

Pad Man [12A] 2018 | India | 140 min

UK release date **9th February 2018**

Director **R. Balki**

Screenplay **R. Balki, Swanand Kirkire**

Cinematographer **Tanveer Mir, P.C. Sreevam**

Cast **Akshay Kumar** (Lakshmikant Chauhan); **Radhika Apte** (Gayatri); **Sonam Kapoor** (Pari Walia)

Story: Concerned about his wife Gayatri's (Radhika Apte) menstrual hygiene, Lakshmikant Chauhan (Akshay Kumar) urges her to ditch the cloth and opt for sanitary napkins. Gayatri is reluctant to go for disposable pads as they are expensive. Lakshmi obsessing over a 'ladies problem' makes her cringe but he insists on bringing upon a change by addressing the taboo topic. Subjected to hostility for ruffling the religious and age-old beliefs of people around, can the man brave the resistance and get his point across?

Review: The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do. Through Padman, R Balki tells the real life inspiring story of Arunachalam Muruganatham (played by Akshay Kumar), a social entrepreneur from Coimbatore, who invented low cost sanitary napkins in India, despite the massive opposition and humiliation he was subjected to. The director changes the film's setting to Maheshwar, Madhya Pradesh, while retaining the core of his courageous story.

Given the constant mention of statistics pertaining to the inadequate percentage of women who use pads in India, and reiteration of the film's issue-based motive, Padman often seems like a Public Service Advertisement parading as a commercial film. In order to appeal to the lowest common denominator, things are over-explained and all of this results in a sluggish progression of events. However, given how awkward women are made to feel even today while buying sanitary pads from a medical store, this social drama makes for an important film that needs to be watched.

Having said that, in portions, Balki struggles to maintain a balance as it's not easy to entertain, spread awareness and sensitize people about the issue, all at one go. His semi-humorous and urban outlook at a predominantly rural issue, isn't seamless as the script often meanders but he redeems himself in scenes that convey a lot more through unspoken words. A quiet moment when Gayatri realises Lakshmi's concern for her after she sees her brother abusing and neglecting his wife's health is heart-breaking. Lakshmi's reaction to his first consumer's feedback is equally moving.

The 'superhero' of the film — Akshay Kumar, makes you wonder why he continues to be one of our most underrated actors, despite such immense body of work. He going as far as wearing a pink ladies underwear and a pad to prove a point, goes on to show how actors are willing to push boundaries and embrace their screen characters for the films they believe in. Radhika Apte portrays her part beautifully, making her character relatable to the section of women, who still face such societal taboos. Sonam Kapoor too lights up the screen with her candour and makes her presence felt in a significant role.

Known for making films that work towards bridging the age and gender gap, Balki's Padman is an empowering film that gives you the wings, despite the odds. It will free women of their inhibitions and that will be its biggest success. Period!

Renuka Vyavahare, Times of India, 9 Feb 2018

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