

RAJAN KOTHARI

SECTION I: Personal Background & Early Years

- 1. Tell us something about your family background and the cultural context in which you grew up.**

Essentially a business community, my grandfather came to Mumbai in the early twenties, traded in cotton and oil-seeds, made his fortune and lost it too. Father, who was the eldest in the family was forced to take up a job in the time of crisis, and photography which till this point of time was merely a hobby became the breadwinner for the family. Photography was the mainstay of the family when I was born and as I was growing up. A whole lot of processing and printing was being done at home in a proper dark-room.

- 2. Were there any people in your immediate environment who had any interest in, or professional involvement with the visual or performing arts. Did they in any way initiate your interest in cinema or the visual arts?**

In the immediate family, father's forays in the realm of still photography and uncle's association with film societies like Anandam and music circles were the subliminal influences in the immediate environment.

- 3. How were films, people associated with cinema viewed in your family and in your immediate circle of acquaintances?**

They were definitely not looked down upon.

- 4. Please describe in some detail the 'visual field' of your childhood, (perhaps in terms of colours and light). By visual field we mean the ensemble of things that you saw and that have left an imprint on your memory. These**

could be details in nature, memories of performances or rituals, or films, or paintings and photographs, things that you saw on the street or in a city, or any other striking visual memories.

“Visual field” of childhood is not very specific. It is at best a random mixture of beautiful figures and faces, picturesque landscapes as they featured in some of the international photographic magazines to which my father subscribed regularly. Traditional rituals at the time of death and dances around the Navratri and Govinda festivals have left some imprint in time, but nothing overbearing.

- 5. Do you recall the first or very early films that you saw? Can you tell us something about that experience? What was/were the films? Do you recall anything about the cinema hall, or space where the film was shown, and about the general atmosphere about the space?**

Father and uncle used to bring home a 16mm projector and the earliest exposure to films has been to the films of Chaplin, Keaton and Laurel & Hardy. It was essentially home viewing for kid brothers and others in the immediate family. Earliest cinema hall experience was *Benhur* at Metro Bombay and was in fact quite frightening.

- 6. How did you get interested in watching films? Were you ever a member of a film society or film club? Did you know about film societies?**

Watching films was not a habitual interest. Once in a way till mid sixties, father/uncle would take me out to Sunday morning shows of movies like *Guns of Navarone*, *Ice Station Zebra* or *Robinson Crusoe*. I quite liked and enjoyed them. But it did not develop into a cinema going habit. In the late sixties and early seventies, it was a movie with friends once a month or maybe a fortnight. The only time I saw movies everyday of the week was when Prabhat movies were being screened next door to where I live and of which I distinctly remember *Sant*

Gnaneshwar, Sant Tukaram, Ramashastris and Kunku, and even till today consider them as masterpieces. I have not been a member of any film societies. Yes I did know of their existence since my uncle was a member of Anandam.

7. What were your other interests? Have those interests remained with you in later life?

Other interests were travelling, literature and medicine and they still persist.

8. Did you have an interest in still photography? Were you ever a member of any amateur photography club?

Not really.

9. Can you name some of the important films that you saw when you were growing up? Why did you think of them as significant?

Till the time I joined the Institute (FTII), the films mentioned above remained as important films for me both in terms of their powerful narrative and technical wizardry. Visually these are lethally potent and hence they are very significant.

10. How, why and when did you decide to become a cinematographer? What were the factors that influenced this decision? Did your family encourage or discourage your choice of vocation?

Was your becoming a cinematographer not a result of a conscious decision, but a result of circumstances? If so, please tell us something about those circumstances.

When I failed to acquire the grades necessary for medical school, my father told me that I should not look at it as the end of the road. He advised me to

consider his as one of the other possible professions to which I could belong and according to him would be a better option than a simple B.Sc., or even maybe a Ph.D. The only pre-condition in case I said yes to his suggestion was that I should opt for formal training. Since there were none for still photography he suggested that I study cinematography as an extension to his own profession and then decide where I would like to belong. Two of his very good friends were practicing cinematographers in their own right – Keith Allams in London and Bombay and B.C. Tarkas in Bombay. That is how fate got sealed. Father and Uncle were the factors that strongly encouraged, mother's dissent got vetoed. Uncle by now was a good friend of Kumar and Mani, and knew KK Mahajan fairly well, so apprenticeship somewhere here was a foregone conclusion.

So I would say that becoming a cinematographer was a result of conscious decisions forced by circumstances that kept me out of medical school.

SECTION II: On Learning to be a Cinematographer

- 1. Tell us about your education as a cinematographer, did it occur in film school (which institute), or in the industry.**

Education is a never-ending process. My education as a cinematographer began in film school – FTII, Pune and it continues today in the industry.

- 2. If you studied in a film school, can you tell us about your years in the institute, and what your memories are of that time? About the syllabus, and quality of film education and technical training. Things that you were dissatisfied with. Any specific memories of visiting faculty, important workshops.**

I spent three years in FTII: 1973-1976. Quality of film education and technical inputs was adequate or rather good. We had teachers who did not dissuade us from the urge to learn – there were least hindrances on their part and we were never questioned as to why we attempted some things in a certain way. But they would always be there to guide us and make us learn from our mistakes. Also we had very good batches before us and people like Jehangir Choudhury would make us work our ass out on our projects. His was a batch, which was our main taskmaster, and under them we learnt more than probably we learnt in our classrooms. Also ours was a batch of just 4-5 students and we got a lot of hands-on experience, much more than any other batch in the whole history of FTII, maybe.

We had only one workshop, again not specifically meant for our batch, but for the batch senior to us. It was immensely helpful in giving us an over-view in the realm of cinematography. Conducted by none other than Subrata Mitra. We were lucky that we were allowed to squeeze in by our accommodating seniors. Apart from the regular and visiting faculty and our immediate seniors, some others who contributed to this process of learning were Bharat Kanahre, Mirajkur (Annasaheb) and Sakharam. Former himself a still photographer taught each one of us still photography and analysed with each of us our inputs. Also since he was the younger one of the lot, with him there was no need to break the ice, and all of us vibed well with him.

The two others were flag bearers from Prabhat days; Mirajkar who himself was a cameraperson and Sakharam were the ones who were our constant companions on the sets when lighting exercises happened. They would very unobtrusively set right the mistakes we would commit and also tell us why, what and how of what they had modified/ratified. I think one of the major contributions to the success of FTII has been the Prabhat culture and training which was given to us by these torch bearers of a bygone era – be it Annasaheb

in camera dept., Appasaheb in Camera dept. and Kakaji in the editing dept. They have been some of our biggest teachers – without really claiming any credit for it.

3. Can you talk about the important films that you remember seeing from this time? In what way was your perception of cinema, and of cinematography, changing as a result of a sustained and formal film education?

On an average we saw at least three films everyday – at times maybe even more. Each film was an important film for it told us something about the various crafts that combined to create the moving image that is cinema. To a novice like me, this was the first real exposure to the cinematic world. Initially may be we saw much more than what I could possibly absorb but a subliminal imprint would always be left behind by what was seen even at the end of a very long day. Bresson and Godard, Ray and Fellini, Kurosawa and Ozu, Ghatak and Jansco, Guru Dutt and Bimal Roy. A few may have worked at cross purposes in our raw minds, but the fact remains that images they created remained with us till today and helped us to create images that we do. The whole of our perception of cinema in general and cinematography in particular is based on these classics. This to me was really the beginning of the formation of an ideology, and it was this process which was being helped by a sustained and formal education.

