

Vijay 69 on Netflix: *Anupam Kher plays a man with an incredible dream*



GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

There is nothing very novel about elderly folks running marathons or playing other forms of sport. But that this should have formed a plot point in a film is. Anupam Kher starrer *Vijay 69*—a nearly 112-minute saga—flies largely, largely because of the actor who brilliantly portrays a man with an incredible desire to participate in a triathlon. In this competitive form of back-breaking sport—where you swim, cycle, and run on uphill tracks—Kher's Vijay Mathew, despite his tottering physique, has a never-say-die attitude, which emerges from his late wife's desire to see him clinch Gold in a race. Even a bronze would do.

Matthew's dream gives nightmares to his married daughter, Deeksha (Sulagna Panigrahi), who is extremely worried about his ability to survive a triathlon. "You are 69 and have diabetes and hypertension. You will not live to see the end of the race," she tries everything to get her old man to give up the idea. But he is obstinate. He must honour the memory of his wife, who had once wanted him to get into something of this kind. His two friends, Fali (Chunky Panday) and Mrs Bakshi (Guddi Maruti), also try their best to get Matthew to ditch the idea of stepping on the track.

Writer-director Akshay Roy conveys the agony and angst of Matthew as he fights his demons (a weak body and a mind that is in two minds), but in the

end he decides that he must run, swim, and cycle to make a name—perhaps his last opportunity to try something as unique (or insane) as this! And win. Perhaps.

In fact, the movie begins on a tragic-comic note, with viewers led to believe that Matthew has jumped into the sea in Mumbai's Marine Drive. An elaborate church condolence is arranged, and as the teary speeches are made, our man enters with a scorn, lambasting everybody there, including Fali and Mrs Bakshi. You guys are shameless, he screams, killing me before I actually pop off! Well, Matthew's ability to turn a sad and sombre event into one of hilarity is an engaging scene that I think only someone like Kher can carry off with dignity and finesse. He is still one of the best performers we have in this part of the world, and his arc is amazing. From *Saaransh* to *Pestonji* to *Special 26* to *Khosla Ka Ghosla* to *A Wednesday*—these were all great examples of the actor's ability to disappear into his characters with mannerisms as varied as varied can be.

Vijay 69 on Netflix is worth a watch, but if one were to look for something special in the movie, one may be disappointed. Its highs are not as high as expected. And its lows do not pull you down. It is a work that flows like a placid river—a ripple or two popping up from the water now and then to give us a bit of excitement.

The writer is a senior movie critic and author