



Smita Patil: A Brief Incandescence

Maithili Rao

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In the three decades since Smita Patil died—at the impossibly young age of thirty-one—she has unwaveringly been one of Indian cinema's biggest icons. That is unusual enough for a 'parallel cinema' actor, rendered more remarkable in a career that spanned a mere ten years. Patil, one of the leading lights of the New Indian Cinema of the mid-1970s, has a body of work that would make veterans proud. *Smita Patil: A Brief Incandescence* tells her remarkable story, tracing it from her childhood to stardom, controversial marriage and untimely death. Her close friends remember 'Smi' as outspoken and bindaas, not beyond hurling abuses or taking off on bikes for impromptu joyrides. Film-makers like Shyam Benegal and Jabbar Patel, and co-stars Om Puri and Shabana Azmi talk about Patil's dedication to her craft and her intuitive pursuit of that perfect take. From the difficult equation she shared with her mother to her propensity for 'wrong' relationships, about which she was always open unlike other stars of the time, this is a complex and honest exploration of Patil's life. The book also includes a sharp critique of the films that defined her. They read like a roster of the best of New Indian Cinema: *Bhumika*, *Mandi*, *Manthan*, *Umbartha*, *Bhavni Bhavai*, *Akaler Sandhane*, *Chakra*, *Chidambaram* and *Mirch Masala* among them. Maithili Rao also examines Patil's many unfortunate forays into mainstream commercial cinema. Incisive and insightful, *Smita Patil: A Brief Incandescence* is an invaluable addition to film studies in India, bringing alive an entire era when cinema in India was truly different. It is also the definitive biography of a rare talent and a haunting life.

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