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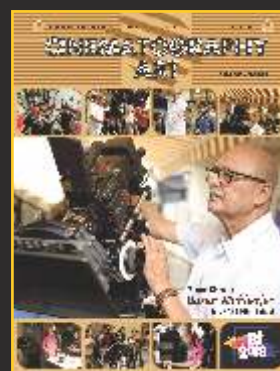
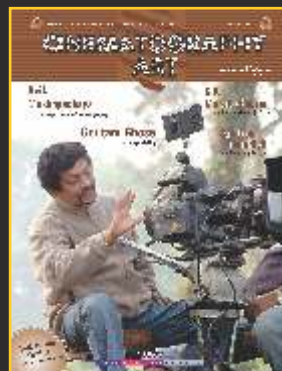
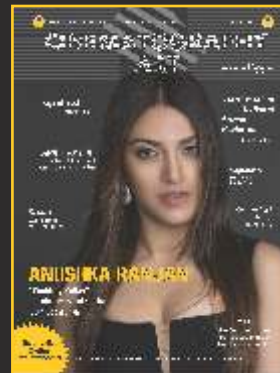
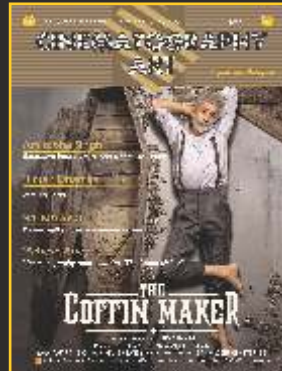
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Interview with DOP

# Anil Mehta

About Shooting "Beyond the Clouds"

In India Cinemascope is most prevalent shooting format for feature films but "Beyond the clouds" is shot on 1:1.85.

At one time, in the era of film prints the 2.35:1 aspect ratio was a given in India because the exhibition chains were all committed to Anamorphic lenses for Projection / 2.35:1 and our audiences grew happy with that format. So we ended up shooting all our films for 2.35:1.

In the digital era it's just muscle memory... Majidi's films are always deeply personal and stay very close to the characters... for me, it was a film not suitable for the 2.35 aspect ratio. When I

told the producers, they were ok with the idea because Majidi's films are also intended for international release. Majidi also preferred 1.85 :1 so the conversation ended there.

**The brothel sequence was shot on location in a very congested space, how did you manage to light up in that kind of situation?**

Most of the locations in this film are in congested areas. The house interior was also a very small space. Dhobi Ghat is a very crowded and congested area, although it looked expansive in the film. It was very tight to navigate in the narrow alleys of Chor Bazaar... that was a challenge of the entire film, that is also

Mumbai. Lighting the apartment was tricky. When we were on location and were planning the house interior, Majidi wanted one removable wall and I said that it might not be necessary, I was happy to work within the confines and find solutions.

In the first shot of the brothel sequence you see everything: ground floor, first floor, second-floor continuous pan on the corridor coming into the room. It's like almost a 360-degree view of the entire location in one shot. These days I find myself lighting more with practicals that are eventually in frame. There is some skylight in that building courtyard then pretty much everything else is lit by the practical light sources There might be a 300W, a 650W or a Kino Flo hidden somewhere... the Dedo Kit was really useful on this film. Actually, I have developed a very minimal approach to lighting.

**The sequence when Ishaan is being chased by the police, he enters in a huge car garage with a high ceiling. One notices that there were narrow shafts of lights coming from the top. Was it the time of day or was it artificially lit from the outside?**

We had to pick the time of the day because accessing that roof needed large cranes and that was not part of the scheme of this film. In spite of being a big production, we had certain limitations to work with. With the Director and with the AD team we worked out specific hours of the day when we would be shooting these scenes and that's how we managed it. It's a very popular Bombay location called Mukesh Mills in which the art director set up the entire garage and then we created those little opening in the ceiling by just picking out the tiles. One brave art department guy went up and picked out some of the terracotta tiles and I remember standing at the location and telling him to take out 2 tiles from here, 3 from there.... There was also some welding going on in that area so some smoke was inherent in the set. Mr Majidi was very 'light conscious' through the film and would respect the 'time of day' schedule. He would also often comment on 'too much light' or 'contrast'... It was interesting to engage with him on these issues.

**In the chasing sequences of the film, there were various fast camera**



**movements which is very risky. How did you manage to execute it smoothly?**

There were many such shots. A lot of Steadicam stuff, with a very experienced and good Steadicam Operator called Sunil Khandpur. Narrow lanes of chor bazaar, dhobi ghat, running shots in Mukesh mill, VT Station platform... He was a big asset on this film. Sometimes he would be sitting on the back of the motorcycle, sometimes on a push cart and sometimes just plain

running. Another low cost device that I use often is a Vibration Isolator strapped to an open vehicle like a Maruti Van. The driver is a very key person on such occasions. I had Arjun Bhurji as my Key Grip on this film. Another important member of the crew.

