

From Breaking Paths To Bound scripts

IIFTC Knowledge series spoke to a versatile screenwriter director Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari who successfully crossed over from an advertising wiz winning a Cannes Lions to follow her passion for cinema to give us gems such as the rooted yet uplifting 'Nil Battey Sannata', to the refreshing small-town sweetness of 'Bareilly Ki Barfi', from the emotional sports drama 'Panga' to the soulful ethos of 'Bawaal', drawing widespread admiration from audiences and critics alike.

Moderator: Mikael Svensson, Head of Southern Sweden Film Commission and former Co-President of European Union Film Commissions Network (EUFCN)

Mikael Svensson : I have read so much about you and it's all fantastic. I think people are interested in your stories. You seem to be a story-teller of high rank. How do you find the stories?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : I work a lot on personal insights and human stories. For me the rootedness of characters makes a lot of difference.

People say that they can literally smell the fragrance of the culture or the place when they watch my films.

Mikael Svensson : So do you adapt the stories to the location or the opposite?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : Yes I am a very on-location director. I love shooting on locations. When I am tied up in a closed place, I find it very claustrophobic.

In a country like India, there are so many different locations so I have tried to shoot each film of mine in a different location.

'Nil Battey Sannata' was shot in Agra where I wanted to show a love between a mother and daughter on the backdrop of the Taj Mahal, which is an

epitome of love. Then I shot 'Bareilly ki Barfi' in Lucknow and Bareilly which is like a very heartland place.

Mikael Svensson : Your stories are about families and it's the real India. But when Bollywood makes films, they do more glamorous films? Do you think they should do more real life films?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : No, actually I think we are a very rich storytelling country and we have all kinds of stories. We have the entertaining stories, comedy stories and song & dance stories. There is an audience for all kinds of cinema here and there's nothing right or wrong. It is amazing to see all kinds of story tellers telling all kinds of stories. With OTT platforms coming in, it has got a lot more opportunities for filmmakers to tell experimental stories.

The Bollywood song & dance is world famous and we are very proud of it. We love those bright colours and heroine wearing beautiful sarees on the backdrop of cold mountains. It takes you to a magical world.

Mikael Svensson : So what kind of messages and emotions do you want to create with your stories?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : I like all kind of stories. The only thing which I may not be able to do is horror because I am not that kind of person. Now I am looking forward to do an out-and-out action film but which has emotions.

Anything I do, needs to have the characterization and emotions with a strong storyline. I've always been known for telling very India rooted stories from small towns. It was 'Bareilly Ki Barfi' which started the genre of stories from the small town India. I also think it's very important for us as story tellers to be open and not be tagged to only one kind of story-telling.

Mikael Svensson : How do you think your successful career in advertising influences your work right now?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : I was working in an agency called Leo Burnett and advertising helps us get the insights of

consumer behaviour. Once you know your consumer and have the insights, then you can create the brand communication. In story-telling also it helps to know who your audience, because cinema cannot be consumed by everyone. It's very targeted. So your objectivity is very clear when you come from an advertising background.

Mikael Svensson : What's your approach when you write about these really strong women in your films?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : It just happens. An idea comes from anywhere and you kind of write it down in your notebook and then you start developing it slowly and you tell your close ones about the idea to get some kind of validation. In my case, of course my husband is also a director and a writer so we kind of discuss the idea. And then you move on and start writing and just shut the chaos outside you and just concentrate.

Mikael Svensson : Do you feel that the film industry is mostly male oriented?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : I think we have a

lot of directors, a lot of technical crew who are women right now. I must say that I am privileged to be in a country and an industry where we have so many women in leading positions. It's never enough but it's a very good start.

Mikael Svensson : Do you have any advice for young female film makers who want to get into the industry?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : In Hindi there is a saying 'Kisi Ke Liye Ruko Mat, Maidan Me Jake Kudho'. Do not wait for anyone to approach you, just jump into the arena and find your way, yeah.

Now we have a lot of film schools where there are a lot of women who are taking up filmmaking as a profession. Payal Kapadia, a women director from FTII won at Cannes this year. Kiran Rao's film 'Laapataa Ladies' is the official entry for Oscars this year. So we are very proud to have so many Indian women, including the official film from UK called 'Santosh' which is a film by an Indian women director. So I think we are everywhere now.

Mikael Svensson : Have you tried to shoot abroad? What are the challenges you faced shooting abroad?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : So when we are shooting in India we are a bit flexible in terms of working hours, breaks, camera movements, permissions etc. When I am not allowed to do that, it is little difficult because we still come from a very fluid way of working so a little bit of leniency would be okay. (Abroad) It's so strict in terms of the rules, so sometimes when things don't work out it just becomes a little expensive, there is no leverage there.

Mikael Svensson : I read somewhere that you are a fan of Woody Allen?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : Woody Allen because of the kind of films he makes in terms of characterisation, in terms of the little comic timing and just creating a moment out of a situation.

Mikael Svensson How is it like working with your husband?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : We have worked quite a bit together. 'Bawaal' is directed by him, the story is mine and we have written the screenplay together. We have 'Tarla' produced it together, so we want to tell the similar kind of stories but we make sure that we don't interfere in each other's work. But I think it's better that we work separately because our intention is the same but our style of filmmaking is very different.

Mikael Svensson : You are a producer, a writer, a director, what do you like the most and why?

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari : If you ask me the sequence then, (first) direction because you get to work on so many different things. You get to travel, you work on music, you work on art. I love producing is because it just gives you almost a victory like moment when you see everything coming together and when you see your people shining. I like writing also but for writing you need to shut off. It's a very isolated process. So in that order directing, producing and then writing.

