

REVIEW: 'What's Love Got To Do With It' makes for a disappointing rom-com, despite splendid performances from stars



- Shekhar Kapur's rom-com, starring Shazad Latif and Lily James in lead roles, opened the Red Sea International Film Festival on Thursday night

JEDDAH: Renowned Indian filmmaker Shekhar Kapur's "What's Love Got To Do With It," which opened the Red Sea International Film Festival in Jeddah on Thursday night, is a bit of a disappointment despite its distinguished cast. Coming from someone who gave us solid movies like an extremely likeable "Masoom" ("Innocent"), "Bandit Queen" (on the life of the notorious outlaw, Phoolan Devi) and "Elizbeth," his attempt at a rom-com falls flat.



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To start with, the premise of "What's Love Got To Do With It" hinges on the outdated concept of arranged marriages, which has been fancifully renamed here as an “assisted match.” This is, at best, whitewashing of a concept popular in India where the parents choose their children's partners, and that was that. However, in 21st century London, this idea appears ludicrous, and no amount of dressing up the plot with exquisite locales from the city makes the concept work.

Taking off from a script written by London-born Jemima Goldsmith, who was once married to the former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, and her experiences there have reportedly been worked into the movie, Kapur tells us about two childhood friends, who grew up on the same street in London.

Zoe (Lily James) is a successful documentary film-maker, but the serious subjects she chooses have made finding funding for her projects difficult. When Kazim (Shazad Latif) , whom she secretly pines for, says he has begun the process of looking for a partner through an arranged marriage, because of his mother, played by Shabana Azmi, Zoe feels that this could be an excellent idea for her next work. Yes, this would also lead to a lot of heartache for her.

Kapur's movie travels between Lahore and London with a practiced ease but is also peppered with loud garishness. However, the idea of a fairytale, which Zoe hoped to lace her documentary with, falls flat.

Adding to the silliness is Emma Thomson, who plays Zoe's mother and is quite splendid as a woman trying desperately to match her daughter with Kazim.

James is remarkable as well, and helps to get a message across quite convincingly – that love can happen anytime, anywhere! True, but we already knew that.
