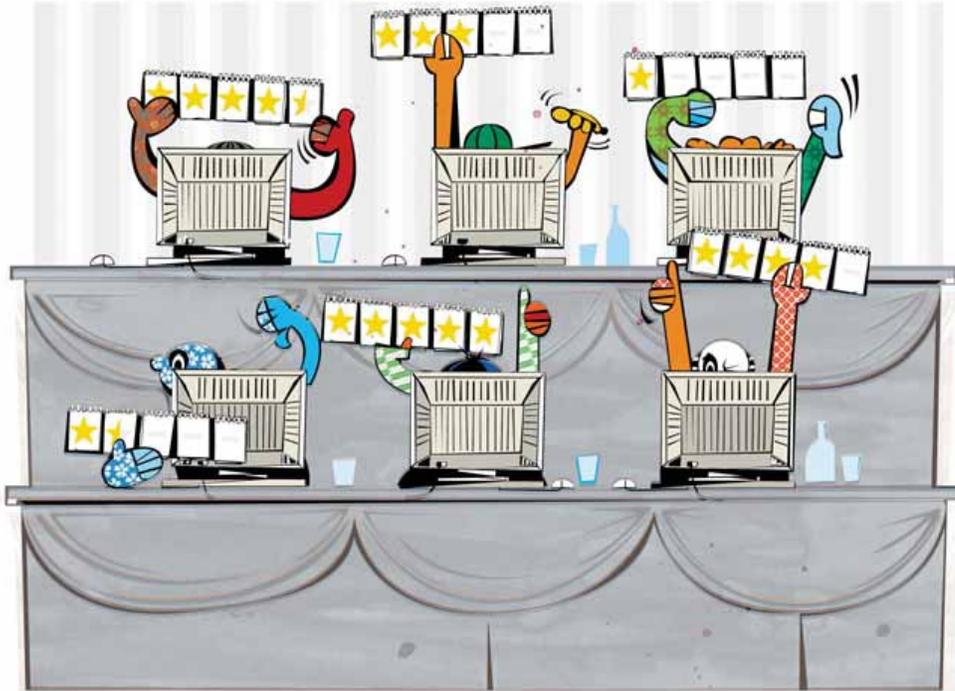


cinema



Mr Critic, you are not wanted

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Nobody likes criticism. Those who brag that they tolerate, even welcome, censure are probably lying. This could not be truer of artists. As a film critic who has been in the business of rubbishing various facets of cinema, even demolishing a whole movie, I have naturally provoked extreme wrath in the men and women of the celluloid world.

There was one occasion when director Mani Ratnam, who has made both good and bad films, refused to speak to me or even acknowledge my presence for three years, because I had ripped apart his *Bombay*.

Later, when I liked one of his movies, Ratnam came back to me with a big, warm hello — like a long lost friend. Vikramaditya Motwane was visibly displeased with me when I disapproved of a few features in his *Udaan*, screened at Cannes in 2010.

Of course, he camouflaged his displeasure by accusing me of having revealed a vital plot point in his work. Nandita Das could never stomach the fact that I could be critical of a “friend’s” movie. So, you do not want me to be a professional journalist, I had quipped once.

The war between filmmakers/actors and critics is perhaps as old

as journalism itself. Some years ago, there was a hue and cry in France when producers and distributors decided that they would not invite critics to movie previews — usually organised a few days before the actual theatrical releases.

What did the critics do? They bought tickets for the first or second show and wrote their columns, which appeared not on the day the picture opened, but a couple of days later. This meant that producers and distributors made money before reviews appeared.

While the Mumbai-wallahs are not so hassled about critical newspaper pieces — and even now hold media screenings well before release dates — the people in Tamil Nadu and other southern states are terribly finicky. They call the media only on the day of the opening — which is usually a Friday. So, I notice now that dailies like *The Hindu* and *The New Indian Express* carry their review sections on a Sunday or Monday. This gives enough room for the films to rake in their collections over the weekend before critics come out with their stars.

