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Monday, July 17th 2023

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BOOK REVIEW

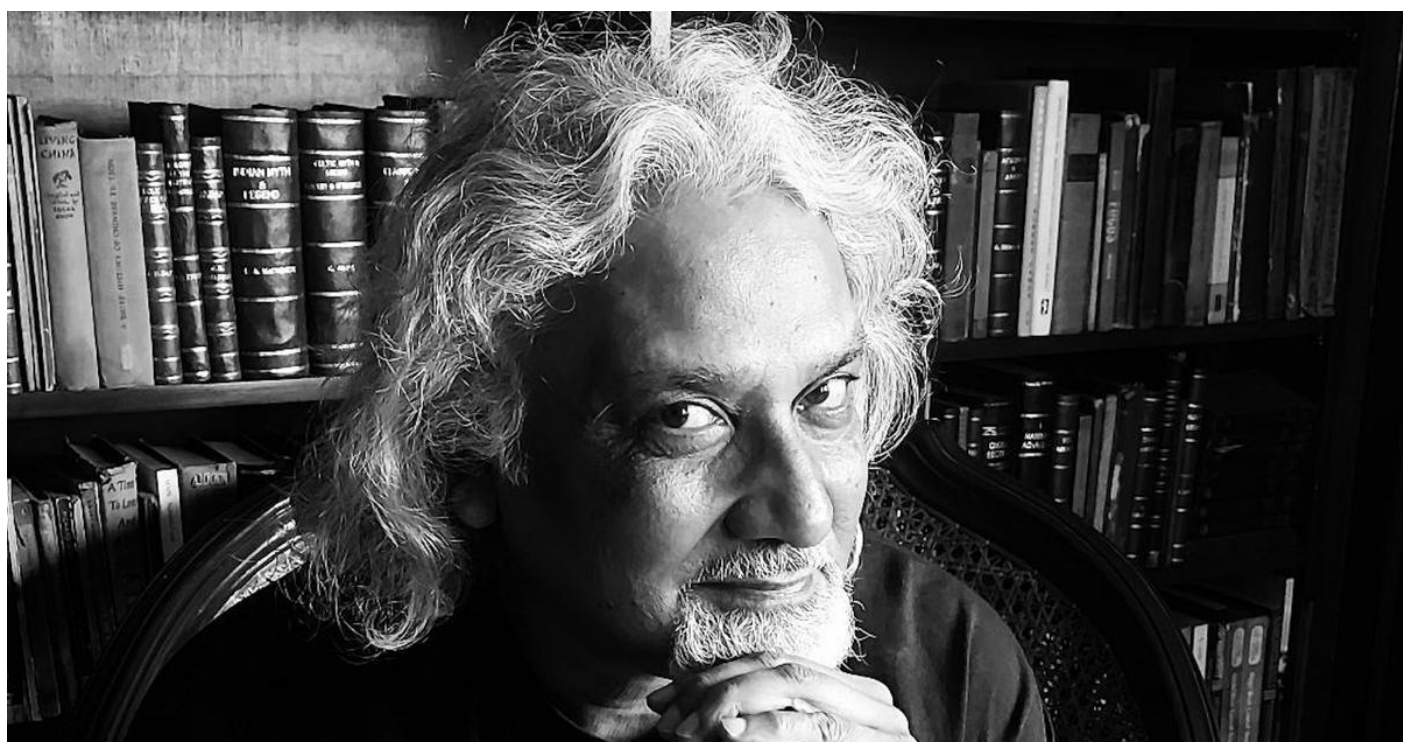
'Filmi Stories': Kunal Basu's thrilling and dramatic short stories unfold like scenes from movies

The influence of Hindi cinema and Bollywood is meant to be seen in this collection of short stories.



Debotri Ghosh

Jun 25, 2023 · 08:30 am



Author Kunal Basu.

