



Swiss-Indian filmmaker Kamal Musale is known for his short and documentary films which have garnered critical acclaim at various international film festivals. His short film *Les Trois soldats* (Three Soldiers) was presented at the festival de Cannes in 1989. He set up his own production company in Mumbai, founded the Swiss-India film bridge to provide a platform for exchange between the two countries, and is now working on his first Hindi film. A selection of his films: *Raclette Curry*, *Three Soldiers* and *Courrier Du Pacifique* are being screened as part of the ongoing European Film Festival in Mumbai. Nandita Dutta catches up with the filmmaker at the opening ceremony of the festival...

How does your Swiss-Indian origin influence the kind of films you make?

I think it influences a lot what I do. When I was very young, there were no Indians in Switzerland and I had to figure out who I was because I could see that I was not a full Swiss. Only when I traveled I realized that it was good to leave one part of me in Switzerland and search for the other one. I think I found some answers throughout the world, not only in India but in different places. This identity problem is really a constitution of me. Every subject I am attracted to subconsciously has to deal with identity problem. Like the next project I'm doing is about fights about property. And for me property is linked to identity because when you belong to a place, you have a sense of property if you know who you are. So I think it is very important for everyone to have a sense of identity and for me probably, in every work I do, it's there somewhere.

What was the influence of silent cinema on your film *Three Soldiers*?

The idea was that I wanted to talk about some issues about the position of Switzerland during the second World War. There was transfer of goods and people happening between Germany and Italy at that time. And I was questioning which country I belonged to. At the time when I did the film, Switzerland was still hiding a lot of things. So I made this film and in order to give it a non-temporal, a timeless feeling, I thought of using the technique of slapstick mixed with early silent Russian films. Even though it was inspired by the event of World War II, it was directly questioning the politics of Switzerland. Because of the timeless feeling,

you can apply it to most times and even most countries. The film traveled throughout the world and a lot of people identified with this theme easily.

Could you talk about your liking for dance and cinema, and the connection you make between the two?

I did the first dance film in Switzerland because I was attracted by the movements in dance, the choreography and later I became really interested in how you write stories and tell things with your body. I think there is an intimate connection between what the camera does and what the movement is, for me it was like a natural wedding.

I did a lot of experiments with dance. Usually I don't like dance when dance survives because of the music. In most dances I see that when you take out the music, there is not much on stage. For me the essence is what you experience when you see a dance. There is no interest for me to record the dance, so there is a need to reinterpret the emotion you felt when you watched the dance. For that you have to use every trick that you can, or every idea that you have in order to do something with the emotion that you have. As you cannot just record it, you have to make another work with it. One of the films that I screen here, *Courrier Du Pacifique*, is a film which is a dance show but it is much more than that. It is using the story of a choreographer doing a dance show but we are talking about a lot of other things. This is the approach I had while making this film to create some of the emotions that were inspiring the dance. It's interesting to show these emotions through images and it's important to use the medium properly.

Could you talk about the Swiss-India film bridge? What are the activities planned?

The Swiss-India film bridge has been around for 2 years and we have done a few events like collaboration with film festivals like this one. What we like is to provide a platform for exchange between the two countries. Films are just the tip of the iceberg, there is much more to it. The idea of the Swiss-India film bridge is meant to facilitate networking. It is a very nice tool because it is apolitical, it's non-governmental and non-profit. It is to be used by people who are interested. And that gave us the idea to extend it to something that we will be doing from next year, that's the EurIndia Film Bridge. So it is on the same principle but there we will work on the European commissions, create a networking lounge in India for people who are willing to know more about cultural exchanges through films and through co-productions with Europe.

How do you think this initiative can help Indian filmmakers find European co-producers?

The first step toward co-production is to meet with European producers and the film bridge will help Indian filmmakers meet people. In Switzerland, there is not much to help from the Swiss side as it is a small market. That is why Europe is better fitted to appropriate co-productions. But for that the first step is to meet people and second is to understand the culture. Most producers in India think co-production is about money. But it is not about money, it is about understanding the culture of the country you co-produce with. If you don't, you cannot show your film there, you cannot have an audience, not even readers for your screenplay. You have to connect with the culture; you have to have something that is easy to translate into the other culture. Commercial exchange is the last part of any project. First you have to figure out why you want to do it, how you do it and who you want to talk with.

What is the idea behind Curry Western productions? When you talk about producing Indian content catering to a western audience, what exactly do you mean?

Basically, I want to satisfy my needs as a consumer of art or film. So I have to make films here that I would love to see in Europe or the West. I want to make films in India, with Indian content and Indian people, but in such a way that the target audiences really are people like me in Europe.

You mean Indian content with European sensibility?

Yes, you can say that. For me, it's very much like you have good stories in India, good actors, good technicians. But it's like food, there is a way to cook it. Not everyone can enjoy the same kind of food. I meet many people in India who want to reach across borders, who want to share and exchange but they don't know how.

Are you in touch with contemporary Indian cinema?

I don't see it a lot. I don't know what you call contemporary Indian cinema. Is *Dev D* that? That is one film I like.

But there are other films which were called contemporary but I thought they were very mainstream to my taste, with little changes. I dislike when very often I see stories shamelessly stolen from other films. Then it loses all its sense and becomes an empty copy which I don't like. But I would like to see more of contemporary filmmaking. It is very interesting

how today you can make films with a limited budget because of the technology and therefore gives more freedom to the filmmaker to have a personal style. But for me what is often missing is the attention and money spent on screenplay. To have a good film, you need to have a good screenplay.

Taking from your point, do you think digital filmmaking is instrumental in producing good content on low budget?

Yes, I think so. I am myself doing my first Hindi movie on digital, which is a film that I write as I shoot. Digital gives me the freedom to do a film like this, which I wouldn't have in the normal way of producing. Certainly not in the Indian way of producing, unless people trust me blindly which is quite rare. But yes I think digital can be instrumental in providing opportunities to a lot of filmmakers.

Tell us more about your first Hindi film.

This is a film called *Mumbai Bird*, a contraction of Mumbai and Bombay. It is the story of a spirit who like a bird is watching different people who have been unconscious in the city and we go back in time to find out what happened to them. Each one of them is linked to a societal theme which according to me is relevant to India, or could happen only in India. And this is a poetic way to approach social events without being too factual or realistic about them.

Is the cast and crew of this film Indian?

Yes, it is fully an Indian cast and crew. I'm the only one who doesn't speak Hindi.

So how easy or difficult is it for you to direct a film in Hindi?

It is going very well. I have been here for a long time and have a good ear for Hindi. We do a lot of discussions and rehearsals of the dialogues. In terms of how the actors act, it is a very simple tool for me to see what they do and then ask for something else. For them, they are very happy to be exposed to a more realistic filmmaking as opposed to stereotypical filmmaking. It is a very interesting experience!

Are these known faces or new comers?

They are not really new comers. But some of them have never been in front of the camera, they are theatre actors. Most of them have done theatre. Some of them have acted in TV serials. And I don't need non-actors for this film. This film is intended to be shown at some film

festivals in Europe and the actors here are not known in Europe. But for me it's more important to work with good actors than "film-looking" people.

When do we get to see this film?

I will carry on the shooting just after the monsoons and try to keep it ready for the end of the year.