



BY MAHADEV  
DESAI

## On A Shopping Spree!

I try to avoid shopping as much as I can. But sometimes it is unavoidable. Last Thursday morning I opened the fridge for milk. No milk. No bread

for breakfast either. I had to quickly resolve this crisis! I told my wife I would get milk and bread and be back in half an hour.

I jumped in my car and drove to the newly opened D-Mart located about six miles from my home. Near the entrance, there were signs in Chinese, Spanish, and English (but not in Hindi) offering huge discounts and bargains. I didn't bother to pick a shopping basket as I thought I wouldn't need one.

It was a huge warehouse-like store with aisles upon aisles selling Korean, Mexican, Indian groceries, seafood, fruits and vegetables; etc. I wished I had more time and money to hunt for bargains. I bought a loaf of 'White Mountain' bread and dashed to the frozen items corner for milk. I wanted only one gallon but it was on sale so I bought two gallons instead. I

carried one plastic gallon in my right and second in my left hand and tucked the loaf under my chin and waddled like a penguin towards the cashiers. Ten feet away and the loaf slipped from underneath my chin and fell on the floor. I felt like a clumsy idiot. I put the milk gallons on the floor and picked up the loaf. And suddenly remembered that Bintu likes orange juice. I left the milk and loaf on the floor and rushed to get a shopping basket. I returned, put the milk and bread in it and went to look for orange juice. I like to munch Lays potato chips. I could not resist the tempting offer, "Buy one, get one free", so I bought two large size packets of chips. My wife loves ice cream—I bought a big tub of Mayfield ice-cream for her.

As I passed the Fruits and Vegetables counters, I noticed that because the D-Mart had just moved in this location, its prices were really low compared to other stores. Normally my wife buys fruits and vegetables but I thought I would give her a surprise. The basket was full and now I needed a shopping cart. So I left the basket on the floor and ran out to get a cart. By the time I returned, someone had kicked my basket aside. I emptied the contents into the cart and bought some vegetables and fruits. Wrong vegetables at wrong price as usual!

While I was shopping, I saw a young man wearing a hood over his head tasting grapes, strawberries, cherries, slices of bread, muffins and other free samples as if he was attending a friend's birthday party. He picked some bananas and put in a plastic bag as if to buy those but left the bag near

the Bakery counter and sneaked out quietly for free coffee!. I pushed the cart to the cashier next to the Express Lane. Though the Express Lane was meant for customers with ten or less items, I saw a few customers check out despite carrying more than ten items. There are only five customers ahead of me, so it shouldn't take long, I thought.

The first customer was an old lady. She had bought twenty items and had a bunch of coupons—some well past expiry date! Some were slightly torn, some wrinkled and some from other stores. The cashier patiently sorted those out while I closed my eyes and recited Hanuman Chalisa. "Who on earth thought of bribing potential customers with coupons?" The second customer changed his mind about Tomato soup after the cashier had checked it out. He thought it was too expensive and wanted that item to be cancelled. The third customer wanted to pay by credit card. When the Credit card was rejected by the machine, he couldn't believe it and argued furiously with the cashier, who was almost in tears. She had to summon her supervisor for help. The man was escorted out by the security officer. The next customer was an old lady who took hours to open her purse, take out dollar bills, count



them thrice and also rummaged for loose cents and dimes to pay \$37 and seventy two cents! The fifth customer was apparently a housewife armed with a cell phone. As soon as the cashier began checking out the first item, the phone rang. "Yes, honey. I'm at D-Mart. What? You need six eggs? O.K. dear, I'll get it." "Excuse me; I'll be back in a sec." She told the cashier and coolly walked to get eggs. The cashier looked helpless. At last, it was my turn. Guess what! The customer in suits and tie behind me said, "You mind, Sir! I have only a sandwich and a coke. I got to rush back to my office" "Sure, go ahead. But next time, try the Express lane" I said. The cashier asked me in broken English if I had a discount card. When I said 'No', she cheered up, "Would you like one, Sir? It is free" ,as if she was handing me keys to a new Mercedes! She gave me a Form to fill in. I was conscious of the long line of customers behind me, so I folded the form and put it in my pocket. I cursed myself for losing 5% discount.

"Look Sir, this banana is squashed. Would you like to get another one?" Bintu eats more bananas than a monkey and I had bought a dozen instead of usual six. But in a hurry, I had put the bunch under the milk gallon and squashed one. "Never mind. You can charge me for it" I said.

I reached home an hour late. When my wife saw me getting out of the car carrying four heavy bags, she said, "Is a snow storm hitting Atlanta or what?"

