

Interview with Filmfare Award Winner Screenplay Writer

SUPRATIK SEN



How much of the novel should one retain in the script? Can you discuss in context to "Kai Po Che!"

In screenplay adaptation of any book, the most important thing is to read the book and throw it out of the window. Unless you make some nuts and bolts changes to the material and kind of re-imagine it, there is not so much fun. So it is important to re-interpret the classic play around with the milieu and backdrop without losing any essence of the original work. Also, a book is exhaustive and has myriad characters and sub plots, it is important that you make a check list of the important events in the book, and then try and collapse that into a gripping two hour movie. A book you can read at night, then go to office, come back next night again and its still waiting for you. You can take breaks like that. When you are watching a movie, you have to watch in a continuous stream, so it has to be very densely plotted. Your attention can't slack. You have to take the important things, the big things and package them in an economical way, which is why I keep saying, focus on the big things, the big themes of the movie. For example friendship between the three friends is a theme or the simmering political backdrop of Gujarat is the theme or mentorship is a theme like Ishaan is a mentor to the little boy. But at the same time, don't compromise on character development. Character is everything.

Can you talk about the magical scene, where Shop opening and the business flourishing and so many things are happening in a rapid montage.

Occasionally, in a song, you will see a whole relationship develop or a big story event transpire in seconds, because that is



the idiom of popular Hindi cinema.

In Hindi cinema the format is such that you have to pack in so much in so little time so that's why the montages comes in handy. Sometimes those are the tricks the director or writer has to adopt so that the story telling doesn't slow down. Like in Kai Po Che!, I remember there was so much happening and you know it's a story about aspirational modern India, this "can do" attitude of the youth entrepreneurship so it tells lot about how India also sees itself now. In a sense there were so many themes – the opening up of the economy, the riots, the earthquake, the cricket series- so actually it was bit of a challenge and I think a lot of credit also goes to the co-writer Pubali Chaudhuri, to be able to compress a lot of the themes into a 2 hour movie which people can enjoy as well as find credible. Not larger than life.

The flag used by the radical Hindu Group reminded me of Hitler's logo. Was it an inspiration or it was already there in the book? How much of the real time politics of the time influenced your script?

Right from the outset, the director, Abhishek Kapoor, never intended to make a very political film. His interest was always in the story of the three young boys. We didn't want to tiptoe around the real events but at the same time, we knew it is difficult to make realistic cinema in this country especially in the commercial format, and deal with overtly political themes. I thought some of the controversial things or which could have become controversial were handled very craftily.

So in that way, Kai Po Che! was an



achievement as it could blend artistic sensibilities with a mainstream language.

How did you go about selecting the actors for "Kai poche"?

I think filmmaking is such a collaborative process and everyone comes in with their own inputs, making it such a rich experience. Writing a good story is just a beginning of it. The most important thing when you go out and make films, always remember to choose a good "crew and cast". They'll make you look good. Like for this film, I remember we went to all the well known A listers but thankfully they were not inclined or did not have the time to do the film. So we selected 3 hungry actors who went out of their way and gave it their best. There were so hungry that they were just dying to go and show off their acting chops.

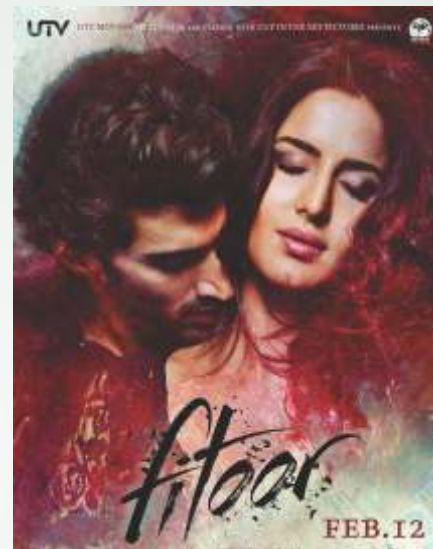
How did you write or set up Scenes? What is the trick to writing a 'satisfying' scene?

Like if you take the first scene where Omi's character is introduced, the guys are watching cricket, so you convey that they are cricket bugs and Ishaan is the boss of the gang, Omi is his right hand, you can make out just from the way he is sitting and parroting whatever Ishaan's saying..how another friend, Govi who is the business head is getting a cheque signed. Ishaan's father is grumbling about how such a wastrel he is, Ishaan's sister is this coquettish young girl, on the cusp of new dreams. So in one scene, you setup 5 characters. That is the beauty of writing and when you can do that, you get a real high. I mean, u know that you are catching their lives from the middle and that is what is so effective.

Can you also talk about the element

kai po che

Brothers...For life.



of surprise like the conversation in the car but they are actually in a trailer, carrying new cars?

That scene works because of the reveal in the end that they are just sitting in the truck which is carrying the cars from the factory. It shows that they cannot actually afford a car but want to own one desperately, putting in place the theme of the movie. When the film begins in the present, Govind is driving a similar swanky car. He's finally 'made' it. He wanted to get out of his neighborhood and move up in life the most. That seed is sown in the scene in the past between the three friends when they fool around in the stationary car. So in this scene there are two things that are happening- one which you can see and one which you cannot see but hear and feel. In their thoughts. In their eyes. If you can manage that in that every scene, then you are well on your way towards a gripping, tight story.

Are you ever worried that something you wrote was so subtle, that people won't understand?

Subtle is not my problem. I am always worried about excess. Personally I NEVER want to spoon-feed the audience. I know directors and producers worry sometimes because it's their money and reputation on the stake. Like sometimes we are told that keep the beginning of the movie and the post interval bits light and breezy, because the audience comes in late and needs time to settle down. But that is not the way to make movies. Its your work- it has to be great from scene 1 to 100. It cannot start getting into gear from scene 3 or scene 5 just because it takes time for the audience to settle.

The dialogues in the movie were written by a dialogue writer or were you a part of the dialogue writing process as well?

I did most of the dialogues. There was a bit of indicative dialogue in English but the flavor and nuances had to be brought in to make all these three characters sound distinct. Like Ishaan was the leader of the group, Omi looks up to Ishaan, Govind was the businessman or the sane head of the group. So you have to follow their arcs. Basically, Ishaan should not sound like Omi and Omi should not sound like Govi.

In the entire film the boy hasn't spoken except at a point where he says "bhaiya" so was that a deliberate attempt?

Not really. That's how the character of the diffident, quiet boy from the ghetto, Ali, was conceptualized. Ishaan would make his personality flower so he was supposed to be in his own shell. It worked to our advantage, honestly as I don't think people write children characters very well here. Because we were children a very long back, we've lost some of that purity, wonderment and innocence. Which is why child characters in Hindi movies come across as bratty and precocious. Ali's talent, his skill was as a cricketer. As long as his bat was talking, he did not need to.

How do you cover all the things in a book in a 100 page script?

Writing a script is often all about editing. Every round of edit is called a draft. Sometimes films take up to 10 to 15 drafts. You keep chiseling it till all extra information and repetition of ideas is done away with. For example, in the

Important Films of Supratik Sen





beginning of the film, the fact that Govind is ambitious and want to get rich quick, was written out in three lengthy scenes- one with friends, one with his mother and one with another business guy, whereas now you know that about Govind, in the first scene that you meet him. Which is why we say writing and re-writing is so important. When you first write something you feel everything is important but when you rewrite the scenes only then will you understand what is important and what is not. And this is called smart writing, economical writing and crisp writing.

To what extent does a script writer have to explain the script to the director? At what point does he surrender to the director's vision?

Nowadays every director wants to be the writer or at least co-write, so most often than not, they sit on the writing session. Which also helps because time is not wasted and if the director does not like something, we address it right there as he is on the same table. There are lots of things which a director won't like and then you have to fight for it, of course you won't always win but if you play smart and stick to your guns, he will understand. To be fair to the directors, writers tend to get very attached to their material and get rigid it but you should hear him out see what is point of view is and if your point of view is stronger than you convince him, or live long enough to see him convince you. But never leave the room. If you leave the room, you've already lost.

