

## Movietone Itu Chaudhuri



DATES.SITES: PROJECT CINEMA CITY, BOMBAY/MUMBAI  
BY  
MADHUSREE DUTTA AND  
SHILPA GUPTA  
(TULIKA, RS. 995)

**T**he writer Mukul Kesavan once warned lazy reviewers that the only way a book could be “read at many levels” was in an elevator and that the use of the word “narrative” should be carefully deliberated, then avoided. With these in mind... One way to describe *Dates.sites* is as an absorbing, multi-track history, presented as a chronology. The events chosen conflate the city’s urban, political, social and cultural development with those in cinema, which is both canvas and subject.

Thus we learn that in 1950-51: the municipality’s writ extends to Andheri; RK Studios opens its doors, Laxman’s ‘Common Man’ gets inked in, Vallabhbhai Patel’s death is filmed, voiced over, edited by the Films Division, and screened at Regal theatre on the same day (!); and that’s far from all. This compressed activity creates a hectic and fascinating picture.

*Dates.sites* can also be seen as a beautiful book: design and production come together to do enough to stop you and command engagement on any page. Ephemera in the form of letters, advertisements, photographs accompany the timeline, creating a sense of period, they are intriguing by themselves, never mind the text. So be warned, as the authors write on the flap, that these ephemera are “playfully associative” and their relation with the text is hardly “umbilical”. The pictures that accompany the timeline also assault and ambush it.

If you’re the sort of egghead that believes that that’s what books should do, and that books which marry pictures to text are not just didactic, but diabolical, and a plot to manipulate you, then

you've probably bought this book already. So don't look to the images for guidance; the artfully blurred, cropped and disconnected images come with a great deal of tough love.

If you're like my friend who admired the book for ten minutes and then asked "But why can't it be easier to read?" you may find it inchoate and indulgent, to be taken in small doses. But still, seductive.

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