

JAL MISTRY

When and where were you born?

1923, in Bombay. I am 73 now.

How did you get interested in cinematography?

I didn't go to any school or college for photography. You see I started my career in films, and that was in 1944. That was in Siri sound studios, Dadar. Actually I did not get the main chance over there. But after about a year and a half some cinematographer was ill so I was asked to photograph that film.

What did you learn before that?

Before that, right before entering films, actually I was interested in art films, still photography and all that. I wanted to learn and became an apprentice in Siri sound studios. That was my beginning. And after about a year and a half over there, some cinematographer fell ill. I was only learning over there and they asked me to photograph and I said I would be able to. And that was the chance I got and I did some of the work. I was seeing the rushes of the same few days work at Famous Laboratories. At that time I met Raj Kapoor. He entered the theatre and was looking at my rush prints. He liked them very much, and asked who had done it. I said I have, and then he said that I am starting a new film called *Barsaat* will you be able to do it? I said yes. He said come to my office the next day. His office was at Mahalaxmi, Dadar. So I went there to the office and he signed me for that film. That's how I started a career.

Could you describe what it was like to be an apprentice in those days, what kind of machines were there, what kind of cameras, what did you have to do as an apprentice....

At the Siri sound studios they had French cameras that were called Debris., completely silent, no noise at all. So we were using the Debris in Siri sound studios but when I photographed *Barsaat*, I photographed on Mitchell. Mitchell is American. At that time it was called the NC Mitchell.

Without Blimp?

That was without blimp and then later on the blimp came.

What about the sound recording?

See actually at that time there was no dubbing. We used to take direct sound and very slight sound used to come from the camera even though it used to come. And then later on then the blimps came for the NC camera, Mitchell NC. But you see they could not afford all the blimps I mean there were only 4-5 blimps.

Those days we used to shoot in the Famous Studios in Mahalaxmi. Famous studios had 2 Mitchells. At that time the Arri was not there.

Can you describe when you were assisting Rajnikant at Siri sound studio, what did you learn from him, or other camera people whose work you were watching, things like that.

Actually I was so quick that within a few days I knew about the camera and all that and I started lighting slowly, slowly and Mr Pandya(?) liked it very much. That's how I got the chance you see, just from those few days.

For how many years you were there?

About a year.

It was totally catwalk lighting?

Yes, the catwalk. Plus you see in those days they had solar lights, MR, BM, flood lights.

Can you tell us something about how your family reacted to your taking up work in the films?

My grandfather was very much against it but my father was very much in favour, and he was the person who pushed me; he and my elder brother (Fali Mistry). My father was himself involved with photography. He used to bring books, magazines, and foreign magazines. Actually our landlords did so but my father did it too. He was very much interested in photography so he was very happy if I would take this line, and that's how I came in.

It was more difficult for your brother...

No at that time my brother was already in films, he was already photographing.

What was his first film?

His first film was I think *Mata* directed by Nandlal Jaswantlal.

What kind of director was he and what did he like about your work and what did you do for that film which was different from other cameramen in those days?

I mostly used to see American pictures and tried to sort of copy from there. It was different then... in those days mostly what I used to see in Indian films was a lot of flat photography and American photography had more of contrast, so I did it on their style and somehow people liked it very much so that was a great change you know... It was different from what they were seeing all the time so maybe that was one of the reasons they liked it - you know contrast photography.

This was the first film that was contrasty so that's why there was a big change and people liked it very much.

You said there was lot of flat photography...

In those days...

Can you try and explain to us what you mean by flat photography?

Flat photography is when there is very little difference between highlight and shadow, I mean the difference is much less. In contrast photography you see highlight and less of fill.

Faces?

Faces also, but overall as well.

The whole feel?

You light up the faces in fact in fashion, plus you light up the set. I mean the basic type is changed. You see that this is the beginning I can say of 3 dimensional photography lighting. And now later on I did advances in that in colour as well.

That time in Bombay there were some technicians from Germany or Italy also... Did they bring different style of photography?

They were in the Bombay talkies I think in those days. Their style was different.

You used to go and see the shooting there...

I did once, Bombay Talkies, much later, not immediately at that time.

Could you make out the differences between American, Indian, Germans present in Bombay?

I did, their style was in between somewhere. That was in Bombay Talkies. German cameramen worked there. They were using the same Mitchell cameras.

But in terms of using lights were they using special....

It depends. They must have done because I used to see all the pictures. Mostly I used to see American pictures and I actually have learnt from American pictures. That is called a lot of practical work or something like that (where you use a lot of practicals). Back in those days there was a film called '*How Green Was My Valley*' that won 11 awards including photography. It was very well photographed. I saw it about 11 times at that time and it engraved in my mind.

What did you like about the film?

Lighting. You see he was using soft lighting like windows, doors, and light coming from windows. I think it was more natural type. I would like to mention that wherever I go I keep on studying lighting. Like the daylight coming on your face from the window but this side is dark, yet I can see the shadow portion also. Something like that. Its called source lighting. Now it is very well advanced, source.

Source lighting, was never done during that period?

Those days, no.

So what were the basics of lighting in that period, how was it done?

Source lighting is a little tricky, difficult. You (touch) up a window if it is in the frame and if it is not there then you imagine that it is on the right side of the frame. There is nothing over there then but you build up the source from the right side and we call it imaginary sort of lighting. In short, source is only one side. If two figures are there then before I light up I decide whether the source will be from this window. If there are two windows I can't give the light from both left and right. That would be wrong you see, if I see left side as source then only one side will provide the lighting. Source lighting is very difficult because people are moving around but you have to light up the whole thing with one source in source lighting. If I decide from left side that I keep the source from left side and from the right side I only fill up.

This sort of fill lighting you do with direct lights or...

No, bounce light. We started using bounce in India, my brother and myself but later when colour came, then we did bounce lighting.

You used the white board or something else?

White board. It's a crude way of doing it but then later on we made some lights. Bounce lights were made. But actually they used white board to bounce the light. We should be very careful with the bounce also. Bounce should not overpower the highlight. For bouncing you can also use open multis...

