



LIFF OPENING NIGHT GALA: WORLD PREMIERE

Dobaaraa

+ Q&A with Anurag Kashyap and other special guests

India's internationally best known director, Anurag Kashyap, returns to the festival with this surreal *Sliding Doors*-style story of a young nurse (Taapsee Pannu) who moves in with her husband and daughter next to a derelict house. Searching through the new place they come across an old camcorder. Playing it during an electric storm, the nurse freakishly connects live to a little boy who lived in the house decades before, but died. In an attempt to stop the boy's death she begs him not to go next door to the deserted house. He delays and this not only disrupts time but her own life story with terrible consequences.

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Indian filmmaker Anurag Kashyap's latest feature, *Dobaaraa*, is based on the Spanish thriller *Mirage* (2018) by Oriol Paulo. 'Dobaaraa' in Hindi translates to 'Again' in English. But, in this multi-temporal film, even the title has layered implications – Do (Two): Baaraa (Twelve) – pivotal to the plot. With characters simultaneously existing in parallel universes and manipulating events in the past to alter the future, the film is a heady cocktail of Nolanesque spirit. Conscious of the inevitable comparisons, Kashyap smartly drops a reference to the Hollywood filmmaker in one scene.

Kashyap is no stranger to surrealism – his mind-bending 2007 thriller *No Smoking* attests to that. Known for exploring dark themes and depraved characters, the rebellious auteur has been the torchbearer of alternative Hindi cinema for most of this century. Besides directing path-breaking films such as *Black Friday* (2004) and *Gangs of Wasseypur* Parts 1 and 2 (2012), he has written and produced several unconventional releases, including the BAFTA-nominated *The Lunchbox* (2013), which he co-produced.

What fascinated you about Mirage? Is Dobaaraa a remake or does it only draw inspiration from it?

I saw *Mirage* only once and liked the story. We already had the script because the producer auctioned the rights to it even before the film came out. I found the script very intriguing. For me, the source material was more the script than the film, which felt too dense and packed. But I am very fond of the filmmaker as I've watched his earlier movies. I think they made hard editing choices in the film.

My writer, Nihit Bhave, and I took the script as a takeoff point. The basic plot remains the same; we just adapted it to the Indian scenario. Since we're primarily catering to an Indian audience that might not be too comfortable with the idea of a parallel universe, I improvised a lot, made intuitive decisions based on our shooting locations and just went along with the flow.

There's a bit of situational humour in Dobaaraa involving the character of Vikas Awasthi (Rahul Bhat). Mirage doesn't have such funny sequences, right?

Mirage is more intense and dark. In my film, I wanted to make every character more humane. Even the antagonist committing the crime does it

unintentionally and isn't an evil person. But, unfortunately, things take a terrible turn. The character of Vikas Awasthi is simply stupid, and he just cannot stay faithful to his wife.

Coming to another high-concept Spanish film, The Platform – which I believe was your favourite film of 2019 – it reminded me of your movie No Smoking, which is also very cerebral, visceral, and political. Why do you think both films are so under-appreciated?

While it's true that viewers are getting exposed to diverse content on streaming platforms, there are still few takers for challenging films like *The Platform* or some of my works. These films demand undivided attention and engagement, whereas most people want to binge-watch content. Maybe it's too much effort for them as they are used to consuming mainstream stuff that spoon-feeds the viewer.

You're one of the biggest champions of alternative cinema in India and have lent support to many budding film artists. It must be very satisfying for you to see indie filmmakers creating such refreshing work nowadays.

I consume a lot of cinema and am mighty impressed with some of the young indie filmmakers of today: Achal Mishra, Aditya Vikram Sengupta, Prateek Vats, and the likes. I liked Ritwik Pareek's *Dug Dug* very much, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival last year. A recent Punjabi film I loved was Anmol Sidhu's *Jaggi* (2021) – very raw and hard-hitting. These are the independent voices who are going to speak up for themselves and other people.

