

FILM

'RAAMI'

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Babak Shirinsefat's "Raami" (Iran-Azerbaijan, colour, 76 mins) transposes on ancient folk legend of the Azeri people, living in Iran and Azerbaijan to the post-Qarabagh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan of 1993. To the background score of string music, the camera pans over painted brocades, with a voice over retelling the tale of Karam, who is in love with a priest's daughter, Asli. Shifting to the present day, the camera focuses on Irkum's (Kamran Yunes) legs and feet, as he walks up to a tree, and paints. He meets Raami (Farhad Ghemian) in a garden. Irkum, from Jabrayil, hitches on a speeding truck, and proceeds to Iran. The truck driver has a film on ten thousand refugees who crossed the Aram river and entered Iran. Irkum watches the film on a TV video projection, with the truck driver's family. Ten years ago, Irkum had lost his family, and recognizes a girl's face in the TV film, and dreams of the real face. Irkum is from Kazakhstan, while the truck hails from Armenia. The search for wife, Raami and son in Azerbaijan has been futile for Irkum.

Old men gather over tea by the roadside. Iranians and Kazakhs are forbidden to marry Armenians. Some years ago, Irkum had decided to marry Raami, an Armenian. Helped by a friend on horseback, Irkum had escaped with his beloved, also on horseback. At Jalilabad, immediately after the wedding, Irkum is arrested from an apartment. After two days, the groom is released with another political prisoner. Raami is waiting outside the prison gates. After a year, a son is born to the couple. During the war, the Kazakh town is scorched by the Armenian army. Irkum is a doctor. Raami is looked after by Irkum's mother, and when the child is born, the on-going war forces the evacuation of the hospital. Families have been separated by the Iran-Iraq war. Similar to Irkum, the elder brother of another groom has lost track of his wife. Irkum now takes a ride in a car to the next town, Sabirabad, which is flooded with refugees. As musicians play on guitars, the war and bombings continue.

Armenians are driven out of Azerbaijan. A lame man limps with a music accordion. Soldiers and Irkum search graveyards. Houses besides a river are on fire. Irkum offers prayers and wishes to a tree. He notices a Kazakh arbor tent, with chickens and cows around. An old man recalls seeing Raami in a truck. Amidst the firing, bombings and raging forces, Raami searches for her husband amongst the dead. She walks away with the crying baby. Later she is found on the banks of the Araz. The boy survived, and was with Gazaar.

As the past is retold "Raami" becomes steeped in history and sudden flashbacks. Shirinsefat resorts to hypothetical deductions in the continuity. The rhythm of the images in the narrative offers thrills. The beauty of the film lies in the human story and the fluidity of the events, fixed in a conflict zone. In the search for a displaced family, the film retains the nuances and ambiguities, as the images proliferate. The film was screened at the Osian's Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema (New Delhi, July 07). □□□