



Interview with Film Editor *Deepa Bhatia*

never assisted her, she became my role model. This is how I edited 4-5 films for him. He taught me everything and we had a wonderful working relationship. My only difficulty was that I couldn't get him to see my point of view sometimes ! He was my mentor so I couldn't force my view but the truth is that a editor should have a strong voice.

I was also going through my own doubts as an editor. I was working on instinct, without enough understanding of craft. For this purpose, I stopped editing for 3 years. During this period I read a lot, watched a lot. I just started to learn editing in my own way. I was more confident when I got back to editing after that gap. I kind of felt that balance between instinct which is invaluable to an editor and craft which is the basic technique. Later, I edited Jahnu Barua's film "Maine Gandhi Ko Nahi Mara" in which I had felt a different kind of confidence as I was in a comfort zone.

You have done so many films. what is your basic expectation from a director ?

The soul. The films which don't have a soul, they just don't work. They may have best technicians; they may have everything at their disposal but they just don't come together. When you just see the material you can feel that inherent honesty and inherent character. When that character is not here, it is almost that 80% of time one is losing the battle. I have even felt that when I watched other people's work.

I have seen some films which I didn't like but they were edited beautifully. I have also seen films which I felt were not well edited but I still loved the film because the filmmaker's soul is very strong. There is something in the films which rises above all departments of film making and vice versa. Hence as an editor, we can bring in the craft and try to do everything we can. But finally it is one quality that only a director can bring to the table. It is that edge a director brings.

Do you think that there is much more opportunity to experiment at the editing in a documentary than Fiction ?

I think it is a fact that the film is made

How did you start your career in editing?

After I finished my social media communication course from Sophia College, I joined Govind Nihalani as an assistant director on the film Sanshodhan. We had an ad film editor who was not able to give as much time as Govind ji probably needed. The machine had all the material and nobody was there to work on it. So I thought let me just try.

I did this over the month whenever the editor was not able to come. After a month, I just edited some material and showed it Govind ji. He liked the way it was put together. Of course, I was not an editor. Later he kept telling me that you

have a good sense of editing and I should pursue it. Even then actually, I didn't take it seriously at all. I think that a year after he started a project "Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa". He called me and told me to edit it.

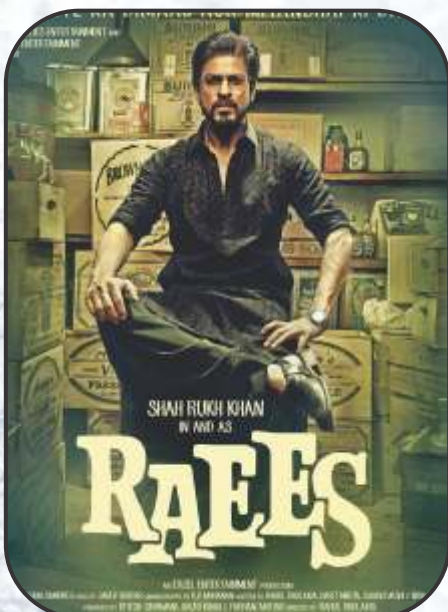
He also said that he would request Renu Saluja (they had worked together in Ardh Satya) to polish it if i don't do it nicely. I felt very privileged that i had a boss who saw a talent in me and helped me to discover it out. I just cut Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa. It just went like as if I was born to do it. I knew how to navigate the process technically, I knew that there was so much to learn because I was a newcomer but the creative process which is the heart of editing came organically to me .

Later you also edited films such as "Takshak" and "Dev" tell us about your experience of working with Govind Nihalani.

Govind ji shoots a lot with multiple angles. So with him i got the chance to explore the material. I had to experiment if I will began with this what will happen ? He had his own machine. Hence, there was no pressure for editing clock ticking. He gave me time to experiment. Since he had worked with Renu Saluja on Ardh Satya he shared a lot of what he observed from her method of working. For example : he told me that as an editor one has to develop a visual memory.

