

Not a ghost of a chance:

City of Joy hurt by Swayze

by Susan Kass
The Collegian

The movie *City of Joy* is based on Dominique Lapiere's uplifting, sentimental novel about people living in the poor slums of Calcutta. The story revolves around the friendship between an Indian ricksha puller, Hasari Pal (Om Puri), and a Western doctor, Max Lowe (Patrick Swayze), and the horror all around them.

Pal brings his family from a small village to the big city in hope that they will find a better life. Unfortunately, they are homeless, conned out of all their money and Pal cannot find work.

At the same time Dr. Lowe quits his residency because he can't save a little girl. He leaves and begins to travel the world in search of his soul. Planning to stay only one night, he is robbed of his passport and money so he must stay at least three weeks until more money is wired.

After Lowe is robbed, Pal runs to his aid bringing along the

prostitute Poomina, played by newcomer Suneeta Sengupta. They bring him to a free but impoverished medical clinic run by an Irish nurse Joan (Pauline Collins, best known for *Shirley Valentine*). Lowe refuses her requests to work at the clinic numerous times but when he has no way out of India, he reluctantly joins the team.

Friendships and conflicts spring up everywhere when the Indian Godfather begins to tighten his demands on the people. Pal is torn between his job, which is provided by the Godfather, and his friends. While at the same time Lowe urges the Indians to fight back.

In the original book, the story revolves around Pal as provider for his family and as hero of the *City Of Joy*. The screenplay, however, expands the role of the doctor as an idealistic, arrogant outsider who becomes entangled with the Indians' troubles.

Director Ronald Joffe, known for *The Killing Fields* and *The Mission*, has been working on

this project for years. This is his third movie about a white man drawn into a poor peoples' struggle in a third world nation. First Cambodia, then somewhere in Africa, and now Calcutta.

Using the same documentary style in this movie, Joffe falls short of the sense of reality felt in his other films. This could easily be blamed on who he chose to star in the movie. Another fault is that the movie is almost too predictable. The idea of a Godfather making the people pay for protection is not new, but his villain is never taken too seriously. The bad guys are simply mean and stupid.

Dr. Lowe's character is full of opportunity for an actor. After having an emotional breakdown, Lowe gets robbed and stranded in India. A nightmare for anyone, this doctor actually begins to care for the people around him.

His character becomes clear to me when I hear that before arriving in Calcutta, Lowe tried to commit suicide. I guess they cut this out of the movie, but

you can see the bandages covering his wrist-slitting attempt later in the movie.

Unfortunately, Swayze cannot translate any of this emotion to the screen. This is his first role with no dancing or action adventure, only pure emotional acting, and I don't think he pulls it off. Instead of acting tormented, Swayze looks like he's vacationing.

The atmosphere in Calcutta is supposed to be stifling, overcrowded and smelly, yet he rarely appears disgusted at the extreme poverty. Throughout the movie Swayze makes Lowe's 9friendship with Pal seem superficial when it should be based on respect.

Basically, the character changes from a selfish man to a giving person but Swayze hardly shows any character change at all.

Swayze even tries acting introverted around the set of the film as part of his attempt to try Method Acting. It is even said that he burst into tears numerous times off camera.

I also think it was a mistake changing the main focus from Pal to Lowe simply because of star appeal to American audiences. Swayze has had some really good performances in *Ghost* and *The Outsiders*, but he can't express the emotion needed in this role.

I wish Om Puri and Shabana Azmi, who portrayed Pal's wife, had more screen time. Both are well known actors in India and Azmi has appeared in over 100 films including *Madame Sousatzka*.

Collins is also very likable and nurturing, but her role is short. About 38 speaking roles make up the Indian ensemble cast and these people are what made the film enjoyable and realistic.

With a high caliber director and a fabulous supporting cast, this movie should have been a touching tale of strength and although it was at times, I wouldn't want to see it again.

"An audacious winner."

Jodie Foster Dianne Wiest

little man
tate

PG-13 DRON

Wed 10:30pm	Thur 10:30pm	Fri 8:00pm
Sat Midnight	Sun 9:30pm	

Admission

Students: \$1.50
w/Act. Card: FREE
Public: \$2.50

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