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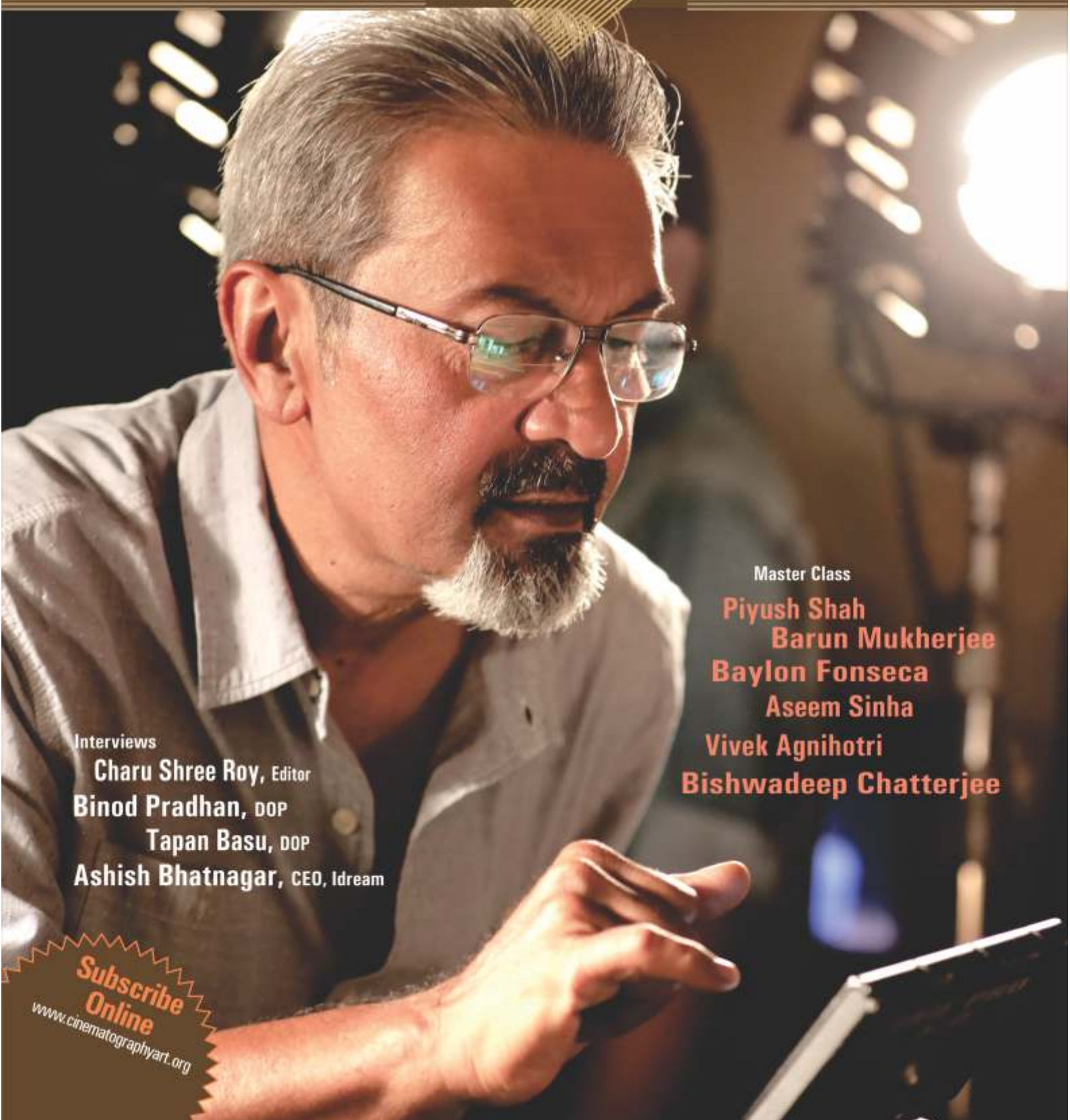
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Interview with Editor

Charu Shree Roy

There is this general saying that films, particularly documentaries are made on the editing table. What is your take on this?

