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## Editor's Desk



Dear Friends,

This particular issue is a special issue of "cinematography art", as with this issue our magazine competes the 5 years. Hence, we thought of bringing out the best of the interviews by various Stalwarts of all disciplines of film making, be it direction, cinematography editing, sound recording or art direction. Most of the hard copies of past issues are exhausted and many a times when people demand the past issue, we have to satiate them by offering. pdf file/on line version.

The issue is a collector's item, as in the past we never had such varied and crisp content in one issue. Hence, instead of normally 68 pages, this issue has 92 pages, only then we could justifiably include most of the important professionals. Many of them are multiple awardees including filmfare and national awardees, to name a few. More important than that is the wisdom they talk about, which comes after years of practising their art.

Not only the illuminative and disseminative interviews have been included from our past issues like - Santos Sivan, Sudeep Chatterjee, R. M. Rao, Barun Murkerjee, C. K. Muralee, but we have also Included the fresh interview of Sudeep Chatterjee, the cinematographer of PADMAVAT.

**Cheers!!**

**Naresh Sharma**

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## Interview with DOP *Avik Mukhopadhyaya*

**You have worked for both feature films and as well as advertisement films which were the challenging for you as DOP. Did it make you think a bit more deeper or sort of give you food for thought to achieve those challenges?**

Feature film and Commercial, both offer challenges of their own kind. Feature has a longer narrative and its own complexities. Cinematography has to have a central thought process which will determine its style and look etc. As the narrative goes through many situations, time and spaces, shooting style also oscillates between them. But the challenges are to maintain a unified style and look throughout the film. I think, more than look and feel, it's an unified cinematographic vision which binds the whole work together. On the other hand, communication of commercial or ad film is unique. It's short, crisp, and needs to communicate to audiences within a very short period of time. So, the clarity of concept and images are most important. Cinematography needs to create imagery which should go with the image

of the brand. Another issue related to this form is the style of image to have contemporary appeal. Dated image style doesn't work for commercial. The good thing about commercials is that it offers a playground for lot of experimentation with lighting, composition, camera movement etc.

**What is your approach for lighting any scene/shot and how does it differ from an ad film to a feature film?**

I always feel, though it's very personal, that a feature work should be more mysterious and to an extent ambiguous too. Ambiguity is one of the key elements of any good work of art. The image has to be pure, genuine but mysterious. I always like light diminishes towards the backdrop, or character standing darkly against a bright backdrop. But the application of this syntax in real situation is kind of complicated. I prefer not to come to the set or location with a rigid idea. I loosely have an idea of my style, but I need to see the character performing in real space, then I decide my lighting and

camera movement. Feature films are collaborative works on a great level. Everything falls in place after a healthy interaction. In Ad, many things are previously decided. Before the shoot, a lot of brainstorming happens between the creative agency, client and the director. After that, many things are discussed between director, cinematographer, art and soon everybody knows what's going to happen. There is a little scope for error. But it's also interesting to go through that process.

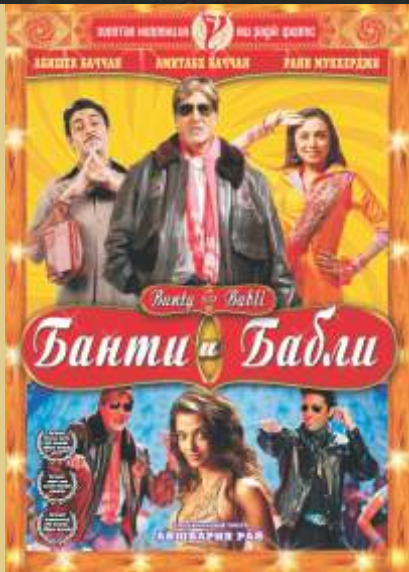
**Did you prepare your cinematography scheme while working for any film?**

While preparing for a film (feature), my primary concern is the script. Primarily, movies are all about human conflict. It's important to realize the core of that conflict and translate that through cinematographic syntaxes. Light and shadow are the most primal conflict, It gets more complicated with color. For preparation, I go through painting, photography even at times literature which will help me to fathom that conflict.

**What were the various challenges you encountered while shooting various feature films. Please elaborate few instances?**

The film which I have done recently, "PINK", has many long court scenes, almost the second half of the film I wanted to shoot in a very realistic way as opposed to the way courts are seen in most Indian cinema. Hence, cinematically it was very organic, a day to day reality. And there has to be a stuffy claustrophobia which in a way helps some characters to break down. I decided along with the director to shoot the scenes with 7 camera set up. In this kind of set up, it helped to break away from a typical theatrical staging of scene where characters perform for the camera. Rather, they perform for the co-actors which was more organic. Now, the challenge was to light up the court as there was no chance to doctor lights for different magnitude. We shot every scene which roughly averages 10 minutes at one go. I had to conceive a lighting scheme with KINO flow which apparently looked simple as it looked





extremely natural but the execution was very tough and complicated. It was an interesting exercise in recent times.



Unlike feature films, ad film “shots” are of small duration. Do you remember few commercials which were thought provoking in terms of lighting or shot taking?

I don't know how much thought provoking it was, but it was great fun to execute. In a recently shot commercial for TATA SKY HD, performed by Mr. Amitabh Bachchan and a group of puppet characters, there is an interesting mix of real scale set and miniature set. As a group of puppeteer from Prague made and performed the show, Mr. Bachchan was performing in front of them. So, there was a mix of miniature set lighting and real scale set lighting.

From where do you draw your inspiration for doing the same thing again and again differently in terms of lighting?

As, light is infinite, there can be infinite combination and permutation of shades and color. Every film comes with different possibilities and energy. Every day is a fresh day with new possibilities.

You have worked with variety of directors. What does a director in to your lighting approach?

Directors don't necessarily always talk about lighting. But at times they take you through some experiences, references which can give an indication of their inclination. But some of them have a visual mind, they give some direct references of painting or other cinema.

If given the choice to choose a particular model between Arri-Red-Sony-canon, which one will be your 1st priority and why?

Though I shoot a big chunk of my

work in celluloid, I prefer Arri Alexa over other cameras because of its color depth. Being digital, it has a celluloid like appeal.

Have you ever encountered any technical problem due to specific camera failure, lighting mess up, laboratory?

Not really much. We all know, film making is a continuous problem solving experience, once I had a big trouble when I shot a particular section of film in black & white stock and by mistake, the lab processed it in color bath. In color processing, there is a stage called bleach which takes out developed silver from stock leaving the color dye image. So it took out all the silver from black & white image leaving a clear base. It was a shock, we had to reshoot the portion again but the lab bore the cost of that. That was a real good gesture from the lab's side.

What is your advice for learning community?

Once, master cinematographer Vittorio Storaro said something like this “An art history of 5000 years starts from Altamira cave painting to pop art works behind the mind as subconscious. Today, art has traveled much from pop art. The purpose and the meaning of art has changed enormously. Cinema and cinematography are not isolated, it holds hand of other art forms to create identity of its own.” My only advice to young friends who want to take up cinematography as serious profession is to keep eyes and mind open to everything happening around. Anything can come as inspiration, may be a strange shadow falling on wall.





Only a handful of exceptionally gifted cinematographers could be in the same league as of Vittorio Storaro or Sven Nykvist, if they met their Bernardo Bertolucci or Ingmar Bergman. Sudeep Chatterjee's work with Sanjay Leela Bhansali can be compared with any international cinematographer, worth his salt.

Each and every frame of PADMAVAT has been filmed with such beauty that it heightens the senses and is a testimony to his craft as a seasoned cinematographer who doesn't just shoot, but paints with his camera. Padmavat, Bajirao Mastani and all other works of SUDEEP will go down in history as not just films but artworks and will become a subject of study and be admired even 20 years from now. It is indeed a matter of pride for the Hindi Film industry that such a talented cinematographer is a part of it.

In this Interview, Naresh Sharma, the Editor of "Cinematography Art", finds out his approach towards lighting while shooting PADMAVAT.



## Interview with DOP *Sudeep Chatterjee*

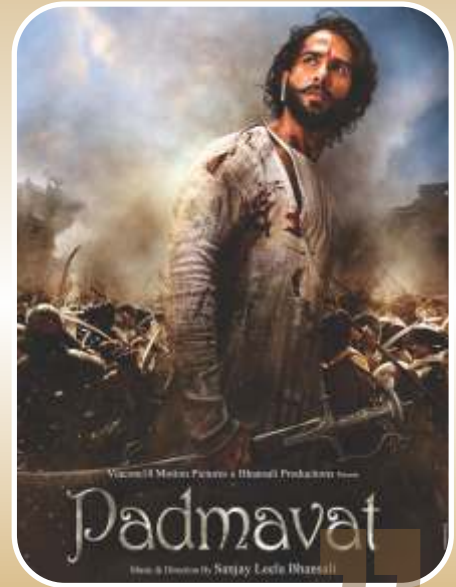
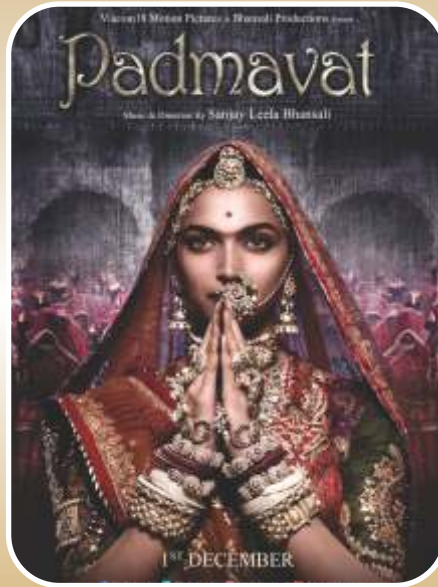
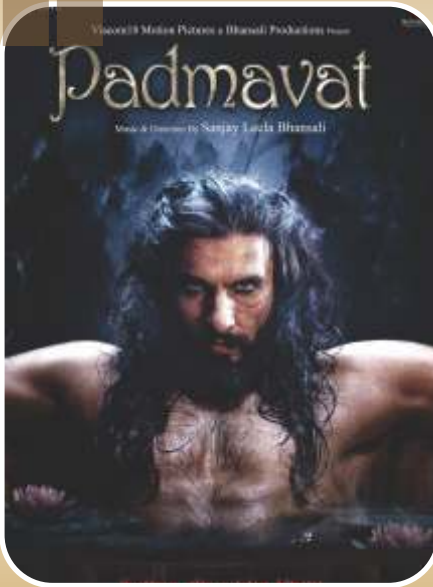
**How did you design the overall color scheme of the film Padmaavat ?**

Sanjay has a very interesting way of working, he is a very visual Director but to start with he will never confine my imagination with what he has in his mind.....he gives me the script and asks

me how I'm visualizing it. He has a very clear idea in his mind about the look of the film but he never says this is what I want. And then through the process of the preprod he keeps giving hints about the direction he wants to go. Sometime he comes with very abstract references. I keep







showing him all kinds of references from paintings , photographs, films.....everything that comes to my mind! And he keeps guiding me with his vision..... In this whole process the look slowly evolves.

