

Venice Film Festival: Why animated film 'Bombay Rose' was just too busy and sentimental



VENICE: Gitanjali Rao's debut animated film "Bombay Rose" opened the Critics' Week at the Venice Film Festival. Rao drew, wrote and edited the film. This is no easy task, but the pressure of having painted a 96-minute movie does take its toll.

The color palette may be opulent and eye-catching, with hues of orange and red, but the storytelling is weak, probably a result of poor editing and wanting to pack in too much. There are multiple plots unfolding, and each one of them moves back and forth, creating confusion.

The most significant story relates to Kamala, voiced by Cyli Khare, a young woman who has escaped to Bombay from her village after a painful child marriage. She sells flowers by day and dances in bars at night. Ready to marry a rogue and fly away to Dubai to give a better future to her student sister, she falls in love with a Muslim youth, Salim (Amit Deondi), whose parents were killed in the Kashmir militancy. The film also tells the tale of Shirley (Amardeep Jha), a retired schoolteacher who has not stopped yearning for her late husband. Finally, Rao profiles Kamala's grandfather, a

watch-repairer, who plays a moralist. If all this is not enough, Rao adds more frames to talk about child labor as well as the ban on dance bars in Bombay and tries to enrich the narrative with old, lilting Bollywood numbers.

Forays into Indian mythology and the 1960s Bollywood fantasy may find admirers, but the writing could have been crisper and more comprehensible. Rao also resorts to the archaic fade in and fade out technique between the scenes, which she chooses to term conventional. But surely cinema has progressed beyond all this?

Her tendency to obfuscate her characters by a moving vehicle is distracting, “but that is how Bombay is,” she quipped in an interview. Whatever the weaknesses of the movie, the regional flavor is interesting, and this leaves a thirst for greater detail. Few stories could have given Rao more freedom to explore some of her characters in depth. In the end, “Bombay Rose” seems overstuffed with too many musical interludes and crammed with archetypes and unnecessary sentiment.