However, I have always wondered whether the average cinema-goer really reads reviews and then makes his choice. Cinema in India is essentially a weekend outing replete with snacking. These days, the menu is even more tantalising and includes samosas, sandwiches, pizzas, burgers and finger chips. So, a visit to the theatre usually

involves eating, texting and chatting rather than watching what is happening on the screen.

Despite this, the feud between critics and moviemakers is growing. Often with box-office collections jingling in spite of bad press, filmmakers smirk.

Recently, Shah Rukh Khan told Yale students when he was delivering the Chubb Lecture that “many-a-night, I have gone back after receiving an award — pumped up and all happy — just to read that what I really deserved was the Golden Banana for the worst actor of the year. I become heartbroken, angry and completely convinced that bananas and critics, both should have their skins peeled and fed to the monkeys”.

Actor and director Sajid Khan reportedly averred: “I have always maintained that I don’t give a damn about critics. The collections are a big slap on their faces. For me, critics have zero value. I feel that only a person who buys a ticket to watch my movie has the right to judge it: praise it or spit at it”. He was saying this after the success of *Housefull 2*.

Here is something nastier coming. Helmer Samir Karnik had this to conclude: “We conduct press shows in the hope that critics would say nice things about our film, but it’s only a false hope. From now on, I won’t conduct press shows. If they want to watch, they can spend their own money. They eat my popcorn, and write against me. Aren’t they ashamed?” He was fuming after seeing the bad reviews of *Chaar Din Ki Chandini*.

Salman Khan concluded that the audience is the final critic. If it likes a film, then nothing else matters. “I make movies to entertain viewers not critics”.

So, who wants the notebook-guys trying to pump their views into packed cinemas?



* Ajay Devgn plays a man with a grudge in *Tezz*.

Fast train to nowhere

Now, here I am all set to lambast. This time, *Tezz*. Helmed by Priyadarshan (remember his excellent *Kanchiavaram* with Prakash Raj on the sorry state of silk weavers in the temple town that won the National Award) and starring Ajay Devgn, Anil Kapoor, Boman Irani, Sameera Reddy and Kangana Ranaut, *Tezz* true to the meaning of its title, (speed), moves like a rocket. Only that the rocket in this case is a fast train travelling from London to Glasgow.

Inspired by and copied from the 1975 Japanese film, *The Bullet Train*, *Tezz* has a train with bombs planted in it by a disgruntled Indian, Aakash Rana (played by Ajay Devgn, who never seems to get rid of his brooding sour looks and finds it an effort to even smile). Deported from Britain and separated from his pregnant wife, Nikita (Kangana Ranaut), for working illegally, he returns four years later, enlists two of his friends (one of them is Megha, played with panache by Sameera Reddy) to plant explosives on the train.

Crafted and edited in a thrillingly pacy style, *Tezz*, however, is plotted with little imagination. There is an awful lot that is unbelievable about the story. Would a man merely deported come back with such a vengeance to kill hundreds of people? Would a man already married to a British citizen be thrown out at all? And what happened in the intervening four years? Could the husband and wife never write to each other, e-mail each other or telephone each other?

To top it all, we have Boman Irani portraying the head of British Rail Security and Anil Kapoor as the chief of anti-terror squad. Seems Indians have taken over all the key positions in the UK. Going past all this stupid scripting, Aakash between his demand for a huge ransom and threatening conversations with Irani’s Sanjay Raina has all the time in the world to go on a nostalgia tour of London.

Though there is a brilliant scene or two — one where Megha chased by the police, zigzags on a motorbike — *Tezz* loses its focus in the second half. The train and its passengers are forgotten with the action shifting to a confrontation between Kapoor’s Arjun Khanna and Aakash that sees gun fights and hot pursuits. Mr Khanna seems to be omnipresent, cornering Aakash at every turn, and in the typical Bollywood style, the London Bobbies arrive only later. If these men seem like a wasted lot, so do Ranaut and Mohanlal as a cop escorting a prisoner on the train (!).

I remember Mohanlal saying the other day that he will not work in a Bollywood picture unless the role was really stimulating. Was this one so?

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