

Kangana: That gutsy star

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Kangana Ranaut needs to break free of the similar kind of characters she has been essaying in her films.



By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Kangana Ranaut plays Julia, Miss Julia, in the Bollywood film, Rangoon – where she is a movie star whose daredevil stunts endear her to her innumerable fans. They are mesmerised by her sexy looks, accentuated by body-hugging clothes, and her carefree attitude on screen in times as conservative as the 1940s India. With the British fighting a losing battle against India's cry for freedom, and with a devastated world hoping that World War II will end soon and the Axis Powers crushed, Julia becomes the spring of sad souls. These also include Indian soldiers working alongside the British army, and one Englishman in uniform (Richard McCabe) thinks that the actress will bring cheer to Indian troops on country's border with what was then Burma – where a battle is raging between the Japanese forces, aided by Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army, and the British.

Julia is sent to the front by her married lover, Russi Billimoria (essayed by Saif Ali Khan), who also owns the studio to which she is contracted. On the front, bombing by Japanese planes puts Julia in a fix. She is separated from her group with just one Indian soldier, Jamadar Nawab Malik (Shahid Kapoor), with her – and then begins a romance between the two, a love affair that takes Julia away from Russi.

Ranaut is a fine actress, but when I look at her range or choice of roles, they all seem so similar. In Tanu Weds Manu, she portrays a stubborn woman in a small town in love with a building contractor. She knows that this relationship is no good, but yet she refuses to marry a doctor from England. At least till the end. Ranaut is a rebel here.

Also, in Queen she is equally strong willed. Here she decides to go on her "honeymoon" without the man she was supposed to marry, a man who ditches her at the eleventh hour. Later, when he comes back to her in Amsterdam, where she is on her so-called honeymoon, she turns him down.

I would think that Indian cinema has this habit of slotting an actor, because it is mistakenly believed that this is what will lead to box-office success. Wrong. For, people will get tired of seeing Kangana essay the same kind of character in film after film.

But away from the screen, I do admire Ranaut for her guts – which she displayed in her recent television session, Koffee with Karan. In an industry and in an India cowed down and ruled by hypocrisy and pretension amply sugar-coated with social niceties, Miss Ranaut was bold and refreshing.

For once, the host, Mr Johar, had a hard time. Ranaut literally talked down to him, reminding him – in full public glare – about all the sarcasm he had heaped on her when she was a struggling actress from a small town trying to find her way in brutal Bollywood. And she spoke on television with admirable sophistication and dignity. Nobody would have missed that.

Kangana hinted, very casually, how Karan had made fun of her English accent, how snobbish he had been then. She was really on a roll, and her Rangoon co-star, Saif, gaped at her in disbelief.

At the beginning of the show, Johar gave out a disclaimer of sorts to Ranaut and said, "This is an unapologetically frivolous show. And you always make a lot of sense in all your interviews. I am a bit nervous of what you will make out of it."

"We are going to give the show some dignity," pat came Kangana's reply.

And when Karan patted her for her two National Awards, the actress quipped: "You've been a driving force in my life. If it wasn't for all the rejections, the mocking... You made fun of my English on this couch...I am not complaining, but somewhere these things drive you." One should have seen Karan squirm.

In what seemed like a desperate effort to rise from the depth Ranaut had pushed him, Johar said with a weak smile: "Kangana has really attacked me. I love you for that my darling."

Johar had more coming from the feisty actress. When Karan asked Kangana who gave the "most attitude" – male or female co-stars, she shot out without batting an eyelid: "I think you Karan". He had no choice but to say as quickly as he could that he was sorry.

Kangana Ranaut, that was really gutsy. But it is about time you sought and got roles that are different from what you have been doing till now. I am sure you have the range and the talent.

* * *

Yaman

At times like these when the world is wracked with terror and violence, Tamil cinema goes merrymaking with sickle dance and bloodshed. And not just this, the fight sequences are set to music – with drums and other instruments freely used – and choreographed in a way to convey that end is paramount, whatever be the road to it. And director Jeeva Shankar ropes in Vijay Antony to play an ordinary citizen, Tamizharasan in Yaman or Lord of Death.

Used as a pawn by two rival politicians, Karunakaran and Pandian (who had once killed Tamizharasan's father in cold blood), Tamizharasan could put to shame Miss Marple and Sherlock Holmes bunched together. Such is our hero's intuitiveness and cunning that he smells his enemies – who are in their dozens – in the most unlikely of places, including a jail and a bar in a movie whose plot is boringly similar to Kamal Haasan's Sathya and Subramaniapuram among several others.

If plot novelty takes a hit here, the writing is poor and scripting poorer with Shankar turning Tamizharasan literally into a Yaman, whose dance of death smacks of eeriness and unexplained evil. As I watched the film, I was wondering why Tamizharasan should turn into such a vengeful man, especially when he remains in the dark about his father's killer.

If writer Shankar's motive was to highlight the filth in the Indian political system with its share of treachery and corruption (look at the way a top cop accepts a bribe to let a bar operate without any hassles), the movie looks awfully exaggerated and unrealistic. Is Shankar wanting to tell us that politics is nothing but a huge cauldron of garbage that men like Karunakaran and Pandian take pleasure in keeping full.

Honestly, if the idea was to slot Antony's Tamizharasan as some kind of a guardian angel, some kind of a saviour, Yaman does not work. The man kills – or very cleverly gets others to do his dirty work. His hands, by and large, remain unsoiled – probably a ploy to airbrush Tamizharasan's villainy, to get a little white into the black.

A bit of romance between Mia George's Archana (an actress) and Tamizharasan sticks out like the proverbial sore thumb. There is zero chemistry between them, and Antony looks visibly ill at ease as the lover-boy.

*Gautaman Bhaskaran has been writing on Indian and world cinema for close to forty years, and may be e-mailed at gautamanb@hotmail.com