

venu ANANDA KUTTAN

What are the early visual references that stay in your mind? (In your childhood) – any festival or anything that stays in one’s mind.

I think my earliest memory is of my elder brother Anie Iyekat and my father trying to hold a bottle with an ant in it and trying to keep it (ant) distracted from getting out...that is one thing I remember.

What is the kind of frame reference now, when you recollect it?

Ya... May be outlines are vague...I remember these birds called “Treepies”. ...those I remember very clearly...these are like when I was four years old, may be 4 to 5 years old.

Do you remember anything like films or any other art forms that you remember ...more of its first viewing of things?

Films...I think the first thing I remember are real life adventures, Walt Disney films, *Jalsaghar*...

How old were you then?

May be 4, 5 or 6...and then I remember walking out of the film, I was sitting with my parents and then we went home.

Do you remember any visuals from that film?

I don’t know...I haven’t seen “**Jalsaghar**” after that but is there a sequence where he is riding on a horse? at the end or something...he is bleeding?

There is a horse shot...

Very fast...kind of desperate...OK I remember it... ya then I remember someone is lighting...

Those were some of the main shots from the film...that big dancing hall and lighting the chandeliers. Anyway, tell us what kind of education you had? But one thing before that... Do you have any family references in terms of visuals or anybody in photography or any kind of art form for that matter?

Aravindan, he was kind of a very close relative...and I had seen him in flashes, till I was quite grown up.

Did you see Aravindan as a cartoonist? Did you have any interaction with him?

No...not any interaction, but I had seen him...he was not in my hometown. He was in Calicut, but I knew he was a very respectable person. Then of course my grand father, he was a well-known writer, Karoor Neelakanta Pillai; a well-known Malayam Writer. Also lots of writers were my grandfather's friends and visited, but never anything like I was never introduced.

But must have been discussions around these things?

Yes, but I was never in that. Another thing I remember is that there were lots of magazines and weeklies coming everyday, there were lots of books in the house....I started reading quite early. I started reading very early actually... This is like my early childhood like below ten or something...

Did you have any early encounter with photography (still photography) as such?

Till then nothing.

And what was your education after that?

I went to school then to college and did my degree in chemistry from Kerala.

What was your track to the Film Institute? Did you have any other interactions, also in political terms?

Yes, there were film societies, that's how I saw the film "*Jalsaghar*" and I was really in. This was a small period and my parents took me to films as there was no one to attend in my house, but then later on when I went to college, there were a couple of film societies happening. There was this Mass Film Society, there was Kottayam Film Society. This was in 1974 – 75. So at that time, I was in my first year of college.

That was the Film Society movement period...there were lots of noon shows...

Yes, ... but shows came later, like in FTII, we see "film appreciation" films... I had seen most of the films before that...like "*Give us our daily bread*", "*Battleship Potemkin*", "*Big City Blues*". That was also the time when good commercial films like American and European films such as "*Zabrisky Point*", "*Stabiesky*", "*Death in the Mist*", which came as regular morning shows., one or two days a week. They were good films. There were strange films which I still remember like "*Sycaraya*", which was like a musical cowboy, which I found much later, very recently found, just 5 – 6 years ago when I met somebody from America and he said that I am the only person he has met who has seen the film. That time in New York it was like a sensational small group film, so those kind of films use to come then and we used to see them without realizing that. Stabisky:

Alendares film and *Zabrisky Point* is of course Antonioni's, so I think "*Zabrisky Point*" was straight English and "*Stavisky*" was dubbed.

Did you have groups that talked about it?

I don't think we talked about it. We used to see films but never with the intention of trying to make films. I never thought about it.

How did you get into the institute?

Getting into the Institute just happened. We had a very senior friend who some how managed to buy or get a 16mm camera and he knew nothing about it. So he looked at the manuals and wasted five rolls just learning to load the camera and this was all reversal black & white, so at that time he had to send it to Calcutta for processing or may be abroad...that was the fancy.... He took lots of shots, he never made films but then he decided to make a film and then he cast me as the hero of the film (laughs) ...but I was never allowed to be next to the camera. So I had seen a movie camera but I don't think I handled a still Camera. Then Institute was after graduation - when you don't have good marks and your future is pretty bleak and you don't know what to do! So it was like that, nothing was schemed about it.