There were open multis in those days...

No, in those days we used to have solars...

You could open the lenses of those lights.

No, by opening the lens the light becomes very weak. A flood. But by closing it you can control it. You can control it by putting nets and all that.

When did you start this practice of bouncing light?

When Kodak fast film came, colour. My first film was in Geva colour. It was very slow. When Kodak film came, colour, at that time we started this.

So in B&W for fill light you always used to give direct light?

Floodlight, we used to get these round floods. They were called floodlights. We used to use flood light for the fill.

Can you describe how someone like Mr. Pandya would light up the set?

What was his method of lighting?

Mr. Pandya was lighting up in his own fashion so he used to give a little more fill for a more brighter picture you see. So when I got the chance of doing it I reduced the fill, which he actually liked very much. Why did I do it – because of seeing American films. This was not my own film but somebody got sick and I got the chance as I told you before. So when I got the chance to shoot my own picture, I immediately reduced the fill - which was very near to the highlight. I said I'd do it my own way. Why should I copy anybody? I did the whole thing on my own from A to Z. And it came out so wonderful and Mr. Pandya said that you have done a very good job - that's all he said.

What stock was it that you were using for this?

Plus X.

And as far as the background was concerned?

You see when you give fill with the flood, it goes on the background also. I had not done that. I was using small baby lights 1KW, 2KW with sponge glass. These glasses used to come with the lights and then later on we added tissues on that, butter paper. A sponge glass is sort of ground glass. B.A.M.M.R. It was part of the accessories. I am talking about 40's, 50's rather.

So this was placed in front of the light?

Yes, after the fresnel. Rather this glass used to slide in. If you wanted two, then two. The third one you would have to hold. It was a special glass not ordinary, not exactly like ground glass but ruffled, something like that.

How was it to work with a director like Raj Kapoor? What did he describe to you, did he talk about what kind of lighting he wanted?

Oh yes. Raj Kapoor was very interested in good lighting, and at times even a dark type of lighting. He used to describe to me in detail, and would say that I want your best from you. Take your time but give me your best creation. And that's the way we used to work in those days.

In *Barsaat* we had to go to Kashmir to see locations. Raj and myself were to go and before going I told him that I would like to take some tests. I took along a small Imo camera and 2000 feet of Kodak Plus X raw stock. After reaching Kashmir and spending a few days looking at locations we got a telegram that the whole outdoor shooting was cancelled.

I had an idea. Since we had 2000 feet and the camera, I talked to Raj and said that lets take some shots after studying the script, and shoot whatever we can shoot as Long Shots, then go back to Bombay and match it. He said yes and that's how we started. For two days we studied the script and noted all the sorts of long shots, day, night, evening. We shoot with a duplicate over there and we brought 2000 feet back to Bombay and did the matching over here in Bombay. All the matching we did in the studio.

Lets talk about the set and the boat and all that.

We erected the set at Lakhani studios, Worli, which doesn't exist nowadays. In those days the stage was about 150 feet by 80 feet. Biggest, one of the biggest. We had to erect one set over there. I built a wall about 6-8 feet high around the complete studio and then we filled up the water. Then we built a

complete houseboat. And painted the background. It took some day night everything, controlled lighting.

How did you cover the wall?

The background?

The wall where the water was filled...

I didn't light up that side. I let it be with very soft lights, and a backdrop with some little clouds, dark.

How did you light the water?

Actually I didn't light the water, I put in the fog. Slowly the fog comes in and that fog was lit from the back, backlit.

How did you make the fog?

In those days, it was a very crude way of doing it. We call it the 'lobaan', smoke, with a kind of coal. And that was the only thing used until the 'Newjol' came later on. Those days we used to have this with the fan, put the fan on and it would slowly come in. There was no other method to do it in those days.

In terms of camera movement and framing, how much conversation would you have with Raj Kapoor about those things?

We would both watch the rehearsals, and he would say, here we will stop, here the trolley will stop. So we used to have markings and we would frame nicely in this mutual sort of way.

After *Barsaat* what is the next film that you did?

I did *Jaan Pehchaan*.

Besides the lighting, what new things did you do?

My first colour film was '*Champakali*'. That was with Mr. Nandlal Jaswantlal. That was a Geva colour very slow film, and I had to use a lot of lights. That was in Filmistan studios.

What was the speed of the film?

I think the speed of the Geva Colour film must have been about 64 or something, very slow. For this film we had a very big set in Filmistan. They had to cancel all the other shootings. Only this film was being shot and it was using the entire power plus one generator. There was an exterior shot of a bazaar so we had the sky background plus the sunlight effect. We had to use a lot of lights, and Filmistan did have a lot of lights at that time. Arc lamps, brute lights. That was one time that I was using lot of lights.

Did you make changes in your lighting pattern between Black & white and colour?

It was more on the glamour side, using a little more fill to make the picture look nice, bright. Of course at the same time it depends on what you are shooting. More of brighter side, more of glamour, but not going beyond the recommended foot-candles.

The backlight came with you and your brother?

Yes. You see in those days we used to copy American pictures, so whenever we used to see more backlight over there we used more backlight

here. But then at a time they reduced this completely as source lighting came in. And then we used to do it in that style.

For instance you are sitting here near the window, I would throw that light from there and just fill. A fill there, there, there. Now supposing if I give backlight from the wall side, don't you think it will look unnatural? Because there is no source from there, there is only wall. So how did the backlight come from there? So we used to illuminate. At least I used to do it.

And I see today also I see that people are sitting in a shot, the wall is there, but hard backlight is there, and it looks very funny you know. One should stick to more natural work.

How would you light up?

I would see the rehearsal and if the actors were moving, if there was movement then I used to light up in that fashion. A long throw, one light one source, and from here all the fills would come. So whenever they move they'll get source from here but fill from there.

Did you do different lighting for the actresses?

