Heeramandi: A Spectacle of Grandeur

A review by **Sanjiva Sahai**


NETFLIX
Presents
Heeramandi

If you’re into drowning in grandeur and have a lifetime to spare, indulge in this 8-hour-and-a-half spectacle called □□□□□□□□□ where the set design gets more screen time than the plot itself.

Who needs historical accuracy when we can have a jolly good □□□□□□□ spin in all the recently released movies? Who cares about facts anyway when we’ve got the glitz and glamour of a Bhansali extravaganza to distract us?

Indeed, amidst the narrative, several performances shine with profound depth. Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Richa Chadha and the entire female ensemble deliver commendable portrayals, leaving a lasting impression. Additionally, the music, both vocal and instrumental, stands as a formidable asset.

Ah, if only Bhansali had a knack for precision! A concise 2-hour 15-minute film instead of this drawn-out series would have spared us all a lot of eye-rolling and tea breaks.

__ Sanjiva Sahai

Sunil Grover, the outrageously, irrepressible match to Kapil Sharma

By **Sunil Sarpal**



Sunil Grover is the most versatile comedian to have graced The Kapil Sharma Show. There is a Hindi song which depicts his aura:

"TERE CHAHRE SE NAZAR NAHIN HAT TI, NAZARE HUM KYA DEKHEN…"

When he is on view, all other actors hide behind him. The eyes are glued to him till the time he departs.

He brings about such a charismatic approach that his aura becomes larger than life. On the Kapil Sharma Show, the most revered actor was Sunil Grover. In his presence, sometimes, even Kapil Sharma took a back seat.

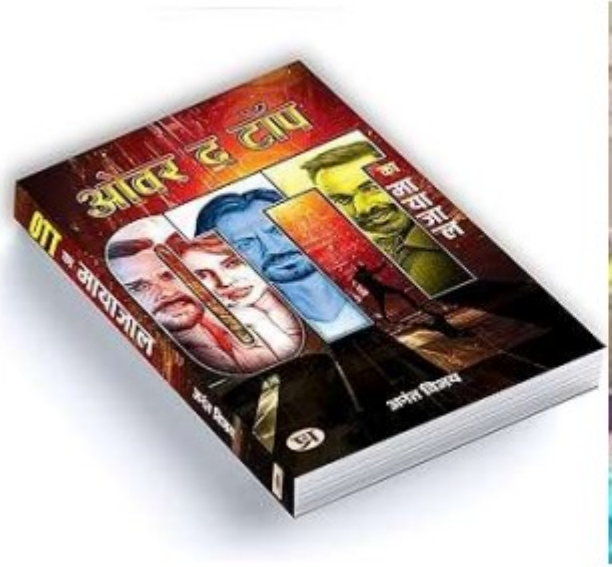
How a meaningless spat between Kapil Sharma and Sunil Grover, on a flight back from Australia resulted in Sunil withdrawing from the show. His absence from the show was then felt by the audience. His replacement, Krushna, was nowhere near a match to his talent.

On the Kapil Sharma show, Sunil first played the character of Guthi and then Dr Mashoor Gulati. His portrayal of both the characters was unique and audience realised his comic potential. His acting brings in new flavour to the audience.

His sense of comic timing, dialogue delivery, attire and the pregnant pauses that he takes, before delivering the punch line, makes him a very special comedian. He simply tickles the funny bone of the audience. Sunil has portrayed the characters of Amitabh Bachchan, Kapil Dev, and Sidhu with distinction. He also played many a characters with a style of his own and left the audience in splits. Sunil is also capable of copying the voice patterns of a number of actors. He is simply a gifted pro.

When Amitabh Bachchan was first launched as an actor, he was tagged as an *Angry Young Man*. The writers then used to write scripts to suit his image and movies were made where Amitabh invariably played the character of the Angry Man. Amitabh's success story on big screen was possible with his image. Similarly, now scripts have to be written keeping in mind Sunil Grover as a comedy actor. His extra ordinary comedy skills could be given further boost so that Sunil's potential is harnessed fully. Watch one more of his charades below:

Is anarchy acceptable in the name of artistic freedom? The magic of OTT.





Book Review by
Utpal Datta

OTT platforms, a new addition to the media, have become competitors to cinema and television programs, raising a few uncomfortable questions. Does OTT concern discern viewers? Is the tasteless and obscene content on OTT platforms a result of the absence of a censor board? Is this the beginning of a dangerous practice for society and culture? Journalist and author Anant Vijay seeks answers to these questions through his Hindi book 'OTT Ka Mayajal.' This is his latest book and probably the first Indian book on OTT. Anant Vijay, a national award-winning film critic, journalist, literary critic, and political analyst, reveals all these identities through this book. The writing style reflects more of his journalistic mentality than a writer's, making the book easy to read, even for non-Hindi-speaking readers familiar with Hindi.

OTT is a platform primarily for movies and similar content. This book mainly discusses programs aired in Hindi. During the pandemic, cinemas were closed, people were under house arrest, and television became the sole means of entertainment for cinema lovers. At the same time, OTT platforms became well-established in the minds of the audience, and OTT directors started planning to provide the audience with a new taste. OTT

had old popular movies replaced by new ones, especially those that failed in theatres. At one point, cinemas opened, but due to the limited audience and the popularity of OTT, new Hindi films were released on this platform. Filmmaking for OTT started, and web series in the style of a TV series also began.

