

The Goat Life: A saga of sorrow in sandy dunes



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One of the biggest follies of Indian cinema is its tendency to stretch—and stretch beyond. Director Blessy's *Aadujeevitham* (*The Goat Life*) in Malayalam (although it is also available in Tamil, Hindi, etc.) is a classic example of this. Adapted from writer Benyamin's *Goat Days*, which was inspired by an actual story, Blessy's work is a survival drama, but a clumsy script and poor editing by Sreekar Prasad got me all yawning. Some of the scenes are so long that they do precious little to push the narrative, with the result that the film stutters and splutters like a car engine gone wrong.

Yes, the story is incredible, the visuals by K.S. Sunil are striking, and A.R. Rahman's music is alluring. Added to this is a fine piece of performance by Prithviraj Sukumaran, who essays Najeeb. He and his friend leave their home in Kerala to build a fortune in Saudi Arabia. But as we have seen so often, they are cheated by a rogue travel agent who promises them the stars but pushes them into the gutters, in this case, a punishing desert where food and water are life-threateningly scarce. Added to this is their master, whose ruthlessness is so brutal that I found it hard to believe. Undoubtedly, cinematic licence is a given style, but

to carry it to such an extent is sheer stupidity.

In the 173 minutes that the movie runs, the plot is wafer thin, and Blessy seems to be struggling to find ideas to keep his audience invested in *The Goat Life*. A healthy and handsome-looking Najeeb turns into an ugly sight—long, unkempt hair, an overgrown beard, and sunken cheeks. Loneliness strangulates him to such an extent that he begins to talk to the sheep he is forced to tend. Kept as a virtual slave for years, he almost loses his mind.

Compare *The Goat Life* with Tom Hanks' *Castaway* (also a survival story), in which the actor finds himself on an uninhabited island after a shipwreck. The American work is neat and to-the-point, making a strong impression. With its clipped scenes and imaginatively written screenplay, *Castaway* endears you to the lead character and his travails. We feel very little empathy for Najeeb and his struggles. Often, they appear laboured, even plastic, although Prithviraj puts his best foot forward. But his endurance (in a badly written part) tests our patience, and the saga of sorrow in the sandy dunes—where dust storms turn killers—is not pointed out. What is worse, the central character has not been penned compellingly. A great idea wasted.

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