

## Film Review

<b>Title:</b>	<i>Sam Bahadur</i>
<b>Director:</b>	Meghna Gulzar
<b>Producer:</b>	Ronnie Screwvala
<b>Cinematographer:</b>	Jay I. Patel
<b>Duration /Running Time:</b>	148 minutes
<b>Available on:</b>	ZEE 5

In the cinematic landscape, where narratives often take creative liberties, 'Sam Bahadur' emerges as a beacon of historical integrity, cautiously crafted through a lens of extensive research. This magnum opus directed by Meghna Gulzar is not just a biopic; it's a vivid tapestry woven with threads of authenticity. As the reels unravel, viewers are not merely transported to the life of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, but rather immersed in a systematically researched chronicle that delves into the very soul of one of India's legendary military leaders.

In an industry often driven by dramatic embellishments, 'Sam Bahadur' stands tall, an exclusive cinematic endeavor that stands as a testament to the profound impact of research-driven storytelling. Manifesting across a vast and diverse landscape, the film 'Sam Bahadur' compresses a lifetime into its succinct two and a half hours. Within this temporal constraint, the film adeptly encapsulates a span of four decades characterized by unwavering commitment to active military service, pivotal engagement in anti-insurgency operations, substantial participation in five distinct wars, and consequential encounters with various authorities. While Meghna Gulzar's ambitious foray into biographical storytelling may convey an initial impression of expeditiousness, it nevertheless deftly navigates the narrative terrain, sustaining an admirable absence of monotony.

The cinematic composition adeptly focuses salient facets, propelled by the dynamic portrayal of 'Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw', skillfully rendered by Vicky Kaushal. Esteemed as both a gentleman and a distinguished officer, Manekshaw's indomitable spirit, gallantry, fervor for life, eloquence, and resolute sense of purpose ascend to a level of legendary acclaim. Operating with a predilection towards an immersive character examination rather than succumbing to the trap-

pings of an action-centric war saga, the film 'Sam Bahadur' exhibits a commendable proficiency in realizing its primary objectives. Interweaving the chronicle of a distinguished life, not from its nascent stages but rather commencing with the protagonist in infancy nestled within a crib, the film deftly showcases the extraordinary prowess of Manekshaw as both a 'formidable soldier' and a 'sagacious leader'.

Conducting a systematic examination of nomenclature, the cinematic depiction of Sam Manekshaw unveils a narrative in which appellations carry profound significance. Within the film's inaugural sequence, a revelation emerges that 'Sam', originally bestowed with the appellation 'Cyrus' by his parents, underwent a subsequent rechristening. This renaming transpired as a consequence of the recent apprehension of a thief sharing the same name within the immediate vicinity, thereby delineating the nuanced layers embedded within the significance of names in the cinematic portrayal. In a subsequent cinematic tableau, a soldier hailing from the 8th Gorkha Rifles affixes the honorific 'Sam Bahadur' to the then Chief of the Indian Army—a sobriquet that resonates persistently throughout the unfolding narrative.

Artfully embodied by Vicky Kaushal, the persona of Sam Manekshaw is delineated with a nuanced equilibrium between vibrant characterization and steadfast authenticity. Kaushal's portrayal encompasses a buoyant stride, a dialogue delivery reminiscent of the iconic 'Dev Anand', and a demeanor that gracefully oscillates between dignified self-assurance and approachable amiability, thereby imbuing the character with a tapestry of distinctive mannerisms.

A conspicuous attribute of 'Sam Bahadur' resides in its deliberate deviation from overtly jingoistic militarism, opting instead for a subtle portrayal that sensitively delineates the formidable challenges confronted by soldiers in situations fraught with mortal peril. While the cinematic narrative incorporates scenes of conflict and poignant dialogues, these elements seamlessly coalesce with the more subdued components that collectively form this kaleidoscopic biographical depiction. Transcending the theatrics of the battlefield, the film auger into the intimate sphere of General Manekshaw, accentuating his interpersonal connections, notably with his spouse Silloo (portrayed by Sanya Malhotra). In doing so, it carefully captures the human dimensions of a military luminary's existence, unfurling a panorama that extends beyond the resonating cadence of inspirational addresses and the veneer of authoritative leadership.

Against a canvas devoid of religious exceptionalism, the film evokes an epoch wherein patriotic fervor was grounded in the commemoration of unity in diversity—an inherent facet of the quintessence of the Indian identity. The culminating battle exhortations resonating from diverse regiments emblematically signify the manifold backgrounds of Indian soldiers converging upon a collective purpose. In a pivotal scene, a court of inquiry scrutinizes Manekshaw's allegiance, attributing suspicions to the display of portraits of British soldiers at the defense academy under his purview. The general's retort categorically refutes the allegation, underscored by the assertion that the academy is a bastion for molding soldiers, eschewing the realm of political considerations.

