Lipstick Under My Burkha—A Review by Raj Ayyar

I enjoyed watching Lipstick Under My Burkha this afternoon—the film is now in its once a day matinee phase, about to exit the big screen.

The film is a great commentary on the suppression of female sexual desire and sexualities in contemporary India. Pornography, phone sex and endless erotic fantasy are the substitutes.

The lead figure in a Hindi porn novel series—Rosie, becomes the fantasy persona of two of the women in lead roles—Ratna Pathak as the older sexy Buaji and Plabita Borthakur as Rehana Abidi, the young Muslim woman, who spends most of her spare time fantasizing about sex in the Rosie persona.

Both women are oppressed by their families; Rehana once her kleptomania is revealed, and Buaji for her erotic fantasies as an older woman. Past 40, women In India are not supposed to think of sex.
Her phone sex with a stud—a swimming life guard, plus her hidden porn stash, get her thrown out of her family and out

into the streets. Bua’s situation reveals the sanctimonious ageist sex prohibition (aside from a generalized sex phobia, homophobia, transphobia and more), rampant in India—older women and men are supposed to be sexless nurturers of the young and nothing more,

Konkona Sen Sharma is disappointingly reduced to sidekick status at best in this film—a shame, given her considerable acting talent (remember Konkona in Mr. & Mrs. Iyer?).
In the end, the major characters are manifestations of the porn novel Rosie character—porn is the real hero of Lipstick.

For me, the glaring melodramatic flaw in the film: the lifeguard who flirts with Bua Usha, and enjoys phone sex with her in her camouflaged Rosie persona, exposes her publicly in her neighborhood, and turns her family and most of her friends in that ghetto against her. Topping it off with a stream of ageist abuse. Given his studly narcissism and enjoyment of the phone sex, it is out of character for him to attempt such a wholesale destruction of one of his admirers.

No, this is Ekta Kapoor channeling thru the director of the film, back to the weepy, the overdone, the implausible melodramatic excesses of Ekta’s soaps. Tsk, tsk.
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