

TIFF 2012 Film Review: Ship of Theseus

• on September 12, 2012

By Preeti Thandi.



The *Ship of Theseus* is a film that you have **probably never seen before**. It triggers a million questions, incites the intellect in ways you cannot even imagine and haunts you. Anand Gandhi has created a world-class masterpiece and infused it with universality. The *Ship of Theseus* is a film that actually puts you there and makes you feel like you are a part of it. **Heightened visuals** and **sound effects** enhance that sensory experience. Each scene fills the canvas of the screen like a unique painting. The film is structured into three parts and each part paints the story of every character.

The film opens with the story of a beautiful **blind photographer** who is inspirational in her quest for art and the need to record moments from life. She has the remarkable ability to focus in her mind's eye and produce outstanding work. Interestingly enough she is not limited by anything. But her own perception changes when she gains sight after a cornea transplant. Aida El-Kashef is brilliant in her portrayal of Aaliya, the photographer. Aida is an actor, filmmaker who was also involved in the revolution in her country, Egypt. Breathtaking visuals and a montage of images express much more than dialogues can. A scene where Aaliya is sitting in a valley surrounded by majestic mountains is splendid and also brings the realization to the fore that some of life's beauty is meant to be absorbed and experienced, it cannot be captured or recorded.

Gandhi uses dialogues sparingly and only when required. But when he does it has a **deep impact** and **evokes humour** even when the characters are posed with serious existential questions. Gandhi's passion for philosophy is evident from the script.

The second character is a wise, dedicated and **learned monk**, Maitreya (Neeraj Kabi). The story of the monk truly embodies the philosophical aspect and that's where you partake witty intellectual exchanges on life, enlightenment and the soul between him and his young friend, Charwaka (Vinay Shukla). Through Charwaka, you hear deep questioning like, "How do you know where you end and your environment begins?" and deep resounding statements like, "You think you are a person, but you are a colony."

[click here for other south asian selections at tiff.](#)

Fighting an animal rights court case against pharmaceutical companies, Maitreya's own ideals and beliefs on life, death and existence are put to test when he falls seriously ill. Refusing to take any medication he withdraws and gives up food. Neeraj Kabi's performance in depicting a **starved and decaying body** is just unbelievable. Also a scene in which the dying man gets delusional and scared is brilliantly done.

The third character's journey from the ordinary to the **extraordinary** is intriguing. Naveen (Sohum Shah) is a young stockbroker who is happy with the way he leads his life. The recipient of a kidney transplant, Naveen incidentally chances upon illegal organ trade. Afraid that he may be the recipient of a stolen kidney, he sets out on a quest to uncover the truth. This quest takes him to Stockholm, Sweden and brings a **transformation** in his own character.

The common element in all three characters is their **steadfastness**, not being limited by anything and yet being forced to change their own beliefs. The *Ship of Theseus* also shines a light on **narrow perspectives** and our own tunnel vision. In the end the characters form pieces of the philosophical puzzle and add a unique dimension to the *Ship of Theseus*.

The cinematography by **Pankaj Kumar** and sound effects by Gábor Erdélyi and Tamás Székely are truly astounding. Anand Gandhi has been receiving rave reviews and applause from the likes of TIFF, Artistic Director, Cameron Bailey, filmmakers Shekhar Kapur and Anurag Kashyap. *Ship of Theseus* was the opening night Gala for the City to City program at TIFF 2012.