



## Newspaper Headlines Thrashed the Movie: Review of The Film Mission Majnu (2023)

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“Mission Majnu,” another story based on the patriotic theme, by Shantanu Bagchi, an endeavour to pay homage a few more unsung heroes who lost their lives saving the motherland. The film is solely based on a spy thriller inspired by a true incident of Pakistan’s covert mission to test a nuclear bomb. It was a retaliation that was being executed after the successful attempt of India’s first nuclear bomb test in Pokhran<sup>1</sup> in 1974, named ‘Smiling Buddha’. Chief of R&AW, R. N. Kao, recites the story of undercover agent Amandeep Ajitpal Singh. Sidharth Malhotra, also known as Tariq (the cover name,) alias Amandeep (the real name,) who resides in Pakistan, has been chosen to find out the nitty-gritty of the entire mission and to eke out the information. His father was a traitor; in order to eradicate this title, “son of a traitor,” he works compassionately for India and proves himself. His dogged determination is aesthetically represented in the film. Rashmika Mandana’s portrayal of blind Pakistani girl Nasreen has been shown quite a few times. She marries Tariq and is unaware of the mission.

Post intermission, the movie takes off and initiates its covert operation. The movie is garnished by some action scenes in the last plot when the identity of Tariq reveals. As expected in espionage thrillers or war-themed movies, the plot of the movie mirrors the same, where one person sacrifices his life to save another. The movie adheres to the same formula: the hero fights to protect and departs his pregnant wife Nasreen for Dubai so she can live a better life even without him. In the course of the assignment, Tariq perished in the mission, and eventually, his wife comes to know about his identity.

### *Historical narration*

The approach taken to begin the film is quite similar to that of a documentary. Initially presenting the scenario of World War II<sup>2</sup>, Nagasaki, and Hiroshima atomic bombings by the US army (1945), then nudges to the era of 1971, where Pakistan got defeated by India for the consequently third time (Hughes, 2023). As revenge, Pakistan enters the race to make its own atomic bomb (the ultimate symbol of power). The story starts on the

<sup>1</sup> A village in outskirts of Jaisalmer city of Rajasthan, India.

<sup>2</sup> War that involved the entire world and lasted from 1938 to 1945

territory of Pakistan, in Rawalpindi, in 1974. Recitation by R. N. Kao also highlights the power of R&AW<sup>3</sup> and explains their agents have already been infiltrated from Peshawar to Karachi at that time. A few other historical incidents have been covered simultaneously, including the overthrow of the Pakistani government under Bhutto in 1977 and the Israel-aborted Air Strike instance (Hassan, 2007).

### *Roller-coaster portrayal of Indo- Pak relations*

The movie tries to give a cinematic voice to the chicanery relationship of Pakistan with its neighbouring country, India. They pretend to be friendly, but they are not. Along with that, the hypocrisy of Pakistan (Dixit, 2002) has been well portrayed, where, on the one hand, they condemned India for its nuclear test and were doing the same on the other. Also mentioned in detail in the book “India-Pakistan War and Peace” by J. N. Dixit, where he not only describes the unsettled tension between the countries but also gives a panoramic view of some darker, untouched relations between these two nations (Bahadur, 2002).

The story touches on the political backgrounds of both nations. After the change of government in India, the running party, Janta Dal, comes into power to mend the relations with Pakistan. Then Prime Minister of India, Morarji Desai, precludes all the undergoing missions, yet the chief of R&AW continued and brought them to fruition.

This movie reminds the viewers of another true incident movie, ‘*Raazi*,’ directed by Meghna Gulzar, where the cast role ‘Alia Bhat,’ marries a Pakistani guy to extract secret information during the 1971 war tension between both countries. (Gulzar, 2018) (spyscape, 2022). It’s an adaptation of the novel “*Calling Sehmat*” by Harinder Sikka.

Other movies like *Veer Zara* (Chopra, 2004), *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha (A Love Story)* (Sharma, 2001), and *Bajranghi Bhaijaan* (Khan, 2015) sought to promote harmony and brotherhood in the country, whereas *Hindustan Ki Kasam (Swear by India)* (Anand, 1973), *Border (1997)*, and *Refugee (2000)* like movies uncovered the face of Pakistan, and ‘Mission Majnu’ is one of them.

