

Jodha Akbar – The Film

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Seema Bawa analyses this highly controversial film with a historical perspective



Actors: Aishwarya Rai and Hrithik Roshan

The historian in me could not resist having a *dekko* at a historical romance based on a character such as Akbar, who indeed is a larger than life figure of world history. A man of vision, statesmanship and great depth Akbar was the *Insaan-e-Kamaal* of his era. Hrithik Roshan as the young Akbar indeed does not disappoint even though in terms of physique he does not match the descriptions of the historical Akbar. The scenes depicting his valour, strength and prowess in battle, though competently performed are not exceptional. It is the sheer regalness of his bearing and the small details such as the fluid and effortless movements with which he sits on the throne, an act which requires immense theatrical perfection, that help him make the character his own. The scene showing Akbar getting into a trance while listening to mystical music of Sufi dervishes is authentic to the sources and enacted with great felicity. Aishwarya Rai as Jodhaa is right out of Mughal-Rajput miniatures paintings in her stance, apparel, ornaments and indeed her entire external persona.

The character of Akbar is better delineated because of the wealth of source material available, much of which is hagiographic in nature. That is not to say that the counterview was not available as is seen from the killing of Adham Khan Akbar's foster brother. Other aspects of Akbar's prowess such as his exceptional skill as a bare-hand fighter, his dueling an elephant, his consulting philosophers of other

faiths; all having basis in historical sources ring quite true in the film.

Jodhaa, on the other hand, being largely a figment of the writer-director's imagination, has been conceptualized with less depth. The single character trait that has been reiterated is her spirit, and her spirited resistance to patriarchal values which while anachronistic to the period depicted, is also quite tedious. Her depiction as a Rajput woman of honour and integrity is overstressed.

As for the characterization of secondary characters, unlike *Lagaan*, in *Jodhaa Akbar* this aspect has been largely ignored. Instead we have stereotypes paraded as Rajput Ranas, and good and faithful courtiers such as the *Khan-i-khanan* and Todar Mal versus fanatical *ulema* and scheming relatives. The entire structure of Mughal aristocracy, the *mansabdars*, so significant for the actual and visual construction of the Mughal era, is overlooked.

The film succeeds in reconstructing the sense of architectural spaces of the grand Mughal era, especially the *Diwan-i-Aam*. The battles and the epic scale are well done even though the armies rush towards each other rather than in formation.

The music of AR Rahman goes well with the film but does not stand out. The background score though is excellent.

The film is at one level an elaborate seduction of the spirited though mono-dimensional Jodhaa by a rather desirable Akbar. The plot is entirely based on coitus-interruptus, which is interrupted ad-nauseum where the consummation is heartily to be wished for so that one can finally go home. The sexual tension is very well structured and indeed works very well but for the length it has been stretched out. The political intrigues and the romance appear to be yoked together by violence and are not linked organically. Indeed they should have been two separate films.

Perhaps the entire relationship of Jodhaa and Akbar should have been read within the context of sexual politics that underlay the harem of the Mughals, which could have served as an interesting back drop to

the delineation of Emperor Akbar, arguably the greatest monarch and statesman this land has seen. We know that Akbar had at least two wives (besides many concubines) before he married the Rajput princess. The Rajput princess, whatever her real name may have been, would have been competing with them for her Emperor's favours and allusions to the same may have made interesting viewing. Instead the harem intrigues center around her conflict with Maham Anaga Akbar's foster mother whose importance had waned by the time Akbar attained adulthood.

The film is largely didactic in that it addresses issues of shared cultural heritage and communal harmony without appearing to preach. The historicity of Jodhaa/ Harka or Jia Bai is irrelevant to the film.

Stars Shine in Himalayan Kingdom | Manohar Khushalani

Along with Dev Anand, Waheeda Rehman, Shahrukh Khan and Manisha Koirala, Manohar Khushalani was invited, by the Indian Embassy, to Kathmandu to attend the celebrations of 50 years of Indian Cinema as a Columnist of Pioneer, where he ran a column called "Footlights". The clip of the review published on 2nd May, 1997 is shown in the attachment. Here is a small extract from the 7 column spread that Pioneer gave his piece.

Probably the best public relations exercise between two country is to establish a people to people interaction through cultural activity. Raj Kapoor was probably the best Indian Ambassador of good will for the soviet Union. Nobody perhaps known it better than the snake Indian Ambassador to Nepal. K.V. Rajan. By organising a festival of Indian films at Kathmandu he proved that what Raj Kapoor did at USSR Dev Anand

can do in the Land locked Himalayan State. The incredible love and affection of Nepalese common men for Indian actors was brought home by the adulatory response to four Indian sorry three Indian and one Nepales star; Waheeda Rehman, Dev Anand, Shahrukh Khan and Manisha Koirala.

