



**SINGLE ENTRY:** *Titli* features Ranvir Shorey, Amit Sial and newcomer Shashank Arora in the lead roles.

# Cannes picks India's *Titli*

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

**T**he other day, I was amazed to see Al Arabia carry an item about an Indian movie being selected for the upcoming Cannes Film Festival. While the official lineup, which was unveiled by the General-Delegate of the festival, Thierry Fremaux, last week in Paris, had great names and titles, it was the inclusion of a work from India, Kanu Behl's debut, *Titli*, which made news. Although the movie is not in Competition – but is part of the sidebar, A Certain Regard – there is buzz around it.

The reason for this could well be that India, despite its 1,200-odd film production every year, struggles to find a berth at Cannes or Venice or even Berlin. I do not even remember when the last time that India made it to Cannes Competition was. It was years and years ago. And then there was a decade or so long hiatus when no Indian movie could get into Cannes, in any of the categories.

I think Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas* broke the dry spell in 2002.

Last year, Amit Kumar's *Monsoon Shootout* was shown as part of Midnight Screenings. The other Indian work was *Bombay Talkies*, helmed by Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar

Banerjee, Karan Johar and Zoya Akhtar. This was screened as a special tribute to 100 years of Indian cinema.

This year, India has just a single entry. Produced by Dibakar Banerjee and Yash Raj Films (YRF), *Titli* features Ranvir Shorey, Amit Sial and newcomer Shashank Arora in the lead roles. The official synopsis of *Titli* goes like this: "In the badlands of Delhi's dystopic underbelly, *Titli*, the youngest member of a violent car-jacking brotherhood plots a desperate bid to escape the 'family' business. His struggle to do so is countered at each stage by his indignant brothers, who finally try marrying him off to 'settle' him.

*Titli* finds an unlikely ally in his new wife, caught though she is in her own web of warped reality and dysfunctional dreams. They form a strange, beneficial partnership, only to confront their inability to escape the bindings of their family roots. But is escape, the same as freedom?"

In an interview to Dear Cinema, Behl said: "At no point there was anything else but pure enthusiasm even from YRF's side. Obviously, everybody has been sane about it being made in a certain budget and that's fair enough ... I wanted the audiences to feel that these are people (characters in the movie) who are living their lives and they've just been accidentally caught.

"The film is very personal. It mirrors my own journey in a lot of ways. Like many

other people, I shared a difficult relationship with my father as I was growing up. Then somewhere down the road, I realised that I had unconsciously started doing things that he used to do in totally different ways. I was becoming more and more like him." Behl added.

The director felt that he was really encouraged by this selection at Cannes. "The recognition from the festival means a lot because it's my first movie. There is obviously – I won't lie – self-doubt about what you've done, how you've done. So, personally for me it's really encouraging that Cannes has picked my work and it helps me know that there is something that I'm doing right."

For Indians, Cannes is magnetic. As much as some would deny, every Indian producer, director and actor wants to be at Cannes – not even so much at Venice or Berlin. In several Indian movie festivals, there are seminars on why the country's cinema cannot get into Cannes. Or, why not enough of it gets there. The unpalatable consensus is that Indian films are not good enough for Cannes (or the Oscars). So, Behl must be deliriously happy today.

The Cannes Film Festival's 67<sup>th</sup> edition runs from May 14 to 25.

## *Tenaliraman*

After all the hullabaloo – which included a legal move to ban Tamil comedian Vadivelu-starrer *Tenaliraman* – the film opened last week. The actor returns after a two-year hiatus with a double bonanza for his fans in *Tenaliraman*, based on a popular folklore. *Tenaliraman* was a jester, but with remarkable intelligence that bordered on the cunning, in the court of the Vijayanagar emperor, Krishnadevaraya.

The period of his reign was 16th century, but the Yuvaraj Dhayalan-helmed movie could have been set in the present day. For, we see the Chinese trying to take over a

market in southern India. They slave drive Indian labour, and dump their own goods, pushing out the local stuff. So, Dhayalan juxtaposes history (atmosphere, costumes, legalised bigamy) with a touch of the modern (issues, scams, poverty).

Actually, *Tenaliraman* is a parody on India's prevailing corruption in the government and in bureaucracy, and on the way men in high places, driven by selfish personal agendas, ruin the economy and the social fabric. And it takes a common man like *Tenaliraman* (Vadivelu) to set things right. He uses his wit and astuteness to become one of the nine gems in the royal court, ultimately rising to be the king's (also portrayed by Vadivelu) most favourite and trusted minister.

However, the other eight gems, led by an evil courtier (Radha Ravi), are in no mood to let the Chinese or their goodies go, and they plan to overthrow the emperor – along with his 36 wives and 52 children!

Undoubtedly, a part of the film plays out with a fair amount of prudence – particularly the early sequences where *Tenaliraman* fools a pack of thieves out to rob the jewels in a village temple, and also where he outsmarts the courtiers in order to clinch a ministerial berth.

Beyond this, the movie sinks into crass stupidity, needlessly stretching the story. Till *Tenaliraman* begins to appear so laboured, with the sets looking extremely artificial.

Obviously, a major part of the film must have been shot in a studio, and this clearly shows. The garishness and exaggeration cannot be missed. Vadivelu does make an effort to look and sound different in the two roles, varying his body language – to appear dignified as the king and comical as the jester. However, the performance tends to be terribly theatrical pushing the movie to a melodramatic precipice. This is a kind of humour that can be enjoyed only by Vadivelu fans. The rest may find it juvenile.