

Not just another brick in the wall

A SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INDIAN FILM CATCHES ATTENTION

MANU REWAL'S film *Chai Pani etc* has just premiered in the market section of Cannes Film Festival. Rewal rewrote the script 15 times and then spent six years looking for a producer. Bollywood rejected it because it lacked the compulsory shots of nearly naked young women. The western producers felt that Rewal's refusal to pander to the notion of 'exotic' India with the customary shots of sadhus and poverty made the film a bad business decision. Without financial backing, Rewal decided to play director, producer and screenplay writer with help from his family and friends.

Three weeks before the proposed shoot, two businessmen from Delhi lent him some money and *Chai Pani etc* was shot in 22 days flat with a relatively small budget of about two crore. The film has 100 percent sync sound. While European distributors have shown serious interest in picking up the film, Bollywood is reluctant to do so. This is a pity, because it is a film that deserves to be seen.

Chai Pani etc is the story of a young, idealistic director (Zafar Karachiwalla) who returns to India but is confronted with the rot of corruption that pervades the bureaucracy. Rewal's documentaries *Mandu*, *Lutyen's New Delhi* and *Le Corbusier in India* have received critical acclaim in film festivals across the world. *Chai Pani etc* is his first feature film.

Rewal says: "The film is a mixture of actual incidents that happened to me, along with a lot of fictional elements. It



CORRUPT REALITY: the individual fights the rot

deals with the fact that corruption is so pervasive that bribing someone to do something has become second nature to most of us." The film shows the daily struggle in the life of every Indian between the high moral ground and the necessity of getting things done. It stands apart from the usual hero-meets-corrupt-officer offerings because instead of bashing the officer to pulp, the hero tries to deal with it in a way an ordinary person would. *Chai Pani etc* does not offer any easy solutions, but puts the onus on the individual to make a choice instead of blindly accepting the status quo.

Priyanka Gill