O yes, yes very much so. To make them look nice, glamorous. My style is flat. They would not be any shadow of the nose, flat. And that flatness also in close ups. It depends on the movement. That gives the heroine more... looks more glamorous, and very soft backlight looks more glamorous.

So that must have broken the rhythm of the source lighting otherwise?

No, no. If she is in the source then I would still keep the source. If the light is wrongly touching her face, then I would just turn the artiste little bit this side and that becomes her backlight so maybe the imagination of the person who is seeing the picture will not have a jump. I will keep my continuity as well as his vision complete.

You have to be a little bit open; there is no hard and fast rule. People are so much absorbed in what they are seeing, what the actors are saying, so little bit of jump is acceptable.

In terms of scenes you used to change the lighting pattern?

This is a very good question. When the artistes are moving - if there are two artistes at a time for example - I would close the light sometime and open others. Certain lights we used to open and certain lights we used to close. In America in those days they were doing it with shutters, shutter on the light. I have used those shutters here also, we got some, but there they have all their lights on shutter and the control from below. And these shutters were used because this closing and opening will not be registered on the film. You see the film is running all the time so you can play with it.

And the colour temperature won't change. See it is like a dipper. You can't use a dimmer in colour film as the temperature change will register, so we used these shutters to control the light.

But it has to be very cleverly done. If supposing two artistes are there and then they are going away, then this side light has to completely dissolve and

the correct light has to come on the one who is moving. It all depends on the movement of the artiste and it has to be very carefully done.

In those days and even till now I have my trained light boys. And the training would happen between shoots. In shooting breaks I would teach them how to do the shutter movement when the artiste is moving. Before the take I would call them down from the catwalk and then explain to them very nicely that when this artiste goes here, put a chalkmark and that is your mark and then you do the shutter movement. Before shooting we used to have a lot of rehearsals especially for that and then later on everything would be perfect when we used to take the shot.

These were used only when we started shooting in colour. In black and white we used dimmers. They had supplied shutters but those shutters were only for arc lights in those days.

Could you describe in what situations you would decide to use an arc for sunlight?

There used to be a lot of arcs at the Famous Studios that we used to use for the source and for the sunlight effect.

Would there be changes in the lighting pattern from scene to scene?

I would change the lighting. If a sad scene is there then I would go for more contrasty lighting, but not to the extent that the faces are not visible. I wouldn't change the fundamental pattern of lighting, I would still use the same source, but give less fill, and that would give the sadness.

Which other director would discuss with you the look of the film?

I did a few pictures like with Chetan Anand. He used to discuss about the look. I think I've done about six films with him. *Aakhri Khat*, *Aandhiyan*, *Kudrat*. *Kudrat* was discussed completely. But then in *Kudrat* he had a lot of effects. And we used to discuss about the look of the film. Very important.

How did you discuss the look of *Kudrat*? What did you talk about?

Discuss means you have to have imagined in your mind the whole film. That the whole film should look like this. So then we used to discuss that.

In those days I used to experiment. Before shooting a lot of experiments were done. And this is possible only when somebody is interested in having good photography. We used to shoot tests and I would try lots of experiment with thin gauze, very thin fog, filters. I used to put this on and light up and just see different kinds of lighting: bright light, mood light, very different types of lighting... and then myself and the director used to see the rushes and if he says wonderful, o.k., we keep it. He has to select, well I mean mutually. This looks good, o.k., throughout some sections this would be there. I did it both in B&W as well as for colour. I did this type of photography for *Kudrat*.

Using gauze?

Very, very, very mild gauze, throughout the film to have a look for the film.

Black net?

Black net, I think I got it from London. It was called Chiffon. Very thin, very thin.

What was your intention in using the black gauze? Lesser contrast?

No this will give you a little bit of moody photography. It'll create some sort of mood which, what can I say, which is a little different from the usual look. Not so sharp, and it'll heighten the contrast.

Were there any other films where you did any experiments of this kind?

I've done it in *Kudrat*, and in B&W I did it in *Barsaat*. Then I've it in *Aandhian*.

What did you do in *Aandhian*?

In *Aandhian* also, he wanted some effect. I used the same gauze in *Aandhian* as well. Then *Jaan Pehchaan* I did it in a different way (it was directed by my brother Fali Mistry). In that film the special effect was in lighting, not on the lens. The lighting was in a different way, actually you can call it third dimensional lighting. Supposing you are face is being lit up from the left side, then it would mean that the left side background is a little darker, dark side is a little brighter. So this would work for the artistes and the background. This was to bring things out more.

When shooting heroines, in the beginning I used a lot of diffusion. Perhaps at that time the make up was not so good or something, and with diffusion they looked nice. Later on I reduced my diffusion as general technique improved in films. When colour came I used to use even less diffusion.

That means in Prem Granth e.g. you used to have no diffusion at all?

In *Prem Granth*, very little. Both for the heroine and the hero, very soft diffusion. And I would get all the diffusion material from abroad. Including filters. A kind of glass diffuser which I used in this film. I imported it after discussing the whole subject; I imported a lot of filters for this film actually.

What kind of filters were they?

There were gradation filters, from transparent to light pink, that light grade. Then blue, complete overall blue for night scenes.

You could do that in grading also later?

No, it does not come out so nice. We have to make a dupe and all that. Amongst the filters that I ordered were a blue filter that you can use in many ways. You can use it a direct blue or then you can use it as a night scene, deep blue, night. The other filters we ordered were sepia filters. It gives you that soft brown effect.

You can, to a certain extent add colours in the lab, but if you want a deep effect of blue, it becomes magenta. With a filter you have a control because all the colours are going thru it, but with the lab there is a limit.

Can you talk about your relationship with the lab? Were you always particular about going through grading and things like that from the beginning?

Yes, I always used to, and do so even now. It is better to go because the lab man working on the analyser has no idea what effect the cameraman is looking for. In normal day scenes it doesn't matter. But if I have done some

effects indoors with colour changes and all that I must go ... it is a great help to him also. So I go there and sit there and I will be able to tell him when to stop.

