

I had been excited for “Bhoyongkor Sundor” ever since it was first announced about two years ago. That is because ever since I started working as an arts journalist, I have desperately wanted our film industry to produce ‘cinema’—stories that make you think, make you feel intense emotions, and take you to a place that lingers in your mind after you have walked out of the theatre—with some consistency. And “Bhoyongkor Sundor” promised to be one of them. With seasoned storyteller Animesh Aich at the helm and an actor of Parambrata Chattopadhyay’s calibre in the mix, “This is going to be good,” I told myself. I was not familiar with Ashna Habib Bhabna’s acting portfolio, but I kept my faith in Animesh’s acumen and prowess. For the first time in my life, I got myself a ‘first day first show’ ticket for a Bangla movie, and walked in with a tub of popcorn in my hands and anticipation in my heart.

Yet, at intermission, for the first time in my life, I seriously considered getting up and leaving from a screening—but I didn’t. I struggled, but managed to keep faith. By the end, I felt betrayed.

The plot

“Bhoyongkor Sundor”, labeled a psychological drama, follows Nayantara (Bhabna) as she leaves the comfort

highlights of the film. “Ei Shohorer Kaktao Jene Gekhhe” is another nice little injection, strengthening Chirkutt’s reputation of making good cinematic music. The theme song is not as striking, but still doesn’t have much wrong with it. The background score is also done with care—although for a psychological drama, one could say there was more scope to use music to enhance the story.

Cinematography and production design: Overall cinematography and art direction are fairly on point, as can be expected in an Animesh Aich film. Some visuals are striking, with some symbolic, surrealistic shots. In terms of aesthetics, there is not a lot to complain about.



IMAGE: COURTESY

“BHOYONGKOR SUNDOR”: A SWING AND A MISS



Screenshot from *Bhoyongkor Sundor*

PHOTO: COURTESY

and love of family and finds herself in a world she doesn’t understand. She crosses path with Muku (Parambrata) along the way, in whom she finds love and unconditional support. Muku saves Nayantara from rape and the two try to start a life that neither of them are too familiar with. Then, one fateful incident changes everything, in the progression of trauma to vengeance to obsession. The premise—based on Kolkata-based journalist and author Mati Nandy’s short story *Joler Ghurni O Bokbok Shobdo*—is plenty interesting, and in the hands of Animesh, could have soared into a truly gripping tale. Instead, it falls on its face for the most part, apart from a good 20-odd minutes in the final, and remains an undercooked story with too many flaws to look past.

The good

The support cast: The film picks out some proper actors, and gets a solid performance out of them. Faruq Ahmed, Shilpi Sarkar Opu, Syed Hasan Imam, Allen Shubhro and Khairul Alam Sabuj held their own, with a special mention to Faruq Ahmed. Parambrata, whose character does not really do justice to his artistry, is also excellent within his scope.

Scores and 75 percent of the songs: Momtaz’s “Phirbo Na Ar Ghor-e” is a haunting track that sets up the movie perfectly in its early minutes, and is one of the

The bad

Characterisation and story arc: The story’s pacing is not great. It takes too long to get rolling, and until half-time, it is so bland it can leave the audience puzzled as to where the film is going. For a 130-minute film, if the plot hasn’t thickened in the first half, it’s not a good sign. The character development of the central players seemed sloppy to me, but I will come back to that.

One terrible song: “Ami Pore Thaki” sticks out like a sore thumb in the film’s otherwise good soundtrack. Tahsan and Elita’s romantic duet is fine on its own as a song, but is a total misfit in the cinematic context, more so because of the out-of-nowhere picturisation that feels forced and unnecessary.

Disclaimer: Animesh Aich did say in a Facebook post after the film’s release that putting the song in was the only thing he regretted about the film.

The ugly

The centrepiece(s): Nayantara, who the entire film revolves around, is an epic cinematic fail. Bhabna may have had a fair amount of success on television, but a 50-foot screen is a different ballpark, and on her first outing, she is way out of her depth. Except for the last quarter (where the film actually gets somewhat intense), she is woefully unconvincing in her role, which tells me that her preparation for the role was not nearly

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sufficient. Parambrata is also somewhat wasted in a role that limits his range, possibly because his screen-time is shared by someone struggling to keep up.

Overall conviction of the story: Probably the most tragic thing about the film is Animesh’s apparent obsession to make Bhabna pop on the screen, visually. Nayantara’s costumes alone make the story more unconvincing than anything else: even while living in a slum she dresses almost exclusively in perfectly-fitted gowns (and a choker at some point!?) and impeccable eyeliner. Add to that her poor acting and the audience never really gets to believe her story. Her character is drawn in such broad strokes (or maybe she could not bring out the nuances—no way for me to know) that it’s near-impossible to be emotionally invested in her. She leaves home with a tiny backpack, but never has a shortage of swanky clothes; she has no necessary life-skills to survive on her own, and even after months of living in hardship is as oblivious as she is impervious to responsibility. The attempt to use Parambrata as the foil also makes Muku’s character one-dimensional and kind of unreasonably emasculated. Most importantly, a lot of proceedings do not seem to make logical sense and that is where “Bhoyongkor Sundor” loses its audience.

In conclusion

I spoke to Animesh Aich the day of the film’s premiere, asking about his expectations, and he said “I am prepared for good reviews, and bad,” and I thought that such a defensive attitude was strange for a director on the eve of his film’s release. Making a film is a tough job and he reportedly had to battle the elements (financial support et al) to bring this film to the screen, but none of the core problems of the film are of budget or time constraints. Had this been made by an ambitious new director, I would definitely have been more lenient in its review, but because it is Animesh Aich, I had high hopes for it. I loved his debut release, “Zero Degree”, and was hoping he one-upped it. But as a fan, I would say it is time for Aich to go back to the drawing board and contemplate what he wants his big-screen legacy to be. “Bhoyongkor Sundor” is a swing and a miss, but Animesh Aich is still a good storyteller, and I will wait for his next one, because honestly at the moment there aren’t too many directors in a position to make films that you can bank your hopes on. It was painful for me to write this review, because I had sincerely wanted it to be great.

Fahmim Ferdous is a Sub-Editor, Arts and Entertainment, *The Daily Star*.