Was Chetan Bhagat comfortable with the changes or were there any blazing arguments on the script?

I don't think there was any trouble at all. He was very open to suggestions. Also Chetan being the smart guy that he is, realizes that book writing is one thing and film-making is another thing. He always trusted the co writers and never tried to put his foot down. He had burnt his hands with some of the previous adaptations. So I think in this film he came with a different approach that helped us all because the atmosphere was very open and democratic.

What are the challenges between adapting a book a play or writing something from scratch?

I think the biggest challenge is when you have an empty page staring at you. I think it is easier if there is a book or a play you can adapt. I mean not less challenging but easier for sure. From a very practical point of view, it is always easier if someone has done the groundwork and you just have to build on the structure. I am personally more comfortable with that. Otherwise we'd all be Shakespeare and writing books and best-selling plays but we are not.

What happens when you face a logical dilemma as in when logic needs to be compromised in order to move forward the story?

If you're writing a thriller, you have to crack the logic else if you're writing a drama or a romance, you suffuse it with emotion. If the emotion is true and heartfelt, then the logic can take a back seat so make sure that the emotion is coming from deep down somewhere.

What are the tips on writing an Action Sequence?

Action is nothing without narrative. Its not like a song that suddenly appears on the screen. Action without emotional depth is zero. You have to care for the characters on screen and what they are going through. For example, in the first scene in Kaminey, the character of Charlie is running from something or towards something. In terms of narrative, you know that you are saying something about the character. So action has to have some role in the narrative and of course you need to do it as realistically as possible.

What is the difference between writing for television and writing for films?

I haven't written much television work so I really don't know how to answer this question, but, I think the major difference is discipline and deadlines because in television you continuously need to churn out content. You have no breathing time and you cannot just ponder and gaze out of a window, waiting for inspiration to strike. Television whips you into shape. But then the flip side is, quality also gets affected as you there is too much clamour for quantity.

When you write the dialogues, do you refer the book you are adapting or you make them your own?

There is a lot of indicative dialogue that you use from the original text but you try and make it your own. For example, in Kai Po Che, we had to incorporate the local slang or dialect in Gujarat. How they talk in Gujarat people won't be the same way they talk in Faridabad.

How do you create an interesting character? What are the do's and don't's?

Try and make him do the opposite thing of what he's supposed to do and see where the story goes. Do not be scared about the story because you are the creator, the story has to be scared of you. It's always fun to break rules. Do something which the audience is not expecting. Break free and see where it goes because if you already know where it's going- its not so much of an original idea then. Especially in your first few films, you can take a chance because everybody is looking to do something out of the box. Be seen, be heard and be above the rest.

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Interview with *Sriram Raghavan*

What are the basic qualities you look for in your D.O.P.?

A DOP is like a co director....so I want someone who connects with the story and can help me tell it better. And of course, we need to get along on a basic level.

I have only worked with batch mates and colleagues from the FTII so far, so there is a terrific comfort level. I've worked with Hari Nair, who shot my Diploma and many Aahat and CID episodes and my docudrama on Raman Raghav .

I have worked with CK Murali....who shot all my feature films so far. And for BADLAPUR I have Anil Mehta who is a colleague from the FTII who I have wanted to work with for so long. So far so good.

When you go for a recce, how important it is for a D.O.P. to go accompany you?

The first recce is like almost a script recce. Say a story is set in Pondicherry or Panjim....I spend some time there, soak in the colour and culture and look for things that I can add to the script. That's

best done alone or with the co writer. Once we have a decent first draft and the actors are cast....then we go for the next recce with the DOP who will have his own inputs and ideas. Which will further help enhance the script. In BADLAPUR there were times when I was busy and my DOP Anil Mehta went to some places to shortlist locations on his own.

Like I said, the DOP is like a co-director and the one who can visualize the script in a better way. His inputs at this stage are vital.

What is your brief to the D.O.P. when you start a film?

We just talk. We discuss films. When Murali was shooting EK HASINA THI, we watched a lot of prison films. Midnight Expresss, Ghayal, Caged Heat, Anjaam and so many more. During AGENT VINOD, we watched spy films ranging from THE SPY WHO LOVED ME to SYRIANA.... This is just to trigger thoughts and debates.

I remember when I first narrated JOHNNY GADDAAR to Murali he didn't give me any reaction. After a couple of days he said he didn't like the story. I

asked him why. He said he tried to narrate it to his wife and she couldn't understand. I realized that I had perhaps narrated it badly. Or maybe it's so plot driven that it's not easy to narrate.

I told him about the movies in the genre which I loved....including many French crime thrillers and Hollywood noir and of course our 70s crime thrillers. Murali watched the Amitabh Bachchan's DON and he was blown by the look and vibe. It was DON that made us decide to go for the 70s retro look in the film, including the title sequence.

Shot taking and shot breakdown is a very important part of the film, whether you do it in your office or at the location, how much is your D.O.P. involved in this process?

Well, totally. I love long takes, I love using the camera to tell the story. The Raabta song in AGENT VINOD, which was a single shot sequence couldn't have been possible without the DOP total inputs and involvement. There is a single shot in BADLAPUR where we had four of our actors mingling with a combination of real crowd and some junior artistes. It was an action sequence

on a live location over which we didn't have control. And we had to hide not just the camera but our entire unit had to be invisible. It's a three minute shot which depended on precise timings. It could have all gone wrong but we got some real good stuff.

When it comes to lighting a scene, how do you brief your DOP?

I trust my DOP completely in terms of lighting. We discuss the scene but often the Lighting aspect adds an added layer to the story. I'll give you an example from JOHNNY GADDAAR.

Neil's character has just killed his colleague and shoved the corpse and the car is in a lake. The next shot was just Neil lying in bed at night, feeling horrible about what he has done. I thought it was a simple shot and wouldn't take much time but Murali kept doing something.... And then I

saw that he had lit the window above Neil in a manner that almost gave the impression that even Neil was underwater. I am not saying it well here but the particular lighting added a terrific mood to the scene.

I have been lucky that 99% of times my DOP gives me a better version of the visions I have in my mind.

When you are doing the color correction or grading, is it the DOP who has to take care of it or it's you or both of you who takes care of DI ?

To me, it's completely his area of expertise and of course I will see it and maybe add my two bits. But most times I go wow....i didn't expect it to look like this. AGENT VINOD had a small sequence set in SOMALIA....we obviously didn't go there to shoot but anyone would be convinced we did.

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Interview with

Shyam Benegal

On Collaborating With Various Cinematographers

You've worked with various cinematographers, starting with Govind Nihalani to Ashok Mehta. What is your general brief to a DOP when you decide to work with a particular one?

I've worked with a number of cameramen, some of whom were venerable old time cameramen from the silent era with styles very much of that period.

My normal working method is to discuss the film, its characters, the style of lighting and so on with the DOP so that the way I would like the narrative interpreted is clear. It is very important for the cameraman to know what exactly you are seeking visually. And I always prefer to discuss that in some detail before we actually start shooting. So he is quite clear about what you want and the demands being made on him.

Now there are certain kinds of films where you might want to shoot - say for instance - with an 18 mm wide angle lens. This lens does a very important thing. It gets the environment to dominate the character. When you use a lens that is less wide than that, say 35mm there is a greater balance

between the environment and the character. You can interpret relative importance of objects, places and people by the lenses you use and the angles you choose to look at them, for instance by shooting from low angles to foreshorten and create dominance.

It all depends on the results you want. You can also choose to have different points-of-view; both subjective and objective. Take the famous Japanese filmmaker, Yasujiro Ozu for example. He used only 35 and 50mm lenses and hardly moved the camera. His view point was by and large from the Japanese sitting position. Your view point determines the way you look at the world. You are made an objective observer, and not a subjective participant in the story. Ozu would use a subjective point of view very sparingly at climactic positions in the narrative.

