

TIFF 2012 Film Review: Mumbai's King

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Manjeet Singh's *Mumbai's King* (Mumbai Cha Raja) emanates from the **slums of Mumbai** and dwells there. Just the mention of the word 'slum' is enough to revive parallels with *Slumdog Millionaire* for any film from India but *Mumbai's King* chooses to differ. Singh's debut film saunters at its own pace but keeps the audience occupied.

The film focuses on two adorable slum kids, Rahul (Rahul Bairagi) and Arbaaz (Arbaaz Khan). Inspired by real life incidents in a Mumbai slum, the camera follows young Rahul as he **aimlessly wanders** around his neighbourhood playing pranks, stealing goodies and generally having a good time with his friend Arbaaz, the balloon seller.

Interestingly, the balloons accompany them everywhere and become a cute symbol of their colourful world which is unruffled by **life's harsh realities**. As the kids go about their day-to-day activities, it makes you wonder if they have a home, a family or why they aren't in school? This becomes clear as the film evolves.

Rahul is undoubtedly the king of his home turf as he moves around unafraid of his surroundings may it be day or night. But he has a **troubled childhood** and an **alcoholic father** who beats both him and his stepmother. For him, the easy **escape** is to spend time on the streets.

Singh's ability to depict the way kids can simplify a **complex** situation and gain their own understanding is noteworthy. This is also obvious in the way the friends support Rahul by feeding and offering him a bed to sleep.

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The camera follows them so closely that the kids merge with their environment. They have no qualms about digging through garbage and creating games. They have their own secret spot or **sanctuary** where they splash around. As the skyscrapers of the city loom in view, Singh illustrates how a completely different world exists right beside them. This **diversity** is especially true in most metropolitan cities like Mumbai in India.

Singh spins the dark and dingy side of things to actually make them light and funny. Despite Rahul's troubled world, the boys have fun and participate in the local festivities of the Lord Ganesh festival and even start following girls. A scene depicts Rahul sleeping behind the statue of Lord Ganesh, it's as if he's taking a **safe refuge**. This is also symbolic given the fact that Lord Ganesh is the remover of obstacles.

Singh uses the **innocence of childhood** as a contrast against serious issues of domestic violence, poverty, over-population, over-crowding and pollution. The upbeat sound track in the film elevates the sordidness of the surroundings.

Singh left his engineering job in the US to pursue a film career in Mumbai. This feature was made with a very small crew in a real environment with real life non-actors. He allowed the kids to **explore situations** and express them in their own way. The film was shot using natural light and a digital SLR camera.

Despite the lack of experience, the non-professional actors are natural and streetwise in their performances. Rahul effectively depicts the **chaos** in his life. The bonding between him and Arbaaz brings you a notch closer to the joys of their world.