

Review #56 : *Jodhaa Akbar* (2007)

Aishwarya Rai and Hrithik Roshan

TRAILER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4nk623x4A4>

Jodhaa Akbar is about the love which blossoms between a husband and a wife after marriage and how it happens. It is about **coming of age, taking up responsibilities and making decisions** for one's self amidst Machiavellian scheming, plotting and pernicious court intrigue. It is also about religious tolerance and political harmony.



PLOT SUMMARY

The film takes place from 1559 AD to 1562 AD and then ends circa 1566 AD. The boy king Abdul Fateh Jalal Ud Deen Muhammad finds himself at the helm of the fast receding **Mughal Empire in India** and he must find a way to put its stars of fortune back on the path of ascendancy. To this end he takes the help of loyal (and not so loyal) courtiers, crushes rebellions, makes alliances by marriages, takes cognizance of the ground realities faced by the common folk of his realm, and thus quickly manages to earn the sobriquet *Akbar*.

Jodhaa Akbar is a love story about a **marriage of alliance that gave birth to true love** between a great Mughal emperor, Akbar (Hrithik Roshan), and a Rajput princess, Jodhaa (Aishwarya Rai Bachchan). The daughter of King Bharmal of Amer resented being reduced to a mere political pawn in this marriage of alliance, and Akbar's biggest challenge now does not merely lie in winning battles, but foremost in winning the love of this defiant princess. Little did Akbar know that when he married Jodhaa he would be embarking upon a new journey — the journey of true love...



THE GREAT THINGS

Caution : I am not a film maker. This review is once again is an ‘arm-chair’ review !

1 – Hrithik Roshan

Jodhaa Akbar will always be counted amongst Hrithik Roshan's finest performances : this is the seminal event of his career ; *Jodhaa Akbar* has changed the way in which even the staunchest of his critics think of him. The respect and admiration he has earned at being able to do justice to a serious role will forget whatever other projects he may have undertaken and which weren't particularly excellent.

Every Inch a King. Hrithik looks and acts royal. He moves and gestures with regal dignity and stylish *blue blood* retinue. He may never be Emperor Akbar in the minds of the more puritanical *aficionados* of history but he looks, acts, and feels emperor-like, and that's all we need to see. The only problem is that there is a lot of difference between the physique of the 5 feet 11 inches muscled and chiselled for the Greek Pantheon Hrithik Roshan and that of the character he plays in this movie, an allegedly 5 feet 4 inches stocky pot-bellied and round-faced historical emperor Akbar. That is cinema all right ! Hrithik has definitely created and cemented a new youthful image of the king for the younger generations to identify more closely with him.

Urdu. *Jodhaa Akbar* makes liberal use of Ancient Persian and Hrithik's pronunciation is perfect. Speakers of Hindustani and Urdu would know that in these languages there is a distinction between the sounds *g* and *gh* as in *gana* (song) and *ghareeb* (poor) and also the same is the case with *k* and *q* as in *kaam* (task) and *qalam* (pen) and Hrithik Akbar hits both perfectly. Even his intonation is very purposeful.

Acting. Powerful, gentle, ecstatic, sad... all done well. There are shades of his earlier movies in many dialogues but he's doing fine.

2 – Camera Work

Jodhaa Akbar boasts of some pretty good camera work throughout the movie. The technical standards of Indian cinemas keep rising with every new production and *Jodhaa Akbar* has raised bar a bit further in this respect.

Angles. Wide angles are utilized to great effect here ; they have been used with great frequency often to show not only the character but also to highlight the work done by the art direction team. The camera angles used in the long shots for all the battle scenes (ultra tele-shots of the cavalry approaching the battle ground or top down shots of infantry troops running in to clash with the opposition) all have been executed with mastery. The hand to hand combat scene between Akbar and Shareef Ud Deen is top notch as well.

Use of Screens. Throughout the movie one can experience a sense of **mystery and excitement** created by use of curtains, marble screens, fine translucent muslins, and *jaali* work objects placed between the camera and the actor in question. All such shots add significantly to the experience, enhanced by perfect lighting or clever CAM positioning.

MUST-SEE SCENES :

1. ***Akbar (Hrithik) standing next to tree*** during the song *Mo'eein Ud Deen Chisti's dargah*. This is the last shot of the scene. A low camera angle shows a larger than life Akbar (*did anyone say Orson Welles ?*) in simple clothes, standing in front of a balding tree with white ground and a clear blue sky framing most of the visible background.

2. ***Dawn shot of Jodhaa (Aishwarya) coming out of her room*** onto the balcony of Amer Fort for the last time with pigeons. The soft light with not even a hint of sunlight is perfect. Another good shot of her with pigeons is when she is sitting in Amer on a huge cushion looking lost and lonely after she has traversed over the Aravallis from Agra.

3. ***Jodhaa (Aishwarya) in highly colourful translucent veils*** : especially the yellow coloured veil during Dushera, the red coloured veil on her marriage night, and the green coloured veil right at the end while seated with Akbar. Much of the movies colour riot is in part due to her gorgeous costumes, as in *Paheli*.

