

FILM

Barah Anna

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Raja Menon's "Barah Aana—Twelve Annas / A few cents" (Hindi, 97 mins, colour) has a natural, flowing vitality in depicting underdogs and crime. Through sugar cane fields, Kedar Shukla (Naseeruddin Shah) is being chased by goons. He was told not to enter the village. Hiding in a brick kiln, he strikes down a goon with a stone, and beats another goon with a stick. He runs away from the village and escapes. But the village authorities declare him dead, and issue a doctor's Death Certificate. Shukla's brothers seize all his lands. Shukla now lives in a community tenement in Mumbai, earning a living as a car driver of an affluent couple. In the small tenements, Shukla has friends. Yadav (Vijay Raaz) works as a nightwatchman in a multi-storeyed apartment building. Aman (Arjun Mathur) is a waiter in a restaurant.

When Shukla has to pull sudden brakes, before a beggar child in front of the car, the cell phone falls from the hands of the car owner's wife (Jayati Bhatia). This annoys the car owner's wife. Yadav falls asleep while on duty, and is scolded by the secretary of the Building Association. Special parking space is created when a Customs Inspector visits. When Kate (Violante Placido), an Italian, offers a tip to waiter, Aman, he promises to take her to a film at a multiplex. At night, Shukla, Yadav and Aman drink on an open truck, installed at a desolate place. Yadav receives a phone call from his wife in the village, informing that his child was ill, and money was urgently needed. In the morning, the tenants crowd around the community tap. Rani (Tannishtha Chatterjee), who runs a store shop and a telephone call office is drawn to Aman; but Aman borrows money from Rani to entertain the Italian Kate. Shukla continues to be ill-treated by the car owner's wife; and gives driving lessons to Yadav, on the owner's car. The rich occupants of the building do not provide any financial help to watchman, Yadav. At a Mumbai Railway station platform, Yadav is robbed of money, which he was to have handed over to a friend, returning to the village, and meant for his wife. As the train whistles, there is agony on his face.

At a fast food stall, three men in a car attack Yadav, and he hits out at one of the attackers, with a drinking glass, costing twelve annas. While the others flee, Yadav takes the injured man to his tenement, and demands extortion money from the stranger's family. Money is exchanged in a public toilet, and the man is dropped in a taxi at a desolate place. The three friends join in for more kidnappings, robberies and extortions. Booty is shared out. Over tea Aman discloses his love for Kate, but Kate wants to be left alone. When Kate faces financial distress, Aman helps her with money. Soon Kate leaves her local residence without informing Aman. More heists take place, and the friends kidnap the wife of Shukla's boss. Not being discreet, Shukla speaks aloud without concealment of identity, and demands Rs 20 lacs from boss Raghu. Anger overtakes crime. Raghu is present at the rail tracks with the money. But police have converged, and the three brigands are arrested. On confessional statements, Yadav and Aman are released. Soon Shukla gains freedom, since

as per government records he was, already dead—there could be no case of 'double indemnity'.

In spite of all the hardships and sudden bursts of anger portrayed, almost everybody in "Barah Aaana" remains happy. The short sequences of serious and comic episodes, build a harsh depiction of the poor and underworld of Mumbai. The truck and railway sheds in orange sepia, the overhead shots of the sea beach lit by car headlights, and the close ups of the lanes in the living tenements construct a surreal domain where life remains unvanquished. Raj Kumar Gupta's dialogues and Menon's script encompasses the miserable lives without any melodrama. Priya Seth's camera is definitive and mobile, fully tracing the pressures and suspense. The acting alternates between the gloom and humour portrayed, with alacrity. □□□