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Heart and soul



Nakul Vaid (left) with co-star Uttam Halder in Mohandas

After creating magic with his lens in films like *Satya*, *Kaun*, *Tarkeeb* and *Jhankaar Beats*, **Mazhar Kamran** is all set with his debut film as director, *Mohandas*. A chat with the IIT graduate with a passion for films...

How did you make the journey from cinematographer to director?

I have always wanted to direct a film. In fact, I became a cinematographer because I wanted to use it as a stepping stone to get into direction. Even while working on films like *Satya* and *Kaun* as director of photography, I knew that my final calling lay in making a film. Over the past year, I have been collaborating with Hindi novelist Uday Prakash on a number of scripts. While working with him, I was quite intrigued by his short story *Mohandas* — the story of a man whose identity is taken on by another. I decided to do a free adaptation of the short story into a feature film and that is how *Mohandas* was born.

What is *Mohandas* all about?

Mohandas is an emotional story of a man who struggles through years of bureaucracy and red-tapism to get a job, only to realise that someone else has not only wrenched the job from right under his nose, but has also usurped his identity. Irony and satire run as undercurrents through the film. On some levels, one can even look upon *Mohandas* as a psychological thriller.

Mohandas is a very real film. And by real, I mean that the film could be about you or me. As a cinematographer, I wanted the film to have a gritty, real texture throughout. That is the reason why we have not shot on any set, but totally on real locations... coal mines, villages, roads, all of which are integral to the plot. Since Sonali Kulkarni plays a news reporter, we have also shot at an actual television channel studio in Delhi.

But then you do have songs in the film...

See, I was always very sure that I wanted songs in my first film. There was never any doubt regarding that. Songs are an inherent part of our culture and our films are defined by songs. Bimal Roy and Guru Dutt used songs to take the narrative forward. *Mohandas* has three songs, all of which are situational and fit in with the mood of the film.

Was the final cast of the film your first choice?

I think I have been extremely fortunate because whoever I thought of while writing every role managed to find their way into the film. I had worked with Nakul (Vaid) in *Ab Tak Chhappan* and I wanted him for the title role. I think his combination of an intense yet innocent face suits the character perfectly. Sonali is someone I have known for a very long time and so it was natural that she would play a role in my debut film. I was the cinematographer for Sushant's first two films — *Satya* and *Kaun* — and that is where he came in. Aditya Srivastav, Govind Namdeo, these are people who I have known for a long, long time and they have all come together because they all believe strongly in the film and what it stands for.

Mohandas has been well received at various international film festivals...

I have made *Mohandas* predominantly for the Indian audience. But the fact that the international audience has accepted and appreciated the film is truly humbling. At the San Francisco Film Festival, *Mohandas* and *Chatrang* were the only two Indian films in the competitive section. At the Austrian Film Festival, there were only six films in the competitive section, of which *Mohandas* was the only Indian film. *Mohandas* was the closing film at the Kolkata Film Festival last year and the response to the film there was tremendous. Mrinalda (Sen) missed the screening, but he wanted to watch the film so much that he actually requested the organisers to arrange a special screening the next day. That is a huge thing for a first-time film-maker to experience. After watching the film, Mrinalda gave me his blessings and said, 'Unlike other first-time film-makers, you haven't been self-indulgent. You will make very good films in future'.

Why the name *Mohandas*?

Well, the chief character is called *Mohandas*. Also, the short story that forms the source of the film is called *Mohandas*, but then we could have changed it in the same manner Q&A was

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changed to *Slumdog Millionaire*. I retained the name because I thought it resonated in an interesting manner.

What are your expectations from *Mohandas* when it releases on August 14?

We are looking at a moderate release of about 100 prints across the country. Given the reaction that *Mohandas* has elicited worldwide, I am expecting a lot out of the film. I know people will like it considering the fact that everyone involved has put his heart and soul into the film.

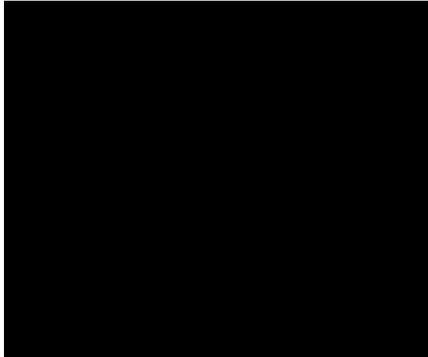
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