Nobel Chor
Shoma A. Chatterji Posted: Mar 02, 2012 at 1042 hrs IST

Gripping story

Story, Screenplay and Direction: Suman Ghosh
Music: Bickram Ghosh
Cast: Mithun Chakrabarty, Soumitra Chatterjee, Rupa Ganguly, Harsh Chhayam Saswata Chatterjee, Soma Chakraborty, Shankar Debnath, Dwijen Banerjee, Sumanta Mukherjee and Arindam Sil

Nobel Chor is a fictionalised account based on the real-life incident of the theft of Rabindranath Tagore’s Nobel Prize Medal in 2004. The then-Left Party-ruled state government failed to solve the case and closed the file some years later. The present Government, then in the Opposition, brayed at the time but is yet to make an official statement after assuming power.
Bhanu Udathi (Mithun Chakraborty), a poor, illiterate peasant, discovers a round, metallic object in the field outside his hut. He has no idea what it is. He takes it to the village headmaster (Soumitra Chatterjee) who is reading the headlines about the theft of the Nobel Medal. A confused Bhanu is packed off to Kolkata to hand over the national property to the State CM along with a framed portrait of Tagore that the master says will protect him from danger.

The film shifts focus to Bhanu’s first-ever trip to Kolkata dotted with encounters, some good, mostly bad ones with different people. Most are convinced that he is the medal thief. His wife and son are socially ostracised and the media sensationalises his ‘escape’. His first encounter is with Hari and his wife Monu. Hari has changed his name to Jeet to fit into Kolkata’s upmarket environment. Monu is naive and innocent but smart enough to smell her husband’s suspicious motives in asking Bhanu to hide the medal.

Bhanu’s journey takes him to other people. The jeweller wants it for the value of the gold in it. The rich businessman wants to sell it at a high price to his international network. The antique dealer is not interested because he wants things that belong to new-age celebrities, not Tagore. The sub-plots show Bhanu being chased by the police on the one hand and the mafia on the other. Embittered and disillusioned, he decides to go back. The medal remains lost. Or, as one of the celebrities interviewed says, “It was lost a long time ago,” figuratively referring to the ignorance and indifference of the common man to Rabindranath Tagore and what he stands for in contemporary West Bengal. Ghosh takes potshots at people who make a living out of celebrating Tagore’s birth and death anniversaries, at people who know nothing about the Nobel and are not keen either and at the value system threatened by the invasive power of materialism in a globalised world.

The structure is a blend of the thriller, some documentation but mainly a straightforward, linear narrative that ends precisely when it should. Mithun Chakraborty gives one more National award-worthy performance as Bhanu. Sankar Debnath as the village nut is brilliant as the voice of conscience and alter-ego of Bhanu. The supporting cast can take a bow, every single one of them. Bickram Ghosh’s musical score is individualistic and unique, yet fits into the ambience of the film in its varying moods. Barun Mukherjee’s cinematography is an epitome of subtlety while Indraneel Ghosh’s art direction sweeps across the aesthetic map of the film. Nobel Chor is Suman Ghosh’s best till date.

Ratings : Four stars for the music, acting, cinematography and direction.