

Movie Review: 99

Cast: Kunal Khemu, Cyrus Broacha, Soha Ali Khan, Boman Irani

Direction: Raj Nidimoru, Krishna DK

Duration: 2 hours

Critic's Rating:

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Set in that inglorious year, 1999, when Indian cricketers were supposedly selling off their matches against South Africa on the behest of the notorious bookies, this comedy of errors refreshingly picks up after a sluggish start. More importantly, it views the underbelly of Indian crime and cricket with a tangy, tongue-in-cheek tenor that ensures you never really lose the plot, even though the narrative unfolds in a somewhat disjointed manner. This crime-and-comic caper not only flits between the present and the past, it also switches between cities: Kabhi Mumbai, kabhi Dilli. But always with the unpredictable, threatening to explode round the corner.

Kunal Khemu and Cyrus Broacha are two small time crooks who sell duplicate sim cards in an age when mobiles have just hit the Indian market. When one such sale goes kaput, they end up escaping the cops in a bookie's (Mahesh Manjrekar) Benz which too ends up kaput. Baying for his pound of flesh, Manjrekar asks the boys to shell out Rs 40 lakh or join his gang as extortion agents. The losers have no option and are soon sent on a mission to Delhi to collect unpaid dues from Boman Irani, a habitual better and a Bollywood actor. The fun begins when Boman sets out on a bumbling trail to pay back the money and begins to play for higher stakes with Dilli's biggest bookie, Vinod Khanna. In the end, the inveterate better and the two-penny crooks have only the last and the most controversial match between India and South Africa to bank on as salvation. And it takes all of Boman's basic instincts to bail the trio out of a hopeless situation.

The second half actually becomes quite zany, with everybody stepping on each other's toes and the losers' ending up as improbable winners in a lost situation. There are a few flaws however. The Kunal-Soha romance is completely tepid as is Cyrus Broacha's restrained comic act. The actor needed to let go, the way he does on TV shows, to keep the funny bones tickling. Sadly, something held him back, a fact which even he complains against by declaring he's forced to play Dravid to Kunal Khemu's Sachin!