

# cinema

**Gautaman Bhaskaran** on mobile phone abusers and snack munchers who mar the movie-going experience these days

## Villains of the real kind

It was a moment of sheer ecstasy. It was an instant of sheer passion as the handsome hero drew the stunning heroine close to him. And as the woman looked up to him, her lips quivering in anticipation, a mobile telephone rang.

The audience in the darkened auditorium, all keyed up to watch that kiss, burst out laughing. A response that would have got the director squirming. Some in the hall were of course angry, and shouted out the choicest of abuses, while the man and mobile remained engrossed in their little affair, callously oblivious of how they had destroyed a frame of sheer love.

In days such as these when film producers, distributors and exhibitors — leave alone directors and actors — are pushing us through every conceivable means to watch movies in cinemas, the cell phone often plays the perfect spoil sport.

The theatre that has been touted as the ultimate in movie experience is fast turning into a dreadful den with many viewers refusing to tear themselves away from their little gadgets that blare and blast us out of the story on the screen.

What follows can be worse with men and women checking out on inanity even as the film rolls. Often, on-screen sweet nothings whispered all too tenderly are lost in the babel of telephone talk. Not just this, but even screen dialogues at high decibels seem inaudible in the ruckus that mobile users create.

The other evening, I had the most trying time figuring out what Amy Jackson was lisping in *Madharasapattinam*. If her strange Tamil accent (but obviously) and an intrusive background score were not enough to drive me nuts, there was this guy perched next me who could not stop taking calls and barking business instructions into

the instrument. My glares could not divorce him from his cellular commerce. Till, I ticked him off, and asked him to get out. He stopped, prodded by his wife, who implored, “*picture parungale*” (see the picture).

But then there are defiant viewers, who would, come what may, not switch themselves off from the world outside. They would tell you that they had paid for the seat and could do what they pleased on it. They are the ticket-paying consumers, and they are kings.

But for the serious watcher or a movie critic like me, such noisy distractions are disasters. And they come in many forms.

There is this age-old problem of self-styled commentators, who feel a new kind of confidence in the anonymity of darkness. Their whispers turn brazenly loud as the movie progresses, and they often assume the role of a critic — sometimes lambasting the costumes, sometimes the style of acting and sometimes the choice of setting for a song.

At other times, they could turn appreciative, adoring the way the star smiles or flutters her eyelashes, clapping for every punch the hero gives the villain and loudly empathising with the tears and tantrums of a jilted lover. What can be much more annoying are the spoilers that some in the audience love to dish out. Normally, they are the second- or third-time watchers, and they find vicious pleasure in loudly announcing the next sentence or sequence to follow.

Some men and women need the pop of the corn to connect with the plot. They must open their jaws as wide as possible to smash the stuff into submission. These days, theatres offer a whole variety of food that becomes a major part of the experience. Sometimes, the film is merely an excuse to gorge on the samosa or puff.



Then there are the silent distracters, who do not seem to be able to live without punching their telephone keys. They are obsessive texters. But little do they understand or probably care that the illuminated phone screens are an awful nuisance.

In India, there is another kind of irritant: children who run around the auditorium, because they have little patience to watch a movie or bawl every time the screen gets noisy or grows silent. Parents just look the other way.

I had to walk out of a cinema when a child at the row behind mine refused to stop kicking my chair until my head began to ache. She would not listen to either her father or mother.

When I complained to the theatre

manager, all he could do was to offer to refund my ticket money. I took it and exited. The man had no guts to ask the offending family to leave, and, by the way, the kid should not have been there at all in the first place, because it was a film for adults!

Unfortunately, cinema owners do not seem to have come to terms with the fact that in today's times of sheer piracy — when just about every movie is out on an illegally burnt diskette often the day it theatrically opens — they have to walk that extra mile to make an evening at the cinema a pleasure.

Otherwise, people may well buy a pirated CD, insert it in a player and watch the images come alive on a large LED television.

Mind you, this works out far, far

cheaper than going to a hall and spending money on transport and the fast-becoming-exorbitant admission rates. The hassle of driving and parking one's vehicle are other impediments.

Yet, nothing can be a substitute for an evening out in the cinema, sharing pleasure and pain with many others in the comfort of a plush environ. There is a lot to lose here. For the viewer and the people who have invested in the theatre.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran lived a door away from a lovely cinema theatre in the then Calcutta, and grew up watching movies minus mobiles and mad munchers, and he may be contacted at [gautamanbhaskaran@yahoo.in](mailto:gautamanbhaskaran@yahoo.in))