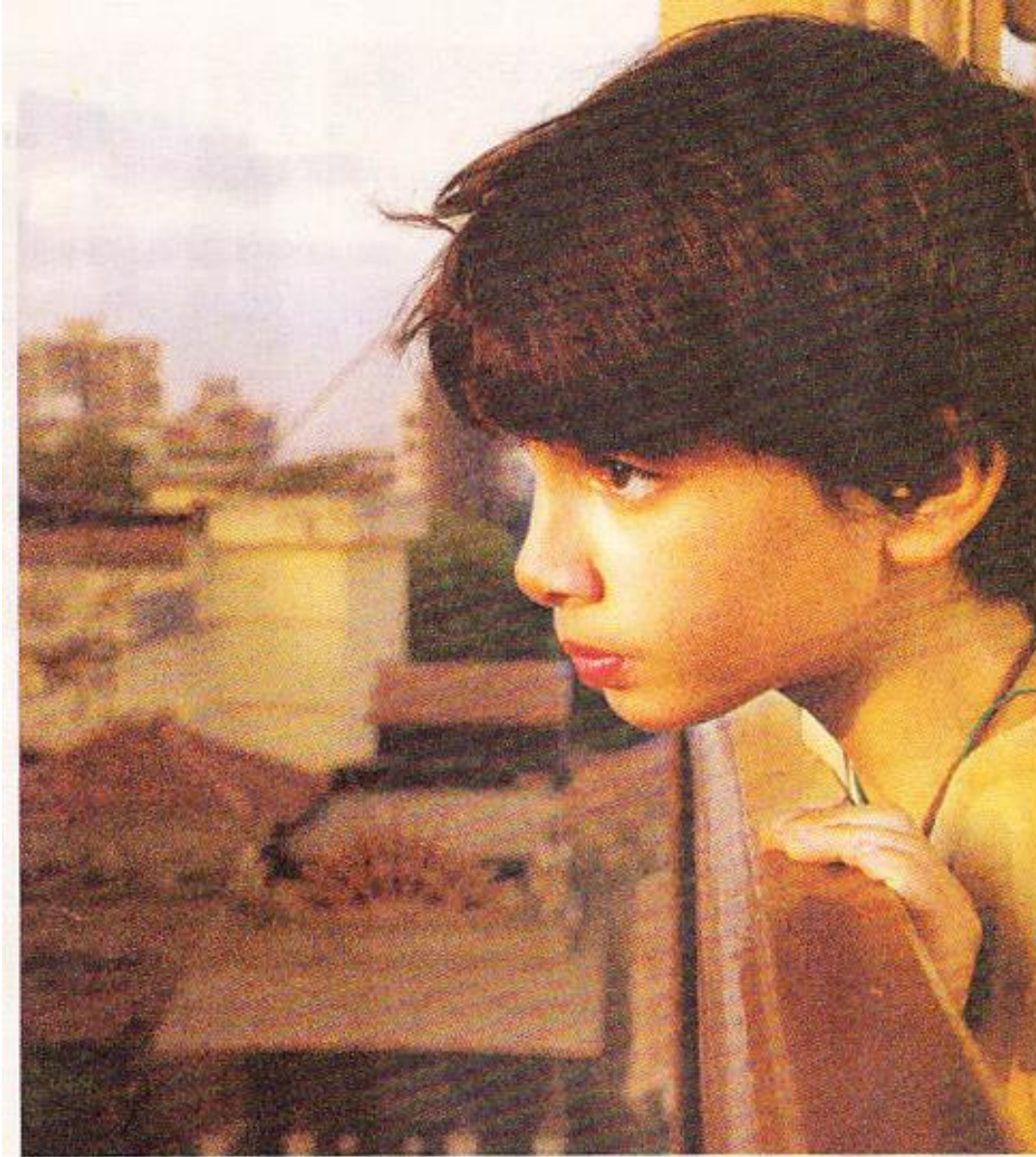


Thoughtful Social Drama

By Deepa Karmalkar | Screen India | March 20th - 26th, 2009



Producer:
Dinaz Stafford
Writer, Director:
Sooni Taraporevala
Stars:
Boman Irani,
Sohrab Ardeshir,
Imaad Shah,
Shernaz Patel,
Zenobia Shroff,
Iyanah & Jahan Bitivala,
John Abraham

