

Critique

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Niraye Thathakalulla Maram



The Tree Full of Parrots (2021, India, Malayalam, 2021) by Jayaraj

As an art form, cinema is important in India as more than 1000 films are made annually. Indian cinema is one of those rare national cinemas which has challenged the hegemony of Hollywood. Cinema as an industry gives various indigenous film industries numerous opportunities to make films that truly reflect the culture and traditions of one particular state. Kerala is one such state in India with the highest literacy rate where cinéphiles get numerous opportunities to appreciate and enjoy both art cinema (serious cinema with a meaningful story) and commercial films (frivolous films with ample action sequences,

dances and songs). After ‘Maharashtra’ and ‘West Bengal’, Kerala is the third state in India which has struck a healthy balance between commercial and art cinemas.

Among the currently active filmmakers in Kerala, Jayaraj is considered a highly respectable figure. He is admired by critics as well as the general public. He is one of those rare directors whose films have been included more than ten times in the Indian panorama section of the International Film Festival of India; a FIAPF accredited film festival. Jayaraj’s films are known for their inventiveness and judicious choice of subject

matters. Malayalam film ‘Hasyam’ (2021) was the last film of the famous Navarasa (nine emotions) series directed by Jayaraj. It was well received by film festival enthusiasts and cinéphiles from India and abroad. However, most intelligent filmmakers have always ensured that their loyal admirers shouldn’t be allowed to wait a long for new films as they feared they might switch sides from one camp to another. Keeping this adage in mind, Mr Jayaraj quickly arrived on the scene with a new film “Niraye Thathakalulla Maram” (2021) [“The Tree full of parrots”]. It can be described as a genuine relationship drama involving two people from different backgrounds whose primary concern is respect for humanity. It also explores the bonding reinforced when a young boy fortuitously rescues a blind old man.



“The Tree full of Parrots” begins with Poonjan, an eight-year-old boy who supports his family by fishing in the backwaters. One day, he rescues a lost blind man from falling into a hole near the boat jetty. The young boy Poonjan decides to help the old man, but he can’t make substantial progress as the old man doesn’t remember anything about his home address. He merely repeats that his house is opposite a ‘tree full of parrots’. This isn’t a proper landmark for anybody to have a definite idea about the house’s location. However, it is often said that where there is a will, there is a way. Poonjan has a strong will and uses all his energy and wit to unite the blind old man with his family. However, things are not as easy as they appear on the surface. In the end, Poonjan and the old man are able to locate the house in question, albeit with unexpected results.

Concern for family, a major theme in almost all the films directed by Jayaraj, is also very much evident in “The Tree full of Parrots”. Poonjan has to look after his drunk father, and the old man is being looked after rather unwillingly by his son and daughter-in-law. In recent times, the phenomenon of elderly parents being abandoned by their selfish young children has reached epic proportions. It wouldn’t be wrong to state that the entire Indian nation is under its pernicious influence. This negative tendency in Kerala has been subtly depicted by Mr Jayaraj as the old man’s son and daughter-in-law abandoning him as his house has been sold to some rich people from Bangalore. With the house being sold, the woman asks her husband to abandon his blind father so that he should never return to disturb their newfound

tranquillity, and shoddy happiness is achieved using evil means.

Just like the great master of ‘world cinema’ Mr Abbas Kiarostami from Iran, Mr Jayaraj is also very resourceful in working with non-professionals. He states that while shooting ‘The Tree full of parrots’, no attempt was made from his side neither to guide nor to control both actors, Master Adithyan (Poonjan) and Narayanan Cheupuzha (old man). They simply received dialogues from Mr Jayaraj and what followed was their fecund imagination followed, making this film a poignant saga of survival in a cruel world. Although it is not a preachy film, ‘The Tree full of parrots’ carries a positive message for audiences who watch it. It reminds people that life is full of unexpected surprises, and it is only those who believe in human beings, especially in their quality of doing good deeds are amply rewarded.

As far as cinema is concerned, the success of many films is hindered due to the weak middle segment. Fortunately, this is not the case with this film, as Mr Jayaraj has made the middle segment pretty strong by adding a lot of humour and suspense. For instance, one of the minor actors mocks China and its gift of Covid-19 exported all over the world by stating that it would solely affect Chinese people as they can eat anything. The suspense element has been highlighted by showing how the young boy and the old man are lost deep in the water as their boat has run out of petrol.

Compassion is the overarching principle that drives ‘The Tree full of parrots’.

Only compassion improves the old man’s wellness due to his meaningful interactions with the young boy. It pushes him to address all the cruelty and indifference that he witnesses. It also makes him bold as he decides to rescue the old man from the clutches of his evil son and daughter-in-law. While talking to media persons during a PIB interaction held in Panaji during the 52nd International Film of India 2021, director Jayaraj described his film “‘The Tree full of parrots’” as a film about compassion which is vanishing from society. After its world premiere at the 52nd International Film Festival of India 2021, which was part of the ‘Indian Panorama’ section, this film was shown at the International Film Festival of Kerala IFFK 2022, Imagine India International Film Festival 2022, held in Madrid, Spain. After enchanting cinéphiles in Spain, Mr Jayaraj will head to Cannes as six regional films from India will be the focus of the 75th Cannes Film Festival 2022. “‘The Tree full of parrots’” is one of the six films chosen by the Indian ministry of information and broadcasting for screening at the Cannes Film Market 2022. ‘The Tree full of parrots’ was screened in Cannes on 22.05.2022 as part of the Marché du Film segment. Hopefully, many more countries will well receive the universal message of compassion conveyed in this film. ‘The Tree full of parrots’ has already won accolades. It deserves to win many more awards and is appreciated by discerning cinéphiles and cinema enthusiasts worldwide.