And how was Institute life.

Institute life was nearly the best times in my life. It was very nice.

In terms of viewing films and teaching...

Not only for that but also for other things. It was the first time I was travelling outside Kerala on my own... First time I spoke English...where everything was new....everything was very convenient and everything was very kind and nobody was bothering anybody and it was a nice place....First time I

was away from my home....and then of course new things to learn. But I joined late, I joined about three months after the batch was on. I was in the waitlist. I mean it was a nice time and a good place to be in.

What was the kind of exposure? Something that struck you in Indian Cinematographic work? Even later, who is the cinematographer you think has influenced you or you think as great.

See, there it was all European cinema anyways. Hollywood was definitely second-class. I don't think I remember any cinematographers from then but definitely I saw a lot of films. See, in the first few weeks I think I realized what was a telephoto lens and this was new...like one person walking and he is never reaching and then he is there - that was a new kind of visual world for me. Lots of other things like that, good colours, soft light such as one notices here where we are talking.

What are the things that struck you? The reference from the films you saw in Kerala and the new world that opened around you?

I think the first thing that struck me was when I saw films in the Main theatre at the Institute was the quality of projection, and that was something that I had not seen before. This was a clean and good projection and nice seats and you didn't have to buy tickets and you felt very close to the film. You are not paying for it, that was the first thing! At that time it was watching a lot of films - everyday there were at least two films or maybe three, and this was the best education. We saw hundreds of films...

What do you feel about the teaching at the Institute?

There was hardly any teaching... I didn't realize this thing then but after I started working. For me personally it was a big turning point in my life when I

shot a film for Mani Kaul. That was quite early in my career...that was my third film.

Before coming to that, which was the first film that you did?

The first film that I shot was M. P. Sukumaran Nair's, a featurette called "*BHAVI*". It was a one-hour film, and not a feature film. On 16mm, not a regular movie but...

You did "PREM NAZIRINE KANMANILLA".

That was a proper film.

That's immediately after the Institute?

No. I worked two years for Shaji, and actually I began working when I was still in my third year. I did two films when I was actually a student...even this "*BHAVI*" was when I was just getting out (of the Institute).

Mani's Film *Mati Manas*?

Till Mani's film I realized was till then, like most people, thinking that cinematography meant lighting. After doing Mani's Film I realised that lighting is just a part of it and there are a lot of other factors to it. I think one major mistake is, I don't know about other film schools but I can say about my experience, that about 90% emphasis was on light which is quite wrong because I think a lot of things have to click and jell or else your lighting has no value. So you have to learn to look at other factors like lensing, choreography or what one calls framing...When I was a student I always thought of a frame as one where you have a tree on your left and a face on your right. Well, I didn't know what was the difference between still photography and static cinematography. I think if you look at a cinematographer's job, lighting is not an unimportant part. It's a major part

but it's only one portion and it's has to be assimilated with lots of other things. I didn't know lensing existed before I did Mani's film *MATI MANAS*. I thought before that lensing was used for image magnification or reduction. Now these things are difficult to explain but I think I know it's important. I don't know the right word but there is something called 'dynamism' of lenses. I am very bad at expressing theory!

But it's a very important thing that you are talking about. Basically this is a major concept. I do believe a lot that lighting is a major thing, but it cannot stand apart alone in a cinematographer's job.

Then it will become only a classroom exercise if you are doing lighting for the sake of lighting. It's like you have a live model, or a statue and you just light up. Like you know the alphabets but you have to stop somewhere and imagine a face and face has to have some kind of meaning, and I think good lighting is not meaningless lighting. So I think in Institute teaching and in film schools, I believe, could be improved by giving these kinds of ideas to students.... I think I knew these things when I was a student, but I didn't realize them then. Everything was the director's job and your job was like a lighting man - that was what I thought then. But now I know.

Do you participate in scripting?

No I don't ...see I am not thinking of ideal situations. Ideal situations are those which do not happen all the time. What I am saying is that you have to realize that there are lot of other factors.