I haven't actually delved into documentaries yet to give a comment on them. But I can tell you generally, in terms of the kind of films I have worked on, this statement is true. However, this is in turn director specific. When you are working with directors who know what they are making and are sure of their craft, the edit table facilitates their content.

What happens in some films is that you get material which is not up to the mark and I think perhaps from there the idea originated. The editor, then, has to/ tries to make the most of the footage and salvage it. The most ideal situation is when the material is shot from various different perspectives and at the same time, is able to dictate you the direction you need to move in. This stands to say that the director has carefully planned

through the shoot and has not just shot aimlessly. It is through the eye of a better film maker that the footage will lead you where it has to go.

If in case the footage is not of that nature, then it is the onus of those who are sitting on the editing table to salvage the situation and find the crux of the story from within. That's how I see the edit. My first priority is to let the material to lead me, going with what it tells me and without trying to put my expectations on it. If that doesn't happen, then I begin foraging for good content to drive the story.

Pace and Rhythm are two very commonly used and important terms in the field of editing. Could you please elaborate on the primary difference these two with context of editing?

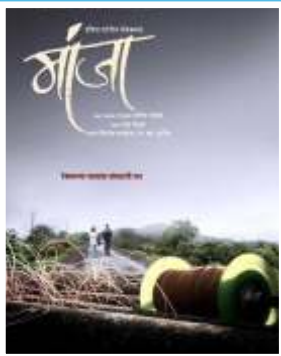
Let's say for instance, right now, I'm talking to you, therefore this conversation has a specific rhythm to it. There is a natural rhythm when I'm delivering my lines, while I'm responding

to you and your questions.

The actors on set have a similar process while shooting for any sequence. When they are delivering their dialogues for the camera, the rhythm is set through the scene and they use their performance within that measure. If it is sad scene, it has a certain rhythm, if it is an argument scene it will have a certain rhythm and an actor will be performing in that kind of a pace.

In an argument he will be faster. The lines will overlap with the other person's dialogue; probably each of them wouldn't be even speaking their full lines. I would possibly pace the scene where there would be overlapping; the characters would even cut across to each other, giving it a feeling of breathlessness while arguing.

Whereas if it is a love scene, it might be a much more languid scenario where each person will probably be taking a moment to say their lines, to



look at each other, to look away, to look shy, so those things will happen. The pace of the scene is slower as compared to the one that having an argument. This could be with the help of, say; pauses, looks, gazes; trying to use the pre-expressions of the actors before they deliver their lines.

Setting the pace of an edit is vital to the storytelling aspect, and for establishing the general stylistic feel of a film. This rhythm will then be created by a series of beats, and cannot be determined by one or two consecutive cuts alone.

Do you think that pace and rhythm needs to be controlled at the time of shoot or it can be controlled at the time of edit or is it possible at both stages?

A. It can be controlled at both positions. Usually the director would know how he wants a scene to convey but say the actor may not. For example when someone slaps the other person, maybe the timing is not correct, it is then controlled in the edit room.

I will give you the example from my films - Sui Dhaga. The scene is that five people are talking to/over each other while the mother had just fainted. Everyone is trying to decipher what must have happened to her and the mother herself is trying to come up with reasons. This was not shot together but instead each of these shots was actually taken individually.

There was no overlap in cueing but there was an overlap with the final edit. The scene gives out a feeling of chaos, especially through the individual

performances. When we connected these separate shots, there is a sense of everything happening together. In a place, while somebody was doing an X thing, someone else was doing a Y thing. Someone else was getting water and someone else was trying to talk over the other person.

The scene emoted itself that no one knows what is happening at that moment. Now that becomes slightly tricky for the director to control or pace on the set. They do try to do their best to create that environment for the actors, but largely it comes to the edit to make that chaos happen and create that sort of a rhythm.

What is the primary difference between editing a song of a feature film and editing a music video, which is an independent identity?

The songs that are composed these days are mostly narrative songs that are deeply interlinked with the actual storyline of the film. They are an integral part of the film which takes the story ahead. There could be a relevant narration in the song or a certain visual story. The visual/ musical narrative is closely linked to the story of the film, trying to make us reach somewhere via the song.