4. ***Choreography of the songs***. In *Azeem O Shaan Shehenshah*, circles upon circles upon circles involving hundreds of dancers and they've done it beautifully.

5. ***Sword Fight between Akbar (Hrithik) and Jodhaa (Aishwarya)***. Everyday life habit between husband and wife *aha !* Ah, the chemistry there is close to perfect. In fact it's through scenes like this one that the true romantic aspects of the movie get highlighted. This is where

their love blossoms. One of my favourite dialogues also takes place here, when Jodhaa almost gains the upper hand over Akbar during the sword fight and then Akbar is quick to remind her '*Malika-i-Hindustan, yeh mat bhooliye ke hum aapke suhag hai*'. You have to see the movie to know what it means !

6. *Morning sunrays bouncing off bejewelled mirrors* in the Khwaab Gah.

All of those must-see scenes what be half as perfect as I'm telling you if not for this wonderful camera work. A simple shot suddenly becomes thrilling, touching, deep, peaceful, soothing, mesmerizing, sublime, divine... when in the hand (and through the eye) of a good director... and proper lighting. Ah, the power of light !

3 – Costumes and Jewellery

The costumes for Akbar (Hrithik Roshan) are the best. Although the costumes for Jodhaa (Aishwarya Rai Bachchan) come second, they are a distant second. Such rich work, amazing colours, intricate jacquards, merging embroidery... are not to be found in just *any* film. His armour is reasonably authentic as well. And for the best jewellery, of course, Jodhaa is queen here. I particularly loved her red peacock neckless. I just wonder how she would have negotiated airport security with all that stuff on had she lived in the 21th century !

4 – Aishwarya Rai as Jodhaa

Beauty, dignity, retinue... Mr. Gowariker knows how to film a woman... Jodhaa is **proud and prejudiced against her husband** at first, yet in her wildest attempts to escape his authority (*and love, because she is starting to fall for him after all*), like during the fight scene, she remains intensely and fully feminine...

5 – Ila Arun as Maham Anga

Cunning, scheming, plotting... Maham Anga was a Machiavellian Queen. It took Akbar the Great to bring about her downfall. Ila should have been nominated for this excellent work as a supporting actress. Tied with her is also the towering personality of Niktin Dheer who lends his Leviathan body frame to the role of Shareef Ud Deen Hussain. This giant even dwarfs Akbar's presence while both are in the same shot and the hand to hand combat sequence between these two at the end has to be one of the best filmed in Indian cinema...

6 – History Facts

Jodhaa Akbar, despite director Ashutosh Gowariker's claim of history not being central to the movie, has a largely accurate chronological sequence of events depicted in it, which enhance the credibility and strength of the film : the accession of Akbar at the age of 13, the Second Battle of Panipat, the forced exile of Bairam Khan, elephant fights, Akbar's marriage with the daughter of the Rajput King of Amer, the assassination of Atka Khan by Adham Khan, the execution of Adham Khan and Maham Anga's subsequent death, the abolition of the *Jizya* (the religious tax imposed on the non-Muslim) by Akbar in early 1564 and the subsequent near-fatal assassination attempt on the king, all find mention in the *Jodhaa Akbar*. Well done !

7– Great songs

Such is *Jash Ne Bahaara*, a nice humble tune which absolutely refuses to vacate one's mind and indeed does establish a permanent presence in one's heart...

THE LESS GOOD (from the less to the more important)

1 – Historical Inaccuracies

There are many and **they don't really matter** as it's a legendary love story first ; some of the more glaring ones are listed below :

1. **The narration in the beginning of *Jodhaa Akbar* mentions 1450 AD** as the date of commencement of Mughal conquest of Hindustan. By no stretch of imagination is this date correct. If Babur is taken to be the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India then the date has to be 1505 AD at the earliest as that is the year of Babur's first incursion into India. If however Timur is taken to be founder, the date has to be 1398-1399 AD and no later. In either case the date of 1450 AD is wrong.

2. **There was no significant rebellion** (as shown to be headed by Shareef Ud Deen Hussain in *Jodhaa Akbar*) circa 1564-1565. In fact the first such rebellion was the Uzbek rebellion in favour of Akbar's half-brother Muhammad Hakim in 1564 followed by two more Uzbek rebellions in subsequent years. Furthermore, Bairam Khan's very active rebellion against his ward is not shown (only possibly hinted at) in the movie...

3. **Gowariker's Akbar's personality is not the historical Akbar's** – Akbar's penchant for the arts, culture, architecture and sciences *etc...* don't find any mention at all in *Jodhaa Akbar*, although he had acquired a taste for these at a very early age. This in my mind distances Hrithik from the real Akbar the most, even more than the disparity in the physical features of the two. His religious and spiritual proclivities have been accurately depicted nevertheless.

4. **Jodhaa** – although many of us have Jodhaa as the name of Akbar's Rajput wife (and Jahangir's mother) in our minds, and although the ASI insists on calling a part of Fateh Pur Sikri as the *Palace of Jodhaa Bai*, no historian of any significance has used the name Jodhaa for this person. This impression seems to have been created by film directors in our collective imagination. When cinema takes over history...

