

TRANSITION; JOURNEY TRAVERSED

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One is encompassed by myriad emotions when suddenly asked to pause and dive into a retrospective.

Having been working incessantly for over two decades never have I really sat back and thought about the life gone by. This seems to be an apt platform for me to drift back in time and get in touch with what has evolved me into the person I am.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Well, after graduating in English Literature, at the cross roads of my life, I discovered a passion for journalism. Then destiny intervened in the form of my father, Mr. A. Sanjivi, a leading film editor, who asked me to spend my holidays at his editing room.

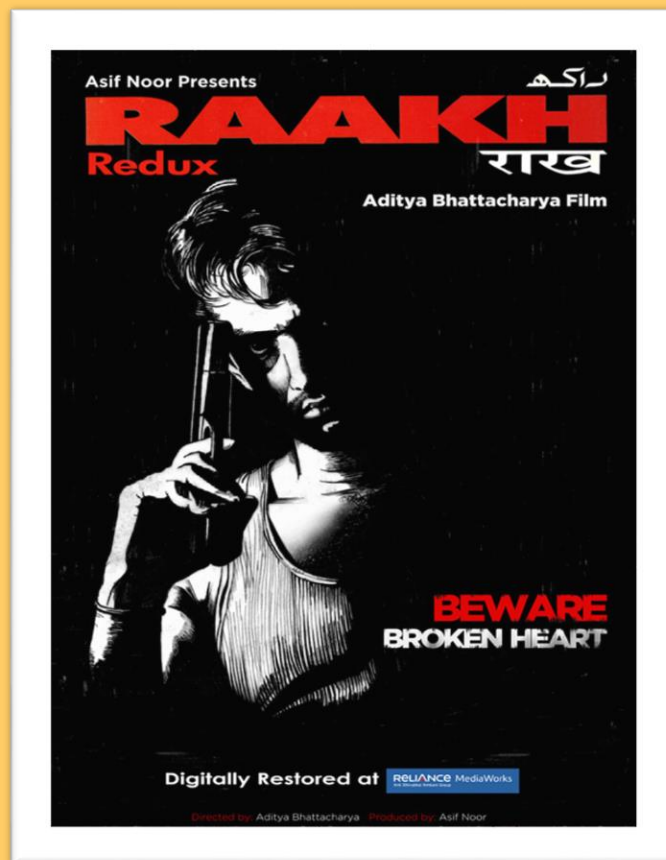
Consumed with apprehension I stepped into a world that I had no intention, being a part of.

Hailing from a film family I was well acquainted with different aspects of film making, but being an observer and actually being a part of the process is a different ball

game all together. Working under my father turned out to be a blessing in disguise, for the simple reason that he never imposed his ideas of creativity on me. He allowed me to be and grow into an individual of my own. This gave me ample freedom to hone my skills and develop a stamp of my creativity. And the entire experience got me hooked and ever since my holiday doesn't seem to have ended, as I got entwined into the intoxicating world of cinema.

The six years that followed were seeped in hard work, as the confines of the workplace almost doubled as home; I say this because, when you are stationed in a place for more than 18 to 20 hours a day one hardly knows the difference between time and space.

Alongside I grappled with insecurities that hound anyone who becomes a part of one of the most unpredictable professions ever and I was no exception. Thankfully I had a family who offered their unflinching support and hence I moved on undisturbed.



Fortunately as time passed by, I went on to becoming an independent editor with a Hindi feature film 'Raakh', which could rightfully be termed as the turning point in my career. What better way, than kick starting your career with a national award for your first independent feature film. With the award came recognition and a conspicuous change in people's attitude towards my work.

Slowly but surely I developed a definitive perspective towards the process of filmmaking. As various avenues started opening up, my interest in different kinds of cinema grew. I made a conscious effort to be a part of cinema that was high on quality and posed great challenges to my creative instincts. My decision to take chances with numerous low budget films which were creatively satisfying paid off.

Cinema has no boundaries and hence I remain insatiate, as always will be the case. A new film, a different character, a mind blowing perspective, the list is never ending, all of them infuse and rejuvenate my spirit and I am raring to go. The journey continues, as there really never is a destination.

