

Rab da Vaasta...

Director's Statement

Every choice we make – determines the type of person that we become! Translated into English as *Just Lather, That's All*, by Prof. Donald A. Yates, Hernando Téllez's short story *Espuma y nada más*, is a poignant and deeply insightful, heartfelt soliloquy of a barber, a reservoir of pain riddled with irony. The singular thing about this story, given its tragic dimension is, also, how strangely uplifting it is!

When I read this story, I decided immediately that somehow I was going to make a film of it. I made enquiries about the rights the following day, and set the process in motion. Our team truly felt that this film was serving a greater purpose and our deliberations within the Writer's Group at Whistlingwoods International, Mumbai, India, began to take shape.

We made a conscious choice to follow the barber's journey through Manjeet's seemingly insuperable tragedy – set against the backdrop of the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 – following Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination; but chose to treat it more melodramatically and lyrically at places to highlight the issue of intolerance, insensitivity and human rights. We titled the film as – *Rab da Vaasta...* (in Punjabi), meaning: *For God's Sake...*, with a tag: Every drop (of blood that's spilt) matters! This would ensure that somehow the story, in all of its dark and complex beauty, would be allowed to breathe with a contemporary immediacy. The 1984 riot sequence is not a misappropriation of a historic blunder. It is, first and foremost, the result of this unique nation's arduous journey since independence – where we examined our presumptions, and rummaged through our experiences while, searching for revelations! Must we kill in order to live...?

The characters we have created are strong from the outside but the film forces the viewer to examine how a vulnerable identity takes root! The aesthetic principle of this film does not lie in its images but in the inherent tensions within and between the images, all layered. The music and sound design is achingly evocative of Sikh history and culture. The cinematography, editing and performances are immediate, instinctive and spontaneous. A dedicated crew gave their best effort for this film and their collective energy and insight has been instrumental in moving this project forward within our budget and academic constraints.

Personally for me, the sequence where an older Hindu woman confronts a mob and saves Manjeet by misdirecting the mob only to realise later – that she has unwittingly perpetuated a greater human genocide – is an unsettling visual that haunts me still!

If '*Rab da Vaasta...*' were to accomplish anything, I would hope that it would provide a deeply humanistic window, an intimate portrait of an increasingly universal experience in India's struggle with diversity, plurality, identity, tolerance, faith and responsibility of its citizens.

Regards,
Chakravarty Devulapalli