Each filmmaker has his or her own method of working. This has to be made clear to the DOP. I personally believe this is a very important aspect of a director-cameraman relationship. For instance, you may have changed your staging of a scene

that will require the cameraman to make drastic changes in his lighting. Perhaps, he may offer an alternate plan which may still be in keeping with the narrative character of the film. The narrative character of any story cannot be arbitrary. It has to be organic and all action should seem inevitable. The Cameraman and the Director, are concerned with not only the visual expression in terms of space but also with physical action, emotional and psychological development of the characters in the narrative that need articulation with the means of light, lenses and movement. It is your DOP who articulates your vision.

Starting from the very beginning I have worked with very senior cameramen. When I was making advertising films, I had cameramen like Mr. Malhotra, a very senior cameraman whose career had started with silent cinema and worked almost exclusively with B.R. Chopra as his cameraman. Then with Dharam Chopra, who was B.R. Chopra's brother. Then the self effacing but hugely accomplished Kamat Ghanekar, who was my partner as well as my cameraman. He had started his career with the famous



Prabhat Studios. And these were people who were much more orthodox in the manner in which they used lighting and in the use of lenses and camera movement. This was because there were many more technological limitations under which they had to work. Today's cameramen don't have those limitations. They had to be much more inventive in lighting, use of lenses and camera movement.

Some cameramen don't require very detailed briefing, but they sense what is required all the same. It always helps if once the cameraman knows what it is that you are looking for and how you wish to interpret it. The important thing is for the director and the cameraman to be on the same page.

How do you approach the shot taking? Do you say it has to be shot with this lens and height or you describe the shot to the DOP and let him decide how to go about it?

I do both, depending on the cameraman. I have worked with very accomplished cameramen like Subrata Mitra who was Satyajit Ray's cameraman.

Subrata Mitra did not like some of the methods I employed. He would say, "Don't tell me what lens I should use. Just tell me what you want". Sometimes we would have an argument and I would tell him, "But how do you know what I have in mind unless I

tell you the mechanics of how I think it can be achieved? You'll get me an excellent result but it may not be the way I want it. If you say that this is a better thing, let me look at it and decide whether it is better." When you start shooting a film, it is always like the first film you have ever made. It's the same with the cameraman. But once the cameraman gets used to working with you, things generally work out to your satisfaction.

Let me put it this way. Whatever film you're making; two things you should never forget. Cinema has a grammar that you have to follow if you don't wish your audience to get confused. Nor can you change the idiom half way. There are certain rules that you have to follow. Either you create a new grammar and a new vocabulary as when Jean-Luc Godard or others of the French nouvelle vague did or follow the narrative conventions that have evolved over a period of time.

To begin with, you must know what your cameraman's capabilities are. There are different kinds of cameramen. Subrata Mitra was very original in the manner in which he used lighting. His lighting was designed to get a naturalistic quality. He hated arbitrariness in lighting. He was very particular about the sources of light. Some cameramen are concerned largely with giving you the effect that you want. Then there are other cameramen who are combination of these two. V.K. Murthy, who shot a couple of films and the mammoth serial 'Bharat Ek Khoj' for me, blended both these techniques. He also concerned himself with source of light but he was not above giving little highlights and touches just to enhance a certain quality that you wanted, to heighten the emotional quality of the scene. He was also a great innovator (much like Subrata Mitra) in lighting and knew how to get certain kinds of light effects that were quite magical.

Could you elaborate the term "innovative" in the case of Subrata Mitra and V. K. Murthy?

Subrata Mitra was probably a pioneer of bounce lighting. So much of his interior





work was shadow-less as you see in real life. You don't notice shadows. The techniques he used were both economical and quite innovative.

Subrata Mitra used white sheets of cloth while V.K. Murthy preferred to use silver paper, or reflective silver foil, depending on the kind of result he wanted. Both used bounce lighting in different ways.

A lot depends on how the DOP has been trained. For instance, Govind Nihalani has been influenced quite a lot by V. K. Murthy as he had assisted him for a long time before he became an independent cameraman. His technique is a combination of what V.K. Murthy might do plus his own considerable contribution.

You had consistently worked with Govind Nihalani for more than 10 films. What did you find unique about him?

Empathy. With Govind Nihalani I did not have to discuss everything in great detail. On the sets we hardly discussed because he could read my mind just as much as I could understand the technique that he was employing. There never was a problem. Once you find a comfort level of that kind you don't want to change your cameraman. It was only when he became a filmmaker in his own right, did I need to go looking for another cameraman.

In between I also worked with K. K. Mahajan and we got along extremely well because he and I were similar, very restless in the manner in which we would function. And he was also very interested in getting certain kind of results as he was very fond of shadow less lighting.

I worked with Ashok Mehta on some of my most satisfying films. Ashok was constantly wanting to experiment, attempting to do new things. And because of his tireless nature I wanted to shoot 'Trikal' with him. I discussed the visual character of the film in great detail. The film

was set in Pre-liberation Goa when there was no electricity, and homes were lit with oil lamps or petromax lanterns or candles. Ashok and I discussed the best way to get the result we wanted.

I introduced a film called 'Barry Lyndon' by Stanley Kubrick to Ashok and some of it was shot like that. In European art, you find that Renaissance painters always used light and shade (chiaroscuro) that gave their work a kind of depth and character that did not exist before in paintings either in Europe or India. That is the kind of result Stanley Kubrick got in Barry Lyndon. He even used lenses that were specially ground and crafted for his cameraman to allow working in low light. Ashok Mehta mastered this technique in 'Trikal'. Ashok came up with idea of actually shooting in candle light and kerosene lamps, as sources of light for nights. This was at a time when the fastest colour negative available was only 200 ASA. To reduce the grain and yet get enough light for exposure, Ashok contacted different candle-makers and they made candles of different shapes and sizes. Constant experimentation allowed Ashok to light all the interior shots in this kind of lighting.

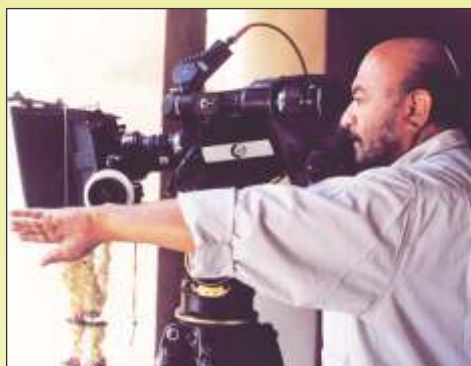
Ashok got the National Award for Cinematography in that film. Ashok Mehta was a very adventurous cameraman. He had first worked with me way back in 1967, when he was not yet a cameraman. He was 18 years old and had come on board as a camera hand, not even an assistant cameraman. He would carry the equipment around and set up the camera, fix lenses, change film rolls and so on. He was totally self-taught. We had gone to Bastar to shoot a documentary on the tribal communities there. By the time we reached Bastar, my cameraman fell ill with malaria. I was stuck. I had no budget provision for another cameraman. I was in a quandary. Necessity forced me to operate the camera. But I did not know enough about exposures. Ashok knew how to read an exposure meter and

set the exposures. He also functioned as a focus puller. Eventually he took over as cameraman. He used car head lights, petromax lamps and so on to light night scenes. The results we got were fabulous. Ashok had a great sense of adventure. His exposures were absolutely perfect. So when 'Trikal' happened at the beginning of 1985 he seemed the right person to shoot the film. By that time, of course, Govind was very much an independent filmmaker. After that Ashok remained with me. We shot 'Kalyug', 'Mandi', 'Making of the Mahatma' and several other short and long documentaries.

In 'Mandi' I wanted a certain kind of color palette. Also I was shooting on actual locations, but I wanted to shoot with the ease and facility of shooting in a studio. So Ashok created a catwalk on the first floor level of the house which went round the entire structure, about 25-30 ft above the ground. He had done that for me when he shot 'Junoon' for some of the battle scenes we had shot from such a trolley, high up. Those days we didn't have huge cranes and, therefore, all of this was specially created for the film. This was used both for use as a camera trolley as well as for lights when needed. This allowed the camera to move around the house, into the rooms on the first floor and so on. It was very inventive and ingenious. This is what made Ashok very special.

Do you remember any other situation which still makes you remember Ashok Mehta?

