

# OF INNOCENCE AND BEAUTY IN VOYANGKOR SUNDOR

*'Voyangkor Sundor' has been a subject of much controversial discussion since its release. Contrary to the mainstream interpretation of the film, Shahidul Mamun reviews 'Voyangkor Sundor' through its theme of innocence and beauty in a positive manner.*

Animesh Aich's film *Voyangkor Sundor* squarely handles one of life's greatest puzzles – whether beauty can survive in a world full of social barriers, human selfishness, communal crudity, and even at the loss of innocence. To me, *Voyangkor Sundor* is a love story seen through the eyes of lovers who goes to the brink of defeat and come back just in time to avoid tragedy.

The singular achievement of this film would probably be the way the character of Nayantara is introduced; enlivened, centralized, and then finally enlarged and exposed to reveal her essential self. Let me add hastily that in my perception of Nayantara I am greatly helped by Muku, the male protagonist; it is through Muku's eyes that you will see this wondrous transformation in Nayantara who escapes the ivory-tower life her father offers. Though young and untrained in understanding the materialistic world she dwells in, Nayantara is no child in her understanding that she is merely a social ladder that her father wants her to become.

*Voyangkor Sundor* uses some time-tested conventions of a budding romance between a young rebel and an unsuspecting male character who is bewitched by the femme fatale's beauty and innocence. Let's take two familiar examples: *Roman Holiday* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The fairytale-like *Roman Holiday* ends with the social order unruffled when the runaway Princess Ann returns to everyday world with her wings cropped. In Shakespeare's play, we see the innocent Juliet rebelling against a demoralizing role that she must play in a house where her father decides who she must love and how her love for a 'suitable boy' must enhance the family's social elevation. In both these films, the lovers are too green to fall victim to corrupting social order – by grudgingly accepting the society or by taking their own lives. *Voyangkor Sundor* offers a very fresh variation from these time-honored versions of romantic rebellion. Let us examine how far this ambition is realized.

The transformation of Nayantara can be traced through three 'escapes' she is forced to make. While her first escape was an act prompted by 'oviman', a sense of being psychologically hurt by her parents, her second escape is prompted by a real threat to her physical body. Her final act of 'escape' is quite different. Instead of fleeing the demon (an angry unforgiving crowd), she slowly recovers her strength, plans her 'revenge' and waits for the right moment to arrive. This is the moment when she must choose her path – either forgiving her tormentors, or by preventing her tormentors from laying hands on the



water she had collected. This part is filled with Nayantara's fantasy where she imagines herself to be the reigning deity who can save the lives of the shanty dwellers. This part of the film wonderfully hovers on elements of absurdity; at one moment even going on the verge of goriness when Muku, waking up at the dead of night to the sound of dripping water, falls into a hallucination of seeing blood coming out of the water tap.

As Nayantara survives one escape after another, she will finally escape into the

embrace of Muku who is very unlike Nayantara in terms of her social position, and her cosmopolitan sophistry built around her 'ignorance' of the material world. However, there is one thing in common between them: their innocence. For most part Nayantara is unaware of her vulnerability for being a runaway, a penniless, and a woman. Muku's innocence is made up of his sense of wonderment at her beauty. He hardly resists her approaches, and his acceptance is completely devoid of any

sensuousness. The director must have planned this part in a careful way when Nayantara reveals her sensuality in a very non self-conscious way. I am tempted to believe that whatever sensuousness I see in her body is 'my own imagination'. Do I see an element of *Lolita* in Nayantara, or as a middle-aged Humbert I only see *Lolita's* voluptuous body? Readers, to avoid such corrupting diversion, I began following Muku's eyes. My trust in Muku's subdued yet unremitting love helped me to discover Nayantara's beauty, innocence, completeness and eroticism.

*Voyangkor Sundor* is primarily a story of Nayantara and Muku who are brilliantly portrayed by a comparatively veteran Parambrata and a much younger Vabna. But it is also the story of a city that wakes up on the banks of river Buriganga, a city where the remains of an older glory is still visible through discolored facades, a city whose narrow alleyways are lined with old houses boasting vanished supremacy, a city where you can take sudden peep into the splendor of Mughal architecture from a dilapidating veranda of a cheap boarding house, a city that can still give shelter to a pair of love-struck youths who hardly understands formidable forces of conformist society. *Voyangkor Sundor* makes great use of rich character portrayals of which you will especially notice the ever-smiling and innocent Allen Subhra and the ever-grumbling but soft-at-heart rickshaw-puller stunningly performed by Khairul Alam.

In *Voyangkor Sundor*, Animesh neither presents a happy 'ever after' nor a 'tragic' finale. Animesh leaves the story at a moment when we are encouraged to take flight with our imagination and think of the days ahead when Nayantara or Muku will have to survive in a world that hardly understands unselfish love.

Going well beyond a gripping and complex story, *Voyangkor Sundor* enmeshes several other broader issues such as water crises in a megacity, marriage between two persons of different religions, demoralizing effects of generational poverty, or the emptiness of social snobbery. However, the images of love, trust, and companionship of Nayantara and Muku shall stay with you long after you have left the theatre hall. Such love can only be created by guiltless lovers. *Voyangkor Sundor* gracefully brings back this long-forgotten truth before us.

Animesh Aich, through his masterful storytelling of *Voyangkor Sundor*, has urged us to reestablish our faith in the power of unselfconscious love. It is a plea that must not go unheeded.