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***Pokhar Ke Dunu Paar: A Poetic Deconstruction of
Masculine Ego in Romantic Relationship***



In 2019, during an interview with veteran film critic Anupama Chopra, when asked about the recent success of *Kabir Singh*, director Sandeep Reddy Vanga said that he believed many people connected with the film because they saw traits of the central character in themselves. It is no surprise that Vanga was referring to the male audience when he mentioned this connection, as the film portrays Kabir as a hyper- masculine, toxic male protagonist who passionately falls in love with a soft-spoken girl. A quintessential story of forbidden love, *Kabir Singh*

celebrates the masculine ego and its toxicity in relationships, vehemently justifying horrendous acts of violence against a partner as an expression of love.

“When you are deeply in love, when you’re deeply connected with your woman and vice versa, there’s a lot of honesty in it. If you don’t have that physical demonstration, if you don’t have the liberty of slapping each other, then I don’t see anything there,” Vanga said. This is a brash defence of the deep-seated misogyny and toxic portrayal of the masculine ego, which Vanga attempts to

mask by presenting a phony tragedy of forbidden love to gain sympathy for the central character. Despite this, *Kabir Singh* can be considered a watershed moment in portraying toxic masculinity in Indian cinema, especially mainstream cinema, which has harboured such characters for decades. In these films, male characters are often consumed by their masculine egos, flaunting their masculinity in front of women, frequently making jokes about their physical appearances and notions of womanhood. In recent years, this trend has become more prominent—and dangerous—evident in films like *Pushpa*, *KGF*, and *Animal*. These films feature macho protagonists, while the female leads are often portrayed as too soft and naïve to question the problematic aspects of their partners. In a way, women are depicted as worshippers of the masculine ego, implying that only men can offer them security, solace, and salvation.

Parth Saurabh's 2022 film *Pokhar Ke Dunu Paar*, on the other hand, deconstructs this myth of masculine ego worship in romantic relationships. The story revolves around an eloped couple, Sumit (Abhinav Jha) and Priyanka (Tanaya Khan Jha), who return to their hometown of Darbhanga due to financial hardships caused by the lockdown. Their relationship is on the brink of collapse as Sumit drifts aimlessly, while Priyanka faces the moral dilemma of either leaving him and returning to her father's home or giving their relationship more time to flourish. Though an independent film, the characters are drawn from the archetypes commonly seen in mainstream portrayals of male and female roles. Sumit embodies the typical masculine ego—riding bikes, smoking

cigarettes, and drinking alcohol with his friends— indicators of stereotypical male behaviours. Meanwhile, Priyanka stays at home, attempting to hold together their so-called home, an archetype of the traditional female homemaker.



This contrast between the two central characters throughout the film reflects Indian patriarchal society, where the patriarch takes responsibility for the family, and women are somewhat subjugated to focus on looking after the home. This value system, prevalent in mainstream mass films, is portrayed in an extreme form. Parth Saurabh's *Pokhar Ke Dunu Paar*, on the other hand, explores the fragility of masculine ego and the feminine aversion to passive-aggressive patriarchy in an unromanticized manner.

As the patriarch of this small family, Sumit can be seen in one particular scene, arrogantly telling Priyanka that he is not dependent on anyone, and, since they eloped, it is now his responsibility to provide for the family, after a heated argument between them. Despite spending his time hanging out with his friends, smoking, and drinking, with no motivation to work, Sumit's statement highlights his male psyche. Despite being

backed into a corner, he is still too proud to accept reality. Yet, there is a sense of fragility in Sumit's masculine ego. Though he embodies the masculine ego, he is terrified of losing Priyanka and tries to restrain it. But his friends (portrayed as the agents of masculine ego), taunt him for his perceived inability to be a "real man." They mock him for his lack of influence over the relationship. Thus, Sumit becomes a multidimensional character torn between the moral dilemma of accepting the fragile nature of his masculinity or succumbing to the false machismo to maintain a façade of control.



Similarly, Priyanka faces her own moral dilemma. In a dream sequence, she envisions herself sitting in the backyard of her father's house, with a swing swaying in front of her. Her father is behind her, shaving, while Sumit stands on the other side of the swing. This scene beautifully encapsulates Priyanka's internal conflict—whether to leave Sumit and return to her father or stay and give their relationship a chance. More significantly, it features two patriarchal figures. In this moment, Parth Saurabh showcases the deep-rooted patriarchy that permeates the female psyche in Indian society. Though Priyanka appears free-

spirited—she drinks alcohol (in one scene, Sumit tells his friend Nihal that she can drink a whole bottle) and can be a dominating figure (in another scene, she tells her friend that if Sumit ever hits her, she'll beat him to death)—she can only find security in the presence of one of these masculine figures.

This is a stark representation of patriarchy and the masculine ego by Parth Saurabh. He captures both sides of the coin with sincerity and raises valid questions about our male-dominated society. While most Indian films are too busy glorifying machismo and promoting an alpha-male culture, *Pokhar Ke Dunu Paar* explores masculine vulnerability and how failing to acknowledge it can destroy relationships. At the same time, it illustrates that, despite resistance to masculinity, the feminine perspective remains a taboo in our society. Patriarchy is so deeply embedded that women find themselves in an existential crisis when not accompanied or validated by a male figure.

The poetic landscape of Darbhanga in *Pokhar Ke Dunu Paar* beautifully complements this psychological exploration. Cinematographer Pradeep Vignavelu captures the hollowness through images of cramped apartments, waterlogged roads, and a grim monsoon sky, which evoke a sense of the breakdown of both the relationship and the characters' existential dilemmas. Many scenes feature political symbols of a left-wing party active in India. The couple also resides in a dilapidated hostel for the party workers. As left-wing politics fade into oblivion and right-wing politics rise in India over the last decade, these directorial choices strikingly hint at the fading nature of the utopia

envisioned by the left in the 1960s and '70s. The freedom they promised from inequality and repression is long gone; all that remains is the residue of a dream. This political subtext mirrors the relationship between Sumit and Priyanka. They elope in search of a utopia, but they fail to understand each other's complex psyches and become too enmeshed in their surroundings. When they finally confront this, their relationship gets doomed.

Pokhar Ke Dunu Paar is not only a poetic deconstruction of the masculine ego but also a rich portrayal of the aimless uncertainty that young Indians face today. Much of this uncertainty stems from the

social insecurities experienced by both men and women. Men are so proud of their egos that they feel threatened and act violently, while women, deeply ingrained with patriarchal values, impose self-restraint that prevents them from fully embracing their aversion to male dominance. As a counterpoint to the brash celebration of masculinity in mainstream cinema, Parth Saurabh delicately observes these psychological and social issues. He doesn't offer black-and-white solutions or concrete answers but creates a lasting impression that is crucial to understand the toxic male characters and the effects of their masculine ego in our society.

References:

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