

3 Idiots: A Tremendously Entertaining Piece Of Cinema

BY SUBHASH K. JHA

By now, Aamir Khan has hit so many sixers in his career that we can only wonder what this maestro of marketing intends to do next. For sure, “3 Idiots” is yet another vehicle to showcase Aamir’s sparkling ability to be part of a cinema that creates a colloquial yet classy language of thought provoking punctuation, syntax and exclamation.

“3 Idiots” is first and foremost a tremendously entertaining piece of cinema. The boys-will-have-fun atmosphere on an engineering campus is shot with the devious humor and warmth of a joke that has not lost its punch even after years of re-telling.

Some things never change in a straightjacketed society like ours. And really, when Rajkumar Hirani, with help from his co-writer Abhijat Joshi, sets down to criticize the glaring anomalies in our education system, we are compelled to wonder for a few seconds, if flogging the sacred cows of our institutionalized system of governance in cinema is not just an excuse to pull out all stops and let the young heroes have all the fun that their more disciplined counterparts deny themselves.

The thought processes underlining the film’s super-vibrant but calm surface are never allowed to seep out and bubble to the exterior of the narrative. If at heart “3 Idiots” is a serious indictment of our education system, at the surface it’s a character-driven film played out at an observant and opulent but always-feisty octave.

The sounds of protest against the curbs, checks and downers in our education reach out to us in a cas-

Cast: Aamir Khan, Kareena Kapoor, R. Madhavan, Sharman Joshi, Boman Irani, Omi Director: Rajkumar Hirani

cade of crisply-written lines spoken by characters who have lived out the nightmare that precedes that long journey into the realisation of our dreams.

At times, the narrative is savagely funny.



Note the sequence where Rancho (Aamir Khan) and his girl take the critically ill old man to the hospital on a scooter. Hirani has always seen humor of mortality. He has a potent style of storytelling, a mix of street wisdom and cinematic sensitivities that come together in a noiseless tango of social comment and entertainment.

The director is strangely shy of displaying emotions. So he counters the melodrama of his third hero Raju Rastongi (Sharma Joshi)’s life with black-and-white 1960s’ self-mocking background music.

Ironically, Hirani’s unconventional hero Rancho often goes the other way and sheds manly tears for colleagues, friends and tormented young citizens of modern India who are crippled by a despotic disregard for their natural creativity.

Aamir undertakes his character’s journey through the paradoxical labyrinth of an ambition-driven education system - incidentally the loopholes in our education was also the theme of Aamir’s “Taare Zameen Par” and Hirani’s “Munnabhai M.B.B.S.” - with a gut-

level understanding of what pains today’s average 20-something.

Aamir’s transformation into a 22-year-old collegian is so complete you end up wondering if he has been lying about being 40-plus in real life! Like most Aamir starrers, “3 Idiots” too is predominantly his vehicle. Most of the funniest lines

and inspiring situations in the script come from Aamir. And boy, does he play the boy-man with restrained relish!

Sharman as the poor middle-class boy driven to near-suicide by his parents’ ambitions gets two meaty sequences. He chews on them with careful sensitivity, leaving a lasting impression. Madhavan as the third ‘idiot’ expresses his smothered dreams through a series of half-expressed thoughts and a fear of unhappiness that reach his eyes without transit.

Kareena as the girl engaged to the tycoon with a penchant for putting a price tag on all his gifts, brings a dollop of sunshine and feminine grace to an otherwise masculine tale. She is so spunky and spontaneous you wish there was room for more of her. There’s even less of Mona Singh who’s again a spirited free soul.

The two ladies are, fortunately, part of the climax where our three heroes deliver Kareena’s sister (Mona Singh)’s baby on the office table - a clear indication that even an all-boys tale has no qualms about embracing maternal responsibilities if the situation arises.

But did “3 Idiots” really need a manufactured child-delivered-in-crisis climax? Did it need those endless toilet-and-bum jokes? Couldn’t Boman Irani and the new actor Omi Vaidya have been delineated less hammily?

It’s not that “3 Idiots” is a flawless work of art. But it is a vital, inspiring and life-revising work of contemporary art with some heart imbued into every part.

In a country where students are driven to suicide by their impossible curriculum, “3 Idiots” provides hope. Maybe cinema can’t save lives. But cinema sure can make you feel life is worth living. “3 Idiots” does just that, and much more.

Paa: A Soulful Experience Of Relationships

BY JYOTHSNA HEGDE

Great movies are not made, they just happen and Paa is one of the rare jewels embellished with exceptional performances, melodious music, an endearing story and engaging direction.

It appears that R. Balki who also directed Cheeni Kum has a flair for pushing the envelope where his stories are concerned, be it Amitabh romancing a girl his daughter’s age or playing a 13 year old son with his real life son Abhishek as his father. And not a regular 13 year old, but a child with a rare genetic condition Progeria that rapidly accelerates the aging process.