Your critics allege that post the success of Gangs of Wasseypur and Sacred Games (India's first Netflix original series, co-directed by Kashyap in 2018), there is pressure on you to dilute your rawness and create more palatable fare. How do you react to such talks?

I think many people were put off by *Choked* (2020), and that's when such talks surfaced. But that's a script I liked, so I bought it and made the film. I don't approach my movies thinking about whether they would be palatable. I try to make a film without dumbing it down. I can't make compromises; otherwise, I won't feel like watching my own films.

Raman Raghav 2.0 (Psycho Raman, 2016) and Mukkabaaz (The Brawler, 2017) were made after Wasseypur, but were raw and intense films. It's just that Wasseypur has become larger than life, and I refuse to revisit that because I don't want to be boxed in. I've seen enough filmmakers getting boxed in by success, and their work becoming repetitive. There has been a lot of pressure on me to make a third part to Wasseypur, which I have outrightly rejected.

Also, the budget of a film determines the flexibility in content. I had more freedom when I made *Raman Raghav 2.0* because the budget was just 35 million (INR). Once the budget goes up, the freedom reduces. Currently, the film I'm making isn't palatable from any count.

The popularity of *Gangs of Wasseypur* and the crime web series *Mirzapur* has influenced the mainstream perception of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to a great extent. As a result, many view the region as a violent hotbed of crime, but that is not entirely true.

I never anticipated *Wasseypur* would become what it is. I made it because I found the life of those gangsters amusing, who had been stupidly fighting over their egos for generations. Had I known what it would eventually become, I

guess everybody involved in that film would have been paid very well! But, unfortunately, it was a film made with no money; nobody got paid for it.

The kind of content being produced nowadays with Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as a backdrop is what is selling, which has become a worrisome trend. But it’s pleasing to see a web series like *Panchayat* (2020-) that portrays the harmonious side of the Hindi heartland also gaining popularity. There are a lot of heartwarming stories coming out of the region, and I hope people consume that too, not just adrenaline-pumping content.

Arun A.K., bfi.org.uk, 22 June 2022

DOBAARAA

Director: Anurag Kashyap
Production Companies: Cult Movies, Athena Entertainment, The Vermilion World
Producers: Gaurav Bose, Ekta Kapoor, Shobha Kapoor, Sunir Khetarpal
Production Manager: Kritika Uppal
Action Director: Amritpal Singh
1st Assistant Director: Sakshi Mehta
Script Supervisor: Shreya Sharma
Casting Director: Gautam Kishanchandani
Writer: Nihit Bhawe
Cinematographer: Sylvester Fonseca
Editor: Ranendu Ranjan
Visual Effects Supervisor: Dhrutiranjana Sahoo
Sound Designer/Production Sound Mixer: Dhiman Karmakar
Boom Operator: Mukhtar Shaikh
Sound Editor: Satish Solanki

Cast

Taapsee Pannu
Saswata Chatterjee
Rahul Bhatt
Pavai Gulati

India 2022
135 min

LONDON INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL

LIFF Opening Night Gala: World Premiere: Dobaaraa + Q&A with Anurag Kashyap and other special guests
Thu 23 Jun 18:00
British Gala: Little English + Q&A with director Pravesh Kumar, cast and crew
Fri 24 Jun 20:30
Gandhi + intro
Sat 25 Jun 19:00
Last Film Show (Chhello Show) + Q&A with director Pan Nalin
Sun 26 Jun 15:00
Once upon a Time in Calcutta + Q&A with director Aditya Vikram Sengupta
Thu 30 Jun 18:00
Too Desi Too Queer + Q&A
Fri 1 Jul 18:00
In Conversation with Aparna Sen + UK Premiere: The Rapist (Busan)
Sat 2 Jul 17:00
LIFF Closing Gala: Superfan: The Nav Bhatia Story + Q&A with Nav Bhatia and producer Rinku Ghei
Sun 3 Jul 15:00

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