



Writing with (Available) Light
Amol Gole Cinematography

Project 1

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Acknowledgments

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Thanks to Prof. Raja Mohanty my interest in documentary making grew. It is really helpful to have visual design guide with a sociologists hat.

Thank you technology! you have democratized film-making

I wish to thank Prof. Sudesh Balan who helped me focus and introspect. It has helped me to understand where my interest in the craft of cinematography and career interest in ethnographic film-making can converge.

Divya, Vinit, Naveed, Reshal, Amol, Shweta, Krishand, Ashok for stimulating coffee break chats!

I am grateful to Prof. Mandar Rane for challenging my thinking and asking some tough questions. It helped me to apply designerly thinking to film-making and articulate the process in an objective manner.

Thank you Prof. G V Sreekumar, who helped me burry my self doubts about whether I belong to a design school!

Learning Objectives

With an academic background in mass communication and professional experience in news and consumer research domain, I was keen that I acquire a new skill during the internship; More importantly a skill that would add up to my professional objectives.

Though I have wandered along different paths; one thing has always remained common. It was my interest in observation of social behaviour and using visual methods to capture that to be able to tell the story vividly.

A medium like TV news demands the storytelling to be pithy, lucid and the production time available is very limited. Though this is a very effective way of communicating information in packages it leaves little scope for reading between the lines and express complex ideas like human emotions. This is where i felt the need to break free.

I wanted to understand cinematic style of storytelling and fuse it with non fiction work that I am interested in to make it engaging.

Why Cinematography?

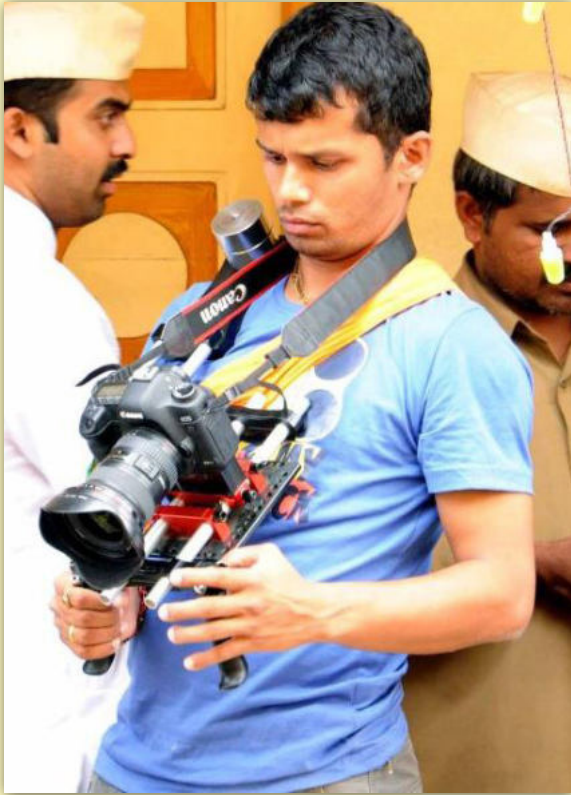
I believe that storytelling becomes effective when it is experiential and one makes the most of the medium of communication.

Film making has the potential to transport the viewer in the world of images and sounds and create a real experience. At the same time one has to understand that this reality is a cinematic reality. I wanted to understand how a real tangible story is transformed into cinematic form using the visual language of cinema. I wanted to learn the grammar of this language

As a visual communicator I depend on photographic and video tools to capture and present my stories. However, my core strength is in my understanding of culture and social dynamics.

I would like to become an independent film-maker who can research and create tangible and engaging video output on social issues, education and experiences. I would like to use techniques of fiction and cinema verite approach in my documentaries.

About Amol Gole



Amol Gole comes from Applied Arts background and started his career as a still photographer working for feature films.