Stories can come to one unannounced. They can show up at unexpected places. One can meet them at an airport, when taking an evening stroll in the garden, while cooking a favourite dish, and if one is lucky enough – it can appear in dreams too. That's what author Kunal Basu believes. The moment an idea for a story flashes in front of him, he scribbles it down as a note – tucked in somewhere for him to find it later, add possibilities, and to turn it into a story.

That's how [Filmi Stories](#) his new collection of stories was born, 15 years after the release of *The Japanese Wife*. This anthology comprises eight stories. The influence of Hindi movies and Bollywood is can be clearly felt in these stories. Basu's fiction like *The Miniaturist*, *Kalkatta*, and *The Japanese Wife* (adapted into a film by Aparna Sen) also have a cinematic quality to them.

I have always considered film and fiction to be ungainly cousins, each trying its best to cover up the imperfection of the other. Might there be a third

cousin? A kinder one, the peacemaker, deft in weaving together the senses, making them seem to be one through a clever sleight of hand? Such thoughts went into the making of these tales...

— *From the Prologue.*

Cinematic stories

Basu's "not so short" stories were born during the pandemic, as is evident in the first story "OK TATA". This instantly reminds the reader of what is written on the backs of trucks. "OK TATA" tells the story of the truck driver Jaggi, who is thinking of killing someone who he thought was having an affair with his wife back in the village as he drives night after night on dark highways. As the story progresses, we get to see the world shutting down because of the pandemic, and migrant workers walking miles after miles carrying loads on their heads, to reach home before all modes of transportation are shut down.

Migrant workers marched in a silent file on the highway in a bid to reach home before the roads were closed to all forms of traffic. Bricklayers, carpenters, stonecutters, cleaners, blacksmiths; a few women among their rank...The truckers watched them march all day under the sun, like an army of ghosts.

— 'OK TATA'

"Jailbird", the second story has a set up in a correctional home located in Bazipur which is compared to hell. But as the story progresses, it becomes more of a love story with a somewhat-happy ending. "Struggler" follows a successful businessman who becomes friends with a group of struggling film aspirants and who help each other out during difficult times. "Oxblood", the fourth story, is a thrilling story of a cop chasing a criminal.

In "Patna" – the author says, the idea for the story arrived when he was taking a nap on his living-room sofa, after lunch. Since he was not entirely conscious in

that moment, the readers are treated to some surreal incidents in the story.

“Fake” takes us inside an art gallery that is covered with white floors and white walls and the cleaner has been warned against any kind of stain sullyng the walls. But what happens when one fine morning the cleaner Jagannath finds the floors stained with blood?

“Passport Wallah” tells the story of Rakesh Mundra who wants to bring the shutter down on their ancestral business of making rubber stamps when he suddenly gets a huge assignment of making visa stamps for fraud passports. Does he go ahead with the project or does his father’s warning of doing any unethical stop him?

...he praised his luck for making the flight in the nick of time. Then, he looked around, left to right, to check up on fellow passengers, craned his neck backwards to the far end of the plane, examined every aisle, middle and window seat. He was alone, he realised, absolutely alone – the sole passenger of flight RA 333 from Bombay to Patna.

