

FILM

KUTTY SRANK AND JANALA

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Shaji N Karun's "Kutty Srank–Kutty boatman" (Malyalam, 2009, colour, 120 mins) follows a non-linear form, in setting relationships on a dead body. A world of dreams, with a man with crown on head and two guards besides a river, is shattered by rains and lightning. Apparently struck by lightning, a burnt boat and the dead body of Kutty (Mamooty) lie on the sea shore, washed by the waves. Revamma (Padmapriya), who claims to be Kutty's wife is in tears. The police station of 1950 is in a hut, and police constables record statements. After fourteen years of medical studies and medical practice, Revamma returns from Colombo to Kerala, in a sailing boat. The zaminder father, Moopan (Suresh) and his assistant, Kutty greet Revamma, who is dressed in white. As a child Revamma had watched her mother being killed with a sawmill blade, by her own father. The nightmare of the child's blood spattered face recurs. Indians were converting to Buddhism in Gaya. Revamma is accompanied by a Buddhist monk, Prasanna (Gaurav), who prays on a spinning wheel. Revamma does not attend a feast with dignitaries at the table, and rejects blood stained wealth. She decides to embrace Buddhism at Gaya. Under the zamindar's instructions, Kutty brutally assaults Prasanna, but the monk does not retaliate. Revamma's touch and feelings have melted with fear. There is a cut to medical school, where Prasanna had opted to be a monk. Kutty has a change of heart, and assures Revamma and Prasanna of no more harm. He arranges for Prasanna's escape in a boat, along a creek. But villagers chase Kutty and Prasanna with sticks. Prasanna is tied in a sack, and thrown to the sea. Revamma accuses Kutty of murder.

The scenario shifts to Pemanna (Kamalini Mukherjee), wife of Kutty. The 'Ballad of Emperor Carlman' is being staged on open air theatre. There are rehearsals for the play at the church festival. Love and songs adorn every step of the play, where Kutty plays emperor, and Pemanna is in the role of Angelina, directed by Loni (Suresh Kumar). Some villagers plot to drop Kutty, and give the role to Japon (Amit). There is drunken revelry before a cottage full of young nuns. Kutty denounces confessions and divine absolution. A giant cross is being raised on the church yard of Father Yonas' parish. Kutty disappears from the village, and the play stops. When Kutty reappears, the priest threatens excommunication. Japon fights with Kutty and Loni. The play revives, and in the theatrical of Paris under siege by Turks, an actor Samdar slashes, Kutty with a blade. The play's director Loni is poisoned, and Japon flees in a boat. Dark clouds hover, and a mud and thatch house collapses. Kutty leaves Cochin.

The film flows through a mixture of flash backs and present events, revealing Kutty's involvement with women, in the melodrama. Every frame is fancily composed, and shot in bright or gloomy blue-grey tone. The psychological drama is full of social comments, though the politics of Kerala in the 1950s is absent. The strident story telling is supported by Anjali Shukla's mobile camera and Isaac Thomas music. The acting is full of incisive clarity. The cross-cutting and the rapid plot developments makes the scenario spacious. But the multi-narrative strand of "Kutty Srank" leaves the story open, and the dramatic contrasts in the boatman's romantic forays remain less vivid.

JANALA

Full of intertextuality and set in Kolkata and Bankura, Buddhadev Dasgupta's "Janala—Window" (Bengali, 2009, colour, 105 mins) respects the codes of genre of dreams, brittle love and financial insecurity. Meera (Swastika Mukherjee) stares at her puffing belly, on a large mirror. A doctor's examination confirms pregnancy. Meera and Bimal (Indraneil Sengupta) are living together in an apartment. The couple wake up in embrace. On phone,

Meera's mother insists on an immediate medical termination. Meera wants to give a notice to the Marriage Registrar. Less affluent Bimal is worried about money. The young unweds have joint bank accounts. Meera is relatively affluent, working in a business processing office. Ex-athlete, Bimal works in old age home, in Purulia. They feel that married couples turn to dead fish, after six years of marriage. Meera prepares coffee. At the old age home, where Bimal is a caretaker, an old man makes cut out of girls from magazines, and pastes in a scrap book. Bimal travels in a mofussal bus, from Purulia to Kolkata. At a roadside halt, the men descend from the bus, and ease themselves in the fields, in a variety of poses. A thief (Tapas Pal) steals a bicycle, and Bimal's briefcase, full of a child's toys. There are mobile phone conversations between Bimal in Bankura, and Meera at American Airlines Travels. Sometimes Meera has to hear un-solicited advances from North America. Keeping in view forthcoming wedlock, Meera takes a big loan from her office.

Bimal takes a detour and visits his old secondary school in Nimtala. As Ganesh, the old chowkidar shows him around the empty, dilapidated school building, memories of Bimal's school days return. Reminiscences glide of a new blackboard, children clapping and shouting, a river in view from a window, translations from Bengali to English, magic shows and flying pigeons, and children fighting. Bimal promises to present the chowkidar's daughter, Maya with a pair of earrings studded with stones, on her marriage. He also assures to repair an old broken window, with a new replacement. Meanwhile, the thief steals the school bell, shoes and chappals from a district office, and a suitcase, old blankets and valuables from the old age home. The timber merchant, Pachu (Manoj Mitra) demands around Rs 22,000 for the new grill-wooden window. Bimal loses his job at the old age home for long unauthorized absence. He looks out of the school window and visualizes the sea and a room full of clocks, being the son of a clock maker. The school committee has no use for the window. Circus owners try to force an abortion on a Telegu circus trapeze girl. Local villagers attack the district health centre, following a woman's death. After paying a hefty sum to the truck driver carting the new window, Bimal discovers the thief has stolen the window, from the parked truck.

At the village market, the thief finds no buyers for the window. Meera breaks off the relationship, on discovering that Bimal has withdrawn Rs 25,000 of her own money, from the bank joint savings accounts. Villagers return home at twilight, and the new window lies below a desolate tree grove. Chirrup of birds return with dawn. Das Gupta's script scrutinizes, the many degrees of live-in companionship and impractical drift of the hero. But the hero, Bimal, is too foolish and irresponsible for words. Poised between the manic physical love, the pursuit of irrational meanderings and the sorrowful end, the script and the plot are unrealistic. In a film of few visuals flourishes, where Sunny Joseph's camera remains static in fixed frame situations, sudden urges and romantic flights remain unnecessary, without any stirring emotions. The characterizations are linked to the serial drama of stereo-types, without any climatic scenes. □□□