Another quality which I appreciated greatly in him was the fact that he did not like direct lighting on characters. He always preferred diffused light, particularly in interiors where the light was in any case diffuse. As a result, the characters came alive in a marvelous way. It was not simply for cosmetic reasons. It always helped in



creating the right atmosphere for the narrative.

During "Making of the Mahatma", we had to shoot in the old Parliament House in Pretoria. It was a large hall and was quite a challenge. The gaffer saw it and said, "We will require a large number of lights, much more than we have. What is more, it will take a couple of days to light up the entire hall. We will need an additional generator." I told Ashok that we could not afford that. He said, "Leave it to me." He decided to use both natural light and some selective artificial lighting. He surprised everybody as we finished the shooting in half a day. He started lighting from 6 to 9 am and by lunch time we had finished shooting the scene. We had only been given the location for a single day.

For "Making of the Mahatma", we had worked out an 85 days shooting schedule. We finished shooting the film in 38 days! His lighting style was to make the best use of whatever natural light he'd get and augmenting it with artificial lights to get the results we wanted. He was an absolute master at that sort of thing.

Another DOP you have worked with for many films is Rajan Kotahri. What do you find in Rajan Kothari so unique about his way of working?

Rajan and I had excellent understanding. And we shot films primarily outdoors, like 'Samar', 'Hari Bhari' and 'Welcome to Sajjanpur'.

Rajan Kothari was always very cool, very quiet. No shouting, no screaming. Ashok Mehta was quite the opposite. So there never was any kind of tension on the sets. I haven't found any other cameraman to match that quality. Although now I think I have found another cameraman who in some ways has a similar kind of personality; Akashdeep Pandey, who shot 'Samvidhaan'.

I believe it is important for a director to understand basic principles of lighting and also the use of space, lenses, camera movement, etc. If he knows these basics, it is a great help to the cameraman.

In between you've also switched to 2-3 people like Piyush Shah and Prasann Jain. What was your experience with them?

Piyush is another very gifted cameraman. Again, he's a great innovator. He reminds me a lot of Ashok because of his ability to innovate. I had seen his excellent work for Mani Kaul, particularly his aerial shooting. I took him as a second unit cameraman when I made 'Bharat Ek Khoj'. He had to shoot from a helicopter all over the country. We filmed all the major rivers of India, all the major forts, historical monuments and so on. We couldn't afford expensive equipment needed for this and he had to do all this with a handheld camera. You will not notice any of the vibrations of the aircraft or the camera shaking due to those vibrations. This he



managed by shooting at high speed, just enough to eliminate the vibrations and other small jerks and shakes. He did a brilliant job. After 'Bharat Ek Khoj', Piyush shot 'Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda.' And that was also some kind of a record because his lighting style was very simple and very effective. We had created a set, both indoor and outdoor and he shot the film at such speed that we finished the entire film with a whole week to spare. The time taken was much shorter than what we had scheduled for the film. Piyush is very quick, and very confident of his work. That's what I like in him and he's very intellectually attuned to the film being shot. He's not just a craftsman. He is imaginative, creative and wants to be intellectually and emotionally part of the complete film. An excellent cameraman!

Considering that I've been a filmmaker now for over 50 years, I can't say that I have had a difficult time with any cameraman I have worked with. All the cameramen I have worked with have been exceptional craftsman and extremely creative people. Their contribution to my films has been immense.

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**Interview with
Director &
Cinematographer**

Goutam Ghose

What motivated you to choose both “Cinematography and Direction” together which is a rare combination in film making as a career?

If I look at it in retrospect, I think that the first idea of capturing images came to me at a very early age when I was given a Kodak Brownie camera by my uncle as a birthday gift. I was very fascinated with the frame. I was looking through the Kodak Brownie Camera even when it had no film inside the camera. I used to move around with it and would be watching from the rooftop the pedestrians, the traffic. Later on, I realised that right from childhood whether one is inclined to photography or not, one selects the space. One selects frames through one's likings and thereby one eliminates certain spaces too. My maternal uncle was a serious though amateur photographer. He also influenced me to take up the camera and to look at the world at large and particular, both at the micro and macro level. I think that it was the beginning. Later on, I got interested in the stage and learnt various elements of stage craft from a great teacher Prithvi Bhattacharya.

He taught us everything from mime, physical acting, voice modulation and so on. He was a very good teacher. In our family, learning music was a part of education, cultural orientation. All children had to learn basic sargam, scales and notes. Later, started combining both performance on stage and my liking for photography and music. All these elements became a natural progression towards cinema. Frankly speaking, I never became a cinematographer first and director later. In my case it started simultaneously.

Did you take some professional training to learn the photography/cinematography because cinematography is much more technical?

When I got into cinema I started reading all the Focal Press publications like a bible on cinematography, editing, sound, art direction, on makeup etc. It's a great series and I found it at the British Council library. Of course, later on I started reading more advanced books available in the National Library. I also began buying books on cinema which

were quite expensive in those days. I could also procure a very rare great book which has been out of print for many-many years, “The Cinema as a Graphic Art” by Vladimir Nilsen. It completely changed my perception of visual imagery, the way Vladimir Nielsen has written the book and narrated Pushkin's poems, The Bronze Horseman. How does one look at the Bronze Horseman. It is a statue and Nilsen was describing how can one make it move. What are the angles? How can one create a kind of dynamics in the frame? How can one handle the whole thing with light and shadow? When does one shoot? Early morning or in the evening? During the day or when the sun is at top? That was a great book and like that one starts by reading more such books. Books are the basic inspiration for my learning cinematography. Once I even thought of going to FTII in Pune but somehow being the eldest son in the family...I thought that I should start earning to support my family. For this reason I chose not to go to film school. But I continued to learn by watching films

through film societies, Alliance Française, American Centre, British Council...whenever I found any opportunity. I rushed and watched all kinds of films.

You started shooting documentaries on 16mm / 35 mm which were quite expensive to make. How did you get the opportunity to start making films?

Super 8 was not so expensive but 16mm was still quite expensive. My first assignment of documentary was in 35mm. I didn't dare to handle a 35mm Arri camera and I engaged the cameramen as I wasn't acquainted with the equipment. For my first documentary film there was a cameraman and also for my first feature film which I made in Hyderabad "Maa Bhoomi" in 1978, I took a cameraman. However, Kamal Nayak, a FTII alumni couldn't complete the film as the film got delayed. He photographed the first part and the last two schedules were left for me to complete. I remember the very first time I ever handled the 35mm camera, there was a great still photographer called Bhupen Sanyal, a mentor to many still photographers. All important cameramen, directors used to come to his studio called the 'Renaissance Studio'. I asked him, "Sir, I am going to shoot with 35mm camera. Kindly give me some advice". He said, "Do you remember the film 'Sound of Music'?" I have confidence - in confidence and confidence. Sing that song and shoot!! It was a great inspiration and I started shooting with 35mm camera with black and white stock. Kodak just stopped importing their stocks. Hence, we were dependent on Orwo raw stock. I began with a black and white documentary assigned by the Film's Division and some private companies. For this reason direction and photography started together and not separately.

I remember watching your film 'Paar', can you talk about the sequence of pigs crossing the river with actors Shabana Azmi and Naseeruddin Shah. how did you manage to shoot it?

It was a great adventure for us because in those days there were no special effects or computer graphics. It was all real and we had a small budget so we couldn't really arrange proper rigs for placing our cameras. Shabana knew

swimming really well but Naseer didn't know how to swim. However, Naseer was so serious that he learned a bit of swimming and attempted to take the risk, because swimming in the Ganges during the monsoons is no joke as there is a lot of under current. I told my producer, a very adventurous friend of mine that we shoot the climax first if we succeed we will make the film otherwise not. He agreed to it. On the 4th or 5th day we attempted those very difficult scenes. The first day was disastrous as all the pigs went haywire. The herd didn't obey to Shabana and Naseer and then I thought that we needed to call the instructor who brought the pigs. That particular old man was giving instructions in a very strange language di-pa di-pa..... a very typical sound. Both Naseer and Shabana learned that language.

