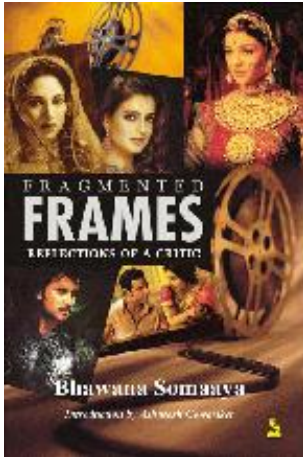




Fragmented Frames



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The different articles on a variety of topics are a reflection of the many colours, trends, sections and seasons of show business.
- Karan Johar

Fearless and compassionate the author takes a stand on many relevant issues related to the film fraternity.
- Anil Kapoor

Full of insights the book is a must buy for the thinking film buff.
- Vidya Balan

From the advent of moving images more than 100 years ago to the multiple genres and mega projects of today, Indian cinema has really come a long way. The audience that earlier discarded this medium as a 'world of make-believe' is now akin to critics whose verdict determines the success of a film. Even writing on cinema, once referred to as 'yellow journalism' confined to the glossies, has transformed into a serious and respectable profession. What's more, it has even infiltrated into the front-page territory! Fragmented Frames is a celebration of this change in perspective, as recorded by an eminent film critic, who has seen cinema developing and achieving greater heights over the three long decades. The book offers her reflections on various aspects ranging from mythology, theatre, television, superstition to literature, scandals, controversies and more. It provides a glimpse of this dream world, and at the same time, discusses certain 'real' issues associated with it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bhawana Somaaya began her career in journalism in the late 70s while studying for her BA degree in Psychology. Commencing with Free Press Journal's Cinema Journal as chief reporter, she moved to Super as a special correspondent while completing LLB at the Government Law College, Mumbai. In '81 she joined Movie as an assistant editor and was promoted in '85 as its joint editor. In '89 Chitrallekha asked her to launch their first English publication and in 2000 she joined as editor Screen a film weekly of the Indian Express group. She is the recipient of several prestigious awards and has contributed columns to Sunday Observer, Afternoon, Janmabhoomi, Pravasi, Hindustan Times, The Hindu, The Pioneer and Newstime. She has written six books, Amitabh Bachchan - The Legend, Salaam Bollywood, Take-25, The Story So Far, Cinema : Images and Issues, and Hema Malini - The Authorised Biography. Fragmented Frames is Bhawana's seventh book with two more in the pipeline.

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FOREWORD

More than 100 years ago when cinema still had to evolve, it was no mean task to get the audience accustomed to the phenomena of moving images. It is said that there were strange reactions amongst the audience when the first film was screened. While many rushed out of the theatre on the sight of a train approaching a platform, in some other parts of the world, the audience suspected that the theatre was haunted by evil spirits.

Understandably, filmmaking in olden days was not an easy task and people from respectable families refrained from the world of make-believe.

In the late seventies when I became a film journalist, nobody remotely intelligent wanted to be associated with film journalism. The mainstream media considered it below their dignity to feature private lives of celebrities, and the glossies who did so were described 'yellow' journals.

The discrimination continued all through the eighties. Then sometime in the nineties, one still doesn't know why but it became mandatory for leading newspapers to devote a full colour feature to the dream merchants. Initially devised as a respite from the regular serious stories, the readers slowly got hooked on to the trivia involving show business!

Come 2000 and entertainment had consumed the common man. From stray features on news glaze pages on weekends, it had invaded the front-page headlines. Suddenly, the average reader was familiar with not just the superstars but also the business of entertainment. As the budgets of mega movies got bigger and merchandising became the new mantra, writing on cinema transformed into a serious profession.

In the millennium there is a newfound respect for the film critic.

No more is the film critic treated like a pariah or his brand of writing termed 'yellow'. Now he has new epithets like 'trade analyst' and 'historian' added to his by-line and film buffs pause on their remotes to listen to his expert comments on TV channels. Interestingly, even those not directly involved with film trade are well acquainted with jargons like box-office collection and world right distribution. At cocktail circuits everyone has an opinion on everything connected to movies, be it reviews, international film festivals or panel discussions.

The splendour of cinema is all around and it is no longer possible to escape its connecting media. Unlike 100 years ago when nobody respectable wanted to be a part of the film world, today, everybody, everywhere is obsessed with movies, Hindi films in particular!



Unknown artistes, nouveau writers and self-taught technicians with no film background or experience have crowded the market and are being encouraged by corporate houses. In present times, the cinegoer is akin to a critic and invests his hard-earned money in collecting expensive film memorabilia. The change is everywhere. More and more University students both abroad and in our country are opting for Hindi cinema as a subject for their thesis.

Fragmented Frames is an effort to applaud that shift in attitude. The book is a collection of heartfelt essays on varied aspects of cinema ranging from mythology, theatre, television, superstition, children, marriage and mental-health to premier culture, literature, sex scandals, legendary controversies and more. There are intimate chronicles of love and heartbreaks of prominent personalities and also thought-provoking features on personal and social tragedies like the fire eruption on the sets of Black and bomb blast at Plaza Theatre in Mumbai.

