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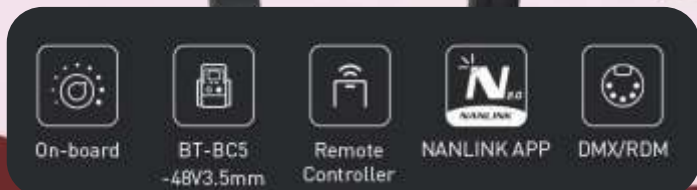
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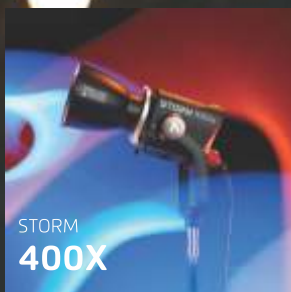
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P.G. Vinda  
M.D. Cinematica Expo

## From Lens to Legacy: How *P. G. Vinda & Cinematica Expo* Are Positioning India at the Centre of The Global Creative Economy

When P. G. Vinda picked up a camera in the early 2000s, he was already chasing innovation. His breakthrough project, *Grahanam* (2004), was one of the earliest digitally shot independent films in India, setting him apart as a cinematographer unafraid to experiment. Two decades later, his journey has expanded beyond cinematography into institution-building: the creation of Cinematica Expo Pvt. Ltd., a venture designed not

merely as a trade fair but as a global marketplace for cinema, technology, and creativity.

The Cinematica Expo 2024 edition drew more than 40,000 trade visitors, 109 exhibitors, and 95 speakers from over 10 countries, positioning Hyderabad as a new focal point in the global film-tech ecosystem. While the numbers reflect scale, what Vinda and his team are aiming for is something

larger: to place India firmly in the international creative economy valued at over \$3 trillion.

“Whether behind the lens or behind a platform, passion is what sustains creativity,” Vinda says. “Cinema is not just an art form, it’s an industry. And industries need ecosystems to thrive.”

### Hyderabad's Leap Into the Global Arena

India's film industry has long been prolific producing the largest number of feature films annually worldwide. Yet, for decades, the absence of a dedicated global-scale convention meant that much of Indian cinema remained fragmented when it came to international trade, collaboration, and technology adoption.

### That is what Cinematica Expo is attempting to solve.

Unlike traditional film expos which are either gear-focused (like NAB in Las Vegas) or market-driven (like Cannes and Berlinale), Cinematica positions itself as a hybrid: a festival, a trade fair, and an innovation summit rolled into one. It showcases the seven creative pillars of filmmaking, directing, writing, cinematography, editing, sound design, production design, and digital innovation while also hosting B2B markets, co-production forums, and technology demonstrations.

“Hyderabad is no longer just the centre of Telugu cinema,” says Executive Director Panja Shravan. “It is positioning itself as a global hub where art and commerce intersect.”

### The Wildfire Effect: Conversations that Travel

If Cinematica's trade numbers represent its backbone, its cultural programming provides its heartbeat.

In 2024, the Expo hosted the “Wildfire Conversations” series, a no-holds-barred dialogue between directors Sandeep Reddy Vanga (*Animal*, Kabir Singh) and Ram Gopal Varma, India's notorious rebel auteur. Their discussion on rebellion in storytelling, the necessity of risk-taking, and honesty on screen went viral almost overnight, garnering over one million YouTube views within days.



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#### HIGHLIGHTS 2025

- **Cinematic Innovations**  
Cutting-edge tech unveiled.
- **AI-Driven Film making**  
AI tools shaping the future of cinema.
- **High-Tech Film making**  
The next big leap.
- **Robotic Camera Gear**  
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# CINEMATICA - EXPO-2025 -

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Left to Right Names RamGopal Varma , Sandeepreddy Vanga , KK Senthil Kumar ,P.G. Vinda

“This session embodied the spirit of Cinematica,” Vinda notes. “Bold, and impossible to ignore. That’s what makes it different from any other industry platform it creates culture, not just commerce.”

#### **Betting on the Future: AI and Virtual Production**

One of Cinematica's strongest differentiators is its early bet on AI and Virtual Production (VP).

At the 2024 edition, attendees engaged with AI-powered previsualization systems, automated editing platforms, generative VFX pipelines, and LED volume workflows. Masterclasses debated how AI might shorten production schedules without eroding artistic integrity.

“AI is not a threat,” Vinda insists. “It is a multiplier of human imagination. The soul of cinema remains human; AI just gives us new canvases to imagine on.”

This approach has already given Cinematica an international footprint. Its roadshows in London, Dubai, and Singapore are dedicated to AI + Cinema, creating bridges between Indian storytelling and global technological ecosystems. In doing so, Cinematica is positioning Hyderabad as a thought leader in a domain often dominated by Hollywood and Europe.

#### **CINICA Creators Council: Building an Institution Beyond the Expo**

Perhaps the most ambitious aspect of the initiative is not the Expo itself,

but its permanent institutional arm: the CINICA Creators Council.

Set up as a Section 8 non-profit entity under Indian law, CINICA functions as a talent development and creative economy council. It aims to nurture the next generation of storytellers through script labs, mentorship programs, artist residencies, global talent exchanges, and policy dialogues.

“CINICA is where the soul of Cinematica lives,” says Shravan. “We want to ensure that students, researchers, and professionals don't just get access to tools but to networks and opportunities that sustain careers.”

In effect, while Cinematica Expo is the annual showcase, CINICA is the year-round incubator ensuring continuity, credibility, and scalability.

#### **A Marketplace with Global Comparisons**

What makes Cinematica Expo 2025 particularly significant is its expanded trade focus, designed to align with international benchmarks.

#### **The upcoming edition will feature:**

- International Co-Production Forums connecting Indian producers with European, Hollywood, and Asian counterparts.
- Film Financing Masterclasses featuring venture funds, studios, and global investment banks.
- Virtual Production & LED Volume Demos, showcasing workflows increasingly used in Hollywood blockbusters.
- Legal & IP Clinics helping creators navigate international contracts and copyright complexities.
- OTT Pitch Rooms & Sales Agent Lounges, facilitating direct access to buyers, curators, and distributors.
- Cinematica Awards 2025, recognising excellence across craft and technology.



Left to Right Names MV Raghu, Rasool,Sudheep Chatarjee ,P.G. Vinda, Venkat C Dilip





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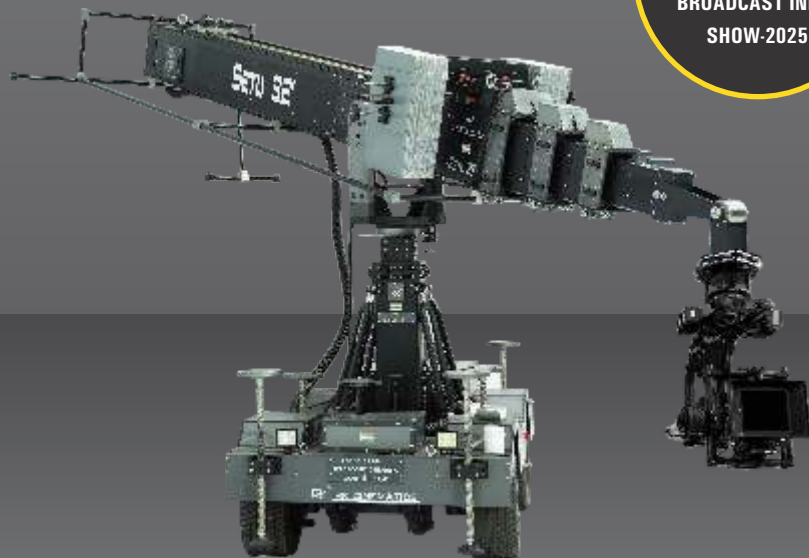
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This dual architecture artistic carnival + commercial trade fair positions Cinematica in the same league as International Cinema Expos and Film Festivals of Asia's fastest-growing creative market.

#### Hyderabad as a Global Headquarters

Cinematica's location is not incidental. Hyderabad, in Telangana, has already established itself as one of India's top film production hubs, boasting state-of-the-art studios, OTT-ready infrastructure, and a rich talent pool.

Now, with the government's increasing push towards AVGC-XR (Animation, VFX, Gaming, Comics, Extended Reality) sectors, the city is aligning policy incentives with global investment opportunities.

#### For Vinda, this alignment represents a long-term bet:

"Hyderabad can become to cinema what Bengaluru became to IT. We have the talent, the tradition, and now, with Cinematica, the platform."

#### Leadership in Tandem: Vinda and Panja

What makes Cinematica distinctive is the dual leadership lens.

**P. G. Vinda**, as a Founder & Managing Director, brings the artistic and visionary perspective, grounded in decades of cinematographic practice

and storytelling innovation.

**Panja Shravan**, as Executive Director, provides the strategic and commercial framework building global partnerships, structuring B2B marketplaces, and positioning Cinematica as a competitive international brand.

This combination mirrors the founder executive dynamic seen in successful global enterprises, vision paired with execution.

#### Why It Matters Globally

The global creative economy is currently valued at \$3 trillion, with film and AVGC sectors forming some of its fastest-growing components. Asia, in particular, is projected to drive over 40% of new creative industry revenues by 2030.

In this context, platforms like Cinematica are not just cultural festivals, they are economic catalysts. They enable cross-border co-productions, accelerate investment

**Panja Shravan**  
Executive Director,  
Cinematica Expo  
team@cinematicaexpo.com  
Mob.: 9000345922

flows, and ensure emerging economies like India are not just content producers but also innovation leaders.

#### Looking Ahead: Cinematica 2025 and Beyond

The November 2025 edition promises to be the largest yet. Alongside robotic camera systems, AI filmmaking hubs, and all-crafts pavilions, Cinematica Expo will introduce curated B2B networking nights, festival curator summits, and international student showcases.

As Vinda reflects on his journey from a small village in Telangana to becoming a global cinema entrepreneur the vision is clear:

"Cinema's future belongs not just to those who dream, but to those bold enough to build the platforms where those dreams can thrive."

#### Final Word

For global investors, distributors, and policymakers, Cinematica Expo & Cinica Creators Council together represents India's answer to Cannes, NAB, and SXSW rolled into one, but powered by Asia's fastest-growing content market.

**From lens to legacy, P. G. Vinda is not just capturing images anymore he is building an institution that may well define the future of cinema in the 21st century.**

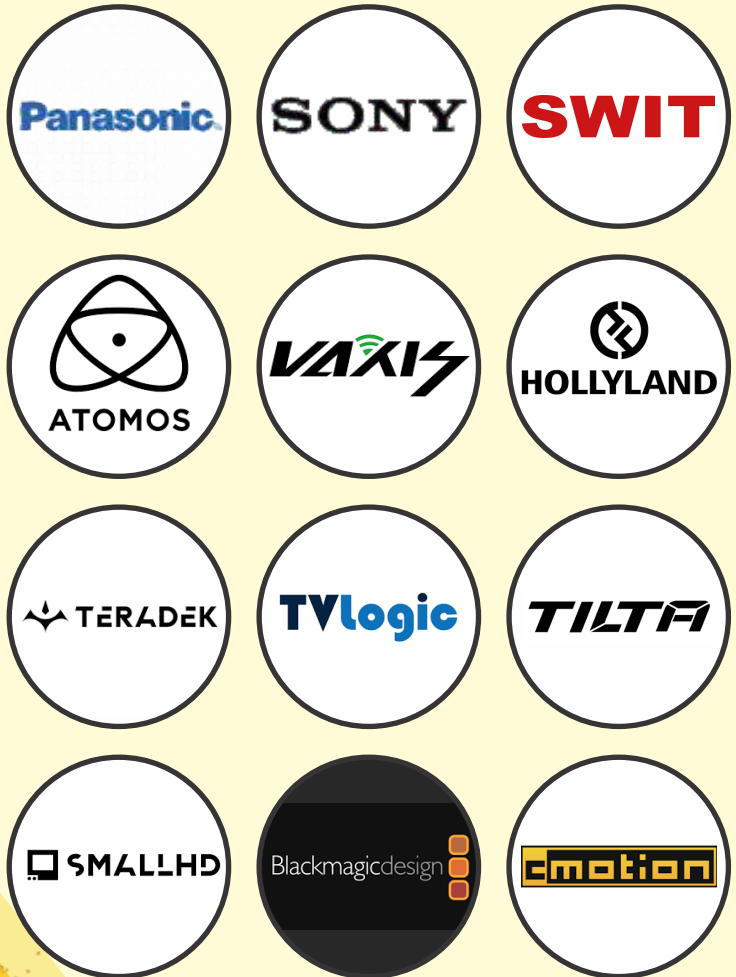






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cross section of music lovers including industrialists from across India would visit my store in Madras.

#### **How did you manage the challenges of importing equipment?**

India had no foreign exchange, so importing was tough. Customs duties were sometimes 300%, and there were no laws allowing fully built units (CBU). We brought equipment in knockdown condition—speakers, cabinets, and PCBs / composes separately—and assembled them in Chennai . The scarcity of foreign exchange was the primary reason suites were kept high to restrict consumer goods .

#### **What was the service landscape before you introduced Kino Flo?**

Around 1989-1990, during travels to Dubai and Singapore, I connected with Aiwa a respected brand before Sony (their senior associate company ) . There was no distribution channel in India, and customers who brought Aiwa products as baggage and couldn't get service due to customs regulations. I had the opportunity to to set up a few service centers for both brands which did very well because we had smart technicians who could quickly adapt to the technology.

