

BOLLYWOOD & beyond

THE PIANO

A JANE CAMPION FILM



WINNER
BEST ACTRESS
BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS
BEST WRITING
ACADEMY
AWARDS



PALME D'OR
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

WINNER
BEST ACTRESS
FESTIVAL DE
CANNES

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Dr. Rita Gangu

Katzelmache
Dr. Jacqueline Rousset

Anth Se Aaramb
Dr. Abhilash Pillai

Kenchu
Neelesh Deepa

Cinema

Karsten Stoter
International Co-production

Sreekar Prasad
Film Editor

Bishwadeep Chatterjee
Sound Designer

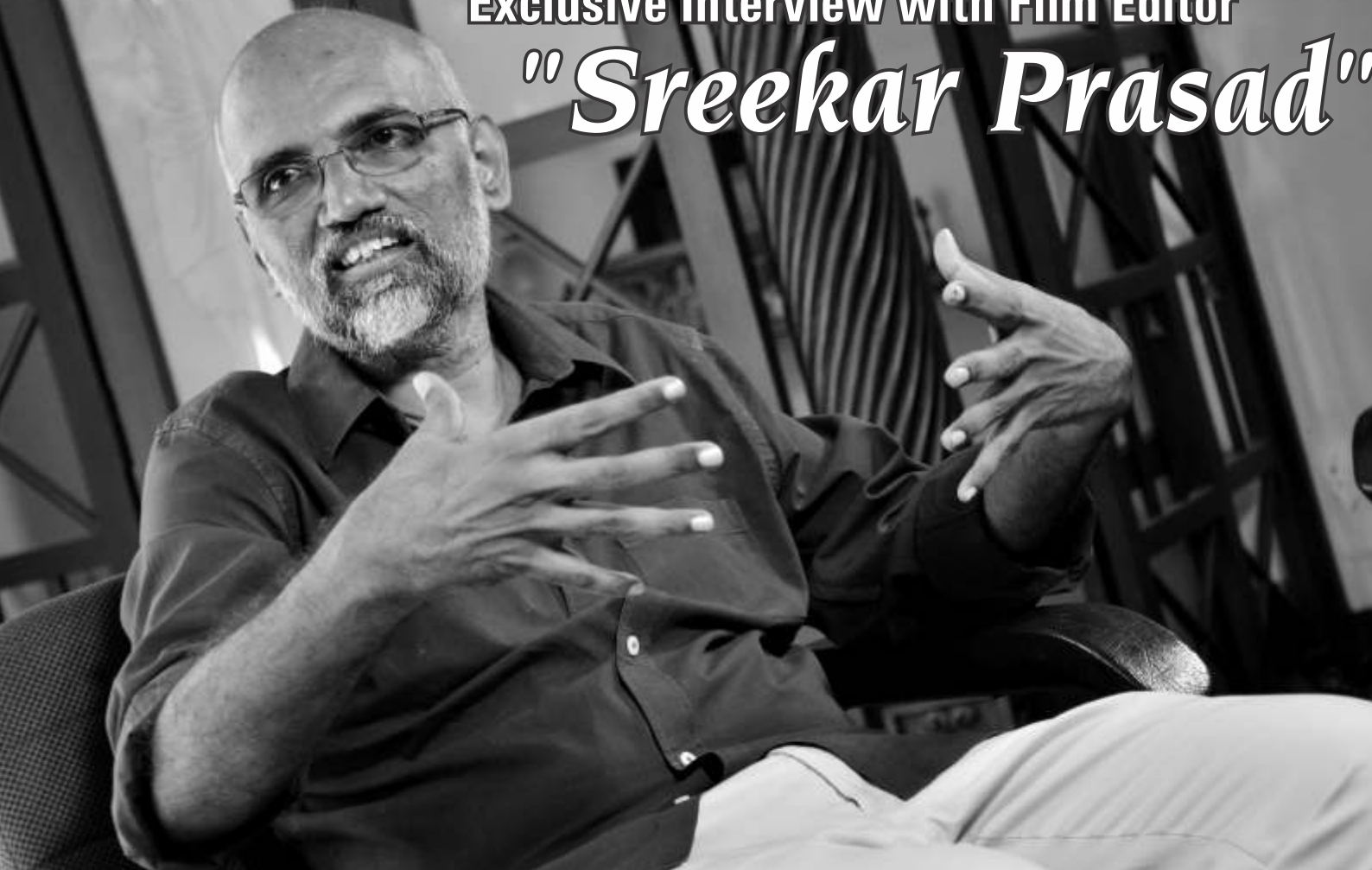


Cover Story

Piano And The Eternal Triangle
by Shrikant Prabhu

Exclusive Interview with Film Editor

"Sreekar Prasad"



SREEKAR PRASAD is one of the most sought-after editors in India. Prasad was a literature graduate from the University of Madras, who inherited his interest in editing from his father, Akkineni Sanjeevi. He started with Telugu films but expanded to Hindi, English, Malayalam, and Tamil films. As Mani Ratnam's go-to-editor, they have worked together for two decades on films like 'OK Kanmani', 'Chekka Chivantha Vaanam' and 'Raavan'. The shooting for their upcoming historical drama, 'Ponniyin Selvan' has already begun in Thailand. Prasad has also worked with various directors like Vikas Bahl on 'Super 30', Meghana Gulzar on 'Talvar', Vishal Bharadwaj on '7 Khoon Maaf', and many others. He won the National Film Award for his work in movies Raakh, Vaanaprastham, Kannathil Muthamittal, Firaq and his first Hindi film, Raakh, Filmfare Awards for Dil Chahta Hai, Firaq and Talvar, Kerala State Film Awards for Yodha, and Anandabhadram. Some of his recent works are 'Super 30', 'Saaho', 'Sye Raa Narasimha Reddy'. As of now, he is working on multiple projects set to release in 2020 like 'Indian 2' and 'Angrezi Medium'.

Pace' and 'Rhythm' are considered significant and commonly used terms in the field of editing.

Please elaborate on the primary difference between the terms.

'Pace' can be defined as the tone pertaining to a particular genre. This can be fast or slow, intense or mild. Pace is often defined by the genres of a particular film. For example, in a horror film, the presence of pauses and silences creates the effect of a scary or mysterious moment. While, in an action movie, the pace would be very different in terms of unfolding the story. Rhythm is slightly different in comparison to pace. It is to do with the interaction between two characters in a particular scene and the rhythm with which that particular emotion or interaction happens. It can also be defined as the duration of emotion or space in a particular shot or the scene itself. Both, pace and rhythm are combined in symmetry in the process of film editing, ultimately reflecting in the outcome of the film experience.