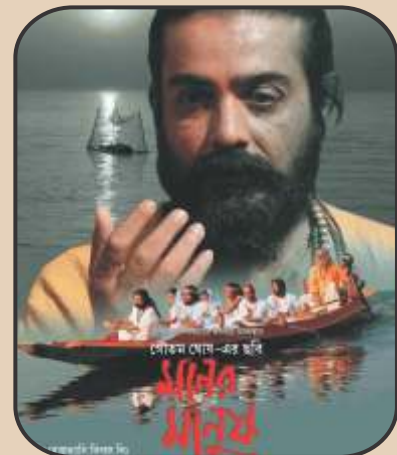
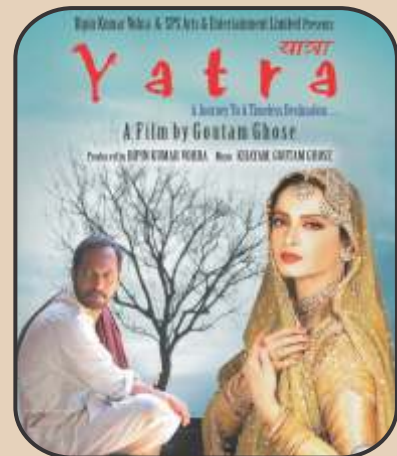
They practiced during the whole night and we began shooting the next morning and we could manage to track the pigs in the river through that sound instruction. It was an absolute adventure. For that particular scene I used two 35 mm cameras, mostly on the boat, sometimes on the ground. It was very difficult and we had a small life saving boat especially for our actors. I always love this kind of adventure. In cinema, one has to take up both aesthetical as well as technical challenges. One has to be innovative according to the theme and subject.

I remember when I was making "Antarjali Jatra" which was shot mainly on one location with early morning and twilight sequences, the first time I brought 250 D from Rochester because I was in USA and Kodak was planning to market 250 D stock. 250D stock was very interesting for mix light. The film was shot at one spot on a riverbank and on the water there was a huge reflection. I used new Canon aspheric lenses as they can cut down excess glare.

What kind of aspect ratio you prefer to shoot Your Films?

I used 1:66 aspect ratio gate to shoot "Antarjali Jatra" because of the landscape. At that time cinemascope lenses were also available but I found that it had limitation of exposures and anamorphic lenses were not really fast. I went to Subrata Mitra, my mentor and told him that I wanted to use 1:66 ratio.

Important Film of Goutam Ghose





He asked me how would I get the ground glass and gate. I told him that I would make a request to Anand Cine to import it for me. The owners of Anand Cine Service were so good that they purchased 1:66 gate and ground glass for me!

I must add here that Subrata Mitra was so adventurous that in one of the films he shot, probably "The Householder", he used 1:66 ratio. He made his own gate and as one knows that making a camera gate is a very difficult and precision job.

The aspect ratio you choose is important because of its impact on how one looks at the images which will in turn express your subject effectively. Later in another film, I used 1:85 aspect ratio. At one point of time, what happened was that most of the cinemas in India got converted into cinemascope projection system. In Europe 1:66 and 1:85 aspect ratio was very popular except for the big American films which were in Panavision. But in India strangely cinemascope took over as we Indians like larger than life images. Hence, we had to shoot in cinemascope format. Even now in the digital age one knows that this is a nightmare to shoot a film in 1:85 ratio. Finally one doesn't even know how it will be projected in the cinema hall. It's so simple digitally to switch between various aspect ratios but what happens is the projectionist mind is set for "cinemascope". They just set the projection at cinemascope without caring for the actual aspect ratio like 1:85 at which film is expected to be projected.

For the early morning sequences in "Antarjali Jatra", did you use some artificial lights to boost up certain light level?

Well, for the twilight sequences I used very less filler light for the foreground characters. Otherwise to seek the details in the sky, had I given the exposure for the sky, the characters in foreground were going dark and losing their details. I put little fire in the foreground so that I could get a source for a filler. In realistic photography one has to follow the source light. After all there are only two natural sources available, the sun and the moon. All other sources were created by human beings. At times, one follows sources and sometimes one breaks the sources. One can create other kinds of mood lighting which we have seen in Hollywood, in European and Indian movies which can also create a powerful impact.

Have you shot for other directors too or do you shoot your own films?

I have shot only two films one for Harisadhan Dasgupta, a great Indian documentary filmmaker and one film for my dear friend Aparna Sen – 'Mr & Mrs. Iyer'. I shoot only my own films as my thinking process right from beginning when I start writing the script is that of a director/cinematographer. I can't think separately. I am very comfortable instructing my actors through the viewfinder. It has become my habit but as I am aging it is becoming very extraneous. Of course, I have a very good lighting assistants but I believe in paper work.

I draw the lighting schemes for each and every sequence of the film for the light sources, kind of lighting and various light ratios which would be there. Later, I consult my chief gaffer and they start lighting. Just before the take I will do my final fine-tuning. This has been my practice for many years. I rehearse with my actors without camera first and then with camera. As I am growing older, in my last films though I took many shots but I also used a camera man so I found it much easier as there is a video monitor system from which one can see the image properly. Before the video monitor days the as Jean Luc Godard's DOP Raoul Coutard said that you have to really give credit to the cameraman because they were the first audience of the film.

As the things are digital and one has grown up in an era which was 16 mm and 35 mm, how good and comfortable does one feel with the digital now?

The cinema was born with this

dichotomy of change. We film makers are making films, directors directing, cinematographers taking pictures, sound recordists doing audiography. We always forget that there are scientists and technologists who are not sitting idle. They are also working towards innovating new things continuously.

Take the case of cinema when it began, it was silent. Later it found its language, its aesthetics and it reached great heights in the twenties. It became an independent art, an independent cinematic expression without word, may be with few title cards. But what happened to it after sound in cinema was invented? There was a sharp decline of silent cinema. Cinema has gone back to the theatre because sound was there. Scientists said that as they have audio technology, why doesn't one add sound. Many film makers didn't do that. If you remember Chaplin in "Modern Times", there was hardly any sound except some gibberish. A lot of filmmakers didn't like to use sound for a long time but the market force is a prime factor between the scientist and creative people. Your cinema becomes outdated if you don't use new technology.

It was like that and it will always be like that. Hence from silence era to sound era, from black and white to color, from analog to digital, it's a continuous process of change and I am very lucky to have witnessed a wide range of evolution in both image making and audio. In my first feature film made in Telugu "Maa Bhoomi" which was shot in Hyderabad, for the interior studio shots, I had the opportunity of using a Michelle camera. When I shot my documentary "Hungry autumn" in 1974, which won many international awards, I used a spring driven Paillard Bolex camera and I used black and white reversal stock. I have shot with all kind of cameras be it Arri-2a, 2c, 3, 435 and of course recently in digital format. In this world, change is a natural way of things so one has to keep oneself updated, that's the only way you can survive and create. I love cinematographic emulsion, photochemical process. The process has evolved for many years. In many years of research and development Kodak and Fuji had reached a peak of refining their stock and one fine morning with a big push of digital lobby, everything has disappeared! Now no lab exists. The technicians involved in this process have lost their jobs. Such is the rule of the

game.

In today's digital platform, my personal aim is how to create images that are closer to a film look than video. Of course, now digital cameras have really improved a lot. This 2k, 4k, 8k, are all business jargons. The most important thing is what one is doing with frames, images, lights, that's the real challenge. We have to live with this digital age but the only problem is that there is no "standardization" because of competition. When it was only emulsion it was standard all over the world whether you use Fuji or Kodak or any other stock the process was same.

But in the digital world, each and every company has their separate log like C-log, Sony log etc. so it creates some confusion. One has to be very careful about how to use all these digital platforms creatively because DI, Compositing has made it easy to leave of things for post. But the most important is how much does one take and reject? When zoom lenses were introduced - it was zoom in and zoom out in most films. Then we realized that the perspective is not changing. Zoom lens was fine for news camera man and documentary film makers where they can quickly change the focal length. The advantage of zoom lens is that there is no aberration and I was also using the same optics which will maintain certain continuity. Though I didn't use zoom in, zoom out, I used different focal lengths. Most DOPs discourage zoom unless you need to use it for a purpose.