#### **How did you expand your distribution portfolio?**

As India progressed, we distributed brands like Celestion and NAD for hi-fi, and later GoPro for India and Sri Lanka. GoPro is quite bulletproof, with a low defect rate, and we replaced faulty units under warranty if the need arose rarely . Around 20 plus years ago, through my Hollywood connections enabled quite a lot cousin Kish Sadhvani , an Academy award winner , we introduced Phantom high-speed cameras( slo-mo) like the Phantom Gold which generated significant revenue. We also brought in KinoFlo's fluorescent lighting technology around 1995-96, which was initially met with skepticism but grew rapidly once DOPs in Chennai recognized its amazing benefits for filmmaking. The other noteworthy products that we introduced to the Indian film-making community were the MRMC Bolt Robotics , Hydroflex underwater hosing for Arri 35 mm ( later added tech for current digital versions ) and a plethora of small tech speciality gadgets incl a

## **Interview with** ***Mr. Harish Samtani*** **on Completing 50 Years of "Stereovision"**

#### **How did you get into this business, primarily dealing with equipment?**

I was born in Bombay in 1957. My family came as refugees during the partition, and my father in his wisdom moved us to Madras in 1962. I was very fond of Western music from my convent school days at the India was a closed market at the time with tough customs regulations and no Internet , Spotify etc to download music from . Listening to current music was possible only on LP

records and cassette tape . I sensed an opportunity to combine passion and earn a living in those extremely tough times . StereoVision importing high-end hi-fi equipment like Nakamichi, Technics, Akai Sansui to name but a few . However prior to this since there was huge void for Western we sourced LP records from the UK mainly with the help of well wishers and good old postal department and began recording music for customers. Copyright wasn't really heard of at the time to be honest . A





# BI 2025

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Crash housing to keep a movie camera safe from a couple of feet during explosions. This has also been employed for industrial purposes.

### How did you move into the rental business?

About a year and a half before COVID, we saw the challenges with distribution. As India opened up, many manufacturers developed unreasonable demands for growth leading to the loss of exclusivity which we had earned through years of hard work and at a high cost coiled with parallel imports by other inscrupulous dealers started to affect our bottom line. The operating cost overall with high cost of money and low margins made distribution less viable. Fortunately, I had already put in a plan B in the form of a rental business (not putting all eggs in one basket) focusing on exclusive equipment as mentioned earlier.

### How did you handle challenges with brands like Arri?

We became Arri's distributor for lighting and cameras after another distributor was phased out. We had success, especially with digital cameras, but faced challenges with a new manager who was difficult to work with. This, combined with market changes, led us to let go of the Arri distributorship, though we did have good days with them. The list of top brands that we introduced to India is indeed very long. We are proud of this.

### How did the rental business protect your company?

The rental business shielded us from the unpredictability of international trade. With 132 employees at one point, we had significant bills to pay. By focusing on exclusive rental equipment, we maintained a steady revenue stream. We downsized to keep only essential staff, ensuring financial stability.

### What was the contribution of Anuj Samtani & Tania Samtani in maintaining your business?

Recognizing the evolving direction of our company, I held an in-depth discussion with Anuj Samtani, encouraging him to pursue a career in movie and advertisement filmmaking

rather than a traditional academic path. He eagerly embraced the opportunity and enrolled at Whistling Woods International in Mumbai in 2017. Over two years, the program honed his natural cinematography talents, setting the stage for an illustrious career. Today, Anuj is a highly sought-after Director of Photography (DoP) and director, collaborating with leading production houses like Dharma Productions on projects such as Call Me Bae (2024). He is also a prominent cinematographer for advertisements featuring global brands, including L'Oréal, McDonald's, and Samsung.

Renowned for his expertise in motion-controlled robotics and compelling storytelling, Anuj Samtani's portfolio spans web series, films, ad films, and music videos. His work on Masaba Masaba (2020) has been widely celebrated for its vibrant narrative, alongside other notable projects like Call Me Bae (2024) and Tribhuvan Mishra: CA Topper (2024). A Filmfare nominee for Tribhuvan Mishra: CA Topper and recognized by IMDb for his exceptional contributions, Anuj was honored as the Breakthrough Cinematographer of the Year at the 2024 Digital Studio Magazine Awards. Collaborating with top-tier brands such as Estée Lauder, Toyota, and Apple, he consistently pushes the boundaries of visual storytelling, tackling creative challenges with innovative flair.

Tania Samtani joined our family-run business in 2005 and has made significant contributions across critical areas, including administration, marketing, curation, and trade show



preparation. She played a pivotal role in business development, public relations initiatives, and overall company support, strengthening the organization's foundation.

In 2012, when the company secured distribution rights for GoPro in India and Sri Lanka, Tania expertly managed dealer relationships, imports, orders, logistics, and payment systems, ensuring seamless operations. She also developed and executed innovative marketing strategies, organized events and sponsorships, and boosted brand visibility through strategic social media campaigns and on-ground activations.

As a partner alongside me (Chairman), Tania has driven sustained growth through her hands-on involvement in both strategic planning and daily operations, significantly contributing to the business's ongoing success. □□□





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## Interview with **Madan Mohan Bakshi** Vice president - Association of Cine Equipment Services

“ *Current scenario of cine camera equipment rental industry trends in Bombay* ”

**How has the film industry's production landscape changed post-COVID, particularly in terms of market recovery and the types of projects being produced?**

Post-COVID, the film industry has seen a partial recovery, but it hasn't returned to its pre-COVID peak. Production has resumed, including web series, but the scale is reduced. Previously, the market saw releases of four significant films—two major and two smaller ones. Now, it's primarily two big films, with smaller films struggling to find a place.

In regions like Mumbai, the industry, particularly Hindi cinema, is experiencing a downturn, while Marathi and Gujarati cinema maintain a moderate output, producing around 40 films annually compared to Hindi cinema's drastic reduction from 200–300 to about 25 films per year.

**What is the current rental scenario for high-end cinema cameras and lenses (e.g., ARRI Alexa, RED, Sony Venice) in the Hindi film industry?**

The rental market for high-end cinema cameras and lenses is facing a crisis due to decreased demand, particularly in Hindi cinema. With fewer films being produced, the supply of equipment has increased four to five times, leading to intense competition among rental houses. This has driven prices to rock-bottom levels, as companies desperately seek bookings. For instance, Marathi and Gujarati cinema maintain moderate demand, but the overall volume is low, making it challenging for rental houses to remain profitable.

**How many rental houses for high-end cinema cameras and lenses operate in Mumbai, and how are they distributed?**

Mumbai has approximately 40–80 rental houses for cinema cameras and lenses. Around 40 are major players handling high-end equipment like ARRI Alexa, RED, and Sony Venice, accounting for the majority of the market. The remaining 40 smaller operators, with limited equipment, make up about 10% of the market.

**How effective is the service support for high-end cameras like ARRI Alexa and Sony Venice in Mumbai?**

Service support for high-end cameras in Mumbai is mixed. About 50% of issues can be resolved locally by ARRI or Sony service centers, but serious problems require sending equipment abroad, as local technicians are limited by component availability. Sony's service is relatively more affordable, with sensor replacements costing 6–7 lakhs compared to ARRI's 14–15 lakhs. Independent technicians in Mumbai and Chennai exist, but their ability to repair is constrained by restricted access to proprietary components, forcing reliance on official service centers.

**Why are filmmakers hesitant to invest in Blackmagic cameras despite their affordability and high-resolution capabilities (e.g., 12K, 17K)?**

Blackmagic cameras, while cost-effective and offering high resolutions like 12K or 17K, are less popular due to limited market demand and poor service support. Filmmakers prioritize equipment that guarantees rental bookings, and Blackmagic's cameras are not widely requested compared to ARRI or Sony.

Additionally, the lack of reliable service centers in Mumbai or Delhi discourages investment, as repairs are challenging. The high resolutions are also seen as excessive for current

industry needs, where 4K is sufficient, making Blackmagic less practical for rental houses.

**Why did Cooke Optics, known for premium lenses, introduce the more affordable SP3 series?**

Cooke Optics introduced the SP3 series to tap into the growing low-end market, where volume and demand are higher. Unlike their premium S7 and S8 lenses, the SP3 targets budget-conscious filmmakers using cameras like Sony's Burano, FX3, or Canon models. The rise of digital cinema blurred the lines between professional and consumer-grade equipment, prompting Cooke to compete with affordable lenses from Chinese manufacturers like DZOFilm and Laowa. However, the SP3 lacks the quality of higher-end lenses and does not offer autofocus, limiting its appeal in some contexts.

**How do anamorphic lenses function in the digital era compared to the film era, and why are they still used?**

In the digital era, anamorphic lenses compress images similarly to the film era, using ratios like 1.3x, 1.6x, or 2x, which are then decompressed in post-production. Unlike film, where anamorphic lenses created a CinemaScope look for theatrical grandeur, digital sensors offer a 16:9 ratio, making anamorphic less essential for widescreen. However, DPs use anamorphic lenses for their aesthetic qualities, like oval bokeh and slight distortion, which provide a cinematic feel. The choice of compression ratio (e.g., 1.3x for 16:9 sensors vs. 2x for 4:3) depends on desired resolution and sensor coverage, but the variety of ratios confuses DPs.

**Feedback: Madan Mohan Bakshi**  
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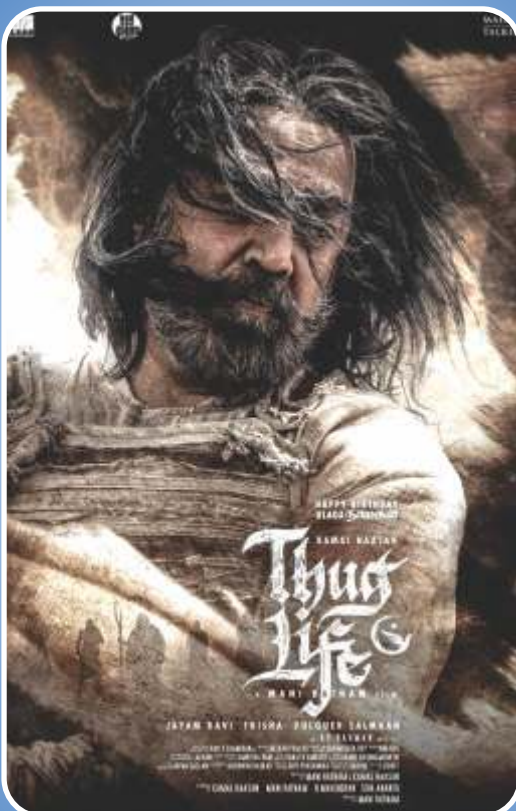
Interview with DOP

# Ravi K. Chandran

On Shooting **THUG LIFE**



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When *Thug Life* begins, it features a black-and-white section, followed by the rest of the film in color. Was the choice to use black-and-white yours, or was it Mani Ratnam's decision? Were there other options considered, such as incorporating a color tint, a warmer look, or a different visual style to achieve a similar effect?

Initially, we hadn't planned to use black-and-white for the scene. However, during the editing process, Mani Ratnam sir felt it might work well and suggested we try it. After reviewing the edit, he believed black-and-white perfectly suited the scene's mood. I was initially hesitant because the sequence wasn't shot with black-and-white in mind, like a classic monochrome style. It was filmed more like an action sequence, with a different visual approach. Had we planned for black-and-white from the start, I would have approached the cinematography differently, likely using more contrasty lighting to enhance the effect. During the color grading process, we experimented with adding a slightly grainy texture to evoke a vintage feel, but we ultimately decided the grain didn't work. Instead, we opted for a softer, less harsh contrast, inspired by the look of older films, to balance the black-and-white aesthetic.

The location for the black-and-white sequence in *Thug Life* was striking. How did you select that location





The location for the black-and-white sequence in *Thug Life* isn't a typical filming site. It was recommended to us, and after visiting, we found it perfect despite its challenges. The site is Pachaiyappa's School in Chennai, an old building in a bustling market area with narrow lanes. One section of the building is partially dilapidated, adding to its unique character.

Logistically, it was tough. There was no space to park our generators nearby, so we used a small ground across the street to station them, along with the actors' vans. We had to run power lines from there to the third and fourth floors of the building. Because of the distance of power line, we couldn't use heavy lights. Additionally, the action sequence required cameras to move freely, so we rigged all the lights on the terrace, directing them inward to illuminate the interior scenes effectively.

**Thug Life features several dynamic action sequences, including one set in a desert area and another involving a car chase. Could you discuss how you approached shooting and lighting these action sequences?**

In many South Indian action films, Phantom cameras are commonly used

for high-frame-rate shots, which can complicate a cinematographer's work. These cameras require lot of extra heavy lights to compensate for exposure, especially when capturing sequences at around 1,000 frames per second. This was a significant challenge for the action sequences in *Thug Life*, as we also needed to move around

quickly to keep up with the dynamic pacing. Ultimately, we decided to shoot many of the road-based action scenes, including the car chases, without heavy lighting whenever possible. Additionally, several car sequences were filmed against a green screen to allow greater flexibility in post-production.

Because there were many people inside the car, you couldn't move the camera very freely. Additionally, shooting on the main roads, like in the Red Fort area, posed challenges. So, we filmed the major action sequences without actors present, capturing only a few shots with actors there. The rest of the action was shot inside the studio. First, we shot the outdoor scenes, then we shot the interior action shots later. This allowed me to use the outdoor footage as a lighting reference for the interior shots, ensuring the lighting matched.

