

Film Review: Australia

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There was a lot of hype in the lead up to the release of the much talked about Baz Luhrmann's blockbuster film Australia. It has been labelled as an Australian epic. Parallel was also drawn between Australia and Hollywood epics like Gone With the Wind and Out of Africa. In my judgement, it has failed to live up to all expectations.

I had a fair amount of doubt about the appeal of the film. In the end I went to see the film hoping to enjoy the harsh beauty of the Australian outback in the film. I must admit, I have also been disappointed in that respect. The film's story lacks definite direction and purpose. Its sheer



melodramatics remind me of Bollywood films. I wonder, if Luhrmann was motivated by the twists and tweaks of Bollywood movies, while writing the story and screenplay of his own.

There were two likely elements of epicness in the film: love affair between the aristocrat British lady Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman) and Drover (Hugh Jackman), a rugged Aussie cowboy, and the outback aboriginal Australia, both of which fails to reach epic proportion.

Lady Sarah's outback adventure of driving out 1500 cattle from the far flung outback cattle station Faraway Downs to Darwin with the help of Drover and her house-hold team of cook and maids is not at all convincing. Along the drive, Lady Sarah falls in love with Drover. The love affair between these two people from contrasting societal background lacks intensity. Both actors, Hugu Jackman and Nicole Kidman fails to infuse emotion and charm in their love episode. Nicole's Lady Sarah looks every bit stereotyped and her acting in the sequence when she bursts into Australia down under on way to meeting Hugh Jackman for the first time is comical indeed.

Luhrmann has tried to link up with the issue of stolen generation in the story. But it does not go deep enough. Nevertheless, his respect for the aboriginal history of Australia shines through. The aboriginal conscience of the film story is represented by the half-caste aboriginal boy, Nullah, played by young Brandon Walters with natural ease. His boyish charm and innocence wins the heart of Lady Sarah, who decides to adopt him. However, her graciousness is thwarted by the racially motivated politics of Australia at that time. Ashley, Drover and Nullah are separated when they are caught up in the devastations of Darwin city wrecked by the Japanese bombers during World War II. In the end they are united again by the heroics of Drover, who rescues from the advancing Japanese army a whole bunch of stolen aboriginal and half-caste kids including Nullah from Mission island. Walter's Nullah provides the much needed freshness and relief into the melodramatic roller coaster ride of the film.

Epic films are always associated with enduring background or theme music. I still can hum the background music of Hollywood epics and classics like Dr. Zhivago by David Leen, and The Big Country by William Wyler. One fails to pick up any dominant mood in the film Australia, which would have likened to its theme music. Its background music loses its way, as the movie progresses. When you step out of cinema hall, the music does not linger any more.

It is told, a number of endings to the film was shot. Whatever be the ending, it would not have made any difference to its overall impact. It's an unconvincing and disappointing film.