

Critique

Dipsikha Bhagawati

***Sirf Ek Banda Kafi Hain : Unfolding the Juridical Algorithm***



*"Charity karna aur hospital banana aapko kisiki rape karne ki ijazat nahi deta"*  
(Doing charities and building hospitals don't licentiate you to rape") -*Sirf Ek Banda Kafi Hain*

In the pan India history of the beginning of cinema, right from the leniently fibered trial scene of Queen Taramati from the trailblazing 'Raja Harishchandra', courtroom dramas have occupied a major space in many celebrated movies, and the global technoscape of cinema isn't an exception to this popular content. In the film 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1962) - unanimously trusted as one of the timeless films ever made, Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck), the defence lawyer of Tom Robinson (Brock Peters) told in the final scene of the film:

*"Now gentlemen, in this country, our courts are the great levelers. In our courts, all men are created equal. I'm no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and of our jury system. That's no ideal to me. That is a living, working reality. Now I am confident that you gentlemen will review—without*

*passion—the evidence that you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this man to his family. In the name of God, do your duty. In the name of God, believe Tom Robinson."*

*Sirf Ek Banda Kafi Hain*, the electrifying courtroom drama of 2023, India, has portrayed the character of Attorney P.C. Solanki, too well played by none other than Manoj Bajpayee. The spot on direction of Apoorva Singh Karki introduces the protagonist as 'Ye dilaye fatah, law hai iska dhandha, ye hai Rab ka banda' at the very initial shot of '*Sirf Ek Banda Kafi Hai*'. This background song makes the audience understand about the extraordinary sense and attitude of this ordinary looking person. The film is infact related to the life of Bapu Asaram - the self acclaimed controversial, yet ironically powerful godman. Simultaneously it is based on the life of

lawyer PC Solanki, who established a penalty for him - which was that tough in front of a vast, high-powered and influential mechanism that prevailed with all its evil investment.

The film is credited to impact a number of major flaws of our judiciary system, that how the weak tunnels of the law policies create hundreds of gateways for a criminal to roam under the free sky.

A question often comes in people's mind that can a single person fight against the whole system? Is it possible for a common man to fight against a big political and religious power figure, survive and finally win? In Indian society, where the status of a religious Baba has been made very high by the groundlings itself, where in spite of many anti social issues (where concerned) genuinely fixed on them, they are protected by the standing machinery, is it even possible for a small session court lawyer to declare a risky combat against him? Manoj Bajpayee in the role of PC Solanki is upstanding and the film is apparently based on true events.

By the course, the plot progresses, it is evidently understood that the Baba of the film is a real life projection. The courage of the filmmaker and actors also needs to be appreciated, because in our society everything is forgivable for a so-called religious person and especially if a small girl starts breaking the ice of destructive silence, the passive or neutral role of the society makes the game even more difficult.

The film also gives information about the nuances of the POCSO law. It repeatedly reminds how this law has been made in 2012 only to prevent sexual abuse of children, and how this law is misused, the way the lawyer of the criminal tries to find loopholes in this law, and how can a skilled lawyer counter their vicious intentions by sensing them.

The story begins with Nu, a minor girl, and her parents visiting the Kamal Nagar police station in Delhi. There, they get a case registered against a baba for sexually abusing a minor. After this the police arrest Baba. Baba's devotees get enraged and the first lawyer tries to hush up the matter. In such a situation, the girl's parents take support of lawyer PC Solanki, as Manoj Bajpayee in the film.

Manoj Bajpayee in the role of Solanki acts as a thread that binds the entire film and dominates the screen through his plasmatic senses of practising a role. On the one hand, he constantly instructs his elderly mother at home to keep her blood pressure low, and on the other hand, he takes full care of his adopted son. A responsible man, a father and a son, and a true "unregistered" practitioner of Dharma to the contrary of that "registered" godman. When Baba's representatives bring him a bribe of 20 crores, he harshly denies and drives them away. Solanki's cordial relations with son and mother reveal the soft side of his personality.