Once I read the script I realized that the look has to be a lot more dramatic than Bajirao Mastani. I thought it would be very interesting to create the two worlds .....one of the Rajput which is pristine, serene and gorgeous and the other of Khilji which is raw, rustic yet terribly arresting.

**You have used dust as a very creative element, how did you decide on that. Was it a little bit real and enhanced later on in post?**

Both! The location we had chosen was a barren landscape in Masaipatta near Kolhapur. And this place is a barren land, it had a lot of dust. We broke the ground to have some extra dust. Physically too, we had storm fans to blow the dust. And then it was also enhanced in post. We did everything we could to get that extra dust.

Whatever is closer to camera is real, the background dust you see is CG.

**There are many sequences that are early morning & late evening, where Diyas and Mashaals are major source of lighting. How did you go about lighting**

**such large areas with a proper exposure with even illumination of moonlight kind of a feel and hiding your artificial lights?**

What you see in the film in terms of Diyas and Mashaals, they are all real. Sanjay wants it to be real and he doesn't prefer that it to be enhanced later. We have hardly done any digital enhancement. Only probably in the Ghoomar song, at the end when Deepika is dancing with Diyas, that is CG work, because it's too risky for Deepika to dance with real Diyas in her hand.

If it is an outdoor location, these are all shot at actual twilight. We did all the long shots in one day and did the close-

ups on the subsequent day. Luckily I had a very wonderful team of focus pullers who did proper focus puling at T2, sometimes T1.3 and I got away .

**You have maintained the flickering of the Diyas really well on the faces. Was this achieved on camera or in post?**

I used a panel of Flicker Boxes, this is something that my gaffer Shyam Shukla fabricated for me. It can create an individual flicker pattern for every light which is what makes it totally like real fire. The frequency, the high point and the low point you can control, you can also set the master dimmer. Most of my lights came through this flicker







control panel.

I remember the sequence, where Khilji invited Ratan Singh to his tent .It was a daylight situation, where you have diffused light for the Shahid's face and a patch of light coming through a slit of the tent falling on the Ranveer's face. How did you design the lighting for this sequence?

This sequence was shot inside the studio, so the light is completely under my control. I wanted to keep it simple for Ratan because there isn't any drama happening there. For Khilji, there are such variations to what he is doing that I had to come up with something equally dramatic..

I don't always design in advance.....I just watch the rehearsal, see how things are building up and then just add my bit.

There is a huge waterfall, when she's going to meet her husband in the outdoor location, how did you find that location?

I did spend 4-5 months on pre-production, looking at locations, selecting the locations. We need to give the time for preparation, it is so important.

There are couple of top angle shots, they enhance the feel of the whole sequences, particularly when she's dancing, the Ghoomar song. How do you go about choosing the top angle, whenever it is required?

When you are doing a top angle - you are doing a top angle. You just put the camera on a jib and put a nice wide lens.

Also when Khilji's nephew comes to inquire the health of wounded Khilji in sitting position , there was hard sun light coming from outside, while rest of scene is lit very softly, what was the idea behind it?

These are very instinctive decisions and I really like the way Ranveer was half sitting, even when he was really unwell, there was something very powerful in his posture. And I wanted to enhance that with the hard light.

In the end, where Padmavati is running and the camera follows from her point of view, which ends where Ratan Singh is watching the whole army from the top of the fort, how did you design the shot ?

I wanted to take some big shot, which would show the scale and the geography. I wanted to design something like that. We shot that with a drone.

How did you create the 3D version also of the film?

It was created much later. I was shooting it for 2D not 3D.. It was converted in post. While shooting I didn't even know that we would have a 3D version.

What was your collaboration between post-production supervisor like, what was your brief to him. Could you talk about that?





I have a very good understanding with him. He knows what we want . Having said that you as a Director of Photography must have the time to supervise the entire VFX work

Because of all the disturbances that was going on a lot of the work that was supposed to be on real locations had to be done on VFX. I wish we had more time on that.....

**In terms of the look, Deepika and Aditi's faces were kept softer while Ranveer's and Shahid's was more sharper , was it done at the time of shoot itself or later in post?**

Both, that was the exact idea, it was achieved through lighting and grading .

**What percentage of the film has been shot on location and on set?**

We shot a lot on sets. Initially, the plan was to shoot a lot on locations but then there were certain disturbances that forced us to wrap up the shoot on the second day of our outdoor schedule. We couldn't do everything. A lot of time was lost, we looked for alternative locations and finally went to Masaipatta, Kolhapur. There too our sets got burned, we lost time, lost our costumes but eventually managed to shoot amidst a lot of security. It was harrowing .

**DI plays an important role. Do you work with a single DI artist or several?**

I've only worked with only one DI colorist, Ashirwad Hadkar from Prime Focus, for all my films. I prefer to stick to one person. Ashirwad is a very open person, he also evolves with me. It's nice to work with him.

**As it's a period drama, costume plays a major role, can you talk about the costume part of the film?**

Sanjay is extremely knowledgeable about costumes.....Most of the times, what he thinks of, is so appropriate, that nobody wants to change anything about it. But he always asks, "this is what I'm thinking, what do you think about it". So there was a lot of discussion. I gave him my point of view but Sanjay was a huge support. I learned many things while working with him.

□□□





A photograph of Barun Mukherjee on a film set. He is wearing a white shirt and glasses, holding a camera. Another man in a white shirt is visible in the background, looking at a monitor.

# How I did it **Barun Mukherjee**

## FIRST ASSIGNMENT

When I go down the memory lane, I find that my very first assignment was nothing but a challenge. After FTII, I have been in Bombay for more than four years struggling to get some work. All my colleagues had found something to be busy with...in the whole group I was, to be honest, the only black-sheep whose struggle had become too tortuous to be tolerated any more. So when I was about to quit, pack up and say goodbye to Bombay, I got a call for work, and that in fact was not a work but a challenge. It was a phone call from Hitendra Ghosh, a fellow acquaintance from FTII : " Hey Barun, there's a film to be shot for Shyam [Benegal] in a company called 'Trial Films'. Would you do it ?" When I was just thinking to tell him--"It's a joke to ask a blind man whether he needs eyes"-- Ghosh threw the challenge, " Well, see, this film has been refused by many since the film has night situation, but the location they are to shoot at is available to them only during the day-time. So you'll have to create night outside the windows, and that too during the day. So think hard over the problem and only then give your reply." My mind was thinking fast : a 'no' means an end to my career even before a beginning ; a 'yes'

means to agree to commit suicide even before I express my desire to live. " O.K.," I somehow managed to say, " I just want to have a look of the location, and only then I can give you the final reply." I still remember it was Grant Road in Bombay South. I had a close look of the apartment where they intended to shoot. It was on the ground floor of a very congested area, and naturally not very sunny. Then I asked them if I could have the choice of spots for shooting. They said that I could choose any portion of that room. I was bold enough to tell them that the things would need some sort of experimentation. They had no objection to that also. So I decided to take the plunge. And what I did was to cover the window with some five to six or even more layers of black net from outside, and then to lit up some bulbs of 500 and 1000 watts on the bamboo poles outside the window. Inside I went on with normal day-light initially, but had to later give it some boost. Glass-panes of the window were closed. It gave a foggy vision of the electric-bulb light outside and the total effect was that of a night haze of natural density of 2 to 8 outside and 5 to 6 inside. Then I shot the film which to my good luck became a hit.

RAJAN SILK SAREES

I remember another equally interesting episode. I have been in to ad world doing Forhans Flouride ad that sort of helped me get in to advertising market. Then I did Maharani Soap ad with Shyam Benegal and I was pretty busy doing jobs with Girish Dhandekar, Govind Nihlani, R.N. Rao -- all great cameramen and of course talented directors, indeed. And then came my way a big challenge. One day Mathew Matthan called me and said : " Barun da, there is a film on Rajan Silk Sarees. Actually, the film has been shot and rejected. They want us to redo it. So it is a bounced project and therefore has to be handled very carefully and sensitively. They want to have a meeting with us." So we went there and were told that the film is simple -- a woman sitting on a 'jhoola' in pitch black darkness gets in to light from nowhere and recedes back in to the nowhere of that very pitch black darkness. The Sarees and their colors have to be focused only for that split second when the woman gets in to light. I said : " O.K. We need one day to think about it." They consented. The cameramen in those days used to do a lot of experimentation, and they never had the heart to say 'no'. So we tried out many things that day, experimenting a



great deal. In the evening when we saw the rushes, we decided to go for the project. On the third day we shot the ad which fortunately became a hit and the things really started, as they say, happening.

To be honest, even the bounced thing was pretty good, but somehow they wanted nothing but the woman, the Sarees and pitch black darkness...no paraphernalia. I adopted a very simple path...just cut the light to the position that it falls only on the woman, and the rest of it is cut. So it was just a matter how you cut the light, and for that I decided -- to the surprise of the rest -- not to use soft lighting as the soft lighting is difficult to be cut to precision. What I mean is that before the woman enters, I had kept a chink so that the focused moment was not a sudden jerk but just like the melting of butter-- appeared...vanished. That did the magic. It was only a trick that worked with the grace of God. But it was an effort preceding the production.

#### LAKME AD

Now I tell you an episode that demanded for a post-production effort. It was a Lakme ad concerning nail enamel. Johnny Pinto was the director. He wanted to show only nails in color, rest everything in black and white -- the entire set, the woman, the hands, everything. So the set was made in black n white, most of the props were painted in black n white, and the woman was dressed in black n white...even her skin tones were all in different shades of grey. But the entire film we shot is color. Then there is a process called 'master grade' by which you can omit and retain any of the colors out of VIBGYOR. The tricky part was to think in terms of black n white regarding set, woman, props. In color, we can get the separation easily, but in black n white it was sort of a risk. I was really scared, praying to God all the while that this trick also works. And it did, thank God. How I wish I could show you the results and the effects! Any way, Lakme nail enamel with Pinto till date with me is a film that I relished the most in terms of doing a film.