Is it possible to regulate the rhythm while shooting as well as at the time of editing? According to you, what is the ideal approach?

It is possible to regulate the rhythm at both the stages though it is much easier to control the rhythm of two characters at the time of shoot. Otherwise, we have to artificially create it. Consider two characters, A and B, who are having a conversation. There has to be a certain rhythm where A says something and B listens to it and absorbs the impact of what A said which means a space or pause needs to be there while in shooting, this can help in using a single take for that conversation but if it is not done during the shoot I would cut that moment in two shots and add necessary pause in between the two shots to get the necessary impact as it is this same impact which the audience also absorb as much as character B. So, it can be done either way.

Is there any sort of difference between editing a comedy sequence and a romantic sequence?

Definitely there will be a difference. To give a very basic example, in a comedy sequence, body language, gestures, and dialogues convey the idea of comedy. So, the hold on the shot is important to convey that particular feeling. Also when there is a funny moment in the film, we have to give the audience some time to enjoy and laugh before moving on to the next act, it would kill the humorous moment if I move to another scene without the hold on that moment. Romance on the other hand is a personal affair. This is shown via close moments and proximity. If two people are sitting across each other in love, chemistry between them is created by moving from one face to the other by cutting close shots as action and reaction of love. Instead of creating a single, long moment, we add more of interaction. As far as Indian cinema is concerned, background music plays a major role in such scenes. To emphasize on the feeling of love, there will always be a song or music in the background. As an editor I need to judge how much space and length is required for music in such a moment and keep the length accordingly. On the other hand, a comedy scene does not require this thought process.