He worked on several well known films like -

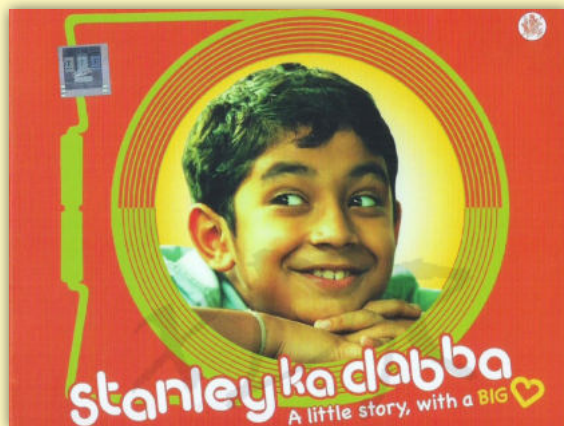
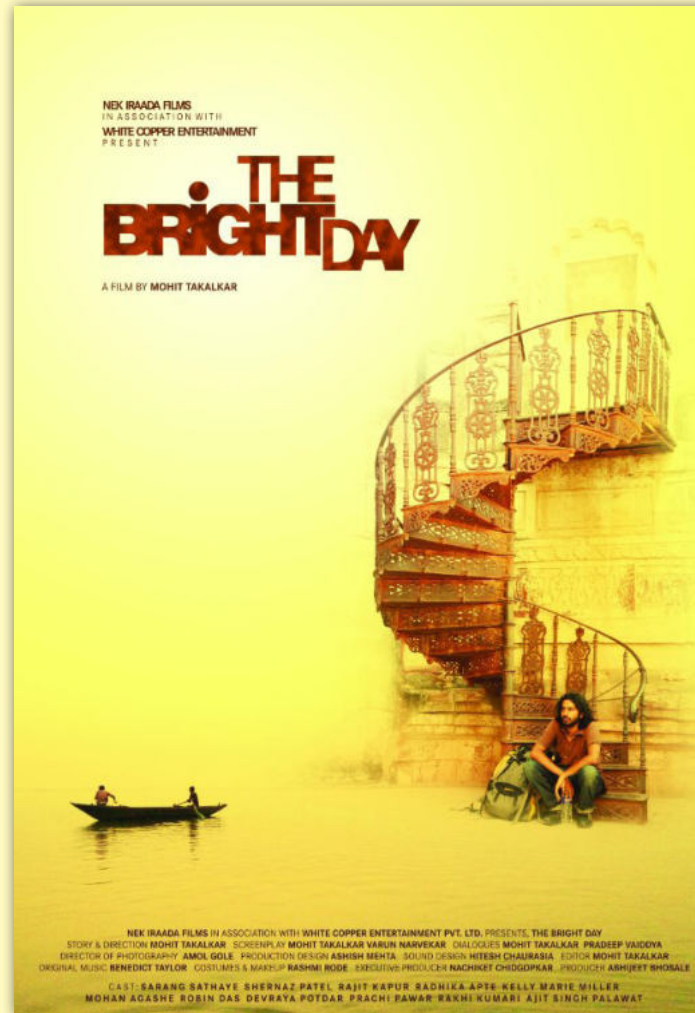
Rang De Basanti, Taare Zameen Par, Kalyug, Mangal Pandey the Rising, Bose the forgotten Hero, The Blue Umbrella, Maqbool as a still photographer. After several years of working in still he decided to graduate into cinematography; the world of moving images.

He was acclaimed for his cinematography in Stanley ka Dibba directed by Amole Gupte and followed up with interesting projects in Hindi and Marathi. Amol is known for his DSLR cinematography using minimalistic lighting and shooting mainly with available light.

Amol Gole's repertoire as a DOP/ Cinematographer

Stanley ka Dibba, Gajaar, A Bright Day, Nero's Guests, Sanhita, Investment, Touring Talkies

Why Amol Gole?



