

Paresh Rawal's unceremonious exit, Akshay Kumar's lawsuit, Priyadarshan and Suniel Shetty clueless: Is the team doing Hera Pheri with fans?

Hera Pheri 3 has been in the making for 10 years. Since then, it's changed four directors, and Akshay Kumar has walked out and back into the threequel twice. Is the film in trouble again or is this all a marketing gimmick?

"Ye Baburao ka style hai" memes flooded the internet as Paresh Rawal walked out of Hera Pheri 3 last week, making fans wonder if the film will be shelved yet again. This was the closest the comedy threequel came to go on floors in the 10 years since the idea was first conceived. Akshay Kumar as Raju, Suniel Shetty as Shyam, and Paresh Rawal as Baburao, were all onboard along with the director of the iconic first part from 2000, Priyadarshan. Here's a timeline of the doomed threequel...

Even though the Hera Pheri sequel, Phir Hera Pheri (2006), ended on a cliffhanger, the film wasn't renewed for a threequel for nine years. In 2015, Hera Pheri 3 was launched by producer Firoz A Nadiadwala, but with a twist in the tale. While Rawal and Shetty reprised their roles, Akshay Kumar was nowhere to be seen as Raju. Kumar, at a new turn in his sensibilities as an actor, was going through a career shift by turning to more socially conscious cinema like Airlift and Rustom, both of which released in 2016.

Consequently, a new plot device of 'Duplicate Raju' was woven into the script by director Neeraj Vora, who also wrote the first part, and wrote and directed the sequel. Dostana duo Abhishek Bachchan and John Abraham claimed to be Raju, much to the confusion of Shyam, Baburao, and the fans. Vora was all set to helm the threequel.

Abraham mentioned in an interview with the Times of India that he's unaware of the film's development. He claimed that Bachchan has walked out, but he'd be open to playing Raju once Hera Pheri 3 goes on floors again. The film wasn't taking off due to financial constraints. Later that year, Vora went into coma after a massive stroke, and passed away, leaving the film's future in uncertainty.

With Vora's death, the plot device of 'Duplicate Raju' got eliminated as well. In May, it was announced that Masti and Dhamaal director Indra Kumar will take over the directorial duties. Much to the fans' delight, it was announced that Akshay would return as Raju in Hera Pheri 3, which would be an adventure comedy, on the lines of Indra's subsequent hit, Total Dhamaal (2019). Akshay was looking for a return to the comedy genre with films like Hera Pheri 3 and Housefull 4 (2019).

Hera Pheri 3 was supposed to go on floors in 2020, and release in 2021, but the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns stalled the process.

2022 – As Indra Kumar walked out of the sequel citing creative differences with Akshay, the actor followed suit, returning to his brand of socially conscious cinema like Raksha Bandhan and Ram Setu. After the success of Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2, Nadiadwala signed the director-actor duo of Anees Bazmee and Kartik Aaryan for Hera Pheri 3. Rawal also confirmed the development and said the film would go on floors the following year. At the HT Leadership Summit, Akshay claimed that while he wants to make Hera Pheri 3 work, he wasn't satisfied with the creative changes.

In February, news broke out that Akshay has acquired the rights of Hera Pheri 3 from Nadiadwala, agreed to reprise his role of Raju in the threequel, and enrolled his Bachchan Paandey director Farhad Samji as the captain of the ship. Samji even shot an announcement promo with the three actors, which hasn't been released yet. In March, Sanjay Dutt also confirmed he's joined the film's cast.

In January, Akshay confirmed while promoting Sky Force that he'd start Hera Pheri 3 next year. While shooting for Priyadarshan's horror comedy Bhoot Bungla, he approached the director and convinced him to helm the threequel. On the occasion of Priyadarshan's birthday on January 30, Akshay announced the director has agreed to return to the franchise, and will be taking it forward instead of Samji.

In an interview with The Lallantop in April, Rawal confessed playing Baburao has been a trap because the audience finds it difficult to appreciate Rawal in serious roles. He even revealed that after Phir Hera Pheri, he approached Vishal Bhardwaj and R Balki to cast him in extremely opposite roles because he wanted to get out of that image. However, he also confirmed Hera Pheri 3 would start next year, and that he doesn't want to hamper the franchise.

In May, Rawal confirmed his exit from Hera Pheri 3, claiming no creative differences with Priyadarshan. He said he just doesn't see himself as part of that franchise today. On Tuesday, reports claimed Akshay is all set to sue Rawal, his co-star of several hit films, for Rs 50 crore for breaching his contract. Priyadarshan also backed Akshay, and claimed he and Akshay had no clue about Rawal's exit. Suniel Shetty also echoed the same. However, in an interview with Mid-Day on Monday, Rawal claimed he'd informed all three about his decision and Priyadarshan even tried to convince him.

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So, what's the truth? Has Rawal indeed walked out of Hera Pheri 3 so unceremoniously, just because of a creative burnout? And has Akshay really taking Rawal to court? While there are conflicting versions out there, a reliable source close to the actor-producer confirmed to SCREEN that it may very well be a marketing gimmick.

"After Akshay spoke of his exit from Hera Pheri 3 at the summit three years ago, the Hera Pheri fan army broke the internet. They're just trying to recreate the same excitement now, with Rawal's exit," said the source, adding, "I'm not denying what Akshay was feeling then and Paresh ji is feeling now about the creative disagreement or burnout, but they're just using those true feelings to build an illusion around the film that it's not happening."

"Once the teaser, that they shot way back in 2023, is out, the fans are going to forget about these marketing gimmicks and lap up the reunion they've all been waiting for. Some harmless hera pheri doesn't hurt, especially when it's in favour of the actual Hera Pheri and its much-awaited return," said a trade analyst on the condition of anonymity.