

# bollywood



\* Barbara Mori and Hrithik Roshan in *Kites*: overhyped, under-developed.

## Drifting *Kites*, sinking hearts

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

**A** year ago at Cannes, Anurag Basu's *Kites* was shown to international trade teams. It was a rough cut, and journalists like me were not given the privilege of watching it, lest we wrote an unflattering piece on the film.

A year later this May, *Kites*, produced by Reliance Big Pictures, was premiered at the Cannes Market, having failed to get into the Festival's official sections. This time too, scribes were not welcome.

The PR girl at Reliance was apologetic, but firm. The screenings, and there were a few, were only for the industry, she smiled. Seeing the disappointment written on my face, she quickly invited me for a gala cocktail party, hosted by Reliance.

However, the point of the matter is, for all the trouble Reliance took to keep its baby up, up and away, *Kites*, has virtually crashed into the ground. Despite the promos and the parties, with the film's lead couple, Hrithik Roshan and Barbara Mori, being carted around the world (with a romance between them, real or imagined, thrown in), Basu, who had given us movies like *Life in a Metro*, *Gangster* and *Murder*, has failed to keep his *Kites* flying.

Many things are wrong with the film. To begin with, it is a rehash of so many movies, including Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise*, Woody Allen's *Matchpoint*, Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* and even Charlie Chaplin's *Gold Rush*. So what, one may ask. After all, many Indian films are either blatantly inspired by or copies of foreign work. True, but I did not expect this from Basu or Reliance.

It took nearly three years for *Kites* to hit the screens, and I am told that Hrithik Roshan and father Rakesh Roshan (who wrote the story and produced the movie) spent months editing and re-editing it, while poor Basu hung around watching. Unfortunately, this is the problem

with most Indian films: editors are not allowed to edit or, in other words, do their job.

And, *Kites* has no story to brag about: an Indian man living in Las Vegas, who makes money helping illegal immigrant girls get their green cards by marrying them, falls in love with a Mexican beauty, also looking to settle down in the land of plenty. The makers must have been naïve to believe that exotic locales, bare-all costumes, stylish thugs and car chases would do the trick. What emerges from this slick package is a screenplay without substance.

Panned by critics and audiences, *Kites* may well turn out to be a black mark in Hrithik's 10-year career. And the man seems to be smarting under such reception. An annoyed Hrithik is said to have snapped that every man was entitled to his view. But then, when that one view grows into a torrent, surely the message cannot be missed.

Much like the Bachchans, the Roshans too are awfully allergic to criticism. Earlier, when a reviewer had pointed out Hrithik's flaws in his Urdu diction in *Jodhaa Akbar*, the entire family, including wife Sussanne, was enraged.

The family must understand that Hrithik is no great actor. We have seen him in *Krrish*, *Kaho Naa...Pyaar Hai* and *Koi...Mil Gaya* among some others, and except for finely chiselled looks he has had not much to offer. Worse, he is turning into a narcissist, obsessed with the way the camera captures him, the right angles, the right smile and so on.

Finally, in what seems like a desperate bid to get *Kites* off the ground, Filmkraft, Roshans' production banner, has got a shorter version of the movie done by Brett Ratner. A music video director known for helming the three Jackie Chan *Rush Hour* films, Ratner may not be able to magically transform *Kites* into something dramatically different.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran has been writing on Indian and international cinema for more than three decades.)

### Star performer

Katrina Kaif (*below*) is better known as that Bollywood enfant terrible Salman Khan's girlfriend. May not be for long, though. Starring in Prakash Jha's *Raajneeti*, soon to open worldwide, Katrina or Kat, as she is lovingly called, plays Indu, the daughter of a political financier. Rich and spoilt, she wears couture clothes and commands life the way she wants it. Till, the man she loves dumps her. Pushed to be a politician in a role that is rumoured to echo Sonia Gandhi's life, Katrina changes into a feisty, lecture-spewing woman. "I look pretty plain then", she quips at all those detractors who had considered her no more than a pretty, though dumb doll. Now *Raajneeti* may well turn her into an actress to be lauded.

Kat, who was raised in Hawaii, America and England, obviously had a problem with Hindi. Her diction was embarrassingly accented, and we heard that in movies like *Namaste London*, *Singh is Kinng*, *Race* and *Blue*. However, she is crossing that barrier.

"I'm fully aware that my Hindi has been criticised by a lot of people. But the Hindi I have spoken in *Raajneeti* is more correct than all my previous movies. I have taken special care to dub my lines carefully. I know there are heroines who speak better Hindi than me, but with due modesty, let me add, Hindi alone is not the criteria for being in a position of power," she avers.

Life will not stop at *Raajneeti* for Katrina. And cinema is not her only passion. She has just opened an orphanage in Madurai, and would want another in Mumbai, an extension to the one she runs with her mother in Hong Kong. Indeed, a side to Katrina that many of us were not aware of.

