

Interview with
Bishwadeep Chatterjee
on Sound Design of **Padmavat**



You already have worked with Sanjay Leela Bhansali. You know his mindset. What exactly did he expect from you as a sound designer. What was his primary expectation from you?

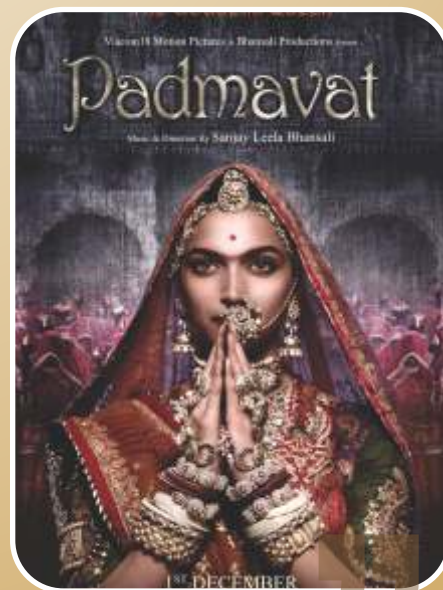
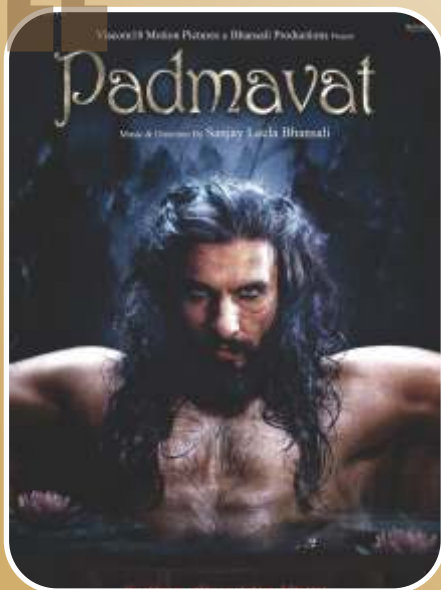
Knowing Sanjay and his approach, it's always a challenge and pleasure working with him. I have read Padmavat, but the

way Sanjay executed it did give us a different perspective about his view of the Padmavat saga.

The film starts with Jalaluddin Khilji's palace in Afghanistan. Their environment had to sound ominous with birds of prey like vultures, ravens and hawks circling above... the music also contributed to the

environment created. Then, by complete contrast, we reach Sinhala where Padmavati was originally from. It is vibrant with forest sounds, chirpy, a different kind of mystery... The Art/ Production Design department and DOP Sudeep Chatterjee did a fantastic job in making the forest look so real and convincing that it inspired us to create a soundscape that would

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complement the visuals and enhance the scale of the film in general. . There is a whole sequence about how she was hunting and how she tried to shoot a deer with an arrow and how it accidentally hits Rawal Ratan Singh and that's how they meet. From the open vibrant forest, we enter a dark cave where the Buddhist monks were tending to Ratan Singh's wounds...The atmosphere in the cave suddenly changes to a mysterious dark and damp environment with bats and critters squeaking and crawling around to the burning fire of the torches....water drops with long reverbs, the stylised chanting of the monks etc made the cave magical. When the king of Singhal sent out a search party to look for Ratan Singh, you could hear ethnic drums, the conch amidst people shouting.... Historically, I knew that there was an ancient connection with Kalinga (now Odisha), Singhal and Bali. I don't know where the tradition of blowing the conch originated, but we hear that a lot in Odisha, Bengal and Assam. It is also popular in present day Sri Lanka.

