Sarkar Raj – a product of our times where Business controls Politics

Sarkar Raj – a product of our times where Business controls Politics

A Review by Joya John





The movie ***Sarkar Raj*** belongs to a genre of Bollywood films that have repeatedly shown the nexus between the mafia and governments. The audience is reminded time and time again that politics and governments are not in the hands of visionaries and incorruptible leaders. This is essentially a politics of the crooks with ideals and the crooks with no ideals. The central question that needs to be asked of the film Sarkar Raj is why should the audience/spectator identify with the father-

son duo of the film played by Amitabh Bacchan(Sarkar) and Abhishek Bacchan(Shankar)?

The film works through certain tropes that are typical of the genre of mafia movies. An old guard, epitomized in Amitabh Bacchan or Sarkar, makes way for a new leadership—Abhishek Bacchan or Shankar. Shankar becomes involved in a multi-crore-power project-, which we are told, repeatedly, will benefit the people of Maharashtra. The words, "*badlav",*"development", and "public good" achieve an incantatory quality when reiterated by the tough talking glib Shankar. Not surprisingly this project encounters a contradiction that we are now only too familiar with, post nandigram- people versus development. The construction of the power project will displace 40,000 villagers. Shankar travels extensively to convince villagers of the necessity of this project. We never hear these arguments because of a deafening background score that reinforces the aura of the leader Shankar. All we are given are a series of homilies on "welfare", exchanged between Amitabh Bacchan and Aishwarya Rai.

However, opposition builds up to the proposed project and is spearheaded by Som, a peasant leader who convinces villagers that the project will benefit only the metropolis of Mumbai. The nature of this opposition is however suspect from the start and we learn later that Som's resistance is only part of a larger Machiavellian politics to overthrow the Sarkar backed government in Maharashtra. Shankar, the visionary, is killed and Amitabh Bacchan or Sarkar discovers that the project was never meant to take off and "power to the people" was never the purpose of the project. Through a series of vendetta killings Sarkar, reestablishes the power of the "raj".

The film Sarkar Raj ends with painting a rather grim picture of the world of politics. Interestingly its visonary-Shankar has strong links to the underworld and is not comparable to the student leader of *Yuva,* played by Ajay Devgan or a socially motivated protagonist like Sharukh Khan in*Swades.*

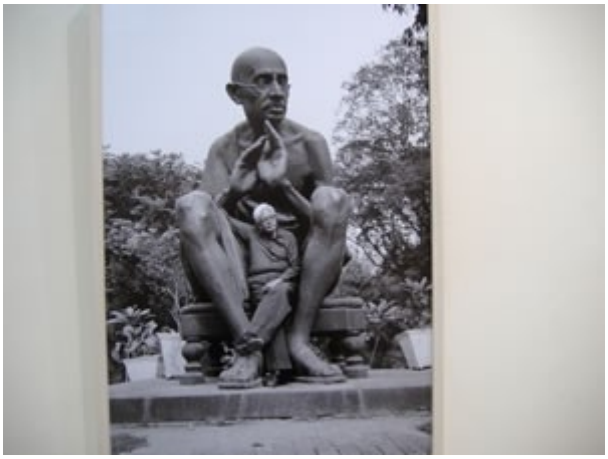
Characteristically these would be the agents of social change for middle class audiences. So why does Ram Gopal Verma, decide to deify a hero who is after all from the mafia? Sarkar Raj is very much a product of its times when clearly the world of business controls politics. This has also meant that the self-proclaimed agent of social welfare is no longer the state, but big corporations. Sarkar Raj also depicts an old style mafia now diversifying into 'clean'/aboveboard business. Ironically the film makes us believe that we are not watching a business venture take off but are in fact witnessing a welfare project to develop resources. The film is however a product of its own dilemmas. Can there be private profit with welfare? The film portrays power hungry politicians and money-grubbing businessmen who are not remotely concerned with welfare. In the grim world of Sarkar Raj, the public can only be pawns in the machinations of the powerful. Even when we see protest, the scenes of violence are strategic. Dissident peasants go on a rampage, destroying public property and attacking civilians and it becomes easy for an audience to distance itself from these concerns and see this protest as "incitement" of a misguided public. At the end of the day it's the goonda with a conscience or the visionary businessman and their idea of public good that controls Ram Gopal's plot. It is no small irony that Abhishek Bacchan has played the role of both the visionary entrepreneur in Guru as well as the visionary gangster in Sarkar Raj. Despite its rather patronizing subtext of public good being thwarted by corrupt politicians and unscrupulous businessmen and mafia the film Sarkar Raj deifies power not the people.

Bioscope – Ram Rahman’s photo exhibitio (Divya Raina)

Bioscope – Ram Rahman’s photo exhibition

a REVIEW by

Divya Raina



In Mahatma Gandhi’s lap – Bhupek Khakkar as seen by Ram Rehman

When does one become a tourist of reality? Can photography explain man to man? It was a famous photographer who once said; “A photograph is a secret about a secret…the more it tells you the less you know”. These thoughts came to mind while visiting Ram Rahman’s recent photo exhibition called Bioscope, held at the Rabindra Bhawan Gallery in New Delhi recently. From the wonderfully intimate collage mounted at the beginning of the exhibition; featuring Ram’s famous parents, dancer Indrani Rahman and architect father Habib Rahman, it felt like an instantaneous view of the entire trajectory of Ram’s life from infancy onwards.