The skillfully crafted screenplay, a testament to the refined artistry of Meghna Gulzar in collaboration with Bhavani Iyer and Shantanu Srivastava, beautifully synthesizes an array of primary sources, archival materials, and firsthand accounts. This cinematic opus transcends the conventional boundaries of mere interpretation, instead embarking on a scholarly odyssey into the life of Manekshaw, thus weaving a narrative that is not only an aesthetic triumph but also a profound exploration grounded in rigorous research. Expanding beyond the singular trajectory of an individual's narrative, the film broadens its purview to envelop the expansive chronicle of a nation, seamlessly fusing the magnificence inherent in an epic with the nuanced cadence of an intimate chronicle. Distinguished by its paramount commitment to historical precision—a rarity in the realm of Bollywood biopics—the film exquisitely reconstructs each frame to exhale the authenticity inherent in the era it portrays. This authenticity is a testament to exhaustive research, setting the film apart in its dedication to rendering a faithful portrayal of historical epochs. The sagacious screenwriters intricately weave sufficient narrative substance onto the compendious storyline, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the charismatic general's career within the broader canvas of the nation's eventful history, comprising both pre- and post-independence developments. This augmentation is methodically orchestrated to do justice to the multifaceted facets of the protagonist's journey. Traversing various points in time from the early 1940s to the early 1970s, the film acknowledges its occasional narrative ellipses. However, these gaps do not hinder the continuous allure of the saga, maintaining a consistently captivating narrative.

Field Marshal Manekshaw's recurrent proclamation, "I fight to win," though redolent of the indomitable ethos associated with Hindi action heroes, is astutely navigated by the director to eschew the allure of magnifying the protagonist into an exaggerated, larger-than-life persona. This

discerning directorial choice preserves a detailed and authentic portrayal, steering clear of sensationalism. Through a deliberate avoidance of historical hyperbole, Meghna Gulzar carefully presents the eminent soldier as a nuanced human entity—an individual characterized by conviction, sagacity, assurance, and intermittent self-assurance. This portrayal unveils a master strategist unhesitant in articulating his thoughts with discerning clarity.

While ‘Sam Bahadur’ demonstrates proficiency in delineating specific political figures, most notably Indira Gandhi, it encounters a lapse in its perfunctory portrayal of Jawaharlal Nehru, as embodied by Neeraj Kabi. Notwithstanding this limitation, the film intricately intertwines threads of historical insight and personal dimensions, crafting a mesmerizing narrative that encapsulates the charisma of a military icon within the expansive canvas of India’s socio-political scenario. In a seminal sequence, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi asserts her diplomatic acumen, strategically deploying Chief of Army Staff Manekshaw as a diplomatic instrument to counter Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State under Richard Nixon. Kissinger had issued stern warnings to India, delineating potential repercussions should the nation contemplate an offensive against Pakistan on the eastern front.

The film adeptly integrates archival newsreel footage, featuring poignant moments such as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s fervent call for rebellion, distressing scenes capturing Dhaka University students confronting violence inflicted by the Pakistan army, and glimpses into the machinations of General Yahya Khan (enacted by Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub). General Yahya Khan, who was previously Manekshaw’s comrade at the pre-partition defense academy, is portrayed orchestrating schemes to instigate a confrontation with India. This seamless integration serves to enhance the narrative depth, illustrating that ‘Sam Bahadur’ surpasses mere verbal exchanges by providing a comprehensive depiction of historical events, with particular emphasis on the prelude to the Bangladesh war. This approach ensures the maintenance of continuous narrative tension throughout the cinematic exposition.

Although Vicky Kaushal undeniably commands attention with his compelling presence in pivotal scenes, the film’s genuine strength resides in the discerning equilibrium assiduously crafted by director Meghna Gulzar. This delicate balance between ambitious storytelling and judicious restraint proves instrumental in elevating not only the spirited central performance but also in augmenting the emotional and cinematic payoff to a

level of remarkable significance. The triumph of the film, thus, cannot be solely ascribed to Kaushal's adept showmanship but is equally indebted to Gulzar's skillful navigation of the intricate dynamics entwined within the interplay of ambition and subtlety.

'Sam Bahadur' not only entertains but educates, leaving a lasting impact on its audience. The film prompts reflection on the sacrifices made by military leaders like Manekshaw and their pivotal role in shaping the destiny of nations. Beyond the cinematic experience, it serves as a valuable historical document, prompting discussions and fostering a deeper appreciation for India's military history.

**Saad Ullah Khan**