

In Conversation With.... Bhupendra Bhattarai



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We have with us today: Bhupendra Bhattarai - a young, energetic, passionate and a very talented filmmaker. He is the founding member of the production house - Underground Talkies and Ekadeshma Film Festival. The co-producer of 'Basuli' which was selected at 69th Venice Film Festival; 'Saas Phere Jasto Lagcha' and 'Ma Khushi Chhu' which was selected at Busan International Film Festival; debuted as a director with 'Raghav'. We talked with him about his journey so far, his future plans and many other things. Have a read!

Hello! How are you doing?

Hi. I am doing good.

What keeps you busy these days?

I've been busy trying to re-write and get into pre-production for our next project.

Your directorial flick 'Raghav' was recently released online. What kind of responses are you receiving for the film?

It has been okay. People are connecting with the story that we have tried to say and all the characters, so that's a positive thing for us. People are loving the presentation of it and we have got pretty good feedback for the performances too. So we are thrilled. But having said that, we have also got pretty harsh responses too, but we do appreciate that. When people point out flaws in our work, then it's easier for us to improve. But yeah, the way people are connecting and finding themselves in the movie, it's pretty exciting.

The 'big' question, everybody is wondering about: why on youtube but theaters?

I alongside our producer Raj Ballav Koirala have already officially responded to this question. It all comes down to economics and the scale of your product. I think what RBK Films did was what a smart producer would do.

Does that also indicate that it's difficult to get movies screened in Nepal?

It is tough, especially if you are talking about a movie of our scale. There are costs beside promotion that you need to put in and promotion on top of that. So when we wanted to release the movie in limited theaters, economics never worked out. So yeah, if yours is a small movie, it's little tough.

The film beautifully depicts the struggles of Nepali students living abroad. How did you come up with this idea?

Pretty much everything you see in the movie comes out of experience. When we set out to write, we decided we have to say something we know and then only we can be honest to the story. So yeah all the struggles you see in the movie, comes out of our experiences.

Is 'Raghav' your own lifestory?

If you watch the movie, you can see the opening title that reads "Every piece of art is autobiographical to an extent and Raghav is not an exception". Yes, it is for sure my life story and story of people like me.

If you had a real life situation just like Raghav had in the film, would you go to Nepal and try to save your love or would you just try to move on?

(Laughs) I did what Raghav did. And I don't know if what I did was right or wrong and I also don't know if I would do it in any different way if I ever had the same situation. But I am happy where I am right now. Most of it would depend upon the circumstances I would be in. It's is not just one thing that would influence my decision.

What is your next project?

It's again a drama. It's a sweet little love story surrounded by conflicts .

Tell us more about it.

Story-wise that's all I can say for now. I completed rough draft of this screenplay almost 7-8 months ago but I couldn't really work around and make it exciting. I just recently cracked it so our work is flowing lot smoother. In a few weeks of time, we will be able to update you more about the project .

How long have you been in States?

Ah.. 8 years. That's a long time but seems like yesterday. Time just flies.

Any plans on going back to Nepal any sooner?

No, not any time sooner. It will probably be in 2016 for the release of our movie but other than that, no plans for now.

Who are some of your favorite Nepali and international filmmakers?

That's a very tough one. I am a movie-goer and I watch every kind of cinema - from Bollywood 'masala' to French art house. Every movie teaches me something as a filmmaker but more than that as a human being. So I love watching movies as a whole. Talking about filmmakers, I don't know, I cannot specify any one of them. There are a lot and pretty much every other filmmaker who makes me feel like - how did s/he pulled that one out. So yeah there is not any particular filmmaker to name.

What do you think of the current situation of Nepali film industry?

We are going great, we have many new filmmakers coming up with wonderful ideas and executing them the right way. We have managed to find our market in diaspora too, though I think it needs to be little more organized. So it's great time, all we need is audience that can create a culture of watching Nepali movies. I wouldn't say Nepali movies look as mouthwatering as Bollywood flicks but we are not very far behind if we compare it with the amount of budget and infrastructure we have. Once we get more audience, these things will gradually grow up. I think we are heading right way, we just need little more patience.

Which Nepali actors according to you have the capacity to take industry a step ahead?

Hmm... I find everyone exciting, I cannot single out one or two and say this male or female actor can change the course of our movie industry (by the way, we are not an industry yet, I wish we were). Everyone is capable of doing so, it's just a matter of finding the right platform. So actors need to be more careful what kind of work they do but having said that, they also have their own circumstances. It's a tough thing.