When you talked about education in the Institute, these are the elements you think which you couldn't get?

Yes, may be it was my mistake.

This seems to be a problem with many film schools. Probably this kind of structuring could come from a lack of expertise on that front, or people who make the syllabi were not concentrating on that aspect. Please comment.

See I will give you a very simple example which has just struck me. When I was doing a workshop in FTII, I was telling the students that you do whatever you like. So one of the guys came up and showed me a picture and said that "Can we light up like this?" It was the "Potato Eaters". The lighting in that painting is just one light from the top. You can do lighting like that but you can never have that feeling because it's not only the light. There is lot of darkness; there are these fantastic faces. So then I asked the students – "Who is going to sit there?" They said, I will sit, he will sit. I said, No this is not the way, you have to get faces like that or else you will never get that image.

So that is very important. It's not the lighting, it's also the object on which the light falls which is very important. So I tried to explain to them - this has to be incorporated in education.

Working on Mani Kaul's film, what were the kind of discussions you had with him?

I didn't have any discussions. He was telling me exactly what to do, so I was watching him. He is basically a cinematographer. So what he does is that he will put a track and try out various shots. He has this fantastic ability to design shots. Shot designing is his highlight. You give him the ugliest corner and he will come out with a very good shot. Very impressive shots which is very commendable. So I would watch him. He would say I haven't done these things before, and then shift the track back 6", and I would wonder what's the difference because one was losing 15 minutes but only after a couple of days or weeks I

would realize that these things matter a lot. These things definitely give an edge to the image.

I mean these are like final points. I consider myself to be extremely lucky because that was my actual education. I am not claiming that I am actually using that education... but still may be also because I was fresh those days, it made a big impact on me. I was just out of the Institute. I am not saying Mani's films are the ideal films or anything like that. I have no belief like that, but if you can get these things into young heads then it helps a lot.

What are the films you worked on when you were assisting Shaji?

I must have done something like 7-8 films. At that time I was in the third year, but that was a small unit with no stars. It was like shooting home movies but that was the first time I had seen somebody cleaning a lens – and that is a visual memory. In the Institute I had never seen anybody doing that. Here somebody was seriously cleaning it and fixing it on the Ilc camera. So it sticks to you, that may be this is important and that is why he is doing it. When you see the film, it's not because he cleaned the lens but may be you feel everything is in sharp focus and nothing is a bad image. Even though that may have been a very average camera, but that thing makes you feel that you should make the most of things, you should try things. Somebody was also cleaning the tripod, and these are like feelers, even though I never looked through the camera and was never near it (even if I was the only assistant.).

Do you think Aravindan also had that sense of lensing.

No, but he had the fantastic ability to catch a frame from a vast expanse. He would say, "That site", and you would see that that site did seem to be a good looking site. So his ability was to pick up the most fantastic locations. That needs a lot of talent.

Did he have good communication with the cameraman?

I am not sure about that ... may be. But if you go to that place – Sastamkotta - where we shot that film '*POKKUVEIL*' you will see that it's a nice place... Keep the rest of the film aside, but for a cameraman it's a delight.

What was your relationship with Shaji?

After doing this film Shaji started doing a lot of commercial films, before that he never did any commercial films. He did films like '*LEKHAYUDE MARANAM ORU FLASHBACK*' and at that time it was a huge budget film which for the first time Shaji was doing. I was the chief assistant and there were other assistants and that was my first exposure to the Madras industry.

Did you discuss lighting or short breakdown with him?

Nothing. I was like the ideal real assistant.

Do you have any relation with him now?

No.

Actually that thing does not exist in Bombay either. Contemporary cinematographers never talk about their work.

See, that is because everybody knows their limitations. Everybody knows that if we are truthful, then we all know that we are doing very, very mediocre stuff. You know we are living in a country where mediocrity is interpreted as genius. So why should we talk about it? About my work or my career, there is nothing to talk. May be one or two films. It is quite an embarrassment to talk about.

Why do you say that? Regarding films you have done, do you think there are any important ones in retrospect?

Yes, may be one or two.

Which are those one or two?

May be ' *AMMA ARIYAN*'

And?

