

Review: 'The Stranger's Case' critiques the 'mountainish inhumanity' shown toward refugees



CHENNAI: Historically, refugees have borne the brunt of cruelty and most aptly “The Strangers’ Case,” which follows a family of Syrian refugees, opens with a quote from a Shakespearean play chastising the “mountainish inhumanity” shown toward refugees.



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Shot in Jordan and Turkey, the film just played at the Berlin International Film Festival. The plight of refugees is examined with a lot of feeling by producer-turned-director Brandt Anderson. Though it starts and ends with Amira (Yasmine Al-Massri), a Syrian doctor who escapes from Aleppo and finds a safe haven in Chicago, “The Strangers’ Case” takes us to four countries and focuses on five families.

We see how the homeless are pressured by punishing costs of travel and the treacherous journeys they are forced to undertake in ramshackle boats. They are forever at the mercy of horrible human traffickers. Shot with a large cast — which Brandon handles with a level of confidence that is amazing for a first-timer — the movie, though, does not throw up any new angle and the screenplay runs along a familiar and well-beaten path.

The prelude begins in Chicago and introduces us to Amira, but it is not until the first chapter titled “The Doctor” that we really get to know who she is. She maintains a courageous sense of calm even when a soldier points a gun at her for saving the life of a rebel fighter. She is truly a doctor and has nothing to do with politics. However, things take a different turn when a tragedy strikes her family during a party to celebrate her birthday. Amira flees with her teenage daughter Rasha (Massa Daoud).

Several chapters follow, including the likes of “Lupin” star Omar Sy who plays Marwan, a man in charge of smuggling people across borders. He has no feeling for those hapless men, women and children. “They make it, they don't make it — the play is the same,” he growls, words laced with venomous sarcasm. Yet, Marwan is a completely different man when he is with his sick son, and he dreams of a future together in some foreign land.

One of the final chapters explores the mental anguish of a Greek Coastguard officer (Constantine Markoulakis), who cannot get over the innumerable lives lost in clandestine journeys across borders. But a shot of the Chicago Trump Tower conveys that everyone is not as sympathetic as the doctor and the coastguard who are prepared to put their own necks on the guillotine to save others.

The work may not be easy to sit through: It is intense, it is violent and gruesome, and Brandon does not hesitate to thrust in our faces the utter misery of the refugees.