After editing is done, music is added later, so how do you comprehend the need of pauses and space?

It's a matter of intuition. If there are two people looking at each other in silence and there is some emotional tussle present between them; you have to judge it and decide what is the appropriate length for that interaction. Also it depends on the actors performance the amount of length I could hold onto in a particular scene or moment, so that I can hold the attention of the audience without feeling bored or distracted. First I watch the scene in silence and imagine the music that will work for the scenario, this is primarily done by instinct. I always try to end the scene before it gets redundant, whether it is a tragic scene or a romantic scene.

Was there an instance where you planned a scene with specific music, but during editing it didn't compliment it?

It has happened. Sometimes what happens is that there are big montages, a term we use in Indian cinema for the passage of time or a process. In the script, montage is when there is a long time frame, for example it can be a few months or few years. In some stories, it is important to show the hardships of a character in those 3 years, which can take too much screen time and also hinder the pace of the film. So, in such situations we create montages where you show a lot of visuals depicting time passage. These three years sometimes we are able to depict in one or two minutes with help of music. One such example is the pregnancy scene in the Malayalam movie 'Vanaprastham'. The movie doesn't talk about the pregnancy but as the story unfolds in a montage of shots, different aspects of her life is shown and at the end of that montage we reveal her to be fully pregnant. Sometimes it has happened that I had to re-cut the sequence after the music director composes his music for this sort of scene, so that it is in rhythm with the music he has composed after seeing our edit.

Music videos has become an independent industry even in India. Is there any primary difference between editing a song which is part of a feature film and an independent music video?

For me there is definitely a difference. If I am editing a dance number, then we cut the sequence according to the rhythm of the song. But for a theatrical film, the rhythm of shots cut in a song can be a little longer in length as it is projected on a big screen and it would take that much





time to register. But in a music video I aim to cut faster and that's because it is seen on a smaller tv screen where even shot durations of half a second are registered easily then. Unfortunately, for a film song, the editing takes place on a 21 inches screen, so u need to constantly remind yourself how it would look on a huge big theatre screen. This is a problem that new and inexperienced editors face and sometimes they tend to overcut and it leaves a not so good experience on big screen. For example if there is a character standing in the middle of a wide shot, registering it for an audience on a widescreen takes more time than on a small screen so the hold on that shot has to be more for wide screen. So, this is the primary difference in editing a feature film song and a tv music video.

During the editing of a dance sequence, do you prefer doing it with the choreographer or do you think the choreographer should assist the director only?

I use both methods because i deal with many types of people. There are some directors who prefer to take the route of the choreographer. They like to believe that the dance is a product of the choreographer's mind so they do not interfere with that and so allow choreographers freedom in shooting and editing songs. But I have also worked with directors who are totally involved with

shooting and editing of the song and the choreographer has no participation in the editing of it. Usually I like to edit the song myself and once the edit is done, we all sit together and analyze it and look into the possible improvements if any. The primary concern for me would always to continue the story of the film how much ever distracting a song can be in a storyline. Anyways nowadays thankfully songs are becoming less of dances and more of story narration in todays cinema.

In the case of action sequences, there are multi-camera setup shoots. As an editor, how helpful is it to use multi-camera setup in film and dance sequences in terms of footage?

For me, working with extra footage is never tiresome. In fact, it is helpful because more the merrier. But it's all about making the right choice. Often directors take four cameras because they can afford it, not because it is necessary. The wiser ones get the exact shots. As an editor I have to use my discretion in choosing the right angle for that particular moment. Sometimes they use multi cameras for situations which cannot have a second take for example bomb blasts etc. It is something that cannot be re-performed so it is shot in 3-4 angles. The first thought of every editor will be to put every angle into his edit but it is not so for me as i have to be objective, and see which angle gives the scene the most

impact. It has happened many times that they have shot a scene with multiple cameras but I end up using only one camera angle because the impact that one camera provided was much better than all the other camera angles.