THAT ENIGMA OF EDITING

My attempt to unravel the enigma behind editing is essentially why this page prevails. This endeavor springs from a persistent urge to share my experiences, specifically with upcoming young editors. Hence it gives me immense pleasure to delve into a topic that will always be a part and parcel of me.

Editing is a world of its own where a film could be reborn; it is at the editing table where a film takes actual shape and is infused with a comprehensive dimension.

Every editor would have his take on the craft, but by and large there are certain fundamental aspects that have become an integral part of editing. Slick editing is synonymous with pace and rhythm. Any work of editing

devoid of these two qualities will inevitably damage the comfortable flow of a film. A film's content and treatment determine the rhythm and pace of a film. One can arrive at the required rhythm and pace, by the compilation of the best possible combination of performances and expressions.

The selection of shots and their duration on screen is crucial to create the desired impact in the given scene. When you string various shots together while sustaining a certain emotional level you are invariably setting the momentum of the entire film.

The more seamless a film appears the better it has been edited. When a performer is doing a fabulous job, you cannot interrupt him or her with cuts, even though you may have the option to do so. If an actor is fabulous in a long uninterrupted take, the editor should not intervene. The cardinal rule is to strike a balance between the narrative pace and the performances.

Eventually it all boils down to a good sense of judgment. For example, if a shot in a film has a girl crying you can keep it on for 10, 20 or even 40 seconds, but as an editor you should be able to gauge the film's impact on the audience.

If one looks at the entire film scenario and the contributions by the various technicians involved, an editor's role is far more important than just being associated with the length of the film, as commonly believed. He in fact makes for the first audience of any film, providing the director with an objective insight.

This is possible because an editor may not be present during the shooting of a film and therefore he is able to adopt an unbiased approach towards the film. The rapport an editor shares with his director plays a pivotal role in determining the quality of his work. Once you understand your director, that's half the battle won. A

director's enthusiasm about his project is infectious and that motivates the crew to give in their best. Ideally an editor should be a part of the team, from the day the script is ready, so he has time to prepare even before the film reaches the editing table.

I have been lucky with the directors I have worked with. They have given me ample freedom and have seriously considered my suggestions. That is because they believe that my thoughts are in sync with theirs. That kind of confidence is important between a director and an editor.

Having spoken at length about the importance of a relationship shared between a director and an editor, the next obvious step would be to talk about the memorable experiences with the directors I have worked with.



SANTOSH SIVAN

It would be appropriate, to start off with Santosh Sivan, as my association with him goes all the way back to the film 'Raakh' which was his first as a cinematographer and mine as editor.

Santosh is a master of sudden ideas.

More than a planned shoot, he works by his instincts. Sparks fly when he gets behind the camera, both as a cinematographer and as a director.

'Terrorist' was tremendously visual and editing the film was sheer pleasure. Santosh's tendency to experiment brought out the best in me too.

Throughout, 'Terrorist' enticed innovation, like the use of tight close-ups, blank frames and still photographs as transitions for some of the scenes.

Usually, when you see blank frames u think there is something wrong. But we used them in such a way that they merged with the film. For instance when the girl realizes she is pregnant we use blank frames and the duration of the blank frames increased indicating the growth of the child.

As far as 'Asoka' is concerned, it was a tough film to edit.

Being a period film, Santosh's energy and imagination had to be more disciplined. Yet his stamp could be felt in every shot, like the removing of the sword, which had three different cuts.

The film's pace had to be advanced despite the philosophical and meditative underpinnings of the plot. To edit the battle scenes was particularly challenging as they were shot with six different cameras.

With whatever resources he had at his disposal, he did a stupendous job, and the film which must have cost about Rs. 8 crores ended up looking as if Rs. 30 crores had been spent on it. It will always remain a joy, being a part of his creative madness.



SHAJI KARUN

From a world of madness, now I move on into a world of silence, a world that belongs to Shaji Karun.

Shaji is basically soft spoken by nature and puts you in ease, which results in a conducive working atmosphere. He's well planned and very open to suggestions, which allows me a certain level of freedom with him. I am glad that I got such a fantastic opportunity to edit work of such high creative standards.

