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Bollywood's bet on 3D not without challenges



A poster of *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*.

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- Hollywood 3D films--Avatar, Gravity, Transformers, Avengers are considered iconic because their stories come alive in this format

NEW DELHI: The release and success of two 3D films within the first month of 2020, *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior* and *Street Dancer 3D*, has given Bollywood hope for the genre, especially considering that these movies came close on the heels of blockbusters such as period drama *Padmaavat* and Rajinikanth-starrer *2.0*. But media and entertainment industry experts say the format is far from picking up in India, and as of now, the only 3D film in the making is Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt's superhero flick *Brahmastra*.

"The first point to make here is that nobody is shooting their films in 3D, they are just converting them during post-production," said Preetham Daniels, senior vice-president, Asia, at movie screen manufacturing company Harkness Screens.

Shooting in 3D leads to a 50-100% escalation in costs. Rajinikanth's *2.0* was an exception to be shot in the 3D format and its ₹500 crore plus budget is testament to the same. In the run-up to the release of the film, *2.0* producer Lyca Productions had even organised a 'meet-and-greet' with exhibitors across Tamil Nadu to ensure more screens were 3D enabled to maximise its box office prospects.

Costs are an impediment not just for producers but exhibitors as well. Running a 3D film in a theatre requires the purchase of a special polariser for accurate projection of light, which can cost up to Rs. 10-12 lakh.

Besides, you need 3D glasses that require careful maintenance, that is, if they manage to not put people off in the first place. Exhibitors say a lot of people just find the idea of wearing glasses for three hours at a stretch, cumbersome.

Pankaj Jaysinh, chief operating officer, Indian operations, at cinema distribution network UFO Moviez pointed out that the limited exhibition infrastructure automatically means that the 3D version of any film releases in fewer screens than the 2D version. Even the most posh properties will not have more than one screen or auditorium playing the 3D version as compared to at least three for 2D. Even though ticket prices are higher for 3D, it means a negligible addition to overall box office revenue.

"Today, a significant portion of your recovery comes from satellite and OTT streams but since they do not allow for the 3D version, they will not pay extra," Jaysinh said.

Most importantly, industry experts say the content of the film needs to warrant a 3D version. The reason that Hollywood 3D films like Avatar, Gravity, Transformers and Avengers are considered iconic, is not just because they have spared no costs but because their stories come alive in 3D. While action and spectacle-driven Hollywood films necessitate the 3D experience a lot more, typical Indian romances, comedies and family dramas hardly make for 3D films.

"It's also a matter of lack of attractive content. Just two people running around a bush in 3D looks very silly," Daniel said.