Did you use filters on lights also?

Yes very important. I got a huge big box now because my son is abroad and he gets them for me. I have about two hundred gelatin filters by Lee. I have a huge box of filters that can even an RTM. They won't burn, special filters.

When do you use these filters – for correction or for effects?

No, not for correction, for effects. If the director says that I want the whole scene to look blue, then I use filters on the light and make it blue. Supposing you are in the outdoor and blue effect is there, but in the frame a fire is also there, so then I give fire effect filters. I stick to more natural side of life.

You mix the lights in colour?

The blue shouldn't touch the orange light. If the orange effect is here, and your blue effect is there and the camera is panning, and this person comes near another person out of the blue light, then he comes into this orange light. Something like that.

Did you use filters in your B&W photography?

Of course. For instance we used to use orange filter on the camera just to have more contrast. Then for night scenes we used to have a red filter, for more deeper contrast. Then there was an in-between filter – the 23 A orange, little bit on the redder side.

Did your lighting change with the coming of faster stock?

Well, you can reduce the number of lights. In America also, they use faster film as well as normal film, which they mix sometimes. When the time comes where you feel that after this there will be no exposure possible, then you photograph the whole scene in faster film, in 500ASA. And I feel that one can cut between fast and slow film. If you have controlled enough during camera exposure, there won't be any jump. I even I prefer faster film because you can have less number of lights.

Did you over expose when shooting?

Very little maybe, very slightly, just for our...see if you have a good negative then you can have 4 prints. Something like that. You see if you have a dense negative, then the most important problem that we face here – scratches – will be handled better by it. These scratches are a real problem in India, first while processing, also in cutting.

Have you ever processed any of your films abroad?

I had sent tests during both *Kudrat* and *Naseeb*. One was sent to Madras – Prasad – and the other to a London lab. When I projected them I couldn't tell which was which.

For a dense negative I would try to keep with the exposure meter for what is called the consistency of the negative. But then what do you do if the emulsion changes, if you are using one batch and then immediately another batch comes, then there will be a little difference in the colour. Then we have to compensate for these changes in the lab.

Is there a single exposure stop that you try to work towards in your films?

For me the last exposure is T4. This is the stop that you get as the lowest in the zoom lens (although you can get faster zoom lenses...) But for me one should do "zoom lighting" – that is light for the zoom and go no less than T4.

Of course it all depends upon how many characters are there in the shot. If I want all in focus then I go up to 8, T8. I get better depth. If I am not zooming then I would definitely do the shot with block lens.

You don't like to zoom?

Its not a question of liking, zooming is very unnatural. Its not a trolley shot. You see in American films also, no zooming at all in American films. Hollywood they don't use zoom at all. They have given an article in American Society of Cinematographer magazine that we don't use zoom now for the last maybe 7-10 years. They only trolley, and they have got special trolleys. See their trolley is something so superb today and those people who are handling the trolley, they will only handle trolley, nothing else, and they will not touch anything. They will give you a wonderful shot. Here, where equipment is concerned, we have good cameras but trolleys....

You use Kodak stock normally?

I used Kodak throughout.

You have never used Fuji?

I have used Fuji with Manmohan Desai earlier. There is little difference in money.

What preference do you have in printing stocks?

Even in my last film I had to fight with the lab for Kodak. They keep saying Kodak, Kodak, Kodak, here, but then all of a sudden you hear in the lab that they are changing the positive. Once you have different positive then there is different colour to the film, and all your hard work is gone, finished.

Do you have change the lighting when you are shooting a big film like *Naseeb*, where all the six big stars have to look good in the same frame?

In *Naseeb* this thing did happen. In *Naseeb* Manmohan Desai told me that we have got so many artistes on such and such day, you pre-light the whole thing, the main stars I will give you only for about 5-10 minutes, and that's because they have given only two days for this bulk work. And I did it. I used to light up, the general background lighting, then just say 1-2-3 ON!, and the whole background was ready. Only the figure lighting had to change and that carried on. We had to do it.

There were many, many sets. Especially in the revolving restaurant set. This was the most difficult part when all the artistes were in the same frame, they are coming for a party and we had to pre plan the whole thing. We lit up the whole set for two days before we shot, for two days. On the shooting day there was no lighting change. I will tell you how I did it.

Over the whole set I had put up a muslin cloth, thin and white. And I built another catwalk of about 4 feet above the main catwalk. This was the second catwalk. My usual catwalk which was below that was empty. And from there I had stretched the full ceiling of white muslin. Through that I started lighting up. Manmohan Desai would say that the artistes will come from here, from there.

The whole industry of artists was there in that scene! So finally everything was pre lit. The actors only came for one single day from 9am to 7-8 p.m.

The whole sequence was shot in one day?

Yes, because I had lit it that way. Non-stop we were shooting. I had lit this whole thing in round way and there were no shadows anywhere because the light was coming through the white cloth. The overall exposure was f5.6. I had lights on the ground for the artistes which I would just switch on. But that was for fill, extra light fill. And overall was 5.6. That's the way I shot.

If you had actors in a situation like this who were not so time bound, who would come when you call and you had to do the same sequence again, you would do different lighting?

Yes there was a time when they would give hours at a time. Under intense time problems, it is very difficult and naturally your work drops down, the quality of your work. If you get a little more time, a normal amount of time, then you can do your best. Those days they would still give time but nowadays they give only 8 hours, 8-9 hours that's all.

Like you said in *Barsaat* Raj Kapoor said take your time...

In those days Raj Kapoor the producer, director, artiste had a major plus point - he used to love photography. He was very much in love with photography. After *Barsaat* I could not work with him because in those days we were producing pictures also. Myself and my brother. Raj had offered me that if you work with me I will give this much of salary plus partnership in production. But I would not do it as I was producing pictures along with my brother. Later on we stopped. Loss.

There was something called the eyelight, just above the camera, just for the eyes, those days...

