



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LIFE IN A... METRO AND METRO... IN DINO: CHANGING URBAN REALITIES IN INDIAN CINEMA

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Abstract

*This research article examines *Life in a... Metro* (2007) and *Metro... In Dino* (2024), two anthology-style Hindi films directed by Anurag Basu, to understand how each represents changing urban experiences, interpersonal relationships, and emotional alienation in India's metropolitan contexts. While *Life in a... Metro* captured the anxieties of globalization and fragmented relationships in early 21st-century Mumbai, *Metro... In Dino* remain similar themes for a post-pandemic, digital-age audience. This comparative study analyzes the two films through the lenses of urban sociology, interpersonal communication, and film narrative structure. Findings reveal a clear evolution in cinematic language, character agency, and emotional tone—from pessimistic alienation to empathetic resilience—reflecting the transformation of Indian urban life over two decades.*

Keywords: *Life in a Metro, Metro In Dino, Anurag Basu, urban life, Indian cinema, relationships, digital culture, Mumbai, modernity.*

Introduction

Cinema, as both art and social document, mirrors the cultural, psychological, and technological shifts of its time. Indian urban cinema, in particular, has chronicled the rapidly changing lives, desires, and disconnections within its metropolitan spaces (Mazumdar, 2013). Director Anurag Basu's *Life in a... Metro* (2007) and *Metro... In Dino* (2024) offer two temporal snapshots of urban India separated by nearly two decades. Both films use a multi-narrative structure - interweaving the lives of multiple characters - to explore loneliness, love, ambition, and human connection in an increasingly chaotic cityscape.





The first film, *Life in a... Metro*, released in a period of globalization and corporate expansion, portrays urban alienation, infidelity, and emotional detachment within the backdrop of Mumbai's rising corporate culture. The latter, *metro... In Dino*, released post-pandemic, revisits similar themes but reinterprets them through a softer, more reflective tone, focusing on emotional healing, reconnection, and digital interdependence.

This article compares the two films as cultural texts that document evolving urban sensibilities. It aims to understand how Basu's storytelling, characterization, music, and mise-en-scène evolve between the two films to reflect shifts in the moral, emotional, and social fabric of India's metropolitan middle class.





Urban Space and Modern Alienation in Cinema

The city in Indian cinema has often served as a metaphor for modernity, aspiration, and fragmentation. As Rajadhyaksha (2009) notes, the metropolis is “a site of convergence where dreams and disillusionments collide.” Scholars such as Prasad (1998) and Ganti (2013) have examined how Hindi cinema increasingly portrays the emotional costs of urban success, often centering stories around isolation, materialism, and the search for belonging.

Anurag Basu’s Narrative Style

Basu’s cinematic idiom is marked by realism blended with stylization. His anthology narratives interconnect lives through coincidence and emotional resonance, similar to global urban dramas like *Crash* (2004) and *Love Actually* (2003). Critics (Chatterjee, 2015; Thomas, 2020) have praised his ability to use music, particularly collaborations with Pritam, as narrative devices that express emotional subtext. *Life in a... Metro* was lauded for its ensemble cast and depiction of moral conflict within middle-class life.

The Changing Urban Discourse

Since the 2000s, India’s urban cinema has moved from depicting the corporate loneliness of early liberalization to exploring questions of identity, mental health, and digital-age disconnection (Mehta, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic further influenced cinematic narratives, shifting focus toward empathy, healing, and community resilience (Sen, 2023).

Research Gap

While *Life in a... Metro* has been widely analyzed for its portrayal of moral fragmentation and gender politics, *Metro... In Dino* a sequel or spiritual successor has yet to be academically studied. This comparative analysis thus provides insight into how Anurag Basu revises his thematic and visual vocabulary to engage with new urban realities.

Methodology

This qualitative comparative study uses textual and thematic film analysis. Both films were examined for their narrative structure, character arcs, cinematography, music, and dialogue. The analysis was informed by the frameworks of urban sociology (Simmel, 1903; Lefebvre, 1991) and interpersonal communication theory (Knapp, 1978; Duck, 2007).

Key analytical parameters included:

1. **Representation of urban space:** How the city functions as a character.
2. **Narrative tone:** From disillusionment (2007) to reconnection (2024).
3. **Gender and relationship dynamics:** Shifts in agency and emotional expression.
4. **Use of music and performance:** As narrative and thematic bridges.
5. **Cinematographic approach:** Visual representation of urban emotion.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Urban Context and Thematic Continuity

Both *Lives in a... Metro* and *Metro... In Dino* explore the theme of loneliness amidst crowd, but their contexts differ dramatically.