I did quite well in ' *MATI MANAS*' as well. But those are the one or two.

Why do you think this is so? If you look at the graph from the 1930's onwards, we could say some brilliant work happened in the 50s, such as V.K Murty's films. So...

Yes, but I am talking about myself.

The point here being that there was consistent development in work till a certain point but after that the graph seems to have flattened out ...

But that was a kind of out dated kind of development.

Sort of a western copy?

Yes, we are behind time anyway. I won't say we were behind time in technology. Technology is not the point; I am talking about being innovative. I can't, in this questionnaire, think of something I have innovated. I can't think of something in my life.

To reinterpret the question: there are a lot of things in everyday shooting that cinematographers come across, and have to tackle. Subrata Mitra's "Dubba" (his light box) is something of an innovation.

Yes it is. It is, but I can't think of a single thing for myself.

There are always minor things, things that one deals with innovatively. If you don't have a crane, e.g., you find another way of taking the shot...

The thing I am trying to say is that here we shoot films like handicraft!

Here we separate cinematography from filmmaking. The concept of the film needs to improve if we want sister concepts to improve. You can't do good photography in a bad film, right! Then all your work is meaningless, and this is a basic fact which every body knows. Only if the people who are responsible for the film, that is the director, only if they come up with new things can the cinematographer join them. The cinematographer cannot be the first person to do it. There is no doubt about it, the first one has to be the director – and here I mean conceptually.

What happens in most cases is that the directors, I am not saying all of them, but most of them are incompetent. So they depend upon cinematographers to get the film made in whichever convenient way. You know, the cinematographers do a lot of technical work for the directors. I am not saying that this is true for every director. But for a vast majority it is true. It may be happening all over the world. But you cannot expect growth in cinematography without growth in ideas about filmmaking. So the filmmaker has to grow, this fellow cinematographer can grow only with him.

The cinematographers of the 60's experienced a different kind of light in their life. Subrata Mitra's experience of light in a haveli is different from us who live in flats, where our experience of light is mostly fluorescent lamps. Do you think this difference in experience has affected the look of cinematography in any way?

But tell me one film in which this kind of light is in the concept? It is not in the concept. And if we introduce it, then it is like introducing a new species, which is completely against nature.

But a lot more flatness has come in lighting, isn't it?

Yes, there is lot of flatness, but I don't know if this is the right word here. Actually I think it is right technically. But again, you have something in mind when you say flatness. You are talking about some particular shot that you remember. Even if that particular shot was very nicely lit, does it still improve anything?

You have been working for maybe 16-17 years. Do you think the concept of cinematography has changed over this period?

See, when I started as an assistant, good cinematography was 'landscape photography'. Slowly - I may not be chronologically correct here - but slowly it changed to 'Back lighting', then it became harsh 'Top Lighting' then it became 'Bounce Light Below'. I mean these are all silly things. And then it becomes: hot spots, burnout, diffusion. Then it becomes something else. So I am not talking about things like that... If you categorise lighting like that, you know these are trivial variations. I don't call them cinematography at all. People used to clap even when there was a good sunrise. Now if I show a good sunrise nobody claps! Also about lensing: the superwide angle 24mm Cinemascope is very fashionable and earlier it was (here I don't about the latest...) but the telephoto lens was very fashionable at one time. So it's like fashion...nothing else.

What would be good work for you?

Good Work! It would be good concepts in scripting and filming ... only that will work. Nothing else. Cinematographers have no chance without it.

And if you were to have all of that?

Then you wouldn't have to make any effort. It would all come naturally.

Five years back or little before that, advertisements were considered the best work. This kind of thing also got into cinematography, the advertisement feel, which can be called a kind of seduction... you know it is seduction lighting...

If you conceive your film as an ad-film, nothing wrong with it, but if you conceive your film like something else, and then you do this kind of lighting then it's different work. These things are simple. I mean to me these things are very simple. Which is why I say that nothing happens, one does nothing. Which is why I say it is embarrassing to talk. I am not being negative here...

What do you think is some good work, Indian or international?

