

Indians feel every Pakistani is a religious fanatic: Pakistani director

Director Shoaib Mansoor feels his 'Khuda Kay Liye', which is the first Pakistani film to have a commercial release in India, has resonance in every country with a sizeable Muslim population. And he urges non-Muslims to watch it.

'I want non-Muslims to see my film to know the crisis that Muslims in Pakistan and elsewhere are facing and to know what real Islam is and what the Pakistanis are all about,' Mansoor told IANS in an interview.

'Tragically, I feel, Indians don't know much about Pakistan. Indians feel every Pakistani is a religious fanatic. That's not true. If you go to any city of Pakistan you'll find only one out of 100 men with a beard. But here in India in the bazaars of Andheri in [Mumbai](#) and Chandni Chowk in Delhi, almost every Muslim sports a beard.'

Released Friday, the film delicately yet deftly draws out the disturbing and distracting dichotomies between radical and liberal Islamic elements in Pakistan. The topical film, already an unqualified success in Pakistan, now comes to India.

'I hope that the theme makes an impact here in India. It will not only please me personally but also help in erasing some of the misconceptions about life in Pakistan,' said Mansoor.

Excerpts:

Q: What prospects do you see for 'Khuda Kay Liye' (KKL) in India?

A: Well.... it has belied all scepticism by succeeding in Pakistan. I can only hope that the theme makes an impact here in India. It will not only please me personally but also help in erasing some of the misconceptions about life in Pakistan.

Yes, it isn't a formula film. I'd have never made a commercial film. I've been doing non-formulistic work on Pakistan television. For almost 25 years now I was being offered opportunities to direct feature films. I refused them all because my interpretation of cinema didn't match the demands of the Pakistani financiers. I wanted to use the cinematic medium for more than just entertainment, or even artistic satisfaction.

Q: So what according to you should cinema do?

A: Well, according to some who have seen 'Khuda Kay Liye', it doesn't fit into any established definition of cinema. I keep telling the traditionalists that the formula they've been applying to cinema all the time was not the formula after all. In fact audiences were being forced to watch a certain kind of entertainment because nothing else was made available to them. I signed Pakistan's top-most Shaan for KKL. But I didn't sign him to cash in on his stardom. I always thought he was a brilliant actor being grossly misused in our movies.

Q: Do you see your film's theme, Islamic fundamentalism, being equally prevalent on both sides of the border?

A: Not just Pakistan and India but anywhere where Muslims live. And why just Muslims? Anyone concerned with the isolation of any community would empathise with my film. When KKL was shown at the Cairo Film Festival, the impact was even stronger than in Pakistan. At the end of the screening, women came running and weeping to say they completely understood issues addressed in my film. I'm hoping the film would strike a chord in India. You've a larger Muslim population than we do.

I also want non-Muslims to see my film to know the crisis that Muslims in Pakistan and elsewhere are facing and to know what real Islam is and what the Pakistanis are all about. Tragically, I feel, Indians don't know much about Pakistan. Indians feel every Pakistani is a religious fanatic. That's not true. If you go to any city of Pakistan you'll find only one out of 100 men with a beard. But here in India in the bazaars of Andheri in Mumbai and Chandni Chowk in Delhi almost every Muslim sports a beard.

Q: Why did you choose Naseeruddin Shah to play the voice of the liberal Muslim in the film?

A: Firstly, he's a great actor. He didn't know who I was. But I saw him in that particular role from the time I was writing the script. I had no access to him. I asked a common friend, Salman Ahmed of the band Junoon, for his number. With the reputation that Pakistani films have, I was pretty sure he'd turn down my offer. Sure enough he was initially reluctant. He asked me to send over the script. After he read it, he immediately SMSed me to say he was on.

Q: Did you have problems with the film in Pakistan?

A: Whatever negative reactions came were before the film's release in my country last July. About 20 madrassas in Karachi issued a fatwa against the movie without watching it. After the film's release, all the protests died down. I've balanced out all the issues in such a way that no one can point an accusing finger at any viewpoint.

Q: Would you now like to make a run-of-the-mill film?

A: Never. I'm 50-plus and I don't have much time or energy to indulge in frivolity. Filmmaking requires a lot of physical energy. There's no existent infrastructure in my country for a filmmaker like me. It took me four years to make 'Khuda Kay Liye'. I don't see myself directing more than five more films during my lifetime.

Q: Do you think the right films from India are being released in Pakistan?

A: Not yet. At the moment apart from 'Taare Zameen Par', all the other Indian films are more sophisticated versions of what we produce in Pakistan.

Subhash K. Jha (© IANS / India eNews)