



Machan

Director: Uberto Pasolini
Country: Sri Lanka
Date: 2010

A review by Tom Huddleston for *Time Out*:

A comic story of mismatched losers who lift themselves out of the poverty trap by learning a new and surprising skill... Sound familiar? It should: Uberto Pasolini produced 'The Full Monty' and makes his directing debut with this strikingly similar, true tale of the first Sri Lankan National Handball Team.

When their visa application to Germany is rejected, Stanley and Manoj seem destined to spend their lives hustling on the streets of Colombo. Until Stanley stumbles across a bizarre ad: the German Handball Association is seeking teams to attend the world championships in Bavaria. The only catch: no one in Sri Lanka has heard of the game.



With its twinkly underdog charm sugarcoating a surprisingly direct indictment of global immigration policy, 'Machan' seems eager to evade the lazy feelgood trap, but a last-act stumble into sports-triumph territory undermines Pasolini's clear affinity – and sympathy– for his subject.

From: <http://www.timeout.com/london/film/machan>

An interview with the director, Uberto Pasolini, by David Gritten at the 2008 Venice Film Festival:

It's been a decade since Uberto Pasolini was a name on everyone's lips in British film circles. An Italian native living in London, he was the producer of *The Full Monty*, a huge financial success that made him a lot of money and earned him an Oscar nomination for best picture.

Since then, it's been rather quiet on the Pasolini front. He produced a disastrous Irish film *The Closer You Get*, and the slight but charming *The Emperor's New Clothes*, starring Ian Holm, which few people paid to see. The last anyone heard of him, he was trying to hold together a struggling Australian production, *Eucalyptus*, which finally had to be closed down because its star Russell Crowe could not see eye-to-eye with its director Jocelyn Moorhouse. All of which proves that a single success in the British film industry does not guarantee a successful career.

Yet Pasolini is back in Venice, touting a new film which he not only produced but directed and co-wrote. Titled *Machan* and based loosely on a true story, it is set largely in Sri Lanka and concerns the attempts of 23 hard-up local slum dwellers to obtain visas to work in Germany, from where they would send money home to their families.

They do this by proclaiming themselves the Sri Lanka National Handball Team, though the game is not even played in their country, and they have no idea of its rules. But as a team, they obtain an invitation to

play in a German tournament. (The real 'team' disappeared after playing a tournament in Bavaria, and have never been located. It is assumed they have quietly been assimilated into German life.) Pasolini, a tall lean elegant man with grey hair, rimless glasses and a fastidious manner, agrees Machan is similar in spirit to *The Full Monty*, and its jobless steelworkers who reluctantly become male strippers.



"The Full Monty was a lucky success," he reflected. "It struck a vein at the time in Britain and the rest of the world. Five years earlier or later, it might not have made waves. But it dealt with completely universal issues – including male disempowerment and unemployment." That's equally true of Machan (a form of address in Sri Lanka that means "mate" or "friend"): "The difference is that *The Full Monty* was a fiction, but these 23 Sri Lankan men created this story for me.

"My view was that anyone who can invent the Sri Lanka National Handball Team when the game doesn't even exist in that country must have a good sense of humour. And that's what appealed to me." Pasolini likes to use humour to shed light on serious issues – a device that worked in *The Full Monty*. "You can engage the interest of a cynical public in human problems more easily through humour than by being deadly serious," he reflected. "It's a subtle, devious way of doing it, but it works." He also likes stories about underdogs and dispossessed people, though nothing in his own upbringing suggests why. He grew up in a wealthy Italian family, he is the nephew of legendary film director Luchino Visconti, and as a younger man he worked briefly as a merchant banker. "I was born with five silver spoons in my mouth," he said wryly. "But I found the society I grew up in uninteresting."

He wrote the film's screenplay with Sri Lankan playwright Ruwathie de Chickera, the daughter of a prominent clergyman, who was bishop for one of the poorest areas of Colombo when she was growing up. Together she and Pasolini interviewed slum dwellers and used their observations and stories as a basis for their screenplay. The film, which is charming and appealing, has been received warmly by audiences in Venice - a prelude, Pasolini hopes, to its receiving wide distribution worldwide. He raised money from sources in Italy, Germany and Sri Lanka – though the UK Film Council turned him down because it was felt the film was 'too commercial'. Pasolini cocks an eyebrow knowingly as he repeats that phrase.

He decided to direct for the first time, he says, "because I went to Sri Lanka and researched people like these characters. Once I got so close to them, I had to go the whole way. I couldn't leave that experience at the altar. "And let me tell, you directing this film is the most fun thing I've ever done."

From: www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/starsandstories/3559554/Venice-Film-Festival-interview-Uberto-Pasolini.html