

Critique

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Neeyat



***Neeyat* (Motive, India, Hindi, 2023, 130 mins) Directed by: Anu Menon**

The film opens with an exiled Indian billionaire, Ashish Kapoor, known as AK, to friends and his executive assistant Kay Patel as they arrive at a spectacular gothic Scottish castle overlooking the sea. Ashish Kapoor has lost about 20,000 crore rupees in his dream company in India, which has led to many suicides by his erstwhile employees and is in the news. To avoid being incarcerated, he flees India to take refuge in the UK. AK has also invited his close circle to celebrate his birthday. Among his friends and family, we see Zara as a tarot card reader and his healer, his best friend Sanjay Suri with his wife Noor Suri and their son, who idolises Christopher Nolan and wants to win an Oscar one day. AK's girlfriend, Lisa; his brother-in-law Jimmy, an alcoholic, an unemployed rich man who behaves rather like a brat;

AK's stepson Ryan a drug junkie, with his mystery girlfriend, Gigi, are also present.

Even though it's an Indian film with a predominantly Indian cast, the film aims to address a global audience, which is made clear by the action being placed in a locale such as Scotland, which breathes exoticism. The story seems to be loosely based on the actual life instance of Vijay Mallya, the Indian billionaire and tycoon who defrauded several Indian banks of millions of rupees, evaded the investigating agencies in India and absconded to England. Perhaps here in *Neeyat*, the story has been adopted and fictionalised so as to build up the drama and maybe even give rise to empathy and pathos.

The whole film is an attempt to imagine the life of the wealthy, and it reminded me of Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*. While the latter is an

extremely well-made and enjoyable film with a definite political stance, director Anu Menon's film is a ruinous failure. The plot is loose, and the actors seem less than convinced about the kind of roles that they have been asked to portray.

It is a third-person narration and one wonders whether there is a character in the film through whose eyes we get to see all these characters since the voice-over gives us all the secrets and vices of the players in the piece. The way they are presented to us by the voiceover actually aids in nothing but initiating a prejudiced view of them, which is a major flaw in any kind of storytelling.

The plot, at best, resembles an Agatha Christie murder mystery- the tenet of which is a group of people gathered in a country mansion in England where a murder or two takes place, so you get the feeling that you have seen all of it before. The twist in the plot, which comes almost at the end of the film, is, however, an interesting one which also acts as a face-saver for it. However, the fact that there is an intertextual reference to *Kahaani*, a 2012 hit Bollywood film starring Vidya Balan as the avenging woman, which you may have seen, takes away much from this twist. Here, too, the formula seems to be the same. We are introduced to this nervous, bumbling woman who walks into the party, and the host chooses to keep her identity a secret from everyone else. Even as they wonder who it is, the host declares that he will surrender to the Indian authorities and that his properties and bank accounts will be confiscated by the Indian state here, represented by the CBI officer Mira, the mystery woman.

Ashish Kapoor later has a heated argument with his son and storms out of the house, and after a few hours, it is found that he has committed suicide as his "smashed body" is discovered by the faithful Kay on the rocks below. It seems that Ashish Kapoor had jumped off the cliff, as Zara had witnessed. The investigation of it is taken up by Mira, who is artfully dodged by a number of key players who have been planning to keep Ashish Kapoor's red briefcase with them.

The event manager, Tanveer, turns out to be an undercover reporter determined to dig up Ashish Kapoor's dirty secrets and is the first to die after Kapoor as he runs away with the briefcase; next on the list is Sanjay Suri, who is murdered by persons unknown until Mira puts two and two together and unearths the truth. When she discovers that Ashish Kapoor has staged his own death while he is planning to escape with his money converted into bonds Mira takes it upon herself to deliver justice singlehandedly. She encounters AK in an underground cave, which only he and his sister know about. Incidentally, the tarot card reader cum healer is none other than his own sister Zara with whom he had planned his getaway and which a partly unconscious Mira had overheard. The two fight and Kapoor even attacks her, threatening to kill her unless she lets him get away. The two struggle, and the camera moves away to reveal what is happening at his castle until we find Mira emerging triumphantly from his underground hideout with the red briefcase.

The director, Anu Menon, here seems to be delivering a message at the cost of realism. If someone is impersonating a CBI officer, shouldn't there be an investigation into this? Instead, the real Mira seems to be cooling her heels while the impersonator has taken off, a murder committed since Ashish Kumar has been shot dead and his red briefcase missing. Since there is a personal motive involved in the avenging, we don't even get to know her real name apart from the fact that she is not the real Mira, and it is all unravelled at the end of the film. Since her girlfriend was one of the casualties of AK's bankruptcy, she takes it upon herself to avenge her. While Ashish Kapoor seems to be the main villain, the rest of his close associates, with the exception of one or two people among them, come off looking like leeches living off him or at least hoping to.

While the twist is a refreshing one, as in real life, it needed to be dealt with properly to achieve a sense of realism rather than mere poetic justice, as the director aimed for.