4. When you look back on the exercises that you had to do as a student of cinematography, what are the things that come to mind?

Most of the inputs were very well designed and implemented. The basic format is valid even today.

5. Tell us something about the experience of shooting your diploma film or first film? If you had to do it over again, what approach would you take? What were the mistakes that you learnt from?

Our forays into shooting films were earlier than the stipulated time frame. We did camerawork for the films made for the acting students at the end of our second year. Also since we were a batch of only 4 students, we got to shoot three diploma films each and assist of six more – hence the experience was extensive. We learnt from the mistakes we committed and improved in the next one we shot. If we were to shoot them today it would be an altogether different approach. We keep committing mistakes, even today, and unless you do that, you do not learn. A lot of learning is done at one's own expense and risk.

- 6. Were you attracted to the work of any particular cinematographer/s? If so, what attracted you to their work? Tell us something about the important cinematographic influences on you in this period? Have you found that in the course of time, these influences have varied, or have they remained the same?**

Most important cinematographic influence in this period was of the Subrata Mitra/Satyajit Ray/Bansi Chandragupta team. They complemented, and supplemented, each other so well that their style and their films have left an indelible imprint on our minds. Subrata Mitra's images and shadowless lighting has left such an impression that even after being in the field for so long one is sceptical about using a direct light – even for a backlight. Come to think of it, one is almost ill equipped to think and execute a film with the classicism of direct light!

- 7. What if any, were the other sources of influence (outside cinema and filmmaking) on the shaping of your vision?**

There are very few other influences outside of cinema and filmmaking which have really helped shape the vision – maybe some amount of exposure to theatre.

8. What suggestions do you have about the education of a young person studying cinematography in a film institute today?

Use every opportunity that comes your way to learn and work very hard. Cinematography in itself demands unstinting concentration, swift reflexes and undaunting hard work under extreme situations for days and months together. And the last thing you can afford to lose is your cool as well as your perspective. You have to stay focussed all the time, every second.

9. If you learnt in the industry, what were the sources of information on technical matters? What was the relationship that you had with the cinematographers from whom you learnt your craft? From the point of view of learning your craft, can you tell us about any significant experiences that you had?

The industry is as big a teacher as any film school or maybe bigger. The first thing I learnt and which has stayed with me till today is never say no to the demands of a director. If he conceives a shot, it can be done, It has to be done, there is always a way and you can find and execute it no matter how difficult it may be.

10. What is the nature of the relationship between you and the cinematographer/s from whom you learnt your craft today?

Very cordial, full of faith and trust.

SECTION III: On Entering and being in the Profession.

- 1. Tell us something about how you entered the profession? What were the first few projects that you worked on? + 2. What are the kinds of**

experiences that you had as an assistant? Who were the cinematographers that you worked with as an assistant, on which films and for how long?

1976 is the year that I completed my studies at FTII. Still photography was something known to me in terms of its intricacies, both as business and as a profession. Having accompanied my father for some of his assignments right from the late sixties and spending time with a variety of people at his workstation I was more familiar with the agencies he used to deal with both in his service with Bourne & Shepherd, Calcutta, and later as a freelancer in Mumbai. I thought that I was not cut out to deal with the kind of people he was dealing with. On the cinematography front it was almost a blind alley. Since I was determined to stay away from advertising, I was looking for an opening under somebody in feature films. Deep down within myself I must have been wanting to belong there. Film school familiarises you with technicalities but it gives you no exposure to day-to-day modus operandi. I had no idea how things functioned in the world that mattered and hence had decided to work as an assistant for at least 3-4 years to get enough experience in handling the field of realities.

Opportunity came my way when Jehangir got his first assignment in a major production of this time, namely *Dulhan wohi jo piya man bhaye*, produced by Rajshri Productions, and directed by veteran director Lekh Tandon. In the time in between and after *Dulhan wohi...* I would keep myself occupied in my father's studio, assisting him and also assisted Binod Pradhan on *Jait re Jait* and Ranajit Ray on *Seetha Rati* – the only B&W film I worked on after FTII. I worked with the three above-mentioned cinematographers on & off till I branched out on my own in 1981. All of them happened to be from the same batch at FTII, one year senior to me.

3. Tell us something about the different things that you learnt from the cinematographers that you have assisted.

Dulhan wohi... with Jehangir was a thorough learning experience in terms of everything. Right from the requisites of lighting huge big sets, focusing for intricate movements, checking out equipment and dailies, handling the big lighting crew and understanding how to put up with the demands of a seasoned director, and of course working long hours on a meagre salary – Rs 300 a month, with Rs 5 as a daily allowance. But what this one film taught me has stood me in good stead through the next two decades.

Jait re jait with Binod was a lesson in endurance. One of the most patient camerapersons I have worked under, who would not buckle under extremes of pressure with a relatively novice director and inexperienced producers. *Dulhan wohi...* was essentially an indoors film on big sound stages, *Jait re jait* was a full gamut of outdoor blues. But the results on both of these were immensely likeable. With Binod, the major emphasis was portraiture and this is where I developed the adage that no matter how you light up, the actor/actress have got to be presentable and readable even in the worst projection environments.

With Ranajit and Manmohan Mohapatra, it was primarily a lesson in lensing and cutting. This was one film which got shot entirely on just one lens i.e. a 28mm. Their use of lensing and cutting was what made the dynamics of that film work.

At the end of my fourth year, I had altogether assisted on about 5 films, and I thought that now I had my own survival kit on which I can draw upon.

4. How has your experience of being an assistant influenced your relationships with your assistants today?

I consider the key members of my unit as collaborators. Once I know the capability of the person working with me, I depend a lot on them, and I can do that only if there is mutual respect and faith. I think that it is a kind of culture I

shared with people under whom I worked and I am just keeping the same tradition alive.

5. Is there anything in the generally prevalent relationship between assistants and cinematographers that you think needs to be questioned?

Lack of trust and respect.

6. Can you talk about any devices that you designed or innovations that you brought into practice? How did these come about?

I am quite proud of the three-wheeler dolly we used in *Damul* to execute the outdoor mise-en-scene on unlevelled surface, without rails. We needed to move the camera extensively and elaborately, and definitely not in a straight line. Hence the device like a three-wheeler with a steering wheel and centre support for camera which could pan at least 300 degrees.

7. Were there any 'improvisations' that you had to resort to, in order to deal with a particular problem or situation?

Not replied

8. How did you get the 'break' to shoot your first film?

Four years out of the Institute, I had stopped assisting and was looking for suitable assignments to work on. Advertisement scene was not conducive and due to slump in the trade, my father's studio was also on the verge of closure. To top it all I had also gotten married. A sound recordist friend, Rakesh Ranjan, introduced me to one of his producer/directors Bhism Kohli, who had worked with established cameramen but was willing to stake his film on a low priced new cinematographer who could also work fast. He saw some of the colour slides I had made on one of my sojourns to Kalimpong. This along with my film school

background and credentials as Jehangir/Binod's assistant did him in. I must admire his guts and to his big relief I did not let him down.