#### HAMARA BAJAJ

Ha! 'Hamara Bajaj' became a popular film mainly because of its jingle, and it was a jingle composed in a way by a cinematographer -- who else but me! Lintas wanted a jingle based on some

'raga'. Shubhanthro Ghosh, though much younger, is extremely friendly with me. People used to say they were married to each other. He knew I used to sing a little and had had some initiation in Hindustani 'ragas'. So one day after the pack-up, we gulped some beer together, and Ghosh asked me to compose some jingle. I tried and tried but could think of nothing. So I went home, and the whole night my mind wrestled with the jingle. I composed

about six tunes out of which the Lintas liked three, and after discussing them with the Loui Band my tune based on 'raga jay-jay-wanti' was finalized. Vinay Manake and Loui Band ultimately composed the music and that is how 'Hamara Bajaj' materialized.

#### CHERRY BLOSSOM

'Cherry Blossom' ad happened much earlier. Shubhanthro had just started his production company. Obviously the budget used to be low, and there was little scope for post production. The requirement was the live shot of a shoe which must have a starry sparkle on it. We scratched and scratched our heads thinking hard what kind of light could reflect best from the leather. Incidentally, we were taking tea and, as it happened, the glass containing tea slipped out of the hands of some body. Its broken bits were lying on the ground where upon, fortunately for us, sunlight was falling. Suddenly I found the required sparkle being reflected from a broken piece of glass. I hit upon an idea. I got up with a jerk, picked up a very small splinter of broken glass and pasted it on a shoe placed in the area lit by sun light. Lo ! Cherry Blossom Sparkle was the

outcome. The use of 'sparkle filter' was not a big effort, but that gave us the result to our full satisfaction.

So far as Charlie Chaplin part of 'Cherry Blossom' ad is concerned, we saw a lot of his films and concluded that speed was the key to it. So we selected the range of 12-16 frames after a lot of experimentation. To give it the look of antiquity, we shot it in black n white. Most of the sets were outdoors and the entire lighting was done from the top and we had to use stop exposures as well. Everything had to be done in the camera since the post production strategies were little attempted those days.

#### V I P -- AD

I have done enormous work with Shubhanthro. VIP-AD IS my favourite film with him. To create the look of a railway station inside the studio was quite a challenge. The shots of train and coaches were, of course, added afterwards, but the platform was created in the studio. To give the effects of the length and depth of a real platform was a tough job, but we could create the illusion by using extreme tint and the widest lens-- probably 75-- and that too with zoom. We did not use normal lens at all in that ad. The most memorable part was its jingle--'kal bhi aaj bhi'--which was done by me.

#### HERO HONDA

'The Hero Honda ad' --'Fill it, shut it and forget it-- was shot in Rajasthan. The temperature was 49 degree Celsius and it was shot in a desert though what is shown in the film is an oasis. Actually there was no oasis in that desert, and the







giving wooden semblance. It reflected light so much that every where there was nothing but reflection. I was almost in tears. Then I had to use a big softener, a huge translucent sheet over the entire area which was quite a job and in the process I learnt a lesson . That day I realized that a cinematographer can never say that he has learnt everything.

#### PAST VERSUS PRESENT

To shift from celluloid to digital is just like leaving a rural child midst an urban setting. It would be difficult to adjust for him initially, but slowly he shall get used to the alien setting and steadily he must adapt himself completely. So it was the shift from celluloid to digital. All my life I had worked with celluloid and I loved it. But then new techniques are bound to come. So though I miss celluloid, I am at ease with digital now. I am working mostly with Alexa but I have done some work with Red also. It may be that I am biased, but it is a fact that I enjoyed doing work with celluloid. However, rising prices put the logistics in favor of digital.

Similarly, in the past there was no DI. We had only RGB for color correction. However, good films were made even then. There is no DI in movies like 'Baghban', 'Babul' or 'Gehrayee'. At that time people were very conscious that if there be a mistake, it would get revealed. So there was a precision in the working.

People were very particular about the quality of work and would pay a lot more attention to detailing. I myself belong to that category. People would complain that I took a long time, but then we got good results as well.

I have worked with both big budgeted and small budgeted films. I have done some regional cinema also in Bengal. If the subject was good and I got a good director, then money did not matter much. Once I got the basic optimum amount, I would never rundown or reject a film because of money. I rather preferred a film on the merit of its content.

I was lucky that I got some very good and talented assistants. I am indeed proud of them. Vinod Pradhan Chang, Anil Mehta, Murli, Mahesh Anane, Vijay Khambati--all worked with me for some time or more.



oasis was artificially created. A huge pit was dug and a plastic cover was put on all the sides. About 5 to 6 tankers of water were pumped into it. Date-palm trees were brought from Mumbai. And the real challenge was the camel which was to see the oasis, come running towards it, drink the water and to go away. The camel literally ran towards the oasis assuming it to be real and in no time drank water and ran away. The guys said that it would come again. And really it did come again, drank the water to its fill, and shook its head. I don't know how it happened, but indeed it happened and it shaking its head became the marvel of the ad ; it was as if the camel were literally saying -- 'Fill it, shut it and forget it'. I had to be very quick in catching its movements in one go. I enjoyed that film and it was really a wonderful stuff.

#### LYRIL-AD

The 'Lyril ad' was purely a magic of lighting. It was done with Raam Madhvani . I don't know what were the constraints, but somehow the agency wanted to do it indoor. It took almost 3 to 4 days to create an artificial jungle and the waterfall was also artificially created. The water of the tanker was used, and needless to say the water was muddy--certainly not as clear and clean as was needed to show a natural waterfall. But Raam insisted that the waterfall, the jungle, every bit of the scene must look completely natural. Though I had the heart to say that it would be done, but fear lurked in my

mind regarding how it could be done. Then I thought that the only thing that could be tried was to shoot the entire film from the top angle. But still the problem of lighting remained. It was a big area and so I decided to do the whole thing in sections. So I asked the lighting department to prepare banks of 5k light--two up, two down, and one behind with a little slant, and all the banks not in a straight line or even one above the other, but one here and the other there in a scattered way. The art department had put the plants and shrubs in big polythene bags. So when it was shot from the top angle, it focused only on leaves and branches. That way the jungle looked amazing. In the part where Preity Zinta is seen walking across the jungle, we used back lights that were cut from the sides. When it came to water part, I put the focus on reflections rather than on water. I used a skimmer and that made the reflections move fast. Now the moving reflections did not let the muddy layer below surface in the shot. The total effect was that of crystal clear water. On the whole every thing was crisp and effective.

#### CEAT TYRES-AD

This ad was again with Shumanthro Ghosal . It was shot in famous Mahalakshmi, studio No. 1. The set was big -- from wall to wall. Two cars were to be shown running at full speed. So I was given no space on the ground for lighting. I was almost in tears. The floor was made of some vinyl like translucent material





# Anil Mehta on Shooting Highway

The DOP always helps the Director in the realization of his vision. What kind of locations came to your mind regarding that vision when Imtiaz narrated the Script to you and how did you go about choosing the locations?

To begin with Imtiaz narrated only the idea, not the script, he was still working on it. Straight away it was very clear to me that this film was going to unusual places. It's a kidnap story that starts in Delhi. So in a sense it's a story that has to stay off the Highway. Locations were first plotted on a map in Imtiaz's office, what route would the kidnappers take. Imtiaz's long time Associate, Rajesh Tibrewal then went on the first recce by himself.

My chat with him before he left was 'don't think logistics, find places that 'smell' right for the movie, let's push ourselves and production.' We were more interested in what is true for the film. The Salt Factory, near Sambar,

where she is kept captive is not a very friendly place-there are no hotels nearby and you have to travel one and a half hour to the nearest hotel, but we were not concerned about all these things.

The spirit of the film determined the locations. We trekked 45 minutes from Aru in Pahalgam to reach the village location for the climax.

In the upper Himachal the roads and hotels had not yet opened for tourism, we shot in towns like Reckong Peo, Nako, Kaza. It was -5 degrees one night in a hotel in Kaza, without electricity and water.

Imtiaz likes to shoot his films in script sequence and he is very loyal to real locations. That sets a tone for the film.

What was your basic approach to cinematography in "Highway" ?

I approached Highway with an 'Indie' spirit. Minimal Gear, Shoot from the hip, Keep it simple...

When we finished shooting in Delhi, Haryana and Rajasthan I shed all the big lights, because everything from thereon was day exterior. There was some night scenes in Punjab and Kashmir but I kept stripping down the kit. For the climax we were down to a portable generator, some household fixtures and polyboards. A lot of the film is shot handheld and available light.

On certain occasions one happens to see wall graffiti in the foreground, say when the Truck is going away in the frame. Was it the result of conscious efforts to bring out the local area feeling or it just happened?

Following the Graffiti on the walls for changing areas and changing languages was one of the motifs that Imtiaz had in mind. Another motif was electric poles. Every time we'd see a set of electric poles and electric cables or for that matter communication cables like telephone cables, we would be doing tracking,



passing shots with them. The cables and poles did not make the final cut.

Since most of the time in the film the shots are being taken while the truck is moving, in such a situation what were the rigging plans for the camera ?

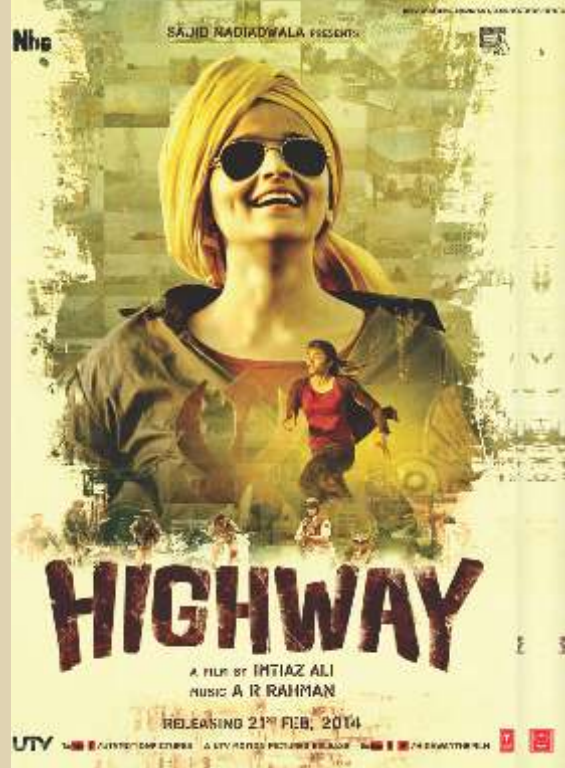
We knew that the TATA 407 was going a large part of the middle section of the film, a lot of scenes were going to be set within it. It had me worried initially, because Imtiaz wanted a very generic cabin at the back, like a metal container.