The exhibition consists mostly of black and white

photographs, with compelling images and portraits of both the well-known and not- so –well- known, taken at various periods in this extraordinarily gifted and socially committed designer and photographer. Ram's forte is in the capturing of the moment and freezing it in time. The overhead view of Safdar Hashmis funeral, for instance expresses the horror and sense of solidarity at this most ghastly slaughter of an amazing life.

Also, Ram revels in the relationship between foreground and subject and there is generally an extraordinarily fraught tension between the two as can be seen in the accompanying picture of painter Bhupen Khaker in the lap of Gandhi.

Whether Ram has taken pictures of left- liberal friends and SAHMAT colleagues, or pictures of Rajeev Sethi and other "culture-czars " and "czarinas" or of wrestlers or of inanimate figures, dummies, posters and graffiti, everything is touched with a faintly self-mocking irony. Finally, these pictures at the exhibition, tell us more about the photographer himself, his concerns and ultimately his "ethics of seeing".

INDIAN IDOL FINALIST TAKES A MUSICAL VOW (B.B. Nagpal)

INDIAN IDOL FINALIST TAKES A MUSICAL VOW

"Dowry? My Left Foot! Grooms Dad Foot's the Bill"

by

B B Nagpal

Senior Film Critic



This is a new way to fight the menace of dowry – through rock entertainment that appeals to the gennext generation and takes the message home.

In her very first music album, this finalist from the second edition of Indian Idol has in a song categorically sent out the message that all the festivities will take place as usual for her marriage, but the expenses will have to be borne by the groom's father.

And though stated lightly, Neha Kakkar told this critic that the message was not to be taken lightly. She said the song, written by her brother Tony, had conveyed a view that both the siblings held. Why is it that the bride's parents have to bear the cost of marriage, and also pay dowry, she asked.

But '*Tere Baap ka*' is only one of the eight tracks in the album, *Neha the Rockstar*, which has been brought out by a music company owned by a duo who are themselves well known in the world of Hindi and Punjabi pop – the Meet Brothers, Harmeet and Manmeet. In fact, this is the first album brought out by their new music company 'Meet Bros Music'.

Neha, who marked her 19th birthday last week, said she felt that messages can be conveyed more powerfully through music since all the young people loved to listen to new numbers.

Asked why the Meet Brothers selected her, she said 'I am happy they saw something different in me and selected me'.

She said she had been singing since the age of four when she would sing in bhajan sandhya (prayer meetings). She had not received any training.

However, she admitted she had been inspired by her sister Sonu Kakkar who has become popular with the number ‘Babuji zaraa dheere chalo, bijli kharhi yahaan bijli kharhi’.

When asked about the genuineness of reality shows, she admitted that there was a lot of written scripting in the ‘fights’ between judges, but said the shows were by and large genuine.

Harmeet said that the duo always believed in making songs on real situations. For example, when Rakhi Sawanthad planted her now famous kiss on Mika’s cheek, they had sung the song ‘Behen tune pappi kyun lee’.

Asked why they had gone to Mumbai to make a career in Punjabi singing, both Harmeet and Manmeet said that they felt that the metropolis was the right city for music. They also had a passion for acting and got a break in serials like ‘Kyun ki saas bhi kabhi bahu thi’ for which one of them one an award, ‘Kumkum’, ‘Kalash’ and some others.

Music was something they had done from childhood, but it was only ZEE TV which first recognized their singing talent.

When asked why they had decided to launch their own music company, they said the existing companies appeared to have lost interest in genuine rock stars.

They felt that Neha was a natural as she was not just a good singer, but also a gifted dancer. Furthermore, they felt that singers who took part in reality shows were often forgotten later.

Asked about the concept of the father-in-law paying dowry, they said that the launch of the album in Mumbai had been

unusual when the girl came on a ‘ghorri’ (horse) and the ‘groom’ went in a ‘doli’.

On a serious note, they said several women’s organizations had approached them to perform this song in the presence of audiences.

They were now planning a Sufi album of their own and had signed three other artistes as well.

‘Instant Culture – pushing children too far?

‘*Instant Culture* – pushing children too far?

An Examination of the competitive pressures of our educational system

by

Divya Raina



The Innocent World of Children’s transgressed ?

–“ **Conspicuous Achievement**.”

This phrase implies that a child must transform himself into some sort of prodigy and excel. The most likely areas are sports, ‘conspicuous’ social causes, being super-fluent in a foreign language, or being the musical equivalent of Beethoven. ‘Leaving no stone unturned’ has become a middle-

class parent's motto. Landing a seat in some elite college is no longer enough apparently.

