

# 'Khan Magic' Vanishes In Battle With Fresh Scripts

NEW DELHI: Content is king, not the Khans -- the year 2018 proved this with the success of fresh and high concept films like "Stree", "Badhaai Ho" and "AndhaDhun", embraced by the audience over the Khan-led "Race 3", "Thugs of Hindostan" and "Zero", which had set high expectations but fell flat at the box office.

"Sanju", "Padmaavat", "2.0" (Hindi version), "Baaghi", "Raazi", "Gold", "Raid" and "Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety" are some of the other titles that did good business, and high hopes are pinned on the just-released "Simmba", which is likely to draw the mass audience.

"The landscape is changing," Vijay Singh, CEO, Fox Star Studios, told IANS of how the star-led industry is transforming.

"Content is evolving at a huge rate. Filmmakers are investing more and more time in developing scripts. This year truly belonged to great concepts and scripts and audiences have showered their love wholeheartedly.

"It is all about a narrating a powerful story in an engaging way. Star power remains important but can only help open a film - finally it's all about a great script and a brilliant film," Singh said.

That explains the reception to a



Swara Bhasker, Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Shikha Talsania and producer Ekta Kapoor at the music launch of their film "Veere Di Wedding" in Mumbai.

"Badhaai Ho" -- about a 50-plus pregnant woman's emotional struggle, to "AndhaDhun" -- a quirky thriller, to "Stree" -- a horror comedy, or a "Raazi" -- about a woman spy.

Overall, it has been a good year for the industry after a couple of disappointing years. Film and trade business expert Girish Johar pointed out that 2018 has witnessed the maximum entertainers -- around 15 -- to surpass the Rs. 100 crore benchmark, which has

given a fillip to the year-round business by 10 per cent as compared to last year. He estimates a business of around Rs. 3500 crore this year.

"The Khan starrers drew a fantastic response on Day 1, but Day 3 onwards, they fell flat. People are outrightly rejecting mediocre, half-baked movies, and we have to make something extraordinary to draw them into theatres," Johar told IANS. There were also movies like "Mukkabaaz", "October",

"Hichki" and "Pad Man" that were appreciated.

According to Shibashish Sarkar, Chief Operating Officer, Reliance Entertainment, it is important to cater stories to the right audience. "There is an audience for every kind of film, so long as your story is correct. Where will one classify a 'Padmaavat', or 'Sanju' or 'Raazi' -- are they star driven films or content driven films? When you have correct content, and you have a star,

the film implodes and explodes," Sarkar told IANS.

Singh said the year established that the viewers like content which has relatability, likeability and virality. But high ticket prices, in Johar's view, are turning out to be deterrents for the audience to visit theatres.

A movie viewing experience for a family of four at a multiplex can cost anything between Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 including food and beverages.

Also, with stiff competition from regional films, Hollywood and especially the vast variety of digital content, Bollywood needs to step up its game with scripts being the focal point, and by allotting the right budget.

"It's a norm nowadays to say 'movies don't fail, budgets do'," Singh said, adding that film and OTT will co-exist and will result in a larger pool of writers, directors, actors and technical talent.

However, Sarkar said OTT platforms, which are bringing international content closer to Indians, will continue to consume more and more audience time.

"I will not be surprised if in a medium to long term, films are made straight for digital. Who would have thought 'Mowgli' launching on Netflix a few years back?"

## 'Thackeray' Director Unfazed By Box Office Clash Of Three Films

NEW DELHI: Abhijit Panse, director of "Thackeray", based on the life of Shiv Sena founder, isn't worried about competing with Kangana Ranaut's "Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi" and Emraan Hashmi-starrer "Cheat India". He says if a film is good, it will work.

All the three movies will hit the screens on January 25, 2019.

Asked if Panse would like to change the release date of "Thackeray" -- based on Bal Thackeray's life -- he told IANS: "We have already announced the date. We won't change it. We were thinking of releasing it on January 23, which is Thackeray Sir's birth anniversary date but later we thought of releasing it on 25th."

"As far as other films are concerned, every year, more than 52 films are made. So, every Friday, either one or two or three films release. The public knows everything and will see 'Manikarnika...' as well as 'Cheat India'. If the film is good, it will work. As a director, I want all the films to work," he added.

Meanwhile, Bala Lokare, secretary of Chitrapat Sena, posted on Facebook that since "Thackeray" will be arriving on January 25, they will not let any other film release on the same day.

The film, which features Nawazuddin Siddiqui as the Shiv Sena supremo, has been talk of the town since its trailer launch

on Wednesday. The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) reportedly raised objections to the trailer, hours before its launch.

