



# Lion



AUSTRALIA, 2015, 120 MINUTES, COLOUR

*Dev Patel, Rooney Mara, David Wenham, Nicole Kidman, Sunny Pawar. Directed by Garth Davies.*

The title causes a question mark right throughout the film. The title of the book on which the film is based is called A Long Journey Home. And we see no lions either in India or in Tasmania! It is only in the last minute that the meaning of the title is revealed – and is symbolically satisfying.

The author of the book is Saroo Brierley, who remembers something of his childhood in India, especially his love for his older brother, the love for his mother, out in the fields (and a myriad butterflies), on top of a coal train filling bags with coal to exchange for milk at the market, life at home, and his persuading his brother (after showing him all the things, heavy things, that he could lift) to taking with him to his night work. He is told to wait at the station, dozes off, wakes in fear, goes on to a train and is carried over 1600 km from his home to the busyness of Calcutta.

The film is very moving as we share the plight of a little boy lost, not really comprehending what has happened or what is happening, wandering through crowds, offered a piece of cardboard to sleep on in a subway, going to a shrine, praying but eating the food left in offering. When he is found by a sympathetic woman and taken home and cared for, there is the dreaded realisation that the man she calls in for help is a pimp for paedophiles. Saroo runs away, is collected and put into a boys' home, interrogated by the police – but, finally interviewed

by a sympathetic official, he has been chosen for adoption in Australia, joining other little adoptees to learn a little English as well as table manners.

This first almost half of the film is well worth seeing. The performance by the little boy, Sunny Pawar, is just right.

As is the rest of the film, the little boy flying to Hobart, meeting his adoptive parents John and Sue Brierley, played sympathetically by David Wenham and Nicole Kidman. Saroo adapts to Australian life, though an adoptee brother finds it very difficult. And then 20 years have passed, Saroo (Dev Patel) truly Australian, going to study in Melbourne, encountering a young American student (Rooney Mara), and finding in discussions with their friends, especially Indian friends, a re-awakening of the story of his past, his longing for his mother and his brother.

As this becomes a preoccupation, then an obsession, he does not cope well – one of the most moving sequences in the film is, courtesy of a fine Nicole Kidman performance, where his mother is in something of an emotional collapse and she explains her life, her experience when young and her longing to help a child less fortunate than an Australian child and that her longing has been fulfilled in him.

Google Earth will be very pleased with the film

because it provides an opportunity for him to further explore, to go back to India and, as Saroo says, and so the questions he has always had answered and the holes in his heart are filled.

The central characters all appear as themselves for the final credits – including a very moving sequence in India.

### ***Fr Peter Malone MSC***

*Peter is a former president of SIGNIS - the World Catholic Association for Communication. He's a highly experienced film critic and author who has travelled the world watching, writing on and talking about movies. Since 1968, he's written reviews for a number of Catholic magazines and periodicals. He has also written many books on cinema including *Films and Values, Movie Christs and Antichrists, Cinema Down Under* and the excellent *Lights, Camera, Faith (Movie Lectionary)* series.*