In India, are we aware of what are we doing to our *own* children? Yes, our own middle-class children, our so-called privileged youth? Now that summer is here, are not Delhi's children being packed off to summer workshops? Are they not spending the scorching summer learning "something useful"? Why is 'getting bored' no longer an option? Spending time alone is unheard of. It's like leaving the tap water running. Such an obscene waste. Activities such as introspection, thinking, doodling, drawing, just exploring one's universe are certainly not even considered activities, and kids who do this are condemned, reprimanded, considered lazy, moody, shy, unsocial and impractical. Spontaneous creative activity done at home, is 'too messy', too time consuming, vague and without any direction or goal.

And who dares to spend waking hours day- dreaming? Being sensitive is ghastly; one has to have a thick skin to survive. After all; it's a parent's job to see that his kid is street-smart, assertive, if not downright aggressive. Morals, values, and ethics take a backseat to cut-throat competition. After all, it *is* a "dog-eat-dog" world out there, and for this purpose one must be thoroughly trained and prepared. Who remembers the lines "…What is this life if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?"

We are told repeatedly that our children need constant diversion. Yet watching TV is like selling one's soul to the devil. For most parents, simply surfing the net unsupervised makes them anxious about their kids getting to unsuitable sites. If sending them to the hills or even some exotic locale is not possible, and we don't want them hanging out in air-conditioned malls or movie-multiplexes all the time; and when buying the latest gadgetry, branded cell phones and designer clothing is inadequate; we simply have to ensure that they must not remain idle, hence, the old adage about an idle mind

being the devil's workshop is trotted out as justification.

For those in school, holiday homework is something that will be finished off in the last week or so of the hols. Vacation time must be spent acquiring something else, an extra–curricular skill that is fun and keeps the child gainfully employed for some, if not all the time. Dance classes, from kathak to salsa, yoga camps, squash or chess, swimming, theatre, piano playing and what –have-you, all are considered vital. If one can actually swing some membership to clubs and special centers, then this potpourri of skill-learning will get even better.

Reading, though highly valued, seems the most challenging for parents. The very word 'classic' seems anathema to kids, and a 'good' book translates to 'boring'. To explain, or to justify this, is the convenient cliché doing the rounds; "the dwindling attention-span of today's kids and their inability to focus for long". If a child still shows some inclination to read then let him/her attend a reading workshop where he /she will be able to plough through specially selected titles for a fee and which will be conducted by some specialist aunty or uncle, whose manner appears more magnanimous than the average school teacher.

Far from de-schooling society, it is as though we want school all the time. Everything has to be structured, pre-digested, pre-packaged and sold to the anxious consumer/ parent. And the parent is totally consumed with anxiety and often guilt about providing the very best he can afford, or obtain.

When did we stop becoming parents and become instructors instead? All the time, that we are with our children we are hell-bent on instructing them, on teaching them something or the other: at the dining table it is all about saying robotic "please" and "thank you" , traveling anywhere becomes a lesson in geography, opening a newspaper is all about current affairs and improving general knowledge. The examples can be

multiplied, even visits to a park is all about botany or keeping fit. We are in a position of authority; the child must simply go along with what we have planned for him/her

Often, elderly relatives are now being valued as culture givers, heritage communicators, with their smattering of folk-lore, wise, pithy sayings, and interpretations of the epics, and dusty tomes or antiquated relics of the past are being venerated in many homes in a manner never seen before. Parents who dump children with elderly relatives feel that by some strange process of cultural osmosis "good Indian values" will seep through to their video-game-ridden minds, and they will be purged. Regional languages will be spoken and not forgotten, there will be the nurturance of the glorious value of Respect for Elders. Time spent with kids is always 'quality time' and caregivers, home-makers, and nurturers are becoming adept in the multiple roles of chauffeurs and registration experts who alertly scout for the very best workshops and sessions that the city has to offer. Time is at a premium; time-slots and schedules are vital.

What underlies this frantic activity that parents seem to face? Is it seen as an inability to provide the very best cultural inputs? Does it stem from the fear that the homogenizing influences of our televised, globalized world is reducing each child to looking and dressing alike, speaking and even thinking in a similar fashion? Is it a fear that unless a child has some exceptional talent that is recognized by all, the 'portfolio' of their accomplishments will be inadequate?

This entire rigmarole, which we *know* has begun when four year old children are packed off to 'confidence building workshops', comes to a head at the time of college admissions, bringing out tremendous inherent inner fears of rejection. This is the time when the most claustrophobic competition gets underway. Isn't this getting a seat in a prized college or brand-name institution, the ultimate nirvana? Isn't this what

those who committed suicide over their non-performance in the dreaded exam time were made to feel totally inadequate about?

Has it anything to do with a vicarious realizing of our own unfinished dreams? Is it an "I never had the ability/opportunity/finances to do what I wanted to, so I must seize this chance and ensure my son/daughter is able to." Is it less about molding our children, and more about our own unfinished business?

And what does the child think and feel about this? Does the young adult have a say in this process? Or does he/she mindlessly go along with whatever has been planned? Look around you and you will get your answers.

