

'Shoot On Sight' lays out blueprint for global terrorism

Film: 'Shoot On Sight'; Cast: Naseeruddin Shah, Om Puri, Greta Scacchi, Gulshan Grover, Mikhaal Zulfikar; Director: Jagmohan Mundhra; Rating: ***

'Shoot On Sight' works as a wake-up call for those slumbering in their bourgeois belief that terrorism is as far away from home as Osama Bin Laden is from the US.

It's a frightening piece of fiction laced with a fair amount of warmth and affection that lulls us into a false sense of wellbeing. In essence, the plot takes us back to the domesticated terrorism of Alan Pakula's 'The Devil's Own' or more recently Subhash Ghai's 'Black And White' where a young wide-eyed seemingly-unspoilt guest in the house turns out to be a closet-terrorist.

Where 'Shoot On Sight' scores is in laying out the blueprint for global terrorism through characters who appear real in words, body language and political ideology.

Jagmohan Mundhra has earlier balanced a social cause with a message in 'Provoked'. Here the 'thrill' element emanates far more effortlessly from the characters and their predicament, partly because the theme of terrorism renders itself far dramatically to a cinematic treatment than domestic violence.

London is shot by cinematographer Madhu Ambat with all its inherent buzz and blemishes without fuss or rush. The flow of adrenaline as the British cops zero in on their distinguished Pakistani colleague's nephew as a terrorist is rather reined in than rushed.

This isn't a film that's in a hurry to get there. But it knows how to value the audiences' time.

And this is where 'Shoot On Sight' scores the optimum impact. Mundhra revels in generous levels of understatement most of the time. Whether showing the fanaticism in the mosque (Om Puri, aptly extravagant) or the dilemma of the cop's Pakistan-British daughter - Mundhra packs it all into the simmering cultural cauldron with dexterity and dignity.

While on the whole the characters in the cop-protagonist Tariq Ali's home and workplace come to life with vigorous fluency, some portions of the storytelling fall flat. Naseer's assistant, played by Laila Rouass, comes to a soggy end in a river with the suddenness of a video-game with its socket pulled out. The hastily-executed climax in a shopping mall where Tariq Ali's nephew is shot down with a sweeping-under-the-carpet haste, is a screaming shame.

Mostly, Mundhra uses economy of expression to great effect. Sometimes just one or two scenes are enough to establish the camaraderie between characters creating a crisscross of inter-relations with disconcerting deftness.

There's just one intimate interlude in the kitchen at the start between the Pakistani cop Naseer and his British wife played Greta Scacchi. It's enough to show the enduring empathy between the couple. The rift that seeps into their marriage because of the closet-terrorist nephew's presence in their house is again represented in a flash of anger and indignation where Naseer accuses Scacchi of discrimination.

A culturally-defining moment that stays with you after the last bang-bang.

A major part of the film's success goes to the the actors. Om Puri as a radical clergy, Gulshan Grover as Naseer's butcher-friend, and the British actors, who play Naseer's colleagues at the precinct, they all add a wealth of credibility to Mundhra's tale of malevolence in a city that's outwardly a haven for healing.

Debutant Mikhaal Zulfikar as Naseer's nephew gives a comfortably-defined performance. Mikhaal gets the point early in the narrative when on arrival from Pakistan in London, driving from the airport he gets to know his English aunt has not converted to Islam.

Watch the young actor's subtle shift of expression from easy grace to disgust and disapproval -- it's frightening to see because it reflects the reality about how young people all over the world are converted to extremist causes.

What finally gives 'Shoot On Sight' a compelling edge beyond the expected, making it more than just a pantomime of post-terrorism mores, is Naseer.

As always Naseer merges into the character pitching the emotions at a level where they appear to be thought of on the-the-spot and certainly not for the sake of a camera. Domestic scenes and details served up in delicious vignettes provide a back projection to Naseer's complex character. Naseer glides effortlessly with his character as it goes from cultural comfort to fundamentalist isolation. The actor and the character become one.

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