

**Book Review****Milind Damle****‘Pure Evil’: An Effort to Pen The Bad Men Of Hindi Cinema!**

“Sach poochiye to, aap jaise “shareef” logon ke wajah se hee hum police waalon ka kaam chalta hai. Agar aap log na ho, to hamara to yeh department hi band jaaye (Very noble emotions. Frankly, we policemen owe our livelihood to ‘decent’ individuals like you. Without you, our department would shut down)”, Deputy Commissioner of Police Ashwini Kumar (Dilip Kumar) tells smuggler J.K. Verma (Amrish Puri) in *Shakti* (1982)

One way or the other, Hindi cine-goers have contrived to take the villain character for granted. He must look obnoxiously evil when the script demands so. And he must deign to get beaten up when it is time for the hero to establish his credentials. Yet, nobody denies the permanency of the imprint characters like Mogambo in *Mr India* (1987) or Gabbar Singh in *Sholay* (1975) have left in our memories. They are the villains of the story, but the financiers of these films will tell you that these are their ‘heroes’. Also, while film chroniclers have authored biographies of actors like Pran and Amrish Puri, we have missed a documented walkthrough of the life cycle of the Hindi film villain down the ages. This is where Balaji Vittal’s newly released book *Pure Evil -The Bad Men of Bollywood*, published by Harper Collins, is significant. Winner of the President of India’s National

award in 2011 for his debut book *RD Burman: The Man, The Music* and the MAMI International Film Festival for the Best Book on Cinema in 2015 for *Gaata Rahe Mera Dil – 50 Classic Hindi Film Songs* (both of which he co-authored with Anirudha Bhattacharjee), Balaji shifts tracks unexpectedly from writing on dulcet retro music to writing about bad men. With a catchy foreword by filmmaker Sriram Raghavan, Balaji opens the doors to a rogues’ gallery where villainy of every genre seen in the last ninety years of Hindi film is showcased. *Pure Evil* consists of various sections, with each section dedicated to a particular category of villain – the foreigners, the dacoits, the mafia, the mentally ill (psychotics, serial killing psychopaths, and megalomaniacs) and the enemies within (like cheating spouses, the backstabbing friends/employees/business partners, etc.). Balaji traces the history of each villain category and the nuances thereof, thereby connecting the dots that add up to the extensive exposition of Bollywood villainy. An example is how the upright police force became corrupt and criminal in the 1980s and after, becoming a soft landing for the criminal politician and a fulcrum for the mafia. The narrative traces these turning points, substantiating them with examples. The

physical appearances, sartorial details, and quirks that underlined these characters have also been discussed, helping trigger memories or making the reader head to the YouTube browser. A case in point is how Anupam Kher used a plastic nose and pulled his lip inward while essaying the role of the vile Tribhuvan Chacha in *Chaalbaaz* (1989).

Balaji also tracks the emergence of each genre of villainy in the socio-economic milieu – for example, how the ‘License raj’ of the 1960s with excessively high import duties saw a spurt in smuggling activities in the country. The filmmakers quickly wove this development into their scripts, giving us the ‘smuggler’ as the principal villain of the late 1960s right through the 1970s with towering villains like Teja and Shakaal (both acted by Ajit in *Zanjeer & Yaadon ki Baaraat*, both from 1973). *Pure Evil* is a treasure trove of information; the enormous research that has gone into it is evident in the fact that Balaji has interviewed close to fifty influential Bollywood personalities, in addition to the copious archival material that he has drawn upon. The book contains a generous hamper of rich trivia, backstories, and anecdotes – chapter after chapter- the picture within the picture. For example, why did Raj Kapoor publicly snub Danny Denzongpa during the shooting of *Abdullah* when all Danny wanted to do was touch Raj Kapoor’s feet as a mark of respect? Was it indeed a snub?

*Pure Evil* contains two lighter shades of evil – the anti-heroes played by Raj Kapoor in *Awara* and *Shree 420* and Dev Anand in *Baazi* and *Jaal* and later by Amitabh Bachchan in *Deewar*, *Zanjeer* and *Trishul* and the dark ensemble films like *Parakh* and *Jaagte Raho*. Now, whether these belong to a

book titled ‘*Pure Evil*’ (which, by definition, should necessarily include only the blackest of characters) is a matter of debate over which many cups of coffee may get emptied. But we may concede to the author’s prerogative here, more so since the book is a first of its kind. Here one also suggests including the offbeat hits with character artists being given odd negative roles, which have remained a big on-screen surprise. For example, *Apradhi Kaun* (1957), directed by Asit Sen, offers a rare double role with two shades to character artists in Gajanan Jagirdar, who has played the contrary roles with ease.