***Higher expectations lead to disappointments.*** Although this 129-minute movie had clarity in its narration, it also lacked any real surprises. It was also a major contributing element that the movie caught the critics attention and earned scathing criticism. Soon after the release of the movie on Netflix, all the newspaper headlines embarked with negative reviews about it. Newspapers like “The Hindu” criticised the movie in their article, saying that Sidharth Mehrotra could not justify its role as undercover. (Kumar, 2023) The movie elicited more yawns than some exciting action scenes to thrill the audience with jingoism. Apart from this, it also praises the love romance between Sidharth Malhotra as Tariq and Rashmika Mandana. She played the role of a blind girl, which had nothing to do with the movie till the end, leaving the audience disappointed (Punwani, 2023). In the entire movie, she just filled the gap with a tad of love by being a co-actor. She had nothing to do in the movie except for the tiny emotional scene at the end. A commendable role has been played by supporting actors Sharib Hashmi and Kumud Mishra (Tariq’s accomplices) as the other two

<sup>3</sup> Research and Analysis Wing, India’s International intelligence agency.

undercover agents of India infiltrated Pakistan ages ago. They kept the movie engaging with a ripple of laughter and suspense.

The weak story of the movie has been targeted in various newspapers. 'Hindustan Times' claims, there were high expectations from Sidharth after seeing him in *Shershaah* (2021), but this story has impacted his role (Kukreja, 2023). The story is inundated with numerous loopholes, which made the viewers laugh at the script. For instance, excerpting information from the Brigadier's house, easy boarding into the train, cracking the codes one after the other with some silly tricks within minutes, and the unavoidable fight scenes of the airport supplied chucklesome rather than thriller in the story. Also, 'son of a traitor'; doesn't add anything substantial to the film's plot. While praising a few plots of the movie, the newspaper mentions the shootout sequence where RAW agents of Pakistan assassinated every suspect.

In this queue, Outlook also thrashed the movie sarcastically and headlined, "It's a pain to watch" (Sur, 2023). Siddharth Mehrotra's performance has degraded the bar raised in "*Shershaah*," and Rashmika Mandanna has been criticised for not doing justice to the role of the blind girl yet still better than Siddharth in the character. The movie also lacks the intensity of jingoism, which has been importance in such patriotic movies; rather, it adds too many dramatic, unrealistic incidents that make fun of it. It also played with historical data terribly. For instance, Israel's intervention has been showcased in the movie in 1984, when Morarji Desai<sup>4</sup> was the administrative head of the country. But according to the facts, Morarji was prime minister of India during 1977-79. (pmindia.gov.in, 1979) In continuation, 'Indian Express' mauled that, the patriotic movie lacks its patriotism and questions its authenticity in compiling the real incidents chronologically. (Gupta, 2023)

'India today' also slated the acting of Siddharth, as he fails to bring anything new to this role, and director Shantanu Bagchi seems confused and lost, whereas the supporting cast has performed better throughout the entire movie, keeping it from falling flat. Though a few parts were engaging, the movie could have had a better direction and story plot.

*Media ecology of movie*, With its music and dialogues, the movie offers a holistic view of patriotic fervour. For instance, "*maati ko maa kehte hai*" (we only say mother to soil) in Sonu Nigam's voice smacks hard to give goosebumps.

The stereotypical<sup>5</sup> Pakistani-Muslim appearance of Sidharth Mehrotra attracts online trolls, not only for his kajar, tawiz; and clothing styles throughout the movie, but also for his greetings "*adaab*", "*janab*", "*bhai jaan*" too. This portrayal was nothing more than a laughter therapy that came via Indian cinema (Images, 2023). Aeons have passed; the old Indo-Pak relationship is being stretched in the media. It's time to impose a moratorium on this genre, and emphasis should instead be placed on fostering unity rather than hatred.

The Times of India praised all the characters and plots of the movie. From "*Student of the Year*" to this, Sidharth Mehrotra has grown commendably; his delivery of dialogues and action scenes are so apt. Following the movie "*Pushpa*", Rashmika also expanded her persona. Though acting as a blind girl was a challenging task, she held it graciously. The sweet on-screen chemistry between them was entertaining to see.

<sup>4</sup> Morarji Ranchhodji Desai, former prime minister of India born in Gujrat in 1896.

<sup>5</sup> A fixed notion about something, which is often not true.

The heart skips a beat on the plot where, Tariq was about to get shot down. Initial dialogues of the movie “*Mitti se dur mitti ke sipahi*” (Soldiers of the country, far from the land) sparked the enthusiasm of patriotism in viewers from the beginning. Yet, despite numerous flaws, the movie could not impact Tanishk Bagchi’s music, that was also a saviour in the film. Overall, the movie made a commendable effort; however, Aseem Arora and Parveez Shakh need to sharpen and refine their below average screenplay considerably because the entire movie was quite predictable.

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