

Review

Utpal Datta

The Disciple: Serious, Committed and Entertaining

Young Indian classical vocal artist Sarad Nerulkar sometimes comes out of his home to get rid of the daily problems, starts his motorbike and starts traveling slowly through the silent roads of Mumbai - camera frames him from front and tracks back with the rhythm of the speed of the bike. . . the background changes from a small road to wide road, the sky becomes more visible, and suddenly the sound of tanpura comes and that is followed by a rich voice of an elderly lady - the voice emerges from somewhere like the sky, as of *Daivabani*, she speaks a few deeply philosophical lines on Indian classical music. She advises not to be trapped by consumerism and at the same time a galaxy of street lights appears on the backdrop of the motorbike as a metaphor for the dazzling marketplace.

This aesthetically composed shot with sound and a sight not only speaks something metaphorical but also strengthens the narrative of the film displaying the applied force of suggestiveness and binds the audience with the flow of the message.

This was almost the first sequence and the first guiding moment of the film. The film starts with a concert by a veteran vocalist Vinayak Kulkarni and the hero of this film, Sarad Nerulkar is his disciple. He learns music from this veteran artist in the *Guru-Shishya* tradition.

The film's writer and director Chaitanya Tamhane loves Indian music from the core of his heart and the critical outlook has intensified this love. He reveals the aesthetic and aesthetic secrets of Indian Classical music in the film and the life and struggles of a few devoted artists. The director also wants to re-examine some myths related to classical gurus. He wrote this story because he wants to tell his quest through a story.

Disciple's Guru Search: Denying Traditional Speech

The name of the film -'Disciple' - the word used in music as a learner under a guru and a future flag bearer of the school (*Gharana*) he is following. Three

generations of artists and two generations of disciples are assembled here - the Sindhutai Yadav- Guru from the Gharana, her disciple and the father of the hero - both had left this planet and her another disciple, the guru of the protagonist. Hero's father preserved a few audiotapes of Sindhutai Yadav's discourse, he used to listen to those frequently and Sarad had passed his childhood watching his father's devotion and love and respect for the tapes. He is one disciple, portrayed in the film. The next disciple is Vinayak Kulkarni, not a so-known vocalist, not even a good performer, known mostly for his Guru and the third is Sarad Nerulker who is trying to go forward with the sayings of Sindhutai Yadav, an example of his father and learning from his guru. With these four characters, writer-director Chaitanya Tamhane brilliantly portrayed the crisis of an Indian Classical artist who tries to remain sincere to the originality and philosophical aesthetics of Indian Classical Music in the market-driven society. The principal crisis point of the story is whether a music artist should stick to the originality of the art or he should follow the terms determined by the market forces.



Rajan Joshi: The Cause of Crisis

There is a good deal of classical music-based Indian films which narrate the story of a classical singer and incorporate a few Raga-based songs. This film is a major paradigm from that trend. The director based this film on Indian Classical music, but the film is not musical, this is a fiction film that speaks about the crisis and achievement of a struggler.

The hero was amid many questions that arose from the changing trend of the classical music world. Suddenly he met one music critic, Ranjan Joshi whose critical and frank comments compelled him to think about some myths that create a larger-than-life image of artists (guru) and some myths that overshadow

some shortfalls. Sarad protested to Ranjan Joshi, but in due course of time, he realized. Though the character of Ranjan Joshi was brief and one-dimensional, yet, his comments threw light on some serious aspects of the world of classical music which was not discussed earlier.



Power of Image: Stable and Eloquent

In the previous film 'Court', Chaitanya Tamhane had used mostly static long shots with longer durations to express the philosophical undertone of his comment and content. He repeated the same visual treatment with some minor but meaningful creative changes. The director has maintained a kind of epic detachment in his visuals to provide space for the audience to enter the musical world and to feel the environment which is essentially a lonely planet. In some sequences, the Director discarded his prevailing critical bend of mind and tried to be closer to the characters with slow push-in shots and they worked wonderfully. Such a few shots remind some shots from the film Godfather. The extreme long shots with the slow movement have created magic and echoed the inner void and ambition of doing bigger of the character. In some transit moments, he used a black frame, fade out of the prevailing shot, for a long duration and those shots created deserving mood of the narrative.

Music and editing: Accurate and sensitive

The most powerful aspects of the film are- the unfolding of the crisis with powerful images, application of accurate music and sound, and innovative editing. The point at the heart of the film is a conflict between the actual world and the philosophical vision of a creative person. Classical

music has come into the film as an organic part of the work and environmental sound and creative use of music created the environment apt to reflect the inner turmoil of the protagonist. In most of the films, one can see that the greatest classical *ustad* sings only a simple raga-based modern song. But in this film, the proper khayal was used and created the perfect personality of the music part of this film. The sound of Tanpura dominated a lion's share of the background score and it synchronized this sound with the mood of the film. Tanpura, used as a prelude to the speeches of Sindhutai Yadab created the desired ambiance even in the location of a street. The popular Hindi film song used in a market scene had broken the illusion of the world that Tamhane had created.

The film is essentially an anthology of long shots and the editor joined those shots so effectively using music on the background, that someone could feel no jerk. Using black screen for transition is a remarkable addition to the narrative and the aesthetic part of the editing craft.

Committed film

The depth of Indian classical music and the attempt of evaluating its importance in this changing world- this approach made the film a novel creation and its support to the originals to classical music is a committed responsibility of the filmmaker. And the novel subject that has been explored it in the present

day context will keep the audience in a thought process for a long time with the aesthetic make of the film.



The weakness in the narrative became prominent in the conversation sequence of Ranjan Joshi and Sarad which was almost like a picturization of a radio play. The character also needed little more importance as he played one of the important characters in the protagonist's life. The scenes of masturbation by Sarad are completely misfitting in the poetic and subtle narrative of the film.

The theme of the film is serious, yet the director has presented the film in a lucid narrative without sacrificing its weight. This is a commendable work.

■ *Mr. Utpal Datta is a filmmaker, an author and a film critic based in Guwahati.*