Desire and Repetition: The miniaturisation of the Hindi film song (Shikha Jhingan)

Desire and Repetition: The miniaturisation of the Hindi film song

Fourth Asian Women's Film Festival 2008 "Insights and Aspirations"

By Shikha Jhingan



Scene from Shikha Jhingan's *'Born to Sing'*

Let us examine the contemporary popular Hindi film songs and their circulation through the convergence of new media technologies. How has the emergence of global television and digital music changed the aesthetics, the cultural codes and the formal structure of the Hindi film song by mobilizing new circuits for the consumption of popular music? In fact, the use of repetition and heightened codes of visuality have perhaps given new forms of identity to a large number of young girls on 'realty shows' based on popular film music.

In recent times, one big change in the structure of the song has been the use of a 'hook line' as a repetitive structure. This clever use of the hook line allows the song as a musical category to evoke a discernible response from the body. Popular songs like Nach Baliye (*Bunty Aur Babli*), Dhoom Machale Dhoom (*Dhoom*), Mauja hi Mauja (*Jab We Met*) rely on the repetition of words or cluster of words and rhythmic patterns that is described as the hook line of the song. This metonymical formulation completely undermines the conventional structure of the film song thus opening up the song for an 'afterlife' for its circulation in the global circuits of value and exchange. The repetitive use of the hook line through television promos and trailers, reality shows, award nights, ring tones and advertisements of mobile phones and telecom service providers, leads to obfuscation of the original song and its emotional appeal. In this new formulation the film song not only gets unhinged from the narrative of the film but is primarily meant to evoke a response from a dancing body.

In analysing Reality Television and talent shows based on music, one would like to draw attention to the democratisation where it is possible to have greater access to these technologies not just as consumers but in recreation of the musical mode. What is interesting here is that the accent here is not just on being a good singer but a great performer. The

mobilization of a unique voice along with a great performance, an energetic dancing body, go into this new form of dispersal. The creation of a certain persona, with the help of props, dress, hats, belts, gestures and other visual signs create the uniqueness of each singer. So music is providing a basis for the creation of an identity. The emphasis is on showcasing 'your own voice' in sharp contrast to the earlier phase of remixes and cover versions which relied entirely on imitation or the recreation of an 'affect'. What is even more interesting is that there is a blurring of boundaries between music and dance, between the singer and the listener, between rehearsal and performance between sound and music and between voice and sound.

Shikha Jhingan, an IAWRT member, is a Professor in Media at Lady Sri Ram College , New Delhi

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Project Half Widows, in partnership with IAWRT and APDP

Project *Half Widows*,

in partnership with IAWRT and APDP

info by

Iffat Fatima, Filmmaker



The project ”**Half Widows”** is a three year media project. which began in 2006. The project is a partnership between International Association of Women in Radio and Television(IAWRT), a forum for personal contact and professional development among women broadcasters worldwide and the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons(APDP) Kashmir. APDP is an association of the relatives of the victims of **Enforced Disappearances**, campaigning collectively to seek justice and to get information on the whereabouts of the missing members of their families. The project conceived and executed by Iffat Fatima is supported by FOKUS, a Norwegian based organisation which by supporting project based cooperation between Nowegian and their partner organisations in the south, aims to contribute to the improvement of economic, social and political status of women world wide.

The project is about the struggle of the family members of the disappeared persons in Kashmir.who have spent vast sums of money, time, resources and energy in a legal system that has systematically failed to provide justice to the victims. Enforced disappearance is not recognized as a crime under Indian law. Specifically the project is about women whose husbands have disappeared and are missing in the more than decade old violence in Kashmir. These women known as **half widows** in Kashmir, are living in a state of limbo, suspended in a space where they lead a life of uncertainity and anxiety. There is no closure for them to pick up the threads of their lives and move on. Being young and vulnerable they are under the pressure of their family and society to stay within the

framework of marriage and conform to a marital status, while as the reality is that they are without husbands. Their lives are torn apart and their status undefined, subject to Islamic legal procedures which are ambiguous and determined by local interpretations.

APDP was founded in 1994 by Parveena Ahangar whose 17-year-old son was abducted and never heard of again In 1994. Parveena filed a habeas corpus petition in the Srinagar High Court. With the help of human rights activists and lawyers more and more petitions continued to be filed. More and more family members got together, went to court together, held demonstrations together. Thus began a movement, a collective struggle formalized as APDP. The testimonies of the members of APDP and the documentation of cases of disappeared persons in Kashmir indicate that the practice of enforced disappearance is widespread and systematic. Almost 8000 people are thought to have disappeared, some as young as 13 or 14 years old. A large number of disappearance cases remain undocumented for various reasons, including fear of reprisal allegedly by the security forces.

Media Documentation

The media project seeks to document the personal experiences of these women and the stories which emerge from these experiences through the production of a documentary film. The documentary film will explore issues of memory , violence and healing and be a space for women whose voice is buried in the larger political and militaristic discourse to narrate their experiences with violence from their own perspectives. Besides a video documentary the project also includes 3 to 4 short video magazines which highlight immediate concerns and problems confronted by women as theystruggle to get legal assistance and information about their family members who are missing.

