

Review: Little Zizou

By Shashi Baliga | *The Hindustan Times* | March 14, 2009

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Cast: Jahan Bativala, Iyanah Bativala, Imaad Shah, Boman Irani, Zenobia Shroff, Sohrab Ardeshir, Shernaz Patel

Director: Sooni Taraporewala

Rating: ***

Little Zizou is a bit like wandering into related stories one of the houses in Mumbai's Parsi bastion of Cusrow Baug. A quirky landscape filled with non-stop chatter, good-natured bickering and a smattering of dysfunctional characters. This is familiar territory for Sooni Taraporewala (writer of *Salaam Bombay* and *Mississippi Masala*), who sets her directorial debut on home turf.

But naturally, the Parsi milieu and characters are pitch-perfect. They glow with an everyday authenticity as a battle rages between the rabidly religious Cyrus II Khodaiji and the pugnacious Boman Presswala, editor of community newspaper *Rustom-E-Sohrab*. The former launches his PLO (Parsi Liberation Organisation); the latter an editorial attack.

And it's full-throttle Parsi eccentricity as a medley of characters gets sucked into the warfare: chiefly, Xerxes (Jahan Bativala) and Artaxerxes (Imaad Shah), Khodaiji's two sons who loathe him; Presswala's wife, Roxanne (Zenobia Shroff) and their daughter Lianna (Iyanah Bativala).

Xerxes has one abiding wish: to see football legend Zinedine Zidane (whose French nickname is Zizou). If he can go to Bangladesh, why not India, is his argument as he prays to his dead mother to bring the footballer here.

Fittingly, Jahan and Iyanah Bativala are the scene-stealers, with the naturalness that only kids can deliver. But Zenobia Shroff is a delight too and the rest of the cast is engagingly real, discounting Ardeshir and Shernaz Patel (as his sidekick), whose characters are terribly camp.

Whether you're familiar with Parsis or not, you should warm up to this film with its gentle humour and plea for peace — a persuasive voice in these times of madness.

PS Did we forget John Abraham?

No — he may be all over the film's publicity, but there's precious little of the hunk. Sorry.