



Aju Aravind

The popularity of Bollywood is at the edge of negotiations with its own identity, both in terms of films and actors, and its isolation from the prevailing political, economic cultural structures of contemporary India. Bollywood once used to be acknowledged as the mirror of the nation, for not just directly and indirectly engaging the masses with the evils and taboos, but also for leading the path for rectification of the conservative ideologies that remained hidden in the fabric of our society despite our best efforts to be a part of the modern globalized and liberalized world.

At a time when cinematic storytelling has in general become more experimental, intricate, complex and unsettling, the paucity of originality in Bollywood might make a cinephile question about the future of Bollywood. Remakes and biopics might realize the monetary gains of the producers, directors and actors temporarily but it would undoubtedly cultivate a pessimistic effect in the minds of the masses about the Bombay based film industry.



Director: Raghava Lawrence

Laxmii, initially titled Laxmmi Bomb is the first big budget Indian film streaming digitally on OTT platform in India. Raghava Lawrence's first Bollywood directorial is a remake of his own 2011 Tamil film Kanchana. Laxmii differs from its original Kanchana by trying to position itself within the new political environment that has arguably been widely visible in Bollywood especially after 2014. In the opening scene we are introduced to a modern metropolitan urban couple Mohammad Asif Khan (Aasif Akshay Kumar) and Rashmi Khemka (Kiara Advani); and his late brother's son Shaan Khan who remarks "abhi bhi Hindu-Muslim mein atkey huey hain" (trans: are they still stuck in the debate between Hindus and Muslims) After almost three years of their marriage the couple is invited by Rashmi's parents on the occasion of her parents 25th wedding anniversary. Once at the village Asif, Shaan and some other children go to a nearby deserted playground which the locals believed to be haunted. While he was putting the stumps into the ground, it hits a body buried in the ground and later the ghost enters the body of Asif. The rest of the film deals with the story of ghost, who is a transgender. In one of the early scene where the transgender ghost is introduced we find a reference to the 2014 general elections as the ghost claims that the transgender is listed in the column of gender, which earlier included only the

male and the female. This reference of course would confuse and leave a sensible segment of the audience clueless about the time when Laxmii Sharma (Sharad Kelkar) was killed by the land mafia.



Stills from Laxmii

Even while some segments of the media claim the Laxmii released on OTT platform Disney Plus Hotstar on November 9 has set a new record in viewership within hours after its release surpassing the the viewership of the late Sushant Singh Rajput' s last film Dil Bechara, this film does no wonders to entertain or excite the audience. Most of the action in the film is deplorable and the horror element is almost lacking. The controversy surrounding the name of the film and little new options available for the common Hindi film fans is undoubtedly the reason for the new viewership record.



A still fro Laxmii

The expectation from the film of a seasoned actor like Akshay Kumar who always guarantees actions, comedy and morals in his films is almost missing in Laxmii. At times we feel that he is more sidelined by Kiara Advani and Sharad Kelkar. While the actions and emotions of Akshay as a transgender disappoints us, Kelkar executes and perfectly builds the empathy and sympathy for the transgenders. But however, Laxmii makes difference in the depiction of the transgender, rather it just tries to reinforce the stereotypical images confirmed on them mainly by just trying to focus on some of their mannerisms. One of the punch dialogues in the film ‘Ye bhoot kuch nahi hota hai, jis din sach mei mere saamne bhoot aaya na, toh maa kasam chooriyan pehen lunga. (trans: there is no such thing as ghosts. The day I see one, I swear on my mom, I will wear bangles) subtly hints the prevailing patriarchal dominance both within and outside the culture industry.



A still from Laxmii

Dependence on the cultural structures of religion for coherence and justification would not always be beneficial for the culture industry. The growing superstitions in our contemporary progressive yet religious fundamentalist and divided society is indeed a threat to our modernity. Laxmii counts and builds its on drape of religion. It arguably challenges the belief of certain segments of the society and recreates the myth of the vulnerable by depicting women and transgenders as passive and weak who fail to justify their existence when they are alive.

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