However the larger objective of the project is to assist and

support the APDP effort to launch a long term self sustaining information and advocacy campaign against “Disappearances” and to build awareness about its impact on women Community level participation and networking is an important component of the campaign. The process of documentation, dissemination and distribution is being undertaken through a consultative process with APDP members, a network of organisations, activists, academics and practitioners. Through workshops, and conferences APDP members are trained to acquire long term organisational and media skills to be able to carry on the advocacy campaign independently. The project raises important issues of human rights, peace and justice confronting other countries as well. It will generate material that has international resonance as well as relevance and will urge policy makers and those who wield power to address the concerns of human rights , democracy and justice.

Source: IAWRT, Iffat Fatima

Interpreting Myth and Recreating New Myths

‘Interpreting Myth and Recreating New Myths’

4th IAWRT Asian Women’s Film Festival 2008

a Documentary film Review by

Divya Raina



The Perfect Match' by Dhwani Desai

The wonderful world of tales from the Panchatantra is open to numerous tellings and retellings. The extraordinary elasticity of these tales mean that one can enjoy seeing in them current, contemporary concerns embedded in their structure.

The animation documentary 'Man Pasand – The Perfect Match' by Dhwani Desai about the "journey of a father in search of a suitable groom for his daughter, which was screened at the 4th IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival at the India International Centre, provoked some heated discussion.

Some of the questions raised were whether the selection of the Panchatantra tale itself as a subject of the film was a bit regressive. Did it imply that the 'she-mouse' could never have 'lofty ambitions' and ideals; unable to aspire to marrying a 'god' instead of the implications of marrying only a 'mouse' – as this would restrict her to her lowly status.

Some in the audience wondered if the film maker had thought this through and whether its repercussions had occurred to her. Moreover the answers provided by the defensive film-maker present on the occasion were not considered very satisfactory either. Later, in an informal session, outside the screening venue, someone in the audience asserted that the woman/mouse had been allowed to freely choose her future husband by the father, and wasn't this a progressive step?

Some others wondered why the Children's Film Society had

decided to use this particular fable and sponsor it. Was there any ominous conncection, or ulterior motive in doing so?

However, a closer reading of the film would suggest that the agency the ‘she-mouse’ enjoys in willfully rejecting suitor after suitor and finally settling to her own choice – the ‘he-mouse’ is in fact, radically subversive and extremely liberating in a different level.

This reading is in fact consistent with the moral allegory of the film’s structure – the false bravado of the fiery sun, the coldness of the ‘puffed up’ god of ‘wind’, the blackness of the god of thunder, the hard rigidity of the so-called ‘solid’ mountain god – all in contrast to the deceptively insignificant mouse that can actually terrify the mountain god by merely boring a hole in its side.

The entire parable actually serves to function as a tremendously subversive way of looking power, and what we perceive as strength and where true strength *actually* lies.

The entire parable makes us re-examine our own notions of strength as well as gender roles (such as the typically ‘masculine’ desirable qualities in a suitor of ‘strength’, solid’ character, etc).

Why is it that we aren’t able to effectively read and analyse allegory and animation, and are unable to see parables from a multiplicity of viewpoints and instead get weighed down by our attitudes and readings?

The exposure to many diverse films and the analysis that follows the screenings is vital if we are to progress not only in our cine-literacy but also in the new reworking of myth and fable in our lives.

ROMANTIC FILMS CAN ALSO CARRY SOCIAL MESSAGES: YASH CHOPRA

ROMANTIC FILMS CAN ALSO CARRY SOCIAL MESSAGES: YASH CHOPRA

by

B B Nagpal

Senior Film Critic





1. Yash Chopra 2. Raj Tilak, Yash Chopra and Music maestro Ravi

NEW DELHI, APRIL: Filmmaker Yash Chopra has strongly defended his brand of cinema saying that he does not show mere commercial romanticism but infuses a lot of meaningful content into it.

Speaking on the sidelines of a festival of films by his elder brother B R Chopra, he said that it was erroneous to say that his films did not have the kind of social commitment that one saw in the films of his brother.

While noting that he had got his first break as a director in his brother's 'Dhool ka Phool', he said he was entitled to make his own kind of cinema.

Paying a tribute to his brother, he said Baldev Raj Chopra was probably the only filmmaker in India who had never made any compromises and gone ahead and made the kinds of films he wanted irrespective of their commercial outcome.

The cinematic tribute from 18 to 20 April with nine masterpieces from the BR stable were part of ‘Guild Greats’, an initiative of the Film and Television Producers Guild of India . Co-organised by ASSOCHAM, was sponsored by Time Broadband Services Group’s ‘My Time’ to kick-start the announcement of qualitative IPTV service launch in India through empowering technology and compelling content.

Yash Chopra recalled how his brother had proved wrong filmmakers at the time who felt films on themes like widow re-marriage, rehabilitation of prostitutes, or a court room drama sans songs would never be able to woo audiences.