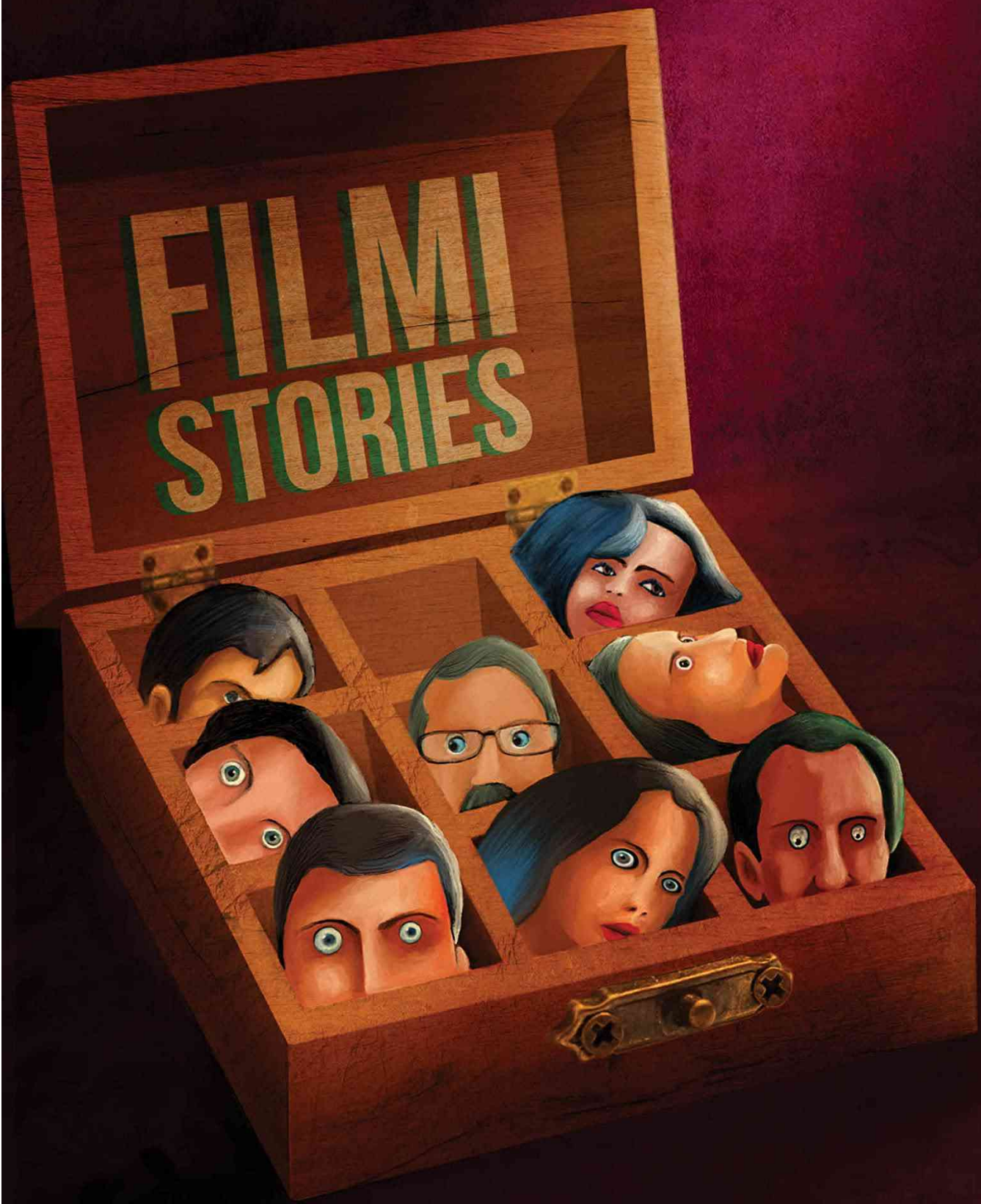
— *'Patna'*

The last story is named “Enemy”. A daughter is pretty sure that her father (who has not been in touch for several years) is dead – suddenly she finds out that he might be alive and in the captivity of Maoists. Spanning from Delhi to the unknown forests of Chhattisgarh – this story reveals the dynamics of a dysfunctional family.

All the short stories in this collection revolve, in one way or another, around human relationships in different circumstances. The reader cannot ignore the names of the characters – KK, Rohit Shetty, Manohar, Paranjpe – that jump right out of the pages of Bollywood pages. There are also mentions of superstars like Dev Anand, Dilip Kumar, Shahrukh Khan, and Mithun Chakraborty. The stories of lockdown, murders, disappearances, and forgeries have immense cinematic possibilities.

While not all of them will be adapted for the screen, the reader can easily imagine the scenes of the stories unfolding in front of them. And doesn't that say a lot about Basu's storytelling here?

KUNAL BASU



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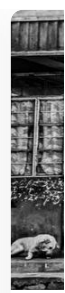
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