Shaji's films are a reflection of the man himself, they are multi layered and have a metaphysical approach. As in the case of 'Vanaprastham', his philosophical outlook and the metaphors had to be kept firmly intact. The use of the Kathakali art form was the film's triumph and extremely difficult to edit initially. We had to stick to the purity of Kathakali; we couldn't break the rules under the guise of cinematic license.

A Kathakali exponent sat in on the edit to see that we didn't go astray at any point. I had to work towards concising the Kathakali performance and weave the story around it, which had to be done with a lot of precision.

Shaji was very particular that they be a part of the narrative, and not just performance for performance's sake.

It was indeed a great challenge working on this project, which had adequate scope for me to prove my editing skills.



MANI RATHNAM

From one master craftsman to another, well I am talking about none other than Mani Rathnam himself.

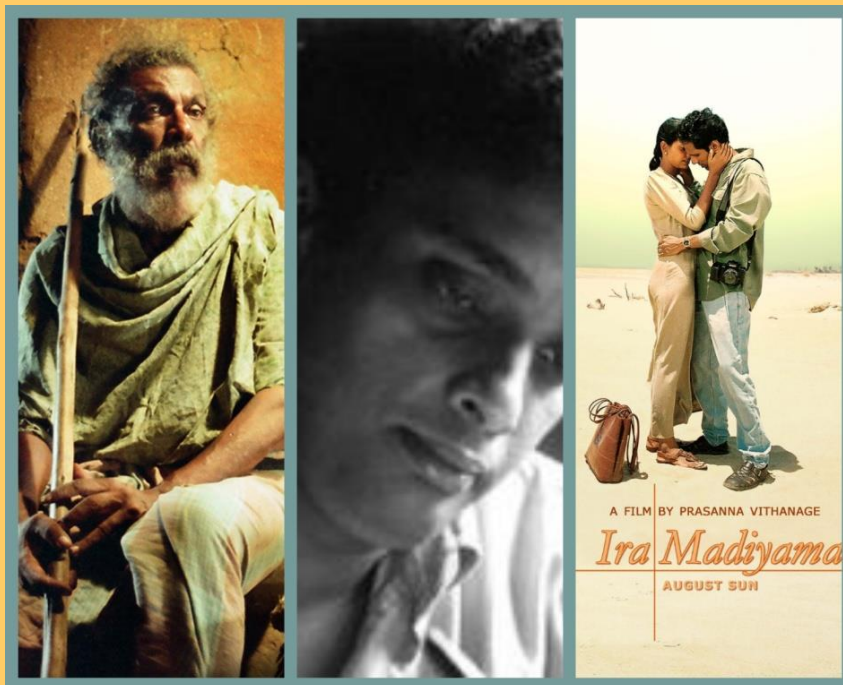
My association with him started with the Tamil film 'Alaipayudhe' and ever since we have found common ground.

He expects his editor to possess a certain level of understanding and sensitivity. He gives the editor considerable freedom and yet extracts what he wants as well. He encourages experimentation and yet ensures that we remain within, the set parameters of the script.

As far as 'Kannathil Muthamittal' is concerned, the editing was patterned towards conveying the emotional experience between a mother and her adopted child. The story was being told essentially from the child's

perspective; the editing had to be closer to the way a child would perceive the conditions around her. If the camera traveled through the war-torn areas, Mani Ratham was very clear that this had to be seen through the child's eyes. Instead of delving into the horror, we had to present how a child would see the senseless destruction.

The script, of course, was built on the child's responses, an aspect which evolved with the film as it was shot and edited. He was open to new ideas like the use of ramp work, which is speeding up of shots. Some of the shots in the song picturised on the school children were ramped, yes, but the speed was variegated at the editing stage.



