian Panorama at International Film Festival 2007 at Goa allowed the viewer to discover angles, emotions and preferences of Indian cinema. Buddhadeb Das Gupta's "Ami, Iyasin ar amar Madhubala—The Voyeurs" (Bengali, colour, 104 mins) has a meandering debut. Framed glass windows overlook the night street traffic, full of cars. At a maternity ward of a hospital, while nurses sleep on chairs, rats skip on the floor, stair case, and used plates. A woman wakes up, after being bitten on the nose by a rat. The hospital administrator is interviewed by a TV crew. Journalists invade the maternity ward and ask the woman with the bangdaged nose; "How did the rat look like?" The Superintendent of the hopsital decides to istall six units of camera monitoring equipment in the hospital.

A circulatory camera pans Dilip Nath (Prosenjit Chatterjee), a TV camera and computer technician, sleeping in his room, full of PCs. Dilip installs surveillance instruments. There is a photo of actress Madhubala in his bedroom. Iyasin (Amitav Bhattacharya), from a Muslim family in Berhampur (Murshidabad) is playing the flute, and preparing for his journey to Kolkata. A cylce rickshaw journey through fields, is followed by a rail trip. Police video monitoring screens catch a boy kissing a girl on the cheeks. A bus ride in the city bring out AIDS ads prominently. Footpath vendors carry a sofa set on their heads. Soon Iyasin reaches friend Dilip's residence. He would be assisting Dilip in installing surveillance instruments. The friends fix three monitors with two cameras each, at a hospital. Sunderlal, the hospital equipments supplier offers them more jobs. Iyasin speaks to his mother in Berhampur, from a STD booth, promising to send money for new clothes. A new tenant, Rekha (Sameera Reddy) occupies Dilip's adjacent flat. Dilip strikes an acquain-tanceship with Rekha.

After some days Rekha is pushed on the road by a young man. Dilip and Iyasin, one evening completely drunk, board an empty double decker bus. The driver, Apu from Berhampur, drive the two friends at night. AIDS hoardings appear noticeably. The bus driver, conductor and the two friends sing, dance and recite lyrics and couplets in Dilip's flat. At night the vendors still walk with sofa sets on their heads. A child plays with the steering wheel of the bus, and vagrants board the bus in excitement. Rekha merely peeps into the security glass hole of her door. Rekha reads job ads in newspapers, and dances in her room. She searches for ads reading : "Wanted, young, beautiful, and talented actress and dancer". Next morning the camera pans over saris, and clothes on the terraces and verandahs of the neighbourhood. A peeping tom on a terrace tries to catch a glimpse, as Rekha emerges from a shower. She visits a film studio, and introduces herself to the film director. She has group theatre acting experience, and was a kathak dancer. Actor Tapas Pal and Mala are in the midst of a kissing sequence shooting. The film director is sympathetic, and gives Rekha music cassette with a song, having a fast beat, to dance with.

Dilip offers Rekha a movie visit, which she declines. Dilip and Iyasin watch a Kishore Kumar-Madhubala movie, which Dilip has seen seven times, stealing money from his mother. Rekha knocks at Dilip's door, requesting to borrow a

cassette palyer. Dilip gives the CD player to Rekha, but there were no plug points in Rekha's room. Rekha rehearses for theatre, and mimes anger, affections, anxiety, facial expressions, and hands and fingers movements. She leaves the key of her apartment with Dilip, who fixes the electric plug, and also sets a secret camera on Rekha's dressing table, with the images on the mirror, connected to the computer screen in Dilip's room. Returning home, Rekha unaware dances before her table mirror. Dilip and Iyasin watch her on the TV monitor. Rekha dances to the tunes on the music cassette, but the images on Dilip's TV screen are without sound. As Rekha does exercises with her hands and legs, and plays with an umbrella before the mirror Iyasin keeps commenting. As Rekha eats from a tiffin carrier supplied by a meals agency, Iyasin feels hungry. When Rekha undresses, Dilip puts off his TV screen. The friends just discuss nude women.

Sunderlal seeks Dilip and Iyasin's help in fixing secret cameras on his wife, who is lying in bed. As Dilip climbs a wooden ladder for setting a camera on a lamp shade, Sunderlal's wife, Basanti discovers the plot. She breaks a mirror. Rekha dances on stage auditorium, as part of an audition for the film director. The film director and producer watch the performance on a TV monitor. The film director beats up the producer for abusing. Later Dilip offers coconut candies to Rekha. He keeps following Rekha on the TV monitor, as she dances or undresses in her bedroom. Iyasin suggests that Dilip phone or e-mail to Rekha, expressing love. Dilip's computers are programmed, and he wants his computers to live with him. Dilip has to proceed to Krishnagar. From the ants and insects in Dilip's room, the camera shifts to vagrants on the footpath. There is love on the footpath. Vendors walk with sofa set on head. Police arrest the coolies. 'Buladi' from the AIDS ad, calls Dilip on phone, and Dilip states that he has no desire for sex, and never loved anyone.

In the morning, Rekha wakes up and notices flashes on the lens of the secret camera, fixed on her mirror. The suspicion leads to Dilip's flat, but Dilip and Iyasin are not there. When Rekha complains police break open Dilip's door and confirm the secret wire connection. Police watch the CD with Rekha undressing. The wires are traced from the top of the mirror. The flat is sealed, two constables positioned, and arrest warrants on Dilip and Iyasin are issued. Rekha pushes a sofa before the mirror, and speaks to the hidden camera, asking: "Have you loved anyone?" At night when Dilip and Iyasin return to their lane, and being tipped off by a tea vendor, they run. Amidst the rain and thunder, there is an explosion on a tram. Radio broadcasts declare the presence of Sayed Ali, leader of a terrorist group. Senior police officers issue orders for shooting at sight. The two friends hitch hike on a truck, cross an over-head bridge over a stream where women wash clothes, and run through woods. They spend the night at a railway station retiring room. Dilip speaks on the mobile to Rekha, who threatens to inform police. Dilip states that there was no ulterior motive in fixing the camera, and staying alone, installing computers, he had become a machine. Meanwhile a man wakes up on a railway platform bench, and compares Dilip and Iyasin's faces with the terrorist suspect's photo in Newspapers. Police arrive and shoot. Hit on the legs and back, Iyasin dies on the railway platform, and the body is dragged to the police station, as Sayeed the terrorist. Dilip is tortured and beaten up by the police. He is even stripped to confirm circumcision.

The camera pans over computer machines on the floor and tables in Dilip's flat. At a railway station police-men glimpse Rekha on a spy camera, flinging a mobile phone with camera from a passerby. TV channels interview Iyasin's mother, as police admit that Dilip and Iyasin were not terrorists, but innocent. A procession with newly weds, is followed by vendors carrying sofa sets on their heads, A TV crew stops to click photos. Dilip, released from jail is unable to walk and lies on a sofa. State surveillance and private individual spy cameras make Buddhadeb Das Gupta's film overviews several films within the film plan narrative. Sunny Joseph's shifting camera never misses the details of the unaffected daily life, Rekha's shock, Iyasin's death and Dilip's physical scars become essential ingredients of the spy camera tragedy, in spite of frequent humorous spoofs. But Das Gupta's script fails to keep the anecdotes and tableaux allusive and demonstrative. The paths which the protagonists travel become less important than the final denouement. Newspaper grabbing headlines and repeated focus on AIDS hoardings and street coolies carrying sofa sets do not reveal the spirit of an epoch. While the subdivision episodes are numerous and the obsession of parti-cular images focused, the filmed narrative is full of frivolity and moral lessons. Certain of the recurring images boomerang as a metaphor of destiny.