The key of editing is to be able to remember all those thousands of shots. He told me how perfect were Renu's cuts and how much she contributed. Though I

Important Films of Deepa Bhatia as Film Editor



on the editing table holds completely true for documentary. like for my own documentary which I made on the farmer's suicide, I had a young editor Avro Banerjee as I wanted some objectivity. Since the day I visualized the film I thought of a certain beginning. I had always seen it that way but he threw a very different idea that was so exciting !

Hence in a documentary that really holds true because you don't shoot so much as per the structure as you shoot a fiction film. A fiction film is bound within different parameters of the script but if the material is there then good editors can really perform miracles. As I always say to myself for films that I edit if it was loose or clumsy, did you smarten it up to the best it can become? That's the goal I keep; make the film the best it can be.

It is also said that "rhythm and pace" is to be created in the editing. Do you also think that it is created more at the time of shot taking or it is only created in the editing ?

Rhythm in the scene comes from two things - internal and external elements. The external rhythms include how is the camera operated, how is one covering it? What is the break down for shots? How many angles is one giving to the editor? One can manipulate the rhythm based on the material. How does your actor say his lines, what is his rhythm? You may do the whole six-minute scene in a single shot. What can I do about the rhythm then? Once the film comes to the editing table, you know that if you have angles, if you have coverage, you can manipulate.

If I find the scene which is too slow. I can speed it up. it is in my hands. If I find that the scene is going too fast, I can slow it down too. I can create a pause. you have to break down the rhythm which is feeling correct to your heart. I think rhythm is the key to editing. It is just like observing people.

I think as an editor we have to constantly observe people as it gives us the chance to reconstruct that in the cinematic space. Most of directors i have worked with, all of them tend to shoot enough so that I can play with it but yes, if one has fair amount of material, coverage then you can do a lot with rhythm.

When we talk about the pace it is more like the scene is going fast or slow or is it more of the overall film ?

If you watch a film like "social network" how quickly the characters speak ! That is because it is reflecting a time which is energetic, young, cutting edge, when new ideas were being explored. So the general pace is high energy. Different films have their own way of communicating different emotions.

If one talks about from where the pace comes from, it is generally the way the character is speaks lines. Sometimes people say that the film is too slow. Editing could have been sharper. I remember that I edited the film 'Takshak' and a critic wrote that film could be cut short by 45 minutes. I was like... do these people know what is 45 minutes of screen time? What actually happens is when the viewer/critic is unhappy with the film is

that we have to find something to blame that blame invariably falls on the editing and the pacing.

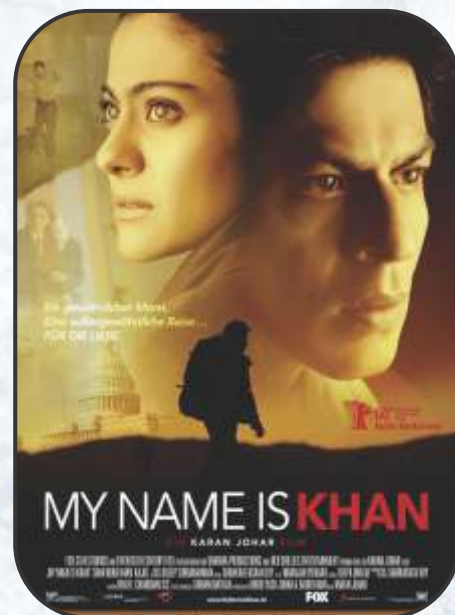
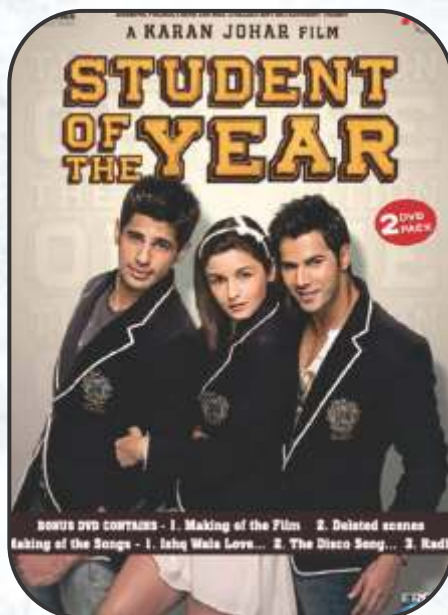
How important it is for the choreographers to be present at the time of the editing ?

