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Thursday Ji

Book Review: Filmi Stories- Tried-and-Tested Formulas of the Box Office Mediated by an Idealistic Vision

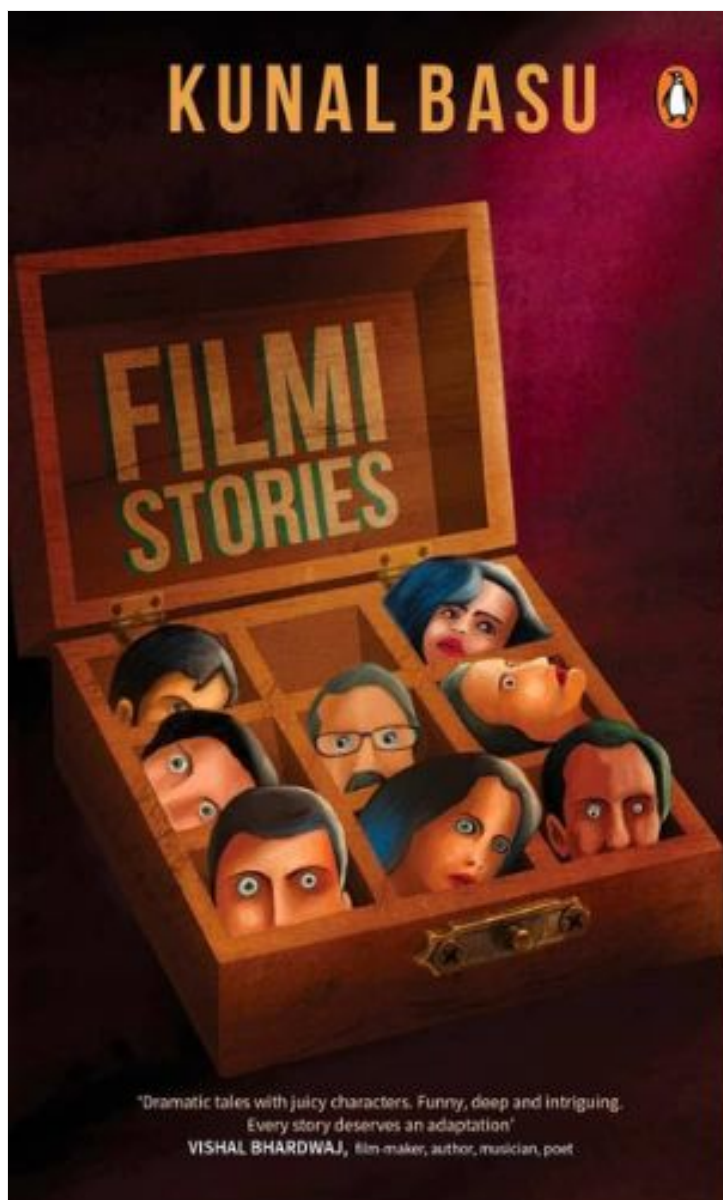


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Home (<https://thespace.ink/>) » Reviews (<https://thespace.ink/books-movies-music/>) » Book Review: Filmi Stories- Tried-and-Tested Formulas of the Box Office Mediated by an Idealistic Vision

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Filmi Stories

Kunal Basu

Cover design: Pinaki De

Publisher: Vintage Books

Price: Rs 499

Kunal Basu's *Filmi Stories* is his 15th book (including four in Bangla) and second collection of shorts after the much acclaimed *The Japanese Wife* (2008), the title story of which was adapted to screen by Aparna Sen. It was a collection that explored unusual loves over twelve stories of varying length. *Filmi Stories* has lesser stories, but is a meatier collection, with all its eight stories being long shorts of roughly 30 pages. He calls them "filmi" because they are "full of light and shadow, sound and silence and the jerky movement of a camera desperate to catch all the action."

"Action" there is aplenty in this collection, with the tried-and-tested formulas of the box-office: adventure, sex and violence. It actually covers a wide range in the erotic arc – including domestic love, which underpins several stories. Romantic love is expressly at the heart of 'Jailbirds', in which a jail warden and his wife (Pankaj and Kavita Jha) play cupid to their gardener and cook (Bukka and Indu), both jail inmates who work as domestic helps for them. The secret love between a famous artist and his gay lover (Kabir Shah and Varun Joshi), and the changing fate of his 'Mad Nudes', celebrating the latter, in turn propel the destiny of failed-artist-turned-gallery-staff KK in 'Fake'. The story is an exploration of not only authenticity in Art, but also in relationships – professional and romantic; and not the least in our relationship to our own self. A false charge of murder and consequent prison life surprisingly restores KK to his true self: "Just as the Arabian Sea had washed away Jabalpur, the prison had washed away Mumbai. He was now Kamlesh Kumar, the artist."

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Sexual jealousy drives the plot of 'OK TATA', where a truck driver (Jaggi) is close to killing his rival (Raju), but the pandemic – with the long journeys of migrant workers forced back home from metros – brings a twist in the tale and turns it into a highway story. The rival in love as well as the cheating partner (Nusrat and Manohar) do get killed, though, in 'Oxblood' – the title coming from a rare lipstick-shade (dark red with brown and purple undertones) that gives away the murderer (Jyoti).

Manohar and Jyoti had run a successful international business for years, where they created

cover for criminals. At one point, Manohar reflects:

“For the very first time, he could see what his business really meant to his clients. Beyond the thrill of risky makeovers, he sensed something bigger, close to a divine truth: the ordainment of a second life, bestowed upon those who’d suffered in their first.”

This is the case with ‘Passport Wallah’ – the risky makeover being, an honest man (Rakesh Mundra) with a hereditary (and losing) business in stamps, being suddenly lured with big money by a trafficker (Montek Singh) who perforce dealt in fake passports. The story, which is as much his friend’s (Jitu) as his, ultimately has a most unpredictable end.

The most surreal is ‘Patna’, where an anxious son working in Mumbai heads to Patna on short notice for an emergency – the hospitalization of his widowed mother. He goes through a harrowing journey of numerous stops, en route, caused by delays, alternating between the extremes of being absolutely alone (imagine being the only passenger in an airplane or a terminal!) or in the company of gregarious co-travelers. Of all the stories, this is the most open to interpretation.

The stories geographically cover a sizable chunk of India – from Goa and Mumbai to Raipur, Jabalpur and the forests of Chhattisgarh, from Bazipur to Patna. It travels to Kathmandu in ‘Oxblood’, the only story with several locales outside India. Mumbai is the setting of as many as three stories, understandably in a collection that is professedly “filmi”.

What is most striking about them is that, though they are mostly preoccupied with the seamy side of life, they are nevertheless permeated by an idealistic vision – where generosity, loyalty, honesty, love and friendship triumph despite circumstances.

‘Filmi Stories’ is available for sale on Amazon (<https://www.amazon.in/Filmi-Stories-Kunal-Basu/dp/0670098396>) and Flipkart (<https://www.flipkart.com/filmi-stories/p/itm063e4151e06>).



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