

TIFF 2012 Film Review: Shanghai

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By Preeti Thandi.



Dibakar Banerjee's trademark classy **unconventional style** instantly makes *Shanghai* a must-see film. A politically charged thriller, the film is an adaptation of Vassillis Vassilikos's **explosive** novel 'Z'. Equally explosive in content *Shanghai* is set in small town Bharat Nagar. Yet through this unknown locale, Banerjee deftly unravels the machinations of India's political landscape, bureaucracy and corruption.

Interestingly, the title of the film is an ominous symbol of both progress and destruction. A high profile multinational project in Bharat Nagar is a vision of the state's ruling political party. This dream project, IBP - International Business Park promises to **transform** the area with booming development into a mega city like Shanghai.

As is clearly obvious from Banerjee's earlier offerings like *Khosla Ka Ghosla* and *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!*, his ability to capture the slightest nuances of his subject matter are **remarkable**. His effectiveness in revealing the other side of progress is both scary and chilling at the same time.

Prosenjit Chatterjee is imposing and fluid in his portrayal of Doctor Ahmedi, the firebrand activist opposed to the government's plan because it displaces the poor residents of the town. He arrives in Bharat Nagar and is greeted by his assistant Shalini (Kalki Koechlin) who has been forewarned about danger ahead. Obviously perturbed she tries to warn Ahmedi only to ignite passion. Paying no heed to the warnings, Ahmedi delivers his speech to the people with enough **zeal** and **humour** despite the prevailing tension. As he steps out of the meeting, he is hit by a truck. What appears to be a horrendous accident is considered to be an orchestrated **assassination** attempt by Ahmedi's well-wishers.

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Abhay Deol plays a bureaucrat, Krishnan who is brought in to investigate the crime. Convincing in his portrayal of a Tamil IAS officer, Deol also effectively depicts the 'pressures' of his high profile rank. Despite that he does stand up against authority. Kalki Koechlin's performance is similar to other angered foreign-born characters she has played in previous films.

But most **refreshing** is the transformation of **Emraan Hashmi** from an on screen Casanova to an everyday common man, Joginder trying his hand at every opportunity. A small time videographer and pornographer, Joginder chances upon key evidence for the case and willingly throws himself into imminent danger.

Banerjee has sculpted his characters really well from the way they look to their transformation and the inner core of their personalities. It's not only Hashmi or Deol, even Farooque Shaikh appears in a completely different role as Kaul and represents how the **political machinery** of the country operates. Elements in the film that make it truly **commendable** are layers of politics, mob mentality, greed and how people can be influenced by it. Progress also becomes a character in it's own - the political coalition for the infrastructure project is 'progressive' and every time a member picks up his phone he exclaims "Jai Pragati" which means long live progress. But in the end the **paradox** still remains, has anything really changed in the name of progress?