"Don't start please. I saved you some money. And don't ask me to return anything for I have already thrown the receipt away!" Now you know why I hate shopping!

## Rann: A Razor-Sharp Biting Look At The Real World

**Film:** "Rann"; **Cast:** Amitabh Bachchan, Riteish Deshmukh, Sudeep, Paresh Rawal, Rajat Kapoor, Neetu Chandra, Gul Panag, Suchitra Krishnamurthy; **Director:** Ram Gopal Varma; **Rating:** \*\*\*\*

BY SUBHASH K. JHA

"Rann" is that rare cinema about the collective conscience which we often like to think has gone out of style. Like Mehboob Khan's "Mother India" and Hrishikesh Mukherjee's "Satyakam", "Rann" shows how tough it is to hold your head high up in dignified righteousness in a world where ethics crumble faster than cookies in wide-open jar left out too long in the sun.

Ironically, there isn't much sunshine in "Rann". The film has been shot in an anaemic light, symbolizing a world that's largely losing light.

Cleverly, Ram Gopal Varma situates his morality tale in the cut-throat world of the electronic media where the TRP is god and deadlines the devil. And may the voice of the conscience rest in peace.

Without wasting time Varma introduces us to the plethora of characters who colonise the bowel of a declining channel run by the idealistic Vijay Harshvardhan Malik (Amitabh Bachchan). Malik believes there's room still for the straight and narrow path in a business where grabbing attention is the murder of all invention.

The glistening sweat on ratings, challenged eyebrows are captured through tight close-ups of worried faces that the camera - Amit Roy's sharply cruising lenses moving from face-to-face with obstinate restlessness - that give nothing and yet everything away.

As in Varma's "Sarkar", the moral battle lines in the media-run tale of "Rann" are drawn between the idealistic patriarch and his US-returned hyper-ventilating son Jai (Kannada star Sudeep) who is so anxious and ambitious, you know he will eventually cause trouble for his ideologue dad's news-worthiness.

Trouble arrives in the flabby form of a seedy politician Pandey - played by Paresh Rawal and he re-embraces villainy with lip-smacking relish - who plunges into the TRP war on television with no sense of propriety, legalese or the law.

Pandey pompously tells Jai before they both conspire with the help of a rival television tycoon (Mohnish Behl) to trash the idealistic Harshvardhan's reputation. The plot accommodates more characters that a miniature touristic island in the holiday season. Not one of the characters need any explanation or occupy a superfluous place in the plot.

Varma's concern for the characters is genuine but non-judgemental. Each characters even the relatively-shadowy women, emerges as casualty of an over-competitive society where morality goes out of the nearest window.

The narrative is taut, restless and biting in its depiction of corruption in supposedly respon-

sible places.

While much of film's inner fire burns outwards from the pithy and peppery writing (Rohit Banawlikar), the essential core of idealism is preserved in the understated relationship between the idealistic young rookie Purab Shastri and his mentor Harshvardhan. Wish this bonding was built on.

As restless as his camera, Varma gives no space to the complicated labyrinth of relationships to grow. We are left to gauge the depths and dimensions that underline the furious flow of empathy and antipathy between various characters by reading between the lines.

The first two-thirds of the narrative creates a gripping patchwork of television, drama and politics and how the three worlds often come together to destroy the basic fibre of human morality.

It's the last quarter of the narrative where Harshvardhan, after realising he has been taken for a ride by his own son's over-ambitiousness, that packs in the maximum punch.

Cleverly borrowing the premise for its climax from Mehboob Khan's "Mother India", "Rann" moves aggressively but confidently into its passionate finale where the patriarchal television tycoon must expose some harsh home-truths to cleanse his own conscience.

"Rann" takes us into a world where right and wrong are more financial than moral issues, where the people who make news conveniently forget that the source is often the nadir of the conscience.

"Rann" is a razor-sharp bitter and biting look at the real world of rapidly-moving moral issues.

Varma extracts superlative performances from the entire cast. From Ritesh's heartbreaking idealism to Neetu Chandra's part as Jai Malik's secret love interest.

As expected Bachchan as the conscience of the plot, presides over the speedened proceedings with a thoughtful and gentle performance. His climactic speech makes all of us sit up and think about the quality of work we do in order to keep up with the competition.

Luckily, Bachchan's consistently excellent output is never dependant on the 'competition' around him. Ironically, his character is forced to stoop in order to conquer the TRPs.

Varma, who has been lately guilty of making fairly compromised films, rises above the morass of mediocrity with a meteoric force, letting other filmmakers know what he is capable of achieving if he sets his heart to it.

"Rann" defines the role of the electronic media in today's context with remarkable virility and dramatic force. This is Varma's best work since "Company".



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