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Sarpatta Parambarai Review: Arya is Raging Bull in Boxing Film That Leads to the Predictable Goal-post



Pa Ranjith's directorial Sarpatta Parambarai leaves nobody in doubt that the winner has to be the underdog, played by Arya's Kabilan.

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GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

Sarpatta Parambarai
Director: Pa Ranjith

Cast: Arya, Pasupathy, John Vijay, Shabeer Kallarakkal, Dushara Vijayan, Shabeer Kallarakkal

A perennial problem with sports films is predictability. It never seems to go away, and we watch this in movie after movie. We knew who would ultimately triumph in the Farhan Akhtar-starrer Toofan. We could easily guess the outcome in Chak De India; why, the women in the Indian hockey team! In Dangal, in the cricket match in Aamir Khan's Lagaan. This list is endless, and the outcome in Pa. Ranjith's directorial Sarpatta Parambarai leaves nobody in doubt. The winner has to be the underdog, played by Arya's Kabilan, whose father was an ace boxer, but ruined himself by taking up the sword. There is a memorable line in Toofan when the coach played by Paresh Rawal tells Akhtar's character Aziz Ali that boxing is all about defence, not aggression or violence. Kabilan's boxing coach, Rangan (Pasupathy), says just about the same thing. The moment you take up a sickle, you are no longer a boxer, he is firm.



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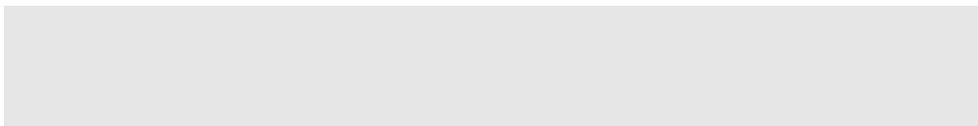
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Yet, Kabilan loses his way, despite his mother's and newly-wed wife Mariamma's (Dushara Vijayan) dire warning against this. The mother, Bakkiyam (Anupama Kumar), is dead against Kabilan stepping into the ring, his wife too. But Rangan sees an immense potential in Kabilan, and trains him to be not just a champion but also keep the flag of his boxing clan, Sarpatta, flying high against the opponent, Idiyappa.

At yawning three hours long, the movie weaves in and out of myriad muddles. The contests degenerate into sword fights, and matches are disrupted when Kabilan is ready to call victory. And the boxing bouts themselves are less about the boxers than about clan contests, pride and prejudice. Personal angles are galore; Rangan's son is peeved at being de-throned by his father in favour of a rank outsider like Kabilan. There is much hysteria and dramatics outside the ring, and all these diversions dilute the core plot – probably in the mistakenly belief among producers, writers and directors that the ticket-paying masses want “wholesome entertainment”, which does not quite work in these times.



Arya is interesting as a raging bull in his boxers, and he does fit the character well. And happily so, for he is most unsuited to play softer, tender roles. Above all, the matches are exciting, well choreographed and shot, particularly the one between Kabilan and Dancing Rose (Shabeer Kallarakkal). The man literally dances in the ring, and it is a pleasure to watch him, a fine piece of writing here. Above all, Pasupathy as the coach produces the calming effect in a game that needs it so badly.

But what was this great idea of inserting Indira Gandhi's Emergency? And making Rangan into a Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) cadre? These stick out like sore thumbs in a film that is all about punches and knockouts.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran is a movie and author)

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