

Cinestaan

REVIEW [BENGALI]

Cat Sticks review: Important film with the potential to change perspective towards drug addicts

Release Date: 18 Apr 2020

Cinestaan Rating



Acting: ● ● ● ○ Direction: ● ● ● ● Music: ● ● ● ○ Story: ● ● ● ●



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Cat Sticks reveals an unexplored picture of a darker Kolkata, hidden under the cover of City of Joy, that is filled with hungry souls connected by a single thread of addiction.



Ronny Sen's *Cat Sticks* is a disturbing yet fascinating revelation of the world of drug addicts that usually remains under cover. Perhaps for this reason, Sen has shot the film in monochrome, to emphasize that the world of these souls, often regarded as worthless, is grey. In this world, however, the addicts, too, have their narratives.

Cat Sticks documents the adventures, or misadventures, of these people with unexplored elements of fiction that are engaging. Sen hasn't tried to evoke pity for these characters; instead, he has tried to present them as individuals with their own struggles in a different dimension.

Cat Sticks is full of moving images of a rainy night, in which a few characters' search for 'stuff' turns more animated and alive. Pablo [Rahul Dutta] is quite sorted with his regular routine. His addiction is not justified with any back story. He is suave when he speaks. He keeps hallucinating and often offers the right life lessons to his fellow smokers, who are yet to get over the rounds of rehabilitation, like Ronnie [Sumit Thakur] and Deshik [Saurav Saraswat].

Ronnie is perhaps the only one of the lot whose journey into addiction can be traced back to his dysfunctional family. Deshik's story is one of every drug addict who spends the last hour of his night getting into trips, before getting admitted to rehab the next morning.

Byang [Tanmay Dhanania] and Potol [Sounak Kundu] share the most beautiful relationship of the lot. Byang finds refuge in Potol's company instead of spending passionate moments with his opportunist girlfriend Orna [Sreejita Mitra]. Perhaps he knows in his heart that he will never find solace in her and hence longs to go to the ocean with Potol, who takes him to the river instead.

The sequence in which Byang and Potol help each other trace the veins in their naked bodies is surreal and poetic. There is more care for each other in their mutual search than in the moments of making out between Orna and Byang. The sequence also brings alive a mystical mindset of those two souls which may be beyond the perception of supposedly normal people, as if in their search, their physical existence dissolves.

Shreya Dev Dube's play with light with her camerawork in this sequence does justice to every moment. There is a hint of secrecy in her choice of frames, giving the sense that this world is to remain in the shadows.

The film opens with Pablo, Deshik and Ronnie finding their hideout in a dilapidated aircraft in the bushes in a heavy downpour. Like the discarded aircraft, they, too, appear discarded in the eyes of society. Darkness, rats and shit in the forest are what they are accustomed to staying with.



The narrative of Biplob [Raja] depicts the journey of a lonely father who is compassionate and also desperate. Biplob repeatedly proves that the desperation for smoking brown sugar has not taken away his humanity. Though the scene of him smoking in front of his child looks odd, Sen probably did not want to hide the father's reality from the child.

On the other hand, the escapades of Toto [Kalpan Mitra], Tamanna Bhai [Joyraj Bhattacharjee] and Bappa [Soumyajit Majumdar] are testament to the untoward situations that drug addicts often get into, going against the legalities of society. The narrative is a bit absurd, but it has an unexpected turn that baffles the audience, which is either disturbed or mesmerized by the unfolding of each subtext in the plot.

Sen has chosen perfect nicknames for the characters. They hallucinate, have raw conversations on life and politics, use a lot of slang. They perhaps love to identify themselves with the entities that the slang represents. Through their conversations, Sen's political ideology in connection with control over drugs can be subtly identified.

Cat Sticks also reveals an unexplored picture of Kolkata that can be related with the tales of unnecessary torture by the police on 'convicts', can be traced in the desperation of addicts who don't hesitate to sell their body parts for 'stuff', or in the exploitation by one addict of another. Under the cover of 'City of Joy', there is a dark Kolkata that is filled with hungry souls

connected by the single thread of addiction.

As all the narratives reach their pinnacle, Sen presents the iconic image of a crow sitting on a stoned addict, who has turned into a statue while holding his cat sticks in his hand. He is oblivious to his surroundings. Even the sorted and confident Pablo is shaken to the core by the sight.

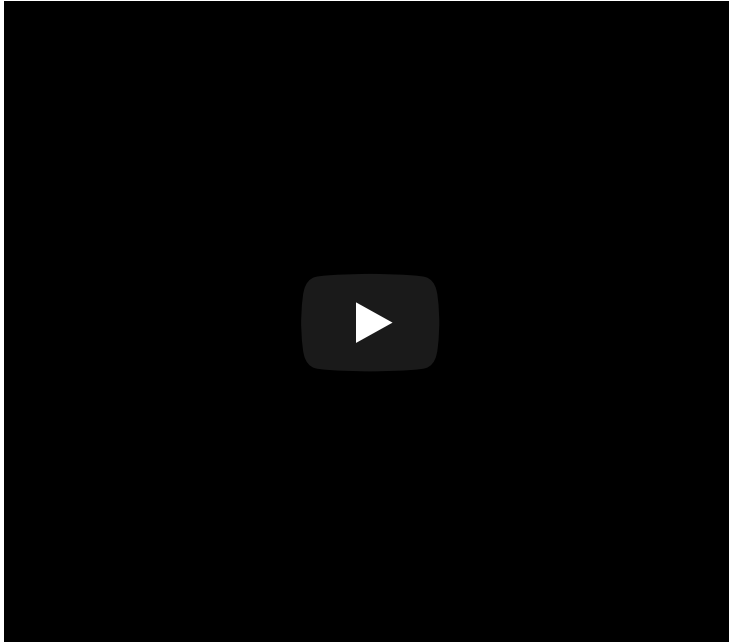


Dube again deserves credit for capturing such an unprecedented moment in the film, along with many other shots that capture the repressed emotions of all the characters, symbols of an unknown Kolkata and of one leftist political party as well.

Oliver Weeks's music is in deep contrast with the depiction of the rugged world, but at the same time it brings out the raw sentiment of the narratives. Nikon's editing preserves the important detailing of each of the frame without making them imposing for a moment.

All the artistes bring their characters alive, inasmuch as an addict can appear alive. It is apparent from the performances that Sen has been able to make them part of a collective concept, in which all are in synch with the core idea. Of all the performances, Raja's striking facial expression, Rahul Dutta and Joyraj Bhattacharjee's consistent temperament and Tanmay Dhanania's natural appearance remain in memory.

Cat Sticks definitely has its target audience, but it is an important film that needs to be viewed widely in a society that chooses to feign blindness about a lot of uncomfortable issues. The film is the outcome of dedicated and passionate teamwork that is reflected in each frame and has the potential to change the viewer's perspective of addicts, without making them rise above their situation.



Cat Sticks is currently available for viewing on MUBI India.

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