

Movie Review: NEWTON-A Political Satire that Tickles the Funny Bone

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Introduction

In the recent past, film makers endeavour in adding a social element to the craft they produce. Unlike the early 21st century Bollywood flicks, where one, as an audience, needed to rummage inside movies in pursuit of some kind of matter of substance, ultimately end up watching a futile content leading to utter disappointment. The past decade per contra, has been focussing on socially relevant subject matter. What has taken by surprise is that even as a business venture, they do not fail to break the box office (Prayers heard, producers).

One such attempt, a master class one for that, has been NEWTON, directed by Amit V Masurkar which was released on the 22nd September, 2017. Newton, who reminds an average Indian, the laws of physics and the great English physicist who worked on them, isn't surprisingly what the movie has in store for its viewers. This is about the stigmatised tribal community in India, controlled by the naxals who are far from civilization and have minimal access to any medium of political, social and economic scenario that takes place outside the zone. And a man who is here, to give them an opportunity to fulfil their duties as a nations citizen. The self-proclaimed Nutan Kumar, who reworked on his name and made it NEWTON, a by- the-book staunch idealist, irrespective of all the odds hoarded against him going into the dark woods to make sure the registered voter gets to cast their votes. The movie is taken forward by two principal characters, who, heedless of their contradicting shades of personalities, fall into the two ends of the same spectrum. Atma Singh, played by Pankaj Tripathi, an army official who has the heaviest of responsibilities of protecting the areas controlled by naxals, wishes for the bare minimum, of witnessing one to no casualty in a day. His attempt

in convincing Newton, played by the dynamic Rajkumar Rao, about the repercussions, fails outrightly. As the movie unfolds, Aatma Singh realises that it would be a snipe hunt to stop Newton from his ardency. Newton is accompanied by his colleagues, and an assigned representative from the tribe, try to be collateral with him to accomplish the hideous task. The movie which portrays the darker, less publicized side of the country, takes a humorous boulevard and shows something as heavy a reality as this through the lens of wits and hilarity.

The Plot

Nutan Kumar a.k.a Newton Kumar is from a middle class Indian family, a rookie in a government department. He is sent on election duty as a replacement of another employee who is unable to make it due to heart problems. Faced with the apathy of war-torn security forces and the looming fear of guerrilla attacks by communist rebels, he tries his best to conduct free and fair voting. Later when a foreign reporter turns up at the polling station the security forces compels the villagers from the constituency to com cast their votes. With much disappointment Newton realises the voters aren't going to turn up, so he decides to address them, talk to them about the procedure. Some think they would make money out of this other come to complain about their less paying jobs. He desperately tries to educate them, but all goes down the drain. Taking the lead, the frustrated security head pushes him aside and shames the villagers by telling them that these officers have risked their lives for their vote, and they should not turn them away, and that the voting machine is a toy; there are symbols of elephants, cycles, etc. and they could press any symbol they like (leaving them uneducated about the fact that those symbols represent respective political parties). So while they vote their favourite symbol, instead

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of politicians they have never heard about, the foreign reporter gets a good news report about India's democracy. Newton wants to sit at the polling booth for the stipulated time but is forced to flee due to a Naxal ambush which he realises later was staged by the forces. On gaining such knowledge, he tried to outrun his escort team back to the polling booth, but gets caught on both sides, and is forcefully taken back to safety. On the way back Newton decides to collect votes of four villagers who suddenly turn up from deep inside the forest. The Chief of Security is reluctant to let them do so. It is here where the film gives the viewer the conundrum of the situation in war torn areas, through two men without any rivalry, bent on their duty, yet a stark difference, exposing the conundrum of truth. Taking his duty very seriously, Newton steals the Chief's gun and holds the officer at gunpoint till the villagers cast their votes. The chief comments out of frustration that it was not his wish to conduct such polling here in an area secured 6 months ago, having more landmines than men. He tells that he doesn't want to lose more brave boys like they already have anymore, even when the government cannot even supply them night vision goggles they have been asking for 2 years. Newton keeps him at gunpoint even after the voting for the remaining two minutes of his official duty (till 3pm). The security forces then beat him up out of frustration.

