

The city and I Screen On & Off

Pratim D. Gupta

Ismat Chughtai and Sadat Hasan Manto discussing modern day Mumbai on a stroll in the middle of the night? It's not a dream sequence from an arthouse flick, but the premise of Madhusree Dutta's new documentary *Seven Islands and a Metro*.



Turning back time: A moment from *Seven Islands and a Metro*

"I choose to call my work non-fiction feature just like Truman Capote called his books non-fiction novels," Dutta tells Metro.

The veteran documentary film-maker, who has won many international awards, apart from two National Awards, is in Calcutta for the premiere of her latest film, to release at Nandan on Friday.

"Seven Islands and a Metro is basically about the city of Mumbai," says Dutta. "It is a metaphorical title trying to show what a vicious circle we are in. Every year, Mumbai reclaims more land from the sea and slowly, more and more people are becoming like islands."

The documentary is shown through a fictional walk-and-talk between the famous writers Chughtai and Manto. "They were close friends and were very close to the city of Mumbai," Dutta reveals. "When Manto left for Lahore in 1950, Chughtai didn't approve of his move and felt he was betraying the nation and the city. Manto lived till 1954 and in those four years wrote extensively about Mumbai. Chughtai lived till 1992 but all those years she didn't write anything about Mumbai. That intrigued me and I wanted to explore who is an insider and who is an outsider. I myself is a migrant having moved to Mumbai from Calcutta and felt I had the edge to make this film on the city."

Seven Islands and a Metro is one of the first Indian documentaries to be commercially released. "When I had a screening in Mumbai, one man from the 650-strong audience stood up and said: 'Hi, I am Shyam Shroff from Shringar Cinemas, can I distribute your film?' " recalls Dutta. "It was truly a historical moment as it marked the return of documentaries after a year-long jinx. If Michael Moore can be seen, why not us?"

After Munnabhai makes an exit from the plexes and before the Dons and Jaan-e-Manns storm in, the Fames and INOXes in Mumbai will get a taste of the *Seven Islands and a Metro*. Then Dutta is ready to take her film to Berlin for the International Film Festival early next year.