

Critique

Pradip Biswas

Fallen Leaves: Aki Kaurismaki's Mocking Comedy



Aki Kaurismaki is a Finnish filmmaker and is famous for making films for the have-nots, downtrodden, homeless and proletariat class; his métier and passion for making such films on the class-based aristocrats and their society is a tenacious and plangent protest he portrayed with mockery; so long he has maintained the trend powerful and made him a social enemy of the bizarre streak.

Kaurismaki, for the first time, seems to have deviated from his angular stream of thoughts; his 26th film, *Fallen Leaves*, has his pet tendency mixed with mockery and comedy with a bizarre blend of cinematically restricted manner. He is making a pretty stylised testament in a beautiful, wryly funny, and poignant mix.

Aki's stance of making a mockery of the plutocrats is very much transparent in *Fallen Leaves*; this year, Aki Kaurismaki hit the bull's eye at the

Cannes Film Festival, winning him the Golden Palm, the rarest of a rarity for Aki. Incredibly, he won the Palme d'Or with 2011's equally great *Le Havre*, making him an object of wonder and pity. The brothers Aki and Mika Kaurismaki track the same line of thoughts, though quite differently and with various nuances. films

Despite several Eumenical prizes at the fest over the years, Kaurismaki only came close to the Palme with 2002's *The Man Without a Past*, which also put him- and Finland – in the running for the Foreign Language Oscar; it is argued that If there is any justice, *Fallen Leaves* will bring the filmmaker, responsible with his brother for most of the country's cinematic success in the past four decades, the kind of recognition he deserves. He is a true gem, and for the first time this year, we have heard applause at the

end from the usually stone-faced press who attend the early morning pre-premiere screenings at the Palais.

Aki Kaurismäki, no doubt, has made *Fallen Leaves*, a deeply engaging film from one of the great humanist filmmakers; it is about two lonely people, their chance meeting, and the star-crossed relationship that follows. As always, the plot goes through meandering ways as Alma Poysti portrays Ansa, a middle-aged single woman who seems to go from one dead-end job to another. This is not new jiggery-pockery for us or the director. In *A Man Without Past*, the protagonist is seen juggling with loss and gaining of memory, making the character a subject of pity. Along with it, we, too, tread the path to look at ourselves and feel that society has put us under the hegemony of power brokers. The film is powerful, where the protagonist in every sequence does things opposite to what is to be done. Sans memory, we are nothing.

Says critic Owen Gliberman: “Their predicament is humane and inviting, and *Fallen Leaves*, like every Kaurismäki movie I’ve seen, from “*Shadows in Paradise*” (1986) to “*The Match Factory Girl*” (1990) to his last film “*The Other Side of Hope*” (2017), has a scruffy appeal.” Each of the aforementioned films has another side of the coin; in each film, the exploitation of plutocrats is apparent. The girl in *The Match Factory Girl* is dragged through labour exploitation, poor payment and inhuman kicking out. *Other Side of Hope* has an equal amount of crazy misconducts, and conflicts between characters take the upper hand; hope is distant from being achieved and understanding of self is strongly stressed.

Interestingly, There are a couple of rock ‘n’ roll interludes at the bar, and these scenes do a mocking job of breaking up the gumdrop fatalism. Yet I’d be lying if one didn’t say that cinephiles are a bit baffled by the critical rapture that has greeted *Fallen Leaves* at Cannes. One critic goes to the extent of saying, “It’s a nice but exceedingly minor movie. It leaves little imprint.” I have an objection as the same critic lacks the motivation to prod film lovers. What people are loving, I trust, is the nostalgia that’s now built into Aki Kaurismäki’s small work but a big challenge. In the age of fragmentation, his films that

have never changed are said to be like time-machine trips back to the quirky gusto of the ’90s, when even an indie trifle dipped in Nordic despair could ripple underneath it all, with optimism.

The narrative is that we first saw her as a supermarket clerk, expressionless, heading home to another stale pre-cooked dinner she just tossed in the garbage. She has some friends at work, mainly Liisa (Nuppu Koivu), but that is about it. Cut to Holappa (his last name), played by Jussi Vatanen. Every sequence is punched with humour, pitiful mockery, laughter, and a crazy halo. We are stricken with sorrow and hack memory play. Many followers of Aki Kaurismäki have a bit grouched against the short duration of his films; they forget thematic treatment banks on the size of the plot. If a plot is short based on bits of seen reality, it cannot be tenaciously elongated or dragged out of shape, like a rubber. In that case, the film is likely diluted and diffuse; no international viewer would like to appreciate this schematic device.

If we look at the band of films of both Kaurismäki Brothers, we find both cut coats according to available cloth. Here, we have to remember the saying of maestro director Robert Bresson, who said: “Art lies in suggestion.” How, truthfully, can the minute meaning be kept in the aesthetic expression? A film, despite its schematic options, Aki Kaurismäki never exploited the contrived corridor, for it mars the intensity of feel and illumination. In the ultimate analysis, a film has to appeal to the minds of the viewers and critics who look for the kernel of the truth and meaning spread in the body of the film. Purity is something that makes the art of the film tauter and more convincing. Godar, for example, with non-narrative, could make a movie big and small; he found his form unavailable with his contemporary directors. Similarly, Finnish directors such as Aki or Mika never indulge in blowing up the given reality that looks ludic and kitschy. Aki Kaurismäki believed that all art at the bottom is communication. And it is beyond polemics of any kind.

Says Peter Bradshaw: “Aki Kaurismäki is the Finnish director who is notable for being not simply one of the directors who is always welcome in the

Cannes competition, but also is one of the rarer subset who makes funny films; that is, actually funny and not just arthouse-funny.” Peter is a little befuddled to read Aki in a mood that is so special to the Kaurismaki brothers.

It narrates how the protagonist works a construction job, basically keeps to himself in a ring but drinks heavily. His friend, Huotari, is livelier and, at over 50, seriously in denial about his age, and he tries to get him interested in going out to a Karaoke bar. Still, he drolly replies, “tough guys don’t sing”. This ploy is kept as a contrast of comedy; He goes anyway, and we hear Huotari in all his patterned glory there.

Aki Kaurismaki is an un-putdownable artist and a filmmaker who loves his fate to be manipulated by the great power that is. *Fallen Leaves* may not go dry so long the work keeps its vibrancy.

FILMOGRAPHY AT A GLANCE

Fallen Leaves (2023)
Night on Earth (1991)
Le Havre (2011)
The Man Without a Past (2002)
To Each His Own Cinema (2007)
The Match Factory Girl (1990)
Not Rated | 69 min | Comedy, Crime, Drama
The Other Side of Hope (2017)
L.A. Without a Map (1998)
Leningrad Cowboys Go America (1989)
Whisky (2004)
Shadows in Paradise (1986)
The Bohemian Life (1992)
Ariel (1988)
Drifting Clouds (1996)
Lights in the Dusk (2006)
Crime and Punishment (1983)

Mr. Pradip Biswas is a Member of FIPRESCI-India, based in Kolkata.