It was not any work of great consequence but it gave me a lot of functional and operational confidence. Yes, I arrived on the scene with a film of little repute – *Maine jeena seekh liya*. But to me it mattered a lot and instilled into me a tremendous amount of confidence that I can function under extreme duress and totally unhygienic conditions. Situations cannot be any worse than the ones I faced here.

9. Can you trace a graph of your learning curve from film to film, or project to project?

Maybe a straight line with a small dip here and there...

10. Please describe in detail at least 3 important sequences that you have shot in the course of your career. Describe also the work that you had to put in, in order to realise these sequences.

One of my seniors commented, "The trouble with you is that you take everything too seriously" and that really is a problem with me. To me each work I do is crucial and each of the sequences I do is important. What I could quote is one major miss and also a major hit.

In 1986 I was doing a low budget environmental film called *Vasundhara*. It was a film I did by proxy because the regular cameraman Sharad Navle had some serious problems with his eyes and doctors advised him not to photograph any film for a year or two. I had known the director Ashok Ahuja who was our batchmate and my next door neighbour at the FTII hostel. He was one of the few directors with an eye for detail and habit for a good amount of ground work. But as luck would have it, nothing went right from Day One. Most of the day exteriors

were done between 11:30 and 2:30. We had a scene against the moonrise programmed during the later part of the schedule.

We were shooting in the vicinity of Missouri and one evening after the pack-up mine was the last vehicle to leave. It was the evening magic hour and the moon came out of distant horizon the whole valley around was beautifully lit by the fading away day light. I cursed myself & my lady luck for not being able to stop the actors and do that particular scene there and then. This one I consider as one of my biggest misses and will never forget.

On *Damul*, Anoop Jotwani who worked with me had helped me with a lot of legwork. In spite of the detailed preparatory work a bit got left out here and there we had the timing for sunrise and sunset noted down. They were like sunrise at 6:30. The minute plus or minus were missing. On one particular sequence, which started pre-sunrise and ended on the rising sun, due to the last minute finalisation of the spot, we could not exactly determine the position and the precise time of sunrise. Direction and time both were slightly general to my liking. The duration of the shot was 4.30 minutes one attempt. One magazine was all that the budget of the film would offer. We had started lining up and relishing the shot well in the darkness of the night. We had about fifty actors to rehearse and choreograph. On a god sent moment I looked up at my focus-puller Pramod Pradhan and asked shall we, he looked at his watch for a moment and nodded and we went in for the take. At the end of about a minute or so the eyepiece started to get fuzzy due to the formation of mist out of my own breath. I went ahead with totally fuzzy images till the end when I had to zoom in on to the rising sun. Every thing happened the way it was destined to and in spite of bad viewing conditions the shot worked out beautifully well and the final impact of the shot still rings bells under my ears. It really was a shot in the dark.

11. Can you tell us something about the problems that you have had professionally and technically and how you have dealt with them? Can you tell us about at least 3 significant professional and technical decisions that you have had to take in the course of your career?

Most of the while because of the phenomenal costs involved in the film production, one is required to have good amount of foresight and most of the professional and technical problems get sorted out at the time of pre-production discussions because of the enormity of the cost involved, one determines his safe standards and works within those parameters from time to time and film to film. I rarely work outside the norms I have set for myself for a particular film.

12. Can you tell us about how you have seen the position of a cinematographer change:

- a) In the industry at large**
- b) In a film unit**
- c) In terms of public perception.**

It has grown from strength to strength with a few years of inconsequential existence in between camera crew is generally well respected in any unit and is second only to the director in any film unit. Audiences have always appreciated good camera work, which has now become more vociferous because of media attention.

13. How do you react when you hear the statement "The Cinematographer takes too much time to light up"? What are your thoughts about the pressure of time, and its effect on the quality of your work?

There never is an ideal situation anywhere in the world under which a cinematographer functions. Most of the time most of us are tearing our hair apart on the sets or on the locations very rarely does anything happen with clock work

precision and the major reason for these delays is some other department but the camera crew. Camera crew is always there the shoulder the blame for others good ups. We have to have very broad shoulders and thick skin to be able to counter the buck that is always being passed onto us. I always tell my detractors that I am as fast or as slow as my director is. There never is a shot that got left out because of me or my crew – so please blame it where it belongs, yet collectively as a member of the unit I own up that part of my responsibility if you start worrying about what others have to say, your work invariably suffers, so why let that happen.

SECTION IV: On the Practice of Cinematography.

1. Do you have preferences in terms of what you like to shoot, and why?

- **song & dance**
- **action**
- **drama**
- **nature & wildlife**
- **historical and period based work**
- **fantasy/science fiction/ special effects oriented work**
- **work with an emphasis on architecture**
- **work with an emphasis on graphic elements**
- **documentaries**
- **other**

In order of preference:

- a. I prefer song and Dance sequences because of the pre-determined rhythm. It helps me conceptualist my visuals better and in a more concert's way and yet

allows me a liberty to go wild in my thought process. It is this dichotomy which enlivenises my inputs in these sequences. These can really be ones trips in to fantasies or tryst with reality.

- b. Drama because it is the essence of the narrative form that I am handling.
- c. Documentaries for being able to do right thing at right time being in the right place one is freezing that moment in time.
- d. Nature and wild life for all our inspiration is largely derived from nature and we at the human end have lot to learn from the so-called wild life. They are the ones who are in much better tune with the nature. All that we have done is to systematically destroy the nature and environment.
- e. Historical and period based work for the opportunity it gives you to be voyeuristically opulent and the vastness of converse.

2. Tell us your opinion (based on your experience) about what you think is the nature of the relationships between

- **cinematographer & director**
- **cinematographer & art director/costume designer**
- **cinematographer & choreographer/action director**
- **cinematographer & sound-recordist**
- **cinematographer & assistants**
- **cinematographer & actors (experienced & inexperienced, stars & non stars)**
- **cinematographer & light boys**
- **cinematographer & laboratory technicians**
- **cinematographer & production in charge**

In these relationships please talk in terms of what you think is the ideal and what you perceive as the existing reality.

This is one field where you are interacting on working with a large body of immensely talented people who could be very egoistic or egocentric. What

matters is how that talent is contributing in totality the project you are working on and how it regulating on your own area of operation. Though every area of operations is crucial, there are a few which are more over bearing them the others. Art and costume, even make-up largely contribute to the look of the film and for which the final and eventual responsibility rests largely on the cinematographer. If these departments work at cross purposes, ultimate look of the film will definitely suffer and the blame will stop at cinematographers end. Hence it is pertinent that they work in unison. All these departments contribute a lot and a closely monitored interaction is for the benefit of the project and definitely conducive to good cinematography. Cinematographers cannot create pertinent visual style without inputs from Art Director, System Designer and the Make-up Artist. Some one whose absence I would immediately notice is that of an Art Director-because he is a major support to the visuals I make for a film.

Most Crucial relationship on any film project is that of cinematographer and Director. You have to see eye to eye, you have to share your emotions, you have to have your differences and you have to make up it each other. You are sharing almost everything with your Director that you would be required to share with your legal wife except may be the bed or the car or how talented one may be, it is always the Director whose over view that matters to the film and it is his command that rules the roost. Some of the landmark classics have been made because of this beautiful relationship. One of the best examples to me is V.K. Murthy, Gurudutt relationship.

