

Are Indians In Tune With Their Culture?

BY MADHUSREE CHATTERJEE

The time has come for Indians to introspect whether they are in tune with their culture or not, "to pause and put a mirror before society to see why dilution, mutilation and modification of culture have taken place against the backdrop of such a distinguished civilization heritage", says diplomat-writer Pavan Varma.

Varma, former director-general of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), was in the capital to promote his new book, "Becoming Indian: The Unfinished Revolution of Culture and Identity" (Allen Lane/Penguin; Price Rs. 499), which was released in the Indian capital.

"My book investigates how those who are culturally rootless and India's educated classes will be co-opted in a globalized world where the victims are usually the last to know," Varma, who is currently India's ambassador to Bhutan, told IANS in an interview.

"We are not merely a nation but a civilization with a legacy of 5,000 years - one that represents great ambiguity, continuity, peaks of refinement and plurality, along with a huge sense of underlying unity. But such a civilization is always at the risk of

mediocrity, mimicry, cultural rootlessness and tokenisms - particularly where the educated middle classes are concerned," Varma said.

"In doing so, we must analyze that the importance of colonialism is not just physical subju-

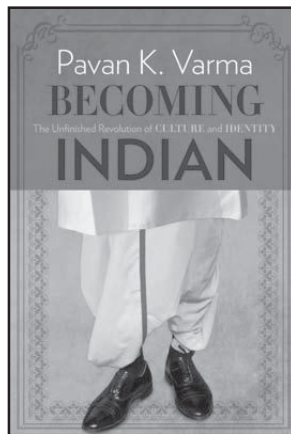
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gation but also about colonization of the mind. While its consequences in terms of politics and economics have been analyzed, a cultural audit of its colonized legacies in compromising the authentic cultural space of Indians has never been done.

"So the great unfinished revolution of India is to re-appropriate the cultural space in authentic terms calmly, without xenophobia and chauvin-

ism. This is the purpose of the book," Varma said.

The book looks at India's cultural journey through the writer's own itinerary as a bureaucrat and Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer. It begins with Varma's vision of exile - his growing up years in Delhi to his relocation to London with his family in the first chapter, "Choosing Exile," followed by the "The Imperishable Empire" in which he analyses the East India Company's role in the country.



"Colonial Amnesia: The Tale of Two Cities", "Creativity and Distortion", "The Empire At Your Threshold", "Within the Global Village: Asymmetry and Co-optation" probe the colonial high, hang-over and the gradual assimilation of the Indian urban educated societies into a new global order.

"Therefore, the book is a rigorous analysis of colonization and consequences in the cultural and intellectual space - and then the enumeration of its impact in areas of language, creative experience, music, films and architecture," Varma said.

It took the veteran career diplomat four years to write the book.

The writer said: "We need to be concerned about our cultures."

"Our threshold of satisfaction is unacceptably low. At the slightest praise from the West, there is euphoria and any criticism evokes extreme indignation. If you see the condition of our classical music and dance - they are pathetic. Even the best of dancers cannot fill a hall when the ticket is free.

"Nearly 70 percent of Bollywood movies are lifted from Hollywood and Gyanpeeth winners cannot sell more than 100 copies of their books. In any area of creative expression, there is shabbiness," he said.

"Photocopies cannot sit at the high table. You have to be original and rooted to the milieu you belong to. Photocopies are like caricatures and those who carry the legacies of great civilizations like India cannot become caricatures," he said.

The writer recommended a change in school language modules.

"Education till Class 6 should be in one's mother tongue and in another language. It will help a child get a firm ground in culture. Recent researches show that those who become adept in their own mother tongue pick up foreign languages faster," he said.

Varma is now working on his first work of fiction - a novel.

"After 20 years of writing non-fiction, I have a powerful story to tell," he said.



My Name is Khan Falls Short Of Expectations

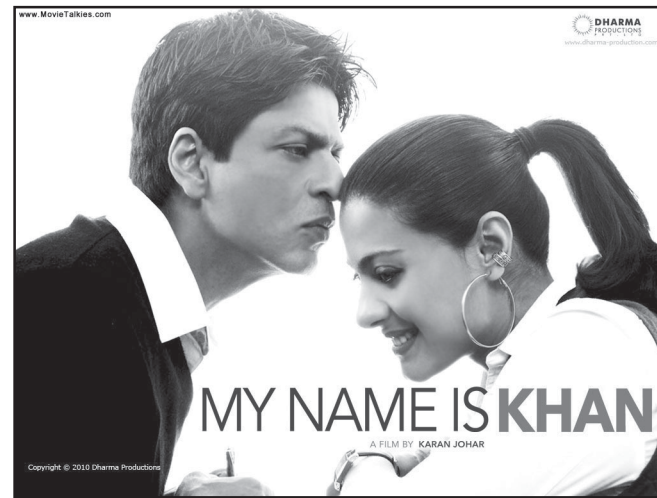
BY JYOTHSNA HEGDE

The movie needs no formal introductions. Karan Johar has shifted gears and is focused on producing and directing more serious cinema and 'My Name is Khan' (MNIK) is an honest and heartfelt effort in that direction. In fact the sincere intentions of the movie almost cover up the clumsy climax (flood in Georgia) and rather