While accepting the case, when the survivor's father asks him for the fee, he only asks for keeping the smile of his daughter intact and protected. The film tells that no superhero is needed to change the world, instead an empathetic human being is enough to rectify the social viruses - though too challenging. The person who repeatedly kicks his old scooter in the morning, the person who is that innocently nonchalant to reach the court with a tag still stuck to his new shirt, that too of Rs 650 - too can become an extraordinary crusader and a master to excel in climactic situations of life.

The film is a statement piece in defining the real meaning of religion - dharma. On one side there is a so-called religious baba who gives the knowledge of peace and morality to the people. But to transparent hypocrisy - there is an exercising molester, who practices his evil intentions even on the minor girls who come to his ashram. On the contrary - there is an apparently ordinary sounding lawyer who is loyal to his life and profession, an idealistic and is leading his life defying the world which has become a slave to power of money. Religion for him exists in conduct, not in scriptures, in flamboyant oration, or in a "piously designed outfit." The lead character offers this message to the society through his disciplined mechanisms of life - from time to time that acts to be the deus ex machina of the entire tour de force.

Nu has done a great job as a survivor child. She gives a message to the entire female fraternity to be courageous in a biased society. His parents constantly support her during this hard hitting

struggle, pitchforking the value of a family. The role of Nu is played by Adrija Sinha.

Manoj Bajpayee is that well versed in the character played, that he exists in no point, but P.C.Solanki. In the last scene of the film, when the debate is going on, the time for the decision is near, Manoj's facial expressions can be seen to the credit of excellence. The close shots capture his perturbed nerves and his emotional outbursts through the muscle manoeuvres on the right side of his face. To its immediate, the camera pans towards his fingers and the flexions and extensions are reflective of his inner turmoil as a humane first. Contextually, one is reminded of the outstanding Hollywood actor Denzel Washington whose face physics could dominate the screen. The films like *Fallen* (2008), *The Book of Eli* (2010), *American Gangster* (2007), *Flight* (2012, as Captain Whip Whitaker, credited to infinity) and many masterstrokes. In the film, the hometown of Manoj Bajpayee is located at Jodhpur and the touch of Rajasthani accent in his Hindi is another example of his being rooted proudly to nativity. We, as audience always love to see a common family man in a scooter, attached to his family, caring and fearless and always praying after a bath. So its a common man's physical space that has been a favourite screen story through ages. The final scene of *Sirf Ek Banda Kafi Hain* though carries a dramatic timbre contrasted to the earlier scenes, it is simultaneously unanimous

that this encompasses the entire strength of the movie and establishes why this is a chivalrous Manoj Bajpayee film.

As a defence attorney, his proceedings against the convict is thoroughly electrifying.

*"Jis paap ka prabhav pure sansar ki maanvta aur prabhuta par sadiyon tak rehta hai, wo mahapaap ke antargat aata hai. Mein Raavan ko maaf kar deta, agar usne Raavan ban kar Sita ka apharan kiya hota, lekin usne sadhu ka vesh dharon kiya tha, jiska prabhav pure sansar ki sadhutwa aur sanatan par sadiyon tak rahega jiski koyi maafi nehi hain..."* (The sin that leaves a lasting indiscretion on the humanity and honesty of the entire universe, that comes under the category of unpardonable sin. I would've forgiven Raavan if he had abducted Sita in his actual form; but he committed that in the guise of a saint that has defamed the entire community of saints and the perpetuality of Dharma which would last to milleniums, and it never ever deserves to be excused."

*"Sirf Ek Banda Kafi Hain"* is perhaps the best work of Apoorva Singh Karki so far. Filming the subtle nuances of a complex and controversial social cum judicial issue, his dexterity is proven in this brave leap of visual storytelling when the alleys and the highways of judicial mechanism is brought into forefront with parallel priority.

**Dr. Dipsikha Bhagawati Teaches English at Dawson Higher Secondary and Multipurpose School, Nagaon, Assam.**