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1226 N Salsipuedes Unit C 1(805)704-5994 |https://hollywoodglee.com Larry@HollywoodGlee.com

Berlinale FILM CAPSULE: Viceroyâ??s House (Chadha, 2017): Great Britain

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson.

Kenyan born and British-reared Gurinder Chadha, best known for *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), presented *Viceroyâ??s House* at the Berlinale Palast as part of the 67th Berlin International Film Festival. Chadha stated in the press conference immediately following the screening, she felt compelled to make the film in memory of her aunt and grandmother.

Viceroyâ??s House is set in 1947 India. India had been under British rule for nearly 90 years form 1858 when the East India Company transferred rule to the Royal Crown. In 1947 amid growing tensions and strife, Britain acquiesced authority. *Viceroyâ??s House* is Chadhaâ??s truth regarding the political background surrounding the transfer of authority and the ensuing transition to independence.

Chadhaâ??s agenda is a heady one as she attempts to present how the transfer was negotiated among Jawaharial Nehru, Mohammad Jinnah, and Mahatma Ghandi while speculating on the role of the viceroy and his wife. Seemingly, to keep the audience intrigued and to help move the narrative forward, Chadha tosses in a love story between Jeet (Manish Dayal), a handsome young Hindu servant and Aalia (Huma Qureshi), a stunningly beautiful Muslim woman working in the Viceroyâ??s House.

The film opens with non-diagetic music playing while an establishing wide-angle pan reveals the setting. The musical beat picks up in tempo as a transition is made revealing a multitude of uniformed Indian servants cleaning and dusting. Two servants in a sidebar conversation have heard the British have announced plans to leave India after a presence of almost two centuries due to the high cost World War II inflicted on the treasury. A viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, Queen Victoriaâ??s great grandson, is coming with his wife and daughter to carry out the transfer of authority and to oversee the countryâ??s transition to independence. Mountbatten is to be the last viceroy.

As simple as that may sound, it isnâ??t. India had three differing groups in the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs. Mahatma Ghandi implored all the people to stay united as one nation. However, according to Chadha, the British had a private agenda to partition the country into a Muslim Pakistan and a smaller secular India to secure oil futures for the British economy. Repeatedly, the spun phrase

â??divide and rule,â?• was proclamated throughout the film.

Viceroyâ??s House is a large scale, big budgeted production with many extras, extravagant costuming and exquisite production design, and has the feel of a propagandized melodramatic revisionist film. Visually, the film has much to offer with physically attractive characters and strong production values. The acting is solid with Hugh Bonneville and Gillian Anderson as Lord and Lady Mountbatten, the Viceroys appointed to carry out the peaceful transfer. Cinematographer Ben Smithard (*My Week With Marilyn*) presents nothing short of a visual feast as part of an alluring mise-en-scene. The musical score by A. R. Rahman enhances the narrative nicely evoking the period.

All in all, *Viceroyâ??s House* works on the surface. Beware, however, of its dark-sewn agenda. Warmly recommended.

*featured photo credit:Kerry Monteen Photography)

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