

Critique

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***Boong* – A Manipur which India Doesn't Know**



*Boong* (India, Manipuri, 2024) directed by Lakshmipriya Devi

*Boong* is not a movie, it is a social document about a conflict ridden state of India behind a Blood Curtain, with a long history of difficulties which India doesn't bother about. The state of Manipur where the movie is set in is suffering an ethnic clash since 2023 with no hope of stopping. Already the state has a separatist insurgent rebel group who wants to liberate Manipur (1). Presence of military is common and atrocities are chronic and regular since past 3 decades (1). In this background *Boong* is a welcome movie. I watched *Boong* like most of the people after it won BAFTA awards 2026 because most of the time we don't care about North Eastern hill states of India and it was not only a pleasant surprise but an eye opener about a

chronically not-so-peaceful Manipur which India doesn't know or doesn't want to know (2). Did you know Bollywood is banned in Manipur? (3) Did you know you can go to Myanmar by paying 20 Rs? Did you know how separatist insurgents have torn apart the fabric of Manipuri society? How does it feel to be under military control? *Boong* revealed these shocking things which mainland Indians never get to know. However, the best part of this film is the revelations are disclosed in a mild casual manner; no crying hoarse about what is horribly wrong though the tone of the movie is overall depressing yet realistic.

Set in the far-flung corner of this country *Boong* is about the feeling of an universal loss. A young boy is growing up



with a single mother waiting for his father to return after the man left them few years ago. The father never returns, is presumed dead though he is very much alive just across the border in a neighbouring country with a full-fledged family. The mother waits, the son ventures out in search of his father with his Marwari, eternally outsider best friend from school only to cross the border to get heartbroken to see his father settled happily in Myanmar oblivious to the son he left behind. After few misadventures the son returns disappointed only to inform his mother and cremate the remains/belongings of his father thus obliterating the past and striding towards a new beginning. Bala Hijam as the mother, Gugun Kipgen as Boong and his friend Angom Sanamatum as Raju Agarwal did real good acting; the script is taut. It never seemed a single dialog is out of place and characters are well etched. In fact, the transgender singer was a surprise entertainer.

The story telling is superb, acting impeccable and never a dull moment with slice of humour chipped in the otherwise heavy and depressing premises. A state where Hindi movie is banned in theatres and seen in secret is a revelation for me. I don't think rest of India knows Hindi movie is banned in Manipur for display. In fact I never knew this fact. In a way this movie is an eye opener to the problems the region has. In the dusty

business town of Moreh a thriving South Indian community lives and for 20 Rs and a passport you can cross the border to Myanmar and come back in the evening after 3 sirens.

As an Outsider to North East, I could relate to the issue of 'Insider-Outsider' or the regional people's bias. Boong's best friend is a 4<sup>th</sup> generation Marwari settled in Manipur doing yarn business. However, locals threaten them and Boong also curses his friend as a 'Shitty Outsider' which his Marwari friend retaliates with 'Momo' slur. Though in the end their friendship is restored the tension between the 'Outsider' and 'Insider' is palpable and it shows how it is not 'India vs Bharat' but also a divide between the son of the soil and a perennial outsider. This is what secular liberal democratic India lives with- a fragmented society and a chasm between regions within our own country which is unbridgeable even after nearly 80 years of independence.



While watching *Boong* I was immediately reminded about a similar movie – Central Station (*Central Do Brasil*), a landmark in world cinema where a 9 year boy goes in search of his missing father with a jaded middle aged woman from Rio de Janeiro (4). In the end Josue, the boy doesn't find his father but his half brother and discovers his father is now married off to another woman enjoying a new family life similar to the ending of *Boong*.

With a layered and nuanced story *Boong* displays a harsh reality which *Boong* is an absolute winner. It tells you a separatist Manipuri people live with. Not a fresh story from the neglected secluded corner of India which mainstream media must know. without a doubt this won BAFTA. Manipuri Manipur stays veiled by a Blood Curtain with movie has always been overlooked by ethnic cleansing going on since 2023 and the Bollywood, regional films like Bengali, Central Government doesn't care. Marathi, South India and Assamese. But it's Mainstream Indian media has a blind spot for time to notice the Manipuri films. It's time to Manipur. Laced with punches of humour unveil the Blood Curtain off Manipur.

### References:

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