Earlier, the trailers were released in cinema halls. But as TVs have become more prevalent, we now see promos being aired. Editors are now specializing in this. According to you, should the promo editing be done by a separate editor and film by someone else?

Actually, it all depends on the discretion of the editor and director in each film. Promo making has become a specialised job because there is a lot of work which happens as a film is being edited and the editor cannot handle trailer work also because of the volume of promotional materials that have to be delivered in the last few weeks before the release of the film. According to me, the editor will be in the best position to know how to take the film forward as a trailer because they have an idea about it as they have edited the film. So, for the films I'm working on, I try working on the trailers if my director insists on me doing it. Some directors like Mani Ratnam give me a free hand in making the trailer so I do it for them. A trailer I feel has to convey the ethos of the film and make u want to see the film. Today trailers and promos have to be made very carefully as they make-or break the film. This is due to the short shelf life of films nowadays with multiple films releasing every week. This means that promos have to be so impact ful that the target is achieved in the first week itself. A decade ago, we used to hide content in the promo so that people have the full experience while seeing the actual film as it used to run for many weeks and films used to grow on word of mouth but now it is different as huge number of theatres are used to release a film nowadays to recover cost very quickly so it needs to be hyped up with a barrage of promos to get necessary numbers in a week itself.

Also, I've heard that sometimes the rough cut is four hours and the final cut two hours or two and a half hours, so why does it happen? What should the ideal length difference between the rough cut and final? Lagan was 5-6 hours at rough cut?

Yeah it is true .In some case like Lagaan they were so confident that the

released it and it worked too. At one time Mughal-e-Azam and Mera Naam Joker were big length films and they had an audience .But that era is gone now I feel.

With advent of television and different platforms for viewing features and web series and serials and so much content online audience is getting used to seeing content which is much shorter. Unless the content is so good or has such a hype or star casting it is very difficult to have a lengthy film now.

So basically, over the years, the script has come down in the number of pages. But what has happened is that in Hollywood films they do a script and they time it correctly. Indian cinema is a little verbose so because of that you tend to say a lot and also we have a tendency here of having a number of subplots and we try to give a lot of items in a single film.

They still have not figured a scientific way of seeing the length of the script. Hardly very few films are precise in length of script and many directors feel“let's shoot and then sort it at the edit table”. But crunching or squeezing during editing is a problem because it could kill the effect in the scene as u tend to say things quickly and u tend to lose the nuances and also clarity. What I do with my films is that i try to cut down the story by removing scenes and not crunch every scene to the point of being in effective. Also when we cut down the story, the nuances of the scenes which remain will not go, But it is a very common problem, as I face this in many films.

How important is the presence of

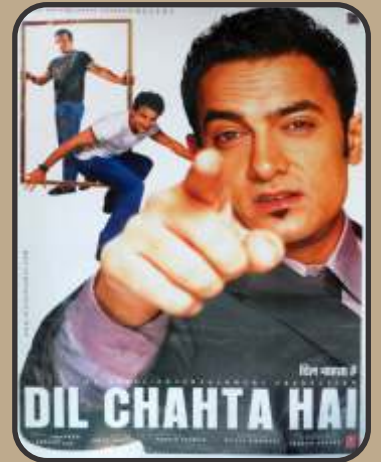
the editor on the set while the shooting of the film, because then you've seen the footage and sometimes people prefer to edit in the evening and the next day, they know what has to be redone. Do you think that is a good idea or let the director do it completely and then do the editing later?

I think both have its advantages and disadvantages. For a newer director as he is not used to shooting or editing it will be advantageous to see an edit immediately on location to judge if he is missing any shots or details or if there any continuity errors. The most important thing for a director is that he knows how the shots are cut together, joined together, and at which point he can join them. That makes his shot taking easier. But for an experienced director, and who has preplanned a lot, it is not a mandatory thing, so many senior directors don't do this. What they do is send rushes to me on a regular basis to my edit office and I edit and see and give him the feedback. Also I don't go to the location and edit, because I think if I get involved in the whole process of shooting I may not be objective enough to judge the rushes from a new perspective.