For example, when we visited Rajasthan, it was extremely hot, and the sunlight was intensely blinding, so I initially graded it to reflect that. However, Mani Ratnam sir felt that, because of the actor, the scenes needed more warmth to avoid looking too grim. Therefore, we adjusted the







grading in post-production to incorporate a warmer tone. Additionally, we shot close-ups in the morning or late evening to capture the magic light.

**Could you also discuss other train station action sequences?**

The shoot was somewhat challenging because the scene needed to be dark and moody. We used a Phantom camera, requiring lighting tailored for it, along with flicker-free HMI lights. We occasionally shot at 500 frames per second. Although there were bulb sources, their exposure wasn't sufficient to appear as a natural light source, so we had to light the

scene slightly unnaturally. At the same time, we ensured the lighting maintained a dramatic effect.

**How did you light the house interior with visible practical lights? Did you balance a stylized look for visual appeal with realistic source lighting, or prioritize aesthetics over realism?**

When I work on a film, I first consider the type of film we are making. If it includes songs, dances, and fight scenes, it's a commercial film. In such cases, we need to create a believable yet stylized world, not one that is entirely realistic. The situations in these films are not realistic, so we design

lighting that appears somewhat realistic while also being stylized. If the look is too realistic, it risks becoming boring.

**In some sequences, I noticed pigeons flying and fluttering during the car chase. How did the idea of incorporating pigeons into that car chase sequence come about?**

We noticed many pigeons in the Red Fort area and decided to incorporate an action sequence there. After obtaining permission to shoot in that location, we filmed a car chase where the vehicle topples amidst pigeons flying, creating a dramatic visual effect. These shots looked striking as we captured them on a real location.

**Did you encounter any challenges while shooting in the snowy area and other sequences like fighting on the top of house ?**

We filmed the snow sequences in Serbia, where the crew is highly experienced in handling winter shoots. Their first assistant camera team was exceptionally skilled, ensuring all equipment, including lenses, was properly heated and maintained to prevent moisture issues. As a result, we faced no significant challenges.





Lighting the night terrorist fight sequence was particularly challenging due to the constrained set. Ideally, we needed a larger studio with greater ceiling height, but due to the artists' scheduling constraints, we were offered a smaller set. To replicate the depth of the original location, the set was constructed with a terrace elevated on a 10-foot platform, with additional steps leading to a fighting area, reaching a total height of 25 feet or maybe more. This brought us close to the studio's "Tarapa", severely limiting lighting placement.

To manage the lighting, I had to turn off several lights, as they were positioned very close to the characters, and we used green cloth to cover them. Additionally, to achieve realistic lighting while frequently using a high-speed Phantom camera, Part of the sequence was filmed in an open area at the actual location, but most of it was shot inside a studio. I had to light the studio set to match the lighting of the location shoot, ensuring seamless matching. It is impossible to distinguish between the real location and the set. Additionally, I avoided using the typical backlighting technique to achieve a unique look.



To maintain a dark, moody aesthetic, I relied primarily on a single light source for the action sequence. As the fight camera moved, we used dimmers to adjust light levels dynamically. When the camera shifted from a backlit angle to a frontal angle, we dimmed the backlight and other lights to maintain consistent three-quarter lighting throughout the scene. This required extensive dimmer work to

manipulate the lighting precisely as the camera moved.

**Did you have a specific choice of lenses and camera to shoot this particular film.**

We filmed the story up to the point where Kamal Haasan's falls from the cliffs, using anamorphic Cooke lenses. I particularly appreciate the large format (LF) because it offers a wider field of







view and better depth of field (DOF). These lenses enhance facial skin tones beautifully. I used wide-angle close-ups extensively as a stylistic choice in the film. When the camera is positioned very close to the actor, I also employed a 30mm macro lens for certain shots.

For the second half of the film, I switched to spherical Cooke S8/I lenses, which deliver exceptional sharpness. The entire film was shot at T4.0 or T4.5 to maintain a consistent depth of field, striking a sweet spot for these lenses. This aperture ensures the right amount of background fall-off without being excessive. Shooting at T1.4, for instance, would blur the background too much, creating a distracting effect. To have some background detail visible,

I avoided using telephoto lenses excessively.

**There are sequences in which a lot of handheld camera movement is there, particularly the seaside area where this girl and this boy are discussing.**

The sequence was filmed by Steadicam operator Gandhi in Chennai. It was his first time working with me, but he performed exceptionally well.

When Kamal Haasan is released from jail in the rain, we nearly packed up because it was late—around 6:30 PM—and growing dark. Despite the challenges, we proceeded, covering the Steadicam to protect it as the operator needed to walk backward for the shot.

The sequence took seven or eight retakes in the natural rain and rapidly falling light levels. To maintain visibility, we used a single tube light held above the camera to create a basic highlight. We provided umbrellas to the actors and successfully captured the shot.

**As a cinematographer, you collaborate closely with the art director and costume designer. What instructions did you provide to ensure smooth collaboration and to help them understand your requirements?**

Our art director, Sharmishta Roy, and costume designers, Eka Lakhani and Amritha Ram, collaborated closely with me. We met multiple times to finalize the color palettes and overall look required for the film. Sharmishta, with her extensive experience from numerous films, understands the size and scale of production and is meticulous about the details in her work. She has a deep knowledge of set properties and character studies, thoroughly analyzing the script to ensure no last-minute adjustments are needed. She proactively asks detailed questions to clarify all aspects of the design.

When working with a highly skilled team, including an exceptional art director and costume designer, more than 80% of the challenges are resolved. This allows us to focus primarily on the director's vision and shot composition. Mani Ratnam, for instance, is very particular about







avoiding jarring colors and is exceptionally sharp in noticing any inconsistencies.

**Regarding color correction, which is a critical aspect for cinematographers, are there any specific details you'd like to share about the color correction process for this film?**

For the color correction, I collaborated with Ashirwad Hadkar. First we flew him to Chennai to see the footage. We screened the film with Mani Ratnam sir, sharing references for the desired looks in specific scenes. I provided Ashirwad with detailed references to guide the process. Once the initial corrected version was ready, I reviewed it before presenting it to Mani Ratnam sir. The result was stunning—Ashirwad lowered the midtones, creating a moodier, more contrasty, & highly cinematic look with a slightly colder tone, resembling an international or Hollywood aesthetic.

However, when Mani Ratnam sir reviewed it, he felt the look was too dark for the story. He wanted the first half to reflect happiness, with songs and a vibrant feel, while gradually introducing the colder look in the second half. Accordingly, we adjusted the color grade: the first half was made more saturated, warmer, & brighter with enhanced shadow detail, while the second half adopted a more crushed, colder aesthetic to suit the narrative's progression.

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## Interview with DOP *Debojeet Ray* on Shooting Kesari Chapter 2

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This is a significant and ambitious project based on the history of Jallianwala Bagh, a well-known event in India's freedom struggle. How did you become involved in executing this ambitious project?

Thank you for calling it ambitious — it truly is. As a cinematographer, I was drawn to the project because Jallianwala Bagh is not just an event in history, it is an emotional scar and a turning point in India's freedom struggle. When I was approached for Kesari Chapter 2, I saw it as an opportunity to visually interpret that history with honesty and intensity.

This film has been one of the most time-consuming and immersive journeys of my career — I devoted myself completely to it. My involvement began when one of the senior producer at Dharma Productions, reached out with the idea of a courtroom drama and asked if I'd be interested in shooting it. They were already familiar with my work on Meenakshi Sundareswar and felt I could bring something distinct to this story.

Courtroom dramas usually have a limited visual scope, but what drew me in was director Karan Singh Tyagi's vision. He had a deeply visual approach to



storytelling and constantly challenged me to push beyond the conventional grammar of the genre.

My involvement came naturally because I've always been interested in stories rooted in India's past, especially ones that demand a cinematic scale but also sensitivity. The director and I had long conversations about how to bring authenticity to the screen — how light, shadows, and framing could make audiences feel the weight of that moment rather than just watch it.

In a way, the project chose me as much as I chose it. It was impossible to turn away from the responsibility of telling this story with the dignity and power it deserves.

**Is the opening sequence where the murder and firing take place a real location or a set?**

We transformed a CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) training ground into the setting for one of the film's most intense sequences. To recreate the period atmosphere, we built a large wall and even added elements like a temple, shaping the space into something that felt authentic to the era.

A key construction was the "well," which carries deep symbolic and emotional weight in the story. For practicality, we built it in two parts. The first was a shallow well, about four feet deep, used for wide shots of people leaping in. Since we couldn't capture the interior action from that structure, we created a second, slightly deeper version designed for interior shots WHICH WAS constructed as 180-degree structures instead of complete circle, giving us camera flexibility while still preserving the illusion of depth and continuity.

The greatest challenge came during the FOUR-day shoot of the firing and running sequences. Continuity of light was critical, as these were consecutive story moments but shot over multiple days with a partial crowd. To manage this, we scheduled the extras strategically while relying heavily on large-scale lighting control. I used five to six industrial cranes and 60-by-40-foot scrim frames to diffuse and control the harsh top light across a 120-foot area.

We were fortunate to shoot in December 2023, when the sun's slightly angled position gave us a natural backlight — something I leaned into for both dramatic and visual impact. To achieve consistent coverage, I positioned two cranes parallel to each other, one inside the ground and another outside, ensuring we could maintain continuity and scale without compromising the emotional intensity of the sequence.

In the end, the combination of practical builds, controlled lighting, and strategic scheduling helped us bring one of the most challenging and emotionally charged chapters of the film to life — with both scale and sensitivity.

**Comment on the shot where people are repeatedly falling in a dark, underexposed scene with minimal lighting, highlighting only one face.**

In this sequence, we deliberately used the crowd as both a physical and emotional barrier. The boy is partially hidden within the throng, obscured from his mother's sight, which creates a



powerful sense of detachment. In a context where the mother-child bond carries immense emotional weight — this separation becomes even more poignant.

The lighting was kept dark and underexposed, with only minimal highlights. Most faces dissolve into shadow, emphasizing anonymity and suffocation, while one face is deliberately illuminated as a point of emotional focus. This contrast reflects the larger tragedy: it isn't just a faceless crowd falling into darkness, but individuals — sons, daughters, mothers — each carrying their own story.

By combining concealment, isolation, and selective illumination, the scene heightens the emotional distance between mother and child while anchoring the audience to a single human moment. It transforms chaos into intimacy, amplifying the tragedy of separation within collective suffering.





**In the scenes featuring Akshay Kumar, who wears glasses throughout most of the shoot, managing light reflections on his glasses must have been challenging, especially since they are real glasses. How did you address this issue?**

Yes, that was definitely something we had to be mindful of. The goal was always to keep the glasses natural to his character while ensuring they didn't distract from his performance or the drama of the scene.

For the courtroom sequences, I positioned most of the key lights outside the windows to create a motivated, realistic source of light while keeping direct glare off the glasses. To add fill, I carefully placed the lights just above his eye line, so they never bounced back into the lens. In certain cases, we brought thermocol sheets close to his face for a soft, controlled bounce that gave us the subtle fill we needed without reflections.

With Madhavan, it was less complicated because of the way his glasses naturally sat on his face — he often looked slightly over them, which reduced reflections. To complement that, I used white cloth on the floor to bounce soft, even light upward, which gave a gentle fill without adding any unwanted highlights.

In the end, it was about striking a balance between technical precision and

storytelling needs. Once we understood how the glasses behaved on camera, the process became intuitive, and the audience could stay fully immersed in the performances rather than the reflections.

**Discuss the lighting design for the three courtroom sequences, particularly the use of patches or shafts of light in the final scene where Akshay Kumar is arguing, and explain how you approached the lighting in relation to the story's seasonal or weather context.**

When designing the lighting for the courtroom sequences, my first step was to analyze the script in context — especially the season and atmosphere. For instance, the Jallianwala Bagh incident occurs in April, during the peak of summer, but instead of leaning into bright, warm tones, I chose a more desaturated palette. This helped avoid overemphasizing the season and kept the focus on the emotional resonance of the event.

The courtroom, however, offered greater flexibility since the case stretched over more than a year. Here, my priority was mood and emotional progression rather than seasonal realism. In the opening sequence, where Ananya enters and exchanges lighthearted banter with Atul Kumar, I used a neutral, balanced scheme — neither distinctly warm nor cool. This

ambiguity kept the emphasis on the narrative weight rather than tying the scene to a fixed time of year.

As the story deepens, the lighting reflects the courtroom's role as a battleground for justice. When Madhavan enters, the energy shifts, so I transitioned into cooler tones, adjusting color temperature to create an atmosphere of intensity and foreboding. This change also foreshadowed the emotional conflict and the strain that C. Sankaran Nair would face — visually translating the attack on his life and ideals.

Toward the climax, when Akshay Kumar argues against Dyer, I introduced shafts of light to heighten the drama. One shaft cut across the courtroom to symbolize hope — “a light at the end of the tunnel” — as the opposing side began to lose ground. At the same time, I allowed a subtle glare from the window side, an intentional imperfection that added unease and tension to the moment. When MR.Akshay, dressed in white, steps forward, he is isolated in a focused patch of light, visually separating him from the rest of the room. This



emphasis not only underlined his pivotal role but also gave the sequence a sense of transcendence.