Yes, the Master Pen light. I brought it from Hollywood. It's only this small and operated by battery. Like a torch. It is fixed in a stand and after you light up your face then you switch on those lights (you have to use 2) and you can just make it less, make it more till it is not even seen that the light is given. It mixes with the eyelight of the face.

And when did you use it?

At times you see when you want the close up and the eyes, the eyes must speak. If there is no dialogue and the director says that let the eyes speak, so then eyes are a little more lit than the skin, and then the eyes can come out you know. Eyes will look more powerful, whether it's he or she, whoever it is. Especially with Pen lights, which are white light.

Which heroine's face was good to shoot?

To start with, Nargis was very good. She was very photogenic. She needed no special lighting technique or special lens. Then Madhubala, she was photogenic.

What do you exactly mean by photogenic?

Photogenic is a very good word, many people may not understand it. That means that she photographs very well. Many people normally do not look nice but on the screen they look great.

Is it something to do with the face or with the cameraman?

Both. You see a cameraman can do wonders but they are always in the background far, far away, even in America.

Any close up in a film which you liked a lot which you have taken?

See I have been known for clever photography as I made them beautiful. Whether in those days or now most important thing for the heroine, is the hairstyle. The hairstyle can make a face look different or the same. She should look the same and have simple hairstyle. Too much of hairstyling may destroy her face. That's what happens.

So you guide the heroine?

I personally tell them don't overdo anything. For instance for my last film *Prem Granth*, I used to tell Madhuri don't overdo anything, just have a simple hairstyle. She is very beautiful in simple make up and she is looking very nice in the film. You've seen *Prem Granth*?

Did you ever find the different kind of lighting by the French New Wave interesting or exciting? Did you ever try to do that kind of lighting?

Our style of working in India is different. First of all the cameraman is the only one person who has to save time, do quick work. If you say that you are not ready with the shot they'll say please, please, come on. And that's the way it goes on here. Everything there is planned. Here nothing is planned. You have to sort of go ahead with whatever little time you have. You have to do your best. You are given 15 minutes to do your best and say you are ready. And its worse today. In those days there were dedicated people, thinking. I mean they would start and they would get lost in the art.

Which cameraman's work do you like in America?

In America? Vilmos Zsigmond is very good.

And in terms of Indian cameramen is there anyone whose work you appreciate?

Ashok Mehta is good.

He sent his regards when we met him recently...

He is good. He is doing good lighting, very good lighting. Then Mani Ratnam's cameraman, Santosh Sivan.

P.C Shriram before him?

Now I think he is gone to direction or something like that. He is good, creative, very creative. We have advanced a lot. Photography has got very good standard.

Don't you think there is change in the glamour from your kind to the kind you find in Mani Ratnam's films?

Yes, definitely. As I told you it depends on your subject what you are going to shoot. According to subject he got the correct effect. *Bombay* was very well photographed. In Madras, compared to Bombay, they do very fast work and there if they start a film they complete it in 4 months. Recently I had an offer from Madras, Krishnamurti. He said we'll finish it in 4 months, please. I said no. I am not accepting films anymore.

You have stopped accepting films?

Not exactly, but I may in the near future go to London. If I get a very tempting offer then I might do the film and not go there. I will tell you very frankly, after my last film with RK Studio (*Prem Granth*) I thought that I have come to a stage where I should get an offer where they want something special from me. I have come to that standard where I can do certain things. But if they just take me to run the camera, then no.

Ideally what would you like to do?

They should understand me. I've photographed about 60-70 films. But those 60-70 films, different kind of films, different kinds of stories and as per the demand of the subject and director, I have given them everything. Now if there is a film with very difficult lighting and then if supposing they come to me that this is for you a challenge then I'll say yes, I'll do it. Otherwise I don't feel like doing it. You know in normal conditions light up day scene, night scene, this normal work, no. If it is special, something special then I will do it.

Shooting a song must be very different from shooting the normal dialogue scenes?

Today when shooting a song, the director is different. The Dance director comes so the thinking is different. They don't discuss with us, nothing. This is the shot o.k., this is the shot, o.k. We keep on shooting.

Did the same thing also happen earlier?

Earlier, no. There were no dance directors then, the director used to direct the songs.

There wouldn't be a different lighting set up for dance sequences?

You have got to be with the picture. You can't change your pattern.

Doesn't that happen now?

Now also pattern should be the same. Supposing something is going on here and then you pan here or cut to the dance sequence, the whole thing should match the picture. It cannot be that it is only taken be for the dance, no. I keep up, you know. The brightness quality, colour quality and then thinking about what you have shot before and what is going to come after the song, these should match.

How do you decide movement of the camera?

It the wrong kind of movement is suggested by the director then naturally I would pull up and say that it should be done in this way and if he says you're right o.k., correct according to your experience. There are times when they say no I want this way, do it this way.

How do you decide whether it should be a pan or a track?

There in America the cameraman decides, definitely.

Here the cameraman doesn't decide, is it the director who decides...?

Here the director decides. I can suggest that I would like a trolley shot or maybe it should be this way or that way, you know what all you can discuss but if the director agrees then its fine, but otherwise you have to follow him.

Have you ever said no to a particular kind of a shot?

Must have long back. But you see what happens in India is that supposing a shot is described to me and supposing that I say no, I don't think this will work, then an argument starts.

When you started your work, was the crane used?

Yes old cranes were used. But only for going up and down. Today you can go forward, backward, panning, all that. In those days only up and down. Those big wheels never used to move.

When did the zoom come? Do you remember when you saw the zoom in India?

In the 70's, maybe between 65 and 70. I think colour came in the 70's, Kodak. At that time people started ordering Arri cameras with the zoom. It was very cheap because there was no license. Later on the license came.

Do you remember on which film you used the zoom first?

Zoom? In 70's I think, I don't exactly remember the film.

How did you find it in the beginning, when you started using the zoom lens?

Actually I never liked the zoom. I only use the zoom when the shot demanded a lens more than 100mm. If you want to jump to 150, then I would call for zoom and take a steady shot at 150. It gives a better moulding.

