

## 'Jail' a gritty reality show

Film: 'Jail'; Director: Madhur Bhandarkar; Cast: Neil Nitin Mukesh, Manoj Bajpai, Mugdha Godse, Arya Babbar, Rahul Singh, Chetan Pandit; Rating: \*\*\*1/2

Madhur Bhandarkar has done it again. From 'Jail', one expected a gritty, hard-hitting and thought-provoking drama. Bhandarkar delivers all this and lots more.

Before one starts drawing any comparisons, let's make one thing clear - 'Jail' isn't 'The Shawshank Redemption'. The only similarity is that they both tell the story of prison inmates. Other than that neither the storyline nor the treatment bear any resemblance.

Bhandarkar recreates the world of prison inmates as he tells the story of Parag Dixit (Neil), who has been falsely implicated in a drug case. The film comes to the point right away with Parag's corporate career coming to a roadblock as he finds himself surrounded by inmates.

In trademark Bhandarkar treatment, numerous characters are fleshed out - the butcher (Manoj Bajpayee) with a mysterious past, a lower middle class man (Rahul Singh) who has committed a murder in a fit of anger, a gangster (Aarya Babbar) and a youngster whose car has mowed down half a dozen people. But the film's core is still Parag.

It is Parag's tale that succeeds in keeping the audience watching. The claustrophobic atmosphere in the jail barrack suffocates audiences as Bhandarkar never allows the film to go off tangent. Yes, the frequent journey from jail to court and then back without any results do turn depressing after a while. But this is where the realism sets in.

Instead of taking the routine Bollywood route about third degree torture, police brutality, homosexuality and inmate bullying, Bhandarkar maintains an unbiased point of view. Yes, the film shocks but more due to the emotional turmoil that Parag goes through rather than on-screen visuals.

Especially notable are the scenes where Neil goes nude for a strip check. Through sheer body language and mannerisms, Neil gives an excellent account of himself. He depicts varied emotions from being subdued to sudden bouts of aggression to helplessness and then the final redemption. With 'Jail', he surpasses his efforts in 'Johnny Gaddaar' and 'New York'.

Manoj Bajpai has a shorter screen time but shines nevertheless. Mugdha is natural as Neil's girlfriend. Aarya Babbar, who till now was struggling in Bollywood, comes up with his best performance so far. He is perfect. So is Rahul Singh, who plays the role of Ghani.

'Jail' raises important questions about India's prison system. Rather than taking sides, Bhandarkar states bare facts and questions whether an individual really deserves to live in misery until proven guilty?

*Joginder Tuteja* ( © IANS / India eNews)