**In the Dhobi Ghat location, in a long shot, you see many cream coloured bed sheets hanging. Was it a real location?**







Those were specially setup in a big open yard in Versova village. Some of the property around the Dhobi Ghat area had been acquired by the builders, so their open-lot drying areas were already gone. The cues came from the real location and then we built.

**There is a scene in the house, where there is an argument between the brother and sister. The sister is in bluish lighting and the boy is in a warm tone, what was the idea behind that?**

It comes from the situation. The fact is that the room which she goes into, no light is on and the room in which the boy is standing is lit with a warm tungsten lamp. On the one hand it's just a simulation of reality and on the other it is an expressive way of playing for contrasts in both colour and illumination.

Mixed colour temperatures are an everyday experience for us and it can be an effective tool for drama.

**Tell us something about the shooting of the Jail Sequence?**

The jail was a completely constructed Set. Although we did get some permissions to shoot jail exteriors, it was very tricky to get inside. Also Majidi's visualization of a Prison was very different from what our real prisons are. We don't have individual cells and bunk beds in our prisons, yet he was very clear that he wanted them. The Set was built to his specifications.

**There is a scene when the boy is hiding in the sister's place. The man comes from outside, he sees the slippers outside and goes away and then the Ishaan's cry is heard in a dimly lit with a rim light only so you cannot see his tears but you only hear him crying in the dark. Was it your idea or the director vision?**

As usual we had a very restricted space. Ishaan then switches off the only practical light source in the room, when this man comes, he is actually in darkness standing in the corner of the room. It is a very emotional and an evocative moment and it was a struggle to find the placement of the lights. I had

set up this cross light on his face without any fill and the director was okay with it. So I left it like that. An interesting interplay happened when Ishaan actually leaned back while he was weeping and rested his head on the wall... After the shot was over, Majidi was really happy. We have to stop believing that it is always about the actors' eyes, light itself can have an expression ...

**When Ishaan is frustrated, he comes and throws the pigeons in a congested room. In that room, there was only one big window which was the main source of light. Did you use artificial light to increase the ambience lighting level?**

It was an overcast day so we did use one '6K Fresnel' HMI coming from the window from a distance and there was also some Kino Flo Fill in that room.

**In the end, last Holi sequence in the film, one gets to see the colour flying. Was it 'time of the day' again or artificial light that was used for streaking the colour?**





This was all natural light but we had to time it properly... we were able to spend sometime looking at the light path, we picked the time of day and we shot it around then.

So the lighting was planned but it was all natural light.

**Since most of it is shot Exterior did you find anything challenging despite your experience of more than 30 years?**

Every shoot throws up new challenges and we have to find specific solutions, that's for sure.

This film similarly, Majidi was happy to throw us off at the deep end... like he did for the opening scene... off a really busy flyover at Bandra. I did not think we could pull off that shot without a Techno crane but we did, with a Jimmy Jib and some really careful platform construction over the city's main water pipes...

**I would like you to comment on the sequence when his friend ditches him and then two goons are seen beating him up in slushy back-waters?**

That is one sequence in which the VFX has been extensively used. It was not safe for the boys to go into that slushy area so we built a wooden platform on which they could do all the action and not drown. The slush was textured in post and of course the birds were multiplied using CGI. The Flamingos were one of the key elements of that location. Real flamingos don't behave in

the manner that the director wanted, so we took the liberty of doing CG.

**Did you have some specific camera choice used for this film?**

My package remains quite simple. I have been repeating the SONY F 65 with Master Prime lenses as my basic kit, the Angénieux 24 to 290 sits in the kit but I rarely use it.

SONY's F 65 has always been my favourite camera but now it's become difficult to use it because manufacturing has stopped and very few bodies are in good shape.

I have already shot the new film 'Sui Dhaga' on the Panasonic VariCam Pure.

**Did you carry out any DI tests before you started shooting?**

Actually more than me, Majidi was keen to see how Digital looks. He was shooting digital for the first time and he was really sceptical. I ran some tests to show him the texture and tonalities which can still look 'Filmic'. We shot something on location with real people so that Majidi could get a feel for the place and the medium. He returned to see some graded dailies and stayed invested in the process. After seeing the first copy he was visibly impressed and at that moment I asked him, "so digital from here on..?" I got only a loud laugh for an answer...

**Anything that you would like to add?**

When you work with a foreign director with a formidable reputation like Majid Majidi's there is always some tension... are we understanding his vision... how is he seeing our reality... Language is a problem as one is always communicating through an interpreter.

I feel, that the way western films deal with drama is different from the way we write and deal with it. With all the characters in "Beyond the Clouds", the moral dilemma and the moral questions keep on opening up and he keeps them in play, the situations never fully resolve themselves... It's the interplay of good and bad that keeps you engaged not the pitting of good vs evil...

**- Interviewed by Lalit Rao, Film Critic (FIPRESCI)**