Gradually after much discussion between Sumit Basu, the Production Designer, Imtiaz and me we arrived at the truck that now features in the film. Production bought a brand new vehicle and every single detail on the truck is put in there by the Art team. The other big

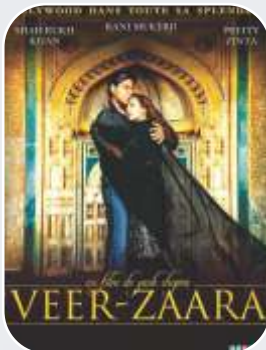
aspect was shooting the truck from the outside, again no fancy gear, No tracking vehicles with jimmy jib, no low loaders, no gyro stabilisers, just some pipes, clamps and ratchet straps..

We got in Arjun Bhurji as key grip and he designed and fabricated platforms on 3 sides of the cabin. I could ride all of them with camera and director tucked in. There were times when Imtiaz and I would be just sitting along and I would be shooting by looking through camera. We wanted that kind of flexibility rather than the locked off camera feel. But because we were not shooting locked down roads, we often had hard rigs on the body of the 407.

We also did a lot of parallel tracking stuff from another vehicle, again





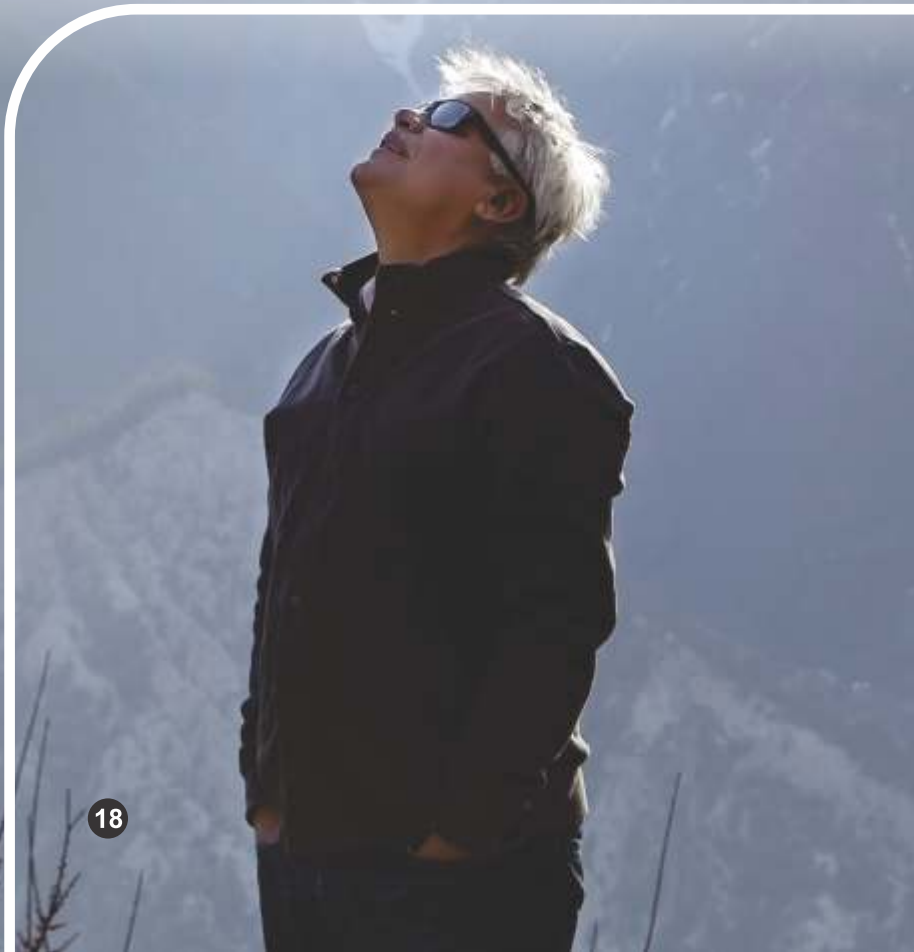


Vibration Isolator on a Innova or Eeco or a small pick up with an open back, whatever we could get. We lived precariously sometimes.

Most of the night sequences having long shots in the outdoor are lit up very realistically as if it were lit by real moon only . How did you plan the lighting scheme for these sequences?

Night lighting in exterior in the open fields was another of the major concerns for me. The sensitivity of the Digital cameras in low light conditions was very useful. I rated the SONY F-65 at 800 ISO. Again the lighting schemes were simple.

We used two units of 12 bank Dinos just giving a one sided wash across the entire field. Maybe there was one 2k or 4k soft box as a fill but I did not complicate the lighting beyond that. In the petrol pump I just ensured that all the Practicals were working. In the torch lit scenes the torches lit the scene. In the exterior of the salt factory, I got the Art Dept. to







buy a Sodium Vapour Fixture, it's in the frame and it lights up the entire shot. A tube light here a naked bulb there, that was the philosophy. Alia's free run in the salt pans is Day for Night. It took a lot of time for the VFX team to get the "day for night" effect to look right. I don't think we cracked it fully, but I do know that it was very hard work. The fact that we had 5D mixed in will all that motion blur.. did not help.

How did you light up sequence of Alia inside the Tata 407, where there is no direct/indirect penetration of the sun light in any obvious manner?

I have to give credit to Sumit and his team here. The phatta/boards at the rear allowed me some fill at times,

The 3" perforated strip along the length of the metal body turned out to be a great lighting solution. Small improvisations went a long way. Sensitivity of the camera and lenses helped a lot.

What were the other occasions where the Production Designer was of great help in achieving your lighting plans?

On a location based film the Production Designer is still a very useful



really good about it was, it's color rendition. I feel in our conditions, our skin tones, the kind of landscape, the kind of light we deal with and the wide palette of colors in our frames, I thought it would help. I chose the Master Primes primarily for sharpness and speed.

Our Projection quality takes care of the rest.

□□□

person. For instance in the Salt Factory where Alia Bhatt is held in the night, there the entire space on the top where she sleeps and wakes up the next morning looks like part of the factory but actually it was all dressed by the Production Designer. When we went there, there was nothing but pigeon shit. All the Industrial debris was brought there by the Art team. I got them to fix in the practicals where I thought they would be useful. In the Dhaba sequence, where Alia has a meltdown, I told the art guys to erect a street lamp pole with a tube light.

Which camera and set of lenses did you use for shooting 'Highway' and any specific reason for choosing the particular model?

Sony F-65 was just out and couple of feature films were already shot on it. I had the opportunity to test it and found it quite faithful at 800 ISO. What I found







# Binod Pradhan

Veteran Cinematographer  
Recollects his Journey

How did you start your journey as a cinematographer and how much helpful was the education at FTII ?

FTII, Pune is one of the best institutes in India wherein we are exposed to lots of cinema techniques and styles. There we watched and studied a huge variety of films, observed things and learnt a lot. The teachers were good and the facilities were nice. I came from a very small town named Kalimpong. I was a sort of withdrawn character. I hesitated going to someone and ask for work. I and my friend Shambu Pradhan passed out from that institute in the same session though he was a graduate in editing. Since I didn't know people in Bombay, so we thought of trying to find some job in Nepal. We knew that in Nepal there was a Royal Film Corporation. So we went there, but the director of the corporation told us that there was no job for us. We came back to Bombay and it was then that Prem Sagar -- another DOP from the institute -- asked me to work under him. That's how my Bombay journey started. At that time the

DOP'S from the film institute were not favorable with the people. Most of the people used to think that these people having learnt for three years at the institute tended to be smarter. I mean that this was a general tendency when we went to somebody for work as an assistant.

Nevertheless, as an assistant I worked with Prem Sagar, A. K. Bir and Barun Mukerjee. There I learnt practical aspects of this field -- how to place lights, how to talk to light-man, how to match lighting, etc. Meanwhile I started doing some independent jobs with companies like Durga Khote Production and there I did many documentaries. Ultimately I decided not to assist any more. Just then there started a youth co-operative organization and I became a part of that team. We shot a film 'Ghasiram Kotwal' -- an experimental film. After that I shot a Marathi film 'Jait Re Jait' which was directed by Jabbar Patel.

Tell us something about your association with Kundan Shah ; how it

started?

It started with 'Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro', a comedy film. Though not a big hit, it was one of the difficult films that I shot. It involved a lot of hard work and that too for long hours. It was an NFDC produced low-budget film involving quite a large number of people and various location-shoots. I had just started shooting movies. So I couldn't say I needed this or that, whatever. I didn't ask for too many lights like the way I might do now. This was a different shoot because maybe the comedy with Kundan Shah was not very easy. He is a very serious man. In one of the scenes, I was holding the camera and I was giggling while the shot was going on. I was trying to control my laughter while taking the shot but that reflected that I was not a very experienced DOP at that time. I had to think hard about many things -- how to light up the things, how to get the correct lighting ratio, how to control the wall when there was no set. It was all a very complicated problem for me then though now I can do all these things blindfolded.



You have been associated with Vinod Chopra for long. Please tell us something about your work with him.

Vinod first took me along in one of the shoots and he was very happy with my work. Since then we have been working together. 'Parinda' was the first star-studded film that I had shot but we wanted to give it a different feel. So 'Parinda' was though a commercial film, still it was treated so differently that it didn't look like a commercial film.

The first thing that I said to myself was not to deal with it the way the normal Hindi commercial movies are shot. So I made every artist lighting up from front and make it as flat as possible. I mean that most of the time I did like that. I like bounce-lighting, and I think most of the people at that time didn't like or approve of that in commercial films. So I used soft light, not necessarily always lighting actors from the front, but looking at from where the light may be coming from, say a window or a door. The effort was to seek the feel of source of light and keep shadows at time. That is the way I worked in 'Parinda'.

