



It may not be smooth sailing for Rajinikanth's '2.0' movie

2.0's trailer hasn't really generated the buzz it should have, and the movie hasn't made massive profits with the sale of ancillary rights before its release

New Delhi: At a budget of ₹510 crore, Rajinikanth's science fiction movie *2.0* is easily the most expensive Indian film till date. But the S. Shankar directed venture that hits theatres Thursday after much delay is unlikely to have it easy.

For one, after the failure of Yash Raj Films' action adventure *Thugs of Hindostan*, euphoria around the idea of the big-screen spectacle has taken a beating. "Thugs was the biggest offering of the year with Aamir Khan and Amitabh Bachchan coming together, and the fact that it was a Diwali release from YRF, one of the biggest banners. This clearly proves audiences are in no mood to spend money on a bad film, no matter whom it comes from," said a trade expert on condition of anonymity.

While YRF has recovered its investment for *Thugs of Hindostan* from ancillary rights, theatre owners have incurred losses as theatrical business did not match expectations, said the trade expert. YRF got exhibitors to pay a minimum guarantee of nearly ₹15-16 crore (per theatre) before release and the earnings of the film have resulted in a 60-70% loss for them.

"The buzz around *2.0* is not as high as *Enthiran* (the first instalment released in 2010)," said Rakesh Gowthaman, managing director of Vettri Theatres in Chennai.

"That film was high on star value with Rajinikanth and Aishwarya Rai coming together. Plus, Rajini was in the best phase of his career then whereas his recent films haven't really fared well and his entry into politics hasn't been accepted wholeheartedly either," added the trade expert quoted above.

Clearly, *2.0*'s content will have to speak for itself. The film's trailer hasn't really generated the buzz it should have, and, contrary to reports, the movie hasn't made massive profits with the sale of ancillary rights before its release. While the satellite TV rights have gone to the Zee Network for ₹110 crore, about ₹80 crore has come from Karan Johar's Dharma Productions for distribution rights of the Hindi version.

Producers Lyca Productions are still in the process of selling distribution rights for other languages, but trade experts say that all put together, pre-release revenue will not exceed ₹250 crore. That leaves more than half the investment still to be recovered. The movie will not only have to cross at least ₹100 crore on day one but sustain thereafter to break-even.

Also while comparisons with the Baahubali franchise may be inevitable, those two films came within two years of each other, unlike *2.0* that comes eight years after *Enthiran*.

“The burden of Baahubali’s investment was borne by two movies, not one. Plus, that was a more conventional genre—mythology, tradition and family values,” said Atul Mohan, editor of trade magazine *Complete Cinema*.

Lyca did not respond to *Mint*’s queries, but industry experts point out that the company is not marketing the film aggressively. Apart from a trailer launch, online contests, poster releases, in-cinema, print and television advertising and a singular interview with Rajinikanth on Zee Tamil for Diwali, the campaign has been low key.

To be sure, there is much going for the movie. Siddharth Bhardwaj, Chief Marketing Officer and Head of Enterprise Sales, UFO Moviez India Ltd, said Lyca is targeting a screen count higher than the 6,500 notched up by *Baahubali 2: The Conclusion* in 2017 in India alone, the highest for an Indian film so far.

Overseas too, *2.0* should take up around 2,000 screens, an unprecedented number. Lyca is also encouraging theatre owners to opt for upgraded 3D technology for audiences to view the VFX-heavy film in full glory.

“I think audiences are intelligent enough to see how the film is pushing the envelope in terms of production values,” said film distributor and exhibitor Akshaye Rathi who expects Rs20 crore from the Hindi version of the film on day one and about Rs55-60 crore from the Tamil version. “Plus, the presence of Akshay Kumar (as the antagonist) ensures that it caters equally to the north and south.”

Gowthaman added the lukewarm buzz around the movie may work for it in the long run. At least in Tamil Nadu, which is Rajinikanth’s mainstay, it is the first wide solo release since Vijay’s *Sarkar* that came for Diwali and will enjoy an uninterrupted two to three-week window afterwards.

“It’s too early to say if the film will ultimately recover its investment, the opening certainly will not cover and the content has to speak. But at the end of the day, it’s a Rajinikanth film, there is no reason for people to not come,” Gowthaman said.

2.0 releases on Thursday in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu.