

Interview with DOP

Binod Pradhan on Shooting "Kalank"

The man known for changing cinematography into visual artistic poetry. He endeavor to deliver the best and the unique, movies that brings a splendid aesthetics to the viewers. He is known to use his camera like a paintbrush to create visuals of unmatched color and combination. His cutting-edge imagery in the much-applauded "Rang De Basanti" for which he won the IIFA Awards and Film Fare awards for Best Cinematography. He's worked with the biggest stars, raising the bar each time. He has also photographed some of the most beautiful women on the Indian screen like Madhuri Dixit in "Parinda", Manisha Koirala in "1942...A Love Story", Aishwarya Rai in "Devdas" making them studded with glitz and glamour. Friends like Vidhu Vinod Chopra repeated him in "Khamosh", "Parinda", "1942...A Love Story", "Mission Kashmir" because of his exceptional talent and complete absence of attitude. He is a veteran cinematographer known for his movies like "Delhi 6", "Munna Bhai MBBS", "Tara Ra Rum Pum", "Yamla Pagla Dewaana", "Mausam", "Kismet Konnection", "Bhaag Milkha Bhaag" etc taking the art of cinematography to a completely different league. In this interview he Talks about his experience of Shooting latest Release " Kalank".



You have already worked in collaboration with the director Abhishek Verman in his previous film 2 States and were aware of his process. However, the sets were important in the film Kalank. Could you please elaborate on what was your first interaction with the set designing of this film?

Abhishek and Amrita-- the production designer of the film—had already made it clear to me that the film should look large. It was a period film and the colours they chose worked very well with how I see the genre and the way I shoot the film.

I was trying to make the colours muted and not make it very colourful; giving the film a warmish tone generally. Red was a recurring colour in the film, used a lot in the set designing or

props and I was slanting more towards including the colour yellow.

I have used red lighting in some places, like one song that is blatantly red in the beginning or in the climax or the end of the film supposed to harp on a red signal light, where they stop the train. I enhanced the scene much more than it would have been with the light.

The poster of the film has used the color red primarily in the design, so was the decision taken prior to the shooting of the film?

I do not know about the poster, but yes, the colour red was to be emphasized in the film since the beginning. We used in most of the scenes as it is a powerful colour that signifies passion, love as well as hatred, violence. The unique quality of this colour is that it signifies a range of emotions, of all varying types and that was our main motivation to use it throughout the film.

The outdoor locations of the films had a lot of steps of different heights. Why were these included in the design, was there a conscious agenda?

I am not sure if Abhi particularly wanted to give any emotional significance to height but what I

understood was it was a rather aesthetical decision. There were large area of flatness in the sets and the village area, so we needed some areas where you had to climb up to. For example, you climb up to where Zafar lives or works, there are steps in Bahaar Begum's kotha.

How did you blend the set and the real location for Bahaar Begum's kotha?

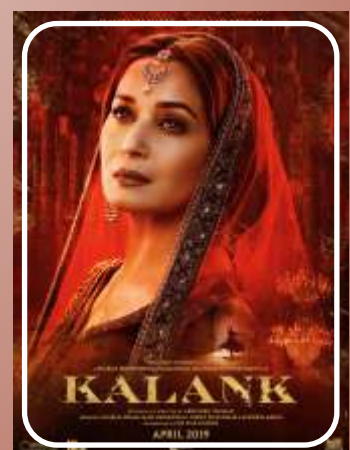
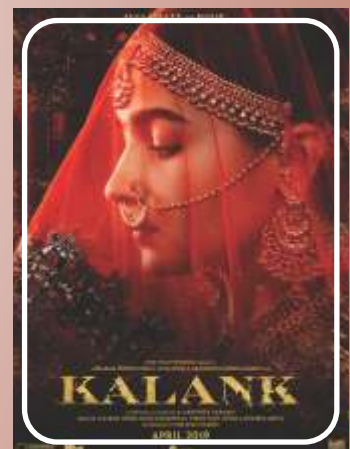
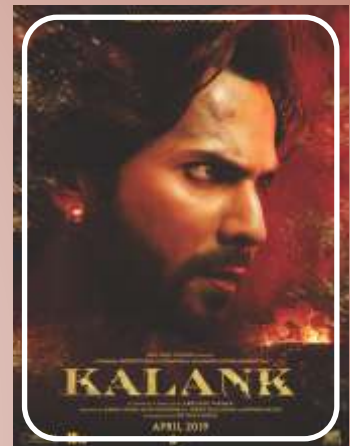
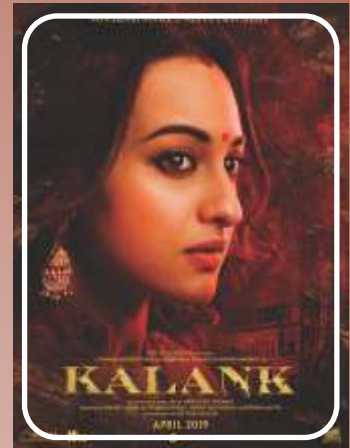
We shot the sequence outside Bahaar Begum's Kotha on an outdoor set along with the Hira Mandi market. There was a water body for the boats to move and the distance expanse of the water was created in vfx. The indoor of the Haveli was shot in an indoor studio floor.

Was the wide shot of the inside of the kotha a real one or did you do it over computer graphics?