Whereas, I think in a music video, the song has an individual identity and doesn't have to fulfil the larger goals of the film or the story that needs to be conveyed. In that sense you have more liberty to have fun while editing them because there will be a story only limited to the length of the music video.





Usually they aren't a part of the movie but maybe its song album or released individually. Drawing parallel from an ad film, the ad does have a story but the story lasts up until the ad. On the other hands, narrative songs are a small but integral part of the film contributing and helping in creating a larger picture.

In the context of dance sequences, there are various ways through which a choreographer deals with the edit. Some are present in the editing room and are pretty much involved in dictating the cuts and some on the other hand try to work in collaboration with the editor as well. What is your view?

A. Usually when the song and dance sequence involves an elaborate choreography, the choreographer is the one who directs it, possessing complete knowledge of the sequence. So when such a sequence is to be edited, I would address the choreographer as the director of song. They visualise and execute the brief from the director of the film, having a clear understanding on the various aspects of the song. I, therefore, find it of great value that they assist me.

I don't think that beyond that point, they are intrusive at all, at least the ones that I have worked with. They help me understand what needs to be cut or retained, according to the idea of the

director. The various choreographers that I have so far worked with have very creative inputs but they are not intrusive, they make it easy to work with them.

And well, in the cases of most narrative driven songs, the execution is in the hands of the directors themselves, so there the choreographer is not present or involved.

In the recent years, promos have become a new and important trend in the industry. Some editors have made it into a specialised niche for themselves. Do you feel that there indeed is that kind of a specialisation required?

Promos in my opinion are a specialised form of editing. The basic understanding with which they are made is to get the footfall in the theatre.

They are less likely to be linked completely with the actual story of the film. Therefore, the mindset with which one tries to edit a promo originates from an idea of marketing the film and requires you to bring in fresh ideas. It is possible that sometimes the people who edit just the promos are able to see the value of the shot in an entirely different way than what you as an editor have trained your eye to see the shot as.

The actual story retains the purity in its entirety whereas the promo tries to convey it in a different form. They try to tell the audience that it is the film that you need to watch this weekend. That is the reason why it becomes difficult for the film's editor to edit at least the promos of their own film, since you have assigned a meaning to a shot. You have been living that meaning for six – eight – ten months; saying that a master shot means emptiness or this close-up means a feeling of longing.

But when a promo maker looks at that shot, he looks at a completely different meaning and he does manage to give it a completely different meaning in the context of the three minutes that they edit. I find it an extremely creative exercise and kudos to those who are able to do it.

I have heard stories that sometimes the rough cut is 4 hrs and final cut is 2 hr or 2 and half an hour. Why does it happen? What should be the ideal length difference between the two?

If I am able to get on board of a film before the cinematography starts, then it becomes a much more collaborative



exercise of trying to tap into the moment. If we have a discussion with the director wherein they have clarity before moving ahead, the difference between the final cut and rough cut is not a lot.

I personally prefer to not do a rough cut because I find it misleading as it has a lot of fat. It has many other things in it from the shoot making it very difficult for at least the director to see, where the footage will go. It makes the editor vulnerable as they try to imagine how the film will look down the line but there is too much to look into. It does give you the nerve.

My idea is to show the director a cut which is flowing. I make sure that the cut is something I would call my final cut or is at least the closest to it. I would tell the director that there may be a few areas I am tentative about, they may have not arrived as well as the others, but at least I would like to show them a cut which is 75% there.

In the film *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, which I had edited, there was a whole reel that was edited out of the film. We just gave an in and out to its footage and deleted the reel of around 20 minutes. We did this after completing the final cut. This was the last reel of the film where each of the characters had taken a decision with what to do in their lives. At the suggestion of an editor, usually a director does not let go of such an important reel. However, Alankrita and I had a discussion over this for around 5 months and the only way we could resolve it was trying an exercise. I cut the reel out of the film one night and told her if she does miss the reel the next morning, it will be back in the film. However, if such a thing does not happen, it will remain deleted and we would never talk about it. The next morning she told me she didn't miss it and we never got that reel back in the film.

