

Cinematic Alphabet Begins With P

In conversation w2 ith

Siddharth Roy Kapur
Founder & MD, Roy Kapur Films.

Moderator: Mikael Svensson
Head South Sweden Film Commission,
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Mikael: From Barfi, to Taare Zameen Par, to Kaminey there are so many fantastic films, so is there a special formula for all these blockbusters?

Siddharth: "I wish there was", but for every film that's mentioned here there are 2 or 3 we rather forget! I suppose, as with most of the producers the first instinct is to go with your gut, but it is important that if you are going to be spending one or two years with that material then you better be in love with it when you decide to produce it.

Mikael: How do you find the stories?

Siddharth: We try to have a more structured system, where there is a way in which you can get in touch with us. There are so many writers and directors who we know personally, who may have a very germinating stage of an idea, or at time you get a complete script that you fall in love with.

Mikael: You've done a great journey from UTV then Disney, and now your own company. tell us about your trip?

Siddharth: At that point of time the film industry was a pretty closed place to break into and it wasn't that easy to be able to find your way in if you weren't born into it. But then Ronny (Screwvala) really paved the way and we all went along for the ride. But that was a period when the relationships with the stars were not really there so, the route that we followed was to teaming up with the directors who had great stories to tell. 'Rang De Basanti' was a very tough film to back but if the film worked it showed that we had to courage. In the same year there was a quirky small film called 'Khosla Ka Ghosla', which cemented our reputation and that's where the journey began, really.

So, we always tried to balance it out by having a larger mainstream films with films that you would traditionally say might not work. And that's what I've tried to do at Roy Kapoor Films as well.

Mikael: Is it possible for a producer to have a favorite movie?

Siddharth: It's very hard. But the marketer in me says, 'The Last Film Show', which is released today is one of my favorite films. Because it's one of those movies that makes you fall in love with the idea of going to the movies once again. And I don't think there could be a more apt time for the film to release than now, which actually tries to evoke that magic of that darkened cinema hall.

Mikael: So, is it time for an Oscar?

Siddharth: We've all been wanting that to happen for a long time. So hopefully this is the year it happens.

Mikael: Being at IIFTC is all about locations, how do you decide where to shoot in the world?

Siddharth: What you try to do is to stay true to where the story is actually set to be. Then you start thinking around things like budget, logistics, and the feasibility of being able to recreate exactly the same environment elsewhere. And then there's a more structured way to do it. We know all the incentives that are being offered by countries as well as states within India. But I think it's very important that you should be true to the film and the material, whilst still being able to ensure the production efficiencies that are needed to make the film logistically sensible and also financially effective.

Mikael: Money is still the most important one?

Siddharth: It is very important because when you've got that blank page in front of you, you can write whatever you want. And that's why we love our filmmakers, because they're not letting their imagination be constrained. But then, obviously, you've got to figure out how to make it, which involves taking hard financial decisions about where

you're going to shoot? where it's set versus how much you can create the illusion of it being set there in a place that is more viable to shoot in? So, budget plays a big role.

Mikael: Now we realise there are actually several film industries in India. So where do you see the greatest development in India right now? Is it from the South?

Siddharth: I think there's no doubt that the South of the country is having quite a renaissance in many ways. I think Malayalam cinema, from the artistic point of view is creating some wonderful work that everyone is just marveling at the uniqueness and the originality of the content. Telugu cinema is taking big gambles and making these massive cinematic experiences that I think the whole world is now coming out to watch. So, I think the current flavour is definitely the South of the country.

Mikael: That's interesting. Lot of my friends in Europe, have never seen Indian films or TVs before, but now with the streamers, they see a lot. Do you think about foreign viewers when you start developing a film?

Siddharth: The Indian audience first always, because we have always had such a large audience in India and diaspora that we never really had to think about making movie for any other audience. Also, the grammar of our films is so different, you have your four-act structure, an interval point, songs and dances, very different things for a non-South Asian audience to wrap their heads around. Sometimes it can appear kitschy, crazy, weird, because that's the cinema we have grown up with and it's very specific to our country.

But increasing we are seeing the younger filmmakers, who have also watched cinema from the west and the east, are now being able to blend those two sensibilities quite well. Again, the Last Film Show is a great example because it's so authentic and real but at the same time, the style of storytelling is so universal. Those are the kind of movies that now filmmakers who've got

a more rounded, cinematic upbringing are being able to make.

Mikael: You think the song and dance in Indian movies will stay?

Siddharth: I hope it does, because that's what makes us so unique. And I do feel that it is something we should embrace. But there's a space for all kinds of movies. You have got your hardcore commercial entertainers but at the same time, there is a space, for movies that are more realistic. Today with multiplexes and with the OTT platforms, all kinds of content can survive. But I do hope that songs and dance to survive.

Mikael: What about locations? It is our dream to get you to our countries to find the virgin location that have not been able to show yet in India.

Siddharth: We're always looking for that. There are so many examples of Hindi films that have been able to popularize places that were not on the map earlier. New Zealand was showcased by Rakesh Roshan in 'Kaho Na Pyar Hai'. Spain was showcased in Zoya's (Akthar) films. I mean, Switzerland, of course, with Yash Chopra. It's incredible, the excitement that it can generate amongst audiences in India to go to those places. I am glad there is a platform like the IIFTC. which can actually help to facilitate that.

Mikael: I am going to get a bit more personal! You come from a family with a lot of famous actors. How come you are not an actor?

Siddharth: Actually, producers are acting all the time. I used to enjoy acting in school and college. But I suppose to be a film actor, you have to wait around a lot between shots and I think I'm not the kind of person who would be able to take to that too well. So, quite early I figured out that being involved in multiple things is what I enjoy much more. And so being a producer just seems to fit my personality better.

Mikael: Do you have favorite memories from abroad where you have shot?



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Siddharth: Quite a few, actually. I remember we were in South Africa shooting for Jagga Jasoos and there was an Ostrich chase that happened there. And that came out of Anurag Basu's crazy, brilliant mind where Ranbir and Katrina chasing sitting on an ostrich. It was the most surreal thing I have ever seen.

Mikael: And the future for your company, what's coming up?

Siddharth: We intend to be able to produce content across all genres and platforms. We really want to be able to create impact and whatever we put out should be of a certain quality, and becomes part of the popular psyche. That's very important.