**In the outdoor lawn sequence where the fire is burning and the character is reading a letter, discuss the source lighting and how it was designed to enhance the scene.**

In the outdoor lawn sequence, the fire itself became the primary source of light — both practically and emotionally. I wanted it to feel like the entire scene was being illuminated by that single, living element, so the flames weren't just atmospheric, they were central to the design. The letter being read carried immense narrative weight, and I felt the fire's warmth and movement could echo that intensity.

The close-up of the eyes reflecting the flames was a deliberate choice — it created an intimacy and immediacy that no artificial setup could replicate. By letting the fire serve as both a practical source and a metaphorical one, the lighting amplified the drama without calling attention to itself, keeping the audience immersed in the emotion of the moment.

**What were the challenging moments during the film's shoot when you needed to pause and rethink your approach?**

Challenges arose almost every day on this film — that's the nature of filmmaking. No matter how detailed the shot lists were on paper, the reality on set often forced me to pause, rethink, and adapt. But I see those moments less as setbacks and more as opportunities to find stronger visual solutions.

One memorable instance was during the courtroom sequence featuring Martha Stevens, the woman accused of falsely alleging rape. That morning, I arrived early, as I often do to give myself space to observe and think creatively. I noticed a lone worker quietly cleaning inside the witness box, and something about the way he was framed in that curved space immediately struck me. It suggested isolation, entrapment, and vulnerability.

Inspired by that, I reimagined Martha's scene. We placed her in the



witness box with a downward posture, and I chose a low-angle framing that emphasized the curvature of the box, almost as though it was closing in on her. This small but instinctive adjustment transformed the shot into a defining image of her character — visually reinforcing her guilt and fragility without losing emotional authenticity.

That moment reminded me why staying open on set is so important. Careful planning gives you a foundation, but the most powerful images often emerge when you pause, respond to your surroundings, and let instinct guide your choices.

**Discuss the special effects used in the film, particularly how you collaborated with the VFX supervisor to achieve them.**

The film relied heavily on VFX to expand its world beyond what we physically built — from towering walls to entire architectural backdrops. My focus was always on making sure these digital extensions felt invisible to the audience. To achieve that, I collaborated closely with our VFX supervisor, Vinay Chowpal[Future Works], providing plates

with carefully controlled lighting so the CGI recreations could blend seamlessly with what we shot on set. Also, a great help from DI colorist Tushar Desai [Future Works].

The railway station sequence was perhaps the most challenging. We filmed at Rewari near Delhi, but working with real trains was simply not feasible. So, we built only the essentials — the station gate, a short wall extension — and let the rest come alive through VFX. On set, something as simple as an apple box became a stand-in to guide the actors' movements, while the trains and the entire station environment were later crafted digitally.

Even in moments where sequences were cut from the final film, we had explored extensive VFX variations to bring authenticity to that world. What mattered most was the constant dialogue with Vinay and his team — aligning physical lighting with digital design so that when the two came together, the result felt like a single, cohesive reality rather than two separate worlds stitched together.

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Interview with

# *Mr. Anant Roongta*

Managing Director, Famous Studios





**AnantRoongta, a third generation entrepreneur at Famous Studios, is taking forth the 75 year legacy set by his Grandfather and Father. From an early age, Anant has closely witnessed content manifestations in the audio-visual industry. He has nurtured his skill set to manage the operations, strategy and development of Famous Studios.**

**Anant has maintained a strong focus towards introducing innovative technologies to add new age relevance to offerings at Famous Studios. He has spearheaded new service offerings at the studio such as visual engineering, virtual production and co-working spaces among many others. He is dedicatedly working towards expanding their creative, visual effects and content production facilities. Under his leadership, Famous Studios has expanded into various locations across Mumbai with an ambition to setup facilities across the country and was nominated for the coveted Filmfare Awards for best "VFX" for "Animal".**

**His long term vision is to re-energise Famous Studios as a global leader and enabler of audio-visual craft and creative solutions, with a mission to unlock, inspire and nurture storytellers from across the globe. He has led the company's recent foray into IP and is aggressively looking to develop content for digital platforms. With this in mind, he has launched "Groundzero.daily", a new digital IP on Instagram and Youtube, covering stories of entrepreneurship, defence, geopolitics, culture and sport and is co-producing Famous' first horror film.**

**Anant has completed his Masters in Entrepreneurship from Aston University, UK and is an active member of the Entrepreneur's Organisation (EO), Mumbai.**

**Since Famous Studio is now well-known for not only its shooting floor but also its animation, VFX, camera rental, and digital intermediate (D.I.) services, how is the business inflow performing amidst intense competition?**

As we see the content landscape democratise, there is a large rise of content creation across platforms. It is a double edged sword at the moment. Volumes are up but overall service rates have fallen and client expectations have gone up. It has forced us to rethink our strategy and rework on our business model. I do feel however, in the course of the next two years, post production, both audio and video will die a slow death as technology becomes more affordable, easier to use and let's not forget the elephant in the room, AI, which is already assisting in the process and reducing delivery times.

**I have heard that Famous Studio is undergoing renovation and that a new building is being constructed. Will the New building -Famous studio continue to maintain its shooting floor, or are there different plans for the company?**

It is truly the end of an era for our studio premises in Mahalaxmi. While our future plans are to scale the business through other strategies such as content creation, IP's, distribution, localised entertainment and distribution, letting the studio go is a tough pill to swallow, not only for the family but for most of the ecosystem that has treated Famous as their own

home. The redevelopment will be residential as a studio real estate model does not make financial sense.

**Is Famous Studio planning to venture into film production, given that it already possesses comprehensive facilities?**

Yes, this is a strong possibility. We have already started working on producing a horror film in collaboration with our dear friend, Sanjay Shetty, Opticus Inc which will be ready in the first quarter of 2026. As I mentioned earlier, content creation and distribution has now democratised and my vision is to push meaningful stories into the market through theatre, OTT and other digital platforms. For example, we launched a new Instagram IP titled "Groundzero.daily" which publishes untold stories about India through the lens of defense, geopolitics, culture, entrepreneurship and sport.

**Does Famous Studio have any plans to launch an Initial Public Offering (IPO), considering its significant brand value in the market?**

Launching an IPO is a dream for any family run business. I cannot comment much on this at this stage but

our rebuild includes a complete mindset shift and I strongly believe that we are in a good position to achieve this as we are a debt free company.

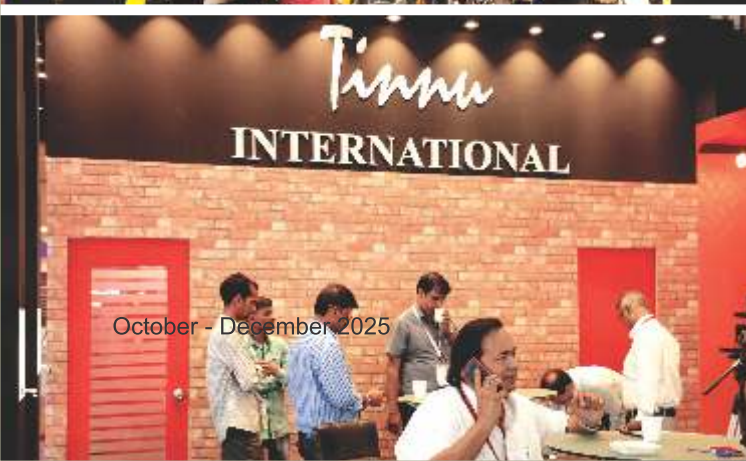
**Are there any new projects or initiatives in the pipeline for Famous Studio?**

The last year has been a massacre in the industry, Advertising, Film especially. I have spent the last few months collating material, studying trends. In short, I have zoomed out for a bird's eye view of what is really going on. This has allowed me time to decide on what our next ventures within the industry will be. Our focus areas will be on doubling down our investment in the Advertising content business, both B2B and B2C which means that we will continue servicing agencies, brands and production houses but will also look at creating our own digital outreach to consumers, for example, our Insta page, "Groundzero.daily" could potentially become a source of collabs with brands. Additionally, we are looking at slowly building our long format content production business and exploring other businesses in tech and localised entertainment.





# A.B.I.S 2025: The Ultimate Convergence of Broadcast, Tech & Content



**Mumbai, India** – As the global media and entertainment landscape continues to transform at unprecedented speed, **Asia's Broadcasting & Infotainment Show (A.B.I.S) 2025** returns with a renewed focus and expanded profile. Taking place from **14 - 16 October 2025 (Tuesday–Thursday)** at the **Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai**, A.B.I.S brings together three powerhouse shows under one roof — the **Broadcast India Show**, the **SCAT India TradeShow**, and the **Content India Show** — offering a 360° view of the broadcast, broadband, and content creation industries. It is the definitive meeting ground for innovators, industry leaders, and visionaries shaping the future of media, connectivity, and storytelling.

## New Tech, Bigger Conversations, Greater Opportunities

The upcoming Broadcast India Show will prominently showcase transformative technologies such as Artificial Intelligence in production and distribution, cloud-based broadcasting with hybrid workflows, immersive AR/VR/XR experiences, advanced video CMS platforms, Content Delivery Networks (CDNs), and blockchain for rights management and media trust. This timing is ideal as India's media and entertainment sector is rapidly expanding to reach INR 3.1 trillion (US\$36.1 billion) by 2027 driven by OTT, gaming, animation, and digital content consumption. The shift from traditional broadcasting to digital and IP-based workflows, coupled with rising internet penetration and affordable data, makes these innovations critical for India's evolving broadcast ecosystem.

The SCAT India TradeShow will spotlight the rapid transformation of India's cable, satellite, and broadband infrastructure. As the nation accelerates its digital and connectivity ambitions, the show will feature cutting-edge satellite equipment for CATV and broadband, innovative OTT applications integrated with telecom networks, and advancements in broadband technologies for both urban and rural markets. With India emerging as a key player in the global space-tech landscape, the event will also highlight satellite launch services, networks, and operators, alongside the growing impact of Indian startups driving innovation in the space and telecom sectors. This year's edition reflects the show's evolution from traditional distribution systems to a future defined by convergence, speed, and scalable connectivity.

The Content India Show 2025 will serve as the creative pulse of A.B.I.S., showcasing the latest trends in content creation, distribution, and monetization across platforms. As India emerges as a global storytelling powerhouse, the show will spotlight innovations in



original IP development, regional and vernacular content, short-form and mobile-first formats, and cross-platform storytelling. Content India Show will bring together producers, writers, studios, and tech enablers to explore how audience behaviors, monetization models, and distribution strategies are evolving in today's multi-screen, on-demand world.

This broadened tech horizon makes **A.B.I.S2025 the ideal platform** to showcase latest products, launch new solutions, and meet the growing demands of a connected, content-first world.

### Where the Future of Media & Infotainment Is Forged

India continues to surge as a global content creation and distribution powerhouse, producing over **200,000 hours of content annually** and serving a diverse domestic and international audience across **1 billion screens**. With convergence accelerating between broadcast and digital platforms, **A.B.I.S provides the industry's most comprehensive platform** to navigate this transformation.

### The event will host:

- 500+ **leading brands and exhibitors** from across the globe
- 30,000+ **decision-makers, creators, broadcasters, and buyers**
- Dedicated **conferences** for Broadcast, Content, and Satellite sectors
- High-level networking opportunities and product demonstrations
- Emerging tech showcases and knowledge sessions

### What to Expect This Year?

**New profiles** to explore such as AI, cloud workflows, immersive tech, and Indian startups

**Live demos** of satellite, fiber, and OTT technologies

**Expanded Broadcast & Content Conferences** covering monetization, tech, and storytelling

A.B.I.S 2025 represents a dynamic platform with an expanded focus on AI, immersive technologies, OTT, and broadband. As a leading platform for the media and infotainment Industry, we bring together global players and emerging disruptors to chart the next phase of growth", says Sonia Prashar, Chairperson & Managing Director, Nürnberg Messe India

**Save the Date: 14-16 October 2025 (Tuesday – Thursday) at the Jio World Convention Centre, Mumbai.**

For more information, visit [www.abis-expo.com](http://www.abis-expo.com) and stay connected through our Industry Connect platforms at [www.broadcastandfilm.com](http://www.broadcastandfilm.com) and [www.scatmag.com](http://www.scatmag.com).

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# SIGMA

## FF High Speed PrimeLine



## "What our DOP thinks about us..."

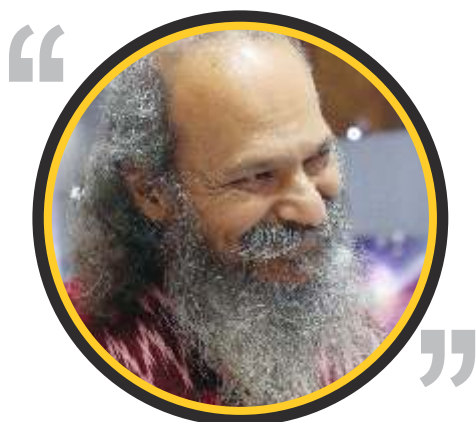


**Supratim Bhol**

### Important Film of Supratim Bhol as DOP

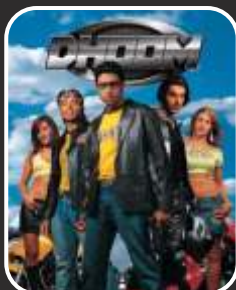


Sigma Lenses are one of the few lenses which I often use in my films or commercials. In my FIPRESCI award winning film "Aparajito - The Undefeated", inspired from the life of the director Satyajit Ray, made in Black and White, I used Sigma FF High Speed lenses. It is one of the light weight lenses producing gorgeous images. In my film, I was looking for a canvas which could depict the world of the 1940s Calcutta. With exceptionally optimum sharpness even when I am shooting in 20mm or 24mm- they kept the focus around the edges beautifully. Constant T1.5 for almost all the lenses enhanced the protagonist who played Ray throughout the film in a stunning captivated manner. Not being artificially developed but natural flares added a lot to my world of Ray. Not being exceptionally heavy too- along with a Red Monstro body, it smoothly maintained the ergonomic feature and helped me sail through even in difficult narrow conditions of work space. The lens being a full frame, added a lot of advantage to gear up for the kind of compositions which I looked for.



