

A Different Theatre of Justice: *Jolly LLB 2*

Despite containing some characteristic Bollywood flaws, the film pushes viewers to question several axioms of our law and order system.

DEBLINA DEY

The movie *Jolly LLB 2*, released in February, is a bold step in mainstream Bollywood cinema. Contextualising the plot against the recent nationalism debates in the country, this movie is a timely and polite reminder to all those who eulogise the soldier, army and police as the most faithful brand of nationalists, to debunk the myth of an impartial and incorruptible democratic system of law and order in the country.

The movie is certainly preachy, but is able to get its message across with a crisp sense of humour. One may argue that many contemporary Bollywood movies compete to narrate a story through the willing suspension of disbelief—to the point of an extreme absence of logic. However, *Jolly LLB 2* narrates its story in such a way that an instance or two of such disbelief is perhaps negotiable for a witty and satirical depiction of the justice system that common people will be able to relate to.

The movie is a call to the *aam junta* to question the taken-for-granted beneficence of the police and those involved in the justice delivery system. The movie weaves its plot around the binary of the “good” soldier, the nationalist who fights for the motherland, and the “bad” soldier, the ostensible terrorist or anti-nationalist. However, the story seems just adequately cogent to spur some thought in the minds of common people, who often lose their sensibilities to make an informed response in the larger argument about who is a true nationalist.

The movie is not a sequel to its first part but follows a similar plot. It replaces the duo of Arshad Warsi and Boman Irani, two extremely talented actors, with Akshay Kumar and Annu Kapoor. It depicts lawyers as shrewd and self-centred. Our hero, Jolly, the struggling lawyer, also fits well within this frame, in the initial plot of the story. While Pramod Kapoor, the powerful opponent who is an established and experienced lawyer, charges fees from his clients even for sitting in his air-conditioned office, Jolly extorts money from a pregnant woman in order to set up his chamber. Utterly desolate and traumatised

after the death of her husband, whom senior police officers have falsely implicated, the woman commits suicide.

After facing social humiliation for his unethical conduct, Jolly plans to atone by taking up the woman’s fight for justice. By transforming Jolly into a better human being, the plot allays possible anxieties among viewers about the previous cynical depiction of the so-called protectors of the law.

The movie poignantly and humorously challenges the iron cage of bureaucratic dominance—to borrow from Max Weber—by the revered judge within the court premises. It reduces the judge, the “milord,” to a funny personality who scribbles on his daughter’s wedding card during court proceedings. It redeems the judge of his burden of being a supremo in the court and portrays him as an ordinary mortal.

By demolishing the court’s formal atmosphere, it asks whether we need to maintain such a strict separation between the judge on the one hand and the advocates and onlookers, including the audience, on the other, and implies that we may be able to do better without such an overly formal environment.

Overdramatising is a predominant ingredient of Bollywood mass entertainers. *Jolly LLB 2*, too, dramatises the judge’s role to the point of exaggeration. He steps beyond the limits of constitutional provisions to allow a witness to be presented without notifying the court and the defence lawyer, swallowing Jolly’s argument that by doing so, the witness would have been either bought off or killed before he appeared in court.

By caricaturing the judge, the film strips the theatre of justice of its ideal image. It highlights the judicial aporia prevalent in many cases in which the judge and lawyers have a sense of what actually happened but can only weigh the evidence that is presented. The movie nudges us to imagine a legal system with fewer hierarchical structures even if it does not offer an alternative vision.

The drama that unfolds before the truth is out reflects frustration and disillusionment with the justice system. The spectacle of justice delivery of an unexpected kind seems to appeal to viewers precisely because of its sheer impossibility.

We have become rather complacent about the country’s law and order system and refuse to harbour any kind of constitutional scepticism, to echo Robin West, and this movie jolts us from our stupor. Despite songs hampering its narrative flow, *Jolly LLB 2* has a well-presented plot, and can serve as a substantial courtroom ethnographic text.

Deblina Dey (ddey@jgu.edu.in) teaches sociology of law at Jindal Global Law School, OP Jindal Global University, Sonipat.

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