Also, a very basic question that is different from person to person, how do you go about with the process of editing? Do you prefer doing it in the presence of a director or you get the footage and first work alone or you give your assistant the rough cut and then you fine tune it? How do you go about it?

Most of the time I get the rushes and continuity reports which tells you how many takes have been shot etc during

Important Film of Sreekar Prasad as Editor





the process of shoot in a delay of 48 hrs or so after the shoot. Then the assistant will sit through and order the whole rushes. Once it has been ordered sequence wise then I'll sit and start editing the scene. I decide and take which is the best take, the best performance and start assembling the scenes. I'm editing parallelly as the shoot goes on. So at any point the director wants to see the edit, i just send it to him to see. Also it helps me in giving feedback on the rushes ,the way the edit is shaping up ,how good the performances are and if I am missing any shots etc

The coordination with the director will happen after the shoot, by the time we would have a rough cut of the most of the film and then we sit and then the director may come around and say that take number three was okay and you've taken take number two and then I would explain to him that take number two was better because of so and so reasons. Then we take calls to freeze the edit.

There have been instances where the film has been edited by a particular editor, but the director or producer is not happy with the outcome. So, to overcome this hurdle, he may introduce a new editor to reedit certain parts. Do you think it is appropriate to get a new editor once the film is being edited and if the producer is not happy to re-edit the movie?

See, this is definitely not the ideal situation to happen with anybody but if it is happening, then there is a valid reason for it to happen. At the end of the day, the producer has invested lot of money, so if

he feels that he is not able to get the best out of it, so it is up to him to engage someone else. But he should give the editor a chance to rework on it and see if it improves. See this happens sometimes because at the core level they are not satisfied with the film. It may not have turned out in the way they expected it or the way it was edited. And then they start over editing it so much they lose objectivity. That can easily happen because you've been editing the same thing for over a year, and you correct something to your satisfaction and then there will be other people who will see, and they will say it is not working. For the production to come to a conclusion is very difficult at that point so they may require another eye who will be objective, So it can be an editor or someone who can help them out. Sometimes it could be excess length and they could be confused what to drop out of the film, or it could be a story structure which needs to be fixed so they go to an experienced editor to solve the problem. Many a film screenplay changes on the edit table.

Also how does an editor contribute creatively, particularly in a dialogue sequence which has kind of a fixed pattern. So where does an editor come to contribute to the overall where one can say that this is a good edit and this is a bad edit?

There is going to be a number of dialogues in a scene and a few actors too, for example lets call them X and Y and Z. While editing the scene according to the situation of the scene in the script, you have to take a call on whom the dialogue should be played, in normal circumstances

it would be the character who speaks the line, lets assume it is X, taking the situation of the story in the scene sometimes I have to use Y 's shot on the dialogue of X or Z' shot on dialogue of X to make the scene more impactful ,for me at the point is on whom these lines make an impact in the context of the story So, these sorts of calls editor has to make, so if you look it as a script paper it will look like- x spoke, y spoke, z spoke, three lines. Suppose x is not a great performer, y and z are very good performers then the whole thing changes too. And sometimes silences and pauses in the editing of a dialogue scene elevate it very much. So, once the footage comes you can interpret it in the best possible way for the script.

Also, very often we use the term timing. Timing particularly in the case of comedy sequence that the timing of the actor is very important. So how we implement this timing thing, which is there at the time of performance, but if it is not taken care at the time of editing and then it may not give the proper impact. So, what is your interpretation of timing while editing?