As Balaji delves into the specificity of the villainy of the characters, he uses popular ones as examples to substantiate his case, thus keeping even the casual Bollywood follower interested in the discussion. But he also shares the names of lesser-known (or unreleased) films that could make the curious reader want to check them out. The final chapter, *Crime, and Punishment*, seem to bring out the author’s tenet on the workings of *karma* as he traces out how the villains met their deserved end – and a few like Susanna in *7 Khoon Maaf* that got away with six murders. While the book is all about Bollywood characters, *Pure Evil* should not be misconstrued to be a 300-page filmy gossip magazine. This is a serious book packed with information that is a product of meticulous research. It requires patient reading. But the language is conversational and simple, avoiding didactic words, and punctuated with dry humour, making it easy on the readers’ eyes and entertaining. *Pure Evil* is a storybook for the masses rather than an academic work for an erudite few.

One wishes that the proofreading could have been more thorough. A handful of misspellings and punctuation errors can be momentarily distracting. Also, one hopes the book had an index of the referenced films and that a few pictures could embellish it further. I sincerely wish these could add value to the book's second edition.

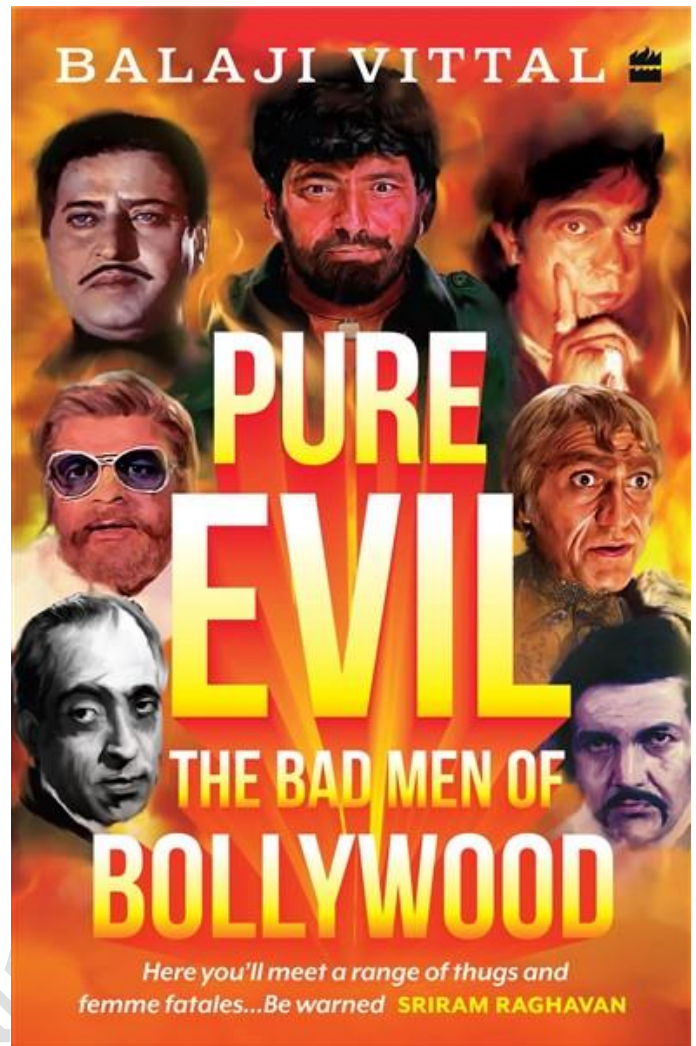
But overall, *Pure Evil – The Bad Men of Bollywood* is a pioneering effort on the horizon of book writing on Hindi cinema, on a topic that very few would have even risked taking up, let alone script so thoroughly. It is highly recommended for Bollywood fans and students of Hindi cinema.

**Pure Evil: The Bad Men of Bollywood**

**₹ 399.00**

**By: Balaji Vittal**

*The book, published by Harper Collins, is available at all leading bookstores and on the Amazon website.*



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