

FILM

Cinema Chronicles Events

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Alexander Shukhorov's "The Sun" (Russia, 110 mins, colour, 2005) focuses on Emperor Hirohito (Issey Ogata) on the concluding days of World War II. The breakfast table of the Emperor is elaborate. The Emperor switches off Radio Tokyo news. The schedule of the day consists of meetings with cabinet ministers, private thought, writing on what will happen if the Americans showed up, and attention to scientific biological research. The Emperor is the descendent of the Sun goddess, and is God in flesh, though without distinguishing marks on the skin. August 1945 brings advances by the allied forces. Orderlies and valets are forever present with bowed heads. But the Emperor's breath had a strong smell and bad taste. He is convinced that he is loved by his wife, elder son, and the common people. A minister informs that there is starvation in Japan, and the Japanese front is suffering defeats. The defence minister conveys news that the remaining part of the regular army is resisting the enemy, and the patriotic fervour of the troops is unprecedented.

The deceased Meiji Emperor had bequeathed peace with USA and England, but not at any price. Emperor Hirohito allows the war, like the sea, to continue to rage. All activities are conducted in underground bunkers. The Emperor is preoccupied on biology research on crabs, crab shells, and crab legs. The species had migrated from Hong Kong to Hokkaido. The Great Asian War arose as the enemy countries did not accept racial equality. Africa had to be attacked. Black and white footage portrays aerial bombing and mortar fire, with smoke and engulfing fire. Sakura flowers blossom at the culmination of spring, and fierce winds. The Emperor composes poetry, draws and browses through photo albums of Hollywood actors and actresses, family photos, and photos with heads of State.

A white ostrich prances in the garden, as US soldiers take positions. The Emperor is in custody, and driven away in a car. There is destitution by the roadside in Tokyo. The building and roads have been bombed out, the will of the Allied command prevails, and the Emperor does not ask for mercy. He discards Kimono, and wears a suit, as it is a day of disgrace and grief. He speaks to the Allied generals in English, without any interpreters. He is under ten days house arrest. The Americans ask various questions on the Emperor's children. The Emperor was in correspondence with only his eldest son. The war was lost as a result of wrong movement of troops. The Allied commanders address the Emperor as 'Majesty'. He is taken back to the palace. The men who worked for him, are under house arrest for extracting details on complicity. The Allied commanders send the Emperor packets of Hershey's almond chocolates. The Emperor studies biology and the illumination of the northern lights. American soldiers photograph the Emperor who poses with chrysanthimum flowers. General Mac Arthur (Robert Dowson) hosts a private dinner for the Emperor, with chinaware from defeated Germany. The Emperor declines the Havana cigars. General Mac Arthur informs that his father was a military attache in Tokyo, and a friend of the American ambassador. Questions are raised on Japan's alliance with Germany. The Emperor explains it was an issue connected with his own fate. When the orderlies leave, the Emperor smokes Havana. He puts off the candles on the dining table.

The Emperor's observations continue. The beasts dropped bombs on Hiroshima. The Emperor did not issue orders for Pearl Harbour. His address to the people raises cries of revenge and victory. But everyone awaited the end of the great war, and the beginning of long awaited peace. The Emperor renounces the divine nature of his origins, in the interest of dynasty, country and people. Moonlight emerges through glass windows of

the palace. The Empress (Kaori Momoi) has an audience, and the Emperor puts his head on her chest, and declares his decision to renounce. The Emperor was merely a common person, and now composing poetry. The sound engineer who had recorded the speech of renunciation had committed hara-kiri.

Sukhorov allows a green sepra to colour all the images, which are generally opaque, as in a mist. His camera is mobile, even within the restricted bunkers. The walled spaces build up the pressure on the minds of the defeated. The scenario of plan sequences allow the Japanese Emperor and the American General Mac Arthur to state their priorities.