I wanted to go and record folk music in Rajasthan, but unfortunately there was some political disturbance regarding the film. Hence some folk musicians came over here and the music director, Sanchit sent me some stuff and we put those as a backdrop for Rajasthan in the film. If you go to the old forts and palaces of Rajasthan & eliminate the contemporary sounds from your mind, it won't be too hard to imagine what the place would



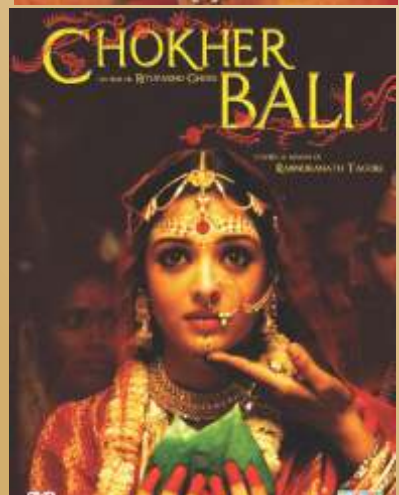
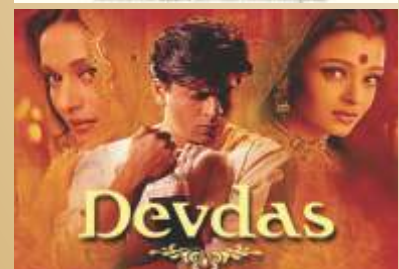
have sounded like centuries ago.

When you say that performance was taken to a different level, it was their dialogue which was given a little treatment in terms of sound?

See the performance happens on various level. The look is given by the DOP through lighting, production designer and costume guys add another dimension to the overall look. But we work a lot on

dialogue and what happens when we work on dialogues is that when we are cleaning the dialogues we are bringing in the consistency and if it is required we are only dubbing certain parts for certain reasons like audio quality, noise of the location most often because of the change in script/dialogues..etc.Treatment of the dialogue really important. You bring consistency, you modulate tones and pitch if required, you equalise, add reverbs and delays depending on the





environment in which they are shown- like in a cave, or a palace, or on the battlefield. You also treat the voices to create a dramatic effect or stylise a situation. I remember Dipika Padukone coming and telling me -“You know, you guys have enhanced our performance to another level. It sounds so international..” Boss...It was a huge compliment coming from one of the leading performers!! I like the kind of sound track that has grandeur, but without being too loud or brash.

Does it not affect the Lip sync?

Never...all this has no relation to Lip Sync... that would be either the editor's mistake or the actor's or sometimes ours if we are careless about shifting tracks. It is not just dialogue, the way you treat the dialogues, the kind of reverberation that you give, the kind of music that enhances the scene and the overall mix that contributes to the actors' personality. For example, the footsteps of a king should carry a certain authority. The ornaments, jewellery of a queen will give her another dimension. We may not necessarily see those things but we aurally associate these sounds with royalty, femininity etc. There is a continuous choreography going on even in sound....

Just like the cinematographer needs to give an actor make up to make him look nice on the screen with his lighting, we too give “make up” to their voices so that they cut through the sound design and music and yet not appear artificial. So if the voice sounds a little scratchy, we take care of those things. We use various softwares to get the desired effects....

Since there are war sequences in this particular film and earlier also you have done the sound effects for the war scenes. How was this film different from the earlier film?

In Bajirao Mastani there was more emphasis on battles and wars, the situation was different and Bajirao's weapon- the “Danpatta” was given special importance. This concept was borrowed from the ancient martial art form from Kerala - Kalarpettu. There were wars in Padmavat, the highlight was the confrontation between Rawal Ratan Singh and Alauddin Khilji. Music leads us into the scene but we gradually removed it and kept just the effects of the weapons, wind, sand and stylised 'whooshes'. Ranvir later told me that it sounded like music to his ears..!!

When you say stylising what else do you highlight to that?

Stylisation in sound is artificial

enhancements, deliberate distortions of certain sounds to create a dramatic effect.... What I do is that I try to layer those sounds. I process those sounds in such a way that the woosh sounds becomes a little exaggerated. Like most of the films that I work on, this too I have mixed in Dolby 'Atmos'. You can actually hear and feel the sword swinging above you. The sheen of the metallic sword is complimented with the exaggerated ring of that sword.... Today, with Dolby Atmos, we call it an 'Immersive Sound' experience. I love doing these things in most of my films.