As I said in my opening remark every person on the set who is a part of the unit matters for the well being of the project on floor, It is therefore pertinent that you treat them with due respect and command the same from them in return. A cinematographer on the set is responsible for the largest section of the crew second only to the production and a lot of your image and so also the quality of images you create depends on how you put to-gather and manage this clavier

kind of personalities. If they know that you honour them as human beings they put their best foot forward for you – it gives you good speed and absolute unison in work atmosphere. There could be one or two unscrupulous elements in this large bunch of people and the best way to tackle them is to ignore them.

For good cinematography you need a production in charge who commands the team and co-ordinates their movements as per your requisition. A whole lot of time this is the single largest factor responsible for unnecessary delays and a lot of heart burns. This is one department, which is largely left to the mercy of untrained and dishonest people who are largely penny wise and found foolish. It is this one department which needs to be spruced up both physically and psychologically to improve the quality of films churned out of Bombay. There are thoroughbred professionals here, but they are very few and far apart.

One cannot function effectively if what exists and what is ideal are too far apart. Most of the time you have to lead from the front, tread on a few toes and create a situation nearer to what could be ideal to be able to deliver to the best of your own ability, there are always supportive elements in every film unit who will back you to the hilt in your endeavour to deliver the best. Under worst of the circumstances if you feel that you are being throttled too much the second best option is to quit and let them fend for themselves.

3. What in your opinion is the relationship between the craft of Cinematography and the other departments in film making:

- **Art Direction**
- **Editing**
- **Scriptwriting**
- **Music**
- **Sound**

Art Direction is the single most obvious contributor to the visual quality of any film. So it is quite pertinent that you work with good quality of ADS who know their job well and are enthusiastic about contribution to the overall visual quality of the film. To me the presence of an AD on the set all the time is an absolute must, but I have not been able to guarantee this always. ADS go a long way in finding you visually interesting locales, put up the sets which keeps an overview of your lighting needs and props up you frames to give an additional Dimension. Some of the best examples of, ADS contributions to the overall visual impact of the film are Thota Tharani in Maniratnam's films, Sabu Cyril in Priyan's films, Samir Chanda in *Dil Se*, Sharmistha Ray in *Dil to Pagal Hai* and Bijon Dasgupta in a lot of Indra Kumar films.

Editing is quite crucial in giving a proper rhythm to the sequences you have executed with the director and eventually to the whole film the contributions of the editor may not be obviously seen when the things are edited well, but when it goes against the spirit of shooting, it becomes glaringly obvious.

Scriptwriting: This is the fundamental input – the force behind all your motivation – it is the inspiration and if you do not feel motivated, do not work on that script because all your executions will be purely clinical and so will the end effect be the same. So if you have any choice, do not work on scripts which you find insipid.

Music and sound are largely supportive. To me a sequence which works in silence works at all times. Music or sound effects will only enhance its output – they can. Not support the weak-kneed visuals.

- 4. Please tell us about at least 3 instances from your experience that clearly illustrates the cinematographer-director relationship. Who are in your opinion the significant directors that you worked with, on which films and**

for how long? Tell us something about the different things that you learnt from the directors that you have shot for.

I shared very good rapport with Prakash Jha on *Hip Hip Hurray* a 1982 production. I could foresee almost all his moves, anticipate his needs and prepare well in advance. Initially I learnt how to handle actors and tune them to finer nuances at the lower end of the scale.

On *Dacait* with Rahul Rawail, I came out with some of my best footage. From him I learnt my cinemascope compositions, takings - manoeuvring the camera and actors movements and also editing. He is one of the master crafts man with a voracious knowledge of the medium and a volcanic temper.

Post 1998 I have been fortunate in working with two marvellous senior citizen of the film world *Gulzarsaab* and *Shyambabu*. How I wish I had worked with him earlier. Both are encyclopaedic in the art and craft of film making in their own styles.

5. ***"Without a well worked out screenplay/script and an imaginative director who is willing to take risks to open out possibilities for the camera, the cinematographer's labour is not worth the footage" - Comment.***

In essence all that you need to state.

6. **What in your opinion are the different professional and technical demands made on cinematographers in:**

- **Mainstream Commercial Cinema**

Bring a semblance of coherency to dis-separately shot visuals over a period of time and definitely not shot under the most ideal conditions and at the best of the times. One has to strive and strive very hard to make things work and eventually make it acceptable to the audiences who see it.

- **Parallel Cinema**

Perform well under tremendous budgetary constraints, but rest of it all is highly motivational the script, the actors, the locales and the time and place where you shoot.

- **Documentary**

Documentary – Specifically topical one has to be in the right place at right time. Narrative documentaries have more or less some constraints as low budget parallel cinema, but generally things are well researched and well planned to be well documented.

- **Ad Films**

Have not been anywhere near it to be able to comment – But from a distance it looks to be too much of everything including the pay check.

- **Television Serials**

- **Television Shows**

Television serials and Tele shows Routine and humdrum as they are done in India. Better to a 9 to 5 desk job.

7. What are the different ways in which you approach working on film and working on video?

Basic inputs being the same, one has to get used to working without the whirl of the movie camera and you need to make a balancing act at least psychologically.

8. What do you think is the importance and role of new image making technologies, digital and computer aided image making in shaping the work of the cinematographer today?

Very much Cosmetic like plastic sugary and skin grafting images manipulation will ultimately be the graveyard of creativity and wizardry of Cinematographers.

9. What are the international trends that you see emerging in cinematography today? What kind of work do you admire in Hollywood, European Cinema, Other Asian Cinemas (Iran, Hong Kong, Japan, China, South Korea etc.) in Mainstream Indian Cinema, in parallel and regional cinema in India?

Have seen less and less of international films of late except some Hollywood films. Basic variants remaining the same, technical refinements have reached its pinnacle. Cinematographers are more concerned about imparting that look to their work than the nitty gritty. Mainstream Bombay cinema still looks the same as ever before with a few exceptions like *Dil To Pagal Hai* & *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*. South is where a total metamorphosis has taken place and with visually well-evolved directors and a disciplined approach to the work, Cinematographers have taken the art of Cinematography to newer heights very close to international standards.

10. What are the trends that you see emerging in Documentary cinematography?

Not qualified to comment.

11. What are the trends that you see emerging in cinematography for advertising?

In this field we are lesser than none and it goes to prove that talent and technical proficiency of Cinematographers have is next to none. It is comparable to international work on all counts. A cinematographer in this field is of a STAR as much.

12. Do you perceive a difference between the cinematography of the mainstream film industries in Bombay, and in the South? If so, what is the nature of this difference? Is there a difference also in terms of the work culture, professional standards etc?

As I mentioned earlier there is a quantum difference to day in the quality of cinematography in the mainstream films of the industries in Bombay and in the south. The nature of difference is qualitative and it stems from the ability of directors down south being visually more evolved, they command and more respect and have a disciplined approach to their profession. They promulgate a better work culture and hence get much better level in terms of professional standards.

13. Do you think there are different schools of cinematography, in India as well as internationally?

These are just about different SECTS of the same RELIGION.

14. What kind of cinematography would you have very negative feelings about?

An effort which obviously speaks volumes about the in aptitude and lack of imagination of both the Director and cinematographer or any cinematography with is too glitzy for drawing attention it the visuals, this it me does not go a long way to support the narrative.

15. How do you keep up with new trends and ideas in cinematography? What are your sources of information on new developments?

Films, journals, books and now of course net and sites.

