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Marx, World Bank statistics and Bollywood

Anustup Basu's new book, *Bollywood in the Age of New Media* certainly deserves a serious reading by all cineastes of Hindi and Indian cinema. Moving out of the post-colonial analytical corridor Anustup forays into the new Indian landscape dotted with cable TV, computers and cell-phones to see how this new media has impacted Bollywood and its spectatorship.

The first chapter is a tour de force explaining the post-modern process of filmmaking/viewing as an 'assemblage', a process in which statements, bodies, sounds, events, beliefs and spaces come together and disperse in opportune manners without getting organised into stable/conventional story-telling systems. Taking the concept of assemblage as pronounced first by Gilles Deleuze he explains how films are not to be understood as 'totalities' but as digital or discreet items of composed pieces of information. The new Bollywood cinemas and their audiences live for those 150 minutes as if walking through an assemblage of various shopping windows in a big cinema mall, purchasing in a few but ending up ignoring the rest. The new cinema has to also share its own 'constructed' space and time with other distractions like SMS messages and other updates reaching the audience simultaneously. And with so many films being ultimately watched on TV channels competing with each other for grabbing eye-balls, Anustup Basu declares open the 'Cinema in the age of the Geo-Televisual Aesthetic'.

This aesthetic is a reaction to the rather quick changes in the new Bollywood land/mindscape shifting from the Raj Kapoor/ Nehruvian mode which addresses various global choices available and yet choosing to remain '...Phir bi dil hai Hindustani' to a cinema where the 'developed' liberal world is consumed as a neo-Indian/global image. Landscapes of Italy, Australia and New York become common place and our Indian archetypes play out their dramatic conflicts here with no visible disturbance seen on the actors or the audience. How did this change happen? For the seasoned Indian film producer, taking their idiosyncratic starry actors abroad is the best way to 'locking' them on shooting sets at their disposal 24/7!! No family functions, endorsements or late night filmy parties to attend! This practical reason apart it ended up as a reflection of a virtual India, an infomercial logic derived from fashion channels and tourism to see the city itself to be a compound of the desire industry. If Deleuze used this idea to deconstruct Hitler's rise, Anustup takes us into these virtual 'cities' and its political underbelly to see how it resonates to the growth of Hindu fundamentalism.

By the time Anustup reaches Part 2 and 3 of his journey he is caught in a web of crossroads analysing in detail Shankar's *Nayak* and Mani Ratnam's *Dil Se* while trying to trace ideological/melodramatic roots in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Natya Sastra, the Bhagvad Gita

and *Mother India* all in the same breath. Unwittingly but quite appropriately he has touched upon Shankar and Mani Ratnam as the two real founders of the Bollywood aesthetic. For me it is not strange that southerners should have defined this typology which is associated with Bombay.

The traditional Madras Cinema has always played the 'national' leader from the days when moguls like Vasan, LV Prasad or AVM made films for an all India market. No wonder then that the cosmetic visualisation of liberalisation should actually come from the boutiques of Madras-based filmmakers. This is where Anustup should have touched and examined grass roots in small towns of India where liberalisation took serious leaps. Instead he resorts to copious inferences from the works of Hegel, Marx, Adorno, Benjamin, added with World Bank statistics, Bhakti poetry and caste politics to create an amazing traffic jam centering around a rather unknown film called '*Rudraksh*' directed by Mani Shankar. In this 'mythic depth of time' names have a certain eerie way of reincarnating again! How does a good-hearted academician like Anustup Basu ever imagine reaching out to the Bollywood cineaste when he devotes over 10 pages of complex analysis to this film?

As is the practice the academic peer pressure on such new writers are so strong that the brilliant expositions are often presented in exclusive Brahminical idioms that few outside the 'film studies' circle can relish and probably digest. Describing the famous scene in '*Deewar*' in which Nirupa Roy the mother dismisses Amitabh her 'crooked' son while preferring to stay with her good cop/son Shashi, he writes "The linear, dialectical parlay of propositions and counter-propositions is suddenly arrested and held in the static, as Rajadhyaksha says, with the sound of the utterance rising to the surface, as if leaving behind the clamor of a multitudinous reality." For the Indian cine-literates who understand such explanations Ashish Rajadhyaksha is one of the first ordained film scholars of international repute and Anustup, professor of cinema studies at the University of Illinois, recurrently pays his 'salaams' to him and the entire clan of 'Masala' Hindi cinema scholars while elucidating his new extended perspective of the 'cosmetic' Bollywood cinema from the 90s. How I wish his long list of inspirational acknowledgements also included the very objective of his study namely filmmakers like Shah Rukh Khan, Mani Ratnam, Salim Javed or Farah Khan. Are they so difficult to access in comparison to the complex terrains that this book has handled?

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