There was a sandstorm sequence in the film, How did you treat that in terms of sound design?

We do have a library of the effects of sand storms but if you listen to them, they are not really great. But what you are doing is adding different layers of wind and each layer of wind is being treated so I like to equalize each layer of wind. I like to bring in the dust, you should feel the sand hitting your face. So you have those little spurts of whooshes and feel the grains of sand 'hitting your face'. If as a sound designer if you did not play around with that you are not utilising this lovely canvas and the technology. That's why I give a lot of credit to Sanjay Bhansali because he gives you the space and allows you to play. I wish more directors were like him who value rich sound design.

I remember in Bajirao you had two different kind of song mix, one for the screen and another for just the audio release. Did you also have two different versions of the song mix?

Song for both Bajirao and Padmavat were mixed beautifully by Tanay and that was for the album. What does happen is that I prefer to the surround mixes with the stems (individual tracks) they provide. So working for song for the films becomes a little more cinematic than musical. For example in a song if there is a backing vocal and in the film if you are showing the crowd singing in the foreground, it does not remain backing vocals anymore. You have to bring it up to add 'body' to the visuals.

Sometimes, I add more chorus singers to layer that track. Like in that Allaudin Khilji song, when they are banging the spear on to the floor and stamping their feet, I like to add those effects along with the rhythm. So you connect with the action on screen. It gives you the feeling and the depth. It connects you with the situation that is going on in

the film. For me if you are not doing that to a song, it is just like listening to just an audio album. It is as good as a DOP shooting a film by switching on the room tube lights ! It will be flat. It has to have dynamics.

In the film there are some emotional scenes where emotion is more important than what is going around. In those scenes, how did you treat the sound in terms of design ?

You need to be intelligent enough to know when to shut up. Even a sound of sweet bird can be so irritating in between the dialogue which is so intense. When I am talking to you there are so many sounds that are happening around us .Be it the air conditioner, footsteps in the corridor, some traffic sound etc but what our brain does is that it shuts out those sounds and allows us to concentrate only on each other's speech.

For the film we are doing that with machine. When there is an intense dialogue happening between two characters, it does not matter whether the door is opening or the wind is blowing or the birds are singing. I bring them down to a level where it is not absolutely silent but at the same time it does not interfere with the drama. Even the background score should remain "invisible", which means it could play with the emotions without distracting the viewer. The intelligent part of the scoring is to know when not to score...

When you were treating Alauddin Khalji dialogues, did you think of his characteristics to be also highlighted through sound treatment?

Sanjay has portrayed Alauddin Khilji as a very loud and ruthless character. Much of it comes from his acting and dialogue delivery. When he eats meat, you add a bone crunch, when he walks you exaggerate his foot falls, the swishing of his robes etc. All this gives this character a personality.

The scene where Jalaluddin's daughter Mehrunisa's wedding is organised, but on the night of the event, Alauddin forces himself on another woman. The witness is killed by Alauddin. When the knife hits the wall, it was a simple metallic sound of the knife hitting the wall. But I tried to dramatize it by giving by elongating the sound effect.

Can you comment on the sound design of the "JOHAR" sequence in the end of the film?

There was lot of music happening and a variety of sounds were recorded on the location. I used all of them. Frantic bells of the temple, roaring fire, chants, shankh, etc...The fire and water are important elements in Sanjay's film which he loves playing with. During the JOHAR sequence all these women are marching, a storm was created and that storm I wanted to take to another level. News had arrived that Rawal Ratan Singh is no more and they have to perform JOHAR. From here on till the very end, there was everything!!! Music, Bells, Conches, cries of women and soldiers shouting, the breaking down of the fort's doors, horses, chants and finally the roaring, hissing and crackling of the fire that engulfs her.

Feedback:



Important Films of Bishwadeep Chatterjee

