Neeraj Ghaywan’s ‘Masaan’ Receives Love and Applause at IFFLA

It was also screened in the Un Certain Regard section at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival and won two prestigious awards.

[Photo Credit: Facebook/MasaanTheFilm]

Neeraj Ghaywan’s “Masaan”—screened at the Indian Film Festival Los Angeles (IFFLA)—garnered great appreciation and applause. The movie, which colloquially means *shamshan*, shows us the real Varanasi—a town that is caught amid the spiritual history to live up to and the changing ideas and beliefs of the youth as a result of increased exposure to technology which has taught people to question the rigidity of several ancient practices like caste system and burying sexual desires until one gets married.

In the movie, when a local girl Devi Pathak (Richa Chaddha) dares to take a step to experience her sexual freedom, it ends up becoming a tragedy. She is a computer literate who chooses to get a room with her love interest Piyush. The story also weaves in the tale of Devi’s father, portrayed by Sanjay Misra, and Deepak, a lower caste boy studying civil engineering whose family has been in the profession of burning dead bodies in the *shamshan* (Hindu crematorium) and a chirpy Shalu, a Hindi-Urdu poetry lover belonging to the upper class.
Devil faces societal stigma because she is committed the ‘so-called’ sin of having sex with her boyfriend. From office colleagues to the police — all shame her. Devi and her father are also threatened by the police saying they will get the media and the court involved in the case if a hefty bribe is not given while Deepak and Shalu choose to pursue their love for each other, irrespective of the caste discrimination.

Shalu admits that her family will never accept their relationship but she commits to stand by it and face the obstacles. Shalu brings a refreshing perkiness to the story. Lyricist Varun Grover perfectly captures the romance between them in an endearing poetry by Dushyant Kumar.

“Tu kisi rail si guzarti hain, Main kisi pul sa thartharata hoon Teri ankhon main jungle hain Main apna jism bhool jaata hoon”

At the end, we realize life is way more real than what we believe. The sorrow of losing people you love is the greatest teacher in life. You realize nothing is permanent—not even the principles of religion, society and spirituality. The fading morality of Devi’s father, a Sanskrit expert who succumbs to betting on the banks of Ganges so he can bribe the local officials to save his daughter’s dignity in the society is a reflection of how we, as human beings, live in our bubble of ethics and when caught in difficulty resort to easy but foul practices to get out of them.

This movie reminds me of a famous quote by Bob Dylan, “all this talk about equality, the only thing people have in common is that they are all going to die.” It is strange how well it fits into the characters of “Masaan.”

Life is a beautiful lie and death is a painful truth. Coping with death is a tempestuous ordeal. But in the milieu of constant cycles of life and death, moving away and moving on, there arrives the heart of the film.
The connection that Ghaywan makes between these characters and explains the various facets of life is riveting.

His directorial debut is an Indo-French co-production produced by Drishyam Films, Macassar Productions, Phantom Films, Sikhya Entertainment, Arte France Cinema and Pathé Productions. It was screened in the Un Certain Regard section at the 2015 Cannes Film Festival and won two prestigious awards.

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