

FAUST

KOLKATA FILM FESTIVAL

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17TH KOLKATA FILM FESTIVAL (Nov, 2011) brought hopes to the state of films in general. Along with the bigger titles in Cinema International, Indian Select and Asian Selects, there were tributes to Visconti (Italy), Imamura (Japan) and Mani Kaul (India). The Calcutta/Kolkata Section was the city on celluloid. Alexandr Sokurov's "Faust" (Russia, colour, 134 mins) has a laboured set up, for strange and disturbing vignettes from Goethe's 'Faust'. The film concludes Sokurov's tetralogy on power and its corruptions, following up Hitler in 'Moloch' (1999), Lenin in "Tauros" (2001) and Emperor Hirohito in "The Sun" (2005). In a scenario of a dangling mirror, suspended from above, dark clouds, relief of mountains and lakes, a frozen face and body dissection, Faust (Johnnes Zeiler) as a doctor, searches for the soul in life and in the heart. A man's internals pour out. Pain of the world is the pain of the soul. Faust observes that God is everywhere, and thus he is nowhere. Two men keep dissecting corpses. A voice-over declares everything comes according to law.

A thief is driven out from a room. A white peacock struts before a cave. Faust has pawned his property, pledged to security. Along with references to 'The Foundations of Human Psychology', crowds throng; with loads of pigs. The beginning of the word is traced to the Bible. Word was with God. Music composer Richard Wagner and Coffin makers pass by. Faust raises a telescope on monkeys in another planet. Amid the turmoil, the maid Ida and Wagner's chatter is a good remedy. An old man indulges in bowel movements next to and inside a church. Faust borrows money from the money-lender, with signature, and finds no logic in belief in God and Satan. The voice-over observes that in the beginning was the dead, and power results from human actions. A friend, Agathe (Hanna Schygulla) drops in. The village roads full of sheep, reflect real human life. Women wash clothes and labour, People everywhere are miserable, but man wants to be happy. Around small fires, women undress, and bathe in buckets of water, with mirth and frolic. The dead are wrapped in sheets on road side. There is a leprosy patient, and the old money-lender, Mauicius (Anton Adasinsky). The voice over is baffled as to why everyone wants to be young. Burgundy wine flows in the tavern. Dr Faust, the master of astrology, is familiar with stars, planets, gas balloons and approaching comets. Imprudence to the defender of the Fatherland provokes brawls. A drunken soldier perforates a wine barrel. People rush as wine pours out. Women are drying clothes as a dead soldier is brought to the village. Gold coins are found in the basement. Friar Emmerich emphasizes that earthly life is brief. Faust notes that caressing gold is a good cure for illness. Hunting dogs attack a coffin at a burial ceremony. Man remains an eternal wanderer who wanders, on hills and vales. Faust is well versed in the order of the universe, and walks with a girl in the woods. Wild bears are present. The voice-over observes that the day of equality is the day when everybody is burning, irrespective of sex. Science argues that death exists, and

scientists fill void. The unhappy are dangerous. A mother, Margarita chides her daughter, Katherina. Christ is engraved on a cross. A horse drawn carriage heads for Paris. Starvation, soldiers, battles, and church donations never cease, Wagner and Faust converse. Human embryos are in jars. Faust impersonates the Father confessor, when Katherina visits the church. Katherina confesses of being a bad daughter, and does not love her mother. The money-lender Mauicius kisses and hugs an idol of the Virgin Mary. God is love, but love has no obligations. A young man accuses Faust of killing his brother. Katherina visits Faust in room full of books. On the banks of a river, Faust plunges into a water spring with Margarita. They make love. Clocks with hands have stopped in a room. Margarita and cats walk around old furniture. Villagers enter the somber room. Loitering draws death closer. The scenario shifts to a waterfall and rivulet. The living goes on living in nothingness. A dying man thinks of death, as life was more difficult living than death. Huge waves strike a sea shore. Vapour emerges from hot fountains. Faust quests for eternal solitude, and does not see any hope for salvation. Volcanic eruptions shoot from holes. Power and influence are stifling. Nature and spirits continue. A big stone drops on money-lender, Mauicius. Villagers are buried under stones. Inspired by Goethe's work "Faust" features dialogue in German. Sokurov's frames are full of chaos, and transmit a disorienting and enervating effect. Physical, visual and spiritual ugliness abound. Bruno Delbonnel's roaming camera is bold and dynamic. The medieval German town is vividly realized. The performances are extra-ordinary, particularly of Johannes Zeiller as the desperate, starving and suicidal Faust; and Anton Adasinsky as the money lending Mephistophelean master, in the shape of a grotesque clown. Alexander Zlamal's music comprising of excerpts from Wagner's Tristan and Isolde has a sensibility which binds the disparate elements in the film. □□□