What are your Views on DI?

When new technology is invented, one gets mesmerized, one gets confused and there is a tendency to overdo it. In the case of DI too, people are over doing it now. Slowly a lot of DOPs have realized that DI means to perfect the image. Your master shoot footage has to be perfect. Hence, DI is a platform where one can do some fine corrections and also if one needs, one can give certain effects which was not possible during the RGB days. In raw stock era, for certain effects we used to change the emulsion or change the chemical processing. Earlier, in the days of colour correction it was a subtractive process and later it was an additive process. Hence there was only RGB based corrections available but in the DI platform there is more scope. But if one feels that whatever footage one shoots



can be managed in DI, then that's wrong in my opinion.

Are you satisfied the way your films are shown on television?

There are certain things which are beyond your control. Suppose you have made a film and that's been telecast, the television is not under your control. You don't know which TV set is calibrated to what. You use your creative ideas, you put a lot of effort but you aren't sure about the final output. It's not standardized yet and it never will. You have to keep creating images according to your aesthetics and expertise.

What is the challenge for cinematographer in today's time?

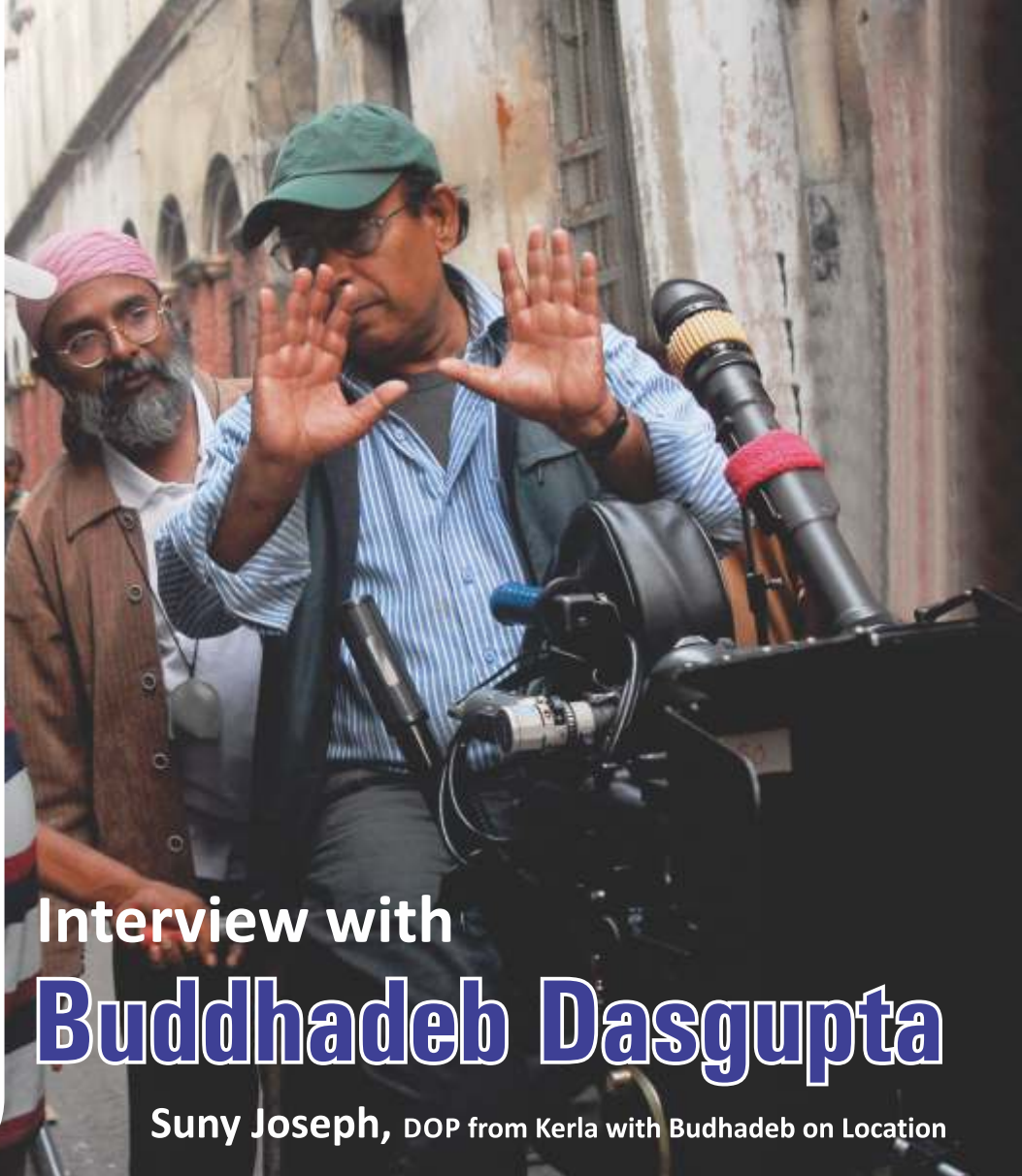
Everyone is now capable of capturing images due to new technology, thus image capturing has become democratic

and accessible to the common man. All kinds of images are being captured including Selfies. For a filmmaker or DOP image making is a great challenge. These days, one has to think of certain kind of images which would give audience a new experience. The same thing happened when photography was invented. All realistic painters were doing realistic paintings. When photography came, they thought that people would prefer photographs than paintings. This is why I think that it was a shift towards impressionism, surrealism, abstract painting and painters started conceiving in a different way. I think the time has come for the film makers or the DOPs to conceive certain kinds of images which is not possible for everyone to make. I think it's a great challenge now for the cinematic art form.



Buddhadeb Dasgupta is a poet and prominent contemporary filmmaker, most known for films like *Bagh Bahadur*, *Tahader Katha*, *Charachar* and *Uttara*. Five of his films have won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film, *Bagh Bahadur*, *Charachar*, *Lal Darja*, *Mondo Meyer Upakhyan* and *Kaalpurush*, while *Dooratwa* and *Tahader Katha* have won the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Bengali. As a director, he has won National Film Award for Best Direction twice, for *Uttara* and *Swapner Din*. Over the years he has published several works of poetry including *Govir Araley*, *Coffin Kimba Suitcase*, *Himjog*, *Chhaata Kahini*, *Roboter Gaan*, *Sreshtha Kabita*, and *Bhomboler Ascharya Kahini O Ananya Kabita*.

In this interview Arijit Seth & Robin Banerjee tries to find out about his relationship with various DOP.



Interview with Buddhadeb Dasgupta

Suny Joseph, DOP from Kerla with Budhadeb on Location

You have worked with more than ten different cinematographers in various films, what is your general brief to a DOP and what do you expect from him to realize your vision?

I have definitely worked with quite a number of cinematographers in my 40 years of journey with cinema. I expect two things from my DOP. One, technically he has to be very sound. I mean he must be an expert on his equipment, know all the technical details which I cannot teach him on the sets. He has to have his own vision of images and needs to be a very good observer of light and also of life. He should know the lens like his finger tips. These are the basics.

Secondly, he should be a very good human being and a tolerant person who respects his co-workers, takes care of them, and should have the spirit to lead his own team. He should try to know my vision because finally it is my vision he has to project. As it is my vision technically, so I must decide first how to get it and this

includes the things like at what time I will shoot, what my lens will be, what kind of movements of the camera I need and accordingly what the movements of the characters will be. These are the things which I always decide. The DOP is an integral part of my team, may be the most important part, but those who have been working with me know thoroughly that this is my domain and I decide everything.

I would want my DOPs to be careful listeners, sensitive human beings, someone who can adjust easily and understands my style of working. It is important that whatever may be his style of working as a DOP, he has to know my style of film-making and should absorb that. These are my minimum expectations from my DOP.

You have worked with different DOP's. Can you elaborate the style of working that you like the most?

