

Critique

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Evil Does Not Exist: Hamaguchi's Ecological Work

Evil Does Not Exist, directed by Ryusuke Hamaguchi, was adjudged the best film at the 28th IFFK, Kerala; Hamaguchi was present to receive the prestigious Golden Chakoram award. He was given a large-scale ovation by the Directorate of Festival as well as the three thousand cinephiles: hand-clapping was a sight to note. His previous film is *'Drive My Car'*; it is said in 2021, Japanese filmmaker Ryusuke Hamaguchi made one of that year's most well-received, exciting movies in *Drive My Car*, a three-hour drama that wove together a story from Haruki Murakami's *Men Without Women* and Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* with enrapturing results.

Evil Does Not Exist won a jury prize at the Venice Film Festival. The film is 105 minutes long and does not bother the cinephiles. Those who know that cinema moves with images and natural sounds must share Hamaguchi's illumination of exploration as to how invasion by multi-corporate bodies can be averted.

The film starts with a 9-minute cinematic silence, in which no word or sound, natural or otherwise, is used. It is unique in that film lovers initially become restless about what is happening!!! Film frames move, display, and sustain marvellous silence not often seen in recent films from any country.

Said Hamaguch: "It is deliberately done to reflect how our rural nature looks like and behaves. This silence is a part of the interplay of nature and the natural ambience of which we are ignorant." *Evil Does Not Exist*, in many a way, is very reflective of profound understanding and grace.

Evil Does Not Exist narrates how life is simple in a small Japanese village. Widowed Takumi (Hitoshi Omika) resides with his young daughter Hana, Ryo Nishikawa, responsible for a few of the film's most delightful moments, living off the land and doing odd jobs for his fellow community members. He is seen trekking through the forest, chopping wood, and collecting stream water for a

local udon joint. Takumi frequently forgets to pick Hana up from school, but there's hardly any worry from her teacher—it's peaceful and idyllic enough here that everyone knows she'll be fine.

This perfect and solemn existence gets interrupted, though, as a talent agency barges into town to make a kill on some leftover pandemic subsidies and build up a glamping site for city-dwelling tourists. The evil of the official part of the Govt. attempts to grab vast rural fields steeped in nature. The company sends a pair of clueless reps, Ryuji Kosaka and Ayaka Shibutani, who strive to use dark passages and contrived corridors to any cost to occupy vast natural god-given peaceful space miles long that are no match for the residents who are protective over their pristine land and resources. After getting sufficiently dressed down in the film's most thrilling, effective sequence, the representatives decide to win the townspeople's trust by following Takumi on his odd jobs and recruiting him for their own mercenary project.

It, at times, shows how the story moves slowly and measured; there's not much going on plot-wise fragments: it is almost linear to the extent the film can sustain musical sanity. It's very poetic, lyrical and imagery-heavy. It is also metaphor-laden as the salt-of-the-earth types challenge the big city mercenary agency reps, the motive of which is financial profits. Hamaguchi brings into Quora stark contrasts and conflicts made to hone the sharpness of Takumi's perceptions. There are lots of confabs and insinuations about how capitalism is inherently damaging and how shallow modern entertainment has made us glaikits. It also displays how fulfilling living with nature can be.

Evil Does Not Exist is all about our increasingly threatened existence, taking aim at it on a small, local scale with universal truths. At first glance, this seems a cut-and-dried case of a story about corporate capitalism despoiling the environment: Takumi, played by acting newcomer Hitoshi Omika, a former AD in Hamaguchi's previous films, lives with his young daughter Hana in

a beautifully unspoiled village – almost like a figure in a folk tale. This idyllic spot, with a deer trail, is a short drive outside Tokyo: Takumi apparently makes a living chopping wood and gathering clear water from a stream in billy cans for a local noodle restaurant for whom this is an essential ingredient, far superior to mere tap water. Inevitably, this paradise can't last: Takumi is already slightly uneasy at the gunshot sounds of people hunting nearby, and for all that he is a devoted father, he has a bad habit of forgetting to pick Hana up from school.

It is pleasant to see the agency reps so willing to adapt to the way of life. Their company seems equipped and determined to destroy the country's natural and valuable productive space. Individual empathy overpowers corporate demands prodded by Takumi, and all may work out for the humble village. This goes on until a conflicting coda that all but guarantees the opposite. The coda part serves as a sharp contrast to the rest of the fairly plodding film, a would-be shock to the system that confuses more than it concludes.

Peter Bradshaw says: “Ryu Hamaguchi's quietist, enigmatic eco-parable ‘Evil Does Not Exist’ refuses easy explanations, and perhaps it also refuses difficult explanations. It's a complex drama, a realist film teetering on the edge of the uncanny, whose very title points the way towards the idea that there are shades of grey in every judgment we make.” He is partly wrong in saying the film is “opaque and contrived”.

The messaging resonates, and Hamaguchi brings good points into play. While *Drive My Car* grabs your attention for 179 minutes, *Evil Does Not Exist* is a pointer to what a good, helpful film can be. Lyrical moments of beauty and simplicity are sure to sustain a humanistic feature. However, a non-sensitive critic comments: “A movie filled with murky metaphors”. This critic feels that this is just a reed-herring and nothing else.

PS: Ecological balance is the real need of hours.