

Gender sensibilities

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Off to a start: Actor Gautami (second from right) at the festival inauguration

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The Samsung Women's International Film Festival seeks to explore feminised viewpoints

The prefix 'Women's' refers less to gender and more to form, noted Rathi Jafer, director of Inko Centre, while introducing the fifth edition of The Samsung Women's International Film Festival over the weekend. A thought-provoking distinction, which suggests the curatorship of the Festival seeks to explore female or feminised viewpoints and sensibilities, rather than simply look for films made by women.

Actor Gautami was the chief guest at the opening of the Festival, which will see 25 visiting directors interact with cine lovers in the city and showcase 31 award-winning films among a total of 120 from 50 countries. The shortest film is just two minutes long, and the longest, close to three hours.

Somewhere in between, at 110 minutes, was the Festival's opening film, *Rolling Home with a Bull* from Korea by Yim Soon-rye, a director with a strong body of work behind her. This 2010 film is based on Kim Do-yeon's novel *How to Travel with a Bull*, and is part road film and part Buddhist fable.

Shattered dreams

Paul / Sun-ho (Kim Yeong-Pil), lives with his crabby father (Jeon Kuk-hwan), and long-suffering mother in a small village in Korea. Though Sun-ho still writes his poetry, he feels his dreams are being ground down — just as thoroughly as the film's titular bull stamps down the earth while ploughing the fields. Sun-ho decides after one drunken and particularly disappointing night — when he fails to win a poetry prize — to drive off with his father's bull. He sees it as both a symbolic and practical gesture — selling the bull at the nearest cattle market and giving up the drudgery of farming.

As it turns out, selling the bull is no easy task, and in the process, the narrative slides into its groove as a road movie about a man and a bull. The third angle of this unusual triangle is newly widowed Hyun-su (Kong Hyo-Jin). It's quickly apparent she was once Sun-ho's great love; it was losing her to his best friend Peter that so embittered him.

The bull is a cleverly ironic metaphor for the things we can't let go of — emotions, hurt, beliefs that imprison us more surely than prison walls. It is only by working through and resolving these issues that we gain wisdom in life's journey.

It is very enjoyable in parts, but overall, an uneven film. The early languorous pacing sits uneasily with the hyped-up dream sequences and bursts of violence towards the ending. It is also overly long; a more rigorous edit would have highlighted the film's visual poetry and its thoughtful examination of lost hopes and rediscovered joys.

For details of the Festival (on till July 21), visit www.inkocentre.org.

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