

Market: A New Day Dawns



Pradip Kurbah, Director of the film *Market*

Between the peaceful, overhead shots of the entire market area, shots at night and shots at dawn, and the camera movements inside the dense, crowded marketplace, director Pradip Kurbah has achieved several things at once. The tilt-downs give you an idea of the area the market covers. What you see are not ‘open’ spaces but a forest of buildings, just a couple of floors high, ordinary, many of them discoloured. The market is inside this space. Locating that space has an importance of its own.

The shots within could really be a market anywhere in India: the hustle and bustle inside the narrow lanes and by lanes; mini stores cheek by jowl, with vegetable stalls (many of them managed by women) in front; tailors at their sewing machines, clothes shops, shoe shops and tea shops with their owners at the counter, grannies with wrinkled cheeks chewing all day; the sellers who chat and argue and announce their rates; paperwallahs, chicken in coops, people moving up and down, in and

out; some bent double, with large sacks on their backs. In the midst of this throng, a guitarist with a Panama hat strumming his guitar, a depth of sadness in his eyes, waiting for the pennies to drop.

Iewduh – or the *Market* – is ordinary yet lively, and so, it would seem, are the people who work and live within its folds. People of all communities and religions. The personality of the one rubs off on the other. Many have been here for years. They know this teeming market’s whirl, they know its smells and sounds, know one another. That, then, is the setting, and the setting is as important as what happens within. Life is colourful but more complex than it appears to outsiders. Behind every face lies a unique story. These stories, passionate but not overtly conveyed, churn bit by bit in the hearts of the people and behind faces that give little hint of that churning. And sometimes they erupt in a blaze, turning on its head the quote from Nietzsche at the start of

the film: “He who has a why to live can bear almost anyhow.”



The film begins with a narrator telling us briefly that these stories, even if not heroic, are lived stories. And it is precisely these stories, bound together by the ‘unheroic’ and humane figure of Mike that lift *Market* from a documentary to docu-drama.

Mike and Hep: no one knows Mike’s parents. But he is well known, having lived long in the neighbourhood, in a single room on the first floor. He has given shelter to Hep, a young, homeless lad – maybe fifteen years old - who he rescued from the streets and who now goes to school. Mike cleans the public urinal uncomplainingly and lives off the tips. And Hep studies and washes utensils in shops to earn a few extra rupees. Now and again he gives a little money to his friend Sanju who does drugs and can’t live a day without them.

Lamarre: a lonely, homeless old man with dementia perennially waiting for “his son David and his daughter-in-law”. They will not come, people tell him. So he wants to know who won the World Cup, Brazil or Spain?

Priya: forlorn and glum, seated by herself in a corner, she sells ready-made garments, hard-

ly speaks and makes no effort to sell. Mike wonders why she screams at night. Sometimes her cheeks show marks of brutality she has endured, presumably at the hands of her husband.

Mike is the link between these and other characters and their personal dramas. He understands and tries to bring succour and solace.

Every day, Mike and Hep spend time on their terrace. They chat, Mike may drink, Hep may do his homework. The buzz of the day. The quiet of the night. The shots tell you that is how it is here, day after day, night after night. These terrace moments also pauses, moments of contemplation, of dreaming of things ahead and of things left behind. Occasionally, Mike tells Hep that a certain Corinna appears in his dreams. He doesn’t know who she is – maybe his mother? Hep (who has run away from a rehab) says he would like to meet his mother, but would she recognise him? Then Mike confesses shyly that he thinks of Edwina, the attractive if curt tea-seller.

Mike and Hep have an unwavering relationship, despite the small ups and downs. They have each other. They stare at the sky. It darkens. Then another day dawns.



Market

So how does the film move ahead? All the characters seem to ponder on life (and this inner life is not articulated), on the path behind and the path ahead. Mike would like to take Priya to the police to lodge a complaint against her husband, but she refuses. And then, one day, quietly, she sets herself on fire. The penetrating, enigmatic expression in her eyes

behind the flame of one burning matchstick make you clutch at your armrest. It is one of the high points of the film. And it leaves Mike with a rush of guilt that he did nothing to prevent it.

Mike is genial, generous, trusted by all around, but his eyes hold a look of fatigue. And people's problems are more unfathomable than he can understand. The young Hep's friend – not too dissimilar in years – confesses his desperate need for drugs. In his innocent way, Hep tries to advise him to give them up and give himself a chance. Sadly, the too-far-gone Sanju is not destined to live. His death breaks Hep the way Priya's death broke Mike.

Remains old Lamarre. Lying sick on the pavement, his health declines and he is dangerously close to dying. Mike carries him on his back through the lanes of the Market to a waiting ambulance and then to a hospital. Post treatment and recovery, we learn that Lamarre is in an old-age home. And then the story turns unbelievably sweet. Mike brings him home to live with him, calls him Dad (a Dad he himself had never known), and Lamarre sees in him a

son. Hep smiles. The picture is complete.

A new day dawns. Says the narrator: People are the same everywhere, with their joys and sorrows and struggles. The narrator is *Iewduh. The Market*.

Pradip Kurbah's unpretentious, heart-warming film made in Khasi, Hindi, Jaintia and Garo should go far. Its wonderful setting, gentle tempo, clear editing and a totally credible script must surely have contributed to the prestigious Kim Ji-seok award it won at the Busan International Film Festival last year. It was also screened at IFFI, Kerala and Goa. May its journey continue.

Iewduh/ Market

Language: Khasi, Hindi, Jaintia, Garo

Duration: 94 Minutes

Release date: 15 Nov 2019

Director: Pradip Kurbah

Producer: Shankar Lall Goenka

Music director: Anurag Saikia

Editor: Lionel Fernandez

Cast: Albert Mawrie, Denver Pariat, Lala Yomeca

Ms. Latika Padgaonkar is a Member of FIPRESCI-India.