We then tweaked the scene before the climax to make it look like the last scene. The last scene which was released was actually twenty minutes before the climax scene happens. So that was a big significant edit difference that happened in one of my own films,



where, I think it was very brave on the director's part to do away with the climax of the film by trusting the editor and kudos to her for that.

How important is the presence of the editor on the set, during the shooting of the film?

I have personally stayed away from being on the set. I have however, tried the whole process of being on the shooting and then editing it on the same day. I realised that the pressure of the shoot on the director is already so much, that the editor's presence is actually not really helping the director. Especially since the pace of shooting and editing are remarkably different. The certain kind of urgency to edit the same day does not give the editor the liberty to be



able to actually explore the material to its fullest.

For example, the director may say, "I find the problem in this scene; can you just put it together and show it to me so I know that I don't have to take any other shot?" And the editor puts it together in two hours however; they have not actually explored even half the potential of the material.

It could be possible that the scene did not require an extra close-up, but in that haphazardly edited material, the editor begins to feel the need for two extra shots, as they did not have ample time with the pool of footage. The editor may ask the director to shoot those shots but may not eventually use them.

Even though I personally feel that excess footage is good, but at the same time it is just adding the pressure on the set for director, the ADs, for the team to be able to comply to it because the editor has asked them to and not because they felt the need.

I'd rather prefer a process where, the edit starts simultaneously to the shooting but not with the pressure to show it the next day before the schedule. The edit room should be in the comforts of your own city, at the comfort of your office to make it a process at ease. It is preferable that the material is sent every two to three days or weekly as per the convenience of the production house.

When you follow such a process, you obviously tend to the critical things first. While you are going through the footage at ease, without any pressure, you are sure when you tell the director that you do feel that ABC is missing. It is a more informed feedback and not the result of trying to put together something hurriedly. This process is what I propose to every director, to start the edit simultaneously, attempting the critical scenes first.

The feedback then comes from a place of knowledge that you are actually missing the shot rather than from a place of convenience since you have just skimmed through the footage. I am, therefore, not a proponent of either on-set editing or the fact that the editor



must sit through the shoot.

How do you go about with the process of editing? Do you prefer to do it in the presence of the director or alone?

I, honestly, prefer and like to work alone. Though I do like my directors hanging around as it makes for great company, as you can just take a break, but during the initial process when I am trying to put together the film I prefer my own solitude. However if the director is present and they aren't intrusive, I don't mind them.

So, sometimes you are taking a direction and you may actually go great lengths at exploring that direction only to find it towards the end that you are wrong. However, it is important for you to realise it yourself, without someone telling you. That is how you can be true to your craft and to the story you are trying to put together.

It is sometimes important to edit the scene in the wrong direction and complete it to find out it was wrong. But if someone else points it out, in the middle of the scene, then it leads to an accident and most often than not, you

as an editor will not be convinced. It is important therefore for the idea to sink in organically by going the whole hog.

I found that editing alone gives you the sense of freedom; where you can explore even a wrong idea. I honestly love exploring wrong ideas. I do not walk in to the editing table with a surety of what I'm going to do with the footage. Sometimes I have all kinds of wrong ideas for the edit and I have fun for four days. After tweaking and trying, I tell myself, to move ahead towards the dedicated cut. The liberty to stay around is beneficial in terms of creatively treating the cut. But while I am exploring my options, it can become difficult for the director to sit through and see me dabbling. The process is as tedious as watching paint dry. So I just tell them to take a break, come back later and they will have something concrete.

Most of the directors have concurred to my process and I feel it's a good process, because when they come, they come with a fresh perspective. Of course for the final cut I have to sit with the director and that process moulds differently with each director.

There have been instances when a film has been completed edited by an editor but the director or producer is not happy with it. To overcome this hurdle, they may introduce a new editor who in turn changes the pace or rhythm. Do you think it is appropriate to get a new editor, for the benefit of the film?

