

A narrow, airbrushed take on the Syrian war



- Syrian auteur Joud Said's latest feature is based on the Syrian war and its impact on two siblings.

CHENNAI: Syrian auteur Joud Said's latest feature, "Between Two Brothers" — which screened at the recent Cairo International Film Festival — is based on the Syrian war and its impact on two siblings.

Khaldoun (Mohammad al-Ahmad) and A'rif (Lujain Ismaeel) see their relationship torn apart by the strife in Syria, leading to agonizing days for their childhood sweethearts, twins Nesmeh and Najmeh.

A'rif goes to war, aligning himself with anti-government forces, while Khaldoun, who had been spending time outside his country, returns to mayhem.

The characters see their world turn upside down when A'rif kidnaps several men and women from the village. Nesmeh and Najmeh are part of the hostages and what ensues is a dilemma that sees A'rif turn violent and vindictive.

Each brother has his own opinion on what is right and what is wrong about the war and this leads to a chasm opening up between them.

The director, who has come under heavy fire in the past for his supposedly pro-government views, is controversial to say the least.

In 2017, Syrian director Samer Ajouri withdrew his entry "The Boy and the Sea" from the Carthage Film Festival in protest at the selection of Said's feature, "Rain Of Homs." Later, in 2018, Egyptian director Kamla Abu-Zikry accused Said of helming films which represented the Assad government's viewpoint.

Despite the director defending his films in a clutch of newspaper interviews, it should be noted that "Between Two Brothers" was produced by Syria's National Film Organization.

Said makes a pitiful attempt to teach the audience that each side has its reasons. But it is not hard to see where the tilt lies — we do not see any state security forces and violence erupts solely from the rebels' ranks. In a way, "Between Two Brothers" airbrushes the destructiveness of war, with blatant symbolism and a couple of comedy scenes further eroding a subject as grim as this.

Yes, there are some visually arresting shots of the countryside captured with articulation and imagination by cinematographer Oukba Ezzeddine and the actors who played both brothers did a fair turn in their roles, but all in all it was far too narrow a representation of war to be effective.
