

Journey A Real Trip

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Exotic in the best sense of the word, "Such a Long Journey" is an unusually well-written and satisfying multilayered drama that conveys the feel of urban India with more vivid accuracy than anything made in the subcontinent in recent years.

Moving and funny, it stars two wonderful Indian actors who have already made an international impact: Rohan Seth ("My Beautiful Laundrette," "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" and Om Puri ("City of Joy," "The Ghost and the Darkness"), and showcases a number of fine actors who deserve to be better known.

Set in Bombay in 1971, on the eve of India's third war with Pakistan, it tells the story of the practical and spiritual crises that threaten the life of struggling gentility led by Gustad Noble (Seth), a bank clerk from a once elegant Parsee family. (The Parsees are descendants of Zoroastrians who fled Persia for India when their homeland was conquered by Muslim Arabs in 800 AD.)

Gustad is contacted by his long-lost best friend, Maj. Jimmy Billimoria (Naseerudin Shah). Jimmy claims to be a member of RAW, the Indian secret service, and through a gangsterish go-between (Om Puri) he asks Gustad to deposit illegally a large sum of money.

At the same time Gustad's son (Vrajesh Hirjee) suddenly refuses to go to an elite college to study science, his little daughter is taken seriously ill, and his wife (the terrific Soni Razdan) becomes consumed by superstition.

Sooni Taraporevala ("Salaam Bombay," "Mississippi Masala") adapted Rohinton Mistry's prizewinning novel, and this screenplay is of considerably greater subtlety and sophistication than her previous work.

The film is deftly directed, with remarkable feeling for place, by Sturla Gunnarsson, an Icelandic-born Canadian.

It is also the first film to depict Parsee religious rituals long kept secret from outsiders.

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