

# cinema



\* A gathering of Kapoors: Anil Kapoor, his daughter Sonam Kapoor, Pankaj Kapoor and his son Shahid Kapoor at the Mumbai premiere of *Mausam* last month. Shahid and Sonam are the lead couple in Pankaj Kapoor's directorial debut.

## Season without reason

Noted actor Pankaj Kapoor's directorial debut *Mausam* has been scripted with very little common sense or logic, writes

**Gautaman Bhaskaran**

Invariably boys and girls at some of the universities I occasionally teach cinema end up asking me when I would make my first film. The question makes me laugh, but then I explain to them that every movie critic cannot make a movie. He may be a good writer, even a good critic, but could turn out to be a bad filmmaker.

Yes, there have been exceptions in the past. Brilliant critics like Françoise Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard went on to become equally brilliant movie-makers. Not just this, they pioneered the French Nouvelle vague, a new kind of cinema that challenged Hollywood and its style — and, yes, even other tradition-bound cinema.

On the contrary, India's Chidananda Dasgupta was a forceful film critic and writer, but when he kept aside his pen and took up the megaphone, what flowed out

of the camera was disappointing, to say the least.

Similarly, very few great actors have able to transform themselves into great directors. George Clooney is a wonderful, wonderful actor, who has turned out to be a wonderful, wonderful helmer. Two of the movies he directed and acted in floored me: *Good Night, and Good Luck* and *The Ides of March*, which opened the recent Venice International Film Festival.

By contrast, India's Kamal Hassan is an excellent actor, but with questionable directorial abilities. Aparna Sen's acting credits have been much talked about and lauded, but her helming has not quite been that. Except for *36 Chowringhee Lane*, her other works were passé.

Actor Pankaj Kapoor's story runs on a similar path. His performances in Dipankar Roy's *Ek Doctor Ki Maut* and Vishal Bharadwaj's

*Maqbool* were gripping. But like so many of our actors, Kapoor wanted to take a shot behind the camera, and he slipped.

His first work, *Mausam* (Season), which opened recently, has no great story to begin with. Worse, it has been scripted with very little common sense or logic.

And this was one of the Indian movies that was to have premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival! But since *Mausam* failed to get a clearance from the Indian Air Force (for the movie deals with the story of an IAF fighter pilot, essayed by Kapoor's son, Shahid Kapoor), its screening was cancelled at the last minute, making the young actor third time unlucky. Earlier, his promotional tours in the UK and the US had to be called off because of riots and a cyclone respectively.

*Mausam* tells the decade-long story of Harry or Harinder Singh from a small town in Punjab who

goes on to become a fighter pilot. Sonam Kapoor's Aayat is a refugee from Kashmir who settles down in the town. The first half is all about Harry and his bunch of friends whose pranks keep the community entertained. Harry flips for Aayat, and in a delightful vintage style, Kapoor pans his camera from coy stolen glances to one-liner notes the two exchange with Harry's sister sleeping blissfully right across them.

However, when seasons change and India is shaken by a string of crises — like the Babri mosque demolition in 1992, the Mumbai riots, the Kargil conflict and the 2002 Gujarat carnage (or genocide?) which followed the Godhra massacre — Harry and Aayat lose and find each other in what seems like an endless cycle.

He becomes an Indian Air Force fighter pilot, she a ballerina, running a curio shop with her

father and uncle in Scotland. There happens the first chance encounter between Harry and Aayat — seven long years after they had felt the first flush of love in Punjab.

Several more chance meetings between Harry and Aayat follow, starting from Edinburgh where he comes on an Air Force training mission. But every time, as the couple get ready to say 'I Do', there is something to play spoilsport. In Edinburgh, it is the Kargil war that separates them. He is called back home, and she has no clue where to find him.

What is absolutely unbelievable in *Mausam* is that Harry and Aayat cannot find each other after every separation, though the plot unfolds in the late 1990s and early 2000 when e-mail and other forms of modern communication were freely available.

Instead, she keeps writing letters that pile up at Harry's empty house in Punjab, and it seems so illogical that Aayat despite having the phone number of his sister does not call her!

What is even more ludicrous is the way Kapoor chooses to end a frightfully long film: at a riot-torn, deserted fair in Ahmedabad with a baby stranded atop a Ferris wheel, a horse engulfed in flames and our hero trying to rescue both, now that he has found his girl!

Also, *Mausam*'s special effects team has done a poor job of the scenes involving the Tiger Hill bombings and the emergency landing. They look quite amateurish.

The performances are not anything to write home about either. Shahid is charming as the village prankster, running away with his uncle's Impala car or chewing sugar cane, but the minute he gets into the Air Force uniform, sporting a moustache, he turns stiff and wooden. (Are Indian Air Force guys meant to be like this?) Often, he resembles a model for Ray Ban glasses, walking away from the planes. And yes, there is one shot of a shirtless him, a la Salman Khan.

Sonam is all decked up as the belle from Kashmir, but shows little life or passion as the tormented sweetheart. The pain of repeated separations hardly ever show, and if speaking in mere whispers is meant to convey pathos, she fails and rather miserably.

Seriously, *Mausam* needs to have been rewritten (the climax is good enough proof of this), and perhaps Kapoor and his men should have been gently reminded that this was no period piece — and mobile phones and e-mails were available and they could have united the sweethearts in a matter of wink. But, then, the story would have landed even before taking off.

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