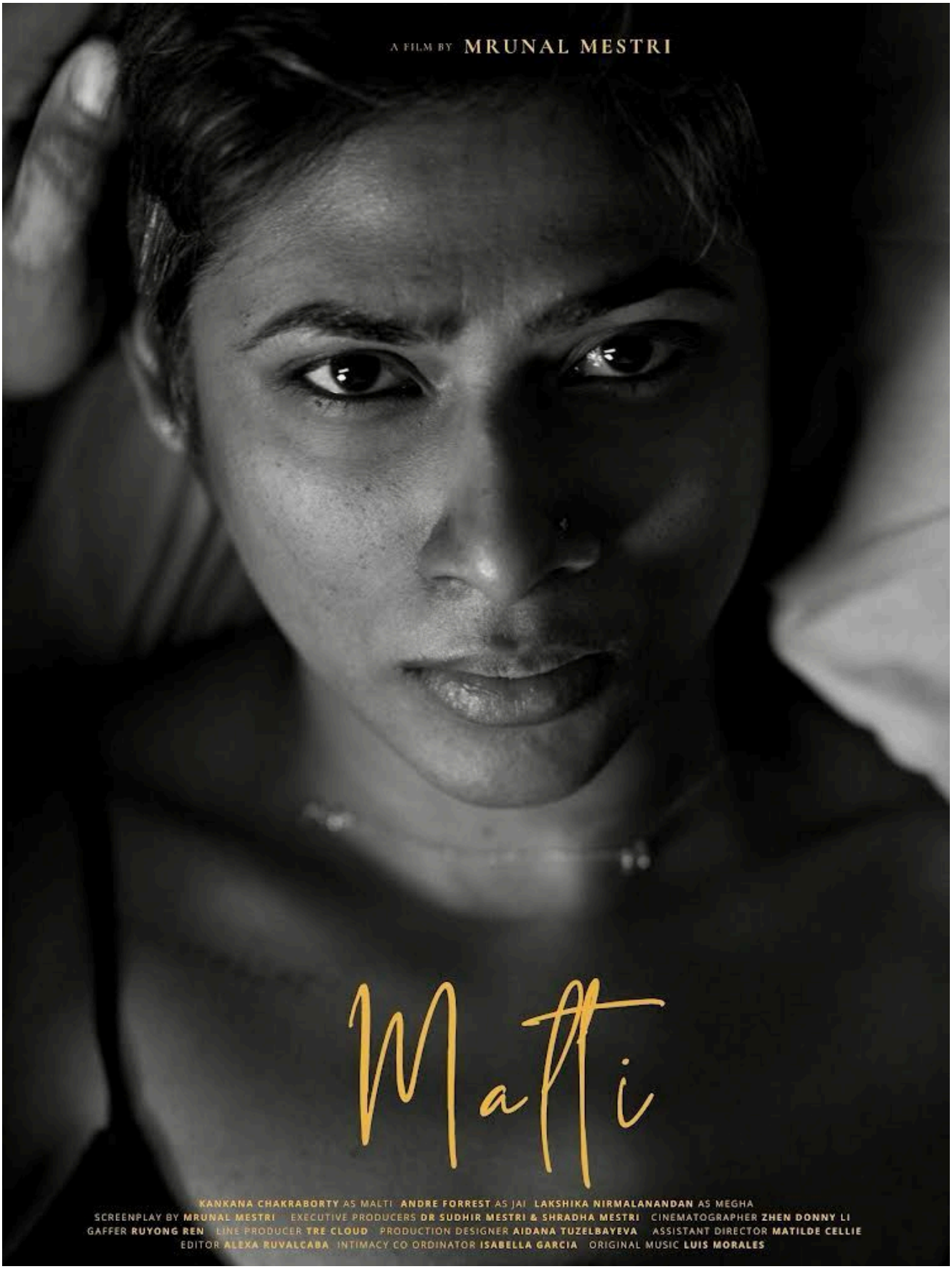
“Malti”: Like a Flower, it spreads Fragrance

Film Criticism | Utpal Datta



In Hindi, ‘Malti’ is the name of a little flower, distinguished by its delicate fragrance.

The film “Malti” opens with a woman in her thirties entering a

house. Two framed photographs adorn the walls: one capturing a girl receiving a ring (a marriage proposal), the other depicting her embracing a man (indicative of marriage). Limited information about the woman is provided. She returns home, takes a bath, and searches for clothes in the closet. As she touches a man's robe, her expression reveals a desire not for the fabric but for the man within. The emotion is palpable, deepened by a melodic accompaniment. It becomes apparent that the robe belongs to her beloved, and through it, she senses his presence. Selecting another robe, she detects a scent, halting her humming; the joyous closeness on her face dissipates, replaced by a pained question mark.

This sets the tone for the film. Mrunal Mestri, the writer-director of the sixteen-minute film 'Malti,' explores the emotions of a newly married woman discovering her husband's proximity to another woman. While such narratives are not novel in cinema, the film's real strength lies in the innovative approach taken by the writers and directors in visual storytelling.

The heroine sings at the film's outset, offering no linguistic cues. Once the humming ceases, the film remains entirely devoid of audible sounds and dialogue—a dialogue-free cinematic experience. The director adeptly compensates for the absence of dialogue by strengthening the visuals to convey the narrative effectively. The primary crisis of the story is introduced within the first two minutes, a testament to the director's skill. By isolating the woman inside the house, the director successfully immerses the audience in the protagonist's emotional turmoil. The actress's gestures convey her anticipation of her husband, evidenced by a smoky candle lit at night. While intimacy is shared in bed, her face betrays no interest, with only the presence of the other woman reflected in her eyes.

The film, presented in black and white, employs shadows and lights aesthetically to complicate scenes. Zhen 'Donny' Li's

camera work contributes to the film’s allure, with certain long shots effectively expressing the emptiness within the woman’s mind. Luis Morales’s background music enhances the film’s appeal, while Alexa Ruvalcaba’s editing skillfully balances the mood and pace of the story.

The director’s choice of a talented actress, Kankana Chakraborty, proves pivotal to the film’s success. Without any dialogue, Chakraborty eloquently communicates the subtle emotions of disbelief, surprise, distrust, and pain through facial and body expressions. Two standout moments include her poignant reaction while smelling the shirt and her solitary contemplation at the dining table. The actress seamlessly embodies the character, and a lion’s share of this credit is due to the director for this achievement.

The film tackles a complex theme, utilizing all elements of filmmaking proficiently to achieve its intended impact. Maintaining the delicate balance among numerous aspects is challenging, yet director Mrunal Mestri succeeds admirably. Although the name ‘Malti’ is presumed to refer to the film’s heroine, the film itself, devoid of dialogue, refrains from explicitly naming her. After viewing the film, one might ponder the choice of the name Malti. Perhaps, like the flower, the film ‘Malti’ is diminutive yet leaves an enduring appeal, akin to the fragrance of the flower.

Key words #utpal_datta #Kankana_chakrabarty, #Malti, #Mrunal, #short film