

IFFI 2010

GOA FILM FESTIVAL

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THE 41ST INTERNATIONAL FILM Festival of India (Goa, Nov/Dec 2010) drew on a wealth of global film making talent, offering the playful, the precise and the social realism to enjoy. The retrospectives and homage covered Eric Rohmer (France), Jan Jakub Kolski (Poland), Michael Cocoyannis (Greece), Jean Becker (France), Jim Jarmusch (USA) and Mira Nair (India). 'Country focus' engaged on Iran, Goergia, Mexico, Sri Lanka and Taiwan.

Debutant director, Andy de Emmony's "West is West" (UK, 2010, 102 mins, colour) is a sequel to writer Ayub Khan Din's semiautobiographical story, "East is East" about a mixed race family in Salford in the early 1970s. The Khan story is developed eight years on, though "West is West" has stand-alone strength. Ayub Khan Din's screenplay develops the story of young Sajid (Aquib Khan), the youngest son of George Jehangir Khan (Om Puri), and Ella (Linda Basset) growing up in Manchester of 1975. Sajid is bullied in school by white children, and dodges classes. George is irritated by the anglicized mannerisms of Sajid. Fails to point out Pakistan on a map, and the white teacher suffers from fears of malaria in Pakistan. The teacher has nostalgia of Rawalpindi and Lahore museum, and gives a copy of Kipling's "Kim" to Sajid. The letters of elder brother, Munir (Emil Marwa) from Pakistan have no interest for Sajid, and Sajid is curious as to why Munir does not use a tractor to plough, instead of bullocks. While another elder brother (Jimi Mistry) flirts with a girl, Sajid has a brush with the police, over stolen goods. Sajid calls his father a 'Paki' when he pulls him up, and mother Ella slaps Sajid.

George Khan feels a trip to Pakistan will set right Sajid. Soon George and son, Sajid arrive at Lahore airport. The taxi drives through rural markets. At a tea stall in a rural area, a procession of camels and sugar cane fields capture Sajid's attention. An accident bus has overturned, and the dead and injured lie by the roadside. The farm has cattle, kept by Goerge's first wife (Ila Arun). George has returned to first wife after thirty years, and is in search for a bride for eldest son, Muneer, farm hand Relatives and neighbours visit, and Sajid wants to know whether they were all related. He keeps wearing western clothes, and hears Nana Muskoris "Over and over I whisper your name". Sajid's elder sister is married to Riaz (Vijay Raaz). The women cook during daytime, and hear ghost stories at night. George shows Sajid the fields he owns and explains his aims to earn money, to buy more land for the entire family.

Sajid notices a passing mendicant, 'peer'. Nature's call has to be answered outdoors. Goerge's first wife weeps and wants to know why George has returned after thirty years. She breaks the glass cover on an old wedding photo. Walking over muddy tracks, Sajid passes the spiritual and academic, village school. A young boy throws pebbles and cultivates Sajid's friendship, speaking in rustic Punjabi. But Sajid cannot speak Punjabi. On a rural bus journey, Sajid sits next to a man, with a goat. The locals fear that George's son, Muneer will travel to England and acquire a British wife. They are disinclined to part with any daughter for marriage. Sajid and his new Punjab friend watch girl's washing colourful clothes, at a water trough point. They visit an old temple courtyard with terracotta idols and bullock sculptures. Ladies clean chaff in the vicinity of farm animals. George Khan wants to demolish the cattle shed, and build a house. Sajid and his friend observe a cow being milched. Girls with water pitches on their heads pass by the lanes. The boys run to the rooftops and follow the girls. The construction of George's new building is in progress. He ploughs the fields with bullocks, and abuses the bulls in English. When George cuts his

hands, the first wife applies lotion and antiseptic paste. Sajid steadily puts on Pakistani clothes and feels comfortable. The 'peer' reads Kipling aloud, and advises Sajid to adapt to situations. The two boys bathe the bullocks in a pond. The village wife in Punjab, tells George that there was no need to go back. Sajid and his friends visit a fair ground, near a Sufi shrine. There are Sufi secular songs, a merry-go-round, and Punjabi mime and dances with pop Urdu songs. A wedding brings songs and dances, where musicians travel on bus roofs.

In their jaunts through the village milieu, Sajid and his Punjabi friend meet Nelly, amongst the girls carrying water vessels. Nelly had studied in Tokyo, and her father was no more. She could take decisions on her own. Meanwhile, George's English wife, Ella arrives from Bradford, along with an old friend, Annie. Sajid is outdoors with goats. Ella meets George's Pakistan wife. At the family dinner, the British ladies smoke. Sajid tells his British mother, that he was not returning to Britain. Ella was surprised that George had not returned after four weeks, and his bank account was almost over. Friend Annie suffers from acidity after kebabs, and rushes to toilets in the fields. The two British visitors sunbathe on the terrace, while George's Pakistan wife and daughter, Basheera prepare cow dung cakes for fuel. The two wives fight over the new building in the farm land. During a fierce dust storm, Sajid and the other Punjabi farmers steer the cattle and goats inside sheds. The Pakistan wife shows Ella, a broken photo of a wedding, twenty five years ago. Ella was unaware of the Pakistan wife. One spoke Punjabi, the other English, but they sound very kind. Nelly's family agrees to the betrothal of Nelly and Muneer, George's eldest son. George Khan and the white ladies visit Nelly's house, and Nelly speaks cockney English. Decorative paste is put on Ella's hands. The groom is on horseback, and rituals of flower petals in vessels of milk, music and dances follow.

George Khan insists on choosing a life that he left three decades earlier. The Pakistan wife expresses tenderness and tells him to leave. The day of parting arrives. The Punjabi boy gives Sajid a talisman, and Sajid gives him a copy of "Kim". Back in Bedford, the family runs a restaurant. Sajid plays the flute gifted by the "peer". While Ayub Khan Din's screenplay is full of relationship naturalism, most of the situations are contrived and the characterizations are stereo-typed. "West is West" is lively, but Andy De Emmony fails to throw up genuinely inventive moments. The key emotional journey from Bradford to the Punjab region of Pakistan enlarges the space for the protagonists self obsession. Peter Robertson's camera has the meldings of documentary and fiction in pursuing the reality of different languages and milieu. □□□