

ZENANA SHOW 2

INTERVIEWS OF WOMEN SPECTATORS



SUSHILA. 33 YEARS OLD. TULU (MAKHADWADI) CASTE. DOMESTIC WORKER. HAS LIVED ALL HER LIFE IN KUNCHIKARVE SLUM, KALINA, BOMBAY. PRIMARY LANGUAGE: MARATHI-HINDI.

Just imagine this is the purdah [makeshift screen] ... so we have the purdah in the middle, you sit on that side and I sit here. And you instal that machine [projector], the one that shows the picture, in the centre. That's how from both ends the entire road used to get filled with people and the purdah used to stand tall right in the middle. It was installed at some height, so everybody could see it from far. It was great fun watching them on the purdah, large pictures – it was like an open-air theatre. People used to scream, comment, clap ... have a lot of fun. That's how I watched Dharmatma, Gai aur Gauri, Apna Desh and Pinjra – that was a Marathi film, and the one with that girl – about elections ... I also saw Zanjeer and a Jitendra film with some famous song. We used to go in the night and carry blankets with us. So we slept there after the show was over and came back home in the morning.

Then I started going to New Model, Bharat, Akash, etc., with friends – but not to Kalpana Talkies. The others used to play old movies and so they were comparatively cheap; the ticket cost about two rupees. Sometimes when we won some money over betting in a game of marbles, we used to run to watch a film. We must have watched more than a hundred films – I can tell you all their names!

They show Amitabh as a porter in some films – in Deewar, and in others too. They showed godis [docks] in Deewar, Hum ... I've seen all these places. I used to go to godis with my father. He was a loader there. Then last year we went to Town – Gateway of India, Nariman Point, all those places. I could recognize everything from the pictures. I told my children, 'See this is the road, the water ... isn't it just like the pictures we've seen?' I hadn't seen these places earlier ... Town is just like you see in films.

AQILA. 24 YEARS OLD. WAHABI MUSLIM. WORKS IN AN NGO FOR MUSLIM WOMEN. CURRENT RESIDENCE: AMBARNATH. PRIMARY LANGUAGE: HINDUSTANI.

I always tell my friends from Bombay that they enjoy such a great life. They can watch films whenever they feel like or go to the sea-front. There are many places one can go, not only to watch films but also to just have a good time. I think Bombay life is different from our life here, it's much better. Bombay is so big, people from different places come there and so it is easy to have a wide circle of friends. But in distant suburbs like Mumbra or Ambarnath we don't have options. Even the small openings for entertainment we have in our life keep shrinking. When we go to a theatre close to our house here, everyone knows everyone else. But in Bombay no one has a clue.

Since there are many girls here who have never been to a theatre, we once arranged a trip. We went to Eternity Mall in Thane – eight or nine girls from Rehnuma [a public library for Muslim girls]. Everyone was wearing burqa and we faced a lot of difficulty because of that. The security people got very hassled as they couldn't see anyone's face. They made everyone remove their burqas. Everyone around was so suspicious ... we were baffled. Then it dawned on me. We were in Thane and so many girls in burqa had come from Mumbra – that was the issue. There is this trend these days and that's why many women have stopped wearing burqa – I too have stopped wearing it. Even in public places like the train, the way people look at us or behave with us has changed.

But behind the burqa they can hide from family members and go to see films?

Here the girls who wear the burqa say their family members can recognize them even behind it. They exchange burqas with friends so that no one recognizes them. They go to a public toilet or meet at a friend's place or in college, exchange burqas and then go out.

Once we went to see *Wanted*. Salman Khan is everyone's favourite, and it was the first time all of us were going to the theatre together to see him. All the girls turned up early in the morning, fully made-up. When I asked them to take off their burqas as we were entering the theatre, they all went to the ladies' room. I kept wondering why they were taking so long, so I went to check on them. I saw that everyone had opened their hair loose and were busy touching up their make-up. When I told them the film was starting, they rushed. They sat there in the dark wearing heavy make-up till the end. Even during the last song when people started walking out, they continued to sit in their seats. They didn't want to leave. For me, taking them to the theatre was a great experience.

FARRUKH WARIS. 59 YEARS OLD. ARISTOCRATIC SHIA MUSLIM. PRINCIPAL AND PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND MASS MEDIA, BURHANI COLLEGE, NAGPADA. MIGRATED FROM LUCKNOW AFTER MARRIAGE IN 1975. CURRENT RESIDENCE: BANDRA WEST. PRIMARY LANGUAGES: ENGLISH, URDU, HINDI.