16. What is the level of your interaction with other cinematographers? What issues would you discuss with your cinematographic colleagues?

Level of interaction is good to fair. Discussions generally centre around of technicalities and aesthetics.

17. Are there enough forums for debate and discussion on cinematography? What are the role of the associations, guilds and other organisations of cinematographers?

There have not been any forums for debate or discussion. Cinematographer's Combine, which come into being last year (May 1999) is striving to provide one. Associates and guilds essentially remain trade union bodies and there is no constructive activity around them. At all.

18. What is your opinion about the practice of giving awards for cinematography? Has this helped raise standards? Has it encouraged unhealthy competition and patronage networks?

Any award is encouraging and so is an Award for Cinematography. It sort of reassures you that your inputs, your interpretations for that particular movie and your perceptions were in place as per as the story telling process in concerned and a body of technically qualified film maker has recognised that your efforts were in right directions. But as in every other field there is lot more is it than what seems to be on surface. A lot of lobbying and mechanization's go into the final decisions and may be the one that nets in the award is probably not the best. So if five films get the nomination and yours is also the one it that, you can look up to your work with a certain sense of satisfaction and achievement most likely you may not end up receiving the trophy when you expect it the most and you night just walk away with one when you least expected you have to learn to take these things in your stride, come to terms with them and keep performing.

19. Do you think that cinematography gets the critical attention it deserves in the press and in film criticism/reviewing?

"XYZ's cinematography is NOTABLE for its lush outdoor visuals, the breeze caressed vistas of New Zealand being particularly well captured"- Says the film critic of long standing repute even as late as this new millennium. I know the cinematographer and his work speaks volumes for himself them to just credit him with capturing what exists as it exists. Any amateur photographer can boast of same credentials. But this is now cinematography gets mentioned and treated by most of the critics and reviewers. They refuse to look beyond the picture post-card value of cinematography, be it Ladakh, Austria or Timbuctoo.

20. Do you think that the ordinary viewing public in India is sensitive to and aware of the contribution made by the cinematographer to a film or television programme?

The awareness has gone up many folks in recent times. Thanks to the exposure potential of television/Electronic media. By and large the audience has be come aware of good cinematography which till a certain point of time was guard by the parameters like brightness/darkness levels.

21. Why do you think there are very few women in the profession of cinematography? And why are so few women taken on as assistants are?

It is only a question of breaking the ice. It is happening, but has been a very slow Process. In India, as early as sixties, K.H. Kapadia had a lady assisting him.

22. What do you think of the payments given to cinematographer?

"Cinematographers are well paid but highly exploited." - Comment

The standards are improving and you are as well paid as you determine to be. There are only two classes, which exist in this, world-exploiter and Exploited and it's for you to decide where you want to belong.

23. What is your opinion on the payments and working conditions of assistants, light boys, grips electricians etc.

Abysmally poor because. Most of them comprise of talented but uneducated lot. For the lack of education, the pay scales are far better than any other field, but because of being not so organized labour, their working conditions and safety standards are very poor.

24. Do you find yourself having to become involved in protecting the interests of the camera crew often? Why is this so?

More often than not. Most of the time the middleman is the culprit. By and large the producers pay up, but the money gets held up down the line. I have also come across producers who would circulate your money (Crew members) on short-term deposits. Only after either they have earned the interest or saved it by some means will they pay up.

SECTION V: Technical Questions and Issues.

1. Pre-production planning

1. Given a choice between Film and Video what would you like to work on and why?

Film because I am more used to it than video that I am, frankly speaking, quite afraid of.

2. What are your preferences in terms of the following and why:

In Film & in Video Accessories & Gadgets

16mm Beta Video Assist

35mm Digi Beta Remote Control

Cinemascope Mini Digi Lighting Fixtures

Hi 8 Steadycam

(In which situations would you choose to work with which of the above)

There is a very limited choice and options available to you because the country does not manufacture any of the hardware that we use. Also the market is very rigid. Once a brand name gets established, nobody uses anything else, because else is simply not available. I have not worked a Mitchell beyond the F.T.I.I or touched a pana vision except at a few Denso. Also Government restrictions are too tight jacketed and duty structures unreasonable.

3. What are the different meters that you feel are essential to your work, and why?

Mostly incident light reading meters. Rarely do I get a chance to use a spot meter. Colour temperature meters are almost unheard of.

4. What are your preferences in terms of aspect ratios? What, in your opinion is enhanced, and what is lost, when you move from one aspect ratio to another?

Where the questions of any option? Since early eighties every single movie shot in the country is being shot scope whether the subject demands it or not. My personal preference thought is 1:1:85 the American wide screen for it is to me pictured confined within 'borders'.

5. What are your preferences in terms of film stock, and why?

Medium to normal speed Eastman Colour negative. I have hardly worked with any other stocks for the lack of availability.

6. Which camera/s do you prefer to work with, and why?

Arri flexes are the only once available (largely), so where is the question of any choice.

7. Which lenses do you prefer to work with, and why?

I hate to work with KOWA lenses which is what is available to us most of the time. I prefer to work with older sets of Todd AOs whenever I can lay my hands on them. They are sharper, have good contrast to them and skin rendition (textural) is very good.

8. Given a choice between working in a studio and a location, what would you opt for, and why?

The choice varies depending on the converse and expanse. Though there is nothing better than an actual location or as set on outdoor locations, provided the director and actors are willing to fit themselves into a disciplined regimen.

9. From a cinematographer's point of view, what typically are the things most neglected and forgotten at the budgeting and production planning stage?

The 'Loss of time' factor and the hardships due to mismanagement and lack of planning.

10. How much say and involvement do you have in discussions about sets, locations, costumes and props? What are the things that you think have to be kept in mind when discussing these questions prior to production?

Quite a bit where it matters and people are willing to listen to you and involve you. Thing that way heavily is the directors style of working most of the decisions and inputs are governed by this. Higher you have worked with him or you have seen his work.

11. "If we do a comparative analysis of the heads and amounts of expenditure in an average film, we find that the least amount of money is actually spent on what the film is going to end up looking like" - Comment

True to an extent, but things are changing for better now.

12. What are the different kind of tests that you are able to do, and would like to do prior to filming (In terms of equipment and stock tests)?

Performance tests all around for the equipment, Stock and laboratory.

13. What is your opinion on the general standards of maintenance of camera equipment, lights and accessories?

Poor.

14. To what do you attribute the absence of innovations in technology, equipment and accessories, especially with relevance to Indian conditions? What can be done to remedy this?

There is no infrastructure investment by the manufacturers whose equipment's we use. Government policies have been a big deterrent to them. But with things opening out in other sectors we can at least make a beginning by assembling things initially with manufacturing coming its at a later date. If this starts, there will be enough interest in research and development, be course we have a development, be course we have a large market share in this area.

15. What in your opinion is the importance of lab reports on stock tests?

Very important. Every lab has its own parameters.

16. How do you decide upon a particular laboratory?

Choice is very limited. More often than not it is the laboratory of the PRODUCER'S choice!!!

2. Lighting

1. When you begin thinking of a lighting design for a film, do you work towards an overall look for the entire film, or do you work out your lighting scheme in terms of different sequences, scenes and shots.