**Nirav Shah**

### Important Film of Nirav Shah as DOP



I have used Sigma High Speed lenses, Nerkonda Paarvai (Forthright Gaze) IN 2019 ON Tamil-language legal action drama film directed by H. Vinoth. The lenses are sharp but pleasing on skin. They have lovely contrast. The bokeh is beautiful and falls off very smoothly. The colours are natural and neutral. The lens doesn't lean towards warm or cool tones.



#### Important Film of Santhosh Rai Pathaje as DOP



#### Santhosh Rai Pathaje

The lens features excellent sharpness and details, Smooth edge fall off helps to create a sense of depth and dimension, Contrast is high. Image quality is pristine Bokeh is clean, smooth and creamy. Chromatic aberration is minimal. The lens creates excellent subject separation, depth and organic transition blur The colour reproduction is natural, subtle yet beautiful. Lenses deliver accurate and pleasing colour reproduction. Color fringing is minimal



#### Important Film of Chirantan Das as DOP



#### Chirantan Das

I frequently use Sigma FF lenses for their exceptional blend of sharpness and stunning bokeh, creating visually captivating films. These lenses deliver crystal-clear central details, ideal for high-resolution cameras like Alexa, with a gentle softening toward the edges that mimics human vision, making scenes feel natural and engaging. Their warm, vintage style enhances realistic skin tones and produces a cinematic look. The smooth, pleasing bokeh isolates subjects beautifully, with spherical lenses creating round, dreamy blur for dramatic effect, adding emotional depth to storytelling. Sigma lenses handle light superbly, minimizing flares while maintaining rich, balanced colors for consistent mood across scenes. Their reliability, ease of use, and variety of focal lengths cover diverse shot magnifications. Built sturdy and versatile, Sigma lenses combine technical precision with artistic flair, ensuring every frame, from close-ups to wide shots, looks polished and evocative".



#### Important Film of Sunil K S as DOP



#### Sunil K S

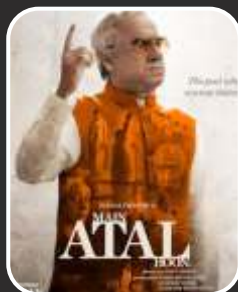
The Sigma FF Cine Primes deliver excellent contrast and minimal flares across all ranges, even when shot wide open. The lens ranges are well-balanced, with especially strong coverage in the wide focal lengths. Ideal choice when aiming for a clean, natural look.





**Mr. Lawrence Dcunha**

**Important Film of Mr. Lawrence Dcunha as DOP**



As a cinematographer, I am always searching for lenses that deliver precision without sacrificing emotion. I had the chance to use the Sigma High Speed Primes extensively on two of my recent web series, Chidiya Udd and First Copy — both set in the early '90s — and these lenses became an integral part of shaping the visual language.

“The Sigma High Speed Primes gave me the perfect balance — sharp yet organic, with beautiful bokeh and natural colors. They allowed me to light boldly and still create a cinematic look true to the '90s world of Chidiya Udd and First Copy.”

Since both series were set in the early '90s, I was conscious of not making the imagery look too modern or clinical. The Sigma High Speed Primes gave me the perfect balance: sharpness that holds detail across the frame, even wide open, yet never feels sterile. The crispness carries an organic texture, allowing close-ups to feel intimate and precise while still retaining a filmic authenticity. The way the sharpness transitions into the fall-off and bokeh created a subtle softness around the edges that perfectly supported the period mood.

Both Chidiya Udd and First Copy relied heavily on expressive lighting. I used a wide range of colored lights — from saturated neons to warm ambers — to evoke the period and emotional tone. The Sigma lenses handled these choices beautifully. Skin tones remained natural even under mixed lighting, and the colors stayed consistent and accurate without shifting. This neutrality gave me freedom in the grade to build a nostalgic palette true to the '90s, while always maintaining a rich, cinematic base image.

For me, the Sigma High Speed Primes strike the perfect balance between precision and character — sharp yet organic, with beautiful bokeh and faithful color reproduction. They gave me the confidence to light boldly, tell stories authentically, and create a visual style that felt true to the era while still resonating with today's audiences.



**Amitabha Singh**

**Important Film of Amitabha Singh as DOP**



For close to 5 years I have been using Sigma Block lenses extensively for my Shoots - both for on the set shoot for Darma as well as for Location work in Documentaries. I love SIGMA block lenses for their sharp, clear images, beautiful bokeh, and unique " Look" that makes films feel timeless and emotional. These lenses, ranging from 14mm to 135mm with T1.5 apertures, deliver crisp details in the center, perfect for high-resolution cameras I like to use.

The bokeh of SIGMA is smooth and creamy, with an iris creating round, soft out-of-focus areas that add depth and draw attention to subjects. Described as “like looking through a window in the rain,” this bokeh enhances storytelling. The lenses minimize flares and maintain rich, warm colors, ensuring a consistent, cinematic mood.

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### Editor's Desk



This edition celebrates India's visionary cinematographers and industry pioneers reshaping visual storytelling. We spotlight Ravi K. Chandran (Thug Life), Attar Singh Saini (The Bengal Files), Vikas Sivaraman (Saiyaara), Aseem Bajaj (Son of Sardar 2), Sunita Radia-Phule, Premal Raval, Debojeet Ray (Kesari Chapter 2), and National Award-winning cinematographer Prashantanu Mahapatra (The Kerala Story).

Ravi K. Chandran, a master across Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam cinema, weaves technical precision and poetic beauty in Thug Life. Attar Singh Saini's The Bengal Files vividly captures the 1946 Calcutta killings with raw emotional depth. Vikas Sivaraman's Saiyaara and Aseem Bajaj's Son of Sardar 2 craft immersive worlds, while Mahapatra's National Award-winning work on The Kerala Story delivers searing, soulful imagery.

Sunita Radia-Phule brings bold, nuanced perspectives to modern cinema. Premal Raval infuses painterly lighting into four challenging ad films. Debojeet Ray's dynamic visuals in the historical drama Kesari Chapter 2 and Kush Chabria's daring short film ITCH push creative boundaries. Madan Bakshi shares insights into the challenges of Mumbai's cine equipment rental industry.

These interviews reveal the passion and innovation driving Indian cinema to new heights.

Happy reading!

**Cheers!!**

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## Interview with DOP *Kush Chhabria* on shooting the short film "Itch" Directed by Altamash Jaleel

*Altamash and I aimed "Itch" to be a film that mirrors reality in an unsettling way, using natural light to shape its distinct look. Every choice was guided by two questions: what is the protagonist feeling, and where do we want to take the audience? The cinematography was tailored to Altamash's story, with the Alexa Mini LF and Cooke Anamorphic lenses creating a cinematic depth and texture.*

**In the opening shot, you see the light level increasing slowly. What was the idea behind this?**

As a cinematographer, my main job is to bring what's on paper to life. The director and me wanted to exaggerate the moment the sunrise affects a certain space. In this case, it was the hospital room and we wanted it to have a strong visual cue of natural light coming in. I had an Arri M90 rigged from the terrace above that had the beam of light centred on the artist through a few layers of diffusion and then with a big 4x4 frame of another diffusion that a lighting assistant operated to simulate the increase of light falling onto his face. One of my favourite openings of a film that I've worked on.

**In the long shot, such as when the doctor is seen at the window, did you boost the lighting from outside?**

Yes, This location was on a higher floor. And since we wanted to see through the depth to capture the texture of the trees outside, i had no other option but to rig an Arri M90 on a secured boomrod suspended from the terrace above. I also wanted the direction of the light to simulate the sun just falling on him. As you can see, he's the only one in the frame who's face is getting this beam of light.

**In the shot where she is carrying her husband home, you see patches of light in the corridor. How did you create it?**

This was honestly the toughest shot to light. We were slightly delayed and we

couldn't shoot this shot at the right time. We missed the direct sun coming into this space. So i had no other alternative but to simulate light patches. There was no time to shift lights and i needed a quick fix to execute the shot. Did this with two 4x4 mirrors at a 45 degree angle that reflected the sun and i positioned them in a certain angle that helped create these two patches of sunlight. Tried to make it as realistic as possible. Really hope that it does it some justice.

**When she says, "I am happy," the shot is a close-up of her lips rather than her entire face?**

We wanted the viewers to be unnaturally close to her, so instead of closes i wanted the shot to be quite intimate and uncomfortable. She was even saying something hard to digest, almost like a confessional. And observing what the lips were saying was a strong visual to communicate what the viewer must hear. The camera then tilts up to see the emotion in her eye so we can see how honest she was with herself.

**In the long shot where a strong sun glare is present, her face is seen in a small mirror. What was the idea behind lighting it like?**

I initially wanted it to be a strong silhouette as she was confessing her true emotions to herself. Wanted two visually illustrate that all is not as it seems, that's why we see her face lit up only in the mirror. Sujith our colourist from Picture Post really helped in achieving the visual complexity of the shot.

**Why does the practical lamp near the crew member scratching her ear and the anchor/main protagonist not appear to light their faces?**

So we had a task of creating separation. We wanted to visually

transform Jagrits house into an informal "set". So i had to create two different spaces to simulate that. The couch was the set for the interview and hence had to be brighter and lit for the "interview". The other part had to be darker and high contrast to show a natural illustration of the directors video village for the interview. Hence needed it to be darker and slightly underexposed. Didn't want the practical lamps to be the guiding source of light. But wanted the "crew" to be lit by the ambient light from the "interview" lights.

**Anything else you would like to tell which was major shooting challenge?**

The challenge was to carefully manage the most expensive resource, time. We actually had a lot of shots to finish and a lot of setups happening simultaneously. So maintaining the look and managing a limited number of lights at the same time. I think i owe a lot of praise to my focus puller, Ac's and the entire department that were up to help out with a smile on their face till pickup! There was a beautiful synergy between Altamash and me so creative discussions were a breeze without any disagreements. I wish for every cinematographer to experience a collaboration such as this.

**Feedback: Kush Chhabria :**  
[info.kushchhabria@gmail.com](mailto:info.kushchhabria@gmail.com)





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Interview with DOP

## Prashantanu Mohapatra on Shooting "The Kerala Story"

“



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**\* National Award for Best Cinematography**

**How do you approach lighting when you're on set after reviewing the script and locations?**

My approach begins with the story. I keep my eyes closed during the script session, to feel the film's emotional undertone. I get into the visuals a little later. For this film, I had the instinctive vision of a someone sympathetic witnessing while the protagonist undergoes emotional and physical grind. Later readings of script led to narrative essence like realistic, documentary look or the visuals should feel natural, unobtrusive etc.

Lighting design to go in dawned to me during the tech recce of the hide out locales. For long I envisioned a single, strong key light from an obscure angle, like overhead or any other place, to create a natural effect. Before shoot we conducted a test shoot with actors, costume and make up and cross checked my vision there in. We liked it, so I locked with my team too.

**What was the director's vision and approach?**

The Director wanted a sense of tentativeness. A lot of places we preferred hand held even in stationary shots. That made me choose the lighting as philosophical choice. That led to choice of Full-frame in combination with wider lensing for sense of proximity. Both of us didn't want a thriller look.

**Could you elaborate the approach to the lighting setup on set in keeping the above vision?**

I chose a realistic approach, ensuring the lighting doesn't draw attention to itself. My goal was to mimic sense of available light on the fly. Even the sources like windows were framed with motivation. I often kept the light source out of frame, so the choice of highlight, its intensity, specularity and the shadows, the darkness pools all are simply thrown out of the rationality and easily in my aesthetic control. I kept fill light minimal, and adjusted its angle to reflect the character's emotional state. Also tried to place the lights close to





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characters, so the intensity and angle varies subtly with body movement dynamising the tentativeness of the protagonist without being overt.

Most times, I preferred to live on Fill light alone, subtly conveying characters' interior of self-awareness. I preferred a semi-specular, more defined look with light and shadow. In fact I avoid making the light source noticeable unless it serves a specific purpose, like another character. Also, I avoided soft, overhead diffused lighting that is in vogue now a days, that would undermine the subtle statement of interiority that we're achieving in lighting.

**Can you elaborate on how you differentiated this film from a thriller and focused on a human saga?**

The script highlighted a story where the protagonist and her family were unaware of their situation, the loose soil under their feet, as opposed to the audience. This inspired a sympathetic, observational tone rather than a thrilling one. I avoided typical thriller shots, for example, over-the-shoulder gun perspectives or suspenseful foreground passes, and instead used plain, simple compositions.

The lighting and framing emphasized a human saga, focusing on the characters' internal journey and a sense of someone silently witnessing, may be a helpless mother at home or a sympathizer, rather than a perpetrator's perspective.