Zoom gives you better moulding?

Not by using it as a zoom but as a block.

What difference in quality do you find between block and zoom lenses?

You'll never have the same quality unless you increase the light. Supposing you are shooting on block lenses say about 50 or 40, and you want to go into very big steady close ups and you use zoom, you have to increase the light. Because you are using hired cameras here. If you are using one camera, the studio camera then it is fine. But when I am shooting a normal picture for any producer, there the camera keeps on changing. This is a real difficulty for a cameraman. That is the worst possible thing we face, every time different lenses.

Why is there no care about the image quality or good photography in the industry?

It's a good question. First of all when you make a film here, I have to face all sorts of different lenses. Then when I say that I want one camera, throughout, start to finish, they say they can't. I say I want one emulsion number in say about three batches, they say they can't.

When did you start using the Arri?

After the coming of colour, Arriflex became popular because after the colour we started going outdoors. Before the Arri we were shooting indoors. When the zoom came, we used to go to Kashmir in those days. Very popular, Kashmir.

Do you think with the coming of colour story telling, story, the look of the film completely changed. Did you see trends in colour that took up this kind of room?

Of course. It is for the betterment of the film that we went outdoors but it all depends on what you are telling, the subject.

Do you think with the coming of colour, it lessened the standards that had been built up by black and white?

In those days when colour film first came it was very slow - that was Geva colour. We had to put a lot of lights and actually at times we did not have so many lights, so in those days we used to go outdoors for the light. If you didn't have correct exposure for the film and it was slightly under exposed it would go magenta.

You see at times when you are shooting, and you want this, this, this, and you don't have it, but they will come to you and say, please do it. If you lose quality we don't mind. So we had to do it.

Did you see the Hollywood film *Citizen Kane*, with a lot of depth of field photography...

When I saw that film, I saw it many times, only because of that. They shot the film on the exposure level throughout, from the first shot to the last shot, at 11, 16. i.e. normally outdoor exposure. I read the article about it. There they can afford it, they can afford to have so many lights. I think the focus in the shots was from about 9 inches or 10 inches to infinity. In those days the last lens was 25. They shot the whole film on 25.

Was that kind of effort made here?

At least I tried. When I saw that film I immediately, (that time I was working I think at Laxmi studio), I went straight and lit a whole little scene on that

same diaphragm and I got everything in focus. Myself I was satisfied. But then to shoot a whole film like that, nobody put in that energy.

Why?

I did a few shots like that though, convincing the director and all that. We took few shots, but then later on he was not interested.

Because it was very costly?

Costly affair of course, you have to light up, lighting takes time and in those days to light up to f 11 with the sun spot lights, the actors used to say, what are you doing, burning me or what? They used to feel the heat of the light coz I couldn't throw light from the top, I had to bring them lower to get intensity, and this used to burn.

How did the shooting process go?

When the scene was started, the actors would rehearse the scene first, shot by shot with the director who would work it all out. I would begin lighting after I saw the rehearsal. Its very important otherwise they will go into the wrong light. After I see the rehearsal then I light up the whole thing you see. After I light up no artiste will get the wrong light, that's how I light up even today.

What is your system of lighting: the background first and then foreground, or key first and then fill?

It is better to see the rehearsal and then light up the figures first and see how much light is going on the background and then touch up the background.

That is the best way of doing it.

You can't give bounce light to the background. Supposing you are sitting here and I give soft light and if it is more on the background, I take a big net and cover the background so the background gets less light than the face. Otherwise it will mix up. If the background is over lit then it will disturb the faces, or people will look at the background more.

What is most important in the frame for you?

Figures are most important. And faces.

With my spectra meter I light up according to Kodak specifications. So, I take the reading and then I do not take an overall reading. I light up the key light and then a soft fill, that's all.

You don't measure the fill?

No, you can't measure it I tell you. Then it becomes mechanical photography. You see you can't measure each and every light. When you say 'lights on', and then if you keep measuring all the lights, then that is wrong technique. Also, you light up a face, the background and then if you go an overall reading it will show you more because of the backlight. So I do it all by the way it looks, visual. And that means film visual, backlight visual, everything visual. Then I set my diaphragm according to the key light. The key light says T4 I give T4.

And the Kodak specifications you keep on the face?

On the face, that is all. After that all visual.

Even if there are two characters, one is standing near the window and one is away from the window, both of them will be within the specifications?

Yes. Supposing my key light is coming from the window side according to Kodak, I measure that and then I go visual. This face should be little less than the key light coming from the window. Then it becomes sort of natural you see. If I want to measure it, I measure it and if I want to change, a little bit of change I do that.

So you work out a kind of percentage between the...

Yes, between the key light and the fill. For instance if the key light is coming from the window, the face is half lit, the rest is completely black, and that is for the fill light. This fill light I give according to the skin. If there are two three characters, I control the light on one face and let the rest go naturally. You see, in motion picture if you try to give different light, and if there are movements, and they are moving – then the whole thing will jumble up. Then what would happen if, for instance if people exchange places? How will they retain the same kind of light? So, I leave it natural.

How many stops over and under are you used to?

In indoors work - half a stop, or a quarter-half. The lighting is very intricate but you have to have half a stop here, half a stop there to play with, and that much latitude and tolerance exists in the negative.

If you are lighting up a night exterior will you keep the same ratio?

There I would give a moonlight effect, light, very light blue filter on the light, I don't want deep blue, just the quarter blue. Then all the lights will have the

same filter. No jump will come. If there are lamps in the frame then it's a different thing.

How do place the fill?

You see the fill light is very important, it should be very near the camera and it should not create another shadow of the nose, very important. If there are two nose shapes, absolutely wrong, it destroys the face, then its wrong lighting.

Is the light behind the camera or on the side?

Very close to the camera, and a little low, and it should not create a shadow. Also, the fill light should not overpower.

If a character is very far away then how do you give that fill?

