

With only two hits in six months, Bollywood loses Rs.1.5 bn

The year is halfway through, but Bollywood has very little to cheer about. More than Rs.3 billion (\$70 million) has gone into making films, but half of the amount sank beyond recovery.

The ratio of success and failure in Bollywood has for the past many years been 5/6:100 - it means, out of 100 movies released in a given year, only five or six manage to hit the jackpot.

The industry takes solace in the fact that of the 47 movies released in the last six months, at least two - 'Race' and 'Jannat' - turned out to be genuine hits, bringing cheer to producers, distributors and exhibitors.

And, of course, they enthused the audience for giving value to its money.

'Race', an Abbas-Mustan-directed racy thriller, was an instantaneous success, unlike 'Jannat'.

Though an equally piquant movie based on the subject of match fixing in cricket, 'Jannat' was a slow starter.

But eventually it reached the finishing line, doing a business of Rs.400 million on an investment of Rs.100 million. That's all that matters to merit it the status of being a hit movie.

UTV's mega budget 'Jodhaa Akbar', which had big stars like Hrithik Roshan and Aishwarya Rai, did the major business in the first quarter of this year. But, with an investment of Rs.450 million - it was a costly production and a period movie at that - it took a long time for UTV to recover the cost, the reason being that the genre, popular with audiences till the early 1970s, lost its past flavour.

According to trade analyst Vinod Mirani, 'Jodhaa Akbar' was more successful in the overseas market than in India. 'A bulk of the revenue it earned came from abroad rather than what was generated in the domestic market,' he said.

Said distributor Vinod Kakkad: 'It ('Jodhaa Akbar') did good business all over as no one lost money on it, but it was not a universal success.'

Rajat Kapoor's 'Mithya' might not have drawn huge crowds everywhere, but the movie was a success because it recovered the modest investment that had gone into it, just as 'Bheja Fry' had done last year.

What happened to the remaining 43 movies?

Of course, they were not all flops. They passed the box-office test with varying grades.

In the beginning of 2007, the audience rejected Rajkumar Santoshi's supposedly serious movie, 'Halla Bol'.

With equal disdain, the paying public passed over 'Sunday', 'My Name is Anthony Gonsalves', 'One Two Three' and 'Bombay to Bangkok'.

Even 'Tashan', 'Thoda Pyaar Thoda Magic' and 'Krazzy4' that had the honour of being produced by two of Bollywood's revered banners, Yash Raj Films and Filmkraft respectively, were rejected.

Subhash Ghai's 'Black and White' and Ravi Chopra's 'Bhoothnath', though reasonably good movies, too didn't meet with success.

Ajay Devgan's maiden directorial venture 'U Me Aur Hum' struggled to stay afloat for some time until it too sank in the emptiness of theatres.

The last mentionable movie of the past six months was Ram Gopal Verma's 'Sarkar Raj', in which Amitabh Bachchan shares the screen with son Abhishek and daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai.

Content-wise performance-wise, Varma's sequel to 'Sarkar' was not faulty. But the audience found the movie's key point, the climax, contrived. Besides, the movie's theme is so Mumbai-centric that those unfamiliar with the milieu of the city's infamous underbelly hardly understood what the conflict in the story was all about.

But that, according to Mirani, has not come in the way of 'Sarkar Raj' being declared a hit.

'The film has earned revenues, but not as much as it was expected. Since the film was sold to the distributors at a very high price, it will take the latter some time to recover the money put in,' he said.

With two much-hyped films - 'Love Story 2050' and 'Jaane Tu... Ya Jane Na' - having released Friday, the revenue collection for 'Sarkar Raj' will further dip,' stated a Bollywood film trade magazine.

But the worldwide distributor of 'Sarkar Raj', Balaji Films, has refused to buy this. It has openly declared that the movie is a 'hit'.

If it is so, that makes it three hits in the last six months, four if 'Jodhaa Akbar' is also taken into account.

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