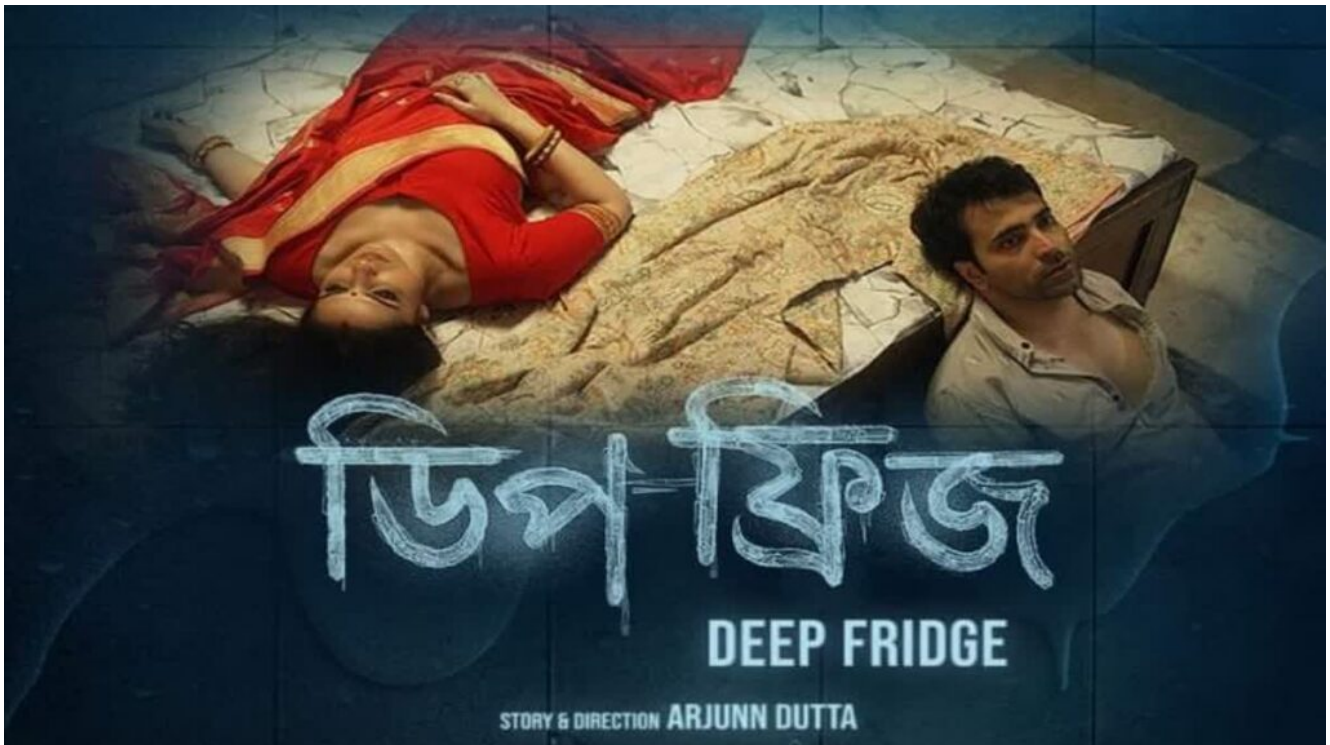


The story of an ice-cold relationship

Film review | Utpal Datta



It's approaching evening, and a woman in her forties is seated in her house, engrossed in a video conference on her laptop. The phone rings, prompting her to step out of the conference to take the call. Her facial expressions and tone shift to a mundane and unwanted conversation. After the call concludes, she re-enters the conference, restoring a smile to her face. This marks the beginning of the film, subtly expressing that the woman inhabits two distinct worlds. An evocative entrance unfolds, inviting viewers into the film.

Titled 'Deep-Fridge,' this Bengali film hints at a section of the refrigerator where ice quickly forms. The name unmistakably suggests an urban theme. The narrative revolves around the relationship between two individuals – Mili, the woman introduced first in the film, and her husband Swarnava, both divorced. They share a child named Tatai, who resides with his mother. Tatai's father has remarried and is

anticipating another child. When the father visits, and Tatai reciprocates, his father's second wife, Ronja, establishes a warm bond with him.

