



Patron: Jim Broadbent
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Hotel Salvation (PG)

dir: Shubhashish Bhutiani

Starring: Adil Hussain, Lalit Behl, Geetanjali Kulkarni

This review contains plot details. It is reproduced with the kind permission of Sight and Sound magazine

Synopsis: Uttar Pradesh, the present. After dreaming that he is going to die, 77 year old Daya demands that his son Rajiv take him to the holy city of Varanasi, the place where Hindus prefer to die in the hope they will attain salvation. They check into a hotel. Daya is very demanding and makes Rajiv look after him hand and foot. Daya becomes friendly with one of the hotel residence called Vimla. After 15 days Daya is told that he must check out as he is not dead, but he can check in again under a different name. Vimla dies suddenly. Having made up his differences with Rajiv, Daya dies too.

The concept of fatalism is alive and well in India and Daya, the 77 year old protagonist of *Hotel Salvation* is certainly a proponent of it. After a premonitory dream, he demands that his accountant son Rajiv take him to the holy city of Varanasi, where thousands of Hindus go in every year to die by the banks of the Ganges, in the belief that their souls will gain eternal salvation. Unlike *Ikuru* (1952), whose bureaucrat protagonist found meaning in his life after being diagnosed with a terminal illness, Daya appears to be in rude health, yet simply accept as a fact that his demise is imminent and is prepared to wait it out calmly - traumatising his harried son in the meantime with his unreasonable demands.

Despite its rather grim premise, *Hotel Salvation* is that rarity - a film in which the events leading to its eventual and inevitable deaths are treated with sly, sometimes gallows humour. For example, as the taxi taking him and Rajiv from their hometown of Kannauj to Varanasi hurdles along the busy National Highway 19, Daya tells the driver that he'd rather die in the holy city than en route. Though death is a constant here, the pervasive wry tone elevates the film into a light hearted but never frivolous study of the process of dying.

The film is, however, about much more than this. It is also a close look at a father son relationship, of a piece with *Big Fish* (2003) or *Nebraska* (2013); a portrait of the average beleaguered Indian salaryman, as embodied by Rajiv, who has to juggle family commitments and a stressful job; and an examination of the Indian joint family system whereby, until their sojourn to Varanasi, Daya lives under the same roof as his middle aged son, his daughter-in-law and his adult granddaughter. The dusty hotel at the centre of the story is a far cry from the colourful ones of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* films; though it is easy enough to pedal exotica in the riot of hues and images that is Varanasi, the visuals in *Hotel Salvation* are kept deliberately neutral.

The film is also a triumph of casting. Lalit Behl made a striking debut as the patriarch in 2014's *Titli*, and continues in that vein here, imbuing the role of a curmudgeonly elder with warmth and dignity. Geetanjali Kulkarni, who memorably played a public prosecutor in *Court* (2014) brings a sharp wit to her role as Rajiv's wife. Palomi Ghosh, best known for her tour-de-force as a jazz singer in *Nachom-ia Kumpasar* 2015, is effective as the granddaughter who



wants to pursue her dreams but is caught in the slipstream of a complicated family. And Navindra Behl makes an assured debut as Vimla, Daya's friend in the hotel. But it is Adil Hussain as Rajiv who is a revelation. He has been plugging away for years, making a quiet impression in films such as *Life of Pi* (2012) and *Tigers* (2014); in *Hotel Salvation* he is potent in an intricate role that requires him to be a dutiful son, a deferential employee and a caring father and husband all at the same time. Particularly poignant is the moment when it is revealed that his father beat his youthful hopes of becoming a poet out of him.

The most surprising aspect of a film as mature as *Hotel Salvation* is that its director, Shubhashish Bhutiani, is only 26 years old. The last Indian feature debut that displayed such a seasoned outlook was *Pather Panchali* (1955), but Satyajit Ray was already 34 when that film was shown at Cannes. Bhutiani made his mark with the devastating short *Kush* (2013) which dealt with the plight of a Sikh school boy in a country torn by sectarian violence in 1984 following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. *Kush* won 2 awards at Venice; *Hotel Salvation* won the UNESCO award at Venice in 2016 and has since won accolades in India and at festivals around the globe. If he continues to build on his early promise, Bhutiani could be one of the few Indian filmmakers who can take a place at the high table of world cinema.

