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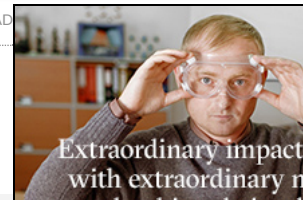
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Shershaah Movie Review: A Mismatched Sidharth Malhotra Does Little Justice to a Kargil War Hero



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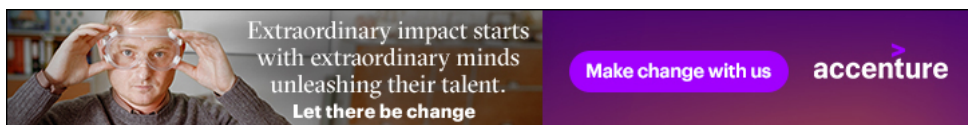
A glimpse of Sidharth Malhotra as Kargil hero Vikram Batra in Shershaah.

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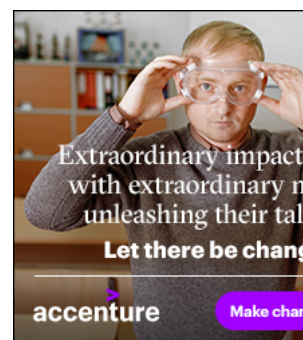
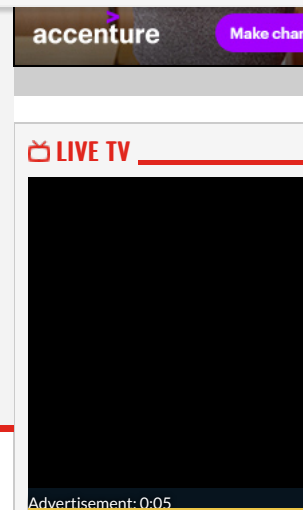
Shershaah
Director: Vishnu Varadhan

Cast: Sidharth Malhotra, Kiara Advani



About the 1999 Kargil War hero and recipient of the highest gallantry award, Paramveer Chakra, Vikram Batra, director Vishnu Varadhan's latest Amazon Prime title, Shershaah, suffers having mismatched Sidharth Malhotra. He is a chocolate boy, absolutely unsuited to play the part of a tough Indian Army Officer, Batra, whose first posting was in Jammu and Kashmir, where he helps kill a hardcore militant, Haider. His subsequent posting takes him to the heights of Kargil in 1999 when Pakistanis (many were not regular soldiers) had infiltrated Indian territory and set up several bunkers that Captain Batra (by then promoted from Lieutenant) and his men re-capture to hoist the tri-colour flag.

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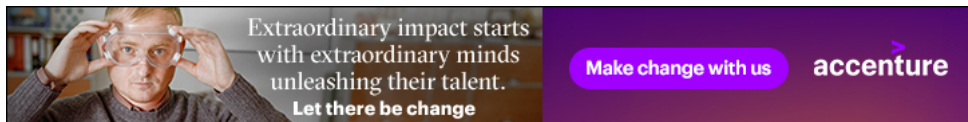


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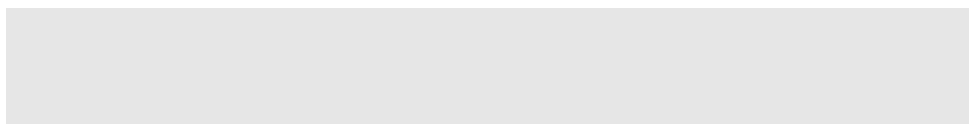
His fiancée, Dimple (Kiara Advani), is more of a mantelpiece on the shelf. In all fairness, her role has been written more like an afterthought. It is wafer-thin, and her emotional parts hardly jell.



Inspired by the true story of Vikram Batra, Shershaah's (his nickname) valour is celebrated not just in his birthplace of Palampur in Himachal, but elsewhere in India. We all know that Batra was felled by an enemy bullet during the Kargil operations, and there is an interesting line earlier on in the film when he tells his buddy. "I would come back either with the Indian flag or draped in it". His words were prophetic.

A sub-plot has this college romance. He falls in love with Dimple, and she is a Sikh, whose father is not keen on the union. Well, the same cliché plays out again: If I marry, I will marry Vikram, otherwise, I shall remain single, she is firm. A long yawn. Dozens of movies have had this, and I wonder why scriptwriters (Sandeep Srivastava in this case) cannot think of something different. (We are told at the very end that she never married and teaches in a school!)

The film also gives us a peek into Batra's boyhood; we watch him take on a much taller boy when he refuses to give his cricket ball back. Will you become a "goonda", Vikram's father admonishes the lad. But he is not shaken, and has already made up his mind to join the Army, and turns up in jungle green uniform for school celebrations on Republic Day and Independence Day. The school management seems to be looking the other way!



Technically, Shershaah does not impress either. The battle scenes lack fire and fury and are a far cry from the kind of excitement evoked by Western war movies like Von Ryan's Express, Battle of the Bulge, Where Eagles Dare, The Bridge on the River Kwai, and so on. Shershaah is awfully patchy here.

And, it becomes clear that the director and writer were more interested in making a hero out of our chocolate boy than presenting a more authentic portrayal of the Kargil War that many feared would lead to a nuclear catastrophe. The enormity of the issue gets glossed over by putting the hero in the limelight in a way that screams that he was THE guy who helped India win that war.

In comparison, the recent Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl was far more plucky and finely performed. As the father-daughter duo, Pankaj Tripathi and Jahnvi Kapoor were superb, and the film exuded novelty in a variety of ways. In the final analysis, Shershaah seems like an ode to a movie star!

(Gautaman Bhaskaran is a film critic and author of a biography of Adoor Gopalakrishnan)

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