

A Character's Real and Imaginary Journey Drive *Ballad of Rustom*

Published on website: March 21, 2013

Categories: [Focus On Film](#) , [VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219/7219](#) , [VISION3 250D Color Negative Film 5207/7207](#)



A scene from Ballad of Rustom



Cinematographer Shanti Bhushan Roy (Photo courtesy of IMAGINEM CINEMA Pvt Ltd India)



Director Ajita Suchitra Veera (Photo courtesy of IMAGINEM CINEMA Pvt Ltd India)

Set against the backdrop of India's breathtaking landscape of mountains, rivers, valleys and forests, *Ballad of Rustom* is a story about seemingly ordinary people who are in fact quite extraordinary.

Rustom is a young, imaginative man working in a small government telephone office in a remote township in India. On the surface, Rustom leads a mundane life fixing telephone lines, but on his adventures he travels into his dream world in the beautiful and magical countryside that is slowly disappearing as the town is eroded by development.

"This film does not rely on the usual storytelling devices," explains director Ajita Suchitra Veera. "Rather it works on a very different psychological plane. It's traditional cinema, but where the narrative is pushed to the background and what's important is the cinematic experience created through the characters' states of minds."

Ballad of Rustom was shot entirely on 35mm KODAK Film in the CinemaScope format. Veera and cinematographer Shanti Bhushan Roy shot over six months, allowing them to capture the transition of seasons in natural light. Locations included Southern India's

exquisite coffee countryside with their undulating landscape of blue hills and dense vegetation.

The film contains different episodes of Rustom's journeys, which alternate between his real and imaginary worlds. Veera worked diligently to utilize the desaturated colors of the landscape, the dialogues between different characters, and the constant presence of nature to tell the story.

“*Ballad of Rustom* draws attention to those ideas and conflicts that are very much part of our lives and our existence in the contemporary world, and which connect us to an uncertain future as we become more and more disconnected from nature with the disappearance of our natural worlds,” says Veera.

Thus, the director chose to shoot *Ballad of Rustom* on film stock — not only for its aesthetic, but for what it represents.

“KODAK [Film] has always given me great choices as a visual artist,” offers Veera. “I’m a photographer myself and I love playing with images, light, color, contrast and texture, to bring an idea — a story — to life cinematically. Film emulsion is very important in expressing moods, feelings and ideas without saying much. Complexity in a scene and characters’ states of minds can be visually communicated with contrast and light, and emulsion is crucial in this respect. KODAK Films give me that freedom and latitude.”

Roy explains that with the KODAK VISION3 250D Color Negative Film 5207 and KODAK VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219 stocks they could shoot with minimal lights and extend daytime scenes. They ended up shooting a lot of magic hours — early morning shots and many interiors where they could not have used artificial lighting to gain the authenticity both he and Veera were trying to achieve.

“We went for push-processing and a bleach bypass to increase the grain, and to get rich, charcoal blacks and washed out colors,” says Roy, explaining that they wanted to define the landscape in the film as a character of its own. “This was only possible because of Kodak’s ability to handle both under-exposure and over-exposure, and still maintain the details in these areas.”

The bleach bypass was a very strong aesthetic choice for Veera. She had previously experimented with it on her graduate thesis film in 2004, and was keen on a high contrast, desaturated look for *Ballad of Rustom*. In fact, Veera reveals that the imagery of the story came to her much ahead of the narrative storyline.

“I often have images playing in my mind that later are defined by a storyline,” says Veera. “I was particular about this desaturated color palette with a heightened sense of monochrome to create the surreal atmosphere of Rustom’s dream world — of technology, nature and his own subconscious — and also to subtly blend the reality and dream sections in the film, since it constantly moves between the stark reality of Rustom’s everyday life and his dream world.”

The cinematographer under-exposed the entire film by three stops and pushed the stock by two stops with bleach bypass on the entire negative to attain their specific look.

“The 500T and 250D really helped to find the image quality we had in mind, since both have a layered grain structure which makes it possible to extract details even with five to seven stops of underexposure,” explains Roy. “We knew the structure of Kodak motion picture emulsion and its ability to produce true colors and tones would allow us to manipulate the image accordingly to suit the story.”

Read more:

http://motion.kodak.com/motion/Publications/InCamera/A_Character_39_s_Real_and_Imaginary_Journey_Drive_Ballad_of_Rustom.htm#ixzz2diCkE8WG