

SCREEN

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REGIONAL

Podokkhep

(Tollygunge)

A daring venture MIDBANNER

Life is all about stepping into new territories for the first time beginning with birth and ending with going away. Some steps, like being born, are relatively smooth and simple. Some others, such as growing old, are complex and difficult.

Podokkhep (The First Step) negotiates the constant fluxes in the relationship between Shashanka Palit, a retired man and his adult daughter. The film with how Palit constantly has to re-negotiate with himself, his daughter, and with the little child Trisha, whose parents, the Sens, move in as neighbours.

The feeling of loneliness that fills us, as we get older is not only because old people live alone. It is also because they find it difficult to cope with their own grown-up children, because their values are different, their thinking differs and so does their ideology. Palit is a reticent old man who does not usually let go of his feelings. The daughter's feelings towards the father vary from plain disgust to a sense of responsibility to a deep and abiding love. They live their lives in private worlds of their own. Little Trisha arrives like a ray of bright sunshine in Palit's life, but only for a short while. The Sens encourage the growing bonding between the old man and the little girl till, one afternoon, while picking Trisha back from school, Palit gets into the metro failing to pull her in with him. All hell breaks loose and the parents give the old man a loud tongue leashing but his daughter comes to his defence. The girl is found, the schism smoothens and they become friends all over again.

Though Podokkhep is focussed on the slow-paced loneliness of the aged Palit, it offers insights into the lives of the grown up daughter and her permissive relationship with her Muslim colleague, the Sens who are pressurised by the pretence of being affluent NRIs while the little Trisha is the happiest of them all, hob-nobbing with her new friend Palit and expressing herself lucidly through her pastel drawings. The Sens leave, Palit has a heart attack and the daughter takes care of the father. The film closes on Palit on his hospital bed, coiled into a foetal position, with Trisha's sketches lying beside him.

Produced by the young Advertisement
Nitesh Sharma under the
banner of Bangla Talkies,
Podokkhep has been
written and directed by
NRI Suman Ghosh. The
narrative is in keeping with
the lifestyle of the old man.
The film opens with a
shocking symbol of death.
The straphanging Palit

inside a moving metro looks out in fear at himself waiting outside on the platform, having failed to catch the train. The Palit inside the moving train is perhaps moving away from life. The Palit on the platform encapsulates the memories and experiences of his life. This scene is repeated when Palit really looks outside the metro train and is shocked to discover a frightened and confused Trisha standing on the platform. There is a beautifully orchestrated picnic scene shot against the soundtrack of a Tagore song sans dialogue. The young Sens and the daughter laugh and chat while the old man wanders away with little Trisha. The vacuum of old age comes across in a scene where Palit lies sprayed on the threshold across two rooms. The frightened daughter thinks he has had a heart attack. When she calls out to him, he turns around to tell her that he was fascinated by the movements of a train of tiny ants across the floor! The father's shock when he discovers that his daughter's sexual morals are at complete variance from his own is a telling moment many parents of grown-up children will identify with.



There is very little dialogue in the film and despite the slow pace, there is a sense of rhythm in the editing (Moinak Bhowmik). Cinematography (Samiran Datta) adds to the quality of the film. Soumitra Chatterjee as Palit, Nandita Das as the daughter, Tota Roychoudhury and June Malya as the Sens, Nitesh Sharma as Nandita's boyfriend and above all, the little girl who plays Trisha to perfection, have fulfilled the difficult task of soaking in the slow ambience of the film without permitting the narrative to drag into boredom. One must admit however, that the film is targeted at a niche audience because the Indian audience mainly used to fast track editing and jet-paced action, may not take kindly to its slow pace. A good debut by Suman Ghosh and congratulations to the young producer for daring to produce such an unconventional film.

—[Shoma A Chatterji](#)

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