I can't think of anything that has done in recent years which is good. Cinematography to me arises from the director. I strongly believe that the director he has to conceive an idea clearly and has to communicate in technical terms and it's a matter of trust. You have to trust your cameraman and the cameraman has to trust the director. And without trust it is like office work.

What about your film 'AMMA ARIYAN'? Definitely it was not the way you would shoot a commercial film... Did it have any technical limitations...

It did not have any limitations. To me it was a good production. May be it had some limitations when you really think about it, but I never thought that may be if could have a crane I could take a better shot... No way. You know we had a whole unit of stuff, we had lights, we had everything, but they were all lying and we never used them.

Suppose you were to shoot a commercial film, you would use all those things wouldn't you? If the script demands, or the atmosphere demands... so that designs the visual language, isn't it?

That designs the visual language, I agree with you completely. That is why I say 'concept'.

What was your working experience with John Abraham?

See, John can't just be called a film director; I mean he is not like that. He himself had very clearly said "I don't need to make film... I am the film." My only regret about *AMMA ARIYAN* is that we had the choice of shooting in 16mm colour and 35mm black & white. The 16mm camera available was a 16 BL which I thought would be not work with all the handheld work. So I thought I will use the 35mm... I mean it could have been impossible that I could have been able to take shots like the ones I took, definitely not, Arri IIC is beautifully nice. For handheld work it's fantastic, really nice - what is it called - ergonomics? Its foolproof in that you can use one hand... no problem. So finally we had all this talk and John said ok we will do it in black and white, and after that we went to KSFDC and he signed all those things and he said "You know it was my dream to make a colour film..." So that I regret. But now *AMMA ARIYAN* is unthinkable in color.

I am hoping to make a film on John Abraham in a couple of ... in black and white, perhaps. But then black and white is so expensive, 16mm black and white is Rs 6000/- per roll, while colour is only Rs 4000/-... so it is expensive now but at that time it was cheap.

Now coming back to basic kinds of things like, when you start... how do you start lighting?

That is very tricky question. I think it is not difficult to light up a set. On a set you always have a freedom...not freedom but the excuse to take time, if you want to do something!! I am talking about completely mediocre stuff here, nothing phenomenal, but with my experience I feel that if your first light goes wrong then the whole sequence goes wrong. I mean it needn't be the key light or whatever light. I always start with one light. It might not be the basic source or anything like that but may be I like to do things the difficult way. It's all in the rigging.... On sets rigging is not very important but on a location rigging is very important so you try and you spend about 20 minutes to put the light up and turn it on and then if it's looking really, then you've had it.

Do you re-do it?

Yes, it depends. Not after 10 pm, then I don't!

I must know the shot, I must really like it. I have got a bit of experience by now, and I know so I don't have to put a track and look through it, 20 + or -. I can understand the frame, without looking through the camera. So I get that into my head then try to put the major light. If that major light fails, the whole scene fails. This is lighting wise. Also I try to foresee what could be the later shots so I don't try out that which I cannot repeat. So I can compromise on that. I think that you know may be in this shot I could use this light (I am not talking about set lighting here) but if in the next shots the camera goes there and then I can't repeat that source. Then I definitely don't go for it in the first place.

So actually you discuss the scene in that way.

No, a lot of people don't tell you what is going to happen, so you guess that this might happen and so you don't do that. But some directors do tell you this...this....this..

How much of leeway do you give in terms of lighting continuity?

50%. No I don't go completely opposite. I follow K.K. Mahajan's kind of thing, I like to imitate him.

So what are the kinds of references you have when you light? Is it a realistic kind of a point of view that you follow?

There are obvious references. If there is a window then I go for that. If there is not then I imagine a lot of sources outside the frame. If it is very convenient to have a source from this side, and if there is no window then I imagine that there is a window there and I do that, and it works.

But you insist on spacious kind of areas to shoot?

No you can't. How can you insist on all that? It never happens like that. Especially when you have already been told that the budget is low.

You know I am completely unsure about exposure in each and every film I do. I somehow manage to get somewhere in between but I am completely unsure. Last time I thought it was right but the printing number was 20. The film before that I thought I was right and it was coming to 40. Now I tell you I don't know if the lab is doing the trick or I, or the meter. Somebody is playing the trick, and you never get an even exposure. I have got, may be in 5 or 6 films, I have got completely even exposure.