The book elaborates on film festivals like IFFI, Osians, MAMI, Cannes and holds a mirror to superstars and government bodies when they falter. Besides Hindi films, there are glimpses of success stories down South and the new emerging multiplex culture. At times subjective, at times reflecting on larger issues, the book is a documentation of dramatic times, a salute to the fascinating medium of moving images. It is an effort to record the changing times and shift in attitudes of dream merchants.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

Reel v/s Real

Nothing could have been more predictable than BJP inviting Tulsi Virani alias Smriti Malhotra Irani of Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi to campaign for the elections. One should have guessed this was coming when BJP spokesman, Sushma Swaraj went out of her way to compliment young producer Ekta Kapoor for her invaluable contribution to the preservation of Indian values via entertainment. This is not the first time that BJP has played the religion card. They have done it in the past by enrolling Dipika Chikhlia (Sita) of Ramayana and later Nitish Bharadwaj (Krishna) of Mahabharata. Even Arvind Trivedi portraying Ravan and Rupa Ganguly portraying Draupadi, were not spared by the party to make the right noises to woo voters. The party's favourite agenda is foreign origin and who better to contrast Congress Party's firang bahu than Balaji Telefilms sindoor-splashed, bangle-adorned, mangalsutra trade-marked Tulsi Virani, the ideal bahu of the Hindu joint family.

From reports in the media, Smriti appears flattered by her new avatar little realising that she is the sacrificial lamb. For the common man, there is no dividing line between the image and the actor. When they watch Amitabh Bachchan destroy anti-social elements and emerge victorious on the big screen, they expect him to perform the same in real life. Similarly they expect Shah Rukh Khan to overcome all obstacles and conquer love like his character in Dilwale Dulhania. Now they will expect the same out of Tulsi Virani. Today, actors can no longer shirk responsibility for characters they portray on screen. We saw evidence of the audience wrath when Amitabh Bachchan played a Casanova in Boom or when the self-righteous Jassi in Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin was offered a bribe by her client. So far Tulsi's image for her audience remains unblemished, but will this continue after she joins politics? I don't think so.

Dancers are comparatively more fortunate because they seldom face the kind of conflict actors do vis-a-vis their art form. Particularly when they are harnessed by a reputed academy like Deeksha, which promotes some of the finest talents in classical art like Hema Malini, Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia and Shubha Mudgal.

An event hosting the combined performance of three generations of artistes (Mrinalini, Mallika and Anahita Sarabhai) was a special day, and the magic sparkled from the time the curtain rose to a barren stage devoid of any backdrop. Not even the customary brass-lamp mandatory for a classical performance. With just a spotlight falling on the three dancers seated on their individual chairs, their costumes and body language were a statement of their unique art form.

Grandmother Mrinalini is 80 years old and fragile like a flower. Mrinalini has been over the years been recognised for her creative anarchy and admired for her discipline. Dressed in a marigold silk sari and a bright kumkum bindi, Mrinalini looked like the Goddess herself.

Granddaughter Anahita, 13 years old and the carrier of the family legacy was attired in jeans and cap and was balancing a football in her lap. Slightly awkward, she made a statement in her casual costume of salwar-kameez.

And finally, Mallika, the bridge between the two generations. Self-assured and forever taking up for causes close to her heart! Mallika has, from time to time, re-invented creative expression.

That day was no exception. The trio performed a unique amalgamation of dance, drama, acting and activism. Through a myriad of expressions and movements, they weaved an enchanting tale on stage. A tale of dreams of goals. Mrinalini, resembling a deer, reflected upon the philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore and freedom. Her feet slightly unsteady, her voice choking with emotion, she re-lived fond memories of her genius husband Vikram Sarabhai, and her burning passion for dance. The moments



vividly elaborated through dance items like Padam and Shabdham.

Mallika, brimming with energy, more boisterous, combined artistic expression with commitment. She acknowledged Peter Brookes for changing her life and re-lived her glories and heartbreaks with rare sincerity and courage. She was Shakti celebrating the strength of the Goddess of the Hindu pantheon. Anahita, still shy but aspiring towards perfection, performed Jatiswaram, and briefly voiced her views on the 21st century.

In the two-hour presentation juxtaposed with words, movements and songs, one got glimpses of Lord Natraj and Lord Krishna... and relished the adavus, and was mesmerised in the fountain of their abhinaya. There were echoes of human rights... protests for justice and equality. It was a magical evening of celebration of multiple media but most important, celebration of self-expression.

For the common man, there is no dividing line between the image and the actor. When they see Amitabh Bachchan destroy anti-social elements and emerge victorious, they expect him to do the same in real life. Similarly they expect Shah Rukh Khan to fight all obstacles and conquer love; they will now expect Tulsi Virani to fight for justice. Today, actors can no longer shirk responsibility for the characters they portray on screen.

About Pustakmahal Publishers

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