

Interview with Shokir Kholikov

Pradip Biswas

**Happiness is The Little Thing**  
*Shokir Kholikov*



*Uzbekistan director Shokir Kholikov presented his 1st film Sunday at 28<sup>th</sup> IFFK, Kerala. He is the first Uzbekistan filmmaker to have won the Silver Chakram award as the best director in the competition section. This critic met him and spent some days with Kholikov for an intimate interview for FIPRESCI.*

PRADIP BISWAS: How is your experience at the 28<sup>th</sup> IFFK, Kerala, a new city to you, absorbed in film culture in God's Own Country!!

SHOKIR KHOLIKOV: It feels wonderful and the genuine enthusiasm of *cinephiles* makes a sense in that films are taken for so seriously here. Such scenario in massive scale is not seen anywhere I have gone into.

Q: It seems from your making of the film Sunday that Uzbekistan cannot allow it in

material luxury. You could see the characters in the films are very down to earth and live a bare life. Our rural people are in a poor and lead a grey, grimy and restricted life.

A: The narrative is delineated in gloomy state of air; only two characters are struggling for a minimal life in cold zone marked by dearth many essential things.

Q: Plot line looks simple and uneventful on surface.

A: An elderly couple is living a peaceful life in a quiet Uzbek village. They have two sons,

one who lives next door and the other who works abroad.

One day, their tranquil life is disrupted when the sons start replacing old items in their house with new ones. The sons have a bigger plan, which is to demolish their parents' old house and build a new one in its place, where the youngest son can live after getting married.

Q: How do you build up the plot line is interesting in a limited parameter??

A: The environment is the bleak, barren and cold mountains of rural Uzbekistan. The house is very old, walls in desperate need of a peel of paint, however spacious and clean. A man (Abdurakhmon Yusufaliev) and his wife (Roza Piyazova), both around 80 years of age, are the lone inhabitants of this self-contained yet entirely satisfactory environment. There is not one little thing that they would change; this is why I made it so close to reality that life is.

Q: While watching the film, one feels at times claustrophobic as there is little external movement in the film. I personally feel quite drawn to rural fringe of Uzbekistan of which is very little known to us. Two characters work out everything in silence and there very little sound in running frames.

A: At times, inner space is disturbed by a singular grotesque appearance of a son who wants to sell the oldish cottage for bigger future. It is a pointer to generation gap and absence of human sympathy? It is clear the old couple likes to cling to what they have; they never want any larger change In their ancestral small home. They take it to be their selves and the pulsation they enjoy with good breath.

Q: Is it the overall picture of rural fringes in Uzbekistan? If so the larger site of the villages is almost the same; there is little relief for scaling to better life than what we perceive in the film?

A: The routine of the elderly couple consists of milking the cows, collecting water from the local stream, and weaving the wool into colourful carpets, assisted by a large handloom outdoors. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Sunday are more or less the same day. They unwind by lying next to each other in bed or underneath the starry sky, on top of blankets and sheets presumably woven with their own hands. Our villages lie in mountains and its heaps of snow; very cold, very dark and frozen. Life pulsates in such contrasting land full of despairs and broken hopes.

Q: Why name Sunday is chosen? Is there any special connotation? If so how do you expound it?

A: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Sunday are more or less the same day. They unwind by lying next to each other in bed or underneath the starry sky, on top of blankets and sheets presumably woven with their own hands. Since there is no variety in the old couple's life, they believe in what they do, eat or live in a bizarre way and this is real, original life style in Uzbek village after village. Urban pollution often though invades into their poor but self-stylised life.

Q: May I draw a reference to your 16 minute documentary called 'Tea'? The short film has an identical visual structure akin to Sunday, the feature film! Interior is same cold, dreary, dank and grey: The solo old man, shaken in severe cold, longs for more tea to warm him up; end part is interesting in that he finally

reached the tea pot kept on self and gives it over to small child who is so thirsty!!

A: Thanks for the reference; yes, the documentary shows need of others even when caught up in self. I want to show how in absolute need though lonely, left out, careless ambience can transform self interest to catholic sharing.

Q: What about the financial aid to filmmaker of Uzbekistan? Is it easily available? Or how do you go about making films alive?

A: As such we do not have easy access to making films of our own kind. The ministry or dept. of finance as such is not very eager to provide substantial financial help to filmmakers like us who live in villages. According to the Decree of the President of Uzbekistan, a Center for the Development of National Cinematography will be created in the country. This is a non-governmental non-profit organization founded by the Agency for the Development of Cinematography and the Union of representatives of the film industry of Uzbekistan.

Q: What about finance for making films like what you like to make?

A: Uzbekistan has adopted a new regulation on the allocation of grants and other financial resources to support the production of historical films.

This regulation concerns the procedure for allocating subsidies from the non-Budgetary Fund for supporting the tourism sector, for

PS: *SUNDAY* WAS ADJUDGED THE BEST FILM AT SANGHAI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

allocating grants to finance the filming of full-length feature films, short films, chronicle documentaries about historical and legendary figures of Uzbekistan, as well as to cover the costs of organizing karaoke halls and tourist and entertainment events.

Q: The camerawork is almost entirely static, tuned to the film's slow and meditative pace. We are invited to spend nearly 100 minutes of our time in the company of two people in the twilight of their lives. In order to do so we must adapt to their quiet and languid ways. There is no rush to get anywhere. The film space is itself self-explicit and good to sensibility.

A: Thanks for comments; these encourage young directors like us. I believe in exploring village life that forms 70% of Uzbek.

Q: This is a film, it is said, about finding beauty and satisfaction in the most trivial and mundane events, and not dissimilar to Wim Wenders's *Perfect Days*, which premiered earlier this year in Cannes

A: Consciously I am not aware of the film mentioned by you; maybe it is there but my life has nothing to do with Wim Wender.

Q: In fine, *Sunday* is a film of celebration of life, I think so.

A: Right you are. This is not a gloomy film about the pains of old age. This is a film about lifelong devotion and love. Sentiments that refuse to die and are firmly etched upon each object and each wall of this rural residence.

**Mr. Pradip Biswas is a Member of FIPRESCI-India.**