Then a separate fill, yes, that will be a separate fill with a solar. Supposing the highlight is from here, then from there I will give direct fill and put a lot of butter paper on the solar. Immediately we can see that the fill light is overpowering. So, put one more butter paper, one more. Now we use special paper from India for this, gateway paper.

Would you change you lighting form this pattern for a dramatic sequence?

Dramatic sequences – then a cross light from the right and left and a little less fill. Then there is drama, good for a fight sequence or something like that - contrast lighting with less fill.

What is the difference between contrast lighting and glamour lighting?

Contrast lighting has got less fill, and glamour lighting has got about 1 is to 2 ratio between the key and fill. It is well-filled, good fill. If half the face is key

lit, then the other half is filled. This highlight and this fill should not become one. The fill should be slightly less than the highlight.

Have you seen the films of Satyajit Ray?

Pather Panchali I had seen. After that I don't think I have seen any. What I have read is that he used to wait for a particular shot, the right timing and all that. Supposing he wanted a certain effect, he used to set up the camera, the artistes and wait, till he got the effect. That was the way they did it.

What is the change with the coming of the cameramen from the film institute?

Some come with bright ideas, they shine, because this is a creative art and it will go on and on and on. All the things for the motion picture will become better and better and better. Lights, camera, even your thinking. Somebody comes with a good idea that I want this, this, this, and this process will go on and on. At times people come from the institute and give brilliant ideas and they shine. At times people come with all the education and everything and they are still my assistants for the last 40 years or 50 years. So it depends on each individual how you want to come and present yourself. You come with a bang, and that bang is still with me. I like to do something better and better and better.

The cameraman is someone whose work is now being recognized more by the general public.

In those days they never knew the cameraman but today they say, yes photography is good. The public is now very aware of the photography. I went for the first day, first show theatre screening of *Prem Granth*. People were coming out and I was just moving around and I heard one person say, "yaar photography

bahut achhi hai” (The photography was very good!). That shows that they are aware of the photography. Everybody is looking nice in the film.

In this picture, *Prem Granth*, its what I would call pleasing photography, and it is my own experiment. I told that director that I would do an experiment in the film, which is the look of the film. When you see the film with the correct projection, you will feel that you are there.

How do you think the projection is here?

Very poor. I had written an article in London. They came to me and they said that how is your projection side? I said very poor. I said my latest film *Prem Granth*, when I projected it before the release I felt like crying. I thought is this what I've done? I have seen the whole film in the lab and everything was fine, what's happened now? I went to the projectionist. I said you open your projector please. He asked me, what for? I said I want to see, open please. The whole mirror was in a thousand pieces, a thousand cracks. I said what is this? The mirror is broken and it is costly so they don't want to change it. I said change the mirror; I can't change my print. But I made the print accordingly, lighter, lighter side, I can't go beyond that, then I lose the colours.

Next day they called me, and they hadn't change it. I said till you change I'm not going to take any trial screening. The director Rajeev Kapoor, he had gone to the Sai Baba shrine. When he came back, I said you come with me, they are not changing the mirror. I brought a perfect print and I showed it to them. I said look. They said we'll change it tomorrow, I said then I'll come tomorrow.

Next day they changed the mirror, and I ran the film. It was still slightly better, slightly better. I said open the projector. When I opened the projector there were about 10 cracks in the mirror. I asked the projectionist, what happened, this is still a cracked mirror. So he said that a producer/director of another film had come and said "Increase, increase", and phut, the mirror cracked.

What was increased, the light?

The fps (frames per second). You can't go beyond certain fps. If you go then the mirror will crack because of the heat. So this the condition in our theatres. And the screen is also very dirty. Then I had to make my prints for *Prem Granth* according to that mirror with the ten cracks...

This phrase is used about you - Jal ki *jaali* (Jal's web). In the 1940's – 50's they would refer to your lighting as Jal ki *jaali*?

You see that was because of my control of the lights. Now once I lit up the set, it would stay so. Before the artiste would come, I would place some people as stand-ins, and make it so perfect that when the artiste actually came and did rehearsal, there would be only slight little change.

The other day the owner of Adlabs said that he had just been seeing the print of *Prem Granth*, and a number of people were asking what is the special formula that Adlabs had used for my print. But there is no special formula, the chemical formula is always the same. They can't make anything special for me. The whole thing is formulized from Kodak. It is you yourself who can do it. I mean you know what you are doing, and most people don't want to put in that much labour. What can I say – I love my work and push the work until the last minute, and then I think o.k., beyond this maybe we cannot go. I say o.k. now we can

release it. So my work is complete then, laboratory work is complete, print is perfect, now then comes the theatre where they have to throw the light.

Till that time you are involved. From where you start till you end, it has got to be perfect. Then you have to just forget it.

How was your work different from Mr. Fali Mistry, what was his style of lighting?

His style was entirely different, entirely different but.... Creative. Even in Hollywood there are maybe about 10-15 cameramen who are very good. See it's a creative art - too difficult to explain. My work I cannot explain. I go more on perfection and pleasing images and I have advanced my work just by seeing American pictures and mixing it in my work.

If a film does not do well at the box office, does it affect your confidence, does it affect you?

No it does not affect me but at the same time enough people do not see my work. For instance *Prem Granth*, that picture should have run for many weeks. More and more people could see my work then. Those who have seen the film phone and tell me excellent work. But there are many who have missed it.

Earlier people, ordinary people in those days would say - achha aapne woh picture photograph kiya thaa (so, you photographed that film). That much recognition was there. People used to recognize photography, but today it increased. Today sound has also improved a lot.

Is there any film where you and your brother have worked together? Not the one that he has directed, besides that.

Yes there was. It was our own production and for that particular picture we had taken story from Madras. We started our work (b7W) with Kishore Kumar and Nutan. And soon they started saying, we have just done this for another film. And then we came to know that our writer had sold someone else the same story. Our film was called *Chandan*, which was released in Eros, and their's was called *Kabhi Andhera kabhi Ujaala*, with the same artistes. Our film was directed by A.V Raman.

You used to discuss photography with your brother?