In fact, south Indian actor Siddharth even tweeted: "Nawazuddin has repeated 'Uthao lungi bajao pungli' (lift the lungi and \*#\$) in the film. Clearly hate speech against South Indians... In a film glorifying the person who said it! Are you planning to make money out of this propaganda? Stop selling hate! Scary stuff!"

Talking about the dialogue, Panse said: "In the Marathi trailer, there was a sentence -- 'Uthao lungi, bajao pungli'. It was Balasaheb's slogan. It is history. He had said it. Even in his magazine, there were cartoons on south Indians. The censor board should understand that we have made a film keeping the character in mind and not the controversy. Balasaheb was a controversial personality."

But he is not open to making changes in the film. "Of course we will stick to that (what we have made). It's history. It's all on YouTube and other platforms. Everyone knows Balasaheb's speeches. He used to talk in front of lakhs of people. It's not like we have made new statements. It was his personality. So, we have to portray that," said the director.

The film will focus on the political leader's "struggles and fights".

## Daggubati Replaces Nana In 'Housefull 4'

NEW DELHI: Screenwriter-director Farhad Samji has revealed that the "Baahubali" star Rana Daggubati will play a threat in their upcoming film "Housefull 4". Rana had replaced Nana Patekar in the film after the veteran actor was accused of sexual misconduct by actress Tanushree Dutta.

Rana started shooting for it in Mumbai in November. "I think it is too early to talk about his role. It's an important role. He is playing the threat in the film," Farhad told IANS in a telephonic interview about the

movie that also stars actors Akshay Kumar, Riteish Deshmukh and Bobby Deol.

Rana is not the only replacement in the film. In October, filmmaker Sajid Khan had to step down as its director after he was accused of sexual harassment.

"It would have been difficult for me had I not written the screenplay and dialogues of the film. Whenever I narrate, I do it like a stand-up act. All the actors... even producers make it a point that I am present on sets. I was in Jaisalmer while the shooting was happening there.

## 'Selection Day' Is Netflix's Best Indian Series To Date



By Subhash K. Jha

"Selection Day"; Cast: Mohammad Samad, Yash Dholye, Akshay Oberoi, Rajesh Tailang, Mahesh Manjrekar, Ratna Pathak Shah; Director: Udayan Prasad; Rating: \*\*\* 1/2 (3 and a half stars).

The actual sacred game in India is cricket. To generate a drama of disenchantment in the cricketing field is relatively easy. What director Udayan Prasad (best remembered for the Om Puri-starrer "My Son The Fanatic") has done is to make the cricket ground a place for meditation on socio-cultural displacement.

Much of the series' meat and juice come from its source material, the novel by Aravind Adiga. This is the epic story of the migratory translocation of two young boys Radha (Yash Dholye) and Manju (Mohammad Samad) aged 15 and 16 from rural Maharashtra whose tyrannical trashy father drags them to Mumbai for a life of cricket.

Udayan Prasad and his writers (Marston Bloom, Karan Aggarwal and Sumit Arora) have dug deep into the class differences at the turf level.

There is a remarkably subtle homoerotic attraction that grows between Manju and an upperclass Muslim boy Javed (Karanvir Malhotra). That young Samad happens to be an actor of phenomenal sensitivity helps give the content a quicksilver immediacy and warmth. Converging gently on Samad, the series becomes the sly of Manju's journey from patriarchal tyranny to sexual and spiritual freedom.

The series is bankably buoyant and breezy without trivializing the issues that

concern the theme such as a young mind's right to follow its own dream.

There is a subplot about an over-ambitious realtor (Akshay Oberoi) trying to get a wily wizened but impish real-estate owner (Ratna Pathak Shah) to part with her property. Akshay and Ratna play against each other with a flirtatious malevolence bringing to the table the mood of tragic travesty that has overtaken the metropolitan psyche.

Ratna Pathak Shah, Mahesh Manjrekar (as an ageing cricket coach who rediscovers his mojo), Rajesh are brilliantly in form. Akshay brings a subtle sliminess to his suave wheeler-dealer's role. Here is an actor who deserves to be on top of the game. Sacred or otherwise.

And I was delighted to see the accomplished Geetanjali Kulkarni (last seen as a prosecutor cutting vegetables on the train back home from court for the family dinner in the Marathi film "Court") playing Mahesh Manjrekar's ailing but smiling wife. But it is Samad whose performance anchors the series. He plays the reluctant cricketer with a just the right amount of angst and assuredness. My favourite sequence in the series is the one where the principal of the school Ratna Pathak Shah punishes Samad by banning him from playing cricket for a week.

"But that's not a punishment," smiles Samad with such understated relevance, it shows we are looking at an actor with a very bright future. Ditto the series.

Brimming with an all-knowing wisdom that never grows cocky, "Selection Day" has me hooked. I can't wait for Season 2.

Pic: Vaibhav Chaturvedi/Netflix.

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