

It is reported that the film stars of Slumdog Millionaire, while doing their ritual visits in Hollywood after the awards were more dazzled by seeing the globally famed galaxy of stars than by their own triumph. These Indian film stars, some of them from the slums of Mumbai, had been so unselfconscious in their manner. They were seen rushing to take autographs from Meryl Streep, Kate Winslet, Brad Pitt, James Bond actor Daniel Craig and so on.

"It feels unreal. This is the best day of my life, man," Madhur Mittal, who plays the wayward Salim, said at the party thrown by the film's US distributor, Fox Searchlight. "I come from India and I never in my wildest dreams thought I would be at the Oscars, much less be part of the movie that sweeps the Oscars."

These film stars perhaps realized that they had only formally gotten into the galaxy. The gap between them and everything they saw around them in Hollywood filled them with a sense of unreality and awe. The designer clothes of the slum actors were merely part of another act in a drama of pretence.

But one comment shared by all those at close quarters was that the Slumdog bandwagon had been high spirited from the start. Director Danny Boyle was key witness to that. Boyle had told the actors, "If you work hard you can make it to the Oscars." From the time the movie was first exposed at the Toronto festival and then at the Telluride film festival in Colorado Slumdog carried the aura and feel of a sure winner. It triumphed at the Critics Choice and the Golden Globe Awards where it got the Best Picture Award. The landslide of eight awards at the Oscar came as a climax in a gathering momentum of spectator response. Unlike many previous Oscar winners Slumdog

did not resort to any unusual hype or media build up.

The storyline of Slumdog is really not anything extraordinary and its elements are predictable. It was based on Vikas Swarap's novel, Q & A and was adapted to the screen by Simon Beaufoy. It tells the story of a young man, Jamal Malik (Indian Londoner, Dev Patel), from the slums of Mumbai who appears on the Indian version of Who Wants to be a Millionaire and got all the answers right. This aroused the suspicions of the game show host (Anil Kapoor) and of the law enforcement officials. The police grilled Jamal in order to find out if this uneducated boy from the slums had cheated.

The grilling took the audience to various interesting episodes in the boy's life experience that had given him the clue to the answers. Through a series of dramatic flashbacks Jamal's knowledge-bringing encounters are brought to light. Along with these disclosures are laid bare the grim and gritty reality of life in the Mumbai slums.

The director has cleverly manipulated the plot to show how romance and frolic can stand comfortably amidst the shit, squalor, and child slavery in Mumbai. The romance is between Jamal and his childhood girl friend Lateefa (Freida Pinto). The scene where thousands of street urchins, for instance, flock to have a glimpse of film star Amitha Bachan was suggestive of the escapism that a poverty-stricken society subconsciously resorts to.

The Mumbai exposure initially became an embarrassment to Indians who pride themselves in believing that their country has taken off to be part



Producer Christian Cozon, centre, along with the cast and crew, accept the Best Picture Oscar for Slumdog Millionaire at Sunday's Academy Awards. (Mark J. Terrill/Associated Press)

MUMBAI'S LANDSLIDE AT THE OSCARS



of the developed world, leaving behind laggards like Sri Lanka. This caused protest all over India and many wanted the movie banned. The bitter reality is that juxtaposed with India's growing filthy rich class is this dark side of squalor and exploitation in a demography that outnumbered the upper class. It was

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harrowing to watch how kids are forced into the profession of begging and how beggar-owners resort to the mutilation of these innocent kids—making them blind etc so that they can be put to the streets to receive more public sympathy and more charity.

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Slumdog Millionaire is a cheerful and jaunty movie designed to thrill the audience. Although Jamal Malik's triumph in the quiz was predictable the audience was kept on the edge of their seats when it came to the decisive moment. The touch of romance helps to lift the spirit. AR Rahman's multilayered musical score seemed to reflect the heartbeat of the subcontinent's largest and richest metropolis—the mass of human beings

breathing life over there.

On that great night of the Oscars, sniffing victory Indians first became anxious and then, after the results were announced, they danced on the streets. It was a different India to the one that had originally protested. No matter that it was a British production. It was about India and the players were largely Indian. Indians love success and loathe failure. The grandeur of winning the ultimate in movies sort of swept the seedy side of Mumbai under the carpet. Said a news story: "Cameras shot celebrations erupting in the family homes of AR Rahman, the composer who took home two golden statuettes, and Resul Pookutty, the Bollywood sound engineer who was part of the winning sound mixing team.

The star for India was definitely Rahman, known as the Mozart of Madras, who picked up the Oscar for best original score before scooping the best song award moments later. He thrilled the home audience by speaking in his native Tamil, closing his second acceptance speech with the evocation: "God is great." His sister, Rehana, told Indian television that "we won't lose Rahman to Hollywood ... he belongs to everyone but he's Indian."