

A peek into the fascinating mind of a filmmaker

At the Grand Finale of the IIFTC Knowledge Series 2024, genius director Anurag Basu spoke about his fascinating journey from the world of Television soap opera to big screen cinema where he comfortably straddled multi genres to give us some of the most memorable films of our time such as Gangster: A Love Story (2006), Life in a... Metro (2007), Barfi! (2012), Jagga Jasoos (2017) to name a few.

Moderator: Zuzana Bielikova

Film Commissioner - Slovak Film Commission, Board Member - EUFCN and Former Producer with 15 years of international experience.

Zuzana Bielikova : Hello Mr. Basu, what an amazing career you have had. What is your favourite role - writing, directing, or producing?

Anurag Basu, Director, Screenwriter and Producer : Cinematography. That is my favourite (Laughs).

Zuzana Bielikova : Cinematography, I am sorry (Confused).

Anurag Basu : Yeah, I also do that. Since my last two films I have started shooting my own films and I think I enjoy it better than anything else.

Zuzana Bielikova : Okay. Is it more complex than other things you do?

Anurag Basu : The film set is an amazing place because there are so many talented people who keep me excited, there is something new to learn. So in my last movie I thought I will do my camera and I really started enjoying it. So in my recent films, I am shooting myself. You get to learn from all the experts & then you do it yourself.

Zuzana Bielikova : Right. I also heard that you started with directing soap operas and one of them was like over seven hundred episodes?

Anurag Basu : Yeah, many thousands of episodes of many soap operas actually across all the channels and all the genres. I always wanted to be a filmmaker but it was a very farfetched dream. There were lot of job opportunities in television so I immediately grabbed it to pave my route.

Zuzana Bielikova : Do you see any difference between creating content for the small screen and for the big screen?

Anurag Basu : The biggest difference is time. In movies, I shoot around a minute in a day and I have to shoot twenty minutes for television in a day.. So that's the major difference, everything else remains the same.

Zuzana Bielikova : But when you are changing format from small screen to big screen, you have to be dependent on the box office, right?

Anurag Basu : No, not really. Actually, the economics of the film is very important. If you make sure you shoot a film in a given budget then, even if it's a failure at the box office, everybody earns money.

Zuzana Bielikova : And how do you manage to change the genres?

Anurag Basu : Whatever medium you are shooting, your language changes, your style changes, your cinematography changes, everything changes actually. So you have to actually shoot in different speed, for movies or web series or TVC, yeah. That's the fun actually... shifting gear and shifting genres.

Zuzana Bielikova : Can we talk a little bit about your creative process. What inspires you to choose the topics and the stories? Is it based on your life experience or books or current affairs? What is the driving force?

Anurag Basu : It changes from film to film actually. Every movie has a different inspiration. Some came from my life, some movies came from comic strips I used to read as a kid. 'Barfi' came from

one of the stories which I had written when I was working with an NGO. Inspiration can come from anywhere. So I keep writing one page – two page stories. And I go back to a collection of these stories to see whether it can be made into a movie.

Zuzana Bielikova : So actually 'Barfi' was one of my films that I wanted to ask you about, where did this idea come from?

Anurag Basu : So I will tell you, Barfi's inspiration came from two or three ideas.

I grew up in a very small town where they had a little Russian club where they used to show us Charlie Chaplin movies on a projector. I wanted to make a film which could pay homage to that but I never had a story.

One day, I went to this NGO called Sanskar Dham where there was this special kid who the teachers couldn't control. But there was a non-teaching staff member in that outfit who could speak to that deaf and mute girl to calm her. So I wrote a story about this chemistry between him and that girl and I realised, I have this film where I can actually combine both. I also

wanted to make a film with less dialogue & more silence so this was it.

Zuzana Bielikova : Amazing, great. So, we are here IIFTC, which is all about locations. So I want to know how you choose different locations? How important are the locations for you? Do they play the main character in your film?

Anurag Basu : They do, sometimes you never know what triggers. Sometimes, the mood and the tone of the movie will decide the location. You start thinking, where I can get this mood, where can I get this colour and you start thinking of location. Sometimes you think of a very important key scene and start thinking where should I shoot this scene? That one scene may decide the location for the whole film. So it changes from film to film...

Zuzana Bielikova : So when you are writing, are you thinking of a location where you want to have this story?

Anurag Basu : Yeah, constantly, because when I finish the first draft then I like to travel to the place where I actually am going to shoot and then I finish the script there.

Zuzana Bielikova : Oh wow, that means, you travel there to get the feeling.

Anurag Basu : Yeah, I travel there to get the feel and then the location organically becomes part of your story. You see certain roads or maybe trains or a just a valley and then it becomes part of your scenes. So I write a skeleton story and select the location and go there to finish the script.

Zuzana Bielikova : Let's talk about the audience. Do you think in terms of local audience or international audience?

Anurag Basu : It's actually very tough you know. In most of my recent films I tried to have a global audience. Most of the Indian movies are made for Indian diaspora and, and we are hoping, the way the world has developed taste for chicken tikka, they will develop taste for our kinds of movies but I don't know when it will happen. We are so busy just making movie for Indian diaspora, we actually miss a large audience.

Zuzana Bielikova : I remember 'Barfi' was screened at 'Busan Film Festival', so its great that you are making these kind of universal stories that can travel.

Anurag Basu : It's a very tight rope you are walking on, when you are trying to make a film which will work in the west and India both, its very tough.

Zuzana Bielikova : Let's talk about your next film...

Anurag Basu : Okay, for my next film, I actually wanted to shoot in Azerbaijan. There is a portion in the film which is a road trip in East Europe. So let's see.

Zuzana Bielikova : Lastly I want to know, how do you work with such a hectic pace?

Anurag Basu : I have just shifted gear now. For last eight-ten years I had in fact slowed down as my kids were small. But I am again back to my old self. I have put my car in the fifth gear.

