

Ranbir Kapoor's *Animal* falls short with its toxic male characters, unnecessary gore

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Animal, directed by Kabir Singh/Arjun Reddy fame Sandeep Reddy Vanga, is all that it promised in its snazzy trailer and more. Let's get some basic questions out of the way.

Is it a mass 'entertainer' taken 100 notches above the *Pushpas*, *KGFs* and *Jawaans* of the world? Yes, it is. Is the movie as stylised, edgy, and inventive as it appears in the trailers? Yes, 100% per cent. Does it have impressive performances and adrenaline-pumping BGM? Yes! Does it have brutal, stomach-churning, toe-curling violence? Gosh, yes! Does it go deep into the dark, deadly, cyclic nature of violence in a brash, unapologetic manner? Yes. Does it hold your attention for its mammoth 3 hour plus runtime? Actually, yes! Does it push you out of your comfort zone? Oh yes, it kicks you out of it! Does it treat its women with as much disdain (if not more) as in Kabir Singh? Duh, what a question!

Should you watch *Animal*? Yes, it's actually a very important film that women (and men) must watch. Why? We'll explain below.

But do all of the above make for riveting, albeit polarising cinema? NO!

The reason why *Animal*, starring Ranbir Kapoor, Anil Kapoor, Rashmika Mandana and Tripti Dimri fails in its cinematic evaluation is because the film does not feel like cinema. A few years ago, writer-director Sandeep Reddy Vanga, after the backlash he received for *Kabir Singh*, had angrily promised critics that he would show them "what violence is". Well, *Animal* is that promise.

To be fair, *Kabir Singh*, despite its faults, had many interesting moments and a uniquely disturbed protagonist who was as fascinating as he was revolting. It had built a universe around him, recognised his flaws and given him certain layers which could be peeled open for judgement and debate. *Animal* does nothing of that sort. Its very purpose is to offend – women (but naturally!), sensitive human beings, medical professionals, historians, minorities...well, anyone with half a functioning brain and thinking mind.

When the very existence of a certain form of art is to offend and provoke, it ceases to be art. It becomes a personal statement. And that's what *Animal* is – Sandeep Reddy Vanga's middle finger to the world-at-large. That's why it's kind of difficult to judge it by its cinematic virtues, plot or storyline. In Vanga-verse, anything and everything goes in the name of violence and male dominance.

The story is obvious from its trailer. Ranvijay Balbir Singh (Ranbir Kapoor) is the problem child whose father Balbir Singh (Anil Kapoor), a hotshot industrialist has no time for him. Ranvijay has huge daddy issues but as a rebellious teen, no one thinks of taking him to a therapist. From a violent, ill-tempered brat pining for his father's attention, he metamorphoses into a violent, bile-loving adult who still pines for his father's attention. Into this mix come some cowering women, equally vile male villains, backstabbing fami-



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ly members and loyal henchmen.

To be fair, the first 1.5 hours of the film are very interesting. The non-linear narrative, the father-son tension, the heavy pall of violence, the threat of the character imploding any minute keeps you curious. However, within two hours, the film, just like its lead, derails. An assassination attempt brings the father and son close, but as the latter goes batshit crazy in revenge, so does the plot.

If toxic relationships between parents and children lay the core of the story, we don't get to see it. What we see is a growling yet helpless Anil Kapoor and a forever-charged up Ranbir mouthing 'Papa Papa' more times than Alia Bhatt says 'Shivaa' in *Brahmastra*. Nuance and character complexities are sacrificed at the altar of action.

Now, gratuitous violence on screen is nothing new. If you have the temperament to enjoy scenes of blood flowing like water from a leaky tap, limbs being chopped and gigantic machine guns firing endless rounds, great! Quentin Tarantino and Wong Kar Wai, and in Bollywood, Anurag Kashyap make blood-soaked, angry films that are a treat to watch. Similarly, problematic, unlikeable protagonists are also completely okay. Leonardo DiCaprio has played foul-mouthed irredeemable roles in many of his films that are

brilliant in their bravado and irreverence.

But in *Animal*, the violence, just like many other elements, for example, the name of the Kapoors' company, Swastik, a speech by Ranbir with his hand held straight in front of him, the cuss words, the references to parts of the male and female anatomy, are there purely for shock value and not for progression of the story.

What still keeps it together is the performance of Ranbir Kapoor. As you would have read on social media, he is brilliant. The actor has completely surrendered to the twisted vision of his director and one can't imagine anyone but Ranbir playing this complex, crazy character with the level of insanity and passion that he does. The others, including Anil Kapoor and Bobby Deol (whose much-talked-about presence is like an extended cameo), don't match up and that's purely because of underdeveloped arcs.

Finally, a word about the women! I will not list the dialogues and sequences that dehumanise women, but suffice to say that it is an extreme celebration of toxic masculinity, deliberately designed to shock, titillate and tease you into a response. Actors like Rashmika Mandana (average) and Tripti Dimri (beautiful but wasted) are just side notes to service the leads.

However, while there would undoubtedly be a lot of debate, discussion and frothing at the mouth by women or critics, there is a huge silver lining in the film.

Men in *Animal* are so disgraced, dehumanised, brutal and toxic that it actually feeds into the male stereotypes that women are warned about. Every single male character lives up to the title, displaying beastly qualities you'd rather run miles away from. For all its alpha male 'it's a man's world' posturing, the film does a disservice to men more than women.

So ladies and gentlemen, here is the final verdict. *Animal* has an important message. It tells women exactly what kind of men they should stay away from. Men, it tells you exactly what you should never be! It also has a lesson for parents. Never raise a child like Ranvijay. Or Kabir Singh.

If you ever have any doubt, just watch a Sandeep Reddy Vanga film.

Animal
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Cast: Ranbir Kapoor, Rashmika Mandana, Anil Kapoor, Bobby Deol

