

Film Review

'Don' - Myth Revisited



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The new "Don" (*starring Shahrukh Khan*) set in the modern era is a tale re-told articulating yet changing the myth of the hero. This is the story of the new "Don" on the similar plot of the older version, starring Amitabh Bachan. So except the time frame, new camera techniques, location and actors *what is it that makes this new Don a myth re-written?*

It is a simple storyline of a great Don of the underworld played by Shahrukh Khan, a killer and a very shrewd operator, wanted by the police of a dozen or so countries. On a certain mission he is interrupted and assumed missing and later on replaced by a simpleton who is surprisingly his look alike. From there on the action takes a new direction with a sprinkling of old vengeance and

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settling of scores on the unassuming Don.

The movie is set in Malaysia but we see the first action taking place in Paris. We travel through the Parisian streets within a snapshot sequence. Another snap and we are on a beach with Don playing golf in a serene environment. The entire movie progresses in a quick succession of events. The Don, mafia lord is hunted, injured and later caught by police. The police chief D. Silva secretly places another simpleton Ajay in Don's place.

The idea being that to get into the criminal's den, get all the information and later handover the original Don to the police. The female counter part is a girl named Roma (starring Priyanka Chopra) who has joined Don's circle to avenge her brother and his fiancé's death. Thus a series of events start strategically controlled and masterminded by the police chief D. Silva. Don is set before us as a suave, brilliant, confident and arrogant man. He is the one who desires to claim the underworld and be the King, he has achieved a lot but knows that there is still a lot to achieve thus his great speed. The action takes a slow motion tempo with the familiar beat of music making us realize how fast it is actually moving. We run through the labyrinth of city streets and alleys, high rise buildings and blank, stark interior spaces. It is a race through time and space and then death, death in water at first for Ramesh, Roma's brother. He had defied the law and had tried to leave the darkness of evil for love and purity. But he had to die because Don could not let that happen. Don is the demi god who could not let Prometheus steal the fire. So Ramesh has to die. His death by poisoned handshake and then falling into water is the symbol of the evil he recognized within himself, the same evil he wanted to purge. Water here becomes an anaesthetist that purges and purifies.

We are never let to forget the stature of Don. He is the anti-thesis of the Greek hero. We do not know anything about his past. Unlike Dons of the movie "Godfather" who originated from Sicily belonging to the family of inherited traditions of murder and crime. We see in him a displacement of culture and social space. In the former version of Don starring Amitabh Bachan we see that he is a transformed Indian Don. He is an orphan Don devoid of any family history. We know nothing about his past.

The third transformation is the International don, "Shahrukh Khan". He moves through Paris, Malaysia, India in his quest to rule the underworld very much like Milton's Satan in "Paradise Lost". His will is unbeatable and strong, his confidence absolute. Nothing can stand in his way. He transgresses all cultural and space boundaries unlike the other Dons. These boundaries are invisible yet very much there in the glass like spaces looking out and down at the city spread underneath, the tall towers housing the various characters. Don inhibits a space totally culture free with its stark, modern, reflective, bland and colourless interiors.

As opposed to Don the simpleton "Ajay" is deeply rooted in culture, eating Banaras beetle leaf and singing on the streets of Mumbai. Here the cultural shift can be easily seen by the cameras shift in perspective. We see him among people and not from above or as a snapshot

projection. He is placed very humbly before us. He is the common, innocent man to be used as canon fodder. His dilemma is his goodness and innocence. Here his innocence becomes his hemartia if the question is if he ever was a hero? In the previous Don starring Amitabh, the simpleton became the hero. He in all his innocence struggles and is finally successful. The cost of experience is innocence. He is like Spencer's knight of the "Ferrie Queen", fighting for the goodness, truth and love. Love for the kids he adopts and love for Roma. His fight is with evil with good reigning supreme. Ajay never was there. It was all along the evil Don wearing the mask of innocence deceiving all, only shed at the last moment. Everyone in the movie is behind a mask going through the cinematic space as in a masquerade, Roma wearing the evil mask of a heartless criminal, D.Silva crouching behind the mask of an honest police officer, Kamini- Ramesh's fiancée (Karina Kapoor) wearing the mask of a glamorous vamp, all out to seduce Don and avenge her lover's murder.

In the new Don the fight never started for Ajay the simpleton. He was never there in the action. The good never got a chance. If the good did get a chance it was lost in front of the cunning smartness of evil. The saviour could not be saved. Here the evil Don is like Lucifer, an archetype, a persistent or recurrent mode of apprehension, representing the forces within and without us that threaten our supreme values, our moral sense. The horror is upon us when we believed ourselves to be safe, *the irony of living in the modern times*.