'Raghav' is produced by the popular actor Raj Ballav Koirala. Why didn't you think of getting him in the film with a cameo role?

(Laughs) Yes, we did think about that, and we planned for it too but something did not work out. And looking back, I feel it would have looked a little forceful. We both are looking for a good script and we will certainly work together someday as a director-actor duo.

Did you take a formal education on filmmaking?

Yes, I have associate in film and video production, alongside Bachelors in Film Studies with production emphasis.

You are a writer, director and a producer so far. Do we expect you to see you as an actor anytime soon?

Hahaha! No.

What is your 'dream project' like?

I do have one; let's keep it a secret for now.

If you were to make a film in Nepal, which actors would you like to sign for it?

That depends on the kind of movie I am making, plus I won't sign anyone without auditioning them. I should be able to see the character in them.

Tell us about 'Ekadeshma Film Festival' and your role in it.

Ekadeshma is this wonderful idea from UT Nepal, more specifically Abhinash Bikram Shah. So as you know, the film festival showcases shorts and gives platform to the national and international filmmakers who might be renounced or a starter; which many festivals lack to do. It's such a confidence booster for any filmmaker. That's the reason it has been popular they way it has. We started organizing the film festival at Tourism Board three years ago with 10-12 films now we have moved to Kumari and taken three -four full days with over 60-70 movies in a span of just 3 years. Regarding my role, as the festival has grown up, my role has been limited. There is very less I can do effectively being in distance. I am one of the founding members of the festival .

We all have that one person because of whom we are what we are today. Who is that one person to you?

My mom. I am what I am because of all the sacrifices she did for me.

Say the first word that comes to your mind when I say these words:

Nepal - *Home*

Filmmaking - *Life*

Money - *I don't mind*

Luck - *I wish for*

USA - *Monotonous*

Dream - *Films*

Friends - *Very few*

What would you advice to the youngsters who are willing to make a career in the film industry?

Haha! I am myself a youngster who is trying to make a career, what would I be able to suggest? I guess I would urge everyone to say what they want to say without being restricted.

Anything you would like to say to your fans and well-wishers?

I would like to call them well wishers rather than fans. Thank you for all the support and feedback you guys have given us for Raghav. And this is just a start, we will try our best to entertain, inform and excite you all with many more of our movies.

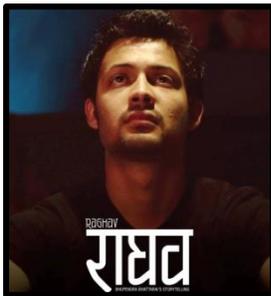
Thank you very much for your time!

Thank You!

Now let's see what do his associates from 'Raghav' think of him and what is that one suggestion they would like him to know :



Raj Ballav Koirala, Producer: *"Bhupendra Bhattarai, as far as I know him is very passionate about movies and music or any form of art. I have known him for a couple of years now. Our first project together is 'Raghav.' As an executive producer, I must share with you all that I am very pleased with the kind of movie he created and crafted. With the kind of situation and space we were placed, he has delivered his best. He is someone who is utterly keen about sharing his ideas and is always excited about hearing the comments and opinion. I am sure, someday, this ordinary man will do 'extra ordinary' something for Nepali Film Industry. And as always, I wish him all the very best. My suggestion for him will be - keep calm and take your time before deciding on to anything."*



Shibir Pokharel, Actor: *"As we all know, he is a very fine director and what makes him that is the hunger and passion towards movies. He knows what he wants from his actors and if he doesn't get it, he will never be satisfied. A great person to learn from and a great person he is. A suggestion from me would be that he tends to lose it quickly on the sets. If someone is not doing their work as he wants them to, instead of talking through, he gets frustrated. I think he should keep it tight and carry the team strongly."*



Asmita Dhakal, Actress: *He defines the word 'passion' for me. He has this drive to fulfill his dream and he is focused just enough. I'm not even boasting. He knows what he wants from his life. We used to shoot for hours and during our sleep times, he used to be editing, watching the recordings over and over. He literally could go hours without eating or sleeping. His work made him happy. Besides work, he is a cheerful, friendly and a warm hearted personality. I absolutely loved working with him. All these words are very heartfelt and I thank him for letting me in his life personally as a friend and professionally. I don't have any suggestion for him as he really knows it all but I would like to wish him all the best and I will always be his number one fan. He is one of those people in my life who have inspired me, motivated me and actually made a difference. I can just go on and on about him but you don't want that. :)*