I was born, brought up and educated in Lucknow. Lucknow in UP [Uttar Pradesh] enjoys the same status as Pune in Maharashtra. It has old families. Mine was a landed family ... yes, a titled Nawab family. But I don't want to talk about that because it's really ridiculous to talk about it now. Lucknow is also a very strong commercial hub, so it has many good theatres. There were some very good theatres which screened only English films, like *May Fair* and *Capitol*. I remember my parents dressing up on Sunday mornings to go to watch an English film ... *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Mary Poppins* or *Sound of Music*. But when it came to *Aradhana*, *Sharabi*, *Junglee* or one of the Hindi movies we were dying to see – I suppose it was class snobbery or intellectual snobbery that came into play – it was an absolute 'No'.

I've seen *Dil Ek Mandir* in three slots. We were allowed to go out to the market for an hour and a half – so first we saw one-and-a-half hours of the movie, then the second time we got to see another hour, and the third time we went again. ... So this is how life went on. *Aradhana* I must have seen in seven to eight slots. Each time you told the driver, 'wait outside, I am going to the market', then you saw a part of *Aradhana* and came out – with your heart, your soul, everything left inside ... and Rajesh Khanna, how he batted his eyelids! There was tremendous interest, and I am talking about traditional Muslim families of north India who were totally addicted to movies, but it was all under cover. The general belief was that our daughters don't watch films, they know nothing about films. I am talking about the 60s and 70s.

I came to Bombay during the Emergency, in 1975. I got married and within a week I was here. Bombay symbolized freedom. You get into a local train and nobody recognizes you, you stand at a paan-beedi shop and nobody recognizes you; you can have your bhel, you can enjoy your freedom. For me, Bombay is liberation from lots of dos and don'ts, and from unwanted ties. It is a city that lets you be. I suppose films in some way give you that platform of shared activity, because you suddenly feel an

integral part of what you are watching. You are not a passive audience, you are active; and Bombay gives you that chance.

I was like a hungry person ... like when you've been deprived of food for very long and then you binge. Sometimes I have seen three films in a day: Amber Oscar Minor, Gaiety Galaxy Gemini ... from one show to another and another. Those were not the days of multiplexes but I created my own multiplex. I would finish one show and then go to another hall in the same area or locality, and watch another movie. Sometimes it has happened that in the other hall, half of the movie would be over – but it was okay, because I had to see it. Like how we catch up on our reading after a long holiday, I caught up on my cinema-watching in a big way. I was 23 when I came here and since then it has been one big rollercoaster ride.

LEONITA MENEZES. 38 YEARS OLD. GOAN CHRISTIAN. HOME MAKER. GREW UP IN BANDRA AND SHIFTED TO KALINA AFTER MARRIAGE. CURRENT RESIDENCE: KALINA VILLAGE. PRIMARY LANGUAGES: KONKANI AND ENGLISH.

When I was a young girl and living in Bandra with my Mummy and Daddy, there used to be this older neighbour of mine. She was married and everything and we became quite friendly, and Mummy used to trust her – because she was married, no? But we were up to no good! I would finish my dinner, and after Daddy went into his room I would slip out to the neighbour's house telling Mummy that I was going to sleep there. Or I would tell her that I was going there to do my homework. And then we used to be up to all sorts of nonsense! She would dress me up in fancy clothes and teach me how to do make-up. Her husband was in the navy, so he used to be away. Quietly we would put out the lights, hold our shoes in our hands and tiptoe out in the nights – to parties and movies, and to meet boys! She showed me how to give boys my telephone number – writing it on a piece of paper and dropping it on the floor. ... We went to this place called Madness near Khar, and Wave was this other disco in Juhu. And movies! She used to take me to all these adult movies, and I learned about kissing and romance and all naughty things like that. Bandra Talkies, New Talkies ... all these English movies, and night shows, that too. Then we copied the way they used to flirt and the way the girls used to dress up and the fashion. It was fun! I actually tried all that on a whole lot of men, including my husband. All my education I had from these films only. Everyone says Bandra girls are loose and easy to get, *chaalu*. Actually we Bandra girls are smart, we know what we want, we break hearts, we don't let anyone take us for a ride.

At that time where could I afford to go watch movies in theatres. And here was this lady who would pay even up to 500 rupees to get tickets in black, but she had to watch the movie when she wanted to. Later, as we grew up and went to college, we used to go for movies with our friends, boys and girls. All around Bandra only. I remember there was this boy I met and he *pataoed* [seduced] me somehow, and I also liked him after some time. But Mummy used to come to the movies with us and sit in between. Only in the interval when I would get a chance to go out to buy some food or go to the toilet, we got to talk alone.

