

'Anwar' highlights love during communal strife

Film: 'Anwar'; Actors: Manisha Koirala, Siddharth Koirala, Nauheed Cyrusi, Hiten Tejwani; Director: Manish Jha; Rating: ** 1/2

Lucknow - volatile, culturally rich, temperamental, poetic, dichotomous, ironical ... somehow writer-director Manish Jha captures all of this with brutal force in this deeply flawed yet moving tale of love and politics.

'Anwar' picks up a welter of headlines on communal strife and stores them in one turbulent but telescopic overview of existence at the fringes.

The focus of Jha's narrative is an old abandoned temple where a derelict-lover Anwar (Siddharth Koirala) takes refuge.

This innocent act of sheltering wounded love triggers off a bizarre chain of events. TV cameras simmer across the horizon, a film crew with an item girl materialises on the spot and a spaced out journalist (Rajpal Yadav) searches for George Bush's mobile number.

Wily politicians who are spurned by women and constituencies walk across Jha's crowded canvas creating a tempo and temperature that is at once intriguing and provocative.

Jha, who earlier made 'Matrubhoomi' - an unbearably gruesome film on female foeticide and mass rape - turns vaguely lyrical here.

'Anwar' is partially a political parable and partly a love story. I'd rather see the politics that envelopes the entire murky skyline as an offshoot of the love story about the sensitive Anwar whose love for the girl next door Mehroo (Nauheed Cyrusi) is thwarted by the happening Hindu boy (Hiten Tejwani).

The triangle builds up into a frightening deadlock culminating in three deaths one after another.

'Anwar' is a dark and wounded work. Its creditable plot line is largely unsupported by any marked pockets of tenderness or sensitivity from the fringes. Every character has a story to yell - and I do mean yell.

Manisha Koirala playing a Barkha Dutta-styled TV journalist speaks to her weeping repentant lover (Sushant Singh). A troubled cop (Yashpal Sharma) has a terminally ill wife and whiny daughter to deal with while trying to flush out the poor 'terrorist' from his holy hideout. And a slimy Hindu chauvinist (Sudhir Pandey) comes down on Valentine's Day revellers because he has just been snubbed in his extra-marital affair.

Shiv Senaites, eat your hearts out.

All these headlines hardly hold together the brittle plot. The sharp edges stick out creating more ideological chaos than any definite denouement to the tangled story. Adding to the prevalent muddle is a beggar-charlatan-actor (Vijay Raaz) who thinks love is the most precious gift in the world. Raaz is both parodic and passionate.

What holds together is the central theme of love during times of communal conflict created not by rioters but within the domestic lifestage. Young Siddharth's character gently nudges Aamir Khan's in Deepa Mehta's '1947: Earth'.

Jha uses granite locations (supposedly Lucknow) and mythological allusions with equal sincerity. He avoids overt sentimentality but ends up creating unconscious folds of tender feelings within the dilating communal canvas.

In the week of the epic 'Guru', let's applaud this small but significant film about scarred souls trying to come to terms with a socio-political scenario that leaves no room for human values.

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