Most web series used elements like obscene abuse, violent scenes, and explicit sexual content to attract a larger audience. While censor boards for movies monitor such scenes, many producers took unimaginable liberties due to the lack of controls for OTT, resulting in chaos in the world of creation.

Some directors are notably aggressive, using verbal abuse to grab the audience's attention. The unhindered and uncontrolled environment of OTT platforms is reflected in his encouragement in the series 'Sacred Games.' Anant Vijay rightly comments, 'When there is no bondage and no need to apologize, freedom turns into anarchy.' He also wrote, 'In fact, such people use abuse, violence, and sexual scenes to cover up their incompetence.'

Not only have movies or series been created for the OTT platform with sexually violent elements, but also series with wholesome entertainment and reality. The author balances the subject with detailed discussions of several such series and maintains his responsibilities as an author.

Author Anant Vijay carefully observes and explains the clever construction of a 'fake narrative' through OTT programs. The same narrative of anti-Hindu and Muslim praise created in Hindi films is seen differently in OTT. The brains of political power control agendas and promotion tactics under the guise of entertainment. It involves either the creator's political beliefs or profit motives or the goal of obtaining the blessings of an influential force. When analysing the present from a political perspective, two things are needed – political knowledge of the past and the ability to predict the

future in light of it. The author rightly considers the political background while discussing the web series ‘Leila’ by the once-famous filmmaker Deepa Mehta. “Art was turned into a rehearsal ground for politics”. He further elaborates by explaining that this was done after the last two Lok Sabha elections. There are many reasons why a distorted image was created of the political dispensation and promoted by portraying some organizations as radical. It can be assumed that a part of that agenda was Deepa Mehta’s ‘Leila.’ Although ‘Leila’ is told as a fictional story, it combines the, so-called grim future it depicts with the image of the agenda. Anant Vijay has informatively analysed many other such agendas. The web series ‘Jubilee’ also beautifully describes how the Russian Communist Party used Indian films as part of their agenda. The author also refers to Dev Ananda’s autobiography ‘Romancing with Life’ in support of this.

Overall, this book analyses both the artistic work and the process of agenda-building through the latest entertainment medium in depth and can provide the reader with thought. In India, the relationship between art and politics has been judged in a one-sided manner. This book has broken down that wall of limitations. This is the real power of the book.

The book is published by Prabhat Prakashan, and the price is Rs 300. The book must be translated into regional languages.

It is worth mentioning that the author dedicated the book to the Maa Kamakhya Temple and released it for sale.

Charlie Chopra & The Mystery

Of Solang Valley



A Review by **Sanjiva Sahai**

Charlie Chopra
& The Mystery Of Solang Valley
(The latest Hindi web series in 6 episodes on Sony Liv)

▫Directed by Vishal Bharadwaj the show opens with an innovative musical score and hilariously clever lyrics that reveal the protagonist's (Wamiqa) home address. These elements stand out as commendable highlights in the series. However, while the music and the stunning snow-capped setting deserve praise, the adaptation of Agatha Christie's classic Sittaford Mystery falls short of delivering a believable, relatable, and engaging narrative.

▫Charlie's sporadic fourth-wall-breaking moments, where she addresses the camera and talks to the viewers, leave much to be desired. This is a well-known technique in theatre, film, TV, and literature but here it's executed with a lack of finesse, often descending into gimmickry and absurdity. Wamiqa Gabbi's reactions serve as mere punctuation to these

instances, highlighting their shallowness. It raises the question of whether delving into a detective's psyche is justified when the true pleasure lies in external observation and deciphering their actions.

▫While Agatha's novel sparkled like a well-polished diamond, the adaptation and cast's performances were more like deflated party balloons. It's as if they were handed a *Rogan Josh* recipe but decided to cook instant noodles instead. The characters needed emotional depth, but the actors served up emotional flatlines. Wamiqa Gabbi, a radiant presence, struggles to carry the show solo, hampered by a lack of versatility, rendering her lengthy role predictably dull. Naseeruddin Shah, oddly out of place, delivers a superficial performance. Neena Gupta, however, shines as the sole beacon of spontaneity and precision. Gulshan Grover repeats himself. The ensemble cast- including the entire Shah family (Ratna Pathak – Heeba – Vivaan – Imaad), Lara Dutta, Chandan Roy Sanyal, Paoli Dam, and Ashique Hussain, adds their bit to the mix.

▫It leaves viewers hoping that future adaptations by Vishal will capture the essence of Christie's work more effectively.

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2/5

_ Sanjiva Sahai

The End and the Future of

Theater

The first obituary of the theater was written in the 1920s when the talkies ushered in a new era of entertainment. But not only did the theater survive the competition from cinema, the Broadway Book Musicals became a billion-dollar industry around the time. The first real blow to small regional and off-off-Broadway theater came from the television in the 1960s when a television set became a household item. But that did not stop Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller from writing great plays. They forced the audience to return to the theaters. Harold Pinter, Beckett, Albee, and more recently Mamet created scintillating works for the stage despite the competition from the cinema and the television industry. The competition challenged theater to become more daring and intelligent.