

NOBEL CHOR

Abhijit Ghosh–Dastidar

A FICTITIOUS ACCOUNT ON THE theft of the Nobel Literature gold medal prize awarded to Rabindranath Tagore forms the basis of the plot line of Suman Ghosh's "Nobel Chor" (Bengali, colour. 105 mins). It is 24 March, 2004 in Shantiniketan. A man walks briskly down a staircase at night. Locks are broken and the 1915 Nobel gold medal prize disappears from a glass casket. Newspaper headlines focus on the theft, with overlapping images and forward zooms on newspapers. Political leader, Atul Vajpayee expresses concern and celebrities Nabanita Deb Sen, Sunil Ganguly and Gautam Chose speak on the stark negligence of security. The state home secretary suspects a foreign conspiracy. The film credits appear with folk songs, and images of rural Birbhum with country roads, cycles, bullock carts; paddy fields and children swinging on ropes tied to trees. A baul singer walks the dusty road. The mathematics school teacher (Soumitra Chatterjee) is upset when a cranky man, Manmotho(Shankar Debnath) rings the school bell, and children walk out of class, taking termination of school hours.

A farmer, Bhanu (Mithun Chakra-varty) is sleeping on a large cot inside a hut with his wife (Soma Chakravarty) and teenaged son, Suren(Rishi Mitra). The night silence is disturbed with shuffling sounds from the courtyard. Bhanu comes out in the open court with kerosene lamp. Day light breaks out and a train passes by. Next to the well, Bhanu finds a gold medal. The wife is excited over the gold medal. Bhanu takes the medal to the school teacher who recognizes the Nobel prize, and compares it to the photograph in a Bengali daily newspaper. But Bhanu does not know Rabindranath, and why he won the Nobel prize. The villagers are concerned more with the high price of onions and rice. That the medal was not stolen by Bhanu has to be proved. Bhanu takes the newspaper, and shows it to his wife. The medal is the pride of country and nation, but what for Bhanu. When under a tree, Bhanu is comparing the medal with the newspaper photo the crank Manmotho snatches the newspaper. Pranab Mukherjee, the politician, dignitaries and senior police officers arrive in Shantiniketan. At a panchayet gathering the school teacher and the village elder (Manoj Mitra) decide that Bhanu should go to Kolkata and return the medal to the chief minister. The school teacher would give a forwarding letter. The compensation in lacs of rupees would be spent for the uplift of the village. The teacher gives the address and telephone number of Hari, a fellow villager who is now settled in Kolkata. Bhanu, along with a framed photo of Rabindranath leaves for Kolkata by cycle-cart and roof of a bus. Bhanu walks down a Kolkata road. A woman washing clothes by the roadside takes notice of rustic Bhanu. Soon Bhanu finds Hari's house, and shows the medal to Hari (Saswata Chatterjee) and his wife Monu (Sudpita Chakravarty). Meanwhile in the village, people visit Bhanu's hut at night with torches, in search of Bhanu. TV news flash that police have arrested two people. Bhanu's wife sits besides a pond dejected. Hari wants to sell the medal and takes a shave, while his wife performs puja. On the mobile phone, Hari clicks a photo of the medal.

Along an isolated highway near Kolkata, Bhanu digs a hole below a tree, and hides the medal. The IG Police (Arindam Seal) is investigating, and perplexed that there was no attempt to break the unbreakable glass covering the medal in the museum. At a police station, police officers make fun of Bhanu's photo of Rabindranath and snatch the letter from the village teacher. Hari drinks at home, while Bhanu sits silently. Bhanu is taken to a businessman, Mr Jhunjhunwala, at a posh hotel. The business contact sends Bhanu to a trader in memorabilia, Mritul (Haresh Chaya). Another trader (Kaushik Ganguly) feels old celebrities do not have market value. At a roadside public meeting a speaker protests over the theft of the medal. Hari's efforts to sell the medal, takes Bhanu on a voyage along golf courses, bars, night clubs and dance floors. Goons attack Hari's house and ransack the premises in search of the medal. Bhanu is chased at night and takes shelter behind a door. The businessman Mritul and his wife Piya (Rupa Ganguly) provide temporary shelter to Bhanu. Police are raiding Bhanu's village, and the teacher affirms that Bhanu has not stolen the medal. On Piya's mobile phone Bhanu connects to a village shopkeeper who calls Bhanu's wife. The wife pleads that Bhanu should immediately return to the village. Bhanu declines all money offers, and leaves Mritul's residence. Police have read the school teacher's letter, and chase Bhanu, who is running along a highway. He is shot in the back, and falls below the tree, where the medal is buried. The IG police admonishes his subordinate for not following instructions of shooting on the legs. Suman Ghosh's original story and script makes the farmer Bhanu's simplicity and lack of education, an excessively tragicomic device. The funny dialogue and the comic efforts plod the script to ripples of action. The contrasts between the rural and the urban come out distinctly, along with the presence of crime and greed in all regions. Bhanu's fugitive run is tedious, and the climaxes often end in silliness and broad melodrama. While "Nobel Chor" reflects current anxieties and issues, the satire is comic but never deep. □□□