“I am very fond of nature & open spaces. In Bombay it was difficult. What I noticed was that when they retired from cinema long ago, my son was still in school. When someone asked him, where the milk came from. He said Mother Dairy. That’s when we decided to move to a Farm and expose our child to that aspect of life as well.”

Waheeda Rahman who is leading a more or less retired life & last asked nearly seven years ago is willing to perform only if she gets a central role. “Unfortunately most of the roles available for performers of my age are stereo typed roles of Aunts or mothers, I would rather not perform than take up such roles”

Waheeda shifted bag & Baggage to a farm house in the outskirts of Bangalore because of she put it her children were not even aware about how the milk come they only knew that it come from a machine in the milk booth. Being a lover of nature she preferred to shift close to it...

“I am very fond of nature & open spaces. In Bombay it was difficult. What I noticed was that when they retired from cinema long ago, my son was still in school. When someone asked him, where the milk came from. He said Mother Dairy. That’s when we decided to move to a Farm and expose our child to that aspect of life as well.” She told me, this too when we were flying later over the everest and I was seated next to her. Both of us were admiring the pristine beauty of nature

Dev Anand despite his severely years displayed such energy and enthusiasm that he would put many younger people to shame. He said that he was greatly in love with this Country and would

never forego an opportunity to come to Nepal. He had always advocated that this Country was a good location of or shooting films but not many producers were willing to come due to difficulties of terrash & communication. Dev to probably the most active amongst the stars of his generation. Right now he was making a film in which he was acting as himself © Dev Anand as the actor. A teen age female fun follows him around the counting observing him as an action. She finally manges to meet him. The story appeared to be similar to Guddi.

Later at a function to felicitate the stars. Dev held the audience spellbound with his half hour long talk which was special with experiences of Nepal, tales of the role of the King in shooting of his films and personal advice on how to lead a dynamics life like him.

Manisha Koirala's entering was greeted by compliments to her beauty and brains in Dev's inimitable style. The local scribes were most comfortable with Manisha in her native tongue. Ms Koirala had no plans to act in a Nepali film in the near future she left it vaguely to events and occassions.

Manohar Khushalani accompanies Indian filmstars on a recent trip to Nepal for a celebration of the golden jubilee of India's independence

Stars shine in Himalayan kingdom

As the Royal Nepal Airlines Boeing 737 circled over the Himalayan ranges to get a clearer view through the dense cloud layers of the level of the Himalayas — Kathmandu — our hearts thumped in anticipation. At the very first sight of the toy-like township nestled in the mountain ranges, gone was the fatigue of the two sleepless nights due to the 48-hour flight delay, caused by the lightning all-India ATC strike. What awaited us was the first official celebration of 50 years of Indian independence in Nepal. Thankfully there were no political speeches on the cards, only entertainment and more entertainment.

Probably the best public relations exercise between any two countries is to establish a people-to-people interaction through cultural activities. Nobody perhaps knows it better than the suave Indian ambassador to Nepal, K V Rajan. By organising a festival of Indian films at Kathmandu he proved that what Raj Kapoor could do for India in the Soviet Union, Dev Anand can do in the land-locked Himalayan kingdom. Later this year, the ambassador is also planning an NSD theatre festival in Kathmandu.

The incredible love and affection of the Nepalese common man for Indian actors and actresses was brought home by the adulatory response to the four filmstars: Waheeda Rehman, Dev Anand, Shah Rukh Khan and Nepali's own Manisha Koirala, of whom the valiant Gorkhas are extremely proud. The streets around the Birendra International Convention Centre were jam-packed with fans as the four stars waded through the milling crowds to attend a function organised to felicitate them.

Inside, Dev held the audiences spellbound with his half-hour-long talk which was spiced with his experiences of the hill state, tales about the part King Birendra played in easing the way of Dev Anand's shootings in Nepal, the guitar-toting hippie girl who inspired the creation of a role for Zeenat Aman in *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*, and of course some personal advice on how to lead a dynamic life and remain young like himself.



Representatives of cultural camaraderie: Dev Anand meets Queen Aishwarya (left); Shah Rukh

As far as Shah Rukh Khan was concerned, great as the confluence of two generations of performers may have been, he was too busy warding off the bevy of Himalayan beauties out to mob him. "Oh no, not here too!" he smirked.

The programme was anchored by none other than the inimitable imitator, Jaaved Jaffrey, who interspersed the audio-visual on Indian cinema with his pet, often heard and sometimes unheard of jokes. While Jaaved did his best to liven up the proceedings, what was really a treat were the nostalgic numbers segmented decade-wise.

