

MOVIES

DHET!

An unflinching examination of the absurdities of inertia


ABIR HOSSAIN

DHET! (2025) by Ummid Ashraf treads the terrains of many modern-day woes. One of the greatest attributes of the short is perhaps the many interpretations that the audience can take away from it. Whether it is the unforgiving nature of the "gig economy" that the film hints at, or the lack of empathy that an indifferent metropolis induces on its inhabitants, the film is driven by a lot of heart. It presents its audience with a fairly simple narrative plot, one that most of us who live in Dhaka are very familiar with. Yet, the twists and turns that unravel throughout its short runtime are exhilarating.

As the night marches on, the protagonist — a ride-sharing motorcyclist — attempts to get to his next passenger. From the get-go, the heaving horrors of the city rear their ugly heads at the audience. The passenger curtly reminds the driver not to bother him and to show up where he is supposed to without any further questions. The film builds on this set-up, going from zero to a hundred in a matter of minutes. Yet, it does so without missing a beat. Given its short runtime,

the short packs a lot of punch throughout the nine minutes, eventually landing the knockout blow.

Horrifying as the film may be, the heart that I refer to — although veiled — pulls the audience in. The driver knows where to go, his destination determined, and his arrival anticipated. With each turn, however, the familiar — in the guise of the alien — pops out. The driver's seemingly mundane task is marred by contradictions. His frustration is palpable, injecting a sense of delirium through each and every aspect of the film.

What stands out right as the film shifts its gears is the blaring, relentless soundtrack. With its pulsating roars, the score encapsulates the fear and exhaustion of a nightmare with no end in sight. The cinematography, on the other hand, feels like a series of shifting tides. At the emotional height of the film, the images descend into madness, multiplying in scale and horror. Despite how absolutely jarring it feels, the visual language of the film is deceptive, arranged with intent to induce the suffocation back to the audience. And

just when the time is right, it dials down the chaos momentarily, merely to slip back into it.

Even through its surreal and often dreamlike quality, *DHET!* aptly captures the darkness lingering across Dhaka at night. The exhaustion is etched to your bones, yet respite remains evasive. This is best portrayed through Ahsabul Yamin Riad's performance, who is both lulled to sleep by the city's cruelty and jolted awake by its chaos.

At its core, the short is a raw and gripping look at how absolutely nauseating and claustrophobic this place feels. It is a subtle nod to the mundane things that drag us forward. Despite our collective apathy towards it, we are thrown into a daze when we are unable to break free from it. It is precisely these contradictions that the film teeters around with a lot of clarity. *DHET!* doesn't attempt to make sense or even contrive meaning from it. It simply lets the feeling fester, unravelling the horrors that manifest when all that we do with it is restrain it.

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