

Jolly LLB 2 – missing Arshad Warsi and Boman Irani

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Jolly LLB 2 fails to live up to the standards that its predecessor set. Right: Surya in Si 3.



By Gautaman Bhaskaran

It is never easy to create a sequel – whether for a novel or for a film. And since cinema is a visual medium, it easily attracts the comparative eye. The Tamil movie franchise called Singam – whose third edition I saw the other day – seemed so ridiculously jaded. Even its hero, the lion of a policeman played by Surya, looked tired and positively disinterested. And director Hari had nothing, nothing new to offer, except a lot of sound and din. I developed a splitting headache after watching Singam 3, stylistically re-titled Si 3.

Also, one must remember that a film is as good as its cast. One may have a gripping story, a marvellous script and a renowned director, but if these are not supported by a good set of actors, the entire show crumbles. This is precisely where the sequel to Jolly LLB, produced by Fox Star Studios and helmed by Subhash Kapoor, falters and falls down.

Fox and perhaps Kapoor – who were also on board part one – made a wrong move in Jolly LLB 2 by replacing the arresting Arshad Warsi and the equally remarkable Boman Irani with Akshay Kumar and Anu Kapoor respectively. Both Kumar and Kapoor really did not match up to their predecessors.

Obviously, Fox must have imagined that it could get more footfalls in theatres if the sequel had a star – and obviously Warsi is not a star like Kumar. Admittedly, Akshay has changed in recent years from being a character frivolous and funny to one we saw in Special 26 (I really liked him here), and in Airlift, where he plays a businessman rescuing hundreds of Indians from Kuwait in what was arguably the biggest military operation in peacetime history. He was also impressive in Rustom – based on the life of decorated Naval Commander Nanavati, who murders his British wife, Sylvia's lover and rich playboy businessman, Prem Ahuja.

But as Jagdishwar Mishra or Jolly, Mr Kumar paled in comparison to Mr Warsi, who as the bumbling small-town lawyer in Mathura moves to New Delhi to try his failing luck. And lady luck does smile on him, when he gets a chance to take on the corrupt and conceited big-time advocate, Tejinder Rajpal, brilliantly essayed by Irani. Warsi too did a splendid job of infusing his character in black coat with a certain adorable innocence, a certain likeable foolhardiness that made Jolly unforgettable. Kumar has not been able to achieve these. And obviously so.

For, Akshay is a star today, and one cannot expect him to shed his star trappings. Even in some of his most vulnerable scenes, he looks invincible – while Warsi seemed so helpless. Remember the scene where he gets beaten up by Rajpal's henchman, and he looks almost frightened. Cut to the scene in Lucknow (part two unfolds in Kanpur, Lucknow and in Kashmir), where Jolly is shot by lumpen elements hired by a villainous cop, who kills an innocent man a day after his marriage. (It is a fake encounter carried out by the policeman, who wants to close the case of a missing terrorist and thus get his bribe and promotion.) Kumar just did not gel here.

The casting also suffers because of Kapoor. Anu was brilliant as a fertility doctor in Vicky Donor. Nobody can forget the man, eating "gol-gappas" on the street, and describing to his clients the path of the sperms in their mating game. I liked the way he convinces the lead actor, Ayushmann Khurrana, to become a sperm donor. But as the defence counsel, Sachin Kantilal Mathur, in Jolly LLB 2, Kapoor really did not come up to Irani's calibre. Boman was fantastic as the slimy, arrogant advocate who treats any opposition with utter contempt.

Even Saurabh Shukla, who is the judge in both editions, is not as memorable in the sequel as he was in the first edition. It looks downright silly for a judge to enter the hallowed premises of a court singing and dancing! The desperation to give a new look to part two appears to have pushed the writer-director to think up of something totally ridiculous.

Jolly LLB 2's plot was not great either – of a missing terrorist and a fake encounter. Part one had a story which had a universal appeal – that of drunken driving. A rich young man in a sozzled state drives his fancy car on sleeping pavement dwellers, killing some and maiming others. An unethical policeman, who double crosses Tejpai defending the youth, takes money from the sole witness to the accident and lets him go. Many of us could easily identify with the case – for we have seen that happen in New Delhi and in Mumbai among the wealthy class.

Jolly LLB was one of the best movies of 2013, a rare attempt to peep into the working of the judiciary. There was drama all right, but nothing exaggerated. The script was believable, the story plausible.

But, in comparison, the writing in Jolly LLB 2 is inconsistent. Is a polygraph test admissible in court? Can an escaped prisoner be brought into a witness stand?

Subhash Kapoor needs to reflect on his decision to pick Akshay and Anu in the place of Arshad and Boman.

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Si 3:

Much like when you walk into a film screening a James Bond adventure or, closer home, a Rajinikanth starrer, you would know exactly what to expect when you troop into a movie that has Surya. And a Surya as Singam or Lion – and that too as a cop – can only push the film in a singularly unilateral direction. The man has to be squeaky clean, putting to shame a force where corruption rules with unbelievably high-handedness. Not only is Singam honest, sincere and dedicated, but he is also so strong that he is equated with a lion – with the actor ever so often leaping into the air before he bangs his opponent with his outstretched palm. Just like the king of the forest, Singam is the undisputed monarch in his territory. Which has been expanding.

Durai Singam – that is the full name of the character which the actor portrays – has grown since his first appearance in Singam 1 – which strove to weave a balance between his family's sentiments and his own arrival into the big city of Chennai. Singam chooses the khaki as his sole identity and principle in life. Singam 2 saw Surya chasing criminals across the Tamil Nadu border – in what was a clear indication of his rising powers and expanding turf.

In the third of the series, shortened stylistically to Si 3, Surya's Durai Singam is a Deputy Commissioner of Police in Chennai who is asked to help solve the murder of the Andhra Pradesh Commissioner of Police. When someone quips why ask a Tamil Nadu policeman to come over, pat comes the reply: Because Singam is forthright, dedicated and unimaginably daring. And may I add, unbelievably strong, so strong that he can race past a racing truck, jump down several storeys with not a scratch to his body and take on dozens of pistol-totting and knife-wielding men, each looking more evil than the other.

Singam lands in Vishakhapatnam, the scene of the murder, and soon smells a huge racket involving an Indian businessman (with an Australian passport and an Indian Minister for a father) – who dumps into the Indian backyard Australian medical waste and medicines past their expiry. Children die when they inhale the smoke from the waste that is burnt. A policeman faints when he takes a spurious pill from Australia. The culprit of this game is Vittal, and Singam – with the help of a few honest cops – breaks into a seemingly impregnable fortress of crime and corruption, greed and inhuman callousness.

The movie is one long chase of 156 minutes – punctuated for brief moments by a night club dance number and a Shruti Haasan as an investigative reporter, Vidya, in love with a Singam, happily married to Anushka Shetty's Kavya. These romantic or marital interludes appear more like an excuse to attract women to the film, which is otherwise tryingly violent, with a camera that could well put to shame an overly hyperactive kid. The only time the camera breathes easy is when Singam gets into his preachy best – forcefully reminding the villains and the traitors that India is a great country. Not one huge garbage bin that men like Vittal treat, dumping into it the poisonous filth and dirt from another nation, Australia in this case. (As I walked out of the cinema, I was wondering whether the Australian government would take umbrage over this.)

Honestly, Si 3 seems quite jaded with nothing really different to offer from the earlier editions. And Surya looks positively tired, a tad uninterested and mechanical as well. After all, there was nothing refreshing about this roar.

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