We generated the roof for the haveli in CG as to construct one would have created logistical problems in lighting. It also helped in simplifying construction.

How did you plan your shoot in terms of lighting Scheme to show different parts of the day in this film ?

Two major songs of the movie were shot inside the kotha so I thought it





would be very boring to see them in the same light repeatedly. One song was shot to look like day and the other was lit to look like night. I tried to simulate outside light to make it seem like it is the daylight coming in and lighting up the faces. We used tungsten light to shoot for the night and emphasized on the warmer tone. While we were shooting in the day, even though there was a lot of tungsten light used, we employed the outside light as well. The daylight was cooler than the tungsten light and we had two different colour schemes in terms of lighting.

In the scenes inside the kotha, the characters are light in softer tones of light. How did you choose the material that should be used to get the desired effect?

I used a variety of diffusion materials to soften the light. I use diffusion materials that you get in rolls and there are big cloth materials also.. I keep alternating between these various materials to get the preferred setting. It varies as there can be many ways of doing it, each material having its own properties. I have hardly used bounced light.

There are many good and diffused lights available in LED these days. I especially like the Arri Sky Panels. I have used many LED lights with good diffusion materials and have realized it can give great results. The throw from these lights is

powerful and big enough these days. Even when using HMI par lights, I diffuse them. Maybe instead of using one I will use two lights to make up for the light loss but most of the lights used in the film are diffused.

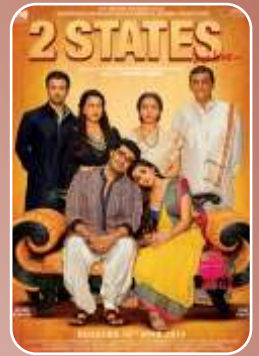
What was your lighting plan for shooting outdoor since the sets did not have a consistent same level ?

Most of the times we diffused the sun light as we had many narrow lanes to shoot. Shooting in the sun was not possible as we could be doing it throughout the day and it will have discrepancies in terms of light.

If I have sunlight coming from the left, firstly the problem that would arise is there would be shadows in narrow lanes. Secondly, sometimes the sun will come and light up the whole street or the sun will change sides and the shadow would fall on the other creating a lot of jerk in lighting continuity.

What we did instead, we used a huge piece of white cloth to cover the top, which acted as diffusion material. Most of the times I was using sunlight shadowed from the top and they are in soft light. There are some places, where you see a patch of light falling on the wall, it was not intentional but was not removed, as it would have taken too much time they did not seem to look bad.

The outdoor nights at Hira Mandi was a huge exercise, the set being





What about the sequence where the character is running on the platform, how did you light it?

The sequence where the character is running on the platform was obviously done with a static train mostly. However, there are some, shots where the train is supposed to be moving which was also shot static. I moved the lights to simulate moving lights on a face when the train moves. . We had very few bogies so the rest were created with computer graphics. We pulled the bogies with a tractor when we had to show it moving.

What are some of the lenses you have used for this film?

I used two ARRI SXT cameras with



Ultra Prime prime lenses and two Allura zooms (40-250mm and 16-42mm).

How difficult is it to ensure what you have shot is retained after the computer graphics are done with?

The computer graphics worked in harmony with what we had shot. There was a shot that we took in the day but Abhishek later decided to make it night. So in DI I worked on it, made the lamps look lit, worked on the windows and lights. We then sent it to the vfx guys as a reference where they did the final touches and we had the shot looking like night.

How did you shoot the sequence where the umbrellas were lit?

We shot that sequence by putting LED lights under the umbrella. Abhi, in the middle of my lighting, came up with

this idea. When he told me about it, I thought he had gone crazy. However, when we tried it once, it did look good so we decided to keep it.

How did you shoot the sequence climax sequence with fire?

The climax scene had widespread fire everywhere but one cannot obviously do it in a set. I instead placed lights where I wanted the fire, as this would light the characters as fire would. We can therefore see that the fire is reacting to people and their movement exactly the way it should. Finally fire was added in vfx to replace the lights

How did you get the flickering effect of the fire?

There is a control box, a flicker board that makes the lights flicker in various ways. one has to dial in the type that is satisfying. At places we used the ARRI Sky Panel to flicker. I had a lot of 1-kilowatt small bulbs that we call 'mirchi' lights, put an orange gel around four or five of them together with a warm gel wrapped around them, connected to the flicker box.

We coined the lollypop for want of a better term. I have used a lot of them in various films since I did Mausam. That's when I first devised it.



really big. It helps me to work on such sets piece by piece with different sets of assistant in different areas different lanes.

In the ending sequence of the film, when the protagonist comes outside the house, you see a warmish tone on him. However, the female character has a bluish tinge. What is the reason behind this?

I did not want to light the scene completely; I wanted some of the dark to be in the frame as well. Even in the scene right before it, Alia is walking on the patio and she is mostly in the dark, bathed in cool light. I wanted it to look like there was moonlight lighting the her face. So we had the Varun's face lit with warm light and and Alia's lit with a cool blue light. Of course, I lit her brighter than normal to prevent it from looking murky. The scene was a romantic one so it was important to ensure that it is not too dark and mysterious.

How did you light up the train sequence as it is congested?

We used the actual practicals that were on the train. I had specified the nature of the lamps to the art department while the set was being constructed. So these were the only lights used tfor most of the scene. We had some highlights coming from the side at times to lie light from the platform coming into the compartment.