I don't like anybody to be present at the time of editing be it the director, the choreographer and the action director. They have shot the film. Now I look at the material. I have the shot break down, I have the script. Now I have to do my job. Supposing as a director you have planned something for the beginning, I might be able to bring in another perspective. If I get it wrong, I'll redo it.

In the same way I tell the choreographers let me cut it. Come and see it. Please give me feedback. If you want something to change, you are the director I will change it. They give their suggestions and they have some amazing ideas too but give me the opportunity to bring in an option, to interpret the material. I have a lot of arguments with choreographers who send their assistants to tell me how I should do it. I don't like that interruption.

I look at ng's and all other shots. like for example 1st take ng, 2nd take ng, 3rd take ng, 4th ok, 5th ok, 7th ok, 9th perfect. What happens when I look at from take 1 to 10? Did he not like the actors' tone ? Did the camera movement change ? I understand the mind of my director through his 10 takes. I don't know why all editors don't look at everything. For me ng's speaks so much more. I spend

Important Films of Deepa Bhatia as Film Editor





hours watching rushes. This is why I do one film at a time.

Do you think a promo also need to be cut by a special editor who cuts only the promo ?

I think that promos edit are marketing driven. They are best executed by those who get that space well. The Padda brothers, Trigger happy... all of them are really good at it !

Why the length of the rough cut is too long then the fine cut ?

First problem is that film scripts are overwritten. Earlier in my career I used to be in this situation. My 1st cut was of 2 hours, 3 hours and I needed to bring it down to 90 minutes. When you are young in your career, you are afraid to alter the scene. You first give complete opportunity to a director's vision. It is at a

later stage that you say ok let's cut, maybe we can change this. What I do now is that I don't have any difference of more than 7-8 minutes between my fine cut and first cut.

Experience helps a person to gain more skills. Editing involves macro and micro inspection. When you are cutting a scene you are looking at the micro structure...the nuances, the small details. When scenes are cut, you pull out and work on the macro picture. Both the director and me now look at overall pacing rhythm and the larger experience. Reinventing is the key. For this reason I think macro and micro shift is always tricky.

How comfortable are you in doing your edit in close or doing edit on the spot when the shoot is done ?

It is the personality of the director.

For certain directors, having the editor on the set is an advantage. In my case if I am editing on the set then I lose my objectivity. I do go visit the set , But I don't like to edit on the set. My process is that I take lot of time watching rushes. Editing is very meditative. It is one part of film making which gives you time to think. I don't know why people rush it. While shooting, one makes impulsive decisions day after day. Both writing and editing are contemplative and it is critical that we don't rush it up. For me this is like a temple. It is a meditative space. For me, it is also a very introspective world. A director comes up with an idea, he develops the script and shoots. It takes 2-5 years. that's how long he has lived with it. As an editor I too must try to discover his film completely. I must know it as well as him only then I can be useful to him. For that I have to look at the material very carefully. Now I know as much as he knows. Now, we have discussion during which he says "why didn't you use take 2, I must be able to justify that choice by being completely in tune with the material.

Is there anything else which you would like to say related to editing ?

Most times editors are fixing problems created by poor writing. It is really important we invest time in good writing because at the end of the day, that is what will create good films. Regarding the process of editing itself, I always believe the key is watching the footage with great care. That usually gives you good results. □□□

Important Films of Deepa Bhatia as Film Editor

