

Shanghai: A slow paced political drama

Written by Sharad Vatss

Thursday, 14 June 2012 18:48



Shanghai is another piece of meaningful cinema from Dibakar Banerjee.

Being one of the most sought-after directors in Bollywood is no mean feat. It takes years of hard work, a string of commercial hits and usually a cinematic and writing aptitude that offers an alternative take to the run-of-the-mill scripts that consistently get bandied around. Dibakar Banerjee is indeed different. Starting his career with 'Khosla Ka Ghosla', he followed it with 'Oye Lucky Lucky Oye' and an experiment called 'Love Sex aur Dhoka'.

Shanghai is another much-anticipated movie from the director. It orbits in the region of gluttony and deceitfulness of politicians.

The movie is based on the 1960s book, 'Z', by a Greek writer. Banerjee detected remarkable similarities between the Greece in the book and the India of today, procured its rights and gave it an Indian flavour.

Story: Chief Minister of the state, Madam Ji (Supriya Pathak) is relocating the Bharat Nagar natives elsewhere, to fulfill her dream of making IBP (Indian Business Park) on the land thus acquired. Renowned social activist, writer, Professor Dr Ahmadi (Prosenjit) comes to town to oppose the project, the same time the CM is there to celebrate IBP. In the midst of a clash between the IBP supporters and Ahmadi's followers clash, Ahmadi is seriously injured in a road accident. His former student, host and soft interest of some time, Shalini (Kalki) believes it to be an attempt of murder. The government appoints an IAS officer Krishnan (Abhay Deol) as head of the commission to investigate the matter. Meanwhile, a local videographer Jogi (Imran Hashmi) claims to have a clip as proof of the 'accident' and offers his help to Shalini. The matter worsens and curfew is imposed in the city.

Shanghai: A slow paced political drama

Written by Sharad Vatss

Thursday, 14 June 2012 18:48

How will Jogi and Shalini prove this as a murder attempt? How will Krishnan go about it? What happens to IBP? The movie provide answers to all these questions. The story is simple but it's the way Banerjee captures and translates the pathos of red tapism on screen that makes it an engrossing and hard-hitting.

Performances: Abhay Deol puts up a superlative show as the straightforward IAS officer. His South Indian accent is so well-done that it is impossible to imagine him as not being Krishnan. His performance is subtle and nuanced. Emraan Hashmi is boisterous as Jogi Parmar, the sleazy but well-meaning videographer. He looks quite authentic in his new look and does a wonderful job. Kalki Koechlin emotes beautifully. Farooq Sheikh, as Kaul, is a delight. Prosenjit Chatterjee is natural and believable as Dr Ahmadi. Pitobash Tripathy (as Bhaggu) does a fine job. Supriya Pathak (as the chief minister) is very good in a short appearance. Anant Jog (as Jaggu) is natural. Kiran Karmarkar (as the CM's coalition partner) looks like the quintessential politician. Tillotama Shome (as Mrs Ahmadi) and others offer adequate support. The overall performances are commendable and convincing.

Screenplay: The story/screenplay of Shanghai, is loosely adapted from the novel 'Z' by the Greek writer and diplomat, Vassilis Vassilikos. Written in 1966 to reveal facts behind the assassination of a prominent Greek Liberal MP in 1963, it was turned into a film in 1969 by the same name. Shanghai starts off slow with several close-up shots and scenes left incomplete. The second half is better than the first as all pieces come together. The pace also improves. The film is heavy, disturbing, layered and complex. In fact, parts of it will play in your head after it is over. The humour and situations are tongue-in-cheek. The reality of small-town poverty, wicked politicians, etc, portrayed in the movie is hard to digest. Banerjee keeps you engaged with dramatic twists, turns, and revelations.

The minute details such as a volleyball player interrupting a meeting, assistants providing bottled water in a loo, the swimming pool being cleaned constantly, and others contribute to the texture of the film.

Dialogues are good and provide the desired impact.

Music and cinematography: The music score by Vishal and Shekhar adds no value to the film. You only remember 'Imported Kamariya' as you come out of the theatre. The item song caters to the growing demand of such songs in our films. 'Bharat Mata ki jai', shown widely during promos, fails to create the desired impact. You will not remember any other song as they

Shanghai: A slow paced political drama

Written by Sharad Vatss

Thursday, 14 June 2012 18:48

come in pieces.

Background score by Michael McCleary (A New Zealand native, born In India, Michael has worked with Lucky Ali, A.R. Rahman and Salim Suleman. He is a busy music director for advertisements and holds the credit for the theme music of Titan, Mahindra Xylo, Lakme, etc.) matches the genre of the film. Though the background score is quite specific, most of the time it's just dialogues and external sounds in the movie. This looks good in terms of cinema but slows down the effect of drama.

Photography by Nikos Andritsakis is something this movie should be watched for. Tight frames and unusual angles helps create enough drama. This Greek photographer was introduced to Bollywood by Banerjee in his last film (LSD). He has taken the photography to a whole new level in this movie. The use of mirrors in many shots deserve a special mention. On the whole, photography helps set the pace for this film.

Shanghai deals with contemporary issues of present India. Red tapism, army scams, porn films, corruption, assassinations, poverty, power, everything is present in Bharat Nagar. It reminds you of recent cases of UP Govt firing at farmers protesting against illegal acquisitions of their farming land to build sky scrapers.

So where does the movie fails? Its the slow and somewhat confused narrative, predictable sequences, and little or no respite from the high tension atmosphere and anti-climax. The three things essential to make a film hit, as Vidya Balan suggested, are actually missing from it, and those are 'Entertainment, Entertainment, Entertainment'!

(Rating:□ *)**

Shanghai: A slow paced political drama

Written by Sharad Vatss

Thursday, 14 June 2012 18:48

---Sharad Vatss is a movie buff who works for Pepsi.