**What were some challenges you faced in terms of lighting or shot-taking during the shoot?**

The biggest challenge was day exteriors of Ladakh in managing continuity of contrast and graphics with unpredictable natural light. Sunlight required a different approach than cloudy conditions. Always the background was harder to manipulate, it needs big production support and of production design. To manage, I tried

incorporated some foreground or other and created simultaneous contrast. I aimed for a consistent contrast ratio, around 1:8, and created texture wherever possible either with a light or by selective dodging so that the heavy contrast doesn't feel ominous.

I planned for single takes (keeping editing suitability in mind), ensuring camera movement reveals more and more background to plant the character in the midst of the locale, whether in a desert or interior hideouts. Closer magnifications were tricky, requiring careful angle changes both for camera and lights, to maintain the sense of character's emotional interior. The concern of continuity of lighting was at stake.

**How many days did it take to shoot the entire film?**

The shoot took approximately 50 days.

**How was the color correction process handled for this film?**

Color correction was managed by Manoj Verma of Prime Focus. From the beginning, the producers desired distinct color palettes to differentiate settings in Kerala and Afghanistan.

We arrived at distinct color saturations to help distinguish the non-linear segments and a bit accentuated colour tilts to carry the emotional grind the protagonist and friends undergo - to be specific, from peaceful home life to indoctrination phase in hostel days, and the travel for a new life to







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viewers the sense of witnessing. I used low-angle fill light and low cross lights to nudge in the characters' self-awareness, degrees changing in emotionally charged scenes. The full-frame format and in cramped spaces also meant keeping lights small and low, and that evoked intimacy in the face of hostile disposition.

LED lights are a good help for quick adjustments. As I said earlier, proximity of lights to characters achieved me a subtle variation within the shot and slightly under flat lighting made good of the character's interiority - around a 1:4 ratio - and separating background texture at 1: 8-16, ensuring variety within a consistent tone.

So throughout the shoot my basic philosophy was to have tentativeness, like dynamic changes of light and contrast, subtle foregrounding and more background in composition and movement of both character and camera - and of course interlaced with handheld shots. I think we achieved an immersive sense of a solemn witness and empathetic as well as cohesive visual narrative. Cohesive, thanks to Edgar Allan Poe.

**Feedback: Prasantanu Mohapatra**  
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Pakistan/Afghanistan to self realization of an entrapment and the bid to escape reflecting the personal life of the protagonist versus the pursuit by perpetrators. I would have preferred a more subtle unified look, but I gave in to exploration not treaded by me so far and that worked for the viewers.

One more thing I should say here, the post production is a very cumbersome process now a days. But if time permits and budget too, the cinematographer's vision is very important to check in while making VFX enhancements for a more unified look.

Unity of expression is very important in cinema, like Edgar Allan Poe delineates concept of Unity of Effect and methods in writing in his essay "Philosophy of Composition" in 1846.

**Is there anything specific about the film's cinematography you want to highlight?**

This film is a journey, tentative vulnerability against simplicity. It carries a unified expression throughout, giving







Interview with DOP

## Attar Singh Saini

### On Shooting The Bengal Files

*Attar Singh Saini, an FTII Pune graduate with over 16 feature films, excels in **The Bengal Files**, blending technical precision with emotional storytelling. His purposeful frames make history resonate with modern audiences, reflecting his pride in creating emotionally, historically, and artistically rich visuals. Through **The Bengal Files**, Saini pushes authenticity and artistry, amplifying a pivotal chapter in Indian history.*

*The film transcends cinema, testifying to vision, collaboration, and artistry. Saini's lens transforms memory into vivid experience. In this interview, **editor Naresh Sharma** explores the nuances of Saini's cinematography in **The Bengal Files**.*

“



”





**The film begins with the opening shot of the parliament emerging from an unnatural dust storm. What was the idea behind presenting it this way?**

The dust storm was a metaphor for the uncertainty and impending turmoil in the narrative. We wanted to visually convey the brewing storm, setting the tone for the audience. This was a collaborative decision with the director, Vivek Agnihotri, to prepare viewers for the story's intensity.



**Why do we see multiple tube lights in the police station during the CBI officer's interaction in daylight with ample window light, but only one tube light in the background during Bharti Banerjee's interrogation on the first floor, especially in a long shot?**

The ground floor of the police station, with its bustling activity and paperwork, called for a typical office environment with tube lights, despite natural light from windows. This created a busy, functional atmosphere. For Bharti Banerjee's interrogation, we chose a larger, less conventional space—a retiring or storage room with extra



furniture—to reflect her complex character and the larger than life character of her past which is going to be revealed soon to the audience. The light source from the large windows emphasized a natural, raw mood, avoiding artificial lighting to keep the scene grounded. We let the natural light dominate, even if it burned out parts of the frame, to maintain authenticity.



**I noticed a recurring lighting pattern where diffuse light from windows doesn't fully illuminate characters' bodies and partly the faces—often stopping at the nose, eyes, or lips, with the rest slightly underlit. What was the intent behind this approach?**

This is a deliberate part of my lighting style. I focus on creating a full range of tonality—highlights, midtones, and shadows—within a limited area of the frame, especially on the face. The eyes are critical, so I ensure they're lit correctly to convey emotion. This approach adds depth and moreover, I see most of the historic personalities in



our film, especially the people in power with a certain greyness to their character. Their true intentions are partially hidden in the dark. So it all boils down to balancing tonality to enhance the character's expressiveness.

**Regarding Pallavi Joshi's portrayal of an older character, how did you coordinate with the prosthetic makeup team to ensure her aged appearance looked natural after grading on the big screen?**

We initially tested prosthetics, but they proved cumbersome. Instead, we relied on VFX for her aging effects. Her hair and certain elements were adjusted on set, but the aging was handled in post-production. Pallavi's skill as an actor helped sell the character's age through her performance, reducing the need for heavy prosthetics.

**In the convocation scene where the young Bharti kills the governor, sunlight streaks hit the audience in the auditorium, and practical lamps on the walls create ambiance. Were these lighting choices historically accurate for the period, or did you take cinematic liberties?**

The practical lamps were period-appropriate, such lighting existed in Bengal at the time. Our Production Designers Late. Rajat Podar and Pradeep Banerjee were absolutely period accurate with their work.

However, the strong sunlight streaks were a design choice to evoke the rebellious energy of young Bharti. The stark contrast of light and shadow underscored the dramatic, black-and-white nature of the situation.

**I noticed carefully crafted glares in scenes like Bharti's conversation with Gandhi jee and the temple sequence with Bhajan singing. How did you approach these moments?**

My lighting style for the whole of Bengal Files was motivated by the dominating emotion of the scene. For Bharti's meeting with Gandhi jee, the glares were metaphorical, symbolizing inspiration and hope. When Gandhi speaks, the light hits Bharti, representing her receiving his wisdom





as a young, rebellious mind seeking guidance. This was a concept from Vivek's script, which we executed to convey her emotional journey.

In the temple sequence, set in the early morning, we used strong backlight to enhance the spiritual atmosphere, complementing the serene mood of the Baul singing.

**The long shot of the colony during Suhrawardy's speech—how large was the set, and how much was enhanced in post-production?**

Our set by Late. Rajat Poddar and later by Pardeep Da, was so meticulously researched upon Kolkata's iconic architecture to ensure authenticity. The whole city was built initially for Direct Action day, covering about six to seven acres. For Suhrawardy's speech, it was a significant physical setup, situated around Kolkata's Writer's Building surrounding the town square with a crowd of about 500 - 600 juniors and

three camera set ups. But long aerial shots required VFX extensions to complete the rooftops and broader environment and crowd multiplications.

**In interior scenes with high-profile characters like Mountbatten, practical lamps are prominent in long shots, but in Suhrawardy's scene, they're present but unlit. Why this distinction?**

For elite settings, practical lamps and daylight were used to reflect the typical ambiance of high profile

government offices, where lights are often on, despite the natural light – an indirect symbol of luxury.

For Suhrawardy and even for Jinnah's house – the dark characters, I kept the practical lamps unlit to create a moody, low-key atmosphere like a very extravagant den. These silhouettes were a crucial part of our metaphors. When Suhrawardy is near the window the strong backlight emphasizes his power and menace, contrasting with the dimly lit room to highlight his negative traits.







In the case of Mountbatten — we see his house twice, once in the start of the film and the next — at a point when the whole of Bengal is burning, everything is covered in ashes. The sudden contrast in their living conditions really highlights the adversity of the common people of Bengal and this same treatment we bring to the present as well — at the police station.

**In riot sequences with changing smoke and fog, how did you maintain consistency in long shots?**

We used real smoke on the set to create the chaotic environment, supplemented by VFX where needed in the background. We avoided white smoke, which causes flaring, and instead used darker smoke to suggest burning tires or debris, enhancing the war-like atmosphere. The progression

of the city's deterioration—from clean streets to broken, chaotic scenes—was carefully planned to reflect the escalating violence.

**In the sequence where Amar saves Bharti in a narrow lane, the lighting is diffused and smoky, set at a specific time of day. How did you choose this approach?**

This scene precedes a night of violence, with the cotton mill burning. Set in the early morning, we used a diffused blueish tone of the early morning light, just before sunrise to create a hopeless mood, reflecting Bharti's loss and the surrounding chaos. The prolonged gloom is created with an ashy-silver tone, creating an atmosphere of eternal doom.

The narrow Kolkata lane, inspired by British-influenced architecture, was

lit softly to avoid strong sources, emphasizing the somber tone. The entire sequence was shot in one day to maintain emotional continuity, despite challenges with changing daylight, my team managed to block the Top light as and when required.

**In the night sequence with dead bodies and fires, how did you maintain lighting continuity for longer shots?**

This sequence, set in a cremation ground, used fire as the primary light source to create a warm, smoky tone. The fires from burning areas provided the only illumination. We avoided additional lighting to keep the scene raw and chaotic, aligning with the narrative's emotional weight — as the bodies were left unclaimed.

**How were the long-duration shots—during the riots, the celebration, and the final tower sequence where Bharti and Amar climb and the camera follows them to a crowd preparing for Independence Day—planned in terms of lighting and execution?**

To capture the riot scene where Bharti is at the Kalighat temple, I proposed to Vivek that we shoot it as a single long take till she reaches her father. She runs through cramped lanes, through multiple blasts and explosions, enters a cabaret bar and then through a tram that catches fire. The camera follows her throughout, transitioning outside in a continuous running take. After two days of rehearsal, with operators seamlessly handing off the camera, we maintained consistent energy and mood, achieving an excellent one take shot of about two and a half minutes.

For the Roy chowdhury house Puja sequence, we planned another single long take starting outside—capturing preparations, rangolis, and flowers—before focusing into Roy chowdhury's home amid the hustle and bustle. Young Bharti gets ready, and we follow her into the room, to the kitchen, and back out. The lighting highlighted the festive colors and energy without cuts, and we executed it successfully. But the real game-changer is when you see the same house in a similar one-take shot—this







time in completely opposite light: a very tragic one. That scene especially gives me goosebumps every time I see it on screen with the sound and background score in its full glory.

For the climax, we shot at a clock tower set built to a height of almost three floors. Lighting it was extremely challenging because of its scale. We used a Jimmy Jib to follow Bharti and Amar from the stairs to a balcony with a backlit clock at 60 feet.

A rostrum platform supported the main light setup, with the clock's glow becoming the primary source when the characters were near it, and fill light from the surroundings shaping their faces as they looked around and talked.

The scene begins joyfully but soon turns chaotic with goons coming in.

Shot with fire and burning mashals (torches) being the primary source of lighting and finally a divine backlight of fire illuminating Young Bharti – embodying Maa Kali's rage.

**You have worked with Vivek Agnihotri on few projects. Can you sum up your collaboration with him in a few words?**

My director, Vivek Agnihotri, always brought tremendous energy to the set, inspiring me to think outside the box, that energy got translated into visual imagery that touches deep human emotions. Even after long, hectic, and tiring days, I felt immense satisfaction because we were creating something larger than ourselves.

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## Interview with DOP *Vikas* *Sivaraman* on Shooting *Saiyaara*

There are a variety of lighting situations for the concert scenes of Ahaan Pandey. How did you go about lighting them so that they don't look the same?

Before we started, we knew there would be many, and we wanted all of them to look a little different. In fact, what was used in the film is only a small portion of what we shot. For the concerts, we filmed large chunks of songs for each situation. The first thing we did was develop a color palette for each show.

We spent almost two days inputting all the data and adjusting the lighting. They're all intelligent lights, so we could control everything from one console. We'd save those programs, and when the scenes were called up, we would literally just hit one button, and the corresponding lighting plan would activate. Basically, we distributed the lighting according to the scale of the performance, so it would build up as Ahaan's success grew—from a smaller lighting pattern to a more elaborate one.

We also used lights and colors to differentiate each performance. Toward the latter part, we got a lot of help from pyrotechnics, which added to the general atmosphere.

The challenge was that we were shooting them outdoors. Indoors, it's easier because smoke stays, and the beams of light are picked up easily. Outdoors, especially in April, the breeze kept blowing the smoke away. So, we had to create a ring of smoke around the entire set, releasing it from all sides simultaneously, depending on the wind

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direction. We also used storm fans to help direct the smoke. This was critical because, in pitch darkness, you wouldn't see anything without it.

