

Backwaters of Kerala to Calgary

Ananth Mahadevan thinks Niagara Falls is breathtakingly beautiful. Masala dosas, kalan, olan and pacchadi made by his mother, are, to die for. He says idly is one of the safest foods and vegetarian south Indian food is perhaps the only scientifically balanced diet. Passionate about places, passionate about food and passionate about his craft. Here is presenting actor, director Anantha Mahadevan in one shot...

1: Why did you decide on Bollywood as a career choice?

It wasn't called Bollywood those days [it shouldn't be called Bollywood, even today] I guess, somewhere creative pursuits, like water, find their own level. One couldn't possibly keep all that passion for theatre, music and cinema, bottled up for long. So even as I graduated in the Sciences, I tutored myself in the arts. And boy, am I glad, I managed to get there!

2: What's your reflection on the past decade? Have things changed from the 90s?

The nineties could possibly be termed as the decade that reflected the worst in Hindi cinema. The new wave that Shyam Bengal began in the 70s and was followed up by Govind Nihalani in the eighties didn't find a successor in the nineties. Even stalwarts like Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Basu Chatterjee and Gulzar were no longer prolific. The formula brainwashed the audiences and one virtually wrote the Hindi film scene off. But the new decade had filmmakers taking potshots in the dark. Sure there was more experimenting and lesser trysts with the formula, but the completeness of a Benegal is still missing. New filmmakers from upstarts to copycats purported to change the face of cinema, but their products reflected a complete surrender to the style of western whiz kids. While that style may have worked in Hollywood, it looks alien to Indian sensibilities. Hindi cinema meanders...An occasional Imtiaz Ali and Rajkumar Hirani are the new Yash Chopra and Manmohan Desai of the industry. That takes care of the commercial aspect. But when will we have another Bimal Roy, Hrishida or Nihalani, let alone Guru Dutt?

3: Do you think Bollywood is too fictional? Do you think movies should become more realistic?

About time. The age of over-the-top performances and in-your-face plots was asking to be buried long ago. We need our spoken lines to be more conversational than flowery. And characters to be more flesh-n-blood and credible. But for that, the makers themselves need to change their approach and thinking. A few directors who claim to be realistic-film-experts are no doubt, weaning away from the formula, but their products are superficial. They merely skim the surface of an issue.

4: Your views on Bollywood churning out similar themes year after year. (with exception of few films of course)

We are the only country in the world who have succeeded in making one plot work year after year, for hundred years!

5: Dil Vil Pyar Vyar was a musical, what is your reason behind using old songs from the 70s and 80s and using them? Why didn't you come up with a new tune (music score) for the project?

The idea of using published music and adapting it to a new situation was tempting, particularly when it was as memorable as Panchamda's. (RD Burman) No one had attempted a retro-musical here, so that was a first too! And considering that most of our new numbers are bereft of melody or rip-offs of old numbers, the experiment wasn't that difficult!

6: Acting or making movies? What hat do you wear best?

The cap of acting and the hat of direction are both for the asking. When a good role comes by its hard to resist and when a good plot thickens, one wants to be the filmmaker. I am glad I have both options all the time.

7: What are the best locations in India/overseas to shoot a film according to you.

India's interiors, the backwaters of Kerala and the Oriental touch of Rajasthan are breathtaking. But then so are the coasts of Australia, the high rises of New York, the countryside of London and the sweep of a Canada and New Zealand.

8: How hard is it for a young filmmaker to break into the industry?

Tough if one doesn't have the right contacts. Today, its not 'what you know', but 'whom you know'. But filmmakers like Anurag Kashyap, have managed to break the cordon with their own brand of cinema by sheer perseverance. Out of the box ideas and a dogged determination are the right elements for those who wish to make filmmaking a career in India.

9: With the help of their computers, software, etc, do you think movie making has become a cakewalk for creative people these days?

Technology may have made fantasies and disasters more spectacular and easier to make, but there is no dispensing with the human element in any story. Even an awe inspiring spectacle like Avtaar came in for criticism on being miserly about the plot. Just as it is easy to mail these answers to you on a computer, filmmaking has benefited from technical advances. But don't you miss my handwritten postcard or the bound 500 page printed book instead of the e-book?

10: When was the last time you visited Canada?

I was at Calgary for the shoot of Nagesh Kukunoor's Tasveer 8x10. It is a picturesque little place and I had a lovely time.

11: What restaurants do you dine in when in Canada?

I am not a regular restaurant goer, so ate with the unit of the film. Would be pleasantly surprised to discover Indian eateries there and feel at home with my simple vegetarian tastes.

12: Your views on south Indian food? What is your favorite south Indian food?

South Indian food is perhaps the only scientifically balanced diet that even prescribes menus according to the seasons. Our forefathers who followed the vegetarian South Indian regime rarely fell ill. The humble idly which is boiled rice is perhaps the safest of all foods and a favourite breakfast item. Not to mention avial, pongal and sambhar which are perennial favourites.

13: Do you cook any of the dishes mentioned?

I am only comfortable with making dosas[rice pancakes] and potato sabzi. My mother's a fabulous cook and her kalan,olan, and pacchadi are to die for!

14: When are you planning a trip to Canada?

Would certainly want to come there specially to see the Canadian side of the Niagara Falls. I have seen it in pictures and it's absolutely breath taking. I think I will cry out loud when I am there!