

Korean gangster film inspires Tamil work

March 15 2016 10:51 PM



A promotional image from Kadhalum Kandanthu Pogum, which itself is inspired by Korean gangster film My Dear Desperado. Right: A scene from My Dear Desperado.



Rate

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Times have changed most wonderfully for Indian cinema. Once, producers and directors unashamedly copied a foreign film, sometimes frame by frame (like Dil Hai Ki Manta Nahi/It Happened One Night), and presented it as unique and original.

But, today, men like Kamal Haasan have no qualms about remaking a foreign movie in Tamil or any other language — and admitting to it. Haasan's recent Thoongavanam was a makeover — of course, with a desi touch — of the inspiring French film, Sleepless Night.

A lot of people loved watching Haasan as the policeman, and probably would not have enjoyed as much actor Tomar Sisley in the original French version.

Now, Nalan Kumarasamy has remade Korean romantic drama, My Dear Desperado, in Tamil and titled it Kadhalum Kandanthu Pogum with Vijay Sethupathi (last seen in Sethupathi).

The Korean work was a delightful movie about an odd couple, a young girl and a weather-beaten gangster. Debutant Korean helmer, Kim Kwang Sik, cast one of the country's top stars, Park Joong Hoon (best known for his tough character in Nowhere to Hide) as the crook — who is drawn to his new neighbour, Si Jin (Jung Yoo Mi). She is desperate after losing her plum IT job. Too proud to return to her small town and domineering father, she shifts to a smaller flat in Seoul. Though the gangster is rude and hardly romantic, Si warms up to him — and an unlikely relationship develops between them.

My Dear Desperado is character driven, not plot impelled, and the chemistry between Park

and Jung is so sizzling, and their performances so riveting that the film grips one attention. There is plenty of banter and tension among them — adding punch to the narrative. Witty and amusing, *My Dear Desperado* is neither too melodramatic nor filled with too many gags.

Finally, the relationship helps Si regain her confidence she lost after her firm goes bust, and the gangster to find some kind meaning in his life, which was on one long drift.

And now here is what I feel about *Kadhalum Kadanthu Pogum*, which opened on March 11.

In what is certainly novel, Vijay Sethupathi's Kathir is a bungling gangster in *Kadhalum Kadanthu Pogum*. It is incredible for a hero like Sethupathi to be bashed up and brutalised ever so often during the 137-minute running time of the movie. And this point is unabashedly driven home by the Premam actress, Madonna Sebastian, when she, playing a fresh Information Technology employee, Yazhini, asks with sarcasm dripping whether Kathir receives many more blows than what he actually gives.

Packed with wit rather than violence, the film has us tickled with innumerable one-liners. For example, when Kathir asks fellow diners in a roadside eatery to keep their mouths shut, one lone female voice quips, but how do we eat then? A lovely scene this that reveals the start of an unlikely relationship between Kathir and a college graduate, Yazhini, who arrives in Chennai for a professional assignment — a journey which her station master father (in small town close to the metropolis) and mother are initially reluctant to let their daughter make.

In Chennai, the first flush of excitement that comes with her job gives way to disappointment and desperation when the company goes bust, and Yazhini is too proud to return home. So, she shifts to a more modest flat whose neighbour happens to be a once-upon-a-time gangster, Kathir, whose fairly long stint in jail leaves him physically and perhaps psychologically unfit to take on battles and brawls. He spends his days pleading with his boss to let him open a liquor bar. He even fancies himself as one with a smart business card and all the other trappings that go with such proprietorship. But, instead, he finds himself sticking posters on roadside walls, and that is what his boss thinks Kathir is fit for.

Yazhini, however, begins to develop a soft corner for Kathir, and the few times he helps her tide over impediments seem to cement the relationship. Till she is bold enough to ask him to play her boss — whom she can introduce to her parents — who are by then highly doubtful about Yazhini's employment. The meeting does not go well. But, of course.

Kadhalum Kadanthu Pogum is often predictable and ponderous, though there are some interesting shots that lift the narrative. The rain scene is one, but like most of Tamil cinema, Kumarasamy's work also cries for greater refinement. A certain lack of finesse is apparent throughout, and the story could have been told more effectively had the movie been edited into a 100-minute slot.

Add to this, Sethupathi's tendency to mumble his lines (something which Hollywood star Marlon Brando did all the time) — a lack of clarity in dialogue delivery that one has been noticing even in his earlier works — is annoying, to say the least.

Yes, a certain redemption comes from Sebastian, who is very good essaying a girl in utter dilemma when she loses her job, and even when she finds herself drawn towards the "rowdy" as she calls Kathir. Can she fill the chasm between them, bridge their yawning differences in social status?

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