Credits

Rajiv Kumar	Adil Hussain
Dayanand Kumar: 'Daya'	Lalit Behl
Lata	Geetanjali Kulkarni
Sunita	Palomi Ghosh
Vimla	Navnindra Behl
Mishraji	Anil K. Rastogi
Director	Shubhashish Bhutiani
Screenplay	Shubhashish Bhutiani
Dialogue	Asad Hussain
Directors of photography	Michael McSweeney, David Huwiler
Editor	Manas Mittal
Production Design	Avyakta Kapur
Music	Tajdar Junaid
Sound	Atirek Pandey
Costume	Shruti Weditwar

India 2016. 101 mins

Another View

Haunted by a recurring dream, seventy-seven-year old Daya (Behl)

is convinced it is time to die. Following tradition, he donates a cow to the temple, before persuading his stressed, overworked son Rajiv (Hussain), to accompany him to the holy city of Varanasi. Hindus believe that people who die there, after bathing in the River Ganges, escape the endless cycle of death and rebirth and achieve salvation. The pair check into 'Mukti Bhawan' (Hotel Salvation) where residents are offered just two weeks accommodation. At first Rajiv is beset by work calls and is desperate to return to the city. It is only his sense of filial duty to his father that keeps him there. While Daya accepts his impending death almost gleefully, Rajiv is torn between feelings of impotence, guilt and impatience. Slowly, though, father and son begin to enjoy each other's company.

Daya embraces his new environment and makes friends with the other residents, in particular Vimla (Navnindra Behi) a kindly widow who has been there for years – the hotel manager changes the name in the register of any resident who lasts longer than a fortnight. The inhabitants live in simple rooms, complete with peeling walls and mice. They watch their favourite TV series, sing hymns together and freely discuss death and the best way to go. When one of their number passes away, they all participate in the funeral rituals, reciting mantras, shrouding and garlanding the corpse and finally cremating the deceased on the River Ganges.

Rajiv is clearly out of touch with his emotions, his country's spiritual heritage and changing mores. Rajiv and his wife Lata (Geetanjali Kulkarni) want their daughter Sunita (Palomi Ghosh) to marry a man of their choice and settle down. But Sunita is happy with her work and doesn't want to give up her independence. Certain traditions, Bhutiani suggests, are outdated. Michael Mcsweeney and David Huwiler's terrific camerawork emphasises the stark divide between Rajiv's hectic working life and the more measured pace in Varanasi; the transcendent over the corporal. Rajiv's restrictive domestic sphere is conveyed through shots of cramped, shadowed rooms, contrasted with stunning tableaux of the Ganges, Varanasi's ghats and temples.

As Rajiv resolves his differences with his father he recognises his own suppressed desires and the sacrifices he has made for his work. Towards the end of *Hotel Salvation* we suspect it has been more about Rajiv's liberation than Daya's. Rajiv's spiritual side (his love of writing poetry) has been reawakened and he has learned the importance of accepting his family's different needs. Bhutaini demonstrates an impressive maturity in his snapshots of life's joys, pains and sorrows, order and chaos and allows us to see what Daya has understood all along – with death comes peace. For its UK release, *Hotel Salvation* is prefaced by the BFI's ninety-second film of Varanasi's ghats by the River Ganges (1899), believed to be the earliest footage of India. It serves to illustrate the city's timelessness and beautifully complements Bhutaini's feature.

Lucy Popescu: CineVue

**Our next screening: Friday April 27th, 7.30pm
The Unknown Girl (Belgium 2016. Cert 15)**

The Dardenne brothers have become programme regulars of late with humane films like *The Kid with The Bike* and *Two Days, One Night*, capturing the changing fortunes for those on the margins of society. In this, their most recent work, they examine the consequences for a locum doctor - Jenny - who gets involved with an African migrant who turns up on the doorstep of her surgery one evening. Jenny's reaction to her arrival sets off a chain of events that lead her to question everything she knows.

the long list for next season is on Saturday April 21st. Please let members of the committee know of your suggestions or email them to filminlincoln@gmail.com.

The deadline for voting on the archive classic for inclusion in next season expires on Friday April 27th.

The Other Side of Hope, which was postponed from March 2nd, will be shown on Saturday May 19th at 7:30 p.m. and not Thursday May 17th, as announced some weeks ago.

We are all also organising a couple of events during the summer, in conjunction with The Venue. On June 8th & 9th, we plan to show two films to mark the centenary of the RAF. Details of the films will be announced as soon as possible.

From July 6th to 9th, we are also joining with The Venue to celebrate the work of school children as filmmakers. There will be a programme of films for members of the public to enjoy; further details will be announced as soon as the programme is confirmed.

Membership Information

Details of the process for joining the society for the 2018-19 season will be made available to members from Monday April 30th. Please watch out for emails, posts on social media and announcements on our website and in film notes. Membership opens for next season on May 14th and will remain open throughout the summer.

Programme news

The deadline for members' nominations for films to be added to