

‘Mulk’ takes a disturbing look at Islamophobia in India



- A brutal look at the kind of Islamophobia now sweeping across the world
- Kapoor gives a fine portrayal of disappointment and sorrow

CHENNAI: Anubhav Sinha, known for fancy thrillers and at least one superhero film with Shah Rukh Khan, has in his latest outing given us an extraordinarily disturbing work, “Mulk.” A brutal look at the kind of Islamophobia now sweeping across the world, India especially in recent years, the movie explores this through the microcosm of a Muslim family living in Banaras, considered to be one of the holiest Hindu cities.

”Mulk,” though, begins on a very different note – with beautiful camaraderie between the family of Murad Ali Mohammed (Rishi Kapoor) and his essentially Hindu neighbors. This solidarity even includes an avowed vegetarian eating meat on the sly during Murad Ali’s 65th birthday bash. As the joyous celebration rolls on, there is little indication of the dark clouds hovering.

When Murad Ali’s nephew, Shahid (Prateik Babbar, son of the late Smita Patil), is found to be a terrorist, having bombed a bus and killed 16 innocent people, lines are redrawn and cracks begin to appear in what once seemed like such a friendly

neighborhood.

Murad Ali is ostracized by the very people who had adored him and his family, and the cops arrest Shahid's father, Bilal (Manoj Pahwa). An engaging courtroom drama follows, in which Aarthi (Taapsee Pannu), a lawyer married to Murad Ali's son, takes on an utterly biased prosecution, which is out to declare the entire family guilty of the heinous crime.

Unfortunately, Pannu springs to life only during the climatic defense argument, which swings between justice and religion, between truth and prejudice. The director dumps just about everything on Kapoor's shoulders.

Kapoor gives a fine portrayal of disappointment and sorrow – whose transformation from a romantic hero (“Bobby”) into unbelievably inspiring characters (as in “D Day,” “102 Not Out” and now “Mulk”) is what cinematic legend is all about. He helps push the well-crafted narrative with feeling: “Why must I prove my patriotism? This is my country,” is his heart-rending cry.

“Mulk” comes as a whiff of fresh air from the Bollywood stable, often criticized for being a shallow song-and-dance show.