**Regarding lighting the face of Ahaan in concerts, especially in close-ups, did you ensure there was always enough light, while in the rest of the frame lighting could vary?**

Well, the rule of thumb is to make sure there's one light on the main character at all times. At the beginning of a track, for instance, we'd bring him in from darkness. As the track started on screen, he would emerge into the light. Apart from that, our lights were usually on towers, about 50 to 60 meters from the stage, using long-throw lights. These were supported by practical lights built into the stage, which allowed us to get enough light and add a bit of drama, rather than just flat lighting from the front. It worked pretty well. Ahaan is a good-looking guy; he doesn't need much help to look good. The lighting was more about the drama of the situation than making him look good.

**In the sound recording studio scene, where Ahaan Pandey is pressuring Aneet Padda to write lyrics, there are interesting practical lights on the studio walls. At a particular moment, a beam of light illuminates them from above when Aneet rebels, saying she can't write in such a tense situation. How did this idea come about to create that striking effect?**

During the general discussion most of the scene is placid, but it builds to a point of contention where Aneet forcefully expresses her point of view. The director wanted to clearly separate these two sections. The first part was built around using practical lighting sources in the studio, with warm, slightly dramatic colors that weren't too unusual.

For the latter part, we needed drama. One option was to go dark, switching off the lights and leaving the studio in darkness. But we felt that might not complement her intense tirade. So, we decided to make it more dramatic with light. We figured an emergency light or something similar

could come on, throwing a beam of light. It's a bit far-fetched, but it's seen in only one shot, followed by close-ups, so it worked.

**In the outdoor scene by the seashore, where you can see an extended part of the sea at a distance, how did you manage lighting that part, which was huge?**

It's impractical to light the sea itself, though I've done it in another film where the beach's geography was different. Here, we used the "Day-for-Night" shooting technique for the reverse angle looking toward the water, matched with night-for-night for closer





shots. Later, I realized we could have added water ripples to the lighting on their faces, as it was supposed to be a moonlit scene with reflections off the water. Unfortunately, the idea came too late, but it could have added something subtle. The stars in the sky were added in post-production using Mattes to push the sky down.

**Regarding post-production for VFX scenes, what were your instructions or coordination with the VFX team?**

My main concern wasn't what would happen in post but whether we were shooting it correctly. The stage was ringed with a green screen for crowd multiplication and other effects. We used smoke and moving beams of light, which worried me—how would the VFX team handle this? I asked if we should keep the beams stationary or adjust the smoke, but they said to go ahead and do what we wanted. Occasionally, they'd ask for the green screen to be lit more or to add another screen. The direction department handled crowd multiplication and other VFX directly, while we adjusted some lighting on the audience in post, like toning down brightness or tweaking colors.

**Toward the end, when Ahaan is successful and singing in various cities, his face is darker on the ramp, which is uncommon in commercial films. How did the director agree to this?**

The director was very accommodating, rarely giving feedback on the photography. My approach was informed by real concerts—stages aren't always brightly lit, and it can look strange to light performers from every angle. Leaving some darkness



complemented the situation better than over-lighting. It was a deliberate choice to prioritize the drama of the scene.

**Reflection is an important part to control when there is any kind of big glass included in the frame. I noticed very often there are strong reflections of nearby lights. How did you determine how much reflection is**

**required?**

In the lovemaking scene, the reflections were added in post to camouflage certain elements, so we had full control over their intensity. For instance, the reflections on the car windscreens: you need to judge it as a balance between how much lighting you can put inside the car and how many types of reflections you want to retain to see the actor inside. For car sequences, we used polarizer to balance the lighting inside the car with the reflections on the windscreen, ensuring the actor was visible without overwhelming reflections.

**Can you share an episode where you went beyond standard lighting techniques?**

My guiding principle is to work within realism and amplify it to suit the story. Everything must be justifiable. Whether it's three-point lighting or





single-source lighting, it should have a justification. Be it a diffused lighting source or the color temperature of the light, the light's origin should make sense.

**What does stylization in lighting mean to you, especially with modern influences like Channel V or MTV ?**

Stylization is guided by the script and situation. Indian commercial cinema now embraces a stylized look, and audiences are more accepting of non-traditional visuals. It's fine to skew the image in some way by adjusting the contrast or other variables, etc.

With the control we have in DI and camera settings, stylization is a personal choice, but it must serve the story. For this film, with a new lead couple and a romantic plot, I kept things palatable. In my next project, there's more scope for dramatic stylization, but it's always about enhancing the narrative without being overly demonstrative.

**Do you consider OTT platforms and smaller screens when lighting a feature film meant for a cinema hall?**

Not at all. Standard corrections are applied when DCPs are exported to platforms like YouTube or OTT, tailored to each medium. Modern screens, even on basic phones, are good enough, so I focus on the big screen without

worrying about smaller displays.

**What was your choice of lenses and camera model for this film?**

I usually prefer sharp lenses like Leica or Signature Primes, but for this music-centric film, we wanted lenses that could produce flares and softer effects. We also tested some other lenses, which gave us a lot of flare. However, they also started affecting the Blacks significantly.

Finally, we chose Cooke lenses for the entire film, paired with zooms. They gave a softer, less crisp image, which suited the music performances, though I personally prefer the contrast of Leica. We shot with Arri Alexa LF and Mini LF, plus DJI drones for aerial shots. A high-speed camera-Ember - was used for a few shots, initially planned for a drone, but the lens was too heavy, so we used it for ground-based high-speed shots.

**How many days did the shoot take? Did you also shoot abroad?**

It was 64 days, initially scheduled for 57 but extended by a week. The production followed a strict 12-hour shooting policy, which was great for long schedules. The London scenes used stock footage of Wembley Stadium, matched with shots at DY Patil Stadium and Levi Park.

**Feedback:**

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## Interview with DOP *Sunita Radia* on Shooting "Phule"

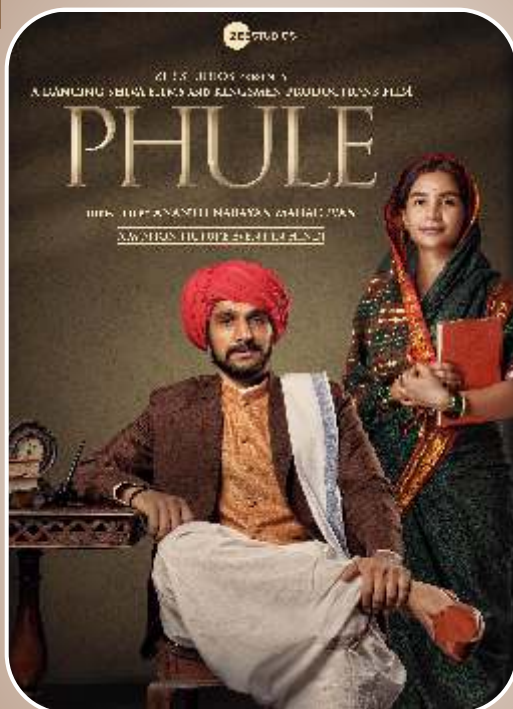


Since this is a historical film with a period setting, what were your main reference points for visual research?

The film is set in a small 19th-century Maharashtra town without electricity, which shaped the visual approach. I relied heavily on natural lighting for daytime scenes and sources, like lamps, for nights. The architecture of that era—dark wooden houses with low windows and dim interiors—guided my choices. My lighting approach is typically naturalistic unless a stylized look is requested, so I aimed to keep the visuals authentic to the period.

From a production designer's perspective, how did you collaborate to achieve the desired look?

The production designer, Santosh Phutane, was exceptional. His experience with period films and familiarity with Maharashtra's Vada region brought authenticity to the props and set elements. He understood the need for a cinematic yet regional aesthetic. The character, Phule, was unfamiliar to me initially, but his monumental contributions, especially for women's rights in India, demanded a pan-India approach rather than a purely regional one. Like Tanaji or Baji Rao, who were lesser-known figures elevated through film, we aimed to make Phule's story resonate nationally, avoiding a documentary-style realism.







**Regarding the color scheme, I noticed the main character's costumes change over time. What was the reasoning behind the color choices for different sections of the film?**

The costumes were Designed by Aparna Shah and it reflected the character's aging, from his twenties to his later years. In his youth, we used vibrant colors with authentic fabrics like Ilkal sarees, true to the era, avoiding synthetic fabrics. As he aged, the colors tapered to muted tones, mirroring the natural progression of his life and

surroundings. This realistic approach extended to both costume & production design, ensuring we recreated the era authentically rather than creating a cosmetic world, given Phule's real-life impact on India's social dynamics.

**I recall a signature maroon pagdi. Was that a key element?**

Yes, the maroon pagdi was Phule's signature look throughout his life, except at the end when he wore white. Extensive research and available materials on Phule, Savitribai, and other characters ensured authenticity. We

aimed to bring their documented appearances to life realistically, avoiding overly stylized interpretations.

**What percentage of the film was shot on location versus on a set?**

Every frame was shot on real locations, with no sets used.

**Given the era had no electricity, how did you handle source lighting for interiors, balancing authenticity with cinematic needs?**

Replicating natural light was key. For interiors, I used light from existing windows, as seen in the period's architecture, without adding artificial windows. I positioned characters to catch light naturally, enhancing the high-contrast aesthetic I envisioned for the film. For night scenes, I used lamps—more than a realistic setting might have—to create depth and scale, avoiding an overreliance on moonlight. Modern battery-powered lights made it easier compared to my early work as an assistant on Devdas, where each lamp required individual wiring and flicker effects. My approach was to maintain authenticity while taking slight cinematic liberties for visual impact.

**Lamps often produce harsh light. How did you balance hardness and softness in your lighting?**







For daylight interiors, I used window light, supplemented by VFX elements like farms visible outside, to keep the look natural. To soften harsh lamp light at night, I diffused sources where needed, adjusting based on the scene's mood—glossier for dramatic moments, harsher for intensity. The high-contrast style, with side-angle and three-quarter compositions, was tested in a look test on a small set, ensuring the lighting and camera movement aligned with the film's aesthetic.

**Can you share details about the night sequences, particularly any specific lighting choices?**

Night sequences are my favorite, drawing from my experience on *Devdas*. Modern battery lights simplified the process compared to earlier films. For one key scene, Phule's death, I insisted on shooting outdoors at sunset rather than in a closed room, as research suggested. This choice reflected his stature as a people's figure, open to the world. We shot in an adjacent field, using the setting sun to create a metaphorical, time-lapse effect, showing his passing without a static, isolated setup.

**That sunset death scene stood out, with the sun directly in the frame. How did you manage continuity with changing light?**

The sunset scene was challenging due to the fleeting light. We planned meticulously, using a two-camera setup to capture different angles and magnifications simultaneously, covering the scene within a 10–15-minute window. The sequence showed Phule speaking to God, referencing his exclusion from temples, with the open sky amplifying the emotional weight. The writer and production designer supported this vision, creating a setup that reflected his paralytic state while maintaining a universal, cinematic feel. Savitribai's earlier death scene also informed this choice, ensuring both felt cohesive.







**What cameras and lenses did you use, and how did you choose them?**

I view cameras and lenses as tools, not the essence of storytelling. For this film, I used an ARRI LF with Signature Prime lenses, chosen for their softness, which suited the sweaty, peak-summer setting of Maharashtra. While vintage lenses were considered, the Signature Primes provided the desired look without overcomplicating the setup. Technical choices were secondary to capturing the story authentically.

**How long did the shoot take?**

I believe it was around 35–38 days.

**Regarding the DI process, how did you approach color grading?**

The DI process was guided by an earlier look test, which clarified the high-contrast, dark, wooden aesthetic with light seeping through windows. I requested transparent glass lamps from the production designer to catch natural light, avoiding an overly dark look. The color palette was earthy—muted

browns and greens—reflecting the era's limited colors. The sunset death scene was graded with a vintage, slightly brown tone, avoiding a warm, glossy sunset feel. The pre-planned look test ensured the grade integrated seamlessly with costumes and backgrounds.

**Anything else worth mentioning related to this film?**

After completing the film, I watched it in a Chandigarh theater during its third week, with 40 crew members. That theatrical experience hit me hard, making me realize the profound impact of Phule and Savitribai's fight for women's education and rights. As a woman in filmmaking, I felt grateful for their legacy. The theater amplified this emotional connection, proving the unmatched power of a cinematic experience over streaming platforms. This realization, shared with my costume designer and other women on the team, underscored the film's significance.

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Interview with DOP

# Aseem Bajaj

on Shooting

Son of Sardaar 2



**Vijay Arora, the director, is a cinematographer-turned-director. What advantages did this bring to your collaboration compared to working with directors who aren't cinematographers?**

Working with Mr. Arora was unique because he understands cinematography intricacies, like lighting challenges and setup times, which streamlined our communication. Having assisted him after Mr. Ashok Mehta, we share a mentor-student bond, a guru-shishya parampara. This relationship fostered trust and ease on set, allowing me to leverage his experience while he treated me with

the same warmth as when I was his assistant.

**Since Son of Sardaar 2 is a comedy, how did you approach the film's color palette to support its tone, unlike thrillers or romances?**

My cinematography approach, regardless of genre, prioritizes actors, given my theater background. I aim to make actors look their best, using lighting to enhance their performance without overpowering it. For Son of Sardaar 2, we consciously chose muted colors to avoid loud, distracting visuals, except in the vibrant wedding sequence, which was a set-driven

choice I wasn't entirely happy with. The director, production designer, costume designer, and I aligned on using subtle tones to keep the focus on the actors and narrative, avoiding the overly bold colors typical in comedies.