PRASANNA VITHANAGE

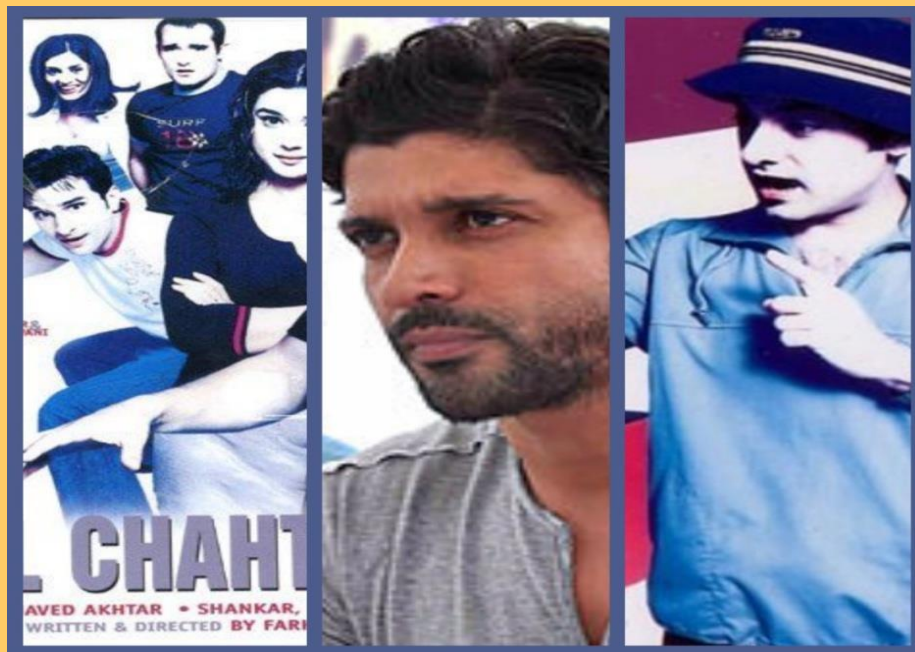
From here I move into a different milieu, with Prasanna Vithanage from Sri Lanka. He introduced me to a different kind of sensibility in film making.

I was absolutely excited about his fresh approach to cinema. The treatments of his films are primarily simplistic in nature and are always close to reality.

The first project we worked together was the film 'Death on a full moon day'. The film was stark and realistic. To make it more so, the director did not use any background music in the film. That was an entirely different experience for me, because as an editor you always have a certain assumption about the background score when you edit, but in this case I had to change the entire pattern of approach, which in turn brought about a novelty to my craft as well.

The next project with him was 'The August Sun'; posed a huge challenge due to its demanding structure. The film had 3 stories transpiring simultaneously, divest of a connective chord. Therefore the challenge was to sustain the pace of each story in a certain tandem, so that the audiences don't disconnect from any of them.

Working with this talented mind has undoubtedly enhanced my editing skills.



FARHAN AKHTAR

Once in a while, you feel a breath of fresh air, wafting into your life. This is precisely what I felt while working with Farhan Akhtar on 'Dil Chahta Hai'.

The film was a reflection of the man himself, young and energetic to the hilt. And hence the editing style followed suit infusing the film with electrifying energy. I was working with a director who was very clued into the youth's mindset and very clear about what he wanted to convey.

I had to get into the groove so to speak, for the smoothness of the dramatic sequences that he expected from me. I would sum it up as a joyride working with this talented young director.

EPILOGUE

Well each and every film and in turn every director I have worked with, has definitely made a difference to my career. And I owe it to all of them to have made me what I am.

Having edited cinema of almost all Indian languages, I have observed that language is not a barrier as the sentiments and emotions of all Indian films have a common thread running through them.

I must admit that I have a strong inclination towards offbeat films which are definitely more interesting and challenging. They are more intense, with not too many distractions like songs and fights. They generally revolve around a central theme.

Barring a few commercial films which tried to bridge the gap between art and commercial cinema, all other commercial ventures are more into fantasy.

Creativity should most definitely take precedence over technicality, but that doesn't mean one should be blind to the growth of technology.

I for instance started on a Moviola in which the film ran vertically and made a lot of noise.

In a short time I moved to the Steenbeck which made no noise and was easier to handle. Around 1995 I moved to the non-linear avid machine. The change has definitely enhanced the quality of my work.

At the end of the day, as in life, each one plays by their rules, and every editor sets his pace creating his rhythm and this one is mine.

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