A. When a director or producer hires an editor, s/he he does so possessing complete knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. However, there are times the director or producer may feel that the edit needs a fresh pair of eyes or an outside perspective to give it a new and creative outlook. In such cases, they come up with a consensus and along with the editor, as a part of that process, look at the edit differently. It is quite possible for an editor to feel a block when they are working with the same material for over months. A new person may give you their new perspective, helping you get your groove back. This process is acceptable only when the editor is also involved and is consenting. So, I am not averse to that idea, because then that's coming from a place of creativity and a respect and consensus.

However, if the director and producer decide to show the door to the editor, after they have been working on it for, maybe, eight months, that becomes an issue. You as an editor may think—rightfully so-- that it is unfair. The director should ideally have been present when you had been working on the edit, and if they were present, how is it possible that they did not find those faults then? How is it that they have realised it only at the last moment that the film is not worthy? Is it truly the fault of you as an editor or it may be so that the material or footage you have received has issues? As the new editor who comes in your place can only provide a fresh perspective to what you have edited and not fix the pool of material. And anyway, if you are a competent editor, you would have put all efforts to make it work. I think one should have the right intentions in mind and then rest can be figured out.

Do you think the editing pattern differs as per the genre of the film?

The craft of editing wouldn't (and shouldn't) change, but the pace—in terms of the engagement—will have certain differences. If you are shooting a love story, you would want to pace it slowly but engagingly.

For instance, while working on an action film, you would be using a lot of gimmick, than compared to a love story. You would not go for freeze frame or flash frame or high speed shots, in love stories but maybe more in a film like Avengers.

In horror films, there are tropes of the trade specific to the genre, that are not used in other films. There has to be some understanding of the genre of the film to have a good and accurate edit. But, your craft remains same for all. The rightness of the cut and its effectiveness needs to be the same. But the edit needs to be moulded according to the trope of genre.

How does an editor contribute creatively when in a dialogue sequence which has a kind of fixed pattern?

I find a dialogue sequence the most difficult because there are immense possibilities to shape the dialogue from any perspective.

For example, if you want to anchor the dialogue scene on your primary character, then you would be editing it

differently. Your agenda is to make the audience empathise for your primary character. If you are trying to create chaos equal importance will be given to several characters. These characters could be speaking over each other and trying to grab the attention of the audience towards themselves. If you want to create empathy for the anti-hero, you edit will favour that character. The dialogue sequences are hence the most exciting to edit as you can really do so much just with people saying their lines. You can manipulate the lines and the feelings attached to the characters. When you choose who speaks when and how much is spoken or their body language—hiding behind someone—you can really give a different direction to the dialogue sequence.

What do you expect from a director to do a brilliant edit on his film?

I think the very basic thing important between the editor and the director is collaboration. Earlier, we would have directors who would have everything planned to the T. The director would move in the direction with a complete sense of surety. The director would be the captain of the ship.

Now, with digital medium, there is a lot to explore and a lot of give and take. It is important to see what the director is bringing to the table, what is the editor can bring to the table. The process has changed and it's about telling a story collectively.

The story belongs to the director but you as a team help to tell it their way. Collaboration is at every level; from discussing the stories, to being able to be vulnerable with each other. There is also a need for the entire team to be present without any judgements and give room to each other to come to the same page.

With the advancement of the digital medium, there is the scope to shoot footage from different angles and variety of material to view. Do you find this excess beneficial?

Today, minimum two cameras are rolling giving a huge pool of footage. I don't find it a problem as I personally feel it is a great liberty to have. It is



however important for the director to understand that this medium should not be misused. The camera should be rolled because it has a purpose to it and not just to aimlessly record without proper planning. At the end of the day, it is important for the editor to be able to engage with the material and continue being excited till the end.

There needs to be a certain value to whatever piece of footage you record. And not roll because you have the liberty to do it. It becomes very difficult to try to manage that material and to tell a story, if everything is done aimlessly.

The problem lies in the lack of commitment. A director need to be sure about their film and commit to the shot they have taken while shooting. After digital since there is a liberty to keep going back and changing, the director cannot keep working on it till the last moment. Otherwise, I thoroughly enjoy the excess material and I find it extremely beneficial.

As told to Naresh Sharma, Editor
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