

Martin Luther Christian University was very privileged to have had Professor Rakesh Katarey as a resource person for the Workshop on Documentary Filmmaking that it organised very recently. Professor Katarey is the Dean, College of Journalism and Mass Communication, Dayanda Sagar University, Bangalore. There was never a dull moment during the entire workshop as the participants' attention were glued to Professor Katarey's wide span of knowledge which he put across effortlessly and dynamically in all his sessions. Katarey was once told by his professor that if he had remained a journalist, he would have been an editor of a national daily by now. Instead, Professor Katarey took the less-trodden path of documentary films and became a documentary filmmaker. Find out why and more in the conversation that our correspondent had with Professor Katarey:

Q: Can you please tell us about what you do?

Prof. Katarey: I'm actually a Dean of Journalism and Mass Communication in Dayanda Sagar University. This is a new university and it looks at entrepreneurship as a differentiator. The students who come to our university are predominantly engineering students although we have schools of basic sciences, pharmacy, dental, management as well as physiotherapy and nursing. Under engineering, we have well known global companies like *Autodesk* and *Bosch* that have set up their labs in the university as a joint investment between the companies and the university. This way, our students are exposed to cutting edge technology. For example, if they want to do 3-D printing, they can do it right there within the campus. These are the kinds of facilities that are given. Even in Journalism and Mass Communication we are very faculty driven because the costs of video and broadcast technology are coming down. The differentiator is in the faculty because we have invested in faculty who are very experienced in their fields. Right now, we are offering only undergraduate degrees but in the future we will be offering post-graduation degrees all the way to Ph.D. We are not very old as an institution, our first batch will be passing out soon but the difference between our students and other students is that our students are very strong in the digital realm and that is a strong advantage because digital media has taken over the world. In addition to knowing the traditional media like television, film, newspaper, magazines and radio, they are also specialising in digital media and digital journalism. We also have very good people to teach journalism, for example we have the former Executive Editor of *Hindustan Times* in Delhi teaching in our university. We also have Renuka Phadnis who for 18 years had been a special correspondent of the *Hindu* also teaching with us. We have also recruited young people who are doing research or have done digital media, so it

is a 'horses for the courses' kind of an HR faculty policy. Our students also hold the record of having won prizes in every event that they participated outside the college. I am in charge of giving shape to the school and chart out the developmental plan of what the school should look like in the future.

Q: What has been the biggest inspirational force that drove you to documentary filmmaking?

Prof. Katarey: When I was a student, everyone was chasing engineering or management. In those times, there were no private management schools; there was only one university and two other schools of management. I appeared in the entrance test for management. 17,000 students wrote the management entrance exam for 60 seats and I secured the 87th rank. I could have easily gotten into any one of the three centres, however, I had always wanted to do journalism and, therefore, gave up my seat in management and went into journalism. I had to sit for another entrance test where 2,000 students appeared and I got in. Because I had such a deep love for the profession, I used to read a lot. When I started to read and do my research I discovered that journalism had become just another business. Therefore, I moved away from journalism and went into documentary filmmaking which is independent and is telling the truth and that is the main reason why I shifted. My professor once said that if I had stuck with journalism, I would have been the editor of some national daily very easily but till today I do not regret my decision but instead I am very happy that I am not doing somebody else's business. It has also developed in me a very necessary critical eye which I feel has helped me extend myself into academics because academics is also a search for truth and so is the documentary form. There is a great consistency although it might be difficult for an outsider to see that thread running through. But I feel it is very important to teach your students ethics. In the end I feel it is one continuous whole; the form, what I have chosen, what I have given up, all are in line in that sense.

Q: As a documentary filmmaker, what has been your biggest obstacle?

Prof. Katarey: The biggest obstacle has been the budget and the time that a documentary consumes. My 2nd documentary was on lake conservation and it won me the award of Best Technical Film. However, there were many restrictions from everywhere including the government because nobody wanted the film to come out and there was no budget. We know *Woodland* shoes are supposed to be everlasting but in 6 months' time, the amount of moving around that I did on

the shoes for that film, I wore them out completely; so you can imagine the amount of effort that goes into the making of a documentary. But the reward that one expects is not and should not be financial. There is a higher purpose for making a documentary and one should always pursue that, at least, people who are in a position to pursue that should do so.

Q: If you were to meet a young person who wants to pursue documentary filmmaking but is clueless about what steps to take, what advice would you give him?

Prof. Katarey: My suggestion to them is to join a newspaper and to refrain from being a television journalist. They can even choose online journalism or join good online magazines like *The Wire*, *Scroll* or *The Quint*. They can even join a journal of their choice as correspondents or writers. At the same time, because they are constantly researching, they should use that material to document and make documentaries. That would be a wonderful way to take this forward. However, one must remember that a documentary film will not fetch them much reward but the biggest reward is the satisfaction that one gets. It may, however, fetch one a lot of awards. Many of my friends have made corporate, institutional films where they get a lot of money. For example, let's take Vidhu Vinod Chopra of all people. One should be inspired, if not by his films, by his dedication to filmmaking. When he was short of money, he made a lot of ad films for ICICI. Ad filmmaking fetches a lot of money and he used that money to make *1942: A Love Story*. One should have that much dedication for what one wants to do. The courage of conviction is very necessary for a filmmaker. If you look at Steven Spielberg, when he made *Jaws*, nobody on the crew actually knew how long it was going to take to be completed. Even Spielberg did not know that when he was asked but you see what a masterpiece *Jaws* went on to become. And even till today, people still say that Spielberg is making *Jaws* again and again; he just replaced the shark with a dinosaur and the sea with a park. So, one should have a strong obsession to get into filmmaking. People who get into filmmaking only for the money will eventually fade away. A documentary filmmaker, because he has gotten into the habit of making lifeless objects talk and tell a story, becomes good in filmmaking as well. For example, Govind Nihalani, who made masterpieces like *Ardh Satya* which won international awards had also made documentaries like the one he made on the Amul Diary in Anand, Gujarat. We also have someone like Shyam Benegal who has made so many documentaries on things like the temple architecture, but who also, at the same time, made feature films.

Q: Who is your favourite filmmaker and why is he or she your favourite?

Prof. Katarey: The film that I will always hold dearest to my heart is *The Bicycle Thief* by De Sica. The Italian neo-realist film has left a great impact on me because it tells the story of human beings in their neighbourhoods. It talks about their problems and even the actors are not professional actors but people themselves. It is the closest that a film can come to a documentary form. I feel that *The Bicycle Thief* is a classic that should make it to any top five list in the world of cinema. Even Satyajit Ray, who made such wonderful films like *Pather Panchali*, was greatly inspired by neo-realist cinema from Italy. Of course, I am not saying that there are other films that are any less; many consider Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* to be the best, but to me, my personal choice will always be *The Bicycle Thief*.

Q: If you were given the chance to redirect any film, which film would it be?

Prof. Katarey: If I got the chance to remove the director's name and put my name instead as the director, it would be *Pather Panchali*. I feel it is the best film that we have had from Satyajit Ray and I feel it is educational for everyone who wants to learn the craft of filmmaking.

Q: How was your experience in Shillong?

Prof. Katarey: This is my third time in Shillong and everytime I come I always had the strong feeling that this is the place that I would like to retire in. In this place, people are so beautiful, so warm, so true. Whenever I go back home I keep on telling people, If you want to learn ethics, manners and how to deal with a human being, go learn in Shillong, because this is the place where everyone that I have met has been a beautiful person.