What is the printing number you normally would decide?

I would like 30.

And you don't get it normally?

No I do get it normally, but sometimes...

What kind of relationship do you have with the lab?

I trust them completely.

Do you have a favourite lab?

Yes, Prasad.

And the stock?

Eastman.

Never tried Fuji?

Yes, I mean I have never tried it voluntarily, but Fuji was imposed upon me.

You don't like it?

Definitely I don't like it. Fuji & Kodak are - please pardon me here - but they are miles apart. Absolutely.

Recently when talking to Manmohan Singh, he said that he likes Fuji.

Perhaps it is a kind of liking that one develops?

Yes. I don't know if some lab could do complete justice to Fuji, which I haven't seen. What I have seen is that it is soft.

And green?

Green? I don't feel the green. Everybody talks about the Green. I don't know what this green is, but it looks dull. It looks like something else. I have shot two films in Geva, which is not available now.

How was Geva ?

You know with Eastman even you get very bad prints sometimes, so I don't know...

What do you print on? Geva?

Eastman sometimes, it depends...

How do you converse with your lab., the person who does the work?

For me the lab is extremely important, in the sense that since I don't know anything about the lab and I don't know how it works... You just see your work either on the analyzer or on the screen, these are only two options, and either you like it or you don't like it. If you don't like it then there could be two reasons, one could be your mistake, or one could be their mistake. Some labs take the blame. Some labs will blame you. A good lab will always tell you the reason why it is bad. I like that. These are all very personal things. You are dealing with one person; you are not dealing with an organisation.

This question of the personal also comes up everywhere - there are assistants and lightmen so that too is very personal. Suppose you have a very bad lightman, you end up doing bad films, bad lighting, and bad cinematography. Everything is a problem, if you have a bad lightman. To me the most important person on the set is the lightman, and they are the most un-credited.

Do you have a personal light man with you?

I don't have one everywhere, only in Bombay. Here (in Kerala) everybody is personal and I have a very good relationship with the lightmen and I depend a lot upon them, and if they are bad then I become bad. Half the credit goes to them.... Definitely.

And Assistants?

Assistant may be 25%. They are not as important as a lightman.

How do you discuss the lighting pattern with a lightboy?

See, I only discuss possibilities. I want this, is this possible? And you don't have time to spend two hours. So one lightman will tell you it is possible, but it will take half an hour and if I don't have half an hour to spend he will come up with a new idea. That is fantastic you know. They are the best people.

Do you discuss the theme with any of them?

No, No.

Or options?

No, only piece by piece, not even shot by shot. I would like to tell you something. At one time I got stuck, and I didn't know what to do, I called everybody to give me a solution. And they helped me.

It's important to have an intelligent lightboy.

Yes, you have to have an intelligent lightboy. you can rely 50% on them. I don't know about others but I do that.

But do they come up with suggestions?

Yes.

How do you react to that kind of thing?

Sometimes they are brilliant, and sometimes I tell them, no. The best thing about them is that they have a point of view. When they say 'No' a lot of people know why it is a 'No'.

Do you work with the Video Assist?

Video assist, I have used only once. To me it was like a disaster. Everybody had a comment to make. It has to be personal, only the director should see it. There should be video assist booth, without a booth the video assist is a disaster for me.

The director must have a booth and he must sit in that and he must see and decide whether it's ok or not. Not everybody else, and definitely not assistant directors.

And when you put up a set how do you go about it? DO you sit with the art director?

To me the art director is very important because they are the people who convert the vague ideas concretely. You tell them what you want and they can come up with even better things than you expected and some would actually redo the whole thing without any ego problem. They will employ somebody for overtime and get the work done. They are of great help, if they are good, and they are a pain if they are bad.

Do you work on the colour scheme?

No colour scheme. I don't tell Art Director or the Director, actually nobody tells anyone anything...and that's why I feel it's vague talk when you don't know or you are not sure of something and you pretend that you know.

When you are working on a song set which has nothing to do with reality, how do you go about it? How do you light up a song set when there is no reference as such in a way?

