

Critique

M K Raghavendra

***Dushor*: An Experimental Film by Purandar Chaudhuri**

Experimental films in India tend to make too many demands upon the patience of their audiences. With a handful of exceptions, such as the films of Mani Kaul, one does not usually associate visual beauty with them. Purandar Chaudhuri is into business administration, but cinema has been his first love, and *Dushor*, which marks his first attempt at feature filmmaking, is a visual and aural treat. The film runs for about an hour, and one does not know if it can be released as a feature film, but it certainly deserves to be seen, especially by those with some exposure to Satyajit Ray and Bengali cinema.

The film is, broadly speaking, a kind of travelogue filmed in black and white and begins with a quote from Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's *Aparajito* dealing with Apu. Satyajit Ray filmed this part of Apu's life as *Apur Sansar* (1959), the part dealing with his wanderings after the death of his young wife

in childbirth. Chaudhuri's unnamed protagonist is hardly fully shown, and the film is more preoccupied with the places he wanders into. As may be anticipated, it begins in Varanasi since the city played an essential part in the life of Apu's child (his father dies there in Ray's *Aparajito*, 1956). The film is in several parts, each preceded by a title, and the Varanasi segment is entitled "The River". At first glance, the film seems only to take in the places: the ghats and alleys in Varanasi and parts of Lucknow. But gradually, we begin to catch on to the film's sensual design and the mood it is trying to impose. The first segments use the sarangi as background music, and there are segments dealing with memories of the Mutiny in a dilapidated structure, perhaps once sheltering Britishers. There is a segment about Awadhi food and its flavours and fragrances. The tone maintained is melancholy. There is, for instance, a

segment set in Lucknow that deals with the ritual Shia lament over Karbala, and a musician demonstrates how it should be sung without accompanying instruments but a drone of human voices as the appropriate background for mourning.



There are conversations in one or two scenes, but Chaudhuri's nameless protagonist only listens. This is not a traveller seeking out new places but someone wandering around places where he has been before. Perhaps he has heard all this earlier or knows about the sites he is visiting. Everything in the film implies the passing of time and change, and no place remains the same; it transforms from moment to moment. This leaves us wondering about the filmmaker's intent. The film's title (meaning 'Grey') does not yield too much but could imply the fleeting, undifferentiated landscape seen on a journey. Often, places merge, and one finds one's memories hopelessly jumbled. Apu, we recollect, wandered but neglected his responsibilities in the process. We can even see his actions after the death of his wife Aparna as mirroring his

ineffectual father since Harihar also wandered from place to place when he was beset by the problem of having to provide for his family. My reading of *Apur Sansar* deals with Apu finally realising that he cannot become like Harihar. The film's last part is shot once again in Benares but indoors, with only views from the windows of parts of the city. This may be like someone returning rather than moving on.

Dushor is not a film that spells out its meaning but creates the mood that I have tried to evoke in this brief account. It is hauntingly beautiful to look at and hear, but one wonders its future as a visual commodity in the marketplace. But if exhibited to the right audience, it can set a huge amount of reflection and reverie for the passing of time.

Credits:

Cinematography: Sachin

Editing: Prakash Braggs

Sound Design: Prabhat Shetty

Traveller: Chiraag Paul

Music: Askari Naqvi - Vocals

Music: Michal Krupa - Piano, Prakash

Kallaremane - Flute, Sarafraz Khan - Esraaj

Story, Direction, Screenplay - Purandar

Chaudhuri

Produced by Purandar Chaudhuri & Sai

Media

M K Raghavendra is a member of FIPRESCI-India.