RUSHES

Plot

The clash between a fundamentalist and a reformist from the Parsi community

Verdict

An easy-flowing narrative about an interesting societal tussle

Box-Office Prospects

A treat for niche audiences

Little Zizou (Hindi)

Thoughtful social drama

CREATIVE QUOTIENT

Sooni Taraporevala, the screenplay writer of celebrated cross-over films like *Salaam Bombay*, *Mississippi Masala* and *The Namesake*, makes a commendable directorial debut with this film. Rather predictably, she chooses to base her entire movie on her own Parsi community, but thereon she springs surprise after surprise by picking up the thorny issue of fundamentalism and tackling it in an easy, breezily-humorous manner.

Xerxes (Jahan Bativala), fondly known as Little Zizou and the 11-year-old protagonist of the film leads a carefree life, idolising soccer star Zinedine Zidane, cutting classes, escaping his religious, bigot father Cyrus II Khodaiji (Sohrab Ardeshir) and his starchy secretary Miss Patel (Shernaz Patel) and talking to his deceased mother's photograph. Little Zizou often finds comfort in the caring warmth of his neighbour, Roxy aunty (Zenobia Shroff). Zizou's older brother, 19-year-old Artazerxes (Imaad Shah) is a caricaturist who is hell-bent on turning a scrapped jumbo-jet cockpit into a flying machine simulator along with his buddies. And he has a crush on Roxy aunty's gamine daughter Zenobia (Dilshad Patel) who in turn is in love with Arjun (John Abraham), an assistant sculptor.

When religious head Khodaiji sparks off a fundamentalist movement about "pure-blooded" Parsis and launches his own chapter of PLO (Parsi Liberation Organisation), his liberal neighbour and Roxy aunty's husband Boman Presvala (Boman Irani) calls his bluff by exposing him through his 100-year-old Parsi community newsletter *Rustom-e-Sohrab*. Khodaiji retaliates by locking out the newspaper.

Will the PLO overpower the libertine Parsis? Will Art be able to get his junk cockpit to fly and will Little Zizou ever

meet his idol Big Zizou and will hope triumph over ostracism? Sooni poses pertinent queries and brings them to a logical culmination in her film. Her characters continue living in your mind long after you have left the cinema hall. Her well-nuanced narrative comes together as wholesome entertainment.

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

Director Taraporevala orchestrates her Parsi story and cast towards a harmonious crescendo. She chooses authentic backdrops like a Parsi colony and the Udwada township where Parsis landed when they fled their native Persia centuries ago. She brings out the quirks and strengths of her community very well - this is an insightful look at their dwindling numbers. Of the players - the debutant child actors Iyanah and Jahan Bativala deserve a special mention for their unaffected, naughty and naive screen presence. Boman Irani, Sohrab Ardeshir, Imaad Shah and Zenobia Shroff fit in effortlessly. Shernaz Patel as the prim secretary and Mahabanoo Mody-Kotwal as Majestic granny are complete revelations. They deserve more roles and films.

Production designer Nitin Desai organises most authentic locations and sets that enhance the appeal of the film. Director of photography Himman Dhamija places his frames most realistically, while editors T Woody Richman's and Kristina Boden's crisp cuts help the film further. Fusion composer and percussionist Bickram Ghosh's music lends an edge too. On the whole, it's a cinematic experience that's easy and entertaining.

VERDICT

Three stars - one each for the writer-director, the supreme talent of the ensemble cast and finally for the light and easy handling of the issue of fundamentalism that continues to haunt modern society.

■ Deepa Karmalkar