The Characters

The refinement that each actor has brought into their character is what has made this movie stand alone from the crowd. Each actor has tried to add a unique element which unconsciously brings conviction to what they portray. The elements include physical traits, personality attributes and how they react to what's thrown at them. Nutan Kumar, rigid to hell is a person with shades of grey. He is uninteresting, stubborn and abides by the rules. This shows how self-centred, arrogant. But the by the book attitude definitely makes him disciplined, grounded, extremely vigilant and goal oriented he is. The viewers as they watch can relate to this person closely. The one person from work, who is annoying, who will refuse to bend and would be the first to reach the workplace. This rigidity is probably what has taken him to this impossible mission to conduct the elections in the Naxal controlled jungle. No matter what hassles awaits him, he wouldn't give up. This may initially make the viewer wonder on how irrational can a person turn out simply out of his

grimness. Howbeit, eventually it is a delight to watch the kind of hard work and determination he puts in order to conduct the elections and it surprises the viewer on how he doesn't give up till the end. Towards the end, even when he gets hurt in the brawl that happens between him and the military force who accompany him, non-chalantly he speaks of how he deserved the wound because of his foolishness. This humility and simplicity doesn't fail to bring a smile to the viewer.

Yet another character who has an equally important stature and shares the screen space without taking away the limelight but brings out the best is Pankaj Tripathi's Aatma Singh. An army official, an assistant commandant who is in-charge of the perilous jungle, shows how to be strong, yet soft, to be convergent yet easy and to be rough with humungous amount of humanity. He is calm, composed, is an epitome of rationality and maturity. His equation with Nutan Kumar, is at the brim of hatred right from the beginning. But eventually the relationship begin to contain respect, affinity and a unique paternal tenderness. His connect with everybody who accompanies him to this mission shows how one should learn to empathise with a fellow human being. His experience and knowledge about how risky this entire election can turn shows his extensive learning about the hidden harm in the jungle and the dangerous operations that happen within the place. However, he decides to do his duty to protect the officers who have risked their lives to do their duties.

The third character that needs a mention as much as the other two male characters is Malko Netam played by Anjali Patil, who willingly joins the team to accomplish the duty. Malko talks through her eyes. She is vigorous, knowledgeable and patient. She tries to be as cooperative as possible with Nutan Kumar and his team by helping them communicate with the localities in their language. Amongst all the tension that gets built up throughout the election, she remains calm, and abides by her duty. Without Malko's commitment, it seemed difficult for Nutan Kumar to be able to convince the villagers to cast their votes.

The reaction and response of all the stubborn villagers and their leader show how least informed are they about sea change that has been happening in the outside world. They still follow the stone age old rules and customs. With ammunition and other weapons, the only things that keep them going is killing, robbing and other illegal activities.

The hardship throughout the movie has been on educating the clan on how to be aware of their duties as citizens of the country and fulfil their social responsibilities.

Conclusion

Director Masurkar has tried to bring into limelight a couple of very interesting facts. He has worked in depth in understanding human behaviour, how a certain trait in a person is crucial and its not everybodys cup of tea to fulfil his duties with much rigour. Human beings are co-dependent and it is impossible to be able to carry out any

activity without depending on a fellow human and society at large. It also speaks about certain sects of the country, still in isolation, having minimal knowledge about the evolving technology, economic policies or anything that has to do with progression. It sure is an eye opener to many political activists and to social workers of the nation on how sometimes many small communities and matters revolving around them turns trivial by receiving little to no attention. Newton by large speaks about collective consciousness, responsibilities of each one of us an individual, relationships that can leave a lasting impression, rational thinking, dedication, all of it with pinch of humour in it.

