

FILM

New Delhi Film Festival

Abhijit Ghosh-Dastidar

The Eleventh Osian's Cine Fan New Delhi Film Festival (Oct 09) continued to evolve in its selections of some of the best of world cinema. Besides the films in competition, the 'Indialogue' section consisted of jolly moments of feature, short and animation films. Adrian Sitaru's "Hooked" (Rumania, 2008, colour, 80 mins) is an experimental work, with a low budget, shot in ten days. Four short films have been combined into a single film, where in depicting the relations between the characters, Andrian Slisteanu's camera moves all the time. A hand held camera records Mihail (Adrian Titieni) and Miha (Ioana Flora) placing bags in a car dicky, and going for a long drive. As Mihail and Miha converse, there are sharp camera sweeps from faces to front wind screen. Mihail, a mathematics school teacher, drives and relates his problems with the institute's lady principal. Miha suggests he confront facts. At a traffic light crossing a boy washes the glass on the car windows. A man cleans the car at a petrol gas station. Miha fills up the water bottle from a basin in the toilet. Before the car starts off, two young girls ask for money. On the rural road, two hookers stop the car; the charges being five lei or the price of a beer. Now Miha drives, and the journey out of town, unrolls on the country road. The car knocks down a girl and veers off the road. As a truck approaches Miha pretends to take photos, and throws up feigning car sickness. Mihail and Miha quarrel over the injured girl. They lift the girl to the back seat of the car, and dump the injured girl in the forest.

When Miha searches for nettles and branches in the forest, Ana (Maria Dinutescu) the injured girl wakes up. A man with a shot gun approaches, proclaiming that the forest belongs to the state, and picking forest shrubs was unlawful, Miha gives the man a five lei bribe. Ana suffers dizzy spells. They halt by a riverside with food and beer. Ana is not in any relationship, but is curious about the couple. She listens to music on a transistor radio. Mihail catches fish on the river bank. There is a mobile phone ring for Miha, apparently her husband is the caller. Conversation and intimacy develops between Miha and the stranger, Ana. The maths teacher Mihail had disagreed with the school principal on passing students, and quit. Ana likes to sit around all day doing nothing. Soon Ana places hands on Miha's bosom. A truck rolls up, and the truck driver Ionut was probably Ana's old client. Ana pretends oblivion of the recent car accident, and explains bruises from another accident. In Ana's absence, Miha and Mihail come closer. As a prostitute, Ana wants to make men happy. Mihail tells Miha that Ana was aware of the accident, but only pretending. He suggests Ana to go to the police and report the accident. Ana is agreeable to sleep together, and Mihail offers money.

The truck driver Ionut takes Ana to the woods. Mihail throws the angled fish into the river. Miha accuses Mihail of getting close to Ana. Miha cries, quarrels with Mihail, and gets slapped. Manipulation and lies over the car accident are low key, as Ana plays on jealousy between the couple. When Ana screams from mid stream, the forest guard returns. They watch the sunset. After speaking to

husband Florin, on cell phone, Miha informs that she has related everything. Mihail would be returning to school the next day. Miha and Mihail embrace in the car. "Hooked" proceeds at the director Sitaru's pace. The car journey stops and starts, lies and truth distortions hide and emerge, and the film narrative scans and stares at the protagonists in post- communism Rumania. Moral dilemmas are reflected on the protagonist faces, kindling immediate fears and doubts.

FROG

Hiroshi Toda's "Frog" (Japan, 2009, 85 mins, colour) begins with a kitchen environment of pineapples and cauliflowers being cut and eggs smashed. An alarm wakes up son Ryo (TakahiroYoshida), the father, Sueo (Shinichi Okayama) pushes a pushcart, selling fries. He stops at a Buddha idol. Ryo works in a car repair garage, and cleans up cars. One day he picks up an expensive lighter from a car, belonging to wealthy, Mr Yamanaka. The boss of 'Doi-auto' makes the last salary payment to Ryo, even through Ryo promises not to be late. After repairs, Ryo returns the car to Yamanaka. Later Ryo visits Yamanaka's residence to return the lighter. There is acute security at Yamanaka's residence, with latticed doors and grills shut. Ryo is called inside the compound and Yamanaka treats him to a sumptuous lunch. Ryo's father, Sueo is busy on the roadside selling snacks. At the noodles lunch dining table, Yamanaka has the company of three business associates. Yamanaka offers help to unemployed Ryo. Gangsters of Uchida are moving into Yamanaka's territory. Gangster Okuida escorts Ryo up to the gate.

Ryo informs his girl friend, Hiromi (Yayoi Yamamoto) that he has lost his job. Father Sueo was a retired gangster. Ryo gives Sueo his entire retirement fees. He searches for a job at boutiques and a Rolex watch showroom. Resumes are returned, and only part time jobs are available. Ryo suffers from depression, and at night keeps a bed lamp on. One evening Sueo is confronted by three gangsters. The push cart hits the leg of one goon, and the hoodlums attack Sueo. The old man offers money. But the goons snatch the entire last salary of Ryo from Sueo's shirt pocket, and beat him up, brutally. Sueo is in a pool of blood. Ryo while eating noodles phones his father on mobile, but there is no reply. Police and ambulance arrive, and Ryo is traced. He identifies his father's dead body in the police morgue. He also notices a tattoo on the naked back of his father. Sueo's dead body is brought home. Ryo, his mother and friend Hiromi offer flowers and prayers at the graveyard. Hiromi expresses apprehension that Ryo may go on a death revenge over his father's killing. Ryo assures that he would seek a job.

At a car maintenance garage, a vacant job has been filled up. Ryo cuts a car body with a coin. He meets gangster boss, Yamanaka and returns the boss's favourite cigarette lighter. Yamanaka gifts the lighter to Ryo. Ryo requests for a job. Ryo's mother cleans up the father's old push cart, and works in a petrol pump. Gangster Okuida shows two photos to Ryo, and gives him a revolver and bullets. If the killing job is successfully conducted, Ryo would get a big promotion. Some cash is given in advance, along with a posh car. With an electric razor, Ryo shaves his heads, and dons a cap. Okuida outlines new strategies for the killing, with promises of a key post in the gangster team. One evening while picking up egg noodles at a restaurant, Ryo notices three boisterous men drinking, through an aquarium. One of the goons refers to the 1,00,000 yen stolen from Ryo's father. The huge restaurant bill is paid from the

stolen money. Ryo follows the three young men as they leave the restaurant. In a subway, Ryo shoots the killer of his father. The second goon is shot in the eye. The third goon is spared after he apologizes. From a bridge, Ryo throws the lighter and the revolver into a river.

Returning home Ryo finds his mother sleeping over a table. Next morning Hiromi joins in to chop vegetables and break eggs. At a meeting of gang bosses Okuida shoots Yamanaka and other bosses. Ryo does not respond to Okuida's telephones calls, and smashes up his mobile phone. Ryo and Hiromi sell fries on the push cart. Hiroshi Toda builds up "Frog" in a vague terrain of mundane rooms and bustling streets. The kitchen room is the most visible, but not the only decor. The horizontal interconnections between the frames emerge and plot the unquiet moments of cruel violence and killings. There is no psychology. The spectacle of a restless camera never loses the perspective of human agony. Hiroshi Toda's camera ensures the narrative tempo. □□□