



Ramchand Pakistani

103 minutes, 2008, Pakistan Director: Mahreen Jabbar

Cast: Syed Fazal Hussain, Nandita Das

Synopsis

'Ramchand Pakistani' is derived from a true story concerning the accidental crossing of the Pakistan-Indian border during a period (June 2002) of extreme, war-like tension between the two countries by two members of a Pakistani Hindu family belonging to the 'untouchable' (Dalit) caste, and the extraordinary consequences of this unintended action upon the lives of a woman, a man, and their son. Belonging to one of the lowest castes in Hinduism (one of the "untouchables"), the family is also part of a small minority of Hindus in a country, which is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, in which 97% of the people are Muslims. The boy and his father are held captive in India where, in contrast to Pakistan, the overwhelming majority of about 80% comprises of Hindus.

The film portrays the lives of a family that is at the bottom of a discriminatory religious ladder and an insensitive social system, which is nevertheless tolerant, inclusive and pluralist. The irony is compounded by the fact that such a family becomes hostage to the acrimonious political relationship between two neighbour-states poised on the brink of war.

Review, Miniba Kamal, *The News on Sunday, Pakistan*

Films are not always what they seem. Ramchand Pakistani is being plugged as a film about "three lives changed by the vagaries of Pakistan-India relations". That is the angle that the international press has taken and Ramchand Pakistani has definitely made waves internationally. Reuters calls it a true-life Pakistan border drama and said that 'Ramchand Pakistani follows the young Hindu boy of the title, as he accidentally steps over the ill-defined border between old rivals India and Pakistan'.

Across the border *The Hindu* calls Ramchand Pakistani 'a film project with a difference' and the article opens with the words "'Two nations poised for war. One family torn apart' reads the tag line for the soon-to-be-released film Ramchand Pakistani. While this dramatic description would seem to fit the bill for any of the numerous war movies Bollywood has produced, Ramchand Pakistani is a film project with a difference.

The first-ever film from Pakistan whose main characters are from the country's minority Hindu community, Ramchand seeks to emphasise the commonality between the people of the two countries rather than focus on the differences and the violence, as many Bollywood movies have tended to do." All the publicity, promotion and numerous articles the film has spawned seem to miss the point. Ramchand Pakistani sounds like a film with socio-political overtones, when in fact it is a film with socio-political undertones. It is very much a film with a heart that focuses on the love between a husband and wife and their child, their pain at their unfortunate parting, the bonds formed in prison between the men who find themselves there and the unlikely bond between a higher caste police inspector forms with a Dalit child. At face value, Ramchand Pakistani may be about India-Pakistan relations, but as a film it transcends them.

From the Film's Presspack: R A M C H A N D P A K I S T A N I

Special aspects of the film

1. This is possibly the first film in the 60-year history of Pakistan, and most certainly the first film post-1971 (after the loss of East Pakistan) in which the central characters of a Pakistani film are Pakistani Hindus.
2. In a country where 97% of the people are Muslims, Hindus constitute only about 1.5% of the non-Muslim population.
3. The film is a human interest story set in South Asia but with universal appeal about a family that is at the bottom of social, religious and economic hierarchies, both by virtue of being non-Muslims in a pre-dominantly Muslim society, and by being from the "untouchable" Dalit (Kohli) caste in the Hindu faith. Yet, the film's theme and story promote secular, non-sectarian values.
4. Adapted from actual events, "Ramchand Pakistani" depicts how an accidental crossing of the Pakistan-Indian border at a time of war-like tension (2002) dramatically changes the lives of a poor Pakistani Hindu "untouchable" peasant family comprising a little boy, his father and his mother. The narrative unfolds on two parallel tracks on either side of the border — until they eventually intersect. This is also a story of a woman's struggle for emotional security and survival in the face of great adversity — and a child's coming of age well before time.
5. This is the first full-length feature film for cinema directed by a young Pakistani woman director, Mehreen Jabbar. Her work reflects a deep concern for the individual identity, rights and empowerment of women.
6. While the film is indigenous to Pakistan, it also represents a rare example of creative and constructive co-operation between Pakistan and India on a non-official level. With the consent of the Government of Pakistan, one of India's reputed actresses Nandita Das has played a lead role in the film as a Pakistani Hindu woman. One of India's leading music directors, Debajyoti Mishra, has composed the background music and four background songs, three of which also feature the voice of one of the leading Indian woman singers, Ms Shubha Mudgal. A widely-acknowledged Indian film editor, Aseem Sinha has also co-edited the film with the Director.
7. The Pakistani cinema has been in steep decline for several years. The decision to produce 'Ramchand Pakistani' brought with it more than the normal risks that any film project faces. The financing of the film had to be mobilized in an unconventional manner. While the Producer and his wife Mrs. Shabnam Jabbar have invested a substantial sum, 20 other citizens of Pakistan and of the USA who have never previously invested in a film for cinema, agreed to invest varying amounts to enable the production of the film.
8. While dealing with the impact of political, and possible military conflict between Pakistan and India on the lives of ordinary human beings living in a remote area, the film presents the story in a narrative, character-based drama, and not in polemical, explicitly political terms.
9. Despite the depiction of a Pakistani child held as a prisoner for several years, with adult prisoners in an Indian jail, the basic theme of the film promotes values of friendship and respect for identities of self, religion and nation, avoiding a narrow, chauvinistic approach.