GASLIGHT – movie review

***Directed by - Pavan Kirpalani***

***Cast – Sara Ali Khan,Chitrangada Singh,Rahul Dev,Vikrant Massey,Akshay Oberoi***

***Year -2023***

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Princess Meesha (Sara Ali Khan) returns to her palace after a long absence only to find that her father is missing. Suspecting foul play, the princess tries to uncover the truth behind his father’s disappearance while navigating the paranormal for clues.

Meesha became estranged from her father after her mother’s suicide and her own accident that left her in a wheelchair. Her mixed feelings for her stepmother (Chitrangada Singh), the strange morbid occurrences that gripped her in the palace and the dismissive attitude of everyone towards her father’s disappearance makes her fear that her father has been murdered and someone on the inside is involved. Meesha’s quest to find what happened to her father and who killed him is the focus of the movie.

Gaslight is that rare Indian thriller where the fear is quiet and lurking in the shadows and an early-set air of mystery keeps you riveted. The sound of the movie deserves a special mention because the effects like spooky piano melody, creaking doors, deliberate footfalls on hardwood floors, projector playing old reels- create an eerie tone that keeps you hooked. Although a huge palace with large empty rooms that rarely has power at night may seem pedantic in this century but the overall darkened ambience that is only dimly lit by candles keeps the tension alive.

Pavan Kirpalani’s Gaslight has a gripping build up that keeps you engaged and wanting for more but its only as good as the build up lasts. The movie starts falling apart as the movie transitions from build up to unfolding of the mystery. The climax seemed rushed, predictable, and almost a desperate attempt to make up for some imaginary lost time. Even though it had all the elements like a haunted palace, suspicious family members, greedy acquaintances, a determined daughter and a buried truth – to make a creative crime-mystery flick but the climax does a massive injustice to an otherwise well thought out build up. The final twist around Meesha tried to salvage the story from a complete wreck but the damage was already done.

But it’s not all bad as the actors did a respectable job portraying their characters, regardless of the character arc in the movie. We see Sara Ali Khan playing a quieter but a more assertive role than usual and doing so while moving in a wheelchair makes her work commendable. Even Chitrangada Singh stepped out of her comfort zone and excels the unconventional role of a stepmother with secrets. Rahul Dev and Akshay Oberoi have made the most of their limited screen times with their exceptional acting skills that precedes their reputation. The actor who falls victim to the dowdily written climax is the otherwise flawless Vikrant Massey who plays the role of the villain and has done a fair job despite the challenges of a predictable journey of the character.

Despite its shortcomings, The Gaslight is a promising stride towards a different style of storytelling thriller mystery movies in Bollywood that is not built on just jump scares and confusing number of irrelevant deaths. So if you like the genre, it’s worth a shot on a lazy weekend afternoon.