

the South Asian Sub-continent.

At the same time when it comes to exploring relationships, the duo fails to live up to expectations. Sohel, it seems, never finds it necessary to talk to Salma, his stepmother, about Rafiq, his father, even when his (own) mother obstinately refuses to shed any light on her (we presume) turbulent married life. The characters do not develop themselves throughout the film; all of them stand alone as inert and monolithic.

Gaetane Rousseau's camera is prosy even when the film moves onto the seductive landscape of Sylhet. One reason can be that from the beginning to end, Rousseau's camera never moves. Why is it so we do not know; if it is a part of the duo's cinematic language, then one must admit that it is spoken in a stilted, stammering voice.

Catherine Masud's editing is skilful but lacks rhythm and tempo to set the duo's Ontorjatra apart from a cluster of "alternative" films that are going to hit the theatres this summer.

In one of the early sequences when Shireen asks Lakkhan Das about past acquaintances, we get a point of view shot of Lakkhan; except for that the subalterns are destined to be subalterns; their pathos and estrangement never come into being. It is a little less than strange that in the film both the home-workers are from a religious minority. The filmmakers do not take the trouble to make this point (we assume there must be one) clear.

In another sequence the duo makes use of parallel cutting to compare and contrast the difference of alienations from which the mother and son suffer. But this leads us to nowhere. Buno and Anushey's presence in the film is pointless; equally thoughtless are the bouts of hysterical laughter that ensue at the end of their song.

The filmmakers are best at using death as a leitmotiv: at a cemetery of early British settlers in Sylhet Tareque and Catherine take on dying in one's known environs as a symbol. Death in Ontorjatra is entwined with leaving (and, perhaps, discovering) home. In another scene, using a game of snakes and ladders as their symbol, the Masuds depict an idea where home becomes one's sense of belonging, a long and ardent journey into one's soul.

But these two are lone instances where one witnesses some flickers of intelligent filmmaking in Ontorjatra. Failure will be too harsh a word to describe it, and it is lagging far behind from becoming a successful endeavour. Like both of its major characters, Ontorjatra dangles between these two. It feels like a cinema in the process of making and one expects the Masuds to take up the theme again and hope that they will handle it with care the next time round.

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