Yes, a lot. Even on the phone we used to discuss. It's a very interesting art.

Did he used to tell you something that he didn't like about your photography and vice versa?

Yes. At times we used to discuss that this scene should have been like this or that. But later on we came to a certain level where we used to have competition. It was fun.

Do you remember any incident or any conversation?

No, I think he was far superior to me.

We have read articles in Filmfare which both of you have written together.

You were saying that you used to see Hollywood films and then take photographs and study the lighting?

I used to do that. I used to sit right in front and take the photograph and I used to enlarge it you know and study the lighting. I mean only the award winning pictures.

You used to photograph from the screen?

Yes, in those days if two people are there in the shot, and if it was a steady shot, I would shoot a picture (increasing the shutter speed). Even now of course you can. Also, in those days I used to take pictures in candlelight, no other light when we used to go for outdoors.

What kind of study of light you used to do?

In some films, when proper plans have been made from before, then you have a chance to study, discuss and plan. For some films we even used to make models, and big photographs and all that. But that you cannot do in all pictures, only in those certain cases where the director is very passionate about the film – then before the film starts you can discuss so many things. Nowadays nobody is doing this. Maybe because of time stress, I don't know. Now when you start a film, you just go straight to shoot.

You didn't have any relation with art directors?

Some pictures. *Kudrat* I had, *Heer Ranjha* - also Chetan Anand's picture. Chetan Anand was very conscious of working with art directors... When you were working in his films, whatever you were doing, you had to put your heart and soul, fall in love.

What about your relationship with your assistants, did they suggest things to you?

Actually one of my assistants was with me for a very long time. Swami. He died. He had come from Madras Institute and he actually knew the complete theory unlike other assistants who come to me but without theoretical knowledge.

They used to suggest to you things in lighting?

Some do but then I tell them not to, because then I get sort of disturbed, because it is all creative right? When I go on the set I don't know how it works - maybe it is god or what - it comes to me like magic. I really feel that something, somebody is helping me. When I enter the set I just forget everything, absolutely, and just start lighting.

Do you always operate your camera?

Till this picture (*Prem Granth*) I operated. 50 years. In 1944 or 45 I started. Cine Sound. Today it comes to 50 years I think. But actually if you don't operate you have more time, more concentration on your lighting. But then, till today we don't have video assist, if we have video assist then I will definitely use an operator and see how he is operating. In my own shooting even if slight jerk was there I would cut.

Do you do anything to prevent your directors from using your wrong takes?

Even if it is N.G for me and they use it, you can't do anything. You can't fight with him. Suppose you have 6 takes, right? Hero will say third for me, heroine will say second for me, director will say the fourth, but whose work is he keeping? He will obviously keep his own. It is very difficult.

How important is camera angle and lensing for the close up of a heroine?

There I put my foot down, nobody will interfere. I will just say, go back. I decide the lens, I decide the distance from the face to camera, its very important. I will decide about the long focus lens. If I like I will go back and take with a long lens and the director has no right. Nobody will tell me that. Unless a very new director, but then if he sees through the camera he will be convinced.

When you are taking close ups do you select your backgrounds?

You see I normally take with longer focal lengths. You know why? To get good moulding and all that effect. It comes out very nice.

But with different faces, different heroines you would change the focal lengths?

Yes definitely. And let me give some examples.

For instance Suraiyya, a very bad face, but she is looking very nice in my film, in *Sanam*, directed by Nand Lal Jaswant Lal. Very old film.

She has got chin like that, big forehead. I used to give her flat lighting, wherever she looks or dances you know, I mean she should look nice.

Would you do tests to know what is working best for which face or would you go by your judgement that?

Most of them are good looking, if the lighting is good and correct for her face then she is bound to look good, she won't look bad. Once I look at the face then I know from which angle it will look good, whether the shadow will look nice or flat light.

Which is your most favourite film?

This latest, Prem Granth. And in B&W there was one film called Armaan, directed by my brother.

Camerawork is a fascinating art. I would like to continue even now, but with the right film. After travelling so much abroad, I feel that we should have all the things that they have but where is it? That's why my son after passing from film college has started to work over there. He used to come during the Manmohan Desai days and he used to operate everything for me. Then he used to say, Dad you are working so hard here, but there we have this and this and this. He compares the facilities like that.

Dharmender offered him a very big film. My son has done some films with a Japanese director, and Dharmender liked his work and offered him his film. My son says o.k. go through my agent. My agent will talk, I won't talk. When the agent talked, he said this is the price, this is the time - four months time and so much of money.

What is the kind of money a cameraman used to get in 1940s?

At that time when I started I think it was 30,000. The pay for *Barsaat* was Rs 30,000. Little by little by little I kept on increasing. Then it went up to one lakh. Then afterwards when colour came I did 1.50, 1.75, then 2 then 3-4 like that.

In *Prem Granth* what is the payment you got?

I signed it for 5 lakhs. For an 18 months period. If I sign one big picture for R.K then only one film I will work on at a time, I don't sign another.

Has the ratio between the budget of the film and the actual amount spent on the production of it changed over time?

Definitely. Our budget has gone up. We use many things for instance the paper that we are using for diffusion, it burns out quickly and they have to buy new but they get it. Very expensive paper.

What is your relationship with the artistes?

I hardly get time to talk to them, unless during lunch time or something like that. Otherwise we talk - not technical but just something.

They don't consult you on make up and things like that?

Certain people who know me, they do. It is so difficult. I had written a complete article on this. I have not photographed for all these new comers (new directors) but I was photographing for this producer Mr. Bappi Soni, a film called *Nischay*. Esmayeel Shroff was directing. So Karishma was there. I said she didn't need a screen test, but I told her to do the right makeup.

Has make up changed from B&W to colour? What kind of changes?

That was a different kind of make up. Panchromatic. Today they have more – on the eyes and lipstick and all that. The earlier one was different because it has to show in monochrome.

You have to be careful with makeup. Otherwise it will come on the screen, patches will come. It has to be well mixed you know.