

IFFI

Indian Panorama

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Indian panorama at the Goa International Film Festival (Dec/Nov,09) was devoted to homegrown works. The contemporary Indian films combined universal sadness and humour, with personal details of life and drama.

IJJODU

Returning to feature film making after almost twelve years, MS Sathyu builds "Ijjudu-Incompatible" (Kannada, 90 mins, colour) into a docu drama of part truth telling and part reconstructed drama. As leaves flutter in the wind before a temple, girls and boys perform ritual dances and acrobatics in the temple compound. In adoration of saint Aniruddha, musicians and dancers perform on temple roof, precincts, and compound. A camera follows the movement of hands and legs, along with close-ups on faces. The temple sculptures relate to king Hoysala dynasty and his dancer wife of 11th century AD. A bullock cart pulls beside a broken down jeep, along the village road. The bullock cart driver Srivasta (Mandya Ramesh) takes the jeep driver, Ananda (Aniruddha) to the village. The village elder, Byrappa provides shelter to Ananda, in his house. Ananda is a journalist, writing a story on the Belawadi Temple. At night the village elder's daughter, Chennai (Meera Jasmine) suddenly enters Ananda's room, and does dance poses like an enchantress. Next morning, Ananda moves around the terraces with a camera. Ananda clicks photos of enigmatic Chennai by a pond, or walking and singing along sun flower fields. Chennai accompanies Ananda to the post letter box.

A stranger, and ex-soldier, Balarama (Sathya) takes a cigarette from Ananda, and advises him to leave Chennai alone. The village was haunted, and there were fears of an epidemic outbreak. Ananda continues to take photos of Chennai, with the face on forward zooms. The photo clicks follow Chennai, dancing inside the temple. Ananda is struck by bats in a temple room, and Chennai tends to his wounds. The temple pillars do not get transferred on the computer print-outs, and Chennai explains that the temple was under goddess Mohini's influence. The jeep is repaired by the ex-soldier, Balarama, who advises Ananda to leave immediately. Flash backs relate the ex-soldier's woes. Within a month of his marriage to Kemki (Arundhati Jatkari), he was posted in the war front with Pakistan. There are docu footages of tank battles. Balarama was injured and captured by Pakistani troops. Kempi receives a letter from the Bangalore army garrison that her husband, Balarama is deemed missing. When Kempi visits the woods to collect branches and twigs, he meets a young man, Venkatesh, and intimacy develops. On insistence by village elders, Kempi marries Venkatesh. Black and white footage present the raising and lowering of flags at the Wagah border, and exchange of prisoners. On release, Balarama returns to the village, and finds his wife remarried. He drops his bag, and hurriedly leaves. Since then he was mentally unbalanced.

Chennai brings food and meals to the journalist visitor, Ananda. She strolls through fields and sings. Ananda feels it is inappropriate for Chennai to visit him at the late hours. Chennai confesses to be a 'Basavi-devdasi' temple courtesan. Seeing the cultured family,

Ananda is shocked. Ten years ago, there was an epidemic in the village, and Chennai was offered to the gods by her family. While Kempu was dauntless, Ananda backs the courage to marry Chennai. Next day Chennai is missing. Chennai's father and the villagers find Chennai's body on the banks of a pond. She died of head injuries. Ex-soldier Balarama puts a towel on Chennai's uncovered legs, and salutes. The urban god, in the shape of the photo-journalist failed to save her. Police and ambulance arrive. Officials take photos of Chennai's body. Police feel it was a case of suicide. Ananda feels guilty for the suicide. Chennai's desire for a new life was sown by the outside visitor.

Sathyu's "Ijjodu" faces hard truths with an open mind. The film is filtered through the sensibility of a social investigation. In spite of religious dances within a temple compound and temple architecture, the film steers clear of religious iconography. The journalist's photo clicks of the temple pillars and Chennai have subjective colouration. Chennai's disappointment in love and final end, fail to avoid melodrama. G S Bhaskar's camera alters angles, and thereby, avoiding the monotony of village life. □□□