Amol has worked on a wide variety of projects and has grasp of various genres. His style involves shooting on available light and in projects like Stanley ka Dibba and Gajaar he demonstrated that HD DSLR way of film-making has the ability to capture the spontaneity and energy of the subjects and this storytelling style was something similar to what I wanted to explore.

His background and experience helped me to understand about aesthetics as well as technicalities of DSLR film-making.

Projects in Production



Amol's company Storyboard films pvt limited was working on the following films during the internship period -

Amole Gupte's fiction for children based on Skating - Sapnon ko Ginte Ginte



'Babanchi Shala' a Marathi film based on Neela Sathyanarayan's book directed by Sampada Jogalekar

Napas - another marathi film based on education as a theme shot in a village on Konkan coast.

Learning Process



Observation -

Watching the filming process and picking up insights through observation and self study

Mentoring and Gupshup -

Discussions on chai breaks with Amol on various shots, doubts and feedback and actual filming under supervision

Technical Learning -

Inputs on DSLR film-making, gadgets, file formats, camera movement accessories

Self study component



Field Research

I did some location photography for Amol's upcoming projects and database where I photographed various locations in Maharashtra for directorial reference

My own film idea-

There were days when Amol's team was not shooting. I was encouraged to work on my own film idea and shoot some sequences with my DSLR. Amol gave inputs on these shots on various technical parameters which helped me try various things without inhibition.

Analysis of Amol's work



I was asked to go through various films photographed by Amol and analyse compositions, shot divisions, visual design strategies, colour and lighting.

Gajaar and Stanley ka Dabba were fine examples of shooting rapidly on location where characters and setting were not in director's control completely. In a film like 'The bright Day' his camera brings out the protagonists journey very vividly. In Nero's guests, Amol shoots on various formats and cameras to bring out the agony of cotton farmers.

What I learnt about

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Composition



Amol's compositions are based on the visual order required in the story.

He goes beyond establishing the most important element at the visual hook point but also brings about a wonderful foreground-background relationship.

He ensures that wide shots establish the context and the surroundings and build a relationship with the audience while close-ups bring out the best in performers. More importantly he reacts to non-planned shot situations with clear thinking



Camera Angles



Amol always comes up with interesting camera angles. He extensively uses wide shots from the top, eye level hand-held shots in a way that creates interest in the story by breaking visual monotony.

However, he is keen to create camera angles that create an experience for the viewer which is natural and easy to relate to.



He tries to immerse into the character to create point of view shots that become a part of the story and go beyond aesthetics and play a functional role.

Depth of field



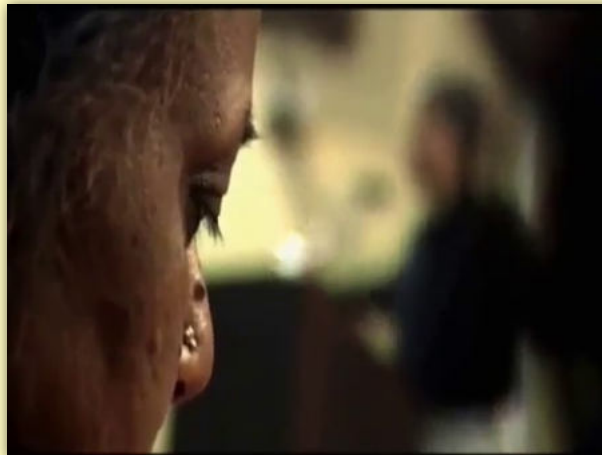
DOF Strategies -

Very shallow depth of field to create complete attention on one element in the frame.

Shallow depth of field to create a viewpoint shot that is surreal and surprising

Deep depth of field when shooting on the go and when action is out of control and the camera has to respond swiftly like a human eye.

Dont bother about it when the shot has compelling action; simply focus on getting it on the camera.



Thinking in Sequence



Amol often adds to director's storytelling by coming up with a montage that picks the graph of the story. According to Amol, this is the key to spontaneous film making without a structured script.