Amitabh’s Auro captures your heart right from the very first time he sets foot in the frame. Thirteen year Auro is a regular kid, playful and witty calling him Grandma (Arundathi Nag) Bum, because she has a big one while his body is physically five times older. Auro lives with his mother Vidya (Vidya Balan) and Bum with no knowledge of his MP dad Amol Atre (Abhishek Bachchan). His world as he knows it changes when Amol Atre visits his school for a function. Auro receives the first prize from his MP dad and when the program is aired on TV, Vidya is reminded of her days spent with Amol when they were younger. She gets pregnant and Amol asks her to get an abortion but she decides to raise the child with her mother’s support. She had never contacted Amol but now the media is hounding Auro after the MP’s visit to his school is aired on TV. They want to know more about his condition and Auro writes to the MP complaining to him about the media. The modern day MP with a mission is

drawn to Auro and cannot walk away and they continue to keep in touch.

The first part of the movie does steal us of Auro’s aura. The story deviates into Amol’s urban redevelopment issues and his battle with the media. Although the plot of dealing with the media is in itself clever, it does not do much to the father son track and distracts us from the main story. The second half however more than makes up for the digression and transports us to Auro’s world. It is here that we see Balki’s sensitive treatment of relationships. After Auro learns that the MP is his father, his mother gives him the freedom to choose whether or not he reveals it to his father, just like her mother gave her the freedom of choice when she was pregnant out of wedlock. Auro has the chance to spend time with his dad, who is not aware of the fact that he is Auro’s dad and some of the most moving moments of the movie are when Auro tries in his own innocent way to explain his dad’s “mistake” to him.

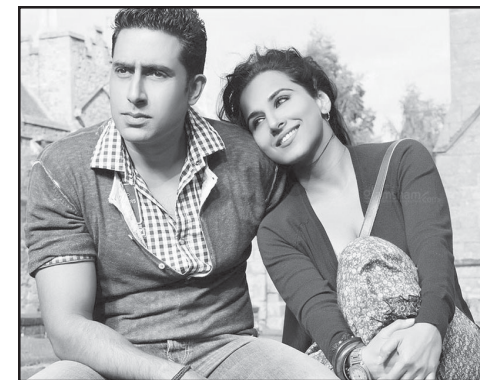
It is truly a treat to watch Amitabh transform his larger than life persona into a mischievous thirteen year old with such conviction that you actually forget Amitabh was in the movie. While Auro does walk away with the trophy, every single actor around him deserves



equal accolades. Balki’s Auro is etched with precision. He is so full of life despite his condition and brownie points to Balki for never letting Auro drown in self-pity, thanks to his pillars, mom and bum. Vidya Balan embodies the essence of a mother with unparalleled perfection. She is strong, loving, simple and oh so graceful in her cotton sarees. She is also vulnerable beneath her tough exterior and Balki does a remarkable job of showcasing all of her different personalities. Arundathi Nag as Bum is a class act. Watch out for the scene when she learns her daughter is pregnant and repeatedly asks her daughter what she wants to do with the child, never forcing her own opinion, it’s brilliant. Abhishek as Paa is very comfortable, calm and composed much like his character in the film. Paresh Rawal does justice to his brief appearance. Auro’s conversations with his friend Vishnu are sweet, funny and simply endearing. Balki’s dialogues are crisp and peppy such as “google se bachke kaha jaoge” to mask the melodramatic effect. It is quite funny to watch Auro tell his Bum not to ask his King Kong (stuffed toy) any questions because he speaks Chinese. Balki also must be commended for keeping a mellow and light mood throughout the movie and never going overboard with emotions.

Music by Ilaiyaraaja and lyrics by Swanand Kirkire are airy and synch flawlessly into the theme of the movie. Shilpa Rao’s rendering of “Mudi Mudi Itfaq se” is just splendid. The music is not meant to be a party starter but soothing and rather simple in its approach. Sabyasachi, Aki Narula, Falguni Thakore and Rahul Agastya nail the styling of the actors to the T. Vidya Balan was made to wear sarees. She looks ethe-

real. Abhishek in his Neta get up is quite adorable. Christien Tinsley and Domini Till deserve special mention for a truly a dramatic transformation of Amitabh to Auro. PC Sreeram’s cinematography merges seamlessly



with the vision of the director.

While Auro’s genetic disorder may be inspired by “The Curious case of Benjamin Button”, that is the only thing that is common with the movie. Amitabh’s riveting, heartfelt performance as Auro complimented by the outstanding depiction of his relationships with his mother, grandmother, friends and Paa is a reminder that we have invaluable, invincible talent in Bollywood that strive to make movies that move you deeply. Abhishek as the producer has indeed added a feather to ABCL, one that will be fondly remembered in the years to come. Don’t miss the chance to share Auro’s joys and tears; this is not just a movie but an experience.