

'Trapped' in a shoddy script

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A scene from Trapped.

★★★★★

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

A key weakness in Indian cinema is writing. It is downright lazy, to say the least. Often armed with a great story, writers do not put their heart and soul into structuring a logical, believable and even authentic script. Such callous work is very common, and if only directors and scriptwriters care to watch their films along with the audience they may well be shocked to see the kind of criticism that even casual viewers air. Many young people in the auditoriums often rip apart movies, aptly pointing out howlers. And these appear promptly on the social media.

The other day, I saw Vikramaditya Motwane's third feature, *Trapped*. I have never rated him as someone out of the ordinary – having watched his two earlier films, *Udaan* and *Lootera*. Both had gripping plots, but they were not executed with any degree of excellence. Rather, the scripting was shoddy, as it was in the case of *Trapped*.

In a very strong way, *Trapped* reminded me of Robert Zemeckis' 2000 *Cast Away* – where Chuck Noland (played by Tom Hanks) is stranded on an uninhabited island for four years after a plane crash. Desperate for company, he picks a football and paints a face on it. He calls the ball Wilson. A time comes years later, when he builds a raft and sets sail. But he fails and faints – only to be picked by a cargo vessel. And when he returns to civilisation and a life he left behind, he finds everything has changed. His longtime girlfriend had given Noland for dead and married her dentist. Noland realises much to his dismay and distress that the society he had known – a society he had been part of – has literally cast him away.

I saw similar incidents in *Trapped*. Rajkummar Rao's Shaurya finds himself trapped on the 35th floor of a totally uninhabited building in Mumbai. Pining for comfort and company, he befriends a rodent (a creature which he is otherwise terrible scared of) and begins a conversation with it. Much like Noland and Wilson. And also like Noland, Shaurya after several days of "imprisonment" in a flat whose door gets locked, trapping him, attempts a daredevil act. Noland after years of hoping against hope to be rescued gets on a raft and sets sail.

Trapped is a story which begins in an office where Shaurya woos and wins over a colleague, Noorie (Geetanjali Thapa). But she is all set to get married, but gives him 48 hours to find a flat the two can move into. He lives in a bachelors' pad. Pushed to the wall, Shaurya somehow manages to zero in on an apartment. He moves in, but the next morning finds that he cannot get out having left the key dangling on the outside of the front door. This door is strange. You need a key to open it even from inside.

Now with the electricity off and water supply gone, he has the precious last minutes before his mobile phone runs out of power as well. So whom should he call to let him out with the key dangling outside on the door? I would have called a friend or an office colleague who could have just walked up to the flat, turned the key and freed me.

But, no. Shaurya tries locating a locksmith! And by the time he starts to explain where exactly he is, the phone dies. How stupid can one get. And what kind of writing is this by Amit Joshi and Hardik Mehta?

If only writers would take a little more pain and walk the last mile without stumbling and taking the easy way out through coincidences and poor writing, Indian cinema could have been brilliant. But we have this chalta-hai attitude, where everything goes, mostly garbage. What a pity.

Trapped takes us through a few more unconvincing plot lines. Shaurya's voice cannot reach the ground below where help may be available. So, he picks the huge television monitor in his place and throws it through a window on the ground below. The watchman listening to the radio does not hear the thud with which the contraption lands next to him. And, what is more, he does not even notice the monitor when he gets up.

Later, as the days roll into night, and a strict vegetarian like Shaurya, is forced to kill pigeons with a sling he makes, he writes HELP on pieces of cardboard and throws them down. One of them lands on a terrace below where a woman finds it and tries to investigate. She even climbs a few floors in Shaurya's building, but finding no answer to her call asking if there is anybody, she abandons her search. Shaurya cannot answer her because he has lost his voice having shouted himself hoarse from his flat, trying to grab someone's attention.

He even takes a saucepan and bangs it against the iron grills on his window overlooking the courtyard below. But nobody looks up. Not today, not tomorrow. Not any day! Highly improbable in a country where idle curiosity is a national pastime.

All this, of course, calls for pure suspension of disbelief. And Indian cinema is forever asking its ticket-paying masses to do just this! Also, Motwane cannot pat himself for originality. For, the core idea and some of the incidents in Trapped appear to have been inspired by the Tom Hanks adventure.

Admittedly, there are a few high points in Trapped. One, it shows how a big city like Mumbai completely alienates people, especially those like Shaurya who may be an outsider. There can be a virtual barrier between two people who may even be living as neighbours.

Two, Rao is very good as virtually a solo player – living through a nightmarish experience. "I do not want to die here," he tells himself. He conveys his agonising helplessness with almost a touch of perfection.

Finally, Motwane's economy with words and actions made me feel that he knew the craft well enough to narrate a tale without resorting to cheap gimmicks and exaggerated mannerisms. The movie is nuanced and subtle. However, it does not work as a thriller, except maybe for the last 20 minutes or so. Sadly, Trapped could have been a far better movie if only the writers had worked harder. And what a shame this is.

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