Basically timing has to be compared to reality in terms of reaction. See every action has a reaction. But it is different in every situation. The thing with comedy is that it is instantaneous so that is the timing what we are talking about. See, if I'm going to say a dialogue, in a situation where it is something that I'm saying is very rude and the other guy has to react then ideally, he will not allow me to finish the sentence also. That is how it has to be edited too. In another instance, if I'm telling someone that your uncle is dead, then that guys timing instantly will be of shock which means he has to absorb the shock and then reply which means u give an expression or pause there before replying ,this is dialogue timing. Basically it has to be as realistic as how we do it in our daily life to get a sense of believability. On the other hand in comedy when the timing is instantaneous it makes you laugh better. If this happens in between the cuts between two shots, then we have to make it as real as it can be. In different situations there will be different timings.

You've worked with a variety of people, Did you also work with directors that makes your job easier or more challenging?

There are some directors you look forward to. Taking Mani Ratnam's name, so he is somebody I would look forward to.

For example, even if it is a simple scene of brother coming to see his sister, though it would have happened in many films, what excites me is how he interprets it and how he opens the scene is always a revelation, he will never do it the conventional way. Because he's always trying to look the another way for it, which is very interesting. Then I've worked with some directors like Homi Adajania. He has a very whacky sense of looking at things, so it suddenly excites you to be in that zone when he's narrating the script and making that film. There is Shaji N. Karun whom I have edited some films. With him he has so many layers that he is been thinking off and he's not an expressive person to tell you everything. So, In the whole process of editing I'll be realizing many things like he's put an image back and it was in the 8th minute and a similar image is back in a different context on the 108th minute which is sort of a revelation. It opens up the possibility of cinema because we are trying to balance between making money and working, what you want to really do is cinema which you hope it is still preserved as an art. When you see some cinema, you get really inspired because the amount of time they've taken or painstaking effort they've put into it, in terms of all the things, visuals, backgrounds, emotions, everything. It feels so overwhelming.

In documentary editing there is no fixed pattern, there is a footage, there is an idea there are sequences that director has shot but how does an editor really make final cut of the documentary where a fixed pattern is not there?

I think documentary editing is something that is far more difficult in terms of getting to the perfect flow than a feature because it doesn't have a story line. But again, when I'm editing a documentary or I'm seeing a documentary it is a story you're telling. When you're telling a story it's about how you unravel the story, that's very important.

Though it may be very simple what a person is narrating, what he says in the beginning and what he says in the middle and what he says in end makes a difference for the documentary to be interesting. It's like a story telling book. So, we keep revealing as the film progresses to get to a climatic high of revelation and satisfaction at the end of it when the topic or idea hits you and affects you in the end.

Also, since there are so many films that you've edited, would you like to narrate any interesting from edit point of view of a particular section from a particular film which you can recollect immediately ?

In the process of editing, the screenplay actually changes. Though it's not necessary that it has to change but there is a possibility that the screenplay may change because reading a script and seeing it on a screen are two different things as it involves a lot of variables like acting, production values, shooting time which sometimes are beyond control of the director. Sometime, it may not work the way we have planned so the screenplay has changed in some films which has made it better as an experience. For example i remember one film called "With you, Without You". Initially it was a non-linear sort of narrative, the film starts with the death of the girl and then we slowly go through the flashbacks. And as you go on towards the end of the film you what happened to her and all that. But when I was editing with Mr. Prasanna Vithanage, the director, I realized that somehow the end part of the film is not holding because you already know she is dead, and then showing her struggle was not working as I knew she was inevitably going to die, had it been a murder mystery where you're trying to investigate, then it could have worked. But for this film I was convinced a linear story telling would work better. I managed to convince the director to do a new structure and after seeing he too agreed.

Another film which immediately comes to my mind is Kaminey where the structure had to modified in such a way, as it was a parallel story between two brothers and one story was romantic and the another was a very hardcore action. So, what happened initially when they cut it, they were not every satisfied and I stepped in later. I found that the problem was the balance between the two stories coming parallelly. One story had so much action in it and then the next was a love story which inherently looked slower than the other story. So, we had to restructure it parallelly in a way that it was that you're spending similar time on two stories and so you don't get distracted. And then we came to whatever is there finally and it worked.

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