Speaking at the inauguration and a discussion on the second day, BR’s son Ravi said his father has always been a man of principles who has continued to make films that he felt committed about, irrespective of the financial returns. BR is a ‘karmayogi’ who firmly believes in the motto of BR Films from the Mahabharata which says one must do one’s duty without worrying about the consequences. Ravi said he would not dare re-make any of his father’s films because he could never bring out the finesse they contained, and stressed that the message in his father’s films came out in a subtle manner without the film turning into a documentary.

The filmmaker’s son-in-law and Guild Vice President Raj Tilak, who is an eminent filmmaker in his own right, said showing films of BR Chopra meant celebrating excellence.

Amit Dev who is Chairman of the ASSOCHAM Committee on Convergence said though India had the largest entertainment industry in the world, it global share was not very high. He said the Guild and ASSOCHAM had come together on a single platform and the offshoot was creation of a Content Licensing Centre. He announced another festival of Dr Chopra’s films would be held later in the year.

Ms Sujata Dev, Managing Director of Time Broadband, said the

launch of IPTV (Internet Protocal Television) on TV sets, computers and mobiles would make TV more interactive, and help to fight piracy and empower content protection. TIME is preparing to shortly launch IPTV over both Mobile and Broadband in India , through collaboration with recently licensed progressive telecom operators; under the brand of “MY TIME” content package.

Music maestro Ravi recalled several incidents to show how Dr Chopra had given him complete freedom in the way he composed his music. He also spoke of the rapport he had always shared with Dr Chopra and recalled an incident where several people in the fraternity had asked the filmmaker to get the music of ‘Nikaah’ done by some other music director saying Ravi would not be able to do justice, but Dr Chopra had not paid heed.

Basu Chatterjee echoed this when he said Dr Chopra had never interfered with the way he made his films for the BR banner. He said he had not many producers who gave so much freedom to their directors.

Senior Film Critic Pradeep Sardana said the issues raised by the BR banner were today being debated and were as fresh as ever. For example, the film ‘Nikaah’ had raised issues that were being discussed in courts of law today.

Eminent film scribe B B Nagpal recalled social themes dealt with by Dr Chopra in several films made almost fifty years earlier. He said issues like widow re-marriage (dealt both in ‘Ek hi Raasta’ and the more recent ‘Babul’, rehabilitation of a prostitute (‘Sadhna’) and questioning the laws of rape and divorce (‘Insaaf ka Taraazu’ and ‘Nikaah’ respectively) were still relevant and some filmmakers were now attempting to make films on these themes, though not with as much success.

Filmmaker Ms Savita Oberoi said she had learnt a lot from interacting with Dr Chopra. She referred to the freedom he and his son Ravi had given to her when she made her hour-long film

on B R Chopra as part of her six-film series on Dadasaheb Phalke Awardees. Excerpts from the film were screened after the discussion on the second day, while an in-house film on Dr Chopra was shown at the inauguration.

Members of the Chopra family included Ravi Chopra's wife, Ravi 's two sisters and their husbands, Ravi 's son Abhay, and his daughter and son-in-law.

The festival opened with 'Insaaf Ka Tarazu' (1980), and other films screened were: Hamraaz (1967), Waqt (1965), Ittefaq (1969), Baghban (2003), Gumraah (1963), Nikaah (1982), Naya Daur (1957), and Chhoti Si Baat (1976).

Hecklers Cross The Line (Manish Vidhani)

Over The *Line*?

Hecklers Cross The *Line*

Interrupt performance of Israel Horovitz's play '*Line*' at India Habitat Center Manish Vidhani reports on the unsavoury event



Crossing the Line?

Forgotten lines, falling pants, flying props, ringing mobile phones… I am sure at least one of these has at one point of time, or the other, been the reason behind an interrupted act. But, saturday night at the India Habitat Centre, the performance of Israel Horovitz's *Line* was interrupted by a protest.

A little insight, I believe, is necessary for some perspective.

Line is now in its 33rd year of continuous performance at 13th Street Repertory Theatre in New York and is the longest running 'off-off Broadway' production (Off-Off-Broadway refers to Non-Broadway theatrical productions of New York City in small theatres having fewer than 100 seats.

Its adaptation, directed by Mallika Taneja and Neel Chaudhuri, being performed by The First City Theatre Foundation at the India Habitat Centre was interrupted by some of the audience who walked out of the hall and forced the production team to stop the performance, following which the play was abruptly stopped. The "*due tounavoidable circumstances…*" routine was duly performed. The crew and the staff were as clueless as the

audiences were, to the extent that nobody knew who necessitated the action and for what reason.

Apparently, it was “too much” and unacceptable to some. Sure, the dialogues were explicit and there was foul language in the play. No denying the fact. But, what exactly is expected from a play, the entry ticket for which clearly says that the entry is for adults only? A loud beep every time a four letter word is used? The naivety of treating *Adults only,* as blithely as *Shake well before use* is inexplicable.

