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Dancing in the streets

February 17, 2013
MUMBAI

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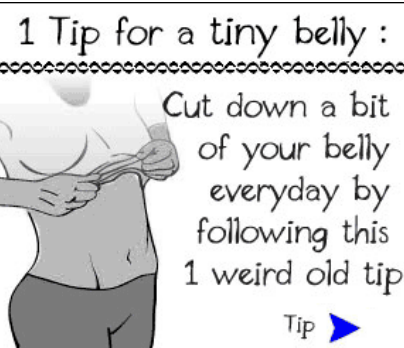


PAROMITA VOHRA

PARO-NORMAL
ACTIVITY

That curious little new hit on the block — Anybody Can Dance, pyar se ABCD — should have been easy to dismiss as timepass really, but I find myself wanting more for it. For those who don't know, ABCD is a dance film, rather heavily inspired by the Step Up series and directed by the choreographer Remo D'Souza.

A choreographer, played by Prabhudeva, is cast out of a successful dance company by his slimy partner, played by KK Menon, in favour of a firangi dance director who will teach the company more sophisticated moves. So, he goes back to his roots, training a bunch of rowdy, basti kids to compete in the biggest TV dance show — Dance Dil Se. The rest is familiar — tribulations, turnarounds and finally, triumph. For a culture so in love with song and dance, we haven't had a dance movie for a surprisingly long time — not since the Mithun and Govinda ones decades ago.



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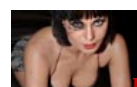
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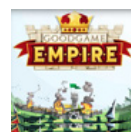
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Illustration/ Amit Bandre

However, the spirit of ABCD — that you don't have to be a somebody to dance and have a chance, just as long as you've got rhythm and soul — is something that plays out for real and of course, in finely constructed so-called reality, on television dance contests.

I went to see ABCD anticipating flamboyant choreography and street dance cool amplified by 3D. I was undeniably disappointed on that count. There is much to criticise here — the lame acting, the half-assed screenplay, the generic choreography. Only the last 20 minutes delivered that rousing feeling I'd hoped, including a full paisa vasool dance featuring Prabhudeva, Remo and the irrepressible Saroj Khan. If it's a good street dance movie you want to see, I would recommend the lovely documentary Breakin' Mumbai by the students of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, which follows the city's b-boying scene. And yet, I found ABCD a relief to watch.

The film will, quite rightly, never be praised what is currently the most praised quality of films — realism. Many well-regarded films today are celebrated for a certain claim they make to reality. Several new filmmakers are at pains to announce their documentary like credentials. They lay claim to significance via this realism, or, the recreation of apparently 'real' worlds, in opposition to the more plastic worlds of big entertainers churned out of Juhu offices.

In truth (for want of a better word) these self-conscious real worlds are to an extent an urban, even intellectual, rather masculinist fantasy of another somewhat unverifiable India; a harsh, violent frontier from which warrior directors return to tell tales of authenticity, sometimes with screenplays only a little less creaky than ABCD's, all forgiven in the light of other achievements, some genuine, some iffy.

The real exists in ABCD too, but what's refreshing about it is how casual it is, how it is not used as a badge of significance. The koliwada location, the basti lanes, and most of all the myriad bodies that fill them are never underlined. It's a long time since we saw so many different kinds of bodies in one film — fat, short, dark, working class, all dancing away. Hey, there's even a Muslim character who has no political angle.

This combines with an experiential authenticity — emotions and aspirations which the makers of this film know well whatever the lacuna in their filmmaking, which makes the film work, makes it feel big hearted and relatable. If the makers could add a little more mind to the heart and body of the upcoming two sequels, we might actually have films which are as resonant as they are fun for a mixed Indian public.

Paromita Vohra is an award-winning Mumbai-based filmmaker, writer and curator working with fiction and non-fiction.

Reach her at www.parodevi.com. The views expressed in this column are the individual's and don't represent those of the paper.



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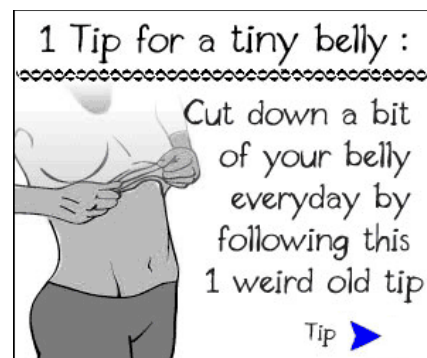
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