I made my first film when I was a student. There was All India competition of scripts organized by FFSI. Satyajit Ray, Vijaya

Muley, Chidananda Dasgupta were in the committee. I was still studying. I just wrote a script and sent it to them because I was deeply in love with cinema. *Dooratwa* was my first feature film. Before that I had made quite a number of documentary films. Many of them I had to shoot. They are not very good films because I had to make films for others just for money sake. It was my initiation into films and they taught me a lot, especially in getting the nuances of cinematography.

It is very good if my DOP loves music, painting and literature, especially poetry. I am greatly indebted to the images that I got from literature or derived from music, poetry and painting. I am not a film school product. I did not get that chance. I studied economics and taught economics for some time. When I was a kid, my mother used to play Piano and recite poetry. She would always ask me to close my eyes and listen to her. I was not happy with that dictate but had to follow. But, then, slowly something started happening. I found that from music I

have started getting some images. From some lines of the poetry some images also started coming. These are the images which have become my constant companion. Those images stayed with me. I talked with those images. I lived with those images and images started living with me. Through this you may know I write poetry and when I compose a composition, I take that composition from those very images that are imprinted in my mind. I would want my DOP to understand that.

When I started making *Dooratwa*, I just wanted to make this film. Whatever little money I had made from documentary films, I invested everything. My mother gave me some money but that too was very little. Somehow I made *Dooratwa* with Ranjit Roy from FTII as the DOP. It was his first film after FTII. What I really liked about him was his confidence. I was new and he too was new and so also was my editor from FTII Pune, Mrinmoy Chakraborty. I have never heard Ranjit telling me even once that this or that was not possible. Whatever I wanted, he did that for me; whatever way I showed to him, he followed that. There was no video assist monitor to see and so you had to have full trust in the DOP. He was such a well known name after *Dooratwa* that he started getting more and more work. He got one film for Mrinal Sen. It was a different kind of film out and out. Satyajit discussed it many times and he also praised the cinematographer very much. What we did from day one was that we never followed the rules laid. We just invented certain things. That is exactly what I have been doing till now. That invention has extended and now become a style being talked about all over.

One of the master cinematographers you have worked with is Soumendu Roy in *Charachar* (1994). How much was his experience useful to you in your film?

I don't rest on anyone else's experience. I just want my DOP to give correct focus. I want my DOP to handle camera rightly. I am pleased with well lit and well exposed shot. When we decided to work together he was not quite used to my style of film making but he could absorb that immediately. That may have happened because of his experience but that was very helpful. He did exactly what I said. Where you are placing the camera, what lens you are using, what kind of movements you are adding to that and where you are also positioning your characters -- all these things together make a shot complete. That is very important and you cannot ask your DOP to do that for you. You have to do it yourself.



I always like to use wide angle lenses because I want everything to look very real. In that reality what do I do? I allow the non real to come in such a way that you don't even start realizing at what point it has come in. It has been brewing slowly and finally when it has taken over the reality, at that time real and unreal remain no more two different things and become one unit. You just take in reality and at the same time you find the zone of unreal, and that is the magic. Besides reality there comes the role of dream and there comes the role of magic. So when I compose all these three things, then unknowingly something takes place and all the three elements give their contribution in composing an integrated frame.

I have seen all my DOP's falling in love with this kind of work. This mutual respect has really helped me a lot. Be it Sudeep Chatterjee, Venu or Sunny Joseph. All of them say that *dada* has made us forget the conventional photography or whatever we were taught. It is because my style of cinematography is exclusively mine. You have to give your hundred percent to achieve this and if you can give that, then you can definitely achieve it.

A documentary film on me is being made by a girl called Supriya Suri. It's being produced by Films Division. They were shooting with me and wanted me to show to them how the movement of double trolley happens. When I went there, I found that these people had already laid the trolley because they learnt about that from Ashim Bose who did "*Uttara*" for me. These are the things that have been contributing to other films. This idea of double trolley where two trolleys move together is something that I decided long time back because I was shooting outdoor on uneven surface where you cannot put anything.

You have to somehow manage to lay the trolley and I also had to add another

movement to the first movement in order to further that design. In those days it cost me 700 Rupees and when I told it to Venu on the phone he was in Trivandrum and I was calling from Calcutta. He almost started laughing at me thinking *dada* must have gone mad, otherwise how can two trolleys move together with one camera and if it can happen, that cannot but be magic.

When the whole thing was brought home to him at the shootings in Orissa, he immediately fell for that. So you may know that I have invented many things that came to my mind automatically and just for my own shots, but it is good that some other people started practicing it. The cinematographers have been using it for reference.

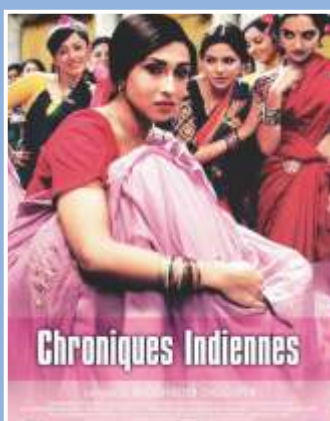
I think Venu is the most spirited person and I really love him like my brother. Now he is a family friend although we have not been working together since some time.

I will never forget the day when I was shooting in Bolpur and that was the last day and last shot. I told Venu to go to the Monitor and watch what I was doing and then just to do that for me.

Since I was also doing it for the first time, I myself was a little uncertain and all I could say to my DOP was to just to go on doing things the way I was telling him. I went on doing what I myself wanted to do.

I told Venu a few things and looked at him. He said to me, "Dada, just 10minutes." It was because I have told him not to use any artificial lights. He just saw what I did and he did that again so well that a beautiful shot was taken. So many times Venu really helped me create the kind of images I needed for my films.

When Sudeep worked with me he was almost a newcomer. He was not very well



known and was a struggling cinematographer. I called him and he started working with me. After finishing the work he also said the same thing that he had learnt so many things. I believe that a film-maker must have his unique style. When a cinematographer comes to work with that film-maker, he realizes that this is the style and from that he absorbs many things.

Sudeep had never worked with me before, but for my kind of camera-work, he can fit the bill very nicely and his lighting is very good though it takes a little more time.

To tell you very frankly I never had any problem working with any DOP. I met this Spanish DOP Diego in Madrid. There was a retrospective happening in Madrid film festival. He used to come every day and he just met me and that's all. He never told me his plan to come to India. But then one day my daughter called me and told me that this person was here. My daughter Alokanda is a music director. She has been working in Mumbai. Diego and my daughter were working together in a Marathi film and it was there that he started talking about me to her. Then she told him that I was her father. Then one day Diego said that he really wanted to work with me and requested me to give him a chance. And thus he came. He is really a very nice person. But he was not used to this type of situation as he had never seen this style, but we started working together. I tell all my cinematographers what exactly I want and how to achieve it. Even after that I show it to them in the monitor.

Sometime some problem would crop up and I had to scold Diego but it was almost a lesson for him and he really did the things nicely. He is a very nice person and very young. We worked together for another film and he did it so nicely that it is worth seeing. What I really expect from my DOP is correct exposure.

I always ask my DOP not to trust his meter but his eyes and his mind. Meter reading is very important but don't think the meter will always guide you correctly. Put your mind, put your experience whatever it is and put your senses in it and then only you know what the correct exposure is.

I think that if I can tell a DOP after seeing his film that here he has put this light and there he has put that light, then he has failed.

A film-maker or even a cinematographer should not be able to know exactly where the lights have been placed and that's very important. I have observed this problem many times while watching a film. Placement of lights is very important, and the DOP should know where he should put lights and where he should not. You don't have to lit everything. You must leave some space for darkness. Darkness in cinema doesn't mean that you don't have to have any light. You have to create darkness also through light but then you must know how to create that.

I was once in Cannes with Sven Nykvist, a legendary cinematographer worshipped all over the world. Sitting in the hotel lobby we were waiting for a car to take us to some theater for seeing a film. I was just telling him that every director dreams that one day his DOP will be Sven Nykvist. He loved that and said—'But for that I have to become a Subroto Mitra.' I found that kind of respect only for Subroto and I think that India's all time great cinematographer was Subroto Mitra.

