



***Machines* is a 2016 live action feature documentary dvd from Kino Lorber. Shot on location in Gujarat, India, it is partly subtitled. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.**

8 of a possible 20 points = ** = mediocre movie

India 2016 color 71 minutes partly subtitled live action feature documentary Producers: Rahul Jain, Thanassis Karathanos, Iikka Vehkalahti Jann Pictures / Pallas Films / IV Films Ltd.

***indicates an outstanding technical achievement**

Points:

Direction: Rahul Jain

- 1 Editing: Rahul Jain, Yaël Bitton, Robert Fenz**
- 2 Cinematography: Rodrigo Trejo Villanueva***
- 2 Lighting: Gregor Pfüller (Digital Colorist)***
- 0 Interviews**
- 2 Sound Design: Susmit "Bob" Nath***
- Sound Recording: Rahul Jain***
- Sound Effects: Grace Auerbach***
- Sound Mixing: Adrian Baumeister**
- 0 Research**
- 0 Conclusion**

0 Contrast
1 Creativity
0 Insightfulness
8 total points

Rahul Jain's feature documentary about a textile factory in Gujarat, India begins promisingly, but peters out into yet another lopsided unionization promotion. Strong on visual content, with radically mobile camerawork, it raises questions which go unanswered. This could be because responses would war with preset opinions of the director. Or perhaps the filmmaking team was misled by an erroneous concept documentaries need only showy camerawork to justify their production.

Viewers are treated to extensive tours of labyrinthine passages inside what appears to be a single huge plant, one blatantly discharging waste into adjacent public channels. Two preteen boys are observed pulling masses of compressed disposable materials from circular wall openings, a process both fetid and potentially hazardous to their health. They hope to obtain triplets of copper among the refuse, which they can then sell for ready cash to indiscriminating adult buyers.

After a prolonged wordless journey through a dark and noisy interior machinescape, the camera lingers on a worker propagandizing for formation of a union, simultaneously detailing exactly why one is unlikely to be created. Labor comes and goes on a monthly basis. Potential strike leaders are eliminated from the company's payroll. Minors are happy to settle for a stable daily job, even one entailing twelve-hour work shifts. As one of them explains to an interviewer, it's a valuable learning experience teaching skills useful in future work situations. Not yet having a family to support, such juveniles can eat, sleep, and survive with relative security by working in such a place.

No one seems to have time or interest in formal education, eschewing even limited vocational instruction which could qualify a participant for some more lucrative supervisory position.

A spokesman for the manufacturing company defends its policies, lambasting current employees as wastrels who spend wages quickly on alcohol, cigarettes, and other non-essentials while disdaining to save any money.

Another interviewee claims salaries are quickly paid out through travel expenses to and from distant villages and necessary food purchases. He explicitly subtracts those outlays from a monthly payout indicating little likelihood any cash will be left to deposit in a savings account. Participating in a strike would be economic suicide for low-level machine operators, production line inspectors, and stock haulers. And testifying in court about illegal employment policies or environmental pollution would increase transport costs while losing at least a day's worth of earnings. Even complaints to visiting government officials have proven useless in altering the status quo. So long as this company provides regional bureaucrats and politicians with money requested nothing gets changed by anyone. There's no labor lobby in India.

However, management may have strong arguments for maintaining current procedures. The camera lingers over adult workers asleep on makeshift beds of burlap sacks. Is this their hour off between shifts? At another point, an underage employee well aware of being photographed shows signs of dozing off on the job. He's alert enough, though, to insure his machine continues to function smoothly without encountering fabric wrinkles. Meanwhile, a supervisor validly asserts workers come to this spot to find jobs. The company isn't conducting recruitment to enlist them.

Filmmakers spent far too little time researching the labor-management relationship at this site. The result is a one-sided propaganda film that looks engaging but is content threadbare.

Discontented wage-earners get each of their words recorded in coherent English subtitles. Yet a boss is given superficial treatment, his thick accent making most of a monologue unintelligible to natives of North America.

On the plus side, sound recording, cinematography, and lighting supply attractive offsets to deficiencies of insightfulness, conclusiveness, fact-gathering, and dramatic tension.

Little helpful information is to be gleaned from watching this movie. It's a disappointing outing from India with annoying unedited obscene language adding to editorial shortcomings.

For more illumination on India's corporate peccadillos, Satyajit Ray's *Company Limited* and *The Middle Man*, an astringent pair of dramas now fifty years old, provide richer, more rewarding context about corporate shenanigans. Sadly, progress seems minimal in the subcontinent on the manufacturing front

over the last five decades. Why this is so will require a lengthier, more systematic investigation of the interplay between boards of directors, government agencies, and migratory blue-collar personnel. Perhaps Sandip Ray might be interested in launching just such a then-and-now project.