

Euphoria Kindles Resilience- A Reading of the Movie Vishanu-Unpaused in the Context of Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

Among the populace of India, the migrant workers were found most vulnerable groups in the lockdown, as their very livelihood came to a complete standstill. The unprecedented crisis which happened because of the pandemic triggered unemployment, quarantine and travel-ban. The paper aims to expose the tinge of happiness along with the fears and insecurities faced by the Indian migrant laborers during lockdown in an anthology of films *Unpaused* (2020). The paper focuses on the fourth segment *Vishanu*, which features the story of struggle, survival, resilience, hope and euphoria of these migrant laborers. It seeks to identify the concept of how these working class people move forward despite adversity.

Key words; Resilience, contingency, euphoria, black humor

INTRODUCTION

Unpaused, an anthology that brings together 5 unique artistic film makers of Hindi Cinema featuring states of love, new beginning, second chances, survival and glimpses of hope. It can be described as a stirring ensemble of slice-of-life tales in the context of pandemic. The paper focuses on the shreds of happiness, hope, satire and resilience in the third movie *Vishanu* from the Anthology *Unpaused*. *Vishanu* is an attempt at delving deep in to the irreparable sufferings of working class laborers amidst the global crisis of pandemic.

Vishanu directed by Avinash Arun and starring Abhishek Banerjee and Geetika Vidya Ohlyan, is an excellent take on resilience, where Indian migrant laborers find themselves trapped in an abandoned city and find no means for survival. The plight of migrant laborers and their contingency are brilliantly essayed by the characters named Manish and Seema. These characters are really sketched and designed to evoke the feeling of fears and insecurities faced by the Indian migrant laborers during lockdown. The leading characters, Manish and Seema, are from Rajasthan and migrated to Mumbai where they have been working as laborers in construction field. Unexpectedly the Pandemic hits, the landlords throw them out of their house and become homeless and jobless. As they become rootless and abandoned in a city like Mumbai, they struggle to reach out their homeland, Rajasthan. The movie recounts their attempt to regain hope and home land and resilience through all the creeping realities of life

During the pandemic, many migrant workers used all possible means to reach their destinations. There are about 100 million internal migrant workers in India, and most of them are daily-wage workers who have travelled out from different states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Rajasthan, etc. Manish in *Vishanu* approaches a tourist driver to get 2 seats in an illegal transportation where Manish is demanded of large sum of 14000 rupees. These marginalized sections of the society who are dependent on daily wages for their living fail to raise money to afford their travel to homeland when all the rail roads and public transports are shut. So many of the migrants who set off by foot were however stuck at borders, including state, district and at national border areas. As per the Government reports, nearly 200 migrant workers died due to lockdown, with reasons of road accidents.

Naturally, these migrant workers face the physical and mental insecurities which are stemmed out of various concerns related to food, safety, shelter, health, etc. Manish and his family also encounter the similar trauma but they are able to

identify the sparks of hope and happiness amidst of all epidemic chaos. The paper examines how the couple traces the perks of happiness and fun even during their struggle for resilience. The young migrant couple, Manish and Seema are thrown out of their rented house for not being able to pay rent during the lockdown and decide to illegally sneak into a sample luxury flat- that is in the same building in which they were working as construction workers. Thus their search for shelter end up in a fancy apartment out of desperation and they start enjoying the perks and fun of living in a luxurious flat. So the plush apartment that the couple has illegally occupied becomes a source of euphoria and the escapist element in the film puts it more in the realm of satire, rather than a straight look at the plight of migrant labourers in the lockdown. Even as he seeks to raise finance which costs his migration back home, he finds some joy in making Tik Tok videos with his wife. His only get away during the pandemic is making Tik Tok videos with his wife.

One night, Manish and Seema sneak out of their bed to other room after putting their son to sleep and record a Tik Tok video of them dancing to a trending music number. These fleeting moments of fantasy happening inside the plush apartment intensify the stark reality which creeps along. Another important moment of experiencing the luxury is when Seema happens to see a fashion magazine which has a cover page of a beautiful spa and bath dub. The viewers can clearly identify the fantasy which has been passed through the mind of Seema. On the very next morning she goes out to collect some flowers in order to prepare her own spa in the sample apartment where they live. On her way to pluck flowers without wearing mask, she accidentally meets the NGO team and she is provided food and mask. She asks for more food which clarifies the scarcity of food they are facing in the apartment. The interwoven layers of fancy and reality are revealed again through the incident. She makes her own spa decorating the bath dub with the flowers she plucked outside and relaxes herself as she saw in the magazine cover page. That momentarily happiness is again destroyed by the rustling of papers, clothes and bags. Manish and their son monu are packing their bags in rush as their Tik Tok video shot in the sample apartment became viral and the apartment contractor gave a threatening call to Manish. A state of despair reflected in everyone's face followed by an eerie music in the background.

Though illegal it was, the moments they lived in the plush apartment were like a dream lived for a short period for them. It was really an encroaching fear, that they would be caught at any moment. When their son looked out at nature and hills far into the distance from the balcony, he was pulled in to indoor and beaten by Manish. Manish was utterly conscious of the consequences of getting caught of staying illegally in a sample apartment where he had been assigned some work.

The characters in the movie randomly ask a question “ Have the trains started running ? ” and the question follows an eerie music in the background. Some of those migrant workers already have left for their homeland by means of walking with kith and kin. Manish was not given any guarantee for passenger's tickets whenever he approached private transportations. Through the conversations between Manish and other laborers, it becomes obvious that no government listens to their voice as they belong nowhere.

“It was supposed to end in 21 days But it's been two months ” Seema, the wife of Manish shares her insecurity and fear on the extending lockdown days which doesn't come to an end. Here she becomes a spokesperson for the entire migrant laborer community in India who loses their shelter, job and safety. The un-ending lockdown casts a shadow of gloom where they live. The movie ends when they leave the sample luxury apartment as an impact of the video they posted in Tik Tok getting viral.

The writing by Shubham combines satire ,empathy , black humour, with realism to good effect. The 20 minute movie of Avinash Arun is mirroring the migrant worker crisis during pandemic affected lockdown. The immediate concerns faced by these vulnerable groups relate to food, shelter, healthcare, fear of spreading virus and anxiety are well captured by the creative team of the film.

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