

‘SRIKANTH’ – FILM REVIEW

THE VISIONARY BLIND MAN SRIKANTH BOLLA



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Not many of us would have probably known the story of philanthropist and entrepreneur Srikanth Bolla, who was featured in Forbes Asia’s prestigious ‘30 under-30’ list in 2017, not until the critically acclaimed biopic ‘Srikanth’ was released on OTT platforms recently. Bolla, the CEO and Founder of Bollant Industries – a multi-crore business enterprise that manufactures compostable and eco-friendly packaging in Hyderabad – trains and employs scores of differently-abled people, giving their lives some hope and direction.

Directed by Tushar Hiranani and produced by Chalk and Cheese Films and T-Series, the film offers an inspiring saga of Bolla, born blind in Seetharamapuram village of Andhra Pradesh. His childhood was marked by trials and tribulations that only a person with exceptional grit and vision could handle constructively. Bolla, played by the critically-acclaimed actor Rajkumar Rao, said in the film “*main sapne toh dekh hi sakta hun*” (I can see dreams) implying that being a visionary in life doesn’t require perfect eyesight.

One of his other memorable dialogue was “*mujhe bhagna nahi aata, sirf ladna aata hai*” (I don’t know how to run but I know how to hold my ground and fight).

Rao has given yet another stellar performance in this film, portraying a character of strong determination and a never-say-die attitude. The director has also showcased some light moments in the film to keep its flavour upbeat despite tackling such a sensitive and serious subject.



Bolla played by child artist

Rao has been well supported by Alaya F, his leading lady, Jyothika, his awe-inspiring teacher, Sharad Kelkar, his businessman-friend who invested in his business idea, and Jameel Khan, who played former President of India A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in the film. According to industry Pundits, the film has crossed the ₹62 crore mark worldwide, especially considering it was a small budget film to begin with.

According to an estimate, 90% of the blind or severely visually impaired children do not visit regular school in India and are further deprived of their basic human rights including a conducive environment for healthy growth and development. This condition of being born blind is colloquially understood as an act of ‘divine justice’ due to sins or bad karma from past lives. Just like it was in the case of the tainted King Dhritarashtra from Hindu mythology who was born blind, but he turned out to side with evil forces in adult life.

In the case of Srikanth, his farmer parents of humble means were distressed to see the state of his eyes at birth. Due to the fear of social retribution and the fear that his life would turn out to be 'meaningless' and too painful in today's day-and-age, his parents considered parting with him. As is also depicted in the film, his father tried to bury infant Bolla as everyone around him, except his mother, advocated for his death as 'a timely service' to protect him from an unfortunate fate. Many people in the film also told Bolla that he was destined to beg and seek alms on roads but he was determined to prove them wrong, and in doing so, broke stereotypes around people like him.

In an interview to the Forbes magazine, the real-life Bolla shared that his parents initially felt that his fate would make him play guard at home and protect it from stray dogs since his hearing was so well developed. Fortunately for Bolla, their humanity got the better of them and they decided to continue supporting him like family ideally should. Unlike King Dhritarashtra, Bolla turned out to be the real-life hero for many differently-abled people in adult life as he chose to side with the good forces represented by many of the struggles he chose to take up. For instance, helping others like him through the kind of business venture he started, persistence, optimism, and hard work to complete his education and in hindsight, making it also possible for others to

do the same, cultivation of ace-level entrepreneurial skills and so on and so forth. The cornerstone of his personality, as ably depicted in the film as well, is his attitude that '*main kissi se kam nahin hun*' (I am not less than anyone).

Throughout his school life, especially in the initial phases, and as can be expected, Bolla had to endure challenges by bullies who taunted him for lack of sight. Despite that, Bolla kept his focus and continued being good at studies, thanks to his persistent hard work and the habit of constantly listening to audio notes that his favourite teacher regularly gave him. A major obstacle in his struggle for education was when he was discriminated against and denied the science stream after completing class X. He went through a six-month legal battle against the 'Indian Education System' with support from his teacher to get admission into the science stream, scoring a mind boggling 98% in class XII exams. However, his IIT dreams got shattered in India due to his disability, but Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA, gave him the opportunity to pursue business management. Afterwards, the real-life Bolla returned to India to continue achieving many more milestones, which includes taking along his differently-abled brothers and sisters, who continue to seek hope much more desperately than anything else in life.



In conversation with former Indian President (It) Shri APJ Abdul Kalam; real and reel-life Bolla