

## FILM REVIEWS - October 10-16, 1994

### ENGLISH, AUGUST (INDIAN) - David Stratton

A confident first feature that explores the intriguing subject of the way grassroots India is administered, "English, August" should crop up at festivals in the coming months but is unlikely to cross over into arthouses in the West.

For anyone interested in life on the subcontinent. Dev Benegal's film give lucid insight into the "middling" corruption of low-level government bureaucrats in the boondocks. Agastya Sen, portrayed with humor and sensitivity by Rahul Bose, is a well-educated Bengali who joins the public service and is sent to work as an assistant to the collector in a tiny village where he doesn't speak the language.

Billeted in appalling quarters without proper plumbing facilities (and soon joined by a persistent frog that simply won't go away), Sen is lonely and bored away from his city friends.

Benegal's convincing depiction of the little village, with its absurd ceremonies and meetings and its deeply ingrained poverty, is the principal attraction of this languid film, which like its indolent hero, just drifts along observing life.

The soundtrack is mostly in English, the language is bureaucrats from different parts of the country converse, and, unusual for an Indian film, it is peppered with four-letter words.

Pic looks good, with top-quality cinematography. Cast members are all fine, with Bose's deadpan delivery of the often humorous dialogue a major asset. Tighter pacing would have helped this likable pic find a far wider audience than it probably will.