

FILM

## Mumbai Film Festival

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The Mumbai Film Festival (Oct, 2010) organized by the Mumbai Academy of Moving Images and Reliance Big Entertainment, offered plenty of something new and exciting, the highlights extending to "Celebration of Japanese Cinema" and relevant documentaries in "The Real Reel". Semih Kaplanoglu's "Bal-Honey" (Turkey,2010, colour, 103 mins) is the third part of the Turkish director's nutritive titles, following "Eggs" and "Milk". It is a hypnotic tale of a six-year-old boy, Yusuf's (Erdal Besikcioglu) response to a momentous event, involving his father, Yakup (Boras Altas). At the start, Bans Ozbicer's camera remains still in the sunlight of woods and trees. Yakup is walking through the woods with goods packed on a mule's back in October,2009. He climbs a rope tied to a tree. Besides bird droppings, tree branches fall menacingly, Yakup later sleeps in his hut. Yusuf loiters around. Approaching winter makes day light shorter by three minutes. Yusuf travels with his father on the hilly terrain, as the honey gathering father, collects honey from the upper branches of trees. He whispers a dream to his father, and the discussion veers to whether a dream should be spread around. One day Yakup frees a tied falcon, which was kept in their hut. At school, when a girl child, Ipek reads, she is given toffees by the teacher. Children play in the school playground. Yusuf is isolated and watches from a window of the classroom. The teacher asks Yusuf to read from "Eagle and the Turtle" but Yusuf is unable to read, and other students laugh at Yusuf when he fails to read. He has difficulties in pronunciation, and walks dejectedly back from school.

Yusuf is unable to write a good copy in school written test, and sits in a sad state, with his hands on books. Returning from school, Yusuf does not find anyone at home. A horse pushes a pail of water on Yusuf's books, and Yusuf dries the books on a stove fire, as his mother cuts vegetables. He lights a small canister fire, and the canister smoke drives out the bees. Yakup cleans the bee hives. Yusuf smiles as he tastes the honey with his fingers. Yusuf's mother works in the fields. In school, Yusuf writes answers to adding sums, but gets scolded for not doing his homework. Father and son speak in whispers about the bees being changed in new hives. Yakup is planning a long trip in the forests, as beehives across the valley are empty. The new beehives are to be placed around the Karkoram mountains. Yusuf's mother wants to take Yusuf to a local Imam. Yusuf watches a girl reading in school, with fascination. A friend, Hamdi gifts Yusuf a small wooden boat. Yusuf is alone at home with his mother. Small fires on the fields, burn at night. A neighbour Farik informs Yusuf's mother of Yakup's efforts in placing hives. Yusuf collects eggs from the chicken coop, while his mother reaps the vegetable harvests. At the dining table, Yusuf declines to drink milk. Amid the still of inside of cottage with a large sitting room and long sofas, Yusuf's mother recalls a dream of placing beehives near a river. The cottage garden blossoms with flowers. The table is full of food, and birds flutter in the sky. Reflections of images glide on a stream. Yusuf's father is absent in the hills, and under stress Yusuf and his mother keep switching off and on the lights. His grandmother visits and gifts a jacket. Yusuf's uncle is a policeman in Istanbul, but Yusuf does not have any aims.

Yakup has still not returned. Yusuf's mother attends religious reading classes with other women. Yusuf does not find interest in stories of milk and honey from Gabriel. He catches the reflection of the moon in a bucket of water. Forlorn, he walks on the village road. He visits the village fair with his mother, and watches men and women sway in community dances. In the milling crowd, Yusuf's mother Zehra searches for husband, Yakup. Back home, Yusuf wakes up with a nightmare of his father, falling from a tree branch. The red

dawn filters through the windows, and Yusuf finds his mother crying. At breakfast, Yusuf sips his milk without protest. Other village women arrive to extend condolences. Yusuf is sent to school, but he is unable to read aloud. The teacher offers toffees, and Yusuf runs back home. Police inform that Yakup died in an accident in the Karkoram mountains, and his body will be extracted soon. Yusuf runs to the woods. There are sounds of thunder in the darkness, and Yusuf falls asleep below tall trees. The camera holds still. Yusuf has virtually stopped speaking with the disappearances of his father. Kaplanoglu's "Honey" has an insistent circularity, returning to folklore, fantasy and hardships in the mountainous woods. The structure of the film narrative enhances the sense of something being spun from luscious, rural images of nature. □□□