Then one most probably tries to imitate what has been the latest success. I hate song shootings. Song shooting in a given set is the most unintelligent thing one can ever think of!! I think it's really bad. I feel it's the show of the choreographer and the cinematographer doesn't have much to say...I mean its not like he or she doesn't have a say entirely but its basically like a show...like a stage show, so the choreographer is the person and you (cinematographer) are just the supplementary or the complementary or whatever.

Do you have a good rapport with the choreographer?

Yes, yes, I completely listen to the choreographer...I trust them completely.

Has there been any incident that has happened with you like demolishing the set that you had lit for the shoot?

Oh No...No way... may be you remove a wall or something but nothing serious.

You have worked with all sorts of film industries in Kerala, Calcutta, etc. What do you think is the kind of difference in terms of work, aesthetics, things like that...

I don't think there is a lot of difference in them.

In which one are you the most comfortable?

See, there are two kinds of working conditions for me, one is a very good film, second is a very convenient film shoot, where there are nice guys and

people you know and you have a very happy situation and where the result is not very important but there is an understanding with everyone, where you know its a good shoot and the results are OK.

In other film, you know things are tough and you know you have to be really at it all the time and it might be nobody's show in which you come up with something nice...so there are two kinds of working conditions and I appreciate both. What I don't appreciate is a bad working place with disastrous kind of relationships amongst the people on the set and ending up with disastrous results. Unfortunately it has happened with me only a couple of times.

Do you think there is any difference in the amount of professionalism, is it better in a particular place or industry?

I don't know....I think this efficiency talk as all fake, bullshit... Some places have there own character...I have heard people saying that Madras is more efficient but to me a lot of Madras is not efficient, a lot of Bombay is not efficient...so I mean they all complement each other...

In a film I shot recently, they said that they needed a production manager from Madras. I mean he was making the film for the first time and he felt they are very efficient ... but I discouraged them for getting a production manager from Madras only because we were shooting in Kashmir & Agra...I mean what will a production manager from Madras do in Agra?? So I feel this efficiency talk is all fake.

How much pre-production planning happens in your shoot? Are you happy with that...?

Very, very little...

What kind of filters do you generally use for the shoot?

Sometimes I use a "Polariser" or something like an "SFX", but nothing very obvious.

Is there a difference between lighting a film star and lighting other actors?

Only for females...Yes.

Do they demand a kind of light?

They don't demand but you supply them... there is no demand but then that is why they are there.

Is visibility an important factor?

No...No... not visibility, but looking good is a major factor.... a lot of male actors are not worried about it because they feel they have a lot of aura about them which is true...I am talking about the Malayalam film Industry strictly... but I won't take a close up with a wide angle lens or something like that unless it is absolutely necessary. But for female actresses, I take extra care mainly for close ups...I won't like a bad shadow on the face and things like that, I think nobody would do it...

And even filtration to a certain extent?

No... I don't...no.

How much mixing of light do you do in your lighting? Mixing Tungsten and Daylight?

I have been doing such things for the last 10-12 years. But if it is a period film or something like that then I wouldn't. Either way, its not like it's a rule.

But usually it is done...First of all if you mix colours in the available filtering situation, they become too obvious...You don't get all these filters and other half stop filters all the time. And even if you do get them, I still like to do it sometimes.

Do you use the steadicam or things like that? Do you use a lot of it? How do you design the shot with it? When do you use such a thing?

The Steadicam is usually a production problem because it is expensive to rent, in fact I have used lot of steadicam. Not operated it myself though, I don't do things that I don't know about! Steadicam is a very nice piece of equipment but it is only a piece of equipment.

The reason asking for this question is that when you design a shot, do you suggest such things as a requirement or do you use them as an option?

If there is a strong demand from the scene, I use it.

Most of the time is it an ornament in a way?

In a way, even in Hollywood people misuse it. There is an abuse of technology but it will settle down after a point...like when colour film came out many painted different walls with different colours but now people don't do that any longer. When the zoom lens came out for the first time, people started zooming in and out without a reason but now people don't do it. When there is computer graphics available people do it left, right and centre, but they will stop doing it after some time. Once it settles, once the toy feel is gone then it will become nice.

