

Critique

Latika Padgaonkar

Murders Too Close, Love Too Far



Murders Too Close, Love Too Far: Dan Wolman & Manju Borah

A first-time Assamese-Israeli co-production, and yes, a crime thriller, had its world premier at the Pune International Film Festival in January 2026. *Murders Too Close - Love Too Far* left the viewer guessing and on his toes till the very end.

Co-scripted and co-directed by two multiple award-winning filmmakers – Dan Wolman (Israel) and Manju Borah (Assam), *Murders Too Close...* interlaces the dark and gloomy aspects of life with the kind-hearted and the humane. The story is complex,

involving characters of clean intent - the protagonist Ram Chaudhary, an ATS officer and his colleagues on the one hand - and those whose hands are dipped in corruption, lies and sexual violence on the other.

But this thriller comes with a difference: underneath the narrative lies a cognitive viewpoint: the difference between the behavior of a man when he is alone, and his conduct when he is – intentionally or otherwise - part of a mob. When with a mob, he just may get carried away, act

unthinkingly, spontaneously, and end up doing what the horde does. Understanding this psychology is what underpins the story. The film begins with a train that has halted at a station. Massive crowds struggle to board and deboard, as at any Indian station. In the melee, an elderly woman with her 5 year-old granddaughter Anita, are separated. The grandmother steps onto the platform, while little Anita is pulled back into the carriage by two men.

The next shot is that of a young woman, Gita, the little girl's mother and the elderly woman's daughter. In the dead of night, Gita is at the reception window of a local police station in rural Assam, complaining about her missing daughter. The policeman asks her to come inside and register her complaint. But she stands firmly at the window and requests him to do the needful without her having to enter this remotely located police station. The man insists, and drags her in. We learn later that that there should have been four policemen present but that night there were only two.

That is where the tale begins. Soon afterwards, the two policemen who were on duty are murdered. Ram Chaudhary, a good-looking, clean, straightforward and compassionate officer of the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) and the son of a respected local judge is asked to investigate. As his inquiry proceeds, he accidentally meets Gita, an artist who, surprisingly, has (along with her mother) entered the compound of his home to take pictures.

The story has several angles: the involvement of CID officers (particularly George, although he does not play too important a role; Ram's meeting with the

head of the Asian Arms Manufacturing (AAM) Co., clearly out to make money; Gita's little daughter Anita in hospital because of excessive injuries in the train and having been pushed out thereafter. A small crowd had picked her up and taken her to a nearby hospital.

Then there is Gita's exhibition of her paintings. Ram is present when a viewer – in reaction to the paintings he now sees, tells Gita that her earlier paintings were abstract but these are 'realistic' and 'political'. Gita confesses that she is now more interested in how a man acts as part of a gang or group. Ram listens carefully, he is clearly attracted to Gita, but is utterly discrete and tactful.

We are shown corruption and bribery at the highest level – political, high-end business and manufacturing, judiciary as well at the level of the police. Clues are scattered along the way, but we just don't know they are clues. A strand of purple hair is found near the bodies of the victims and as the story moves ahead, the 2 absent policemen are shot dead too; and the footprints in the mud of a murdered policeman seem to point to those of a female.

Is it necessary to recount all these complex strands of the story? Perhaps yes. When Gita recounts to Ram why her daughter is in hospital, she does not reveal the whole truth – that the little girl had, in fact, been gang-raped and chucked out of a running train. But what she does describe is a scene she had once witnessed which had stayed in her mind. Long ago, when she was a teacher in an elementary school, she had seen a terrible scene. Looking out of the window of her classroom, she had noticed a bunch of boys stoning a tethered, bleeding goat.

Immensely moved by the scene, she had run out, shooed the kids away, untied the goat and handed it back to its owner. And then told her students that when she grows up and has children of her own, she would instruct them on how to stand up to anyone attacking a goat. Ram agrees. “As a policeman,” he says, “I can tell you that very often a mob starts throwing stones without really knowing why.”

Ram also hears from the grandmother about the corruption in the judiciary, about how her son had died at the hands of the police and how the attackers were released by Ram’s father probably after taking a bribe. The terrible irony here is that Justice Rohan Chaudhary suffers the same fate as other victims – shot point blank in his own house. And the honest Ram also suffers, as the corrupt officers in the CID snatch the case out of his hands.

As mentioned earlier, *Murders Too Close...* has a complex plot, with several threads slickly intertwined to fit into what could be called a murder mystery, a revenge story, but also an understanding of how human beings behave. Every shot takes the story ahead, but one has to see the entire film before one can recognize the significance of

the dialogue, the motives of the various characters and their silence too. The pace is sometimes slow, at other times it speeds up. But at all times, every element adds to the twists and turns of the narrative.

The indoor settings of the film (the homes of Justice Chaudhary, Gita and the arms manufacturer) appear to be a shade too luxurious and sophisticated for dwellings in rural India, while Gita herself seems too hesitant and vulnerable at all times.

And the killer? I may not have guessed his/her identity when I first saw the film, but looking back after the film’s end, I noticed that there were subtle clues sprinkled along the way. The reading of the film, though, has to be so close that no information, even if casually offered, is disregarded.

The film is as much a thriller genre tale as it is of mob psychology. Is there justice in the end? Yes, probably. The one positive sign is that our little traumatized Anita who had for long stayed deeply silent as she lay on her hospital bed, does, softly, utter a few words. And Gita and Ram are together again. A story that spins and may even require a second viewing.

Dr Latika Padgaonkar is a member of FIPRESCI.