

Movies - Chandigarh Style

By M. S. GILL

These days every one wants to have a good time. They all "want to enjoy". How does one do that in an over-grown village like Chandigarh? There is the club of course. You can sit out on the lawn surrounded by lush green foliage, and drink barley water! Or you can hit the card tables and pawn away your dearest—Pandav style. If you really manage to do that, then, of course there is the lake. The lake club even obliges with a leaky boat which falls apart in the middle. Technically, this is not sulcid—I have checked with the L.I.C. chaps—and your children "enjoy" ever after!

These pleasures are only for the lucky few. The membership is limited and vacancies by courtesy of the lake, do not occur fast enough. And so we are left with the cinema—the citizen's den of pleasure. It has something for everyone. The rickshaw walla can be Dilip Kumar or Dara Singh for three hours. The local Fiat and Ambassador set—alas! no jet set here—can at least see Paris or Tokyo by courtesy of S. S. Vasan.

But the Chandigarh cinemas have so much more to give. The ever solicitous managements have built sealed concrete boxes on the Pakistani Pillbox pattern for the benefit of their patrons. Fans are out in modern architecture. Air-conditioning wastes precious energy that should boost national production. And so in winter Punjab fellowship and warmth mingle in a poultry-shed atmosphere. In summer the place serves as a mass Turkish bath for our well-fed brethren.

National Defence is never far from the minds of our patriotic cinema-owners. I have it on the highest authority that should an enemy dare to attack our sacred motherland, each of these concrete monsters will be turned into a Stalingrad, and the treacherous aggressors will bite the dust—knocked out no doubt by Coca Cola bottles hurled from above by the managers!

Going to the cinema is not the drab affair it is elsewhere. To make it exciting the managements have introduced a new game called, Queue Kabad. Any one with an hour or two to spare can take part. The fun lies in pushing and being pushed, abusing and being abused and, of course, in its nerve-racking excitement.

I can never bear the suspense and prefer other methods. Fortunately, my maternal uncle's first cousin's son-in-law is the local thanedar. I get my tickets at home. He even pays the entertainment tax. Or does he? Since tea and samosas in the interval are on the house, my wife invariably wants to take along her public-spirited friends from the Chandigarh Society for the Board.

Last Sunday I was ordered to arrange one such outing. My thanedar friend immediately despatched foot constable Fauja Singh to get half the gallery

booked for me, and to deliver the tickets. By 10.30 all the ladies had assembled in my drawing room. Fifteen minutes to zero hour & no signs of Fauja Singh. I rang the police station. "Hu-zoor, he delivered the tickets two hours ago," answered the Moharrar.

The ladies, desperate now, made a systematic search of my neighbours. Maybe, the tickets were delivered in the wrong house. I phoned thanedar sahib. It was a question of izzat now. He ordered a search party. So did the ladies. 1. Sherlock Holmes, tracked foot constable Fauja Singh to the pan shop in Sector 9. He had stopped for a chat with foot constable Mehnga Singh. Both were suspended on the spot.

We raced to the cinema. The picture had started. The second song and the third dance were in progress. We were herded down the dark aisle with many protests from owners of crushed toes. I tried to keep closer to my wife. At least I thought I did. When the hero started the fifth song, I considered it appropriate to hold her hand. The Vice-President of the society gave me a sharp one across the ears! I quickly found my proper seat.

And then the brats took over. Dilip Kumar was about to start the crucial duet with Vyjayantimala when the first scream rent the air. The cry was taken up by other willing friends in the hall. It was like a regiment of bull frogs around a pond when the first monsoon clouds are sighted. At first the elders all hissed "Shh, Shh..."

Then some one shouted, "chup karao jee". Finally the manager was summoned. The show was interrupted and he took the stage to make a fervent appeal to the rising generation to cooperate with the one that one freedom, for building a new India.

His eloquence had some effect. Dilip Kumar was allowed to resume his tepid love making. He was making some progress despite the villain. Unfortunately, he ran into a more serious rival. My little daughter suddenly screamed: "Papa, woh Auntee laynee".

"Later, later" I whispered. "Naheen, Abhi, laynee" she screamed.

The manager had apparently had enough. I looked up and found two burly ushers. "Out", they said, I don't like to argue on such occasions. I wonder if Dilip made it.