In Nero's Guests; P Sainath's emphatic points about poverty and inequality are hammered in by the shot of a devi-bhakt who shocks us with a whiplash.

The emphasis is not just to conceptualize individual shots but also build a chain of shots that add up together to give momentum to the story.

Multi Camera Shoots



Multiple camera shoot is rarely used except situations like sports and action.

However, at times a back up camera is rolled to ensure that something interesting and spontaneous could be captured as well.



in Stanley ka Dibba and Sapnon ko Ginte Ginte there are several shots picked up with this fly on the wall approach.

Location Mapping



Aspect Ratio 1 : 2.35



Since Amol uses 35mm DSLR lenses made by canon that shoot videos on 16:9 aspect ratio, he uses tapes to give him an indicator of how a cropped shot in 1:2.35 format would look like. He finds this option to be easier and more effective quality wise that using anamorphic lenses.



I felt that this aspect ratio makes cinematic viewing more real and engaging since the field of view is more human like and larger than life.

Shooting on Available Light



Amol rarely lights up his scenes and tries to remain truthful to how things would look naturally.

This is his differentiating strategy as well as ideological aesthetic point of view. At the same time this approach makes even fiction film making possible with a photojournalistic approach; and shoot with minimum fuss.

It comes with challenges related to viewer sensibilities and difficulty levels of executing shots. In *Sapnon ko Ginte Ginte*, skating shots were taken under regular halogen lights in a school.



Illusion of Natural Lighting

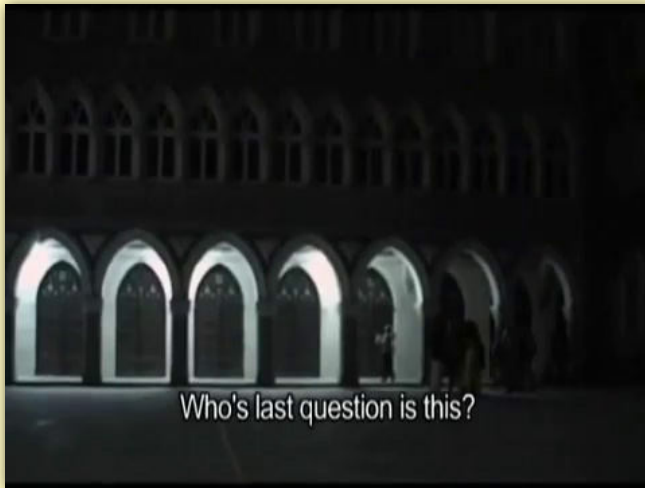


There are times when it is simply not possible to shoot in available light. If tests on post-production platforms show that the result on a 60 ft projection screen may not look good lights are set up in such a way that it looks natural. Whether it is creating feel of a lantern or sunlight trickling in from a school classroom window.



This is crucial to ensure that the visual language of the film remains constant. Key challenge is to be able to match colour temperature.

Visual Syntactics



The shot of lights switching off and an ignorant youngster silenced by the protagonist with his witty line is framed by a long shot of the Xaviers auditorium and the spreading darkness.

A long cavalcade of government car talks about delayed action, slow response of those in seat of power.



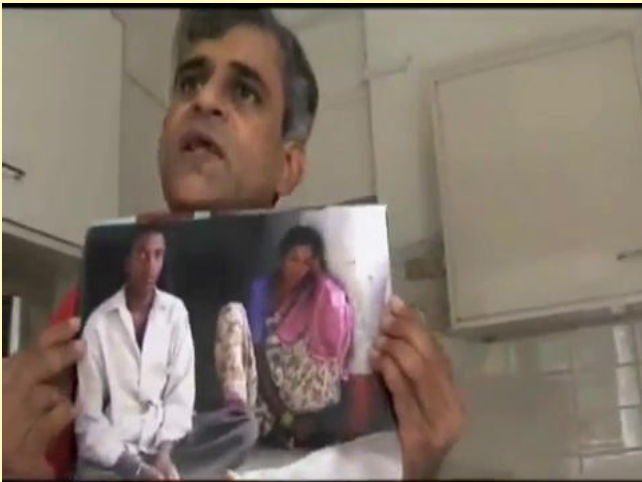
The protagonist seen like a dot on the landscape showing the vastness of the world he is not aware of.