In narrative features, which are where I essentially belong, you have to think in terms of totality and overall look. All the lighting decisions are made with this overview including any deviations. Like for instance you are talking in terms of present and past, you determine how you are going to demarcate the you want to achieve or how thin a line you want to draw between the two. The approach is with the total impact in mind. There a scheme you work within you and without being too rigid about it make minor modifications on scene to scene or shot to shot basis. You cannot go off on a tangent.

Also the whole approach is determined by way you are made and way you look at things. Lot of personality gets reflected in the approach and style and lot of time it becomes like your signature or second nature. It is difficult, a lot of times to deviate from the modalities you have set for yourselves, though not impossible. But any variation will need a studied and laboured departure from your own set mould. This is one challenge one must face to be on toes and get a kick or high on a new project.

2. How do you realise 'the look of a film' in your work? Please talk about this in detail, with examples in terms of lighting, framing, saturation, colour and movement.

My main emphasis is on framing and movement – lighting just has to fall in place – never overbearing. I like to go for subtle saturated tonalities but of a subdued nature and I hate to have stark colours in my frame as an external and imposed element. If it is an integral part of the character or set design I leave it at that, but I would surely desist from implanting such an element to prop-up or dress up my frame. I also prefer to demarcate periods or times on a thin line

basis so that one transits into another without the transition itself being noticeable.

3. How do you begin to light a set?

I set ground or base density first depending on the film speed and my choice of exposure. I rarely shoot wide open or full shut down the choice of exposure being middle of the scale unless a very shallow depth of field is intended for the film. Nobody has time or inclination for a retake for the sake of focus. There after I start working with my key light and other light and the adage have is one at a time to avoid confusion and unwanted overlaps, which are easier to avoid than to set right.

4. Do you light for the frame, or for points of emphasis within the frame? Does Lighting determine the frame, or, does framing determine the lighting. Please answer with examples from your work.

It is more often than not the framing that determines / limits the lighting. If possible I light-up the location for the entire scene and then go with it shot by shot with minor modifications for close-ups. I light up almost for the whole with points and areas of emphasis. These remain for all the shots for the sequence but for indiscernible ratifications and fine-tuning.

5. What are your preferences in terms of specular/ bounced/ diffused lighting, and why?

Generally a diffused mode of lighting with a small and studied mix of specular to give the diffusion a little edge. This is what one has been groomed in and how it is very difficult to get out and work in a different mode though time and again I feel like working under some veteran cinematographer who master the technique of specular lighting.

6. What kind of filters do you use, in what contexts, and to what effect?

With the kind of equipment at our disposal, most of the time, I hardly use any filters at all. I definitely do not proscribe to the school where you light up extremely soft and use an ultra con on the camera- I had rather light up that way. At the same instant I am not averse to the use of filters for a specific look where I would go for warm mixed with SFX and any one of the promists that I pre determine. Out-doors I am not averse to the use of Polarizing or Graded as long as I can avoid its use becoming too obvious.

7. Do you like to work for a 'lit' feeling or for an 'unlit' feeling? Why?

Never for a lit feeling unless the sources in the field demand. The art of cinematography to me lies in creating the unlit feeling inspite of using tonnes and tonnes of Light.

8. Do you ever mix Tungsten and Daylight? In what situations? Why?

Yes I do, to create a tonality.

9. "The Film Industry wastes a lot of power. There is a lot of unnecessary lighting in films today" - Comment

You cannot and should not generalise this.

10. Do you ever consciously make an effort to use fewer lights?

More often than not. My lighting schemes are simple and bare. I go with just enough light to be able to do any shot given to me at any point of time.

11. How much room or leeway do you give to the possibility of changes in your lighting scheme in terms of variations (clouds, sunshine, changes in the weather etc.) in the light condition in your locations?

Within a sequence it is best to avoid variations. But with your back to the wall you may have to allow it, sometimes, to the extent correctable in lab, or within the range of tolerance or something which would not make the cut.

12. Do you incorporate such variations into your lighting pattern, or, do you insist on taking shots at particular time and only under pre-determined light conditions?

There has to be a scope for improvisations. Also depending on the tightness of scheduling, you may not always be able to shoot at the best of the lighting times so you have to learn to make the best use of light available to you at that time. At the best, if time and material permit, redo it under the conditions you thought as ideal if there is an opening. The producer and director will be more than willing if you justly demand something for the betterment.

13. Do you insist on working at a particular aperture setting for a film? Do you have a favourite aperture setting? Why?

Lenses behave the best around the middle of the scale and so does the focus puller. Also a certain amount of sharpness and depth of field is necessary for the sets and scenarios to show up well. Japanese camerapersons are known to have shot at F/11 – F/16 on expansive sets with slow B&W emulsions.

14. What makes a location or a set interesting to work with in terms of Light? What can we say is the 'feel' of a location?

The depth and dimensions of a location and set make them look photogenic, add to this directional light and they come alive on the screen in all their glory.

15. In a given location or set, how do you consciously incorporate natural light sources, available practicals like lanterns, firelight, candlelight etc., architectural features like pillars, doorways and different elevations in the designing of your shots and lighting?

All this has to come on in a very natural process. If there is an interesting arch or a door way on the set, no director worth his salt will not have it incorporated in his scene or scenes. Most of the things fall in place. What is needed is to move or have some of these props and sources adjusted a bit or change the camera artist's positions by a few inches you have everything falling in right place. A light source always enlivens a frame and an ambience of any exterior adds a lot of depth to the scene, also it helps to remove the claustrophobia of the scenes to a great extent. Only principle I follow is not to do any of this overtly. A good Art Director is an asset in these situations or to this end.

16. Do you ever experiment in terms of playing with differences in exposure for different takes of the same shot?

Never.

17. How do you work in the possibilities of camera and character movement into your lighting scheme for a given shot? Please give at least 3 examples from your work.

As I mentioned earlier, my lighting schemes are simple and never rigid. Once a tenor has been set, simplify the modalities to be able to get governed by it through the whole film. A whole lot of it is today derived by how you expose the film and necessarily not just how you light up lighting schemes and exposing modes have to go hand in hand. What really sets any-body work apart is the way he exposes his film. How many stops one lets his highlight go over his set exposure and vis-à-vis how much are his darker of the darkest shadows down

from the set norm-what is the balance between bright and dark areas of his scenes. This not just the lighting that sets the work apart. So essentially the Camera and character movements are determined by the dramatic needs of the scene and the film and the tenor of lighting determined for the film has to then fall in place. Also it is fun to keep varying the lighting a bit here or there in the film like a cook / chef whose food will taste so much better if he finally adds a pinch of salt or decides to stay away from adding it.

18. Do you like to use the idea of moving your camera between different intensities of illumination in a given space? Or, do you prefer evenness in terms of lighting on the set? + 19. Have recently developed faster film stocks changed or had any impact on your overall philosophy and pattern of lighting?

Depending on the mood of the film or its end use I determine which of these elements I am going to go in for. I definitely started, in my initial films by lighting up evenly – but no longer. If I am more or less sure of the Director / Editor's cutting preferences I definitely would like my characters moving in zones of light Today's emulsions handle all these more beautifully than ever before. They are more pliable both in terms of intensities and colour temperatures.