1. *Life in a... Metro* (2007) emerged during India’s early IT boom and the rise of the corporate city. Characters struggle with ambition, infidelity, and existential emptiness despite material success.



2. *Metro... In Dino* (2024), while set in the same city, presents a transformed landscape shaped by digital connectivity, mental health awareness, and post-pandemic introspection.



In *Metro* (2007), the city feels claustrophobic high-rises, cramped offices, and traffic jams symbolize emotional congestion. In *Metro* (2024), space breathes differently cafés, parks, and digital interfaces suggest both openness and artificial connection.

Character Arcs and Emotional Evolution

Life in a... *Metro* (2007)

The film interweaves stories of nine characters, including Shikha (Shilpa Shetty), a homemaker yearning for emotional intimacy; Neha (Kangana Ranaut), a career-driven woman entangled in an affair; and Rahul (Sharman Joshi), a young man whose flat serves as a site of others' illicit liaisons. Their stories converge on the theme of moral compromise and alienation. Love is transactional, relationships are burdened by urban survival, and the tone is melancholic.

Metro... In Dino (2024)

In contrast, Basu's newer film introduces younger characters played by Sara Ali Khan, Aditya Roy Kapur, Konkona Sen Sharma, Fatima Sana Shaikh, and Ali Fazal who navigate similar urban disconnections but with greater self-awareness. Emotional honesty replaces guilt; therapy, communication, and vulnerability become recurring motifs. The title track "*Metro... In Dino*" signifies "everyday love" a celebration of small human connections in an impersonal world.

The comparison reveals a generational shift: from repression to expression, from escapism to emotional literacy.

3. Cinematic Style and Visual Storytelling

Basu's visual treatment of both films contrasts significantly:



Aspect	Life in a... Metro (2007)	Metro... In Dino (2024)
Cinematography	Muted tones, rain, confined interiors	Warmer palette, natural light, urban greens
Music	Rock-band motif performing live within the film; melancholic tone	Melodic, introspective soundtrack with acoustic undertones
Editing	Quick cuts; emotional fragmentation	Slower pace; reflective rhythm
Symbolism	City as trap	City as healing ground

This evolution mirrors India's changing emotional culture—from the anxiety of new urban modernity to the cautious optimism of digital coexistence.

Gender, Morality, and Agency

In *Life in a... Metro*, women are portrayed within moral dichotomies trapped between traditional virtue and modern desire. Shikha's affair and Neha's ambition are framed with guilt and social judgment. Conversely, *Metro... In Dino* reframes female characters as autonomous, emotionally articulate individuals. They navigate heartbreak and career not as binaries but as coexisting realities.

Male characters also evolve from emotionally repressed or exploitative figures (e.g., Kay Kay Menon's Ranjit) to more self-aware, communicative men (e.g., Aditya Roy Kapur's modern counterpart). This gendered evolution aligns with wider societal conversations around consent, emotional intelligence, and equality (Sen, 2023).

Music as Emotional Bridge

Music functions as both continuity and contrast between the two films.

1. *Life in a... Metro* used a live rock band (fronted by Pritam) within the narrative, representing the collective melancholy of the city.
2. *Metro... In Dino*, with lyrics by Irshad Kamil and music by Pritam again, uses acoustic, earthy soundscapes to evoke reflection and inner healing. The sonic evolution mirrors the emotional one: from alienation to empathy.

Findings

1. **Thematic Continuity:** Both films explore loneliness and human connection in metropolitan India, maintaining Basu's auteur signature.
2. **Contextual Transformation:** The 2007 film reflects early globalization anxieties; the 2024 film reflects post-pandemic healing and digital empathy.
3. **Shift in Tone:** Emotional cynicism gives way to compassionate introspection.
4. **Gender Representation:** A marked increase in female agency and emotional equality.
5. **Cinematic Evolution:** Aesthetic choices evolve from cold, confined visuals to warm, inclusive frames.
6. **Music and Mood:** From rock melancholia to acoustic serenity, signaling emotional maturity.

Conclusion

Through *Life in a... Metro* and *Metro... In Dino*, Anurag Basu charts the evolution of Indian urban consciousness across two decades. The former captures a generation struggling to balance moral values and material aspirations, while the latter portrays a society learning to heal, communicate, and



coexist amidst chaos. Together, the films function as cultural texts that trace India's journey from globalization to digitalization from emotional fragmentation to reconnection.

Basu's revisiting of the "Metro" universe signifies not repetition but reflection a cinematic documentation of India's changing relationship with modernity, intimacy, and hope. The comparison thus reveals how Indian cinema, like the city itself, evolves from alienation to empathy, from survival to emotional sustainability.

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