



Man of Tomorrow?

“Your children are not your children
They are the sons and daughters of life longing for
itself
They come through you but not from you And though they are
with you yet they belong not to
you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts For they
have their own thoughts You may house their bodies but not
their souls For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow Which
you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.”

—Kahlil Gibran

The hero of *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* says something similar to the heroine when their fathers oppose their marriage because of a longstanding family feud: ““Your father and my father don’t have the right to decide our lives for us. We are their children, not their property.” The film’s themesong too, which has become the hit of the year, ironically inverts that common thematic pattern of the Bombay film wherein the son’s life mission is to fulfil his father’s dreams. The song (*Papa kehte hain*) proclaims that a father’s dream of worldly success for his son may be at odds with

the son’s unknown destiny. The film endorses this idea with a vengeance when paternal obsessions drive the children to death.

The story of young lovers colliding with hatefilled elders is a staple of legend in many cultures but its peculiar appeal to young people in India today is evidenced not just by *Qayamat*’s runaway success but by that of its predecessors, like *Julie*, *Bobby*, *Love Story* and *Ek Dujhe Ke Liye*.

Apart from the theme of defiance of parental authority common to all these films, some ingredients of the fantasy here are very similar to those in *Love Story*—the cute hero from an elite background, tall, fair complexioned (noticeably fairer than all the other students at the farewell party); the gutsy, effervescent heroine; the dream of isolated togetherness in the primal “innocence” of the mountains where the man chops firewood and the woman keeps house. This Edenic dream is the weakest, because most formula ridden, part of the film. Much of the violence the lovers face also seems gratuitous—imposed to fit a preconceived plot rather than springing from the logic of the situation. Why is it that all the strangers encountered, from truck drivers to picnickers, turn out to be ruffians and potential rapists? This certainly does not correspond to Indian reality.

A noteworthy departure from formula, however, is the lack of

that contempt for women which is betrayed by other films of this genre. The heroine, who has an equal if not leading part to play (a better actress could have made much more of this role), is not undressed for voyeuristic purposes as in *Bobby*; there is no vicious mother as in *Ek Duje*; the suppression of the Rajput women in the family is tellingly evoked as the context in which the men's drama of bloody vengeance is played out.

Most important, the hero is cast in a new mould. He is made to seem heroic even though he loses fights, even though he is initially frightened into lying to his father and even though or perhaps because, he can burst into tears on his father's shoulder. There is no element of swagger, nastiness or roughness in his dealings with the heroine—and this is something of a record for films of the eighties. He is without the philandering tendencies of the *Ek Duje* hero and the bullying tendencies of the *Love Story* hero.

This has something to do with the film being slightly more realistic than others of its type—the hero actually does some work in his father's business instead of just playing around. Similarly realistic is his bashfulness—for example, that he first kisses the heroine on her cheek conveys not just his nonaggressive style but also somehow the sincerity of his

feelings. This kind of characterisation springs from director Mansoor Khan's ability to make a hero of a nonmacho man, to show that sensitivity and sweetness are not necessarily soppy or "effeminate."

That Aamir Khan is currently deluged with fanmail from adolescent girls is perhaps not as important as that a young male audience—elite and nonelite—roots for him as strongly. When we saw the film at a nightshow, the hall was packed with men—mainly young men—and their identification with the hero's conflicts, shyness, innocence and essential goodness, was evident. That the film maker should have accomplished this with a generation brought up on Superman, He Man and Amitabh Bachchan indicates that older traditions which glorified the humane and the loveable rather than the brutal and powerful, are still alive, if only film makers would draw upon them.

Manushi is now 10 years old. We are planning the tenth anniversary issue, No. 50, 1989. Readers are invited to share what **Manushi** means to them. Please write and tell us how you first came across **Manushi**, how you have experienced and reacted to it, how you may have found it of use in your life and work, and how you would like to see it develop in future.

—Ruth Vanita