

Critique

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Remembrance of Things Past



“Nostalgia is meant to give rise to an emotional connection between artist and consumer. The art itself being the canvas on which this connection can be heightened and explored. Sometimes, an artist will use traditional motifs and themes, as opposed to reinterpreted characters and stories, to communicate a sense of ease and familiarity.” Mike Burdge, Editor-in-chief Founder - Story Screen.

The great art of films does not consist of descriptive movement of face and body but in the movements of thought and soul transmitted in a kind of intense isolation. American actress Louise Brooks

Aachar and Co may have become much-needed ambrosia for audiences thirsting for a decent outing at the theatres. Especially at a time wherein grim and gory, mindless machismo displaying, big-ticket films ruled the roost. Not to forget other woefully distasteful productions that saw avowed

audiences pray for meaningful films so families could be entertained without blues and blushes.

In this regard, one can concede that *Aachar and Co* was a welcome autumnal breeze on the Sandalwood horizon. It was written, scripted, directed besides playing the

lead, by the director herself, in her debutant foray, a happy augury. That young and aspiring Sindhu Srinivasa Murthy joins the scroll of women directors of Kannada filmdom, showing pluck and promise, making it a blissful blessing.

However, be that as it may. One ruefully has to admit that the film, despite its charm offensive to covet audiences on a nostalgic trip down memory lane, turns out a rather disbelievably insufferable and insipid affair.



It is understandable, with an eye on box office registers, Sindhu Srinivasa Murthy & Co sought to cash in on the old-world charm of invoking the yesteryear period – 1960s-70s – for their unabashed, unsullied laughter evoking comedic narrative.

Unfortunately, this approach becomes the film's undoing, weighing rather heavily and turning it into a derisive, lampooning, and ridiculously frivolous cinema, much to one's chagrin.

Visibly lacking a refined, sensible and subtle ode to the bygone aeon, the film is a dreary, desultory exercise in milking nostalgia for its emotive quotient rather than drawing audiences to an eclectic engagement with the movies.

Aachar & Co cajoles audiences to a colourful kaleidoscopic canvas and joins in on

a much-romanticised reminiscence trip while vividly recreating the quintessential character of the old City of cosmopolitan Bangalore.

The film tells the tale of domineering and disciplinarian no-nonsense, hide-bound patriarch Madhusudhan Aachar, a civil engineer, his brood of ten clucking children and a docile and dutiful wife. Ashok, playing the starched stiff patriarch, never really gets into the skin and psyche of the character.

Madhusudan is just incidental to pummel the plot to the film's more prominent theme concerning Suma. A 10th fail, Suma's singular mission in life is blissful matrimony, ever hallucinating of hitching herself to someone settled in London, even as spinsterhood starkly stares at her.

She is the butt of everyday conversation, especially so with the BBC of the town, who lose no occasion to prop her still single status in the most acerbic manner even as age is fast catching up with Suma, who sanguinely harbours hope her day and a man would arrive very soon.

The BBC being the tittle tattle trio Bharathi, Bhagyarathi and Chandravathi the gatecrashing gossips marking their presence on every occasion, spouting whirlpool of wisdom.

Played by director Sindhu herself, while Suma's overarching desire to fly away from the constricted confines of her resident's heavy homestead can be empathised with, it is her antics to achieve her ambition which does not gel well to have one rooting for her.

For, apart from the perfunctory plotline of how each of Madhusudhan's brood fails to live up to their fussy father's traditional expectations, at hand, the film, however, lacks the necessary emotional heft and engaging

connect to ensure audiences are actively invested in the plodding proceedings. The goings-on just about evoke guffaws as with a sitcom rather than seriously soaking in the narrative.

The film rarely treads beyond the comfort zone of capturing the familiar peculiarities and peeves of the various members of the Aachar household. Each individual's personal aspiration and obsession to rise above their current situation and station in life, be it education, personal interests, job or even matrimonial dreams.

Every frame of the film tries to tease out as much mindless mirth in the goings-on between the panoply of characters of the large family that constitutes Aachar and Co. Their quirks, quibbles and idiosyncrasies, notwithstanding, the facetious film is rendered into a discomfiting and disquiet affair to indulgently wallow in.

Instead of an enterprising ensemble that dissects and deliberates on the age gone by, providing a reflective mirror on how traditions and social etiquettes had a deleterious effect on the young ones in discipline-driven patriarchal households of the past, with men and women strenuously striving to conform to traditional expectations, the filmmaker rather lampoons these very aspects to keep audiences' rib tickling non-stop at the awkwardness of Aachar household inhabitants.

Of course, Sindhu Srinivasa Murthy makes sure she knits and knots all the pertinent social maladies into the family drama of Aachar, as well as the modern social tropes, to make a plausible case for her film.

Be it the domestic violence, the patriarchal hegemony and harassment, the

winds of change concerning gender roles and women empowerment, women entrepreneurship, and last but not least, women's education, ticking all the right boxes.

Sadly, every character in the film comes across merely as a cardboard cartoonish caricature with nothing natural or realistic about them. The dialogues and dealings among the family are cocky and crass, simply playing to the gallery. All that Sindhu Srinivasa Murthy does and delivers, with her express intent and sassy approach to making Aachar and Co. an affable affair for audiences, is turn it into a reprehensively mindless malarkey.



Where the filmmaker's fault is her overt enthusiasm to have her audiences glued to the diurnal drama with the stock comedic interludes and interplay among the household inhabitants and people that populate the external habitat.

But for fleeting glimpses into the capital city of the times, the filmmaker rarely tries to push the envelope and tread beyond her comfort universe, given that she is invoking her own experiences of the past in the film.

Laudable though for institutively bringing into play the political changes that

are taking place across the State and national landscape of the period, one only wishes the young Sindhu Srinivasa Murthy had also paid attention and detail to script and the narrative in tune with today's times that unfolds nonchalantly.

Suppose the film still draws attention, despite its obvious faultiness. In that case, thanks to the set and art design by Vishwas Kashyap, costuming by Inchara Suresh, cinematography by Abhimanya Sadanandan, and an equally fetching music score by Bindumalini. They add lustre to embellish the otherwise trite and tiresome tale of an era buried in the sands of time and mind's recess.

In essence, if as much thought and effort were exercised into the script and narrative as has been meticulously done for the film's mise en scene, Sindhu Srinivasa Murthy would have had a worthy, winsome winner in her hand. Still, young Sindhu can take a bow for the tangy pickle she whips up with *Aachar and Co.*

I leave with this quote by Canadian director Jason Reitman in my summation of *Aachar and Co.: Filmmaking is a completely imperfect art form that takes years, and over those years, the movie tells you what it is. Mistakes happen, accidents happen, and truly great films result from those mistakes and the directors' decisions during those moments.*

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