Working on documentaries



The most important thing about Amol's approach to a documentary is his involvement in the subject and his no nonsense approach.

Amol becomes a contrastingly different cinematographer when shooting documentaries. He gives content and message delivery the priority over aesthetics.



He is more open to experiment, break all rules, use different cameras in one film and yet produce imagery that is technically sound and rich in expression.

Camera Movements



For the skating film Amol used a Segway battery operated vehicle with a steadycam.

The objective was to follow kids skating and get the feel of that motion by creating various point of view shots.

Instead of using the crane in a usual manner, Amol's team used it motion similar to merry-go-round and captured swinging, circular motion in skating.

Sliders and Jibs



Amol does not like to use sliders and jibs and avoids them as much as possible. He believes that these devices create very unnatural shots and hence they don't fit in his realistic style. He advocates using these devices sparingly to break monotony or make absolutely stationary subjects a bit interesting.

He extensively uses Tilta DOP handheld rig to stabilize and control movements in his handheld shots

What I learnt about

DSLR FILM MAKING

Understanding Director's Vision



Stanley ka Dibba as well as Sapnon ko Ginte Ginte are examples where a cinematographer challenges technology and established rules to adhere to the director's vision and strategy. This impacts efficacy of storytelling.



Both films have been shot with a strategy that kids should not be disturbed and no heavy device should impact their performance.

The Bright Day, Gajaar and Napas are examples where a cinematographer keeps the shoot plan open ended and makes the story fresher.

Spontaneity and Energy



DSLR film making has liberated film makers. I would call it 'Guerilla Filmmaking'

The camera can reach points where a few years ago directors would have not dared to venture.

It is lighter and compact and allows a small crew to shoot and scoot without compromising on the visual fabric of the film.

It has the convenience and accessibility of video and latitude of film.

Working with the Audio



Most of Amol's films have been shot sync-sound and since audio is recorded at 24 fps and DSLRs record at 23.97 fps there are chances of syncing process being difficult.

Audio team and cinematographer have to work closely to plan movements smoothly. If the cinematographer is doing an impromptu shoot it becomes even more critical that their wavelengths match.

Gajaar proved that it is better sometimes to recreate larger than life sound in studio situation to overcome on field limitations.

Working with Kids



Never plan too much.

If you judge kids or come up with more and more rules it never works.

They give best performances within first 3-4 takes and it is important to get your shot okayed within that range.



Telephoto lenses with shallow depth of field are effective in capturing their energy and innocence.

Shorter shoots, involving parents, lots of breaks and playful ambiance is critical.

On the Spot Decision Making



Thinking swiftly and responding immediately is crucial; especially when shooting in a less structured and formal manner. Shooting documentaries for Amol is actually like fieldwork where he is always alert to not miss anything important. He explains how he decided to abandon a doctor's interview midway and capture a farmer who had just consumed pesticide.

He encourages directors to go beyond typical shot division and structured manner and look for shots that catalyse the flow of the story.

References &
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Books

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Real world Production techniques
- Barry Andersson, Janie L Geyen

Shooting Movies; without shooting
in your foot
- Jack Anderson

Digital Video
- Tom Ang

The Five C's of Cinematography
- Joseph V Mascelli

Image Sources

Amol Gole's image collection

Swati Gole's photographs

www.gomolo.com

Manfrotto website

Canon website

Tilta publicity material

Image grabs from promos



"for creative people there is no final frontier you climb one peak and there is always some other expedition you are eager to go for! I always want to break rules it yields fresh and interesting results!"

