

‘Soni:’ A placid attempt at highlighting violence against women



VENICE: The horrific case of Nirbhaya — a young medical intern who was raped on a moving bus in 2012 — brought into sharp focus the crimes against women in Delhi. Ivan Ayr’s “Soni” plays on its after-effects as two female police officers show us what it takes to keep the streets of the city safe at night.

Screened at the Venice film festival, “Soni” is a no-nonsense movie about a young policewoman by the same name (Geetika Vidya Ohlyan) and her boss, Kalpana (Saloni Batra). Together, they scout the streets of Delhi to prevent rape and other acts against women. In a highly male-dominated, patriarchal society, theirs is no easy task.

Ayr’s narrative relies on the simple complexities of a young female cop whose married life is in shambles, but whose passion and dedication toward her profession continues to remain strong.

And while “Soni” could have succumbed to exaggerations and unnecessary dramatic turns, Ayr stops himself short of falling into this trap.

That doesn't mean the movie is not flawed in any way. The protagonist has a mercurial temper and is not forgiving. When her estranged husband arrives home to surprise her, Soni is cold, distant and hostile even as he begs her for a second chance.

Outside the home, her temper gets her into a slew of troubles. In one of the early scenes of the film, as she cycles through Delhi on a cold night, she is harassed by a man. Something snaps in her, and, in a fit of rage, she unleashes her wrath on him, eventually landing him in hospital. The incident puts Kalpana to shame, forcing her to question whether Soni needed to “have hit him so hard that he had to be rushed to hospital.”

Ayr walks us through several such confrontationist situations, where Kalpana is at her wit's end trying to help Soni curb her temper.

But even that does little to temper the film — while it has its emotional high points, it runs a mostly placid course otherwise.