20. When do you say that the lighting for a shot is done?

By and large ten minutes before it actually gets done. There are always finer adjustments after a complete rehearsal. I do not mind modifying something a bit even after one take if I do find if necessary while looking through the Camera in an on going take

3. Framing

1. **"The presence of a video monitor or video assist diminishes the autonomy and authority of a cinematographer on a set in terms of determining the framing of a shot" - Comment.**

To an extent it does, but all depends on the kind of director you are working with and how authoritative he is definitely every unit member should not have an accessibility to the monitor – least of all the actors. If used with care and reverence it also works as a good mode of communication between the cameraman and Director and saves time.

2. **How do you guide the viewer's eye within the frame? Through graphic elements, symmetry/ asymmetry, volume, light or colour.**

Whatever I could lay my eyes on it a give set of situation. It could be just one or mix of many of these elements.

3. **What are your preferences in terms of working with different camera angles?**

Most of it evolves from film to film, place to place and director to director. There is no scope for rigidity. What might be the correct angle for one situation – one film, might just not work on another.

4. **How do you create depth in a frame? With the help of light, or colour, or both?**

Again whatever is available to you under the given situation.

4. Lenses & Lensing

This is primarily the domain of directors. I may be oversimplifying it by saying thus but this I consider as their prerogative. Yet the fact remains that very few directors of to-day have any philosophy about lensing at all – most of them can not differentiate between a piece of glass and a lens. But a few others are

quite knowledge and it is them with whom it is fun to work on with a lensing “System” – though by and large in the ambit of commercial cinema it only tends to becoming very functional.

On a personal level I firmly believe that a character has to relate to its backdrop and ambience. A character or a story cannot develop in a vacuum. Like so many of my peers I also started off with liking big telephoto portraiture for the glamour of it but was lucky enough to get out of it. Thanks to a chance meeting with Mahinder Singh, a serious still photographer on the sets of *Gaman* where I was assisting Nadeem Khan. He is squarely responsible for turning my overview around and making me believe strongly that you have to tell the story in each frame and hence make your characters relate to their back-drops constantly – and to do this renowned still photographers would over use slightly wider than a normal lens. This philosophy has come to stay with me and my preference is a wider than normal lens for that format.

Second influence is that of an article by Mr. Balu Mahendra – Cinematographer – Director who tells us very vividly about the overuse of close – ups in Indian cinema and how sheer overuse dilutes effectiveness of the same. So the adage is to use the CUs sparingly so the over statement is rarely noticed. In fact these days I do not mind using a wide lens to isolate a character and using that as the C.U. To me it works very well.

Given this approach does not necessarily mean that one does not necessarily understand the compression of tele imaging. Given the operational space, I do not mind using only a tele, without isolating my characters from their back drop and doing a whole film that way- so very well used in the film *Landscape after Battle*.

In nutshell all my lensing for various formats gets governed by one adage - do not isolate your characters and make them relate to their backgrounds.

Zoom as a matter of principle I consider as a lazy man's choice and a poor man's option. Zoom lens cannot compensate for the physical movement of the camera and the change in perspective that a physical movement of camera offers. Both have totally different dimensions, neither can replace the other. Also qualitatively zoom lens has resolution problems and more marked in the Indian context. So the preference is always for block lenses. I do not mind using a good zoom lens, for blocking or minor adjustments in compositions in moving shots.

5. Movement

A whole lot of things which mattered to one during one's days at the Institute and on a few of the initial films are no longer relevant today. In the earlier phases one is probably quite nervous about planning and execution and hence the inputs in the division.

Now with so many years behind a lot of things start working at gut level. I like to read the script and then listen to the narration. Both the reading and narration can be more than one. It is in this process the visualisation starts becoming more and more concrete. They are more or less final once the locations are finalised. I am still very nervous about a location not being final till the day before the shoot. So once the conceptual input in the film starts gelling on you, with the director you decide the use of movement - or its absence. This is (to-day) essentially a phase of restlessness and hence the camera also becomes restless. It is more mobile today than at any other point of time in the history of cinema because the human mind has become very restless. This is how the movement gets inculcated in the films you do. Everybody associated with the film is so very restless and hence the camera too. The artistes – your principal players - move all the while and the camera follows to get the best of their facing and so as to read their emotions well. Though within this gamut I prefer to have smaller and softer moves.

I am, personally a great admirer of Ozu and I carry a lot of that influence even till to-date. But this comes into play when I am photographing and directing. With the directors who engage me as a cinematographer, they use me to the hilt as a movement man.

Though I hate movement for movement's sake, I abide by the directorial dictates. Use of any mode of devices to execute a well choreographed movement, one can not be averse too. Jansco has carried out movements so lyrically and given it poetic nuances. Steadicam was so creatively used in the talkie portions of the Hollywood film '*Wall Street*'. These are the few instances of technique being supportive to the narrative as a whole and not being intrusive at all. It is not at all difficult for me to adapt to any form that is suitable to the director for the way he wants to go about a scene or a cut-to-cut pattern.

Moving shots (Moving Camera) generally means compromise on lighting, but as long as it is within limit of tolerance, which it could be, it does not matter. So in a nutshell the director's style and story telling determines the choice of either stable frame, which allows for movement within it or a dynamic mobile camera. If the film calls for I do not mind doing the whole film handheld or on a steadicam. More often than not all these decisions stem from intuitive feelings and more often than not they are absolutely right.

6. Colour

To me colour has just got to be there and not implanted. Colour schemes have to work in tandem with the total design of the film and any deviation has to be a studied one. I do not have any connotations in terms of old memories but definitely have specific likes and dislikes. As I prefer to have subdued tonalities, I have a preference for muted colours. I find brighter and starker shades garish and as a rule do not like to incorporate them in frames or films unless is a directorial need or decision.

I would love to have monochromatic renditions and desaturated colours. Some of my good friends accuse me of wasting my colour stock when I have attempted these effects on still transparencies. I also like to see similar effects done on films. The B&W thought process has gone out of vogue, one always was made to think in terms of colours. But B&W seems to be coming back and is definitely a good sign.

I do not get to work with the costume designer but definitely I have my way of working with Art Directors. Generally one is trying to work out schemes which are true to life and very realistic, all of it being derived from each others observations or research materials – film clips, videos, photographs, painting or any other material one has access to.

I do not go too much out of the way in the lab, for generally it is difficult to offset the routine standards. I try to fiddle around the limited pliability offered by the print stocks and minor processing modifications in terms of time and temperature without trying to change basic chemistry. I do offset it to the required extent to get the desired tonality. I find rendition of colour in video too metallic.

7. Laboratory & Post Production Work

There can be no two ways about your inputs required in the lab. A cameraman's job does not get over with the shooting getting over. In fact most of the time I had liked to start working with the lab in the pre-production stages and it continues through till the release prints get okayed. I prefer to keep in constant touch with the lab through the production, get negative reports on the telephone and go for my dailies initially so that the grader gets into the groove for my needs pertaining to that particular movie. I try and squeeze in time for dupes and other requirements. The grader to me is what I am to my Director. There has to be a tremendous sense of understanding of each other's psyche. I will always miss Mr Devraj of Prasad. He was a phenomenon by himself.

By and large the labs in India provide adequate support and are willing to work hard for you provided you work and be demanding. But a lot of uncouth commerce gets involved at the stage of release and the basic choice of print material is also left to the mercy of distributors. Time factors in this stage are grossly under estimated, sound is generally late to arrive and the prints have to be delivered. There is nothing like an answer print and corrected copies before dupe – for most of the time prints are made out of mother negatives. So at the end of the release the negatives are in tatters – at times even before the first copy because they are not handled properly at any of the stages, in unhealthy and dusty environments and get battered with each print that gets made. The value of the negatives is not there beyond the first release and hence nobody really seems to care for them. Dupes get made only to meet the release deadlines and to feed the printing and processing machine it is never a part of processing machine – it is never a part of production expenditure.