It is not important what style the cinematographer is easy with. It is because he has to realize finally what style a particular script demands. Each and every script itself tells you how to take a shot. So you cannot come with any set style and start making film with it because it doesn't

work. Every script is a different film as every script makes you aware of one thing that stylishly it has to be different from the film that you have just finished.

I have often seen that the directors themselves don't have any clue about cinematography and they begin to bank only upon the DOP. Now this is a dangerous thing. If you can't make yourself clear to your DOP what exactly you want or what kind of style you are going to follow or what kind of treatment a particular script demands, then you are not a director.

Finally for a good DOP it is essential to work with a good director. It is also essential that there is good script and the DOP has read the script several times and noted down the questions and has discussed them with the director again and again.

After Venu, Sunny Joseph is another cinematographer who has worked with you in maximum films. Could you please elaborate the way Sunny worked with you?

BD: Among all the cinematographer I have worked with, Sunny is the quietest. I have never seen him getting angry. While it is quite common to find Venu bubbling with his anger there Sunny is a very quiet person and at times that quietness also is very irritating. Sunny is a very good cinematographer, his shots are always perfect, the exact movement I want and besides that he is a 'Pundit', I mean, a very scholarly person.

He is a very good teacher and he loves to teach. I will not be surprised if one day he gives up film-making or DOP as a profession and gets fully in to teaching as he is a very good teacher.

I tell you one situation when we were shooting. It was 'Lal Darwaja' and we were in Diamond Harbor. We were to start shooting and we were waiting for Venu and he joined us after two days. After he came, the next day I took him to show the place and the location where we'll be shooting. It was cloudy and drizzling all the time. We had umbrellas and we went. I told him that that was the location. Venu got very upset and said, "Dada, we have to change it ; this

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location will not work ; forget about it. Let us find out a different place.” I didn't say anything except telling him, “Let us go to the hotel.”

Next day it was a little better as one could notice that it was a little sunny. I again took him to the place and that time he said, “Dada, what can I do if you insist? Then I will have to shoot.” After two days we started our shooting.

We went there in the morning to lay so many things. When everything was ready, I asked Venu to start shooting and we rehearsed all the shots because you only get 15 minutes to complete the entire scene at that particular light after which it gets completely dark. It was the time when Venu shouted excitedly, “Dada! It looks so brilliant!”

And that is what I mean to say. The DOP may not see what the right time is or what the right position or right lens is. When all these things happen together rightly, then the entire thing will change.

That has happened with me so many times with each and every cinematographer. They have to know what time shooting will start, from which angle, what will be the lens, where the characters will be and whether the backdrop is right. Even your background will change if you change the lens. If you use 24 mm lens, the background will be different and with 40mm or 100 mm it will be altogether different. If you use 150mm, then it is very difficult to say that it is the same location which was shot with 24mm. You can change the shape of the location. I have gone to Purulia and shot certain locations but in my film so many times I have heard people saying the same locations looked different.

There is one house where Mrinal Sen made his film with Smita Patil. In the same

building I also shot a film. It is very difficult to realize for the audience that it is the same house. There is nothing called 'Great Location'. A location has to be supportive to the script or a particular sequence and then the way you will show it in your film should also be supportive to your sequence. This is what exactly you are doing to that location. You can change so much of a location that someone will say this is not the same place as we saw. You have to be thoroughly knowledgeable not only about the script but also about how to achieve it.

No DOP should come to a film-maker as a rigid follower of a particular style. The Director has his own style and the DOP should absorb his style.

Cinema is so magical and so deep that you can place it in between music and poetry. Knowledge has no end and I am still discovering so many new things. These images have contributed so much in my life that I am extremely indebted to these images.

In the beginning I was not very confident while using something. I was not sure that this magical element or the dream element would be accepted. Your images should be such as can absorb the audience fully so that they start a new journey with your images. Then one after another, they start their journey to the point where the magic has started or where the dream has started or where reality has started extending to the dreams. It makes you conscious of so many aspects in our life. Your DOP can really do wonder if he can feel what kind of treatment he needs to apply with a particular Director. Images are my language and so I value my DOP a lot. I need to depend, trust and love my cinematographers. I am lucky that I have been able to do that most of times in my life.

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TREND ALERT: SOFT LIGHTING

In the early 1900s when the movies made a shift from being shot in natural light to studios a lot of things changed. Most of these changes were in set design, camera movements and lighting. Lighting became an important element as we had to create a sensation of natural light using artificial light sources. Most of these light sources were spot lights and created harsh shadows.

Then came the concept of three point lighting and other lighting styles like; Low Key, High Key, Back Lighting, Noir etc. Over a period of time the Artificial Light sources underwent a lot of transformation from Tungsten to HMI to Fluorescent and now to LEDs. Likewise changes occurred in lighting style. Leading cinematographers today prefer Soft/Diffused Lighting.

Soft light is produced by bouncing or diffusing over a relatively large surface, either by light shining through a large frame of diffusion, or light bouncing off of a large white surface. When this happens, the light's quality is altered in a fundamental way.

When light moves away from a conventional light fixture, the rays of light are diverging from the relatively small area of the reflector and lamp. In contrast, when light moves away from a soft source, the bounced or diffused rays move away from all points of the diffuse luminous surface.

If you think of it from the point of view of the subject being lit, light is coming to the subject from many angles. This results in three qualities that are often very desirable:

- 1 Soft shadows. No clean, sharply discernible line is projected. The shadow lines are broad and graduated. The entire image is imbued with a softness that is natural and also very beautiful.
- 2 Soft light around the features of

the subject. Whereas a face lit from one side by hard light is like a half moon (bright on one side and black on the other), lit by a large soft source, it shows a gradual drop off of light from one side to the other. The overall picture has a full tonal range, light to dark, with no harsh shadow lines and lower overall contrast than when lit with harder light.

- 3 Interesting reflections. When lighting shiny or glossy subjects or surfaces with glossy finish, a soft source is reflected as an amorphous highlight. Hard light, on the other hand, is reflected as a bright, glaring hot spot.

In a nutshell, diffusion changes the relative size of a light source. For example, if we were to place a white sheet between your subject and a floodlight, we would get much softer shadows than if we simply hit the subject directly with the floodlight.

Diffusion Techniques include:

1. Diffusion Paper
2. Softboxes
3. Umbrellas
4. China Balls
5. Silks/Scrims
6. 5 in 1 reflector Diffusion Screens
7. Bouncing Light of Walls or Screens
8. Book Lighting

Most of this diffusion techniques have existed from a long time. They are certainly not new to many Cinematographers.

The major reason behind soft lighting gaining popularity in today's time is because of the variety of options that are available right now. In the earlier times we had to rely upon a single strong light source.



Then we would diffuse them using any of the methods mentioned above. From the time LED lighting has been introduced the problems related to diffusion has reduced. For instance, Scrims were used to diffuse the light and to change the size of the light source.

In case of LED this can be done by dimming them and using a bigger panel. We won't need a scrim, an extra stand for it and extra light-men (because a common scrim is 12 x 12 ft in size) to look after it.

Another major reason why I believe Soft Lighting has gained popularity is because of Digital Cameras. Most of them provide the use of Logarithmic function (REDlogFilm, s-log2, s-log3, Log-C) and not Linear.

This provides them with the ability to record footage with High Dynamic Range (HDR). By shooting in soft light these cameras can conceive more information and details.

Feedback:

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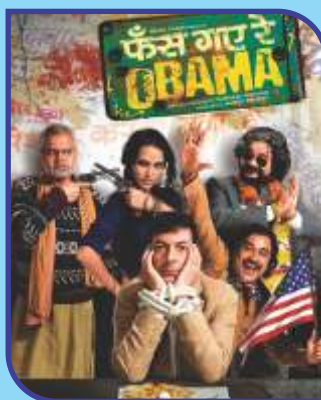




Acting Workshop by
Manu Rishi Chadha in CRAFT Film School



Important Film of Manu Rishi Chadha





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