I hope that our select group of audience who prodded me into writing this article read this and reflect on the following. The team did their job by specifying that the play was for adults. Neither did they intrude your comfort zone by beaming vulgar images on your television at primetime nor did they put obscene posters around the city. It was you who forced your opinion on them and a hundred other audiences by interrupting the performance.

Although, I am grateful for the fact, that there was no display of hooliganism. No slogans, no angry words were exchanged. Yet, it struck the same chord inside me. Is it true that we have become a nation of self-righteous people who have more opinions than information? Whatever little awareness we have, seems to be directed only at reinforcing our insecurities and not otherwise.

Well, all said and done, after fifteen minutes of chaos, confusion and refunding of tickets, the performance was continued due to the decisiveness of the rest of the audience and their support.

As far as the play is concerned, *Line* is a mirror to our flaws and provides food for thought. It is the story of five people waiting in a line. What is the line for and what are these people waiting for? These questions seem irrelevant when compared to what each of them does, to be the first in the

line. In stark contrast to the unhurried initial minutes, the one act show leaves the audience and more so, the actors, breathless. The beauty of it lies in the fact that one detests these characters by the end. A fast and high energy show with absorbing sound effects and intelligent stage utilization is a memorable one breaking News.

BRT JAM

. **Manish Vidhani**

Stagebuzz Correspondent

“The retrospective of my films has come 20 years too soon” (Sudhir Mishra to Shumita Didi)

“The retrospective of my films has come 20 years too soon”

But who’s complaining – Sudhir Mishra talks to Shumita Didi



Shumita: *How does it feel to have the first ever Retrospective of your films at the relatively young age of 51, and that too at Delhi ?*

Sudhir: **“This has come to me twenty years too soon I feel, but I am grateful to be showing the body of my work. I think I hardly the know the boy who made “Yeh Who Manzil Toh Nahin”… An important time in my life from the age of 21 when you form relationships, first meet very good people like Badal Sircar, Safdar Hashmi…was spent at Delhi. By virtue of being here I could soak in the vibrant atmosphere at JNU and Delhi University, get exposed not only to the best of world cinema but also the finest of theatre productions like the NSD Repertory’s work, the Sriram Festival; It was wonderful to be able to savour the rich amalgam of NSD, Triveni, Rabindra Bhavan, LTG, Sriram Centre- at Mandi House. There was an explosion of talent in all fields roughly in the period ’78-’81 when I was here. Even when I left for Bombay, my Father had been posted to Delhi so it was home. Many connections and references stem from here. We belong to Lucknow though.”**

Shumita: *The opening film was, “Hazaro’n Khwahisein Aisi” . It has risen to almost cult status. How do you feel about this film? What is the essence of this film?*

Sudhir: **“It has acquired a life of its own. People enter a film through many doors. They have come up to me and explained**

in it things, way beyond what I had intended. All the actors were new or relatively unknown so it was a challenge in many ways. Sometimes I feel a much appreciated film becomes a mill around your neck! As far as audiences of that film go, you just cant match it! So I often say, I have disowned that film! But it has a very wide range of viewers. I have seen it with students at IIT's, IAS Wives Associations, Policemen, Politicians….I think this film is a soft film even though it talks of many harsh realities. It talks of and touches the vestiges of purity left in each one of us even when we have lost our idealistic youth. I was very moved when after watching the scene on police brutality, a young policeman came up to me with tears in his eyes and said, this is exactly how they make us do it."

Shumita: *Did'nt you face censor trouble with this film? There are many scenes where I wondered eg Police violence, party politics etc?*

Sudhir: **"I would love to say I did! I became a film-maker at a time when if your films weren't agitated against, or heavily censored they perhaps lacked something! But actually I was lucky. I only had to make one small cut in a scene where there was a close up of a banner saying All India Youth Congress, so I replaced it with a wider shot of the same banner, and no one noticed! The irony was that this was during the BJP regime. They were being sensitive to the Congress sentiments! It was released during the Congress regime though. In India I think politics and violence do not evoke as much of sentiment than lets say if it was a film on religion."**

Shumita: *All your films have had varied themes, "Main Zinda Hoon" "Dharavi", "Is Raat Ki Subah Nahin", "Chameli", "Calcutta Mail"…some very down to earth, a thriller, some fantasy woven in..Which would you say is your favourite film from all of them?*

Sudhir: " **It's not a wrestling match! I think for a Director**

for the most part it is like being a parent, you like them all and particularly the one you are immediately involved with. But I would say Khoya Khoya Chaand for now. I liked Chameli, it was a fairy tale. Calcutta Mail I disown! Except for a few sequences I don't like that film it has too much happening in it. But interestingly when I was visiting a beaurocrats party at Washington, no one seemed not to know who I was, what films I had made etc till someone said, he has made Calcutta Mail. And then I was suddenly mobbed!"