Laboratories by and large work with outdated and obsolete machines yet it must be said to their credit that they do produce good quality results when THEY want to.

Space for the cinematographers to intervene in the video post is there if he so desires and is updated with technology and viability. But very few genuinely care. They feel better for not having to make rounds of the lab like in film production once the video shoot gets over.

8. Viewing Conditions

1. What is your opinion on the standards of screens and projectors in cinema theatres in India? What can be done to make for better standards and viewing conditions in the theatres?

This is one area where would over cinematographers exercise very little or no control at all. A concentrated effort on part of every body to set thing right.

At least in metros the things seem to be changing for better. But still the things are far from ideal. Eventually a paucity of business is going to force the powers that be to make amends and provide for better all around environment.

2. What is your opinion on the quality of telecine transfers in television stations?

Poor to extremely poor.

3. What is your opinion on the quality of transmitted video signals on television (including satellite TV)

Quality of transmission of satellite T.V. is at least of good standards but that of Doordarshan is rank bad.

SECTION VI: Aesthetic Questions

1. Do you adapt different styles in different categories of filmmaking?

Yes, I do and everyone must.

2. Can we make a distinction between 'realist' and 'expressive' cinematography? What are the markers of this distinction?

We can and we should – may be on the same lines as the paintings of Jamini Roy and Pablo Picasso would.

3. How much freedom do you give yourself in terms of changing your style? Or, do you work towards maintaining a consistent stylistic signature in all your films?

There is a trap in maintaining a stylistic signature in all of ones work – it gets boring after a while, you become predictable. Though very easy to execute it eventually sets in rigor mortis. So it is better to leave enough room for freedom of choices in every project you do.

- 4. Subrata Mitra once said, " Could *Pather Panchali* have been shot with Panavision cameras, and sophisticated accessories?" - Comment.**

Probably No. At times the limiting factors are the once that bring the best out of you and take you to the pinnacle of creativity. Too much of everything eventually spoils the party. At times I like to work under self imposed restrictions.

- 5. Can an excess of technological gadgets sometimes be a hindrance to the practice of cinematography, and to creative freedom?**

Yes, it may.

- 6. How does the presence of the human body affect the decisions that you take in terms of lighting for a frame? What is the relationship of the image size of your frame to the volume occupied by the human figure within it?**

There is no Rule of the Thumb.

- 7. What are the different elements that you take into consideration when you position the human body within the frame? Do these elements change when you move from a studio set to a location, from an interior scene to an exterior scene and from daylight to night?**

Its visibility vis-à-vis others in relation to its functional utility to the scene.

This does not alter with the change of locale.

- 8. Are there any differences in the way in which male and female figures are lit and framed?**

Obviously female figures tend to take the cake of ones attention and the males suffer to that extent.

9. Are there any differences in the way in which, the eyes, the face and the body are lit and framed?

Eyes are the most expressive part of actors and a lot gets conveyed through them. Even if everything else is very dark, I make a special effort to make the eyes come up to the readable level.

10. Do different characters in a narrative demand the application of different lighting codes and conventions?

May be at times if it fits into the whole to the lighting design. Mogambo in Mr. India is one good example.

11. "The visibility of the Star in mainstream films demands its own form of lighting." - Comment.

Yes visibility of star has a major criteria in the mainstream cinema and till the advent of T.V. / Video / Cable networks it was very crucial because of the projection conditions in the smallest of the centre. Manmohan Desai's definition of good cinematography was bright, clear and sharp images. This has changed over the years but is still practiced in a few quarters.

12. Do you light up the space and then allow the characters to move within it, or, do you light the characters and by doing so evoke the space?

I would like to light up a space as a whole and then work with and a bit on characters.

13. "Pragmatic considerations and Time Management determine the aesthetic of a film" - Comment.

Right. There never is an ideal situation under which anyone functions. Only you are aware of the compromises you have had to make and unless you

do not let them become obvious on the screen, audience and analysts are never going to notice them. At the same instance there is absolutely no excuse for obviously bad work. So if you manage the time available to you well and be pragmatic, results are generally very acceptable.

14. "Editors spoil cinematographers labours" - Comment.

Not always necessary, but yes it can happen. Also the best of the editors cannot make a scene out of badly shot material. There aren't and there never were any short cuts.

15. Do you shoot an urban setting differently from a rural setting?

I get governed by my inner responses.

16. "There is a preference for the panoramic eye in the depiction of the rural, and for the dynamic, mobile eye in the depiction of the urban" - Comment.

It could also be vice versa.

17. " The mobile camera (extended tracks & cranes and steadicam) have transformed the cinematographic experience and effect." - Comment.

And may be spoilt it too!

18. Do you imagine the sound track when you are shooting?

It works at a subliminal level if it could be imagined.

19. "Conception of a sound track gives rhythm to the shot taking" - Comment.

Very much so.

20. Is shooting a beautiful object beautifully good cinematography?

Not at all.

21. What is the notion of beauty that you aspire for? What are the aesthetic goals that you set yourself?

Within the given parameters of the script, the work has to be neat, clean and rhythmic without any glitches. From here if you take off, bigger and better goals keeps evolving on the way.

22. Have you seen the concept of 'Beauty' change in the course of your career as a cinematographer?

Evolution is a natural phenomenon. There should not be any permanent stagnancy in ones outlook.

23. Why is the pursuit of 'Beauty' alone the motivation for so much cinematography? Can there be other motivations?

I think beauty, somewhere, is the mother of all cinematography. This is where it all began and will remain so for times immemorial. This is because you work with a lot of beautiful material - human or otherwise - and no matter what you do you are not going to make them look ugly. There always is that beauty even in horror movies.

24. Do you find that there is a generally accepted notion of an 'aesthetic minimum' for cinematography today? Does this constrain or enable you? Do you have your own, personal 'aesthetic minimum'?

With technical innovations and refinement, the set norms for minimum acceptability keep moving upwards. So at any given point of time there has to be a set aesthetic minimum from where you work upwards. This could be very relative but a line has to be drawn somewhere. It can never constrain one; it always has to enable.

25. What are the aspects of the cinematographer's craft that you find unrealised in your working life? Just as a Director has the freedom to discuss an 'idea' and develop that into a script or screenplay, why does the cinematographer not have the same freedom to develop a specifically cinematographic conception into a full-fledged script!

Not if you have worked with directors of repute. In a lot of long standing cinematographer-director relationships, there is fulfilment somewhere down the line. You may not find an orgasmic high in every work, but there is definitely some fulfilment without which the relationship may not last – like a marriage. You contribute in your own way to directors and script processes, support him in its execution and the dream that is realised is a combined one and not just the director's. You are as much a part of it.

There is no Cinematography without a story telling in the narrative mode of filmmaking. Cinematography has to support the storytelling effectively and economically, and at the same time effortlessly – it cannot be a laboured process. The cinematographer's work should never aspire to be for cinematography's sake alone. This may work in a short, non-narrative, personal cinema but definitely not on a broader narrative format. Yours is definitely a job of a supportive nature and individually it is not supposed to distract the audience's attention.