

# cinema

## The last-mile stumble

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

**T**amil cinema swings from one spectrum to another. For every socially provocative *Angadi Theru*, there is an *Uthamaputhiran* and *Endhiran* with their mushy, almost vulgarised romances, exaggerated situations, unbelievable characters and poor performances. Unfortunately, even the better of the Tamil movies falter in the last mile.

Look at *Angadi Theru*. It had a very novel plot of poor boys and girls carted away from home and hearth and dumped into a huge store that had a business turnover of hundreds of thousands of rupees every day. But the store was callous to the most basic needs of its young workforce, which lived, ate and slept in conditions worse than those in cattle-sheds.

Highly disturbing all right, but writer-director Vasanthabalan in his anxiety (or presumably so) to drive his point deep into every head, went overboard by including in the script situations that were too dark and too dramatic. So much so that the film lost its sense of authenticity.

For example, I could not believe that a store manager would dare take a young salesgirl inside a trial room, partitioned by just a curtain, and sexually molest her as a punishment for a minor mistake even as the crowds thronged the counters! The climax could not have been gloomier. Yes, there was the ray of white in the mass of black, but the light seemed too faint.

Prabhusolomon's recent *Mynaa* is not very different. Suruli (played by Vidharth) and Mynaa (Amala Paul) meet as children. When Mynaa's mother is thrown out of her home, boy Suruli helps her and her daughter find a new meaning to life. He helps Mynaa study, even as he works as a coolie, foregoing his own education. (Now do not ask me how the teenage boy manages all this). Suruli and Mynaa grow up in the idyllic environs of Theni Hills, falling deeper and deeper in love, till the mother, swayed by the riches of a man in a neighbouring village, decides to get Mynaa married to him.

Suruli's travails begin when he beats up the old woman. Arrested, he finds no option but to escape from jail when he hears that Mynaa is being forced into the marriage. Much of the movie unfolds on a Deepawali day, when Suruli and Mynaa flee with a couple of cops chasing them. Suruli is caught, and we see how he and Mynaa are transported back through hills and forests — a road paved with dangerous adventure and deathly traps.

The film paints a beautiful picture of how the relationship between Suruli and



\* Scenes from *Mynaa* (above) and *Uthamaputhiran*: unusual stories that lose the plot halfway.

the policemen gradually changes from one of hatred and suspicion to one of mutual admiration and respect.

It is here at this point that *Mynaa* swerves into a blind alley and finds it difficult to return. It is fine to be inspired by Shakespearean tragedies, but not everybody can replicate *Romeo and Juliet*.

On the other end of the scale is Mithran Jawahar's also recent *Uthamaputhiran*. Rajnikanth's son-in-law, Dhanush, getting into the role of a noble son (that is how the title translates), Shiva, is a do-gooder. But he makes a wrong move and rescues the wrong girl from a marriage hall. Not that Genelia D'Souza's Pooja minds, for the orphaned girl is being pushed into a union she does not want.

Her uncles, however, do, for Pooja is rich and comes with a hefty booty that the men want to usurp. The movie begins its roll, teasing and taunting our sense of intelligence, with actor Vivek as 'Emotional Ekambaram' peppering the story with his silly lines and ridiculous mannerisms.

Shiva's extended family of uncles and aunts plays cupid to unite the couple. They



transform themselves into make-believe billionaires. The film closes on a note of heavy morals and profound speeches, and I suppose that these must have gone over dozens of yawning heads.



Exploring the trauma of bereavement

There is another movie I saw some days ago, though in Hindi, that caught my attention. Happily, for the right reason. The core plot of *Asamapt* (*Memories in March*), of a bereaved parent, is not exactly novel in Indian cinema. One has seen an excellent version of it in Mahesh Bhatt's *Saarangsh*, which India sent as its official entry to compete for the 1985 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. However, Sanjoy Nag's work *Asamapt* looking at the trauma of a mother, Arati Mishra (Deepti Naval, above), who has just lost her son in a road accident, goes further to explore a greater anguish in her. This is done with considerable flair.

The son (who is never seen), an ad firm executive living in Kolkata away from his divorced, Delhi-based mother, crashes his car after a late night party to celebrate his promotion. Three people close to him, boss Arnab (Rituparno Ghosh), junior colleague, Sahana Chowdhury (Raima Sen), whose romantic feelings for him are not reciprocated, and, of course, the mother are devastated. Arnab very much so. Arriving in Kolkata to collect her son's ashes, Mishra is completely shattered by a revelation she finds even more difficult to believe than her son's death itself.

The movie is skillfully scripted by Ghosh (who has also written the story) and shot by Soumik Haldar — ideal for a discerning audience. Arnab's agony at the loss is captured brilliantly, and Ghosh, better known as a director of films such as *Abohoman/The Eternal*, *The Last Lear* and *Raincoat*, conveys in an extraordinarily restrained performance the pain of having lost someone very dear. Unfortunately, Naval disappoints, failing to get deeper into the skin of her character, and Sen, an otherwise fine actress, has a limited part in a work that is, nonetheless, moving and intimate.

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