**What discussions did you have with costume designer Radhika Mehra regarding costume design for different sequences, like weddings or dance scenes, considering factors like texture and light reflection?**

Radhika Mehra did an exceptional job. My primary request was to ensure costumes never outshone the actors, keeping colors muted and textures



balanced to avoid excessive light reflection. The director and Radhika led these discussions, but I emphasized that the talent should remain the focal point. Her designs aligned perfectly with this vision, delivering beautiful results that complemented the cinematography.

**With many interior scenes, how did you collaborate with the art director to achieve your desired look?**

Film's Production Designer Ms. Garima Mehra and I had some creative differences on the choices that were. For example the set construction & design, like the narrow lanes meant that's supposed to be our female lead character Rabiya's house and was to represent UK. It felt a bit compromised due to studio size limitations but I guess these decisions were also made due to production budget limitations but VFX extended half-built sets, such as Rabiya's house. Despite challenges, the art director's work was solid, although our visions didn't always align.

**How much shoot happened in the UK and in India . What were the basic challenges .**

We shot only 9–10 days in India, with 4 in Punjab, and the rest in the UK, including many interiors. The main challenge was mismatched set scales—UK pavements are wide, but our Indian set had roads barely wider than that, limiting lighting and framing options. Although VFX helped bridge these gaps to a large extend.

**How did you collaborate with the VFX supervisor to ensure seamless integration with your cinematography?**

I worked closely with VFX supervisor Pankaj and our VFX head Naveen Paul, a frequent collaborator, to ensure the footage met their needs. Constant consultation on set prevented surprises during post-production. My duty as a cinematographer was to align with film's vision, ensuring the raw footage supported their VFX work effectively.

**In the interior dance sequence with the girls, the lighting features a diffused pattern of patches that enhances the song. How did you develop this idea?**







This lighting pattern originated in 2005 while shooting Leena Yadav's "Shabd" during a rainy night exterior. I used mirror pieces on a black scrim, bouncing 5KW tungsten lights to create a dynamic, wavy effect. For Son of Sardaar 2. We also tried by cutting holes in a scrim to project light, achieving a subtle, diffused pattern of patches of highlights that enhanced the confined space without overpowering the scene but we choose the 1st one which gave better impact. I've used this technique in many other films including "God Tussi Great Ho" as well while filling in for a few days for Ashok jee.

**In the scene where Dolly Ahluwalia talks to her son in a warm streak of light from a window, how did you conceive this lighting setup?**

I wanted a subtle glint to enhance the scene without disrupting the narrative. I imagined a lamppost's light

filtering through a window, replicating that effect to create a natural, emotive glow. This setup added depth to Dolly's character while keeping the lighting organic to the story's setting.

**The continuous Steadicam shot with Ajay Devgn moving through various rooms and corridors has varied lighting for each space. How did you**

**approach this to reflect his emotional journey?**

The shot was designed to reflect Mr. Devgn's character's mental state—navigating emotions and solutions. I collaborated with my long time gaffer & B-Unit DOP and friend, Anshumaan Singh Thakur, to compartmentalize the lighting for each





space, using distinct backdrops to mirror his inner turmoil. Anshumaan's creative input was vital, and his setup beautifully translated this concept into a 30-second shot that felt dynamic and purposeful.

**The film uses many top-angle drone shots, which are complex. Can you comment on the challenges and any notable incidents?**

Drone shots were tricky due to UK council restrictions. However we stole some shots, often on off-days with drone operator Ahmad Sheikh, who's also my dolly operator. One incident saw us lose a drone in the sea during a shoot from a moving ship. The drone's "home" GPS couldn't locate us as we'd sailed too far, and its battery died before we could retrieve it. Despite the risks, Ahmad's skill ensured we captured essential shots.

**What specific camera and lens choices did you make for this film, and why?**

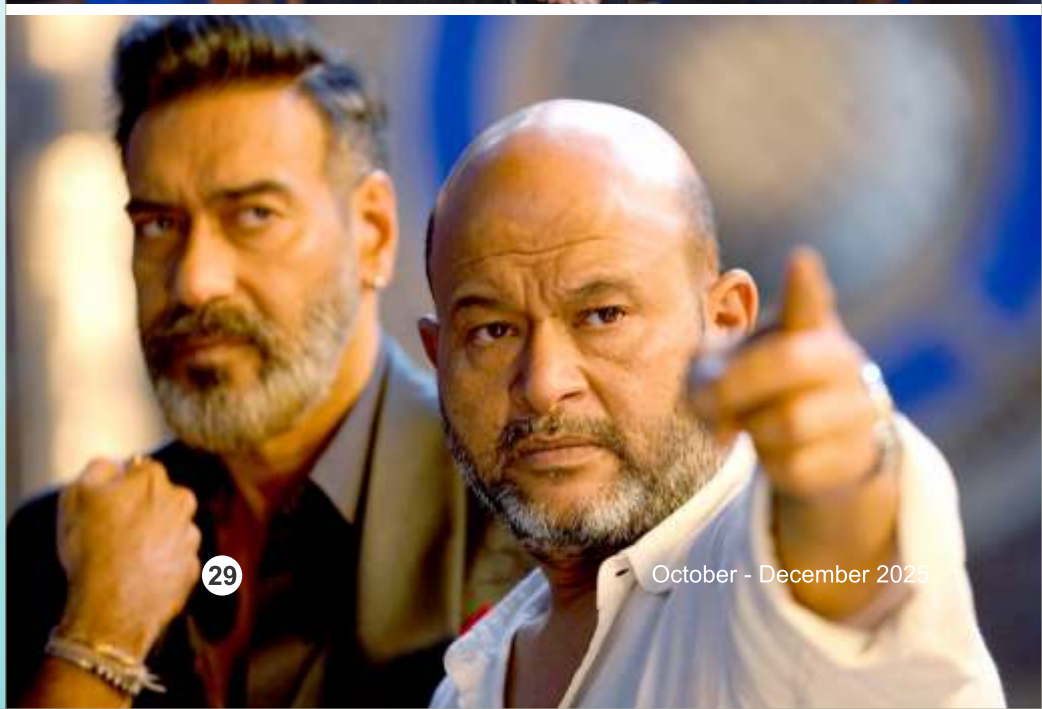
I believe the cinematographer, not the equipment, drives the vision, but I'm a fan of Cooke Optics for their quality and Fujinon zoom lenses for their versatility. I used the Sony Venice 2, which I first used in India for Runway 34 with 14 cameras for a drama, not action. I was introduced to Venice Realto System by Mr, Russell Carpenter, ASC who was also involved in the designing of the system for "Avatar 2" since he was the DOP on the film. I also chose it for its color reproduction which suited our needs perfectly.

**How did you approach color correction to define the film's look and feel?**

Color correction is critical, and I worked with colorist Santosh Pawar (Santy) at NY Diwala, an extension of Ajay Devgn's NYVFX Walla. We took a patient, iterative approach, balancing scenes, stepping away, and revisiting to refine the look. This unhurried process ensured the colors and mood aligned with the film's vision, enhancing its emotional and visual impact.

**Feedback:**

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## A Conversation with DOP (Cinematographer)

# Premal Raval

From capturing lightning storms inside a studio to staging death-defying stunts on a cliff 2,500 feet high, cinematographer **Premal Raval** thrives on challenges that push the boundaries of craft and technology. With a career spanning high-end automotive films, luxury lifestyle campaigns, and technically ambitious commercials, Raval's approach blends classical discipline with cutting-edge tools like Unreal Engine, LED volumes, and AI-driven workflows.

In this conversation, Premal Raval walks us through four of his most recent commercials — **Hero Xtreme**, **Lapis Bard (England)**, **Maruti Dzire**, and **Montra EV** — each a case study in how cinematography evolves when art meets innovation.

DOP : **Premal Raval** on pushing boundaries across four ambitious commercials — from 6:1 formats to LED walls, Unreal Engine, and real cliffside stunts.



 **Hero**







## ON SHOOTING HERO XTREME IN 6:1

**The Hero commercial was shot in a very unusual format. What was the biggest challenge?**

“The 6:1 aspect ratio was the real test. We’re used to 1.85, 2.39, or even vertical frames for social media — but 6:1 is essentially a cinematic ribbon. The challenge was how to fit a Hero Xtreme Bike and rider into that narrow canvas while keeping energy, movement, and stylization intact.”

To maintain resolution, Raval shot natively in **8K 6:1** on the **Sony Venice**, using Orion

Atlas Anamorphic glass and Atomos Shogun monitoring for precision. For high-speed moments, the team switched to the **Phantom Flex 4K at 400fps**, framing with guides and later upscaling in post.

**“With 6:1, every pixel had to carry intention. You couldn’t waste a corner of the frame.”**

Lighting was equally ambitious. “The brief was limbo meets lightning,” Premal Raval says. Using DMX-controlled flashes and a base exposure of f/4, the team built a storm inside the studio, balancing grit with drama.



## ON CRAFTING LUXURY WORLDS FOR LAPIS BARD

**The Lapis Bard film looks simple on screen, but what was happening behind the camera?**

“In reality, everything was green screen,” Raval explains. “The man walks through five worlds — an office, a private jet, a bedroom, an auditorium, and outdoors — but every single one was built in **Unreal Engine** before the shoot.”

By tracking camera movements with sensors linked to the Unreal world, Raval ensured dolly or jib shots naturally

extended into the virtual environments. Lighting was painstakingly matched to pre-rendered designs, ensuring a seamless composite.

**“If my light didn’t marry the Unreal sun, the illusion collapsed. Virtual cinematography only works when the physics of light agree.”**

Fifteen days of pre-production laid the foundation. The result? A film that feels grounded in reality while being entirely fabricated.







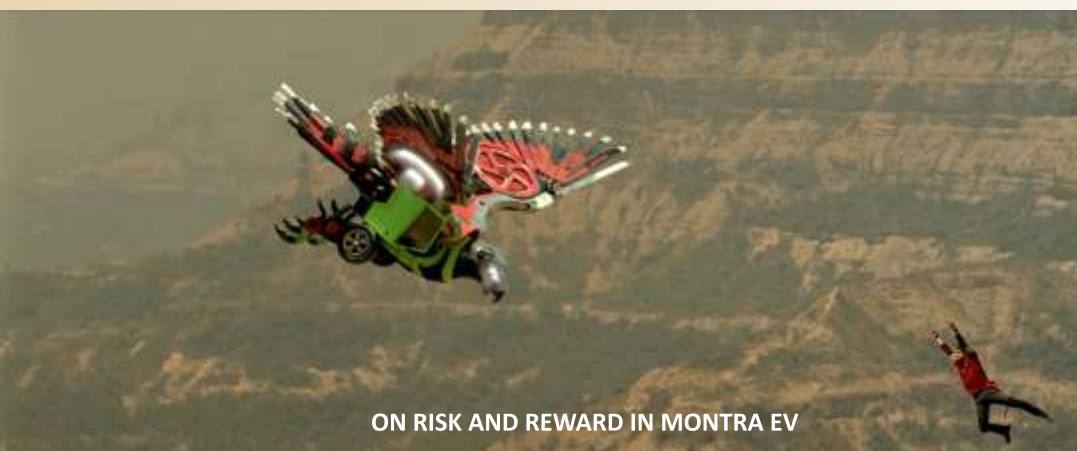
## ON VIRTUAL PRODUCTION FOR MARUTI DZIRE

**How did you make a stationary car look like it was driving through multiple landscapes?**

“With **8K LED walls**, scale, and reflections,” Raval says with a smile. Unreal Engine generated cities, tunnels, bridges, and jungles, projected across **40x60 ft back walls and 25x25 ft ceilings**. The Dzire never moved, but clever shutter control and camera motion sold the illusion of speed.

The reflective nature of the car demanded careful integration. “We had to treat the car like a mirror,” Raval recalls. “Every fixture — from **SkyPanels and Vortex units to Nanlux bi-colors and M90s** — was tuned to blend with the LED-driven environment.”

**“The car never moved an inch, but most viewers would never guess it. That’s the power of light and illusion.”**



## ON RISK AND REWARD IN MONTRA EV

**The Montra EV spot looked dangerous. How real was it?**

“It was very real,” Raval laughs. Shot at **Malchej Ghat, 2,500 feet above sea level**, the ad featured a climber leaping into open space before being caught by an eagle that morphs into the EV.

The team used two **150-foot cranes** with harnesses, plus drones, FPVs, and a crane camera to minimize suspension time. The most breathtaking moment? “The actor pushed off the wall and swung **50 feet into open air**. Even behind the lens, your stomach dropped.”

Close-ups were shot on a smaller rock face for safety, but the final blend of **real stunts, aerial coverage, and VFX** gave the piece its visceral edge.

**“Even with today’s digital tools, nothing matches the authenticity of real**

**danger captured in-camera.”**

### Closing Thoughts

For Premal Raval, the common thread across these commercials is the willingness to step into uncharted territory. Whether it’s reframing cinema in 6:1, blending worlds in Unreal Engine, or orchestrating a storm on cue, his craft balances discipline with experimentation.

“As cinematographers, we’re no longer just shaping light on set,” he reflects. “We’re designing realities — physical, virtual, or somewhere in between. The tools may change, but the essence is the same: telling stories with light, movement, and emotion.”

**“We’re designing realities now — physical, virtual, or somewhere in between.”**

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