When you try to do the source-lighting, it is generally believed that most actors are against it since it goes dark sometimes and the stars object to that kind of lighting. How did you negotiate with that?

No. You don't need to make it so dark. It doesn't happen like that. When the characters are backlit, there are a lot of angles from where light is falling on the face unless dramatically you required darkness. I cannot think of jet black faces, there should always be a little bit of details here and there.

Moving to another big project '1942' and the kind of big hype that was created around it, wasn't there a lot of expectation to live up to? So how did you prepare yourself for that particular film?

See, you do not treat a film differently only because you think that it is a large scale film. I treat a film the way it is supposed to be treated. This film needed a little bit of largeness because of its big canvas. An exotic location was there, a huge crowd was there, large sets were there. But for me the prime job in this film was to try to make it look more and more beautiful because basically it

was a film on romance, on love. After all, its very title was '1942- A Love Story'. So I tried to make the things look as beautiful as possible. Around that time this "promist" filter had come and I had never tried that earlier. Somehow I decided to use that and it worked. Manisha Koirala once said that she never looked as beautiful as she did in his film. We did a lot of reiki and discussion on the sets what the things should be like. I didn't want to give that typical period-look. I do not believe in that. Even in 'Devdas', I tried to do something which was good for the film. As per the script, this one--I mean '1942'--needed beauty. So I tried to make it as beautiful as I could. There was no otherwise handling the film for me. If it was a period-film, then it might be because of dresses and costumes of the actors or the sets. I could have given it 'semi sepia', but I did not. Also in the studio, we had painted backdrop so the sky has to look real, the mountain has to look real. Sometimes it becomes very difficult because somehow it always looks little artificial so I thought maybe burn out the sky little, so that it is just doesn't look like a painted background. So my assistance were all there, lighting the sky and cutting the mountain so that the sky look little brighter. For the night scenes, I just gave a little blue in the sky and make the mountains little black so it has some depth.

Tell us about the famous four/ five camera set-up where some well-known cinematographers were called upon as the 2nd unit to shoot the crowd.

A: That was in the climax sequence of '1942' and it was needed because there was a huge crowd -- I think around 1200 people. Now that was too big a crowd to shoot without any mirror effort for crowd multiplication. Moreover, there was a great deal of movement also involving different groups of crowd going from one point to the other and that too at different places. Now just with me and my one camera it might have taken a lot of time and a lot of money. So we thought that we should have at least four or five cameras. Ultimately five cameras and five very experienced cameramen to operate them were called. Ashok Mehta, Govind Nihalani were brought in. It was a marching sequence since when groups came from one place to the other at almost the same time,

we always ensured that the cameras were there at various places. We did the shots with five cameras couple of times. Some of us would be shooting running shots while some others would be shooting something else.

With Sanjay Leela Bhansali you worked in 'Devdas' which again is a period-film. However, when you really look at it, it looks to be a modern contemporary film. Please give your comments.

Here also I thought I should not give this film the usual period look. In fact, I don't believe in this period look unless I feel that film really demands that. Right now I am doing the film titled 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag'. Here I have given the movie a different sort of look making it a little older and all. Generally with a normal film I would not like to do it because it has to have a lot of glamour and a polished look.

Coming to 'Devdas' again, I didn't want it to look old. Rather I wanted it to look very beautiful as it had colorful sets. So I decided to enhance the beauty of those huge sets by doing whatever I could do.

The film city was very large. So I and my assistant took round of the whole sets along the lake and all. First I didn't know what to do. Then I asked my assistant to put 100 watt bulbs in a particular tower. So that's the way we started lighting up the huge set with 100 watt bulbs though we had 5K and HMI and what not. There was some problem like how to light up a 'strain glass'. Now 'strain glass' always needs something behind it to be seen otherwise it gives a bad look. Another problem was how to light-up 'diyas' which were on the other bank. They were not 'diyas', they were actually lamps flickering like 'diyas'. So these were the problems which interestingly got solved. Also there are sequences in which you have to do the computer graphics. Aishwariya with a 'diya' in her hand is dancing; when she moves her hand this way or that way and 'diya' is full of oil, it is risky. So we used computer graphics for such sequences. We used a small bulb, sort of LED. And there was some sort of reference which the guy handling the computer graphics was to use. He took that element and put a frame around it. We also tried effects in camera in the song "morey piya" where



in the background the trees on the sea are sparkling and it all went very well.

You have worked with Rakesh Om Prakash Mehra in commercials and feature films. What is the difference in his style of working?

Doing a commercial with Rakesh Mehra was one thing but doing a feature film with him was a completely different experience. He wanted to have every sort of dramatic impact, not necessarily exactly the Bollywood way. Quite curiously he would like to make it look very natural and then he would also like to get drama. Now this made me try so many things. First I would let everything look dramatic and then to put things in a more naturalistic way I might not make it very glamorous.

In 'Rang de Basanti' we tried the period-technique because I thought that was needed for the film. So I tried to make everything look more black-and-whitish as if it were a black and white picture faded into a yellow color or like any black and white photograph that with time turns faded and yellowish. That was the basis for my choosing a yellowish color in the past sequences--the flashbacks in 'Rang de Basanti'.

I had done some photo painting in my studio in Kalimpong and there I used to paint photographs of customers by adding skin tone color in the face, and other colors in the background--an old black and white technique of transparent water color. So I thought: let's try and give the feel of that very phase. It was painted like that in 'Rang de Basanti' and it is why we were successful all the time to generate that peculiar color which is flattish--not a skin color but a flesh tint. I

tried to get that flesh tint coloration. So that was my basis of getting the past look and the present, of course, was like present without any manipulation of image.

In the past images, we would go closer to people and had more separate close-ups, but in the present we decided to have more of group shots--nobody was to be alone in the street. So it was what we tried in 'Range de Basanti'. We also did few experiments by changing the FPS. Some shots were as slow as 6 FPS and some only 4 FPS and stretched it to have a streak like feeling that you can find in many of the shots of the past.

What I still remember is that "day for night" scene wherein we had guys from VFX and CG and they added city lights, sky light, blue light and moon glow on the sky. We added headlights of the cars. It's not 100% thing but it is pretty good. We can't shoot in a night like that and then we could not have an artificial light falling on them as to me it would look worse than a "day for night".

"Day for Night" situation was something where I created lights through CG--city lights / moonlit sky and sky-glow. A lot of work. Just to see how lighting could be replicated later on in graphics, I had taken a group of graphic guys to the film city with me in the car, and telling them how dust gets affected by headlights, how the dust is affected by rear headlights or the back-light of the car and so on, so forth. For them also it was a little bit of experiment and as I recall I think it the best job they have done so far. However, one or two shots were pretty impressively done in comparison to other shots. When the cars are running, there was a shot

wherein the tube-lights look stretched. Many people later asked me how I did that. Well, it was a simple thing of shooting at 4 fps to 6 fps!!

To talk about the current film 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag' which you are doing with Om Prakash Mehra, was there any situation wherein you had to work in terms of some special type of photography?

Yeah. There were a lot of stadium-scenes where we had to create the stadium because we could not go to various stadiums involved and shoot all those places. Even if we had gone, we could not have got the desired results as at present those stadiums look very modern and we wanted to show the times of 50's and 60's. So we shot in Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium and in some other stadiums. we shot there with four cameras as there were different types of chases. This film also has its past and present. Thus it has "Milkha" in childhood. I shot that with a very normal hue and I am still working on it. I have done another film 'Delhi 6' wherein the light was quite natural, and in terms of DI, a low contrast and less saturated look was achieved.

In 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag' the races were quite exciting because there were quite a few races of 400 meters and so many other kind of races. We tried to improvise and give each race a little different treatment in terms of shot-taking or 'Lensing' to get different flavors for the running.

You have worked with many ad filmmakers, and advertising is a different ball game. So can you recollect some ads in which it was some trick to be employed



or they really wanted something special ? I mean something which makes advertising more challenging in terms of shooting?

Yes, it's different. Advertising concentrate on products and give them generally a certain glossy look and that is the way it happens most of the times. Feature films on the other hand are more dramatic and you can take more liberties with them in terms of look. Here in ads it is little different. I remember "Iodex" film directed by Ram Madhwani because it was a table top where the train was running inside a character. It was one of the few miniature film-sets that I have shot. In advertising you learn much more while doing things for various effects. Most of the things I applied in feature films, all have their base in advertising. All originated from advertising as far as I am concerned. It was all very stylized--if you would like to call it that way.

Today many cinematographers do not bother about the key, fill, back, kicker kind of things. So do you remember any music video / ad film where you tried something very stylized in a way which does not belong to old school of thought in terms of lighting ?

Earlier, you had to do lighting in certain ways. Nowadays people are happy having the shadow and stark faces. They are not natural but they are stylized. During the song picturisation of a feature film, I had lit up a girl which is burning out. You can call it stylized or you may call it spot-lit.

I don't keep the dark faces unless there is a vision for it. In 'Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro' there was a scene in that characters could not see one another. But as a cameraman I had to show something. So I lit the faces very dimly to show them in a thinly shadowy way since that scene demanded that.

You have worked so much with so many directors that you are sure to know too much about lighting and composition. Then one day you come across a director who begins to specifically want this or that way making you wonder and ask yourself what you are doing here. Did you ever encounter this kind of a director ?

Honestly speaking, I really like it when a director demands something

special. It makes me work a little more. Sometimes they don't demand but expect a lot from you. I like Ram Madhwani. He really works a lot on his visions about various ad films. He experiments about various things. He is one guy who really takes pain but, then, it is worth.

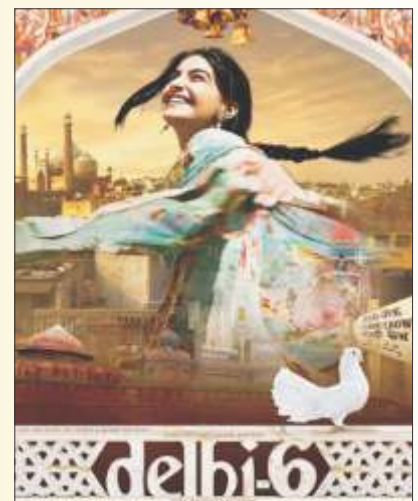
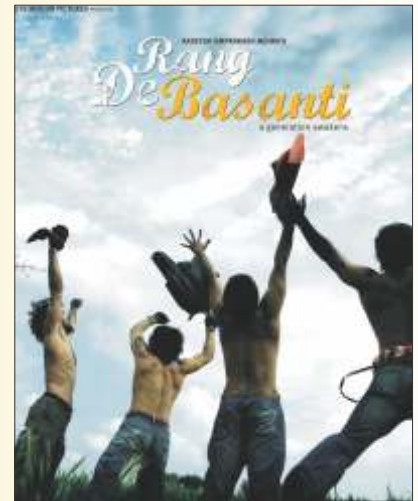
You have grown with the celluloid and now everything is digital. So how do you find the shift?

