



* *D-Day*: Bringing in a breath of fresh air.

Four spies and a don

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By Gautaman Bhaskaran

There was a great Jewish dream during the Second World War. A great desire, a great hope, in fact, to get all the top Nazi leaders, including Hitler, Goebbels and Roschmann, together at one place and assassinate them. This dream came true, but on celluloid.

Quentin Tarantino in one of his best efforts, *Inglorious Basterds*, fulfilled this Jewish wish. A young girl, whose family had been killed by a German officer – brilliantly played by a hitherto unknown Austrian-German actor, Christoph Walt – and her lover running a theatre in France kill the top Nazi men as they watch a film.

The hall is burnt down, and the men inside perish. Perhaps, India also has a similar dream. It would want to capture or kill Dawood Ibrahim, who is said to be responsible for the 1993 Mumbai blasts,

which left many people dead and maimed. Reportedly living in Karachi and also the brain behind several other terror attacks on Indian soil, he is on the most wanted list of the USA and India.

Director Nikhil Advani after a string of eminently forgettable movies like *Chandni Chowk to China*, *Patiala House* and *Delhi Safari*, now comes up with *D-Day*, an extremely interesting work which probably satisfies the great Indian yearning. With the help of a compelling story, a script that stays within the realms of the possible and superb performances, Advani plots India's covert attempt to get an underworld don living in Karachi, well guarded by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Goldman, obviously modelled on Dawood and played to perfection by Rishi Kapoor (and what a transformation from the 1980s chocolate boy that he was, starting his career

as a teen lover in Raj Kapoor's *Bobby*), is all set to conduct his son's "nikah". The film opens with a crooner playing along with his band, while the guests, carefully frisked, arrive for the grand evening.

We then see Goldman's convoy snaking its way to the hotel, where the marriage is all set to happen, and as celebrations swing from one high to another, there are three men and one woman, all Indians and part of India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), stealthily going about their mission to kidnap the don and whisk him across the border -- where he would be tried for terror attacks.

But the mission gets botched up, because of the conflicting motives of the four agents. While Irrfan Khan's Wali Khan wants Goldman to be captured alive and taken to India, Arjun Rampal essaying Rudra Pratap Singh would rather have the man dead. But that would make him a martyr, argues Khan losing precious moments and a great opportunity to get rid of Goldman.

D-Day gets into the flashback mode after the mission fails, and the four Indians escape into the lanes and bylanes of Karachi. Advani then begins to tell us how the mission was conceived, pushing us back several weeks in time and also into the lives of the four people.

Khan has been living in Karachi masquerading as a barber and blending into the city's social fabric. He is happily married to a local girl and has a son, and is all set to send them to London. Singh is an army deserter and a vagabond of sorts who finds love in Karachi when he meets a scarred prostitute (Shruti Hassan). Explosives expert Zoya Rehman (Huma Qureshi), who had to miss her marriage anniversary with her husband in London, and the fourth agent, Aslam (Aakash Dahiya), a petty Mumbai criminal, have all been picked by RAW chief Ashwini Rao (Nasser) to play the deadly game where the cat knows the mice and vice-versa.

The movie winds in and out of ISI's headquarters and RAW's citadel, and through the crowded market places as well as thoroughfares of Karachi. Marvellously shot and set to some haunting music by Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, *D-Day* punctuates mercifully

non-choreographed action with the pathos and pain of the Indian operatives.

The ruthless sarcasm of Goldman, especially in the last scene when he calls India his home and Mumbai his lover, is contrasted with the grief of Khan at having to part with his young son and wife. Even Singh's sorrow has been etched with a touch of excellence, despite Rampal's woodenness.

If at all the script slips somewhat, it is with Qureshi's character; we so not seem to be getting too involved with her life, and often she, despite some fine acting, appears too cardboardish.

There are other fascinating aspects about Advani's film. He lets us peep into not just the murky world of espionage, but also political sleaze.

When the mission goes awry, RAW wants to disown and even bump off the agents. In a press conference, Indian politicians deny any knowledge of the mission. There are unmistakable jabs at the Prime Minister, who in the movie is constantly being called away by "Madam".

Into this scandal and slime, Advani finds time for humour. In one instance, Goldman wants to know who the boss of the mission is. The answer comes later when Khan asks Goldman to squeeze into the boot of a car. You asked who the boss was. Well I am, and now get in, Khan orders the don, much to his anger.

It is hard to pick holes in the film, but, yes, the end could have been far less dramatic and populist. It does not jell with the mood and flavour of the rest of the movie.

However, *D-Day* is one among the few films in recent months that has lifted Bollywood to a happy height. Along with *Lunchbox*, *Jolly LLB*, and *Shanghai*, *D-Day* gives Hindi cinema a chance to look more authentic than what it has been. And this is a patch of refreshing green on an arid mass.

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