

Hills come alive with Irrfan Khan's No Bed of Roses

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Irrfan Khan's IK will co-produce No Bed of Roses, the actor's second foray into production.

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Irrfan Khan will play the lead in No Bed of Roses — to be helmed by Bangladesh's acclaimed Mostofa Sarwar Farooki. To be produced by Kolkata's Eskay Movies and Bangladesh's Jazz Multimedia, No Bed of Roses will be bilingual, Bengali and English. The Bengali title will be Doob.

Khan's IK will co-produce the film, which will be the actor's second foray into production. His first was Ishaan Nair's Kaash — a work about romantic relationships and heartbreaks that premiered at the Tokyo International Film Festival last year. It did not attract rave notices, though.

The plot of No Bed of Roses is not being revealed — not as yet — but we know that Bangladeshi actor Nusrat Imroz Tisha (known for her roles in Farooki's Third Person Singular Number, which was the country's 2011 Oscar submission in the foreign language category, and The Clay Bird, which was part of the Cannes Directors' Fortnight in 2002) will star opposite Khan.

The principal photography of No Bed of Roses began a few days ago, and the entire movie will be shot in the hill resorts of Bangladesh and North Bengal in a single schedule of 35 days. A part of the film will be set in Dhaka.

In a note, Farooqi said that No Bed of Roses would be his first attempt to narrate a story that would grip the entire family, while Khan explaining his reason for getting into the production of the movie averred that the director's debut work, Ant Story, impressed him like nothing else. Farooqi's style and approach and his method of unravelling the plot were impressive. "His selection of casts and the way they behave are something that touched me immensely. His works carry a strong humane angle, which is why his characters are multi layered." No Bed of Roses could be a valuable addition to world cinema.

Khan, who has been part of an array of terrific movies like Paan Singh Tomar, Qissa, The Lunchbox, D-Day, Talvar, Namesake, Haider, Jurassic World, The Amazing Spiderman and Life of Pi, has been saying that Indian actors and directors must work in Hollywood to get a feel of what international cinema is all about. He said this when he heard that Priyanka Chopra had been roped in for Baywatch (after her role in the American television serial, Quantico).

Khan, has just finished shooting Anup Singh's The Song of Scorpions or Mantra on the deserts of Rajasthan. The plot is a strange mix of folklore and exotica. A yarn — woven around a simple tribe that lives in box-like houses bang in the midst of the harsh Rajasthan desert, which is also the home to one of the most venomous scorpions on earth — Mantra promises to be as hauntingly lyrical as it is eerily mysterious.

"When stung by one of these deadly creatures, the only known cure is to find a woman, known as Scorpion Singer, who can read the poisonous melody in the patient's pulse and hum a counter melody. This way, she draws out the lethal toxin from the victim's system," said Singh from Geneva, where he lives for most part of the year. "The Scorpion Singer has the ability to feel the venom as it travels through the body, and she has to stop its flow through the blood stream before it reaches the heart in 24 hours."

In certainly a coup of sorts, Singh roped in the ravishing and gifted Iranian actress, Golshifteh Farahani — who will essay, Nooran, the Scorpion Singer. At one point in the film she would find that her own life has been poisoned by the man she loves.

Farahani has done incredible work in movies like About Elly, The Patience Stone, Chicken with Plums and Body of Lies. Mantra will be her first Indian venture.

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Jacobinte Swargarajyam

Modern Malayalam cinema reminds me of the classic Bengali fare I saw in the Kolkata of the 1960s and 1970s. It was authentic, rooted in reality, and it told unforgettable tales of a struggling country. Minimalistic make-up and extraordinarily natural performances made that cinema a delight to watch. Today's Bengali films shamelessly copy bad Bollywood mannerisms and imagery.

Malayalam movies did dip in the 1970s into a semi-pornographic pit, but they have now brushed off that dirt and have begun in recent times to present sensitive portrayals of everyday life, sans the glitter and gloss of Mumbai movies.

Vineeth Sreenivasan's Jacobinte Swargarajyam (Jacob's Kingdom of Heaven,) in Malayalam might sound like a preachy discourse on religion, but though the film narrates the turmoil of a Malayalee family in Dubai during the times of the great American economic crash, when the Emirates plunged into gloom, faith hardly plays a role in this gripping, well-edited work.

True, the story — though based on a real incident — may not be novel in a certain sense, and I did feel Sreenivasan's touristy obsession with Dubai at times, but this apart, the narrative

has an easy flow and did not weigh me down with teary emotion — like much of Indian cinema does.

Jacobinte Swargarajyam is all about the depressing times that a once-happy family of a father, mother and four children finds itself in after the man loses all his wealth. His trust is broken and the father, Jacob, essayed with riveting subtlety by Renji Panicker, is shattered, and in desperation, flies to Libya hoping to make some quick money so that he can repay his heartless debtors. One of them, Murali Menon (Ashwin Kumar), is vindictive and vicious, threatens the mother and the eldest son, Jerry (Nivin Pauly), with imprisonment and makes sure that Jacob does not return home.

With rare grit and determination, Jerry and his mother (Lakshmi Ramakrishnan) face the storm and rebuild their business from scratch, branching from Jacob's steel enterprise into event management and tourism. The movie stays pretty much focussed — and does not stray into any romantic alleyways (though Jerry has a girlfriend) — except to include a few squabbles which one of Jerry's brothers gets into. These add a certain balance to the film's structure, and with performances by most of the cast members — particularly Pauly, Panicker and Ramakrishnan — disarmingly understated, Sreenivasan's work is captivating.

But, yes, Jacobinte Swargarajyam could have been tighter without its Tour Dubai and a couple of songs.

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