The initial scene's conversation unveils Mili's assumption of full responsibility for Tatai, with Swarnava equally invested. On that stormy evening, Swarnava visits to inquire about the child's health. Reluctantly, both individuals engage in conversation, focusing on the child's well-being. The child persuades his father to stay the night, and with no alternative, they hesitantly begin talking, gradually revealing the thoughts concealed in their hearts. The accumulated ice between them, preserved in the deep freeze for so long, begins to thaw.

Their marital happiness is disrupted when a third party enters, altering the course of their lives. While such narratives are commonplace in films, Arjun Dutta's approach is distinctive. Swarnava marries a close acquaintance and is expecting children, while Mili falls in love with a younger man. Despite their intimate relationship being acknowledged by the boy's family, Mili is hesitant to formalize it. She confides in her male friend, describing this intimacy as a form of escape. The film explores why Mili, who voluntarily embraces a free life, perceives this connection as an escape. As the daughter of a broken relationship, Mili harbours disdain for her mother, preventing her entry into her home. Despite Swarnava's repeated apologies, Mili remains dissatisfied.



Lead Actors Abir Chatterjee and Tanushree Chakraborti

The film unravels the complexities on that rainy night, delving into various aspects such as questions, pride, conflict, sense of rights, responsibilities, and more, providing Mili with answers. It's a portrayal of the ice in the mind, needing to melt and flow like water for life to progress.

While the film primarily addresses personal issues, the director's adept storytelling elevates it to a profound exploration of the human psyche. Presented against the backdrop of a rainy night, the film captures the gloomy mood of the protagonist living in a confined space. Events unfold indoors, often in low light or even complete darkness, while flashback scenes bask in bright light, indoors and outdoors. Cinematographer Supratim Bhol skilfully utilises light and shadow to intensify the prevailing sense of claustrophobia. Capturing facial expressions in low-light situations is

challenging, yet Supratim adeptly manages, maintaining the scene's mood. The blue colour effect harmonises indoor scenes with the prevailing mood. The flashback scenes, featuring Mili in a bright red saree, visually symbolize her strength. In a morning scene following a troubled night, the sunlight delicately highlights the actor's body and the room's interior, showcasing the filmmaker's sensitivity.

In this 100-minute film, Tanushree Chakraborty, portraying Mili, seizes the opportunity to express diverse emotions, perceptions, and reactions. Her nuanced performance, marked by restraint and avoidance of exaggeration, positions her as a potential contender for film awards. Abir Chatterjee, in the role of Swarnava, delivers a natural performance. The complexity of the principal character's emotional journey is navigated with skill, given Abir's experience. However, the kissing scene between Abir and Tanushree feels mechanical and hesitant, contrary to its narrative demand. Anuradha, playing Ronja, impresses with evident improvement as an actress.

The film alternates between the present and the past, with the present progressing chronologically and past scenes interjecting sporadically. Editor Sujay Dutta Roy adeptly manages this intricate pace transition.

The Western music used as background music complements the film's urban setting. Music director Soumya Rit seamlessly incorporates Indian Classical and Folk music as per scene and mood requirements. The sweet songs, especially the one composed with a blend of Mallar and Bhairavi ragas (Gagne Garaj Barse), stand out for their unique fusion and ability to enhance visuals. The singer Mekhla Dasgupta deserves special mention. However, the inclusion of Kaviguru Rabindra Nath Tagore's name as a lyricist in the film's credit title seems unjustified. Tagore did not write songs for Arjun Dutta's films; Dutta used uncopyrighted songs for his work. Tagore's name should be mentioned with proper dignity and respect, a practice observed in many Bengali films.

The screenplay (Arjunn Dutta and Ashirbad Maitra) could have benefited from greater attention to character development with visual details. While Swarnava's profession is labelled as an economist, this alone falls short in establishing his credibility. Characters visiting Mili's home needed more contextual references to firmly establish their identities. A brief verbal introduction proves insufficient for character identity establishment.

In his gentle and nuanced narrative, Arjunn Dutta gracefully unfolds the story of a divorced couple. As a suggestion for future endeavours, expanding creative horizons beyond the confines of upper-middle-class society could add a layer of richness to cinematic encounters.

Tags #Utpal Datta #Arjunn Dutta #Deep Fridge #Film criticism #Bangla Film