



Big Is Beautiful

He's the brain behind some of the top-rated shows on television, such as *Diya Aur Baati Hum* and *Punar Vivah*. But comes a time when even a master storyteller wants a new canvas. Succumbing to the creative itch, **Sumeet Mittal**, Founder-Director of Shashi Sumeet Productions aka Two's Company, is now set to make the transition to the big screen. But before he ventures into the Hindi feature film space, Mittal is using Marathi cinema as a testing ground. Here's the producer in conversation with **Sagorika Dasgupta**

How did you foray into television?

My wife Shashi and I came to Mumbai from Ahmedabad with our four-year-old daughter with the sole intention of working in the television industry and then graduating to films. We had given up everything in our hometown for a better future. At the time, Rajshri Productions was getting into television and we wrote their first show, *Woh Rehne Waali Mehlon Ki*, which aired on Sahara One in 2005. It was a very successful show for six to seven years.

Our other show *Sindoor* became a huge hit on Zee TV. Later, we formed a fruitful collaboration with Arunaji (Aruna Irani), who was also very big on television production back then. Her show *Zameen Se Asmaan Tak* was actually our first show to go on air. I learnt a lot from both Arunaji as well as Rajshri as those were our formative years.

How easy or difficult was it to get in touch with Rajshri Productions?

We had assumed it would be very difficult because we had no background in

entertainment. But, I guess, luck favoured us. It was tough, initially, but my wife knew someone in Rajshri and she would travel to South Mumbai almost every day to meet the people there. She got in touch with a very senior person at Rajshri who helped us meet Rajkumar Barjatya. We met him and I guess we struck a chord with him. He seemed to like our simplicity and that we were prepared to give it all we had.

So he called us back and asked us to develop one of his scripts and he ended up really liking our work. It was Barjatya's first show on TV so the channel wanted big names in terms of the other talent which are a trademark of their films. Rajji and Sooraj Barjatya stood by us and gave us our first break, and I will always be grateful for that.

After working with Rajshri Productions on TV, why didn't you venture into films with them soon after?

We did write two film scripts for them. One of them was this film called *Meri Prem Kahani*, and the other was an

untitled project. Unfortunately, they were both canned. But we were lucky to gain so much experience with big names so early on in our career. After working with these people, we began getting a lot of work on TV and almost all those shows clicked with the audience. The channels were happy with us too, so we started adding more and more shows to our kitty. Then, I thought the time was right to try my hand at films.

Why did you decide to venture into film production with Marathi cinema?

I didn't want to plunge straight into Hindi films because writing and production are two completely different forms of work. When you write a script, the onus of the film's success is not entirely on your shoulders. There are several other people who form the pillars of making sure it's a good film. But as a producer, the ultimate responsibility of a film's success is your responsibility. I wanted to learn the craft a little better before I delved into Hindi films, which reaches out to a larger audience. Also, television and films are two very



Rangakarmi



different mediums and they also cater to different kinds of audiences.

What is your first Marathi film *Rangakarmi* about?

The story is about the journey of an amateur actor, Keshav (Amol Kolhe), whose dream is to become a renowned stage actor. It is also about his unique relationship with his mentor and make-up man, Dwarkanath played by Mohan Joshi, who makes him the star he becomes. This is followed by their fallout. The film has been directed by Sanjiv Kolte. I have also worked on the screenplay along with the director.

You are not very conversant with Marathi. How difficult was it to produce a Marathi film?

As I began work, I realised that language was just a medium, not a barrier. You are simply conveying the same emotion in a different language. Since I have spent over 14 years in the Hindi television industry, I also understood the Marathi industry mainly because Mumbai is also the hub of Marathi films. I had interacted with Marathi writers, technicians and Marathi people in general. So I was very comfortable on that front.

Besides, I have also watched a lot of Marathi shows and was up to date with Marathi theatre. I know a couple of Marathi directors and also watched quite a few good Marathi films. Since I knew that Marathi cinema was experiencing a boom, in terms of talent, quality of films as well as box-office success, I thought I should try my hand at Marathi cinema

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And you are going the whole hog by producing three Marathi films in one go?

Yes, I want to do at least two back-to-back Marathi films. So after *Rangakarmi*, my second film will be directed by Nitin Nandan, who directed an award-winning Marathi film *Jhing Chik Jhing* in 2010. The theme of the second film is completely different because it is every producer's creative desire to make different kinds of movies. This is an out-and-out comedy, which will go on floors in December. I can't say much about my third film since it is still at the inception stage.

When will you make your debut to Hindi films?

I have finalised a few scripts and the work in the Hindi film space is on in full swing. I have to decide whether to start working on my first Hindi film or third Marathi film.

How different is TV from films?

Let me put it this way. After working

for television for such a long time, I can predict the kind of returns I can expect from a TV show. But I am yet to figure out the kind of returns I can expect from films. Jokes apart, we are all here to make movies. There is a lot of charm in making shows for the small screen because it is a very challenging job. Supplying content to people every day is not easy. Satisfying the viewer's entertainment fix on a daily basis is very tough. But we have handled that challenge quite well. I wanted to try a completely new medium and take it head on. This medium also has its own charm. After slogging for a year, all it takes is one day and one three-hour screening to decide the verdict on your film. It's an altogether different kind of anxiety.

You have opted to make a film on an off-beat subject in Marathi. What is the kind of genre you want to experiment within the Hindi space?

The Marathi audience is quite evolved. The kind of films that have worked there have been of superior quality in the last few years. Even when the subject is simple, the execution has been superior. But there is greater scope for experimentation in films, Hindi or Marathi, than with TV shows. There are a lot of stories you don't need to concentrate on and they can be told leisurely. Those stories are well suited for TV. There are also a lot of subjects that require the viewer's undivided attention and that works best in films because you have a captive audience. So we need to take advantage of the time the viewer is allotting to us and choosing to pay for.