

cinema



* Dhanush and Shruti in 3.

At the count of 3...

With its non-song hit *Kolaveri Di* getting excellent pre-release publicity, the Tamil movie has pushed Dhanush to the A-list, writes **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

There was a time when songs pushed films to box-office highs in Indian cinema. They were written by poets like Sahir Ludhianvi and Kannadasan and sung by brilliant artists like Mohammed Rafi and T M Soundararajan.

While Ludhianvi provided the lyrics for hundreds of Hindi movies, Kannadasan penned in Tamil, about 5,000 songs, which were pregnant with meaning, and unforgettable. Gramophone records and song

books immortalised the lyrics.

And now comes a song that has raged like a tornado. It is *Kolaveri Di* in the Dhanush-Shruti Hassan starrer, 3. It was written by no poet, sung by no great vocalist. Yet, it has caught the imagination of a nation.

A cacophonous din, mouthed by Dhanush himself, it sounds more like recitation, than a song. The picturisation is passé.

My guess for *Kolaveri Di's* triumph is Dhanush, not the other way round. Songs made Shammi into a Shammi. Melody made

Gemini into a Gemini. Or almost. But it has been the other way round in the case of Dhanush.

I think it is the young actor who made the murderously-worded song so popular, and part of Dhanush's appeal is reflected glory from dad-in-law and Tamil superstar Rajnikanth.

Rajnikanth is often called 'god' in Tamil Nadu, indeed in most of southern India. Much like Japanese actor Takeshi Kitano is known as in his country. But Kitano shocked me during my meeting with him several

years ago when he greeted me by prostrating.

Rajnikanth, said to be a hit in Japan, may not prostrate before men from the media, but he is known to be extraordinarily humble and unpretentious.

But Rajnikanth – now shooting his movie, *Kochadaiyaan* in London after recovering from an illness that kept him in a Singapore hospital for several weeks – may soon cease to be invincible.

For a new icon could be emerging from the shadows of Rajnikanth. Dhanush. Married to Rajnikanth's elder daughter, Aishwarya, and yet to touch 30, the young man has been around since the early 2000s.

He has had his hits and his misses. Last year, his *Aadukalam* won him the National Award for Best Actor. As a guy engaged in promoting rooster fight as a sport,

Dhanush essaying Karuppu falls in love with an Anglo-Indian girl, Irene. In the end, he wins the game and the girl.

Now, *Kolaveri Di* comes like a double whammy for Dhanush. It has taken him to the stars and has been an excellent PR build-up for 3, which opened across the world last Friday. The first shows (in Chennai) were packed, but I could not see the mass hysteria normally associated with a Rajnikant or Kamal release.

Held by Dhanush's wife Aishwarya, 3 is a reasonably good work for a first-timer. Set in Chennai in the pre-mobile telephone era when the wired gadget on the desk or in the public call office linked lovers, the story may be broadly described as a psychological mystery. Not a thriller as some newspapers are calling it.

Told through a series of flashbacks, 3 begins as a school romance, between Dhanush's Ram and Shruti Hassan's Janani. The stirrings of first love are captured tenderly through hesitant eye contact and, later, the hurried rooftop peck on the cheek. Bicycle rides, a spin on the motorbike and a passionate embrace provoke parental disapproval, particularly because Janani and her family are all set to make America their home. But the girl burns her passport, dashes the family's dream and goes on to marry her man in (strangely) what seems like a pub.

Eventually, as is the usual storyline, both his and her parents come around to their relationship.

But then we have reached only the mid-point in the movie, and the twist that follows shatters the couple's idyllic existence. But this is also precisely where the narrative begins to falter. Ram is ill, but Janani does not know. Ram does not want to tell her. Only his friend, Senthil, is kept in the loop. But why couldn't Senthil talk to Ram's rich father? So what begins as a promising plot dithers along the way.

3 makes up for this unconvincing storyline with good performances. As the son of a rich father, essayed by Prabhu, Dhanush is marvellous in a role that may well be his career best. As a nonchalant schoolboy and later as a man tormented by fear, and swinging between hallucination and reality, he surprises us with his emotive ability that kind of makes up for his unimpressive screen presence.

In many ways, Shruti reminds us that she is her mother, Sarika's (and Kamal Hassan's) daughter, giving a top-notch portrayal of a woman torn between love and angst that often borders on the possessive, though she goes overboard in the emotional scenes.

3 ends with a warning line – and for fear of being a spoiler – I would only say that it sounds so naïve.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran
may be contacted at
gautamanb@hotmail.com)