With DI you can do now lots of things which were not possible earlier. Previously what you could do was the basic correction--change the color, brightness, contrast and that's that. Now you can change the specific color in selected areas ; you can change the tonal sky ; you can brighten up a face ; you can darken up a face and you can have the different tones, all together and much more than what you could do on celluloid. So there are lots of possibilities in DI. That does not mean that you should not work hard at the time of shooting because you cannot get everything in DI. The base-material must be good and only then you can work further.

There is lot you can do in DI--change the contrast to certain extent, increase the highlight, etc. So the pallet of the DOP has now increased a lot more. I think that is the best part of shooting digital. Now I myself find going a little more extreme. There are much more liberties you can take all because of DI.

Coming to the Digital intermediate process, what kind of a colorist you like to work with, someone who knows more about the console or someone who has more of aesthetic sense?

A colorist needs to have both, because if you have someone who knows a machine very well but has no eye, then it gets very difficult because you have to tell him everything, little bit this and little bit that and only then you may get what you want. And somehow I feel if I want something, I really want that very thing. Digital is going to stay here. Since 'Mausam' I have started shooting digital. At that time the digital cameras had just come and I did some tests and I was very happy with the outcome. So in the middle of that very film we stopped shooting on celluloid and shifted to digital.







# ***K. K. Senthil Kumar***

## **Veteran Cinematographer recollects his journey**

**You tell us how you started your Career as a cinematographer in Telugu Film industry?**

I was born and brought up in Hyderabad. My interest was towards civil services as a career. My entry into films is a sheer accident. Maybe a call of Destiny.. As a part of preparation I was writing as many competitive exams as I could, a friend of mine was applying to Pune Film Institute and asked if I would take the test as it would help in preparation for civil services exam. FTII Pune had an amazing selection process. 40 people were called for the interview, half day training, half day of G.D.s for a week. They selected eight out of 40 for admission and I was one of them.

Since I had graduated from Pune film institute, I thought that I would get a red carpet into Telugu film industry. Disappointment is all I got as I had no contacts or background in the industry back home, Hyderabad. At Prasad Labs, I met a film grader called Punayya who asked me to assist any cinematographer before expecting an opportunity.

I joined cinematographer Sharath Sir. My first film as assistant was Premaku Velayara and worked till Jabili movie.

Working as an assistant cinematographer.

I realised that people work for you in the film institute and you work for people in film industry.

Lots of people went to Mumbai and Chennai after their graduation. I came to Hyderabad because of economical reasons I could stay with my parents and try for the movies. I was lucky to get a break in Hyderabad.

**How did the “Aithe” happened for you?**

Chandra Sekhar Yeleti asked me to work as cameraman for his TV serial Amrutham. Short of opportunities in films I agreed though television never interested me. I worked for 13 episodes. My television migration turned out to be my platform. Chandra Sekhar Yeleti directed Aithe and took me on as the cinematographer. This movie debut a team of actors and technicians.

We created a realistic look for Aithe. People felt that we shot the movie without lights. But lights were used and still brought the realistic tint to the movie. I was jobless for six months after Aithe though my work was acknowledged well in the industry.

**“ Rajamouli” is big name in Hyderabad**

**Important Films of Senthil as DOP**

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## film industry. How did the association happened ?

Rajamouli called me and narrated the story of Sye. I loved it. I asked him why he had chosen me. He said he knew under what circumstances I did Aithe . He promised better time and budget. When someone like Rajamouli believes in you so much, you stop at nothing but the best.

Sye was a movie based on Rugby, Rugby is not a popular game to Indians, at that time Rugby world cup was telecast in India for the first time. I observed TV telecast of Rugby to understand the the game as well as the camera angles used as I had to recreate the live atmosphere in the climax of Sye movie. We had two months of Rugby training for the cast. We were able to pull the climax scene with realistic camera work.

In Aithe movie, we didn't have glamour angle as it was a realistic movie. But Sye was a commercial film. Hence we needed to show artists (Nitin and Genelia) glamorously without compromising on the realistic aspect of the movie. I learnt the nuances of showing stars with a realistic look with Sye.

I cannot remember who said it but I always believe that my next shot is the best shot. I am always trying to give my best to every shot within the constraints that I have.

I remember a meeting with Ganga Raju Gunnam (the producer of my first movie) while shooting the song sequence for 'Aithe'. Time was running out and we had no idea how we were going to do it. Then I told him that if he gave us some more time we would do a perfect job, he asked me in return 'what is a perfect job?' I had no answer. And then he said, 'if I give you 15 days you'll do a better job, and if I give another 15 you will better that. But that is not important. What is perfect for us is what we deliver in the time frame we need to'. I always remember that.

## What were the unique experiences while shooting Chatrapati?

I strongly believe that cinematographer's work is not to make visuals look good. But to help director tell his story more efficiently. My work should be in perfect sync with the

director's narration. Since Chatrapati was a harsh story, we used a good lot of brown tint. We deliberately avoided a colourful look. There are two interesting aspects from cinematographer's point of view in Chatrapati. There is a pre-interval mud fight in the movie shot in the rain. We needed constant light to cover a wide outdoor area. Balloon lights did not exist in hyd at that time. I used a 40 ft x 40 ft iron frame and stuffed it with lots of lights, diffuser and dangled it using a 100 ft industrial crane. I used very soft lights while shooting the fight which had lots of slow motion.

We had a song called 'A vachi B pai vaale'. I wanted to have a monotone-color feel to it. It was never done in recent Telugu films. The choreographer objected that monotone-color theme will not highlight his steps. The results were amazing.

Chatrapati was my first step towards visual effects. We canned a shark fight



sequence in the movie where we did major blue-mat work for it.

## Ashok was shot on super 35mm camera, first to be shot in tollywood. What was your Experience on working with a Different Format

Ashok was the first movie to be shot on Super 35 and to do complete DI (digital intermediate) in Telugu films. DI is an integral part of cinematographer's job. There is a sequence in the movie where dead friend (Rajiv Kanakala ) of hero (NTR) appears on the screen. To show the contrast we did Rajiv Kanakala in black and white and the rest of the frame in color.



## Important Films of Senthil as DOP





I used to like the greeting cards done by the photographer Ken Anderson in black and white except for a small thing like rose in a red color. I always wanted something like that. In a fight sequence of Ashok, I wanted the blood to be in red color and rest of the frame in black and white. When I asked director Surender, he agreed. And the concept was well recognized in the movie. I learnt a lot about DI while doing the movie Ashok.

**What were the most challenging scenes you remembered from Rajamouli's Chatrapathi and Yamadonga from lighting point of view?**

I like the scene which begins with Shivaji (Prabhas) defying Kaatraj's (Supreeth) orders to not enter a circle and ends with Shivaji threatening a politician to not enter his area ever again. In the midst of all this, there's a mud fight which is set in the slum where Shivaji lives. Lighting was a major issue for this fight sequence since it had to cover a huge area and to get the right effect. I used 40 x 40 ft iron frame and stuffed it with lots of lights, diffusers and dangled it on top of the area using a 100 ft industrial crane. It's an intense sequence and no one could take their eyes off everything that was happening on screen.

Doing Yamadonga movie gave me immense confidence about my abilities as a cinematographer. When Rajamouli decided to build a Yamalokam set in Ramoji Film City to shoot an important part of the film, once again lighting the entire set became a huge issue for me. The Yamalokam set erected was the biggest indoor set in India. I never worked on such big sets. I was not sure of how i would light up such a massive set as I needed huge number of lights for it.

I am not a big fan of specular light, which casts lots of shadows i don't like so many unwanted shadows in the frame. Hence I got the whole set under a huge skimmer. Soft lights so that there will be no strong shadows. When Rajamouli asked me for glittering effect on the crown and the jewellery of the artists, I took a day's extension. Then I got a huge box of household lights behind the camera and lit them up. Since these were specular lights, they give the glitter without casting shadows. We used all the available lights in Hyderabad to light up Yamalokam set. That's how we captured the grandeur of the entire set.

**Arundhati was your first film which has amazing Visual Effects. What were the first time attempt in the film from cinematography point of view.**

Arundhati was a period film with a fantasy element to it. It was like a dream come true to work with a passionate producer like Shyam Prasad Reddy. Arundhati was a big learning step towards visual effects. Working for Arundhati was an out-of-the world experience. It had mind-boggling visuals for the standard of any Indian movie.

In this movie we used motion control camera for the first time in Telugu films to can a few sequences. the Motion control camera remembers the camera movements and repeats it. Using that we could shoot glittering fort getting converted into a dilapidated fort in the same shot. That camera is not available in India. We imported it from Australia.

**Magadheera was a very large scale Production film. How did you live up the Expectations of Rajamouli?**

I am always fascinated with movies

like Gladiator, Ben Hur and Brave Heart. When Rajamouli narrated the story of Magadheera, my joy knew no bounds. At that same time I was skeptical if I could pull it off. Rajamouli gave me lots of confidence, that we pulled off Yamaloka set so we can also achieve bigger things with Magadheera.

Visual effects were never used in such a large scale in Indian movies before. I had to co-ordinate with VFX team even before the shooting started as visual effects are to be seamlessly integrated into my work.

The film which made Ram Charan a big star is a result of great team work. The mind boggling visuals from the flashback sequence, the onscreen chemistry between Ram Charan and Kajal, especially in Panchadara Bomma song and the overall epic nature of the film have to be seen to be believed.

One of the best scenes in the film is the chariot race episode which was shot in a salt land near Dholavira, Gujarat. Scouting for locations was fun. We were looking for dry, open lands for the chariot race scene. We went to Gujarat to look for it. Out there Some passersby told us that there are white lands around 200 km away. We were thrilled to find salt lands in Dholavira. The vastness of the salt land perfectly complements the azure skies and in the midst of all that we see two warriors chasing a chariot.

