



TIFF 2013 Film Review: Siddharth

Posted on September 11, 2013

Film Review by Preeti Thandi

Canadian director, Richie Mehta's **Siddharth** is a film about a father's desperate quest to find his lost son.



Much like his first feature **Amal**, which premiered at **TIFF in 2004**, Mehta chooses to follow the common man on the street. Taking from his own experience of meeting such a man in **Delhi**, Mehta constructs a story of powerlessness and distress but also instills it with hope. **Siddharth** premiered at the **Venice Film Festival** just preceding TIFF 2013.



A poor, illiterate Delhi street merchant, **Mahendra (Rajesh Tailang)** who makes a living fixing zippers sends his 12-year-old son, **Siddharth (Irfan Khan)** to work in a factory to supplement the family's income. When his son doesn't return home for a festival, it takes him a while to realize that his son has gone missing and has possibly been abducted. Pushed by his wife, **Suman (Tannistha Chatterjee)** to take some action, Mahendra sets out to find his son. But he is ill equipped with no means, knowledge or connections and in the process it also dawns upon him that he doesn't even have a photograph of his son.

Struck by the hopeless tragedy of this true situation, Mehta embarks on this apparently vain search and takes a closer look at the segment of society that is often ignored. Also touching upon issues like forced child labour, child trafficking and poverty in India, **Siddharth** takes a subtle approach. The grief and turmoil of the parents is not so apparent to begin with as they go about their daily tasks. But as the story progresses the true helplessness of the characters is revealed, as they have neither the money nor the resources to find their son. Hence the search gets even more elusive and limited.



Rajesh Tailang and **Tannistha Chatterjee** both do justice to their characters and play their roles delicately. But since their emotions are understated it's a little difficult to completely relate to their inner turmoil or feel for them. We only get a glimpse of Siddharth at the beginning of the film and what makes matters worse is that the father cannot even describe what his son looks like satisfactorily. Mahendra is a man who has no control over his circumstances. Someone suggests to him that his son might have been taken away to **Dongri** and he keeps asking everyone he meets where Dongri is but nobody knows. This particular experience was Mehta's own and it inspired the film. The director met an auto-rickshaw driver on the streets of Delhi who asked him about Dongri and believed that his son had been abducted and trafficked. The film portrays how the tragic callousness of the situation is caused by one careless decision.

Mehta's film is interspersed with vivid images and captures the pulse of life on the streets of Delhi and Mumbai. Mehta tries to balance the despair in the film with an underlying optimism.