



***Bashu: Gharibeh-ye Kuchak (Bashu, the Little Stranger)*** is a prospective future LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that film.

17 of a possible 20 points \*\*\*\*1/2 = a minor classic

Iran 1986 color 106 minutes subtitled live action feature drama  
Kanun Parvaresh fekri (The Institute for the Intellectual Development of  
Children and Young Adults) Producer: Ali Reza Zarrin

Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance  
(j) designates a juvenile performer

**Points:**

- 2 Direction: Bahram Beyzaie\*
- 1 Editing: Bahram Beyzaie
- 2 Cinematography: Firooz Malekzadeh\*  
Stills Photography: Shahabeddin Adel
- 2 Lighting
- 1 Screenplay: Bahram Beyzaie
- 1 Music Selection: Bahram Beyzaie
- 2 Production Design: Bahram Beyzaie\* and Iraj Raminfar\*  
Costume Design: Bahram Beyzaie\* and Iraj Raminfar\*  
Makeup: Farhang Moayyeri

## **2 Sound**

**Sound Effects: Changiz Sayad\***

**Sound Recording: Jahangir Mirshekari\*, Behrooz Moavenian\*, and  
Asghar Shahverdi\***

**Sound Mixing: Hassan Zahedi\***

## **2 Acting**

## **2 Creativity**

**17 total points**

**Cast: Susan Taslimi (Naii), Parviz Poorhosseini (Naii's husband),  
Adnan Afravian (j)\* (Bashu), Golshan Anooshe (Loghman's wife),  
Akbar Doodkar\* (merchant Marhamat), Farokhlagha Hushmand\*  
(Naii's sister-in-law), Hamid Rahbar (j) (Marhamat's son),  
Azizollah Salmani (Loghman), others**

**How would you react to strangers if every other member of your family were suddenly obliterated from human existence? That's the situation young Bashu finds himself in, a solitary survivor in a world of outsiders with the same selfish concern to simply remain alive, no matter needs or hurts of others. Iraqi bombing has deprived him of home and immediate relatives. No matter where he goes to escape from war, the landscape, culture and even conversation will be unfamiliar, more threatening than neutral or supportive.**

**Adnan Afravian is a bewildered, almost feral Bashu, making a spontaneous decision to stow away without permission on the one operative truck outbound from his home town. That action initiates a perilous odyssey. For he soon finds himself carried into a radically different and unpredictable world. From scorching sands of southern Iran the refugee's brought unwittingly to forested farmland in northern foothills where an agrarian population speaks a different language and regards him superstitiously as a probably jinxed interloper.**

**At first rejected by everyone in his new location, Bashu eventually finds a protector in Naii, played by Susan Taslimi. She doesn't understand his language or dark skin, the latter so offending her a thorough scrubbing is undertaken with, from Naii's viewpoint, disappointing results.**

**Proving himself literate by reading from a local primer, Bashu becomes transformed in the eyes of villagers into a sort of junior demon best avoided.**

The boy tends to return the favor, uncomfortable in the presence of alternately bullying and imitative peers. Still, he manages to earn himself a position in Naii's household, serving as free labor and part-time childminder for her two small children. This wins him food, shelter and some badly needed replacement clothing.

Despite increasing acceptance from an adopted family, Bashu can't shake haunting memories of his mother. At one point a vision of her leads him away from a marketplace while inattentive Naii concentrates exclusively on bartering. For a while, the rural community she lives in believes the boy has either left to become more independent or been devoured by a creature of adjacent forest.

Will Bashu return and make peace with reluctantly accepting hosts, including Naii's homecoming husband? Or will uneasiness in their presence and bonds to the past prove too compelling?

Since most cast members were drawn from amateurs found in the area where filming occurred, a documentary atmosphere prevails. Still, there are some exceptions, notably Farokhlaga Hushmand's histrionics as Naii's censorious, meddling sister-in-law and Akbar Doodkar playing a dourly cynical merchant named Marhamat, who threatens to eliminate Naii's credit at his store. Hamid Rahbar, cast as Marhamat's pushy son, is a credible juvenile oppressor.

Sound recording is top-notch, immersing viewers in the natural world surrounding Bashu through birdcalls, rustlings of leaves in a forest, snufflings of boars, memorable souhings of wind passing through rice fields.

Just as effectively evocative is lighting, much of which seems based on natural light as opposed to studio illumination sources. Even interiors are lit sufficiently for outlines of individual objects to be clearly observed.

While Beyzai's usage of unrefined vocal folk music isn't going to be everyone's cup of tea, it does enhance ambience considerably. Employing an Iranian version of magic realism in what might be termed memory flashback sequences involving Bashu's birth mother offers enriching rewards to those watching events. Those also expose the ongoing tussle in the boy's mind between relatively harsh conditions of the present and nurturally comfortable ones from his past.

Obviously, the screenplay must have been substantially developed during the shoot to conform with normal expressions and responses of non-professionals

attempting reenactment of their own stories about accepting or rejecting uninvited visitors. Director Beyzaie smartly developed a subtext of social criticism without overt commentary from the outside. A sagacious policy for keeping out of harm's way in a tyrannical hierarchy such as post-revolutionary Iran.

Costuming is a faithful copying of what rural people in northern Iran would be wearing during the 1980s. Any artificial elegance added would have run contrary to what the filmmaker aimed to present.

*Bashu: Gharibeh-ye kuchak* is appropriate viewing for teens and adults, a strong reminder of pains inflicted on Iran's civilians during protracted conflict with Iraq in the 1980s. It's highly recommended by Kino Ken for psychological insight into parochialism and childhood anguish. The bottom line message of beneficial tolerance directed at strangers and their puzzling behaviors is equally valid for Western contemporary societies currently inclining toward exclusivity.