But it was only later in college, when I became friends with all these 'vernies' ['vernacular'] girls, you know – they used to come all the way from Ghatkoper and god-knows-where – I started watching Hindi movies. Till then, my family and friends from my area watched only English films; but these girls were big Hindi movie fans and

they would drag me along. Some of those boys were very cute. I remember that Aamir singing 'Pehla nasha' ... what a crush I had on him! But otherwise a Hindi movie means laughing at all the rubbish dialogues and family drama ... even in the crying scenes I would be giggling. Badla badla badla (revenge revenge revenge) – bhai ka badla, mama ka badla, baap ka badla (brother's revenge, uncle's revenge, father's revenge), that's all it is about.

LIBY. IN HER LATE 60s. GOAN CHRISTIAN. FORMERLY A STENOGRAPHER. CURRENTLY, CARE GIVER FOR HER AILING MOTHER. CAME TO BOMBAY FROM GOA AT THE AGE OF 10, AND HAS LIVED IN BANDRA SINCE THEN. CURRENT RESIDENCE: PALI VILLAGE, BANDRA. PRIMARY LANGUAGES: KONKANI AND ENGLISH.

When I was working in various places – Charni Road and places like that – during my break, I used to go to see movies in Town. Alone, by myself. Sometimes I would go for an interview and then watch the first show, which used to get over just before the rush hour. Because the interview was at about 10/11 o'clock, I could catch the matinee show. I used to see the show all by myself and then come back home. Often I used to bunk to go see a movie. Or I would go on Saturdays. Instead of coming home in the afternoon on Saturdays, I would watch a movie 12 to 4 and then come home. They used to always wonder why I was so late. When I went to see a movie in Town I would never tell them.

During the school holidays ... my uncle was working for United Artists Distributors and so every Saturday evening he would bring home a reel. At that time we didn't have the Linking Road bus, so we used to take the 83 bus to where Standard Chartered Bank is and walk down to that old Lido Cinema, and there my uncle and I would watch the matinee show. Then he used to bring the reel back because he had to take it to Ballard Pier on Monday morning. That way I saw a lot of movies, like *Wizard of Oz*, *Phantom* and *Alibaba and the Forty Thieves*. Not that I understood everything, I was quite small then.

But these Hindi movies, even now I don't understand them. My sister and my niece and nephew are very fond of Hindi movies, so sometimes I went along with them. If what I saw on screen was funny I used to laugh, but otherwise till today I can't understand anything in Hindi. In English also, the American accent is easy to follow but the English accent can be a little bit difficult. Their humour and their way of talking are quite different.

Which were the theatres you were fond of?

Mostly in Town: Eros, Excelsior, Empire, Sterling ... all round the corner for me because I was working that side. Sometimes when I landed near a theatre, I would go inside immediately. I am mostly a person who likes to be on my own. When I am in a group I don't enjoy a movie as much. And in those days all these noisy children never used to come to a movie. It was mostly girls like you or elderly people. But now I don't get a chance to go out anywhere. I was working till eight to nine years back and then my mother fell ill – since then I've been looking after her at home. After she became a little okay my brothers told me, you don't go to work, you continue looking after her. So I've been at home only since then. Even if I want to watch a movie, there are only Hindi movies here these days ... in Gaiety, Galaxy or any other theatre. And they are always shouting. Every time anything happens, they keep on shouting or clapping their hands

or something or the other. If I want to watch an English movie I have to go to Town. And there is nobody else in the house, just me and my mother. Sometimes my niece and nephew come over the weekend. Otherwise I am always in the house. Those days I used to really enjoy going out...

SABIHA QURESHI. 45 YEARS OLD. BOHRA MUSLIM. HOME MAKER. CURRENT RESIDENCE: NAGPADA. PRIMARY LANGUAGE: GUJARATI.

Going out has stopped now because of all these terrorist threats. It has become an atmosphere full of stress and suspicion. I think that in a theatre, for three hours you can forget everything about your life. For three hours you go out and come back refreshed. You know they say that everything in life happens in three hours: one is born, grows old, and dies. With this, one experiences some happiness. I like it. Especially for Muslim women because they don't really get to see the outside world. So in a sense through these pictures we get to see the world and also learn something along the way; also sometimes a whole lot of bad emotions get purged. It is like a window. I can't visit London or America, but I can experience it in the pictures. I can't go to forests, but I can see them in the pictures. Like ghosts that we see no, in horror films?

Since I've been in school in Bombay right from the fourth standard, we were taught Marathi. So from the fourth to the eleventh I've studied Marathi, but I could never understand the language. It was only when Doordarshan was showing a Hindi picture every Sunday and a Marathi picture every Saturday that I somehow got interested in the Marathi pictures because they had very very powerful stories. All the Marathi stars I became familiar with were via Doordarshan. And then Marathi humour also I started enjoying. Now all the Marathi I know is because of the films I watched on television. Marathi comedies too – I've watched many Dada Kondke films.

The point is that you get to watch something new, meet someone new.