

## ***Kastoori: The Musk* - A Hard hitting Documentation**



Vinod Kamble with the Fipresci-India Award

The oppressed classes and have-nots are finding their own expression in the cinematic language brutally invading the linear middle-class sensibilities. The shift is more than welcome. It was witnessed in the form of the award winning Tamil film *Maadathi- The Un-fairy Tale* directed by Leena Manimekalai and the Marathi film *Kastoori – The Musk* directed by *Vinad Kamble*, honoured with Special Fipresci Jury Mention in the 7<sup>th</sup> Aurangabad International Film Festival 2020. The 7<sup>th</sup> edition of AIFF was a commendably well organized, full-fledged 5 days affair. Be it the selection of the films, the programming, the overall management, the vision of the festival director *Ashok Rane* himself a fipresci member, behind the whole essay was distinctly evident in every aspect.

Coming to the award winning films, both unfold the cruelest forms of oppression the *Dal-its*, deprived classes face every day, but are unknown to the upper classes. Both the films

choose their own styles of conveying the message. *Maadathi* has a folk tale like style, a visual poetry to be precise, whereas *Kastoori* strikes with a stark and shocking realistic narration.

Post Mortem is a dreaded word. It smells of death, in fact unnatural death, but here is a class who have to 'live' with it in order to earn the living.

People shun even to think of the process the moment the word post mortem is uttered. But here is the teenager Gopi, the son of scavenger parents, who actually has to cut the dead bodies with a scalpel, break the skull with a hammer and then stitch the body back to prepare it for the funeral. Vinod Kamble in a subtle way uses Gopi's longing for perfumes as a narrative device to intensify the smell of death that Gopi has to carry on his 'living' body. Gopi has to clean the clogged toilets of a government hospital, help his cousin who cleans manholes and assist his father to clean

the table, prepare the body for the funeral sprinkling it with a perfume after the father has done with the actual post mortem. He tries to kill the smell that he thinks clings to his own person even after bathing, by using the remains of the empty bottles of perfumes obtained from his only friend – A Muslim boy, who gets them from an old acquaintance, a perfume seller from the locality. The friend is a son of a butcher who has to help his father in his profession as well.

Gopi is a brilliant 8<sup>th</sup> standard student, even the winner of a prize as the topper in *Sanskrit* language exam. *Sanskrit* was supposed to be the intellectual, cultural property of the *Brah-*

and then to preach values of cleanliness, education etc. He reprimands Gopi for loitering in the hospital premises instead of attending the school. Little does he realize or try to know the reason behind Gopi's 'loitering' in the premises. Gopi silently watches him preaching. Gopi's silence is quite eloquent, as though observing the hypocrisy of the system at large.

Gopi faces the ugly reality and longs for a better life, the way to which is education and he is quite aware of it, quite serious about his studies. But the circumstances keep depriving him of the opportunity, even depriving him of receiving his rightful prize in person. As he



Vinod Kamble receiving the Fipresci-India Award

*mins* and the *Shudras* – the lowest rung of the society – were not even allowed to learn it. Thus the clever use of the subject further underlines the social paradox as well as intensifies the injustice Gopi has to face.

With the drunkard father removed from the job Gopi is forced to replace him ending up with cutting and stitching the dead bodies- An unspoken comment on the government hospital itself breaking the law of the land by employing child labour! It is left to the sensitivities of the audience to pinpoint the fact.

A social worker visits the hospital every now

is about to set to go to the school to attend the prize distribution ceremony, a 'fresh' dead body arrives at the hospital for postmortem! Predictable indeed!

The prize- the certificate – received by his friend on behalf of him and handed over to him ultimately wipes out the defeatism lurking in his mind. Gopi takes out his torn books. Circumstances have forced him to stitch the dead bodies, now with a renewed zeal he starts stitching the torn book. And when his friend gives him the cherished Katoori he throws the bottle in the sewage water with a determination. Gopi was always in search of

perfumes to kill the foul smell of toilet and death that he thought clung to his own body, came to know about Kastoori, along with his friend desperately tried to obtain the perfume. He even tried to buy the expensive perfume. Now he no longer needs to resort to the perfumes to kill the smell, is determined to pursue his studies come what may and to break away from the rotten tradition forced by the society on his class.

*Kastoori* is an aromatic substance obtained from the nasal gland of *Kastoori Mriga*, a rare species of deer family. It is believed that the *Kastoori Mriga* runs around the jungle in search of the source of the scent unaware of the fact that it itself is the source. Gopi's last act of throwing away the Kastoori bottle is the proclamation of his self-realization.

The flawless performances further intensify the impact of the hard-hitting content with the equally hard hitting treatment.

Gopi's story has a strong autobiographical note which adds another dimension to the film emphasizing the need to change the mindset of the society. The civil engineer turned director Vinod Kamble himself is self-realization personified!

### **Kastoori: The Musk**

Duration: 100 Minutes

Release: 18 October 2019

Director: Vinod Kamble

Writers: Vinod Kamble, Shivaji Karde

Stars: Samarth Sonawane, Shravan Upalakar

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