We doubted whether horses could run on salt. While shooting, we needed a light weight vehicle to follow the horses. So we bought a Maruti van and cut off the top part and used it to mount the camera along with jimmy jib to shoot the race. We shot a part of Dheera Dheera song in Dholavira salt land. I wanted a dry

Important Films of Senthil as DOP

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tree in the backdrop and the art director got one from nowhere.

Rajamouli conceived 100 warriors episode first. We had to make the hero kill 100 warriors, but it had to look convincing. It would be believable if the hero fought with 4-5 people at a time. It struck us that we could use a passage to restrict the number of fighters. Then the conception of a bridge, a cliff and bhairava kona came into existence.

We created the kingdom of Uday Ghad on computer graphics but Developing it was a tedious process. We don't have the culture of arena fights in Indian history as it belongs to roman culture. Conceiving and shooting in that arena set was one of most cumbersome and satisfying experience.

There is a specialty in Panchadara Bomma song. Hero and heroine shouldn't touch each other, but the romance should be strong between them. It is one of the best songs we ever shot. We explored Golkonda in Sye and Yamadonga before. It only got bigger and better in Magadheera.

**Eega was the most audacious and experimental Telugu film in a long time and it's also a major triumph in cinematography. What were the Challenges in shooting Eega?**

Immediately after Magadheera, Rajamouli said we would do an experimental film—a digital movie on a small scale. We started the testing of digital cameras, but the idea was then put to rest. I got busy with another film. Rajamouli started the film with a foreign director of photography but they parted ways on account of creative differences. Then he called me & told me about the film.

Shooting a film with an imaginary fly is easier said than done. It was one of the toughest films I've shot. Later, when we began shooting, we felt the story had universal appeal and had the potential to become bigger. Not wanting to waste the idea, we developed it into its present form.

Eega is my fifth film with Rajamouli .He is a task master who will not settle for anything but the best. I feel honored to have worked on such good projects with him. We understand and respect each other's strengths and limitations.

In films such as Magadheera and

Arundathi films, actors were in the foreground and the CG effects in the background. Here, it was the reverse. It's easy to visualize a shot where the fly moves from one point to another but difficult to shoot. It was as though we started digging a mine not knowing what to expect. If a fly is on a table, however much you focus a lens on it, the lens is a mammoth object compared to the fly. So you require special lenses that can get as close to the fly as possible.

Arri, Canon 5D and Go-Pro cameras were used with probe lenses and macro lenses capable of extreme close-up shots. "Go-Pro is the smallest possible camera that offers close to professional resolution. A probe lens is tubular and needs to be handled carefully. A small jerk in my hand would result in a huge camera shake. Precision of shooting was put to the test," he says. Phantom cameras were used to capture extreme slow motion sequences. For Eega/Naan Ee , we shot certain sequences at more than 2000 frames/second.

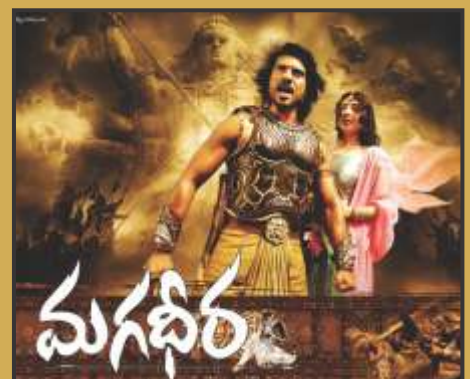
The film was a learning curve that involved both pain and pleasure. In photography language wide apertures of 2.8 or 4 are ideal for low light conditions. The probe lenses used on Eega had a minimum aperture of 8 or more, which called for more lighting especially for slow motion scenes. We had to light up an entire room with high intensity lights, which emitted a lot of heat.

Dummy houseflies were used in some scenes. But mostly I had to deal with vacant space since the fly was inserted later using computer graphics. Sudeep is one of the finest actors today. If Sudeep moved in a certain angle reacting to an imaginary fly, I had to follow his movements with my camera. It was crazy at first. For me A Bug's Life and Bee Movie were reference points, but Naan Ee was a new experiment for me . The pre-climax scene was particularly challenging. Apart from the two imaginary birds that were chasing an imaginary Ee, the sequence had to be shot in low light.

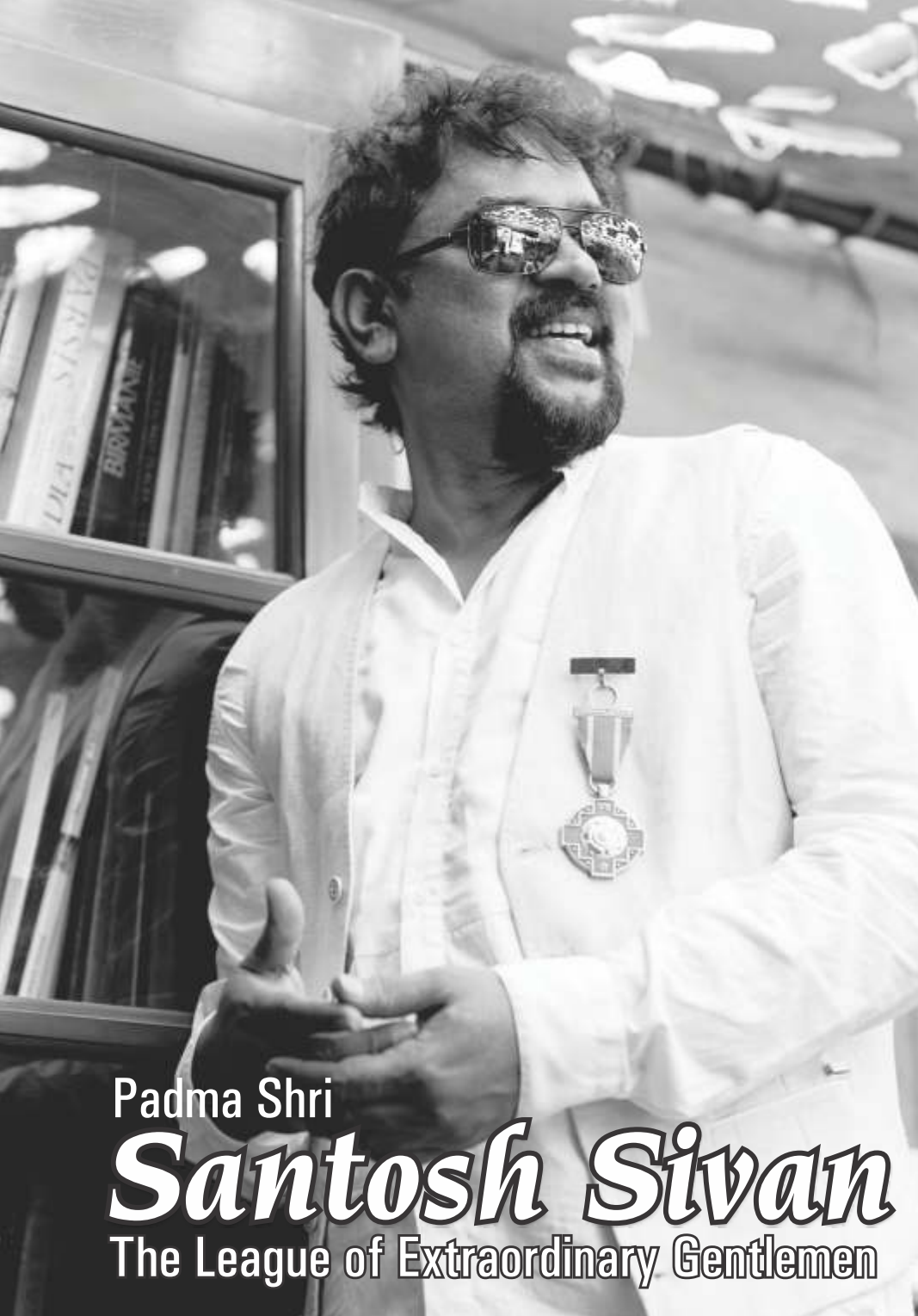
The graphics team was on the sets working alongside for each shot.

We researched on house flies.

We captured flies and photographed them using macro lenses so that the graphics team can design an appealing Eega/Ee. □□□







Padma Shri  
**Santosh Sivan**  
The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen

**What was your basic approach towards work when you first started as a cinematographer?**

Since I hadn't assisted any DOP in a film, I was just looking for an opportunity to film a feature. Back then, the script, money etc. Were not a real concern. I just wanted an opportunity to work as a cinematographer, just like a writer writes every day; my idea was to film every day, however less challenging it maybe. There are always opportunities where one can do something interesting. And if you are lucky, someone is going to see the film and offer

you another. Also later during film making, when you get along well with the director, you exchange ideas, recce locations and spend time talking about it. You try to figure out how the director sees the film and try to blend your ideas into the story and the source of the director's inspiration may be an incident from the past or an adaption or sometimes even a remake. Even now, whenever I start a film, it feels like my first one.

**Could you talk about some of your initial projects as a cinematographer?**

Before 'Raakh' I did a film titled 'Nidhiyude Katha' (Story of a Treasure). It was a Malayalam film for a critic turned director Vijayakrishnan. It was shot on 16mm. He asked me whom I had been assisting. This question is always put to a beginner. I had learnt a lot from my dad, and from all the movies I had seen. There are many DOPs such as Subruto Mitra, V K Murthy, Ashok Mehta, Vincent Master, KK Mahajan, Melli Irani, Marcus Bartley and a host of others from across the borders, like Nestor Almendros, Gordon Willis, Storroro, Greg Tolland, to name a few. One always learns from masters and from the films one sees, but I had not assisted anyone, and that always leaves a question mark for the director who is almost without a budget.

My first film for the critic was slow paced and full of metaphors. We had no budget and had to shoot the movie in four days with a shooting ratio of 1:2! We shot in a very misty terrain. It was rehearsed and the hours were long, but we got caressing shots filmed with magic skies and lanterns etc. Then Chitranjali studios, had acquired a new 16 mm BL Camera. But they didn't have facilities for a Blow-up to 35. For this we had to go to Mumbai AD LABS. The blow up print was quite good for a 16 to 35 blow-up; the process was just getting popular. And every blow up print was a revelation.