GUANTANAMO

“The Road to Guantanamo” (UK, 91 mins, colour, 2005) is a documentary-drama on four friends, Shatiq, Ruhel, Monir and Asif, all British citizens who were imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay of Cuba. The film has a firebrigade van in flames as debut. President Bush is giving a speech, as Tony Blair looks on. The four friends were residents of the English Midlands, and were of Pakistan and Bangladesh descent. Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross trace their journey from London to Faislabad, to Guantanamo. In September 2001, the four friends arrive in Karachi, and spend four days in a village, where Asif Iqbal is to get engaged to a girl. While they halt at Binori mosque in October 2001, crowds march in Pakistan, in support of the Taliban. There are fiery speeches decrying the bombing in Afghanistan. The four friends take a bus to Afghanistan, and reach Quetta on 13 October 2001; arriving on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border on 18 October 2001. Refugees are swarming all over. At the Taliban heartland of Kandahar, it is war of artillery and aerial bombing. Photos from Al-Jazeera TV in Kabul, exhort support for Osama Bin Laden in October 2001. The US bombing raids continue attacking trenches and outposts. Bombs fall on the centre of the Afghan capital. Through night bombing, the four friends journey on trucks through Kunduz province in November 2001. The dead are buried in shallow graves. The Taliban and the bus passengers surrender to the Northern Alliance government forces.

Cash and trinkets are seized from passengers. They are tied with hands behind their backs. Thrown into a container truck, the prisoners are driven to Mazar Hamid-al-Sharif, with sporadic bullet shots on the containers. Many are dead, and those alive are pulled out. Asif suffers bullet wounds. The visitors from England are thrown into Shabergram prison, but Monir is missing. The prisoners are without food and water for days. Transferred to US custody, the prisoners are interrogated by US commanders. The detainees were meant for collecting intelligence. The three friends are locked up in a prison at Kandahar air base. They are not allowed to talk and walk.

There is a head count of prisoners every hour. They are suspected of being with Bin Laden, and are beaten up, when they fail to answer questions on the whereabouts of Bin Laden. The three friends are forced to shave off their heads, and put on a transport plane on 02 January 2002. Wearing orange jackets, masks and goggles, they arrive in Guantanamo Bay, Donald Rumsfeld insists on humane treatment. The prisoners take showers with dark glasses, and are forced to stay off fences. Nobody is permitted to stand and pray. No towels on heads, and no talking. The US commanders disbelieve the British visitors. In February 2003, at Guantanamo Bay, Asif dreams of chickens in court yards and birds in cages, he had seen in Kandahar. 106 inmates are questioned in Guantanamo Bay by the FBI and CIA. The prisoners protest when a US guard desecrates the Koran. Inmates are beaten up, and the prisoners live with rats, snakes and scorpions, in the purpose built facility at ‘Camp Delta’.

The US commanders produce photos of the four friends attending a rally in Afghanistan, addressed by Bin Laden. They deny the charges, and are put in isolation cells on 03 May 2003. The guards play loud music at night. The prisoners are chained to hooks on floors. There are flashes of rapid light at night. After three months, the friends

are cleared, and taken out of isolation. They are kept in Guantanamo Bay for another three months, with threats that their families could be deported from England. They were still not allowed to speak to lawyers and their families. The US commanders force them to sign statements of their connections with Al Qaeda. Out of initial 700 prisoners, there are still 500 prisoners, and only 10 have been charged. British Embassy officials speak to the inmates.

In March 2004, the British detainees are flown back to London by the RAF, and locked up in Paddington green prison. It was an experience that changed lives. The friends are released and fly to Pakistan in June '05, and visit village Merahurny, near Lahore in July '05, where Asif gets married. Besides the wedding, there are celebrations with friends.

“Guantanamo” has a direct style : The scenario mobilizes the logical narrative, without any pathos. The mix of reality in the form of interviews and fiction reconstituting events from the experiences of witnesses, points to world disorder, where law and savage justice are almost indistinguishable. The films were screened at the Kolkata Film Festival (Nov'06).□□□