

Imtiaz Ali in conversation with Anna Dziedzic (Film Commissioner – Polish Film Institute), Manuel Claro (Film Commissioner – Portugal Film Commission) and Truls Kontny (President - EUFCN)

Truls: Which Countries have you shot in till present?

Imtiaz: I have shot in the UK, Czech Republic (Prague), Netherlands, Portugal, Hungary, USA, Japan and France (Corsica). I have also shot twice in Czech Republic.

Truls: What is important for you while choosing to make a film abroad? Is it the location, the financial incentive or personal context?

Imtiaz: The most important thing for me is how the story fits into that location, but not just visually, also the suitability of the location. For instance, if you need a pretty beach you can get many pretty beaches in France, but if you need a pretty beach which is also isolated then you will go to a beach in Corsica.

Truls: You have so many beautiful locations here in India, why do you choose to go abroad?

Imtiaz: Because some stories are such that the nature of it is to be outside the country. For instance in one of the movies two people who are Indians meet very far away where there is no other Indian and nobody understands that language, so we placed that part of the story in Corsica in France. In all my stories, the characters of the story have travelled to the place that I have shown. It's not as though we have started a song in Mumbai and in the next scene they go to Switzerland.

Anna: In all the countries that you have worked in, do you see any differences in shooting?

Imtiaz: It is completely different, the most facilitating and important thing are the people, there is a nature and character attached to the people of a country or a city and that is very important. You have to talk in a certain way with people of a certain place.

The other difference is how aware are they of the process of filmmaking. For instance, In Prague there were a lot of professionally trained filmmakers because of its legacy in film making, that helped us in the line production. Then there are other differences that are cultural in nature, for instance Indians want to work a lot in a week but the French don't want it, the Portuguese people get very easily hassled if you keep changing things till the last moment, in the UK the bureaucracy is very strong but in the US you pay money and get everything done.

Anna: So do you prefer to travel with your crew? How many people do you take with you and how many people do you require from that particular country?

Imtiaz: I personally prefer to take as few people as possible from India and discover people locally because there are huge advantages in terms of culture and language. So, I prefer to take the head of departments and get most of the crew locally. To make this possible we need to do location recce and scouting, not only for the location but also for what is available locally such as lights, technicians etc. and accordingly we decide on how lightly we can travel there.

Anna: Is there anything you expect from film commissions to make your work easier?

Imtiaz: I think great food, good alcoholic beverages and willingness to party all the time... (chuckles) things like that really matter to all filmmakers everywhere in the world... On a serious note, I think it is the desire for somebody to understand you because it becomes very tiring to not being able to understand one another. This ability to understand the film unit is important that all film commissions and line producers need to know.

Manuel: After filming in so many different places in the world, what did you find in Lisbon or in Portugal that convinced you to film there?



Imtiaz: Actually, the light in Portugal is the best natural light I have ever seen. It is very beautiful towards the second half of the day. It's a bohemian place and the sea is very dynamic and cinematic. I also feel that the people are extremely warm and personal just like people in India, so this was my connect with Portugal.

Anna: Do you get inspired by local stories and incorporate them in your films

Imtiaz: Oh yes, all the time! For instance, there is a legend of Sleepy Honza in Czech Republic, which we incorporated in a movie in the form of song and dance with local musicians, artist and dancers. Even in the case of Portugal, we had a song which was based on a local musical style 'Fado' and part of the song was actually in Portuguese. So, for me it's a waste of the location if we cannot include the local flavour, folklore and music from that place.

Truls: Do you choose to go back to a location or a country that you know from before or would you like to try new locations?

Imtiaz: I try to be open and fair to the story. If my writing brings me back to the same country I don't try to resist and I don't try to manipulate the writing in a

way that it falls into the same country just because I like it. So, I try to be unbiased in my personal desire to be in a certain place. I enjoy knowing about various places. I have half impressions about many countries. So, I like to travel in my free time so that gives me the background of that location.

Truls: Many film commissions also offer FAM tours, so is it important to go on such trips to explore new locations, while writing a new story?

Imtiaz: Going to a place is very important because just having the information of a place is not enough. I think somebody who personally likes to travel is the kind of writer who will write travel in his stories. So, I try to travel personally as much as I can so that I can have an idea about the locations.

Audience: How does it work? Do you sort of make a theme or half script and then visit the places to discover and finalise things or is it in your imagination you finalise a certain place?

Imtiaz: It (Script) is not fully formed. For instance, in 'Rockstar' I had the idea of a European Town, which is high class yet a little dark, it is beautiful yet not pretty and pink, so therefore Prague came to mind. When I went there, I realised there is a lot of darkness in the art and I got to know lot of folk legends, which I

wrote back into the script. Yes, to do half (script) is very good so some of your windows are open.

Imtiaz: I know a lot about Poland but I want to know is there a culture of stories in Poland?

Anna: Yes, there is a culture of stories and it is also a country of great filmmakers, so the tradition of storytelling and filmmaking is very strong in Poland. There might not be cheerful stories or happy stories with happy endings but there are stories that are rooted in the local folk legends, which are usually pretty dark in nature.

Truls: One last question, do you find it difficult with the different cultures in film shooting around the world?

Imtiaz: I think film people all over the world are very similar to each other. Many years back I shot with a Spanish cinematographer in Hong Kong but when we met each other we realised that we wear the same clothes, our attitudes are the same, our troubles in life are the same, and we want to go to the same places to eat. Even if the filming culture is different it is not so difficult for us to adapt to it and by nature a film person is not very regimented and even not knowing the language is not a problem.