Shumita: *Any particular reason why you've cast Soha Ali Khan in three projects running, Khoya Khoya Chaand, Tera Kya Hoga Johnny" and "Mumbai Cutting"….? You've worked with Shabana, Deepti, Smriti, Chitranghada,… Do you ever get involved with the beautiful women you work with?*

Sudhir: **"She is a good actress. I feel her potential and different facets of performance are being explored in all three films. I have no qualms about repeating actors according to role requirements..I have also first cast and repeated Shiney Ahuja, and Saurabh Shukla for example is in most of my films. As a director and storywriter I feel very grateful to the actors who bring alive a character I have written, envisaged. To that extent one gets involved with them as bringing to life your characters. If you are talking of romantic involvement with any of my actresses, no, that would be too dangerous!"**

Shumita: *Well, in "Yeh Who Manzil Toh Nahin", you had cast Sushmita Mukherjee, and she was your wife then! What is the main theme of "Tera Kya Hoga Johnny" and why did you feel the need to write and make this film. Is it a short film/ feature length?*

Sudhir **:"In a Bombay trying to be Shanghai, who gives a damn for a young man/boy who sells coffee? But there are some who do. Three characters, played by Neil Nitin Mukesh, K.K. Menon & Soha Ali Khan care about this boy in different ways and**

their life stories unfold through his eyes. Both wonder what will happen to each other. It is a feature length film."

Shumita: *What of the film, "Mumbai Cutting" you are doing as part of an 11 director package? What is the relevance of such a concept? I believe the other directors apart from you are..Kundan Shah, Jahnu Barua, Anurag Kashyp, Ruchi Malhotra…*

Sudhir: **"Yes, and Rituparno Ghosh, Rahul Dholakia, Munish Jha, Revathi, Ayush Raina, Shashank Ghosh…..Each film is roughly 10 mins duration. It is a great concept and more such experiments should be happening. It has been produced by a husband wife team Samrat & Niyati, with Sahara funding and will get a theatre release, plus a TV package. My story is set in almost real time where under the crowded J.J flyover, one of the busiest parts of Bombay, a murder takes place. Soha is in this film too alongwith Chitranghada Singh.**

Shumita: *She disappeared from the scene for a while, how is it working with her again?*

Sudhir: "**She saw the three films I had made and mockingly complained, how could you without me! I teased her back and said you are the one that vanished! Seriously though, I may not have gone looking for another actress if she had been there..**

Shumita: *So in a way that was good, because we got to see very different work from Soha.. I felt she was perfectly cast in Khoya Khoya Chaand. The olde worlde look was carried very well by her. Sushmita was in this film too, did you enjoy working with her after so long?*

Sudhir: **"She always had a great sense of humour and after my film, she is working with Karan Johar these days. I did get annoyed when I heard that she had taken her son to swallow raw fish to heal his asthma which subsequently got worse, I mean he is not my son, he is hers and Raja Bundela's son, but I told her to leave the room. Told her after all her high**

education if she had gone and tried that, I want nothing to do with her!"

Shumita: *She is a lovely person, good actress and a madcap! It is interesting how I was great friends with your second wife Renu Saluja, and I am great friends with your first wife Sushmita! They both gave me things that said "best friends forever" – uncanny. But it is really your brother Sudhanshu I got to know when working at CENDIT making documentaries..he went too soon as did Renu..*

Sudhir: **"Life is like that. There was a time when we were younger when everyone was somehow involved in a triangle! I was involved with someone who was involved with someone and so on…! Sudhanshu was a charmer, many women have come up to me after he died and told me how they felt about him with a glazed look in their eyes! He made some good films. Renu always used to scold me for being absent minded like I would get up from the table if I was done..she'd say I'm going to call up your Mother and ask her why didn't you teach him table manners! The thing is, you live in two worlds simultaneously if you are a writer/director..I would be thinking of some character and wander off. That's why I don't drive!"**

Shumita: *Even though they are'nt on the floor yet, could you talk about the other two projects? "Aur Devdas" to begin with. I believe Anurag Kashyp is coming up with one too. Yet another Devdas film Sudhir! Although I believe you mentioned once it has some political content…?*

Sudhir: **"The initial bit is from there…characters e.g and then takes off in a completely different direction. The idea is that if say Devdas who had originally come from England, instead is heir to a political lineage…his mother is a Chief Minister, and Paro lets say is..the daughter of a Police Commissioner..and gets married into another poitical dynasty and becomes the "bahuji" there…then who would be Chandramukhi…..? Maybe she is the one that handles the money**

of the politicians..that which no one should know of. The story thus takes another trajectory.

Shumita: *What of the film in which you plan to use music by Baba Ghulam Muhammad Chaand from Pakistan, the "Nawab and Nauthchgirl…" film? I hope that is still on?*

Sudhir: **Yes, I would like to use his compositions. He is a very interesting performer. That was a lovely evening you had arranged for us to hear him. This film is a sort of black comedy on 1857.**

Shumita: *What are your immediate plans? Heading towards Cannes this year? Do you find it relevant going there?*

Sudhir: **"I have to be back in Bombay for mixing tomorrow morning. If I get done, I may go for a week to Cannes before setting off to speak at a festival in Calcutta. Cannes is always an interesting place for cinema lovers to go to, discuss co-productions, get to meet colleagues from all over, and gauge your place in world cinema**