

## REVIEW

# Sony TV's Porus – A magnum opus never seen before on television



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This historical series was in the planning stage with Swastik Productions for a long time. A brainchild of Siddharth Kumar Tewary, this magnum opus on the life and times of the Paurava dynasty emperor Puru aka *Porus* is a follow up to his ongoing *Mahakaali Anth Hi Aarambh Hai*. In this historical narrative, the man evocatively interweaves the richness of the period of history with the stance of good judgement which is surely the need of the hour.

A fiercely intimate epic about the clash between Pauravas and the Macedonians and an Akhand Bharat, *Porus* scorchingly reflects the bygone era without being a part of it. The Sony TV series reps a new career high for director Siddharth Tewary whose *Mahabharat* set new trends in Mythology and has created its own cult following across the world.

Set in the times of Bharat Khanda (a term used in the Hindu texts, including the Vedas and the Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Purans to describe the geographic region that encompassed the modern countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Myanmar—that is, *South Asia* at the term's furthest extent) *Porus* focuses on two regions divided by the river Jhelum or as the ancient Greeks called it Hydapses! On one side of the river was India and on the other was Macedonia!

Now, what is noteworthy is - *Porus* is made for the television and a TV series of this sort hasn't ever been seen in our country. That itself is no mean feat! Indeed, the first episode was in many ways admirable and interesting. I am not sure how well it hits the general viewer target. Let me first summarise the episode and then the two perspectives from which I can see it, before setting out as what I see as good and what I think is less good. (There is nothing I think to be bad.) There is a prologue on the motives behind. The episode begins with the river Jhelum talking to the audience about the savage battle that was fought between *Porus* and Alexander on its banks.



The introduction seems pretty semblative to that of Bahubali: The Conclusion, especially with the animated battle being fought as the credits roll and then almost immediately the same VFX laden establishment shot of the Paurava Kingdom that almost flashed the opening scene of the fictitious Mahishmati Kingdom in the above mentioned film in front of my eyes.

The ulterior motive of the Persians setting their eyes on the wealth of the nation is something we have heard about in many folklores and the *Sone Ki Chidiya* that India used to be. The long colourful robes under layers of artful, award calibre make up, costumes and jewellery courtesy Ketki Dalal add a certain amount of believability to the work. But then something magical happens, like it does when the gods of cinema align - Those flashing eyes, brimming with venom, a persian trader, looks through an antediluvian magnifying glass only to see a beautiful all blue vision that is held to be 'Bharat.'

The play of words in the dialogues by Vinod Sharma are terrific and when listened to carefully, one realises the immense usage of alliterations and metaphors to convey the message in a very artistic and yet effective manner.

For instance, when the Persian trader played by Praneet Bhatt enters the Paurav Kingdom on his ship, eyebrows are raised and suspicions are rife about his motive. His wry smile, that evil look in his eyes and the sinister line that he mouths, "Pathar choone se kismat nahi badalti, karobaar se badalti hai , karobaar karna hai mujhe," (One can't change destiny by touching a stone, destiny changes if one trades and I have come here to trade.) Says it all about his lofty ambition and his intentions are pretty clear to the viewing public. Very cleverly, he tries to lure Raja Bamni (played by Aditya Redij) who is the ruler of the Paurava Kingdom by offering a lot more money than anyone else! When his offer hits temptations in the raw nerve, Anusuya (played by Rati Pandey) – the princess of Takshashila and the sister of Takshashila Naresh Ambhiraj (played by Gurpreet Singh) thwarts it stating, "*Jo ek Ka daam paanch se chukaaye, woh to yaa Moorkh hai yaa Dhoorth*" (One who agrees to pay more for something that costs less, is either a fool or is sly.)

That's when Raja Bamni accepts Anusuya's advice and chides the persian trader, much to the chagrin of his own brother and says, "*Aaj agar aapke prastaav ko sweekar na kiya jaay to haani hogi, lekin agar sweekar kiya jaay to kal glaani hogi!*" (If we don't accept your proposal today, it will be our loss but if we accept it, we will have to repent in the future!) Or when Raja Bamni tries to come to a reconciliation with Ambhiraj and the latter with a snide remark tries to shut him off, Bamni says, "*Soch (pauses) ... Soch samajh ke rakhni chahiye Ambhiraj, kyuki Soch ko sach banne mein samay nahi lagta.*" (Thoughts ... The thoughts we harbour makes us what we are, Ambhiraj. It doesn't take much time for the thoughts to turn into reality.)

There are many such instances strewn throughout, when the writing takes the centre stage, for instance, when Anusuya tries to reprimand his elder brother Ambiraj for being rude to Raja Bamni, he retaliates saying, "*Jinke vishwaas mein hi vish ka vaas ho, unke sameep nahi rehte Anusuya.*" (Anusuya, you should never be close to someone who harbours mistrust.)

Aditya Redij's Raja Bamni is big, forbearing and a leader in the truest sense of the word. His tall frame, big eyes and his baritone voice makes his present felt in almost every frame he is seen. Rati Pandey's entry is endearing – Amidst the clamouring crowd, the warrior princess storms in on a horse back with her hair fluttering in slow-mo; when she spots a little kid in the middle of the road; she adeptly picks him up to save him from any injury. Gurpreet's Ambhiraj looks stern and adamant just as his character demands!

The creative team of the series has surely put in a lot of work to make it the visual treat it has turned out to be. The attribution of a specific colour to different kingdoms, for instance – the all blue tint given to the Pauravas and a combination of beige and brown is given to the Takshashila inhabitants looks intriguing and quite belonging to a particular place and this harmony is broken by the multi-coloured robe laden Persians who try to intrude and make their presence felt amidst it all.



Those fearing that *Porus* is nothing but a dull tableau of historical events; be relieved to know that they are in for a lively, provocative historical drama that runs on its own non-stop creative fire. Tewary introduces us to this colossal azure kingdom but from then on, the characters are on their feet and demanding attention. The competition sequence that has been shot on the Khao Sok lake between Raja Bamni and Ambhiraj looked straight out from the movie screens. The action sequences choreographed by Pradit Seelium and Tinu Verma are working wonders for the drama!

The photography looks stunning and grand, especially when the camera glides smoothly over the beautiful Thailand seascape that is being passed off as Jhelum (which is a tad bit unsettling to the mind though) courtesy Kabir Lal. A splendid usage of montage and ariel shots during the humongous dance sequence filmed in a bid to introduce the majestic Paurav Rashtra are quite unbecoming of the television sphere but they have been incorporated and splendidly so! Add to that a team of 200 dedicated VFX designers and the result is more than just impressive.

There are many stereotypes that have been broken in the very first hour long episode of the epic drama and I hope, this continues to happen which will help the television audience to consume something entirely new from what they habitually do!

All I can say is, a storm is raging inside these characters, waiting to rivet our attention and make *Porus* a drama series that grabs you and won't let go!