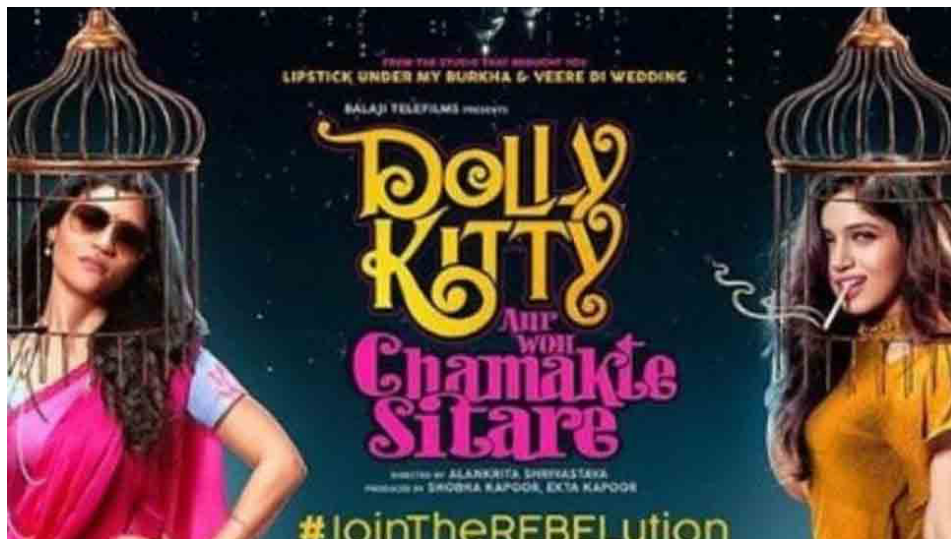


## Film Review

Shubhra Gupta

*Dolly Kitty Aur Woh Chamakte Sitare*

In Alankrita Srivastava's 2016 *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, we got a sharp new voice telling us a vital, crucial story. A bunch of women in Bhopal, struggling to break free from the coils of conservatism, find their path, each in their own way. Of the foursome, which includes a college girl, an oppressed house-wife, a young woman who works in a local beauty parlour, the most interesting one is the 50 year-old-Buaji, the owner of a mouldering haveli, but bereft of either agency or self-hood. The lipstick in the title is not just an item of make-up, but an apt metaphor for the freedom they long for.

*Dolly Kitty Aur Woh Chamakte Sitare*, Srivastava's new film, does not need any metaphorical crutches as it can afford to be much more open about its intentions. Dolly and Kitty are uprooted from the small-town where they were born and brought up, and deposited in a newly formed city, whose chief characteristics are malls, multi-storey buildings, and half-way people in half-way places.

The theme of people arriving in the big, bad city in order to make a life is an old, familiar one. Srivastava freshens it in her creation of Dolly (Konkona Sen Sharma) and her cousin Kitty (Bhumi Pednekar). Dolly is married, has two children, and is stuck in a thankless, clerical job. Kitty, clearly not very educated, is in search of work that can allow her to move out of Dolly's home, where she has to share a small room with her nephews, and ward off the advances from her entitled brother-in-law (Aamir Bashir).

The difficulties they face, while trying to break out of their dead-beat situations, are both specific and universal. Dolly's growing attraction to a pizza delivery boy (Amol Parashar) parallels her passion-less marriage; Kitty's quest for a dignified job leads her into many dodgy situations, and a relationship with a male attendant (Vikrant Massey). The film gives us a bird's eye view of messy, urban lives, all trying to find meaning in spaces they do not quite fit into. In an attempt to become modern, Dolly ditches her 'saris' and 'salwar-kameez' for

short 'kurtis'. And Kitty tries to overcome her distaste for the call-centre she finds herself in : ostensibly, it's all about getting customers to buy cuddly toys and candy, but underneath lies the real exploitative layer, where the female voice on the phone herself becomes the seductive toy-cum-eye candy, all for a hefty sum of course.



he wants to be. Kitty's journey feels a little contrived, especially when she tries to turn the phone-sex-for-men concept on its head. The rising religious polarisation and moral policing in Greater Noida, where our protagonists live, is also touched upon, in passing. More detail would have been welcome.

There are a couple of other interesting strands in the film, which needed more time to be unravelled. A brief, effective scene ensues when Dolly's mother (Neelima Azim) shows up, quite out of the blue. She had walked out on her family to be with her lover, when Dolly was quite little, leaving Dolly to wonder whether her own unsatisfactory marriage has anything to do with that old abandonment. When confronted, Azim refuses to act repentant. Domestic drudgery was not for her, so she left. This time around too, when she sees she is not welcome in her own daughter's house, she leaves again. Quietly.

Another one has to do with the question of masculinity the film poses. One of Dolly's boys is not like the others. He likes dressing up in girly clothes and prefers dolls over trains. At first, Dolly has no idea how to deal with this son of hers, but slowly, as she herself starts to shake off her shackles, she sees him for who

But despite these minor problems there is no doubt that Dolly and Kitty are the flag-bearers of the kind of feminism that needs to be amplified in this day and age. It is not radical, but it feels like it is. A married woman going out for a drive with a younger man is enough to get her killed in some parts of the country; when Dolly sits behind her delivery boy on his two-wheeler, she is making a statement. As is Kitty, when she walls past an unsatisfactory sexual skirmish and actively seeks out another: she has learnt, to her advantage, that a woman can make the first move.

Women being able to act and speak for themselves is the biggest victory of *Dolly, Kitty Aur Woh Chamakte Sitare*. The performances are all good, but the real stars are, as expected, Bhumi Pednekar and Konkona Sen Sharma; in places Sen Sharma shines the brightest of them all.

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