FOR A NOBEL CAUSE

Suman Ghosh is ready with his third film that weaves a fantasy tale around the theft of Tagore’s prized medal

After bagging a National Award with Podokkhep and courting a controversy with Dwando, Suman Ghosh is all set to explore a fantasy tale spun around Tagore’s stolen prize in his new film titled Nobel Chor with Mithun Chakraborty in the lead. A t2 chat with the professor of economics in Miami...

What is Nobel Chor all about?

It is a fictionalised account of what happened to the stolen Nobel prize of Tagore. The protagonist, Bhanu, is a poor farmer who lives in a village in Bolpur. The film is about Bhanu’s journey as he comes to Calcutta from the village to sell the Nobel medal. He encounters different people and his journey takes him across different social strata, where he faces several hilarious as well as poignant incidents which have a profound influence on him. Ultimately what happens to his endeavour? Can Bhanu sell the medal? Nobel Chor is a story about that journey and primarily a thriller that should appeal to all.

What prompted a film on Tagore’s stolen prize?

You see, when the Nobel theft happened in 2004 I found the incident extremely metaphorical. Certainly it is deplorable that such a thing happened. So the incident was on my mind all these years.

Then recently, I was reading The New York Times when I came across a story on how one of Descartes’s (French philosopher and mathematician) very important letters stolen many years ago had been found in a small town in Pennsylvania. The discovery of the letter became big news. Somehow, that triggered the storyline of Nobel Chor. It’s difficult to pinpoint the exact connection but I thought it would be an interesting avenue through which one could explore a lot of issues relating to Tagore and modern Bengal.

Your films have always been a statement on society. What are you trying to convey through this film?

I don’t start off a project with a particular message or statement in mind. But yes, the core issue has to be something I feel intensely about. Podokkhep was about the older generation in today’s Calcutta, Dwando was about marital ethics and Nobel Chor is about the relevance of Tagore in present-day Bengal.

Amartya Sen had said after the theft: ‘It’s really sad. But you see the Nobel was a metal object after all. We have to think whether we still follow Tagore’s true spirit and philosophy in our lives. That is much more important than the medal per se’. You can say that sums up Nobel Chor.

Who is the Nobel chor?

The actual Nobel chor is not shown in the film. I don’t want to reveal any more. I just use the Nobel theft incident and then construct a fantastical account of that.

What made you choose Mithun to play the lead?

Mithun plays the role of a farmer in the film. Of course, he is the protagonist and the entire film revolves around him. I am a big fan of his acting.

Last summer, when I was in Calcutta I saw Shukno Lanka. I was stunned by his performance. His body language, his demeanour... everything. Most of all I was impressed by the dedication and sincerity with which he essayed the role. Even after being one of the top superstars in Mumbai, having won three National Awards... just look at his dedication. After I narrated the story of Nobel Chor to him, he was very excited. I am looking forward...
Soumitra Chatterjee to working with him.

Your films seem incomplete without Soumitra Chatterjee...

(Laughs) I am in love with him. He plays the role of a respected village schoolteacher in *Nobel Chor*.

What is the rest of the cast?

Indrani Halder plays Mithun’s wife and there are two other couples who play important characters. Roopa Ganguly plays a rich businessman’s wife who is pivotal in changing the course of the narrative. She is a strong character who holds on to her ethics. Saswata Chatterjee and Sudipta Chakraborty play another couple. I just love their acting and have been wanting to work with them for quite some time now.

You have cinematographer Barun Mukherjee on board again…

This film is a cinematographer’s delight. He is very excited about the project. You see, *Dwando* was primarily an interior film and hence his scope was limited. We are talking a lot about the visual treatment of the film.

Does music play an important part?

Yes, definitely. Mayookh Bhaumik is directing the music. There will be a lot of folk songs for which Arindam Sil, Barun da and I am trying to collect old folk tunes. And, of course, there will be Tagore songs.

Who is producing *Nobel Chor*?

Mumbai-based Ashwani Sharma of Impact Films is producing it. Arindam Sil’s Nothing Beyond Cinema is taking care of the line production and Arindam is the executive producer.

Why not Databazaar Media Ventures, with which you are associated?

I am associated with Databazaar as one of the board members. I believe what they are doing is amazing as far as distribution of Bengali films is concerned in the North American market but it has nothing to do with me as a director.

Does the controversy related to your last film, *Dwando*, still bother you?

After *Dwando* released and the immense controversy surrounding it exploded, I was heartbroken. During that time, one afternoon Bumba da (Prosenjit) had called me up to find out how I was coping. I told him I was very demoralised and didn’t know whether I could go on.

His reaction was: ‘Ektা gatta khabi erokom kotha aar bolle’. Then we had a long chat in his house where he gave me a larger picture of the industry and how to look ahead from hereon.

He has been a huge source of encouragement for me ever since I met him a few years back. I will never forget those words he told me then and now I am back with gusto for my next film. Bumba da was very excited about my new project when I told him recently.

Mohua Das
Is Mithun the most versatile actor in India? Tell t2@abpmedia.com