

# 'Naal' Sparkles, But Oversells Village Life

By Subhash K. Jha

Enough has been said and written about "Sairat". In 2018, we even saw a shoddy remake of what we all declared to be the game-changing classic of Marathi cinema.

"Sairat" was probably all of this, and more. But when I saw the film again I found its class conflict, no doubt engendered by the director's own feelings of persecution as a Dalit, to be too impressed by its own portrayal of brutality. The ending seems specially manipulative. I felt as if Manjule wrote the ending (with the brutal honour killing of his protagonists) first and then went on to weave the rest of the story.

In "Naal", the tender sweet innocent film about rural Maharashtra, childhood fantasies and their negation in the clutches of reality, the "Sairat" director is just a producer. He lets a new director -- Sudhakar Reddy Yekkanti -- do the needful. Sudhakar, God bless his untarnished soul, loves rural Maharashtra.

He sees the tiny village in the plot as a stress-free haven, a place where poverty is not stressed. Everyone has enough to eat. The men drink at night, and the



women are either cooking or running after their vaguely naughty children. No serious problems of poverty, migration or demonetisation are found here.

The central character is Chaitya, played by an astoundingly unspoilt, sun-soiled child actor Sreenivas Pokale, a boy in a bucolic bubble who one day comes to know that he is an adopted child. Chaitya decides he must meet his real mother who lives in an adjoining village. The scenes in which he begins to act stand-offish with his non-biological mother breaks your heart because these moments are built organically into the plot. They also

break your heart because they seem to suggest a cruelty that the film does not seem capable of inflicting on its narrative.

But then we get other moments that are not so unselfconscious. The cow and the calf tied outside the mud-and-mortar house get to have their own little metaphorical nook in the plot before Chaitya takes off on a magical journey with his father (played by Manjule) and grandfather. The difficult journey by bullock cart through slush, water, sand and rocks is made to seem like a de-glamorised version of a Walt Disney odyssey.

This is where the problem with

"Naal" becomes clearly decipherable. This is the world of childhood innocence and an oblivion to rural poverty that Satyajit Ray inhabited in "Pather Panchali". The lyricism worked within the film's given social context, as the director's gaze never floundered/ even as his imagination soared to the skies.

In "Naal", the 'lyricism' is forced into the creative mind-space of the plot. We are constantly reminded of the film's naturalism.

Once you force your way into being 'natural', it is no longer convincing. "Naal" seems to be designed for film festivals. Sure, the child actor wins you over with his absolutely unaffected presence. But his co-actors seem burdened with their responsibilities of being inheritors of Ray's world. It's a hard cross to bear.

I loved "Naal". But I would have enjoyed it more if it didn't seem like a tourist brochure for ideal rural living.

Here you can smell the cowdung without flinching. No one here wants to escape from the near-static life of a village.

And that idyllic state of existence in itself becomes a form of escapism.

## Film Delegation Meets Modi

MUMBAI: A delegation representing the Indian film and entertainment industry met Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Monday, and pitched for lower and uniform rates of GST for the fraternity.

Actors Akshay Kumar and Ajay Devgn, filmmakers Karan Johar and Rakesh Roshan, Censor Board chief Praseon Joshi and Producers Guild of India President Siddharth Roy Kapur were a part of the delegation that met Modi.

According to a PIB statement, the delegation gave Modi an overview of the vast growth potential of the media and entertainment industry in India, and said that this sector is poised to contribute in a significant way towards the Prime Minister's vision for making India a five trillion dollar economy in the near future.

The film fraternity members even pitched for lower, and uniform rates of GST, for the entertainment industry in India, apart from calling for the development of Mumbai as the global entertainment capital. Modi assured the delegation that the Union Government would consider the suggestions positively.

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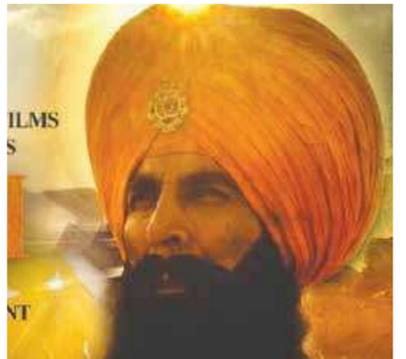
## 'Kesari' Shooting Wrapped Up

JAIPUR: Actors Akshay Kumar and Parineeti Chopra starrer "Kesari", based on the Battle of Saragarhi of 1897, will release on March 21, 2019.

The actors, who have completed the film's shoot in Rajasthan on Monday, took to social media to announce the release date. "And it's a wrap for 'Kesari', a film which swells up my chest with immense pride. Get ready to witness the bravest battle ever fought on 21st March, 2019," Akshay wrote on Instagram while sharing a photograph of his sikh look from the film.

Backed by Cape of Good Hope Films and Karan Johar's Dharma Productions, "Kesari" is directed by Anurag Singh.

Thanking the film's cast and crew, Parineeti tweeted: "Anytime I watched a war movie, it was the love story of those brave men that kept me going. So proud to be a part of this epic experience! Thank



you Akshay sir, Karan Johar and Anurag sir for allowing me to be a part of your vision. You all have made one of the most beautiful movies people will ever see."

Karan wrote on Instagram that the film is a true historic account of one of the bravest battles ever fought. "So proud to have told this story," he said.

## Saira Banu Wants To Meet PM

MUMBAI: Veteran actress Saira Banu has requested a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, following the release of builder Samir Bhojwani who had been arrested for usurping her and yesteryear superstar Dilip Kumar's Pali Hill bungalow here.

A post from Dilip Kumar's official Twitter handle read: "Request from Saira Banu Khan: The Hon'ble PMO India, Shri Narendra Modi sir, land mafia Samir Bhojwani released from jail. No action taken despite assurances by (Maharashtra) Chief

Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Padma Vibhushit betrayed, threatened by money and muscle power. Request meeting with you in Mumbai."

Dilip Kumar turned 96 just earlier this week.

Last year, Saira had complained that Bhojwani, on the basis of forged and fabricated documents, was claiming to be the owner of their bungalow. This led the Economic Offences Wing of the Mumbai Police to register a case of cheating against him.

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