sweet moments between Kajol and Shah Rukh, be it the way he proposes or she accepts. However there is a sense of forced chemistry between the two rather than a natural progression. Zarina Wahab returns to the big screen after a while and delivers her best. Jimmy Shergill and Sonya Jehan are natural. Sumeet Raghavan, Navneet Nishan, Vinay Pathak in their short appearances give their best.

Karan Johar is comfortable through the some parts of the movie, but falters towards the second half. Karan has an inherent, almost compulsive need to please the masses.

And this proves to be his strength in the first half of the movie which deals with romance but also works against him in the latter half when the story shifts over to political mode. Karan even wants his characters to be happily settled in before they face adversities, so Kajol, a woman running a hair salon is able to afford a comfortable home in a San Francisco suburb.



unrealistic sequences (a man with Asperger's Syndrome and hardly any money traveling cross country). Well, almost. The movie however has a message and delivers it successfully, thanks to Shah Rukh Khan, the actor and not the superstar.

Rizwan Khan (Tanay Chheda) plays young Shah Rukh Khan, the actor and not the superstar. Rizwan Khan (Tanay Chheda) plays young Shah Rukh Khan, the actor and not the superstar. He manages to drain water with a bicycle and some bottles but he is different. He has Asperger's Syndrome that causes him to shy away from hugs or touching of any kind, an aversion to loud noises, the color yellow and such. His ammi (Zarina Wahab), amidst the 1983 riots teaches Rizwan that the only way to differentiate between people is to classify them as either good or bad. Rizwan carries the message with him even after she dies. He moves to the US with his brother Zakir Khan (Jimmy Shergill) and sister-in-law (Sonya Jehan) where he is appointed to sell beauty products. On his job, he meets Mandira (Kajol), falls in love and asks her to marry him at the oddest of times. Mandira, a Hindu single mom with a son, Sam (Yuvaan Makaar) welcomes Khan into her life with open arms and even changes the last name of her son to Khan. Post 9/11 her decision to change her son's last name results in a tragedy that leaves Rizwan on his own. Rizwan embarks on a journey to win back his love. His mission is to meet the President of the United States and deliver the message, "My name is Khan and I am not a terrorist"

Step aside Raj, Rahul, Rizwan is here. Shah Rukh clearly steals the show. Rizwan triumphs in conveying the message of humanity through his odyssey. This is one of Shah Rukh's most endearing performances to date. Kajol's Mandira does not have a lot of meat to bite into, and she gets through the movie either being completely energized or totally devastated. There are some

Writer Shibani Bhatija tries hard to elevate Rizwan's innocent character to celebrity status and that results in unrealistic situations and sequences created with undue cinematic liberties such as Rizwan managing to get a hateful Muslim doctor arrested by the FBI or save folks of a flood hit village in Georgia. The climax and sequences leading to it seem rather rushed.

The special effects of the flood scene are amateurish, at best and quite embarrassing for a Dharma production banner. Editing by Deepa Bhatia, moving the story in flashback and cinematography by Ravi K Chandra deserve special mention as they conjure some memorable scenarios and wonderful images. Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy's music is melodious and carries the movie forward with no lip synching. 'Sajda', 'Tere Naina' and 'Noor-e-Khuda' are soulful.

The movie does have some powerful one liners by Niranjan Iyengar and Shibani Bathija. When Rizwan is refused entry for not being Christian to a Christian fund raiser attended by the President, he leaves a 500 \$ behind telling her "This is for those who are not Christians in Africa"

The movie is not without faults, and some glaring ones at that. However, there is an earnest effort to convey a humanitarian message that the only way to distinguish people is by their actions, good or bad.

The simplicity of thought unfortunately never trickles down to its execution. MNIK does carry one of Shah Rukh's most restrained performances. It is Kha Kha (from the epiglottis) Khan's show all the way. If you are a Shah Rukh fan, MNIK is a must watch, however the movie itself falls short of its own and our expectations.