Manmohan Shetty screened the film for quite a few people in the industry. Ashok Mehta and Basu Bhattacharya were also present. I remember Ashok ji wanted to direct 'Moksh'. But thanks to all of them that I got to film 'Raakh' with Aditya. The movie turned out to be a very different experience for me. Actually we shot that film with very few lights, mostly car headlights, and a very small unit, with interesting actors like Aamir Khan, Pankaj Kapoor and Supriya Pathak. It was also Sreekar Prasad's debut as an editor. It was very interesting to be the part of a film where everything was being improvised. The whole film was shot with a Mitchell reflex and all the optical were done in camera. The film was very organic and so it was challenging to explore darkness and nights in Bombay.

**Tell us about the film 'Perumethuchan' for which you got National Award for the best cinematography.**

After 'Raakh', I got offers from Hindi films. But my dream was to shoot some black and white films and to shoot in Kerala. Shooting in Kerala was an obsession. Personally I believe that everything fleeting





is very beautiful, be it a magic sky or twilight or changing seasons. Hence I made it a point to shoot very fast as I love to capture a full scene just after it rains when there is a shiver of sunlight. My mother once said that I was shooting only action movies and that I had never won any award. I promised her I will do a film exclusively dedicated to her, and then happened 'Perumthacha'. It was a folk story scripted by M.T. Vasudevan Nair and the director Ajayan's first film. Budget wise it was the same story and we had to bring a period to life.

But the writer of the film told me that it was a dialogue oriented film. However, he did get curious when I told him that I was going to treat all faces like landscapes. The story was about a master craftsman who made beautiful statues of gods, all of them set to perfect measurements. Then his son comes along and does statues with slight imperfections, but garners more admiration! Eventually the father ends up killing the son. It's like the saying -- "No Beauty without blemish."

**I still remember that it had a very gold kind of look. How did you get it?**

In those days 85 gels were rare and expensive. We would buy glass, papers - orange, red and yellow- and try by fading them. On some occasions, dimmers were also used and normal tungsten 100 watts too. I also used to keep the lights moving.

**Give us some insight about your work with Mani Ratnam.**

I filmed 'Thalapathi' where I took a step forward with the golden look style. It was interesting as 'Thalapathi' was Mani's contemporary take on 'Karna', who is associated with the Sun God, and the central character Rajni Sir was called Surya. So the film is bathed in a golden hue, like the rising sun. I also liked the fact that Rajnikant sir's skin tone accepted this warm light nicely. It is always good to have cinematography caress a film with lights that sometimes subdue and some time reveal!

In a film like 'Roja' we started off without snow and terrace. We held back capturing the snowy hills and snow till the heroine first saw and experienced it. So it is great to plan it out and hold things back. A film is like a music piece. It should have interludes and rhythm in order to have its silences. Not that every shot has to be like that. Most of the times if one planned 100%, one might roughly get about 45-50% of what was actually planned. Though after the first five minutes, style alone cannot hold an audience. Mani Ratnam is someone who puts in a lot of hard work, and leads by example, and his passion is evident in his films. He likes to take risks and encourages innovations and ideas, in almost all the departments.

**You have shot numerous films for director Mani Ratnam. How did you prepare yourself so as not to repeat what you had already done?**

If you look at all the films I did for Mani Ratnam, you would notice that I had tried to

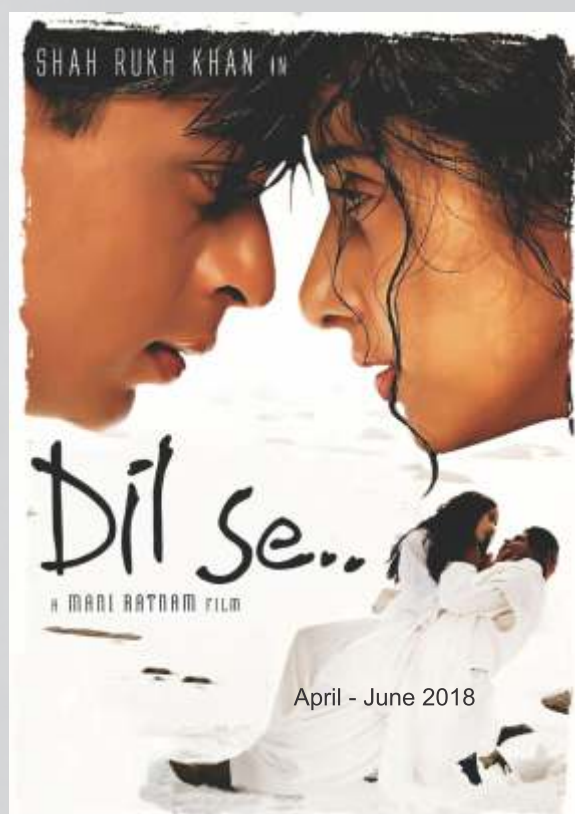
be different with each of them. 'Thalapathi' was very stylized; 'Iruvar' was almost like a tribute to ace cinematographer Subroto Mitra. It was like a black and white political world meeting the colorful world of the cinema industry. It also had this documentary like feel and the camera would move 360 degrees reveal in real time. So the challenges were immense choreographing, lengthy takes with 10,000 crowds, and magic skies...almost like the last over of a one day match, every day!

And 'Dil Se' was different. It was less subtle than 'Iruvar'. When I got a national award for 'Iruvar', Mani jokingly said that the next film should have a mass appeal. So whenever I used to look through the view finder, I would imagine I was sitting in a theater watching the movie unfold and go with pure wonder instinct. Even the "Chhaiya Chhaiya" song was shot as if it were the first time adventure journey of a kid.

**You directed 'Ashoka' which was also photographed by you. How did you manage to take care of these two departments simultaneously?**

I believe that a cinematographer can add scale to a film even without having the budget for it. And I also like being just next to the actors, and being in the midst of things, I guess I got used to that!

'Ashoka' was planned like a movie on the move: one schedule we did in Madhya Pradesh where we just had a kino, a small generator, a small crew, very small sets, and 4 days to film the war since I really didn't want to add fake scale with VFX which was imperfect then. 'Ashoka' was also about trying to film in different changing seasons



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as the character changed. It was also about a war, where you were not taking sides, as to who would win, unlike a regular war film, where you want one side desperately to win. This was about a king who gave up all war, and he feels all the dead bodies have their hands open and the moon and the setting sun witness it. In fact we waited for the moment and filmed it at such time. People say when you die the families mourn but it's also the sun and the moon witnessing the moment.

'The Terrorist' was done with a very small but a very committed crew and a few students. We shot in real rain, and adapted a still camera macro lens to film

most of it. Visually the best compliment was when it became the first Indian film at Sundance, and the American Society of Cinematographer magazine picked it up as one of most visual films, and reviewed it, and all this paved the way for John Malkovich to present the film and release it worldwide.

**You have also acted in a few films. What has motivated you to accept acting roles?**

I acted in only one film where I played Raja Ravi Verma. My grandmother used to teach at the Palace in Trivandrum. She would bring Raja Ravi Verma Calendars and tell us stories of these largely mythological subjects, and the stories about good and evil. She would bring visuals to life, like when the full moon came out, the girl in white appeared, etc. So we would look at the moon for long times, its reflections, and it would keep coming back in our dreams as well.

So I directed a film in Malayalam called 'Anandabhadram' wherein I experimented with good and evil etc, and also did a hugely popular song with the theme of a Raja Ravi Varma painting. So they thought I should play Raja Ravi Varma. Madhu Ambhat shot the film directed by Lenin Rajendran. This was when I was filming 'Ravan'. Filming it was fun and crazy enough because of them. All the actors were encouraging too. Some of them actually were pretty jealous because there were

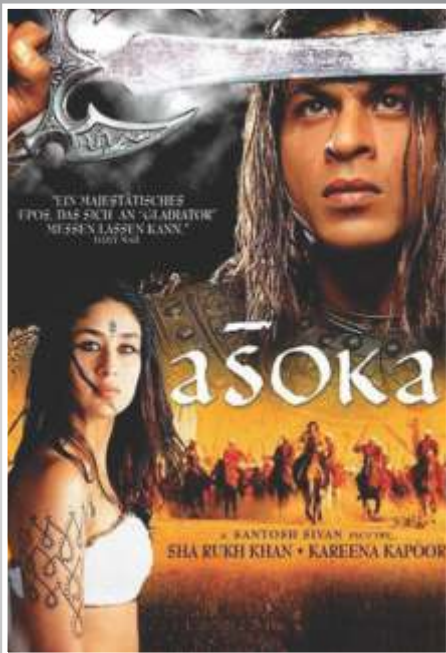
5 heroines!

**Did your experience of observing so many actors from behind the camera come handy to you as an actor?**

Anil Zankar who saw the film commented that he couldn't believe I would play so seriously! But I think the best reaction was from Buddhadev Dasgupta who said he would actually like to cast me!

**How different it was to shoot the film "Meenakshi - a tale of three cities" for a celebrity painter M. F. Hussain?**

He was just finishing a series of paintings on Kerala. He had seen some of my tourism films on Kerala, and he had also seen most of my films. During our meeting, he showed to me a huge painting of Ashoka on a horse with 5 heads, with Ashoka mounted like a warrior in the centre. This was a painting which he had painted after seeing the film. The experience was quite interesting and his son Owais Hussain was also there to bring the film together because the film was about his experiences in 3 cities, and was a blend of memories, art and years of experience. He was never afraid of using colors as he was truly romantic. In fact before he passed away, Owais was making a film that we were filming, and which he had scripted. And I remember talking to him in Dubai over phone, standing there in the green fields of Punjab.





**Tell us about your experience of working with Gurinder Chadha on 'Pride and Prejudice'?**

I liked working with her. Although she is Indian, she had a very western approach. As you know the film discusses how the Indians settled abroad follow Indian customs but there is also another side to it.

It is very interesting to place yourself in different types of scenarios. One of the best things about cinematography is that you get to travel and experience places. Visual language is universal!

**There are many people who look up to you as a cinematographer. What advice would you like to give them?**

I think it is traveling and seeing everything from your own sensibilities. I don't know how to put it, but in a creative space one plus one can't be two. In a relationship it can be 3 or 4, or as a farmer says-- You throw a handful of seeds, hundred saplings grow and yet every tree is uniquely different.

It is strange when someone compliments and compares one's work with a Hollywood film! One doesn't always have to imitate. There is so much in our culture that one can explore. I remember at the ASC club house meeting in Los Angeles how fascinated they were seeing the texture, decorative art, the play of the Sun, and the colors.

It was like different degrees of darkness, all projecting moving images from Meenakshi, Dil se, Vanaprastam, and Rudali.

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