

The Enigma of Arrival

AHMEDE HUSSAIN

Ontorjatra (Home-Land)

Director: Tareque and Catherine Masud

Script: Tareque and Catherine Masud

Camera: Gaetane Rousseau

Editing: Catherine Masud

86 minutes; 35mm

An Audiovision production with support from the British Council

Let us go to another country...

The rest is understood

Just say the word.

--William Plomer

THE Masud duo's new film depicts a world in fragments. Using displacement as their central theme the twain attempt to depict a journey into the heart of their protagonist's forlorn past. The trick is that we are to confront two distinct levels of uprootedness. For Shireen (Sara Zaker), a mother who had fled a bad marriage 15 years ago, it is a personal, almost private, affair. Sohel (Rifaqat Rashid), her grown-up son, on the other hand, faces (or should have faced had the theme

been better-handled) a myriad of problems that is altogether different. Faced with a culture he has never been acquainted with, Sohel clings more and more onto his dead father, who, like Bangladeshi hinterland, remains to him a distant and fuzzy photograph. After more than a decade in Britain, a country he thought he belonged to, Sohel realises he does not really know who he is. While, after a theatrical confession, his mother sleeps in the bunk of a fast-moving carriage, he reflects and arrives at what many may justly find a rather hasty conclusion: That his sense of belonging is not totally lost, he is going to come back here.

One will be sorely disappointed if one tries to find a post-colonial story line in *Ontorjatra*. The dislocation of quasi-slave labourers of tea gardens is aptly put, so is the in-a-limbo situation of the "Bihari" people. Though through the song of the tea-garden-labourers the filmmakers allude to two different degrees of displacements, at the end of the day (the film ends at dawn), they are not similar in nature. It will get even more obvious if one takes class and race into consideration. This seems to elude the Masuds: we never see any one of the tea-garden-labourers in person, neither do we run into anyone who was made a refugee during the gory partition of



A scene from 'Ontorjatra'.