



**SPY SAGA GONE WRONG:** Vidya Balan-starrer *Bobby Jasoos* opened last week after months of publicity that included interviews with the star herself and producer Dia Mirza.

# The sleuth who slips

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Over the years, I have found a pattern in Indian cinema. Often, if a lot of hype precedes a film, it will probably disappoint. There can be two reasons. The movie is either bad or popular expectations have been raised to an unrealistic level; so much so that the film will dissatisfy audiences however good it may be.

Vidya Balan-starrer *Bobby Jasoos* opened last week after months of publicity that included interviews with the star herself and producer Dia Mirza. The movie – woman centric and propelled by the heroine – literally rides on Balan's shoulders. And everybody knew that the film will pass the test only if she scores. Sadly, she does not.

But this is not to conclude or even say that Balan is a bad or an average actress. On the contrary, she is a very good performer. But even a good performer may not be able to do complete justice to some roles.

Although Balan did manage to get into the shoes of the lead character of the wanaabe detective, Bobby, she went overboard with her style. Some might even find fault with her Hyderabad accent. The movie is based in that city.

Playing a Muslim woman – who is 30 and, strictly speaking, past the age of marriage – she is desperate to be a Sherlock Holmes or, better still, a Miss Marple. But her lack of formal training in the art of detection and English knowledge stop a detective agency from hiring her. So, she opens her own and manages to carry on with the little money she makes out of blackmailing couples caught kissing or smooching in the alleys of the

Charminar city or by helping Tasawur (Ali Fazal), a television show host, get rid of the marriage proposals his father brings along.

Bobby's struggle is not made any easier by her orthodox family's opposition to her wayward ways, tomboyish attitude and snooping habits. But then, a rich non-resident Indian walks into her life, offers huge money and asks her to find two missing girls and a boy. He gives Bobby their names, their birth marks and nothing else. Go find them, he says, and she scampers away, deliriously happy with her first real assignment. Happier by far with the bundle of crisp currency notes that lands on her rickety table.

Much like the part of Silk Smitha that Balan essayed some time ago in *The Dirty Picture*, she inclines to be over dramatic as Bobby. Her clumsy walk, her shabby dressing sense and her crude manner of speaking are all very well, but they begin to feel a trifle too exaggerated after a point. And, I felt like saying "ugh", she is over-dramatising the part.

I feel that Balan is best when she portrays sober characters – like in *Parineeta* (still her career best), like in *Paa*, like in *No One Killed Jessica* and like in *Kahaani*. Balan slips when she has to be an erotic star like Silk Smitha or a bumbling sleuth like Bobby.

So, Samar Shaikh-helmed *Bobby Jasoos* stutters because its title character slips while sleuthing and skids while spying. The moral of it all, however superb a star, it is not possible to step into ever pair of sandals. Did not that master actor called Soumitra Chatterjee, an eternal favourite of Satyajit Ray, step aside for Uttam Kumar in *Nayak*. There is, thus, something called casting that is vital to any film. In India, much like the script, casting is hardly given the kind of

importance it deserves.

Besides, *Bobby Jasoos* makes a neat U-turn midway. It becomes a story of family and long lost children – to tread an emotional path. The tale of the detective disappears!

## *Arima Nambi*

When I walk into a James Bond cinematic exploit, I know only too well that nothing ever that 007 does and experiences are real. They are never going to happen to you or me. But when I get into an Indian thriller, I am mid-way between heaven and earth. I am never sure that the feats of the hero can be far-fetched. But, that is what the script aims for – to keep you dangling between terra-firma and the clouds.

Anand Shankar's *Arima Nambi* is a cocktail of murder, political high-handedness and the travails of a gentleman with the strength of a lion. But I suppose most Indian film heroes are just that. In fact, Singham's Ajay Devgn uses his palm the way a lion does its paw to crush the opponent.

In *Arima Nambi*, Arjun Krishna (Vikram Prabhu), an engineer at a car showroom, is no lion, but a gentleman – who is pushed by a series of inexplicable happenings to acquire the immense might of the beast. He is aided in this by a dying cop, who tells Krishna that most of the goondas in Chennai (where the movie unfolds) are experts at handling guns and knives, but terrible with their fists!

The young engineer takes this advice to heart and knocks down tens of men with his bare hands, and one of them is the personal bodyguard of a Union Minister (played by Chakravarthy).

*Arima Nambi* begins in a pub, where Krishna accepts a bet from his friends that he will get the telephone number of one of the girls there, Anamika Raghunath (Priya

Anand). Yawn, yawn. He succeeds, and after their first date, Anamika takes Krishna to her swanky flat (after all, her father is a big shot at a television channel), and the sozzled couple are just about to strip for sex, when a few men barge into the flat and kidnap the girl.

The guy, nursing his tipsy state and a day-old romance that has gone horribly wrong, staggers into a police station – where the cops give him exactly the kind of treatment that anyone will to a drunk. Thus begins the lion-man's voyage into the unknown that is peppered with sheer acrobatics (look at the way he jumps across rooftops or from balconies, landing on the ground below with perfect ease), car chases and snooping around. When Krishna is not up to these, he is ducking bullets – and so what if a hail of them rat-a-tat out of sophisticated weapons. They never get the hero!

As much as Shankar's work manages to retain a fair degree of thrill, much of the script is awfully silly. Logic is out, and the story is synonymous with fantasy. Imagine the entire police force of Chennai playing along with the Minister's evil design.

Surely, no force can be so dumb. Imagine a man going into such elaborate scheming (which involves ordering a policeman to shoot a suspect in a crowded mall) to cover his crime and nail Krishna. And imagine Krishna and Anamika break into a song in a picture perfect locale with birds and waterfall and in the most resplendent of costumes bang in the middle of an agonisingly disturbing moment. Maybe, this was meant to be a short break, a relief with a syrupy song!

And, after this mindless romp, performances are passé. Chakravarthy looks stiffer than his starched clothes, and Anand has little written for her. Prabhu mercifully does not go overboard in a movie that is one long stretch of exaggerated nonsense.

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