The first decade from 1947 to '57 had songs like *tere haan*, *Jeevan hai agar sahar ta*, *Chhor do aanchal zuman kya kahen*, *Mera dil ge pukare aa ja*, and *Almere pyare reatan*. What a comedown it was moving into the present decade with songs like *Choo le chhoo le*, *Chal ke peche kya hai* and

Chumma de de.

Earlier at an informal Press conference the Nepalese and Indian scribes had the opportunity to talk to the Bollywood stars and one particularly got an interesting glimpse of the mindsets of the older legends and how they were coping with the new trends in cinema. Waheeda for example was surprisingly positive about modern Indian cinema.

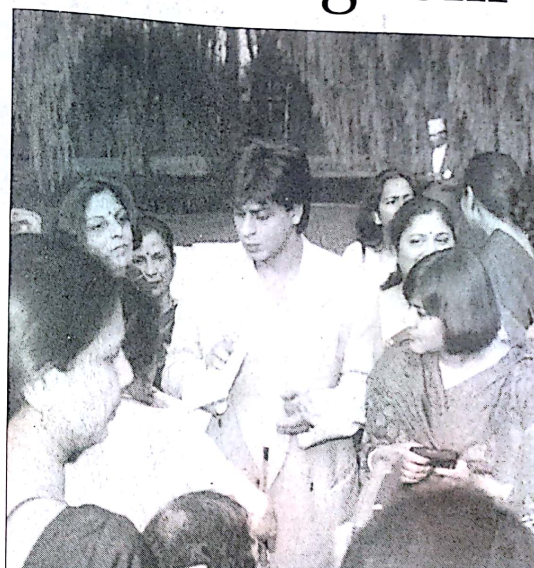
She disagreed with the suggestion that there was too much exposure in today's films and quoted examples of many films which were wholesome like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Kabhi Ha Kabhi Na*. Waheeda herself is leading a more or less retired life and last faced a camera nearly seven years ago.

She was willing to undergo the ordeal again only if she got a satisfying role. "Unfortunately, most of the roles available for performers of my age are stereotyped ones of aunts or mothers,"

she clarified. "I would rather not perform than take up such assignments."

Talking of the time when she lived in Bombay, Waheeda said that her childhood there worked hard in school and watched television rest of the time. They were not even aware about where the milk on their table came from. They only knew that it came from a machine in the milk booth. That shifted bag and baggage to a farmhouse in the outskirts of Bangalore. Being a lover of nature she thus got an opportunity to get close to it.

Dev Anand, despite his 70-odd years, appears to be getting younger — if not in appearance, such energy and enthusiasm that would put many younger people to shame. As he said, he is greatly in love with Nepal and will never forego an opportunity to come to this country. He had always advocated that this



Khan mobbed by female fans in Kathmandu

place was a good location for shooting films but not many producers were willing to come, due to difficulties of terrain and poor communications.

Unlike Waheeda, Dev Anand will like to work right till his last breath. Currently, he is making a film in which he is acting as himself — Dev Anand, the actor — who is followed by a teenage female fan around the country until he awards her an audience. Although the thespian would not admit it, the story sounded similar to *Guddi*.

Manisha Koirala's entry to the Press conference was greeted by the evergreen Dev in his own inimitable style. While she felt awed by the presence of performers whom she admired as a youngster, he proclaimed that now he was her admirer. "You know, I kept my hand close to my heart when I shook hands with you the first time," he confided to the giggling star.

The local scribes were most

comfortable with Manisha as she switched to her native tongue. Manisha has no plans to act in a Nepali film in the near future.

She left it vaguely to events and occasions. Manisha was happy to come to her country but she had no desire to settle here, she said. Living in Mumbai suited her.

Dev Anand was not bothered by the repeated box-office failures of his recent films. He claimed that he never lost money in any film and that if any of his films were appreciated for their quality, that was enough of a reward for him. When this correspondent asked Manisha Koirala if she would prefer to make a good film or a box-office hit — she said she would rather have both, but if it came to a crunch, she would opt for a role in a good film.

Dev Anand put it more succinctly: Many times a good film succeeds at the box office and many times it doesn't. Many times an average film also suc-

ceeds. But if a film succeeds it must have some merits — it cannot be ignored even if the critics think it should be.

Shah Rukh Khan had very little to say except that he would not act in an art film and would no longer do the anti-hero roles. Of course, once upon a time he acted in a Mani Kaul film, because he understood it. Most art films according to him were pseudo-intellectual.

A special flight over Mount Everest with Waheeda Rehman and Jaaved Jaffrey, however, struck an ominous note. The Everest was not visible due to heavy clouds, even while we were in the midst of a golden jubilee celebration. A government had fallen in New Delhi and the future was equally cloudy.

Fortunately, the clouds in Indian politics shifted a little just before the curtains were drawn over the festival in Nepal, with the installation of a new government in India.