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DHURANDHAR: A MOVIE OR A PHENOMENON

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The movie *Citizen Vigilante* has taken the west by storm. Directed by Uwe Boll, starring Armie Hammer, released and instantly banned and blocked in countries like Germany, UK, South Korea, Taiwan, it has been dubbed as right-wing and Islamophobic. A similar labeling of movies in India has seen going on for some time and *Dhurandhar* has been one of them. The unprecedented success of *Dhurandhar* movie on a global scale has created ripples all around, especially in the Indian political and media landscape. While it has been acclaimed by many as a cinematic masterpiece, an incredibly unyielding script and storyline with a major realism ingrained, some have gone overboard in trashing it as political, propaganda and supportive of India's ruling elite. An objective analysis of the movie, however, reveals that it has been made beautifully, with a lot of dedication, immaculate research and impressive performances by the entire crew.

The story revolves around one *Jaskirat* who getting trained to join the military, under a certain situation turns rogue, kills some people violently, imprisoned and ordered death sentence by a court. Given his training as a Special Forces officer, dedication and the extreme anger against criminals, he is whisked away by Indian intelligence agencies, molded and sent to Pakistan as an undercover operative to infiltrate major criminal gangs in Karachi's Lyari area (Pakistan) to carry out major covert operations.

It is a fact that criminals in almost all countries, India, US, UK, Italy, Thailand, Pakistan, Kenya, Middle East or the west, everywhere gets patronized and protected by politicians who in turn secure money or use them for their illegal activities surreptitiously. A good number of Indian movies portray the political-criminal-terror nexus on a routine basis and nobody raises a finger on it.

It then looks bizarre that *Dhurandhar* is being castigated by some for using this background and is thrashed by known anti-government elements/ propagandists as anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan or hyper nationalistic. To begin with, similar to other movies, it also begins with a

disclaimer that *inspired by real events, the movie is a work of fiction*. The background of the movie is set in *Lyari*, an infamous criminal den in Pakistan's largest city Karachi. All major characters, Rehman Dacait, Arshad Pappu, Uzair Baloch, SP Aslam, ASP Omar, politician Jamali their actions and events, as shown in the movie are real and factual.

As for charges of portrayal of Muslims and Pakistan in bad light and misinformation, that is simply ludicrous. Hundreds of Indian movies have shown various Hindu communities/sects, Pandits, Thakurs and soon, as fraud, corrupt, rapists but none found that objectionable, hate mongering or propaganda. Many Indian movies like *Company*, *Satya*, *Vaastav*, *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai*, *Shootout at Lokhandwala* and web series like *Sacred Games*, *Mirzapur*, *Guns & Gulaabs*, *Mathagan*, *Mugilan* showed a high degree of violence, abusive language and criminal-terror-political nexus in different parts of India. Did that made India a hateful, abusive, violent society or Hindus as violent, hateful gangsters?

The so-called intellectuals and media personalities, who are losing sleep on the wide cinematic and financial success of *Dhurandhar*, are the ones who have a track record of abusing Indian PM Modi, ruling party BJP, characterizing them as fascist and frequently claiming their right to freedom of expression is in danger. The same coterie however, fails to tolerate same freedom for a young, dynamic film maker, *Aditya Dhar* to create popular, realistic cinema in the form of *Uri*, *Article 370* and *Dhurandhar*. Their appreciation and adulation for likes of *Pathaan*, *Jawan*, *Main Hoon Naa*, *My Name is Khan*, *Ek Tha Tiger*, *Tiger Zinda Hai*, *Tiger 3* (all portraying an unrealistic RAW and ISI collaboration, in fighting against rogues from RAW/Indian Army), raises several credible questions about their intellect, mental state and of course, loyalty to their homeland, India.

Another important aspect to ponder is that while western/Hollywood movies showing their lead characters *Stallone*, *Tom Cruise*, *Tom Hanks*, *Mel Gibson*, *Chris Evans* doing patriotic heroics and Russia bashing, is acclaimed by same people as masterpieces and great cinema, they find it intolerable when an Indian film maker puts a highly factual story on screen where Pakistan and its politico-military-ISI nexus is exposed explicitly.

Does that mean if a small and influential section in Indian polity, media and intelligentsia, cutting across religion/polity, harbor hidden loyalty to Pakistan, at the cost of India or is there a number of *Jameel Jamali*(s) continue to reside in India, post-1947. It is not merely an allegation but a realistic hypothesis. The explicit reluctance to act against Pakistan, post 26/11 (in spite of IAF/Indian Army's willingness), followed by a \$25 million grant to Pakistan as aid to deal with floods, a clandestine attempted deal to vacate Siachen peaks (held after huge military and financial costs), open support to governmental/non-governmental action to

play down Pakistan's terror support against India, all are broad indications that somewhere a number of such individuals/groups continue to flourish and play games against country's interests.

Dhurandhar at best is a movie with a realistic depiction of events and facts, associated with Indian politico-military-intelligence structure. The depiction is factual, of course, with cinematic liberties taken here and there, but is entertaining and has appealed to masses. It has secured huge success in many Indian languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam besides Hindi and has run full in theaters across US, Canada, UK though pandering to Pakistani sentiments, it has been barred from getting released

In the Middle East. Some Pakistani media personalities have gone so low, suggesting that PM Modi saw the movie and made changes to suit his narrative.

Movies broadly are a reflection of happenings in the society. To be used mostly as a means of entertainment, adding adjectives like propaganda or narrative, fails to do justice with filmmakers, their ventures and months of efforts. For decades, movies across India have been made with a particular slant but rarely critics and audiences protested. Labeling of recent popular movies like *The Kashmir Files*, *The Tashkent Files*, *The Vaccine War*, *The Bengal Files*, *Dhurandhar* and recently released, acclaimed but banned in the west, *Citizen Vigilante* as right-wing, Islamophobic is politically motivated and smear campaign against critical works on important contemporary events.

Seeing *Dhurandhar* as a mere movie will help all including those getting hysterical, going after it calling it a political propaganda. The movie has become a big commercial success and will retain its position as a top grosser in the years to come. However, as audiences and critics, most prudent action for us would be to see and treat it like other movies. It too can be objectively analyzed, criticized and appreciated but to junk it as a propaganda movie, is out of sync and clearly looks a part of narrative and propaganda itself.