2 – Language Barrier

You may have a problem with the frequency of Urdu words employed in *Jodhaa Akbar*. The film does sport out of using a lot of Urdu as adding to the ambience and *feel* of the setting.

3 – Movie Length

Many people have been complaining about the extraordinary length and very slow pace of the *Jodhaa Akbar* (run time is approximately 3 and a half hours). Personally I found the movie to be quite well paced and I cannot see a shorter run time doing justice to the story...

4 – Moral objections

1. Rajput honour – Rajputs are shown in a very poor light in *Jodhaa Akbar*. It is unfathomable for a Rajput queen (Jodhaa's mother) to suggest anything dishonouring the word of her husband. She is shown **suggesting suicide** to her daughter (though this would dishonour her own kingdom) to escape her marriage to the Emperor of the Peacock Throne.

2. Although the discourse in *Jodhaa Akbar* is all about **religion tolerance** (which is very honourable by the way) – it is also very **Muslim-oriented** : Jodhaa converts by the end of the film – one of the reasons why it was refused in western Rajasthan by the way. The film is steeped with Islamic Mysticism and philosophy, with a particularly striking climax in the *whirling dervish* song. So don't be surprised if I gave this film 4 and a ½ stars and not 5. Because the Catholic in me refuses to be completely mollified...

GLORY AND DAZZLE : ARCHEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

1. Humayun's Tomb (Delhi)

Akbar got it built for his father Humayu at the behest of his mother. Many say that it is the prototype to the **Taj Mahal** and I would recommend it to all. The tomb and garden settings around it are the best in Delhi.

2. Adham Khan's Tomb (Delhi)

Both Adham Khan and Maham Anga are said to be buried here though there is only one cenotaph inside. The tomb itself is in a dilapidated condition and the walls are blanket by *graffiti* hewed in them by stupid people. But it is one of the most unique Mughal tombs as the design is more Lodi (Afghan) than Mughal.

3. Red Fort (Agra)

A most beautiful fort and a must-see. Most of the movie features scene setting in this very fort, and the huge golden mirror can still be seen by visitors.

4. Fateh Pur Sikri

The Mughal enigma. Even contemporary historical records don't shed much light on why it was abandoned and there are many versions of the story. What is termed as Jodhaa Bai's Palace is housed inside this fort as are some of the other well renowned structures such as Salim Chisti's Tomb.

5. Amer Fort (Jaipur)

Just like the rest of the monuments in this list, Amer doesn't need any introductions. Make sure you take the elephant ride from the foot of the hill on which Amer is built all way up into the main central square inside the fort on the top of the hill. The fortified walls which run along the surrounding hills from miles are so beautiful to look at !

FINAL THOUGHTS

Let's get one thing straight : you haven't watched anything **so opulent, so magnificent** like this in a long time. It's not just body beautiful, but there's soul as well. It's all about courage, prowess, perseverance, knowledge and passion. Does the viewer of today have the patience to watch a really lengthy film in today's times ? Well, I'm used to the long versions of *Lord of the Rings* so I don't think it's a problem as long as the sequence of events, the drama, the romance and the war keep you mesmerized. In the genre, *Jodhaa Akbar* stands out, and stands out the tallest. To sum up, *Jodhaa Akbar* leaves you spellbound, enthralled, entranced and awestruck. Ashutosh Gowariker makes great characters come alive on screen...

AMAZING MOMENTS :

- You realise the **scale and magnitude** of the film at the beginning with a splendid war sequence at the very outset.
- **Hrithik taming an out-of-control elephant**. It's hair-raising.
- **The two pre-conditions set by Jodhaa** before her marriage to Akbar. Very interesting.
- **The confrontation between Ila Arun and Jodhaa** the kitchen, when Jodhaa decides to make the meal herself.
- **The intermission point**, which sows the seeds of a misunderstanding between Akbar and Jodhaa, gives way on the next morning to a great **sword fight** between husband and wife.
- **The climactic final fight** – although it reminded me of Brad Pitt and Eric Bana in *Troy*.

There's no room for dullness here. The writing is tight, the drama **keeps you hooked** and the romantic track is wonderful. K.P. Saxena's dialogues are amazing. At places, soaked in acid. The writer comes up with several gems, yet again. The camera movements, especially on the battlefield, are breathtaking and capture the grandeur of this saga to the fullest.

Jodhaa Akbar also works because of the right casting. It's difficult to imagine anyone else in the role of Emperor Akbar. Hrithik seems born to play this role and he enacts it with such precision and confidence that it leaves you asking for more. Aishwarya Rai Bachchan is superb and looks ethereal once again — what's new in that ? But watch her emote in this film. You realise the amazing talent that has hitherto not been tapped by any film maker. A flawless performance indeed ! On the whole, *Jodhaa Akbar* is, without a shred of doubt, a brilliant film in almost all respects. Very strongly recommended ! +++