Do you have any experience with Video? Do you work on Video?

No, I haven't. In fact I am quite illiterate about video.

How has your experience been in terms of digital effects? In Padmarajan's "Gandharwan", there was a shot of butterflies flying all around the actress. That looked real. How did you do that effect?

Physically! Just in the camera, there was no special effect at all. That is why I said earlier that you need to have a good art director. P.C. Sriram was making a film called "*Butterflies*", (it was re-named later, after two years), so he rang up and asked me how did you do that and I said, There was this fantastic guy who could do these things and I just had to shoot it...So to make it like a little less obvious, I had used diffusion on the lens and smoke and all that, and I lit it accordingly. There must have been a 100strings around... And even the fireflies, they were all LEDs (Light Emitting Diodes). There was not a single shot that was optically done in the lab...That is one film I regret actually for its failure.

I think Padmarajan is one of the most underestimated filmmakers we have. I personally believe that his films are far, far better than the so-called better films.

Actually he gave me my first opportunity...I shot for Shaji - *Arappatta Kettiya Gramam* – and that was actually my first independent work.

How was your experience as a director? Was it Cinematographer vs. Director or did it complement a lot?

I don't know whether I had all these ideas about myself... but making a film is a lot different from working as a cinematographer.

You started understanding other people's problems?

Understanding, perhaps, but not in a very submissive way. But I did start listening to people. I did a lot of work for the film...it was 24 hours, for about six months. I did everything I could...and I think I did push my cameraman to work better. Maybe I did not give him enough homework but I worked a lot for the

cameraman's benefit. Not like giving him time in terms of lighting but giving him a lot of things to shoot. I spent lots of time on my locations and art direction as these are what the cameraman photographs.

There is a kind of thinking that when a cameraman makes a film, it becomes just a visual film.

No. Govind Nihalani doesn't make films like that?

Some people may do that but I could not imagine myself doing two jobs together...I mean that is outrageous. As it is the cameraman's work is bad enough and then you have to do the direction as well! I had one real problem and that is that for the first time I was looking at something not through a camera and that was really something that upset me a lot of times...It was like I could not judge things because of so many distractions like the light cutters, and this, and that...and when you look through the camera, it is a clean good image that actually I missed that. That is the only thing.

That is about being a cameraman...

Clean...clean... everything is clean. There is no distraction ...nothing like that... Everything is nice.

You didn't ask for a video assist ?

No.

Is there something that you dream about or think you would like to shoot...

This is a random question...like actors say that this is the kind of role I would love to do....something like that?

My Dream? Nothing like that.

You have given people an image of yourself as an angry aggressive cameraman!

Yes?

Is this the way one should work on a set?

I really don't know... I wish I didn't have that image...

You are always being portrayed as such...

As somebody who is troublesome...?!

Not troublesome exactly, but somebody who is quite powerful on the set.

The reason for asking this question is, how do you see the terms of responsibility a cinematographer should take up and function?

I can't separate myself, I can't see myself as two people, one myself and one the cinematographer. Both are part of me...If I am a cinematographer or if I am something else, its all me...so may be its in my character...May be I don't divide my work on set efficiently and take time out, and maybe that's bad management.

That's the point. The cinematographer has to be both manager and artist.

May be I am a bad manager...I like to do everything myself.

Its not excessive involvement... Someone told me once that you spend so much energy and you expect everybody else to be like you. This could be true but I don't think I expect anybody to be like me. I know these are important things but are difficult things to analyze...

Over eighteen years what do you think about the payments that the workers get. Is it justified in terms of ratio of the film budget and things like that?

See, I am not a greedy person but I don't like to be cheated. I will tell you that I do lots of films very cheap. I also refuse films when I am not paid enough. According to me, basically there is a lot of exploitation. See, this is a very personal thing because cinematographers also exploit you. I think it is again a management problem, some people manage, and some don't. Some people make it into a confrontation but I think more than cinematographers, the exploited ones are the people who work with him, the light boys and...I won't talk of the assistants because they have a future but the light boys don't have a future. Most of them do a lot and I think they should be paid more.