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## Film review

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understood against the backdrop of the social and political structures that have maintained power relationships to the disadvantage of women and people of lower socioeconomic status.

This book is a "must read" for professionals in the human care sector. The writers and editors are senior bioethicists, eminently qualified to discuss these issues. However, it could have benefited from a few additions. An introduction explaining the three-part framework could have been provided by the editors. Although this is a large volume comprising 545 pages, the original articles of certain authors could have been included

in place of abridged versions, as these are seminal articles on medical ethics. Though this is the Indian edition of the book, readers who wish to explore specific aspects of Indian ethics or biomedical ethics in India will be disappointed. Finally, the format employed throughout the book could have been made more accessible by the inclusion of introductions and summaries capturing key elements.

Despite these limitations, this textbook is well suited to advanced graduate and undergraduate students who plan to pursue careers in healthcare ethics as well as in the medical and social work professions.

## FILM REVIEW

### Warding off the evil eye

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***Matti o manush* (The soil and the people). Bengali with English subtitles. Rimjhim Gupta and Sabyasachi Chakraborty. Directed by Sisir Sahana, cinematography by Asim Bose, music by Nachiketa.**

Sisir Sahana is a "stormist" from the metaphor of the storm that he uses in his second feature film venture, *Matti o manush*, with its anguished portrayal of ritualism that is mindlessly practised even in the new century. Sahana holds a mirror to our middle-class hypocrisy that reduces the sacred pursuit of the truth to the mechanical following of insipid rituals and superstitions.

The film's story revolves around a teacher of scientific temperament who gives in to his mother's wish, in a moment of emotion, and agrees to leave no stone unturned in driving the so-called "evil" out of his mute daughter's life. He joins the band of village sanyasis who insist that he join them in rituals like dancing around the village in the hot sun, and hanging upside down from a banyan tree - all to ward off the evil eye.

The teacher's daughter, Jhonu, is a happy-go-lucky, uncomplaining adolescent, a keen observer of nature and a connoisseur of line, light, and artistic depiction. Jhonu's portrayal is reminiscent of the woman in Picasso's famed *Guernica*, her extended hand holding the lamp of light and hope. Jhonu is engrossed in the delight of life and draws stunning pictures, some of these on the walls of the room in her mud house. Her mother is a genuinely fond parent, indulgent but protective. The girl's happiness is put at risk when her father begins to participate in the rituals.

Then, when a baby falls and dies in what is a rare mishap in a Santhal tribal fair, the mute girl who happens to be present (and attending the fair like any other "normal" person) is called a fiend and hounded. The anguished child recalls how, over the years, everybody around her has developed a hatred towards her, unreasonably singling her out as the cause of the village's calamities. The youngster's spirit rapidly ebbs.

People's irrational faith in amulets and unscrupulous soothsayers is presented as thoughtless, everyday compulsion. What will our society come to if educated people do not rise as one against blind beliefs? How can we allow meaningless, unreasonable and unscientific ideas to kill the very spirit that keeps each of us alive, playing our individual roles in the cosmic dance drama of life?

The film offers several moments of visual candy: the teacher leading sanyasis in paying obeisance to the lifegiving water of the river, the girl's thrill at the blowing gale, the saffron-clad sanyasis walking across the river complemented by the serene blue waters in the foreground, and the girl in a blue sari, dancing carefree along with the santhals on the silver sands. The artful creation of storms, the fish-eye-lens close-ups of the enraged girl, the baby falling to its death, and the earthen colours of rural Bengal make for some scintillating cinematography by Asim Bose.

Music by Nachiketa adds much to the film's production values, especially lifting high the memorable opening sequence of the sanyasis crossing the river. "*Bam bam bole*," too, is a definitely hum-along tune.

The film was shot in Bankura, in West Bengal state, during April 2009. The lead is convincingly played by Rimjhim Gupta with Sabyasachi Chakraborty in the role of her teacher-father. *Maati o manush* was screened at the International Film Festival of Kolkata in November 2009. It is scheduled for screening during the New Hope Film Festival, a forum for art films in the United States, in June 2010. The film's director, Sisir Sahana, is a reputed sculptor and painter based in Hyderabad and now, with his second film, has begun to earn a reputation for his powerful visualisation. The film's music and cinematography have come together well and have added considerably high production values - something which perhaps he could not have succeeded in showing through any other art medium.

As with his earlier film, *Prithvi*, Sahana's artistic oeuvre and angst serve to provoke the viewer. Those who profess to be near God have totally missed the learning point of life when they beat the life spirit out of a voiceless girl. When divinity is personified in this world as elemental silence, why then can we not be accepting of this mute witness to life? Why are we inimical toward one who is also a part of the whole of life? Who are we to play with so sacred an entity as another's life-soul? These and other questions come across loud and clear in the film. Are we, as thinking persons, willing to listen, to traverse the path of truth and do so against societal pressures? Each one of us must ask ourselves these questions with which Sahana seeks to prod us out of our complacency.

## Indian Association of Medico-Legal Experts J P Modi Lifetime Achievement Award 2011

In memory of the first recognised medico-legal expert in India, also known as the Father of Forensic Medicine in India, the Indian Association of Medico-Legal Experts (IAMLE) is pleased to announce the J P Modi Lifetime Achievement Award. This will be presented to an outstanding expert in medico-legal issues, forensic medicine or forensic science who has contributed to the development of forensic medicine in India.

The award will be presented at the Goa conference of IAMLE in 2011. The award consists of Rs 15,000 along with a citation and an air ticket to the conference. The prize winner is expected to deliver the oration of his or her choice at the conference.

Please send nominations to Prof R K Sharma, President, Indian Association of Medico-Legal Experts (regd), Aster-06/603, Supertech Emerald Court, Sector-93 A, Expressway, NOIDA 201 304 Uttar Pradesh INDIA e-mail:  
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