

Filmmaking is an exhausting job'

[Shoma A. Chatterji](#) Posted: Oct 16, 2009 at 1407 hrs IST

Suman Ghosh made news with his directorial debut, *Podokhhep* that won two National Awards. His second [film](#) *Dwando* released recently. But there is no conflict (*dwando*) in him about the two vocations he practices; making films in India and teaching Economics at the University of Florida



What motivated you to become a filmmaker though you are already a successful professor of Economics?

I was always interested in [filmmaking](#) but lacked the technical faculty. I had come to Cornell University to do my doctorate in economics. During my stay here, I decided to pursue film studies from the department of [theatre](#), films and dance within Cornell. It was all about the theory and art of filmmaking from scratch. I didn't do a degree course but took all the basic classes for a Masters in film studies. I completed my PhD and took up a job. Then I made a [documentary](#) on Amartya Sen, my first film. After that, I had the opportunity to assist Gautam Ghosh for a film in Kolkata. I was sure I want to make my own feature.

How would you compare the two vocations of your choice; making films in Bengali in India and teaching Economics in the U.S.?

In some ways, the two complement each other. My research work in economics and my work in films - starting with the conception of the story to the completion of the film—both have similarities. In research you think of an idea, work on it and ultimately it gets published in a journal, like the release of a film. The major difference is that in research you are dependent on just yourself and your co-author. But in films a lot of people are involved for the success of a film. That makes it interesting as well as scary. Also [film making](#) is a physically exhausting job. One realises this only when one makes a film.

Were you inspired by any particular film/filmmaker to venture into filmmaking?

Satyajit Ray. When I was studying at Cornell, we were exposed to a lot of experimental films from great filmmakers, like Stan Brakhage, Andy Warhol and Maya Deren. I realised how much one can play with the form and the language of cinema to create visual magic. I remember watching Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* and Truffaut's *400 Blows*. They took me further into narrative features and I slowly got sucked into it.

What is your take on Indian cinema as an 'outsider looking in' and as an 'insider looking within?'

To me, cinema, per se, is a magic I cannot fathom. Perhaps I would never want to. It is like chasing infinity. When I look at Indian cinema from outside, I cannot but help bring a sociological perspective to it. I think cinema is a reflection of society. Post liberalisation, India is in a state of frenzy. There is more money at stake, the mall culture and everything associated with it. I have nothing against it. But people lose patience and there is this need for brisk entertainment because they do not want to think and analyse. I think this is why traditional art cinema that emerged from West Bengal and Kerala is fading away. There was a flood of talent in the '70s and '80s. Now there is no market for such films. I think this is a temporary phase. Though there are [Hollywood films](#) in the U.S., we also have a marvelous indie film culture around New York and elsewhere. Films like *The Visitor* and *Rachel Getting Married* are made alongside big blockbusters. I think U.S. today is less of a capitalist frenzy place than India. From within, as a practicing filmmaker, I must try to keep pushing the boundaries. Satyajit Ray used to say- we filmmakers have to take few steps forward and the audience will also take few steps forward. Both must realise that there is a complementarity in the process.

Did the critical success of Podokkhep and the National Awards make you feel fulfilled and happy?

When I made Podokkhep, I was so worked up with a lot of things that I never thought about the response to it, leave alone the National Awards. But the National Awards did not make me ecstatic. Not even in my wildest dreams did I expect to get two National Awards with my first film. I could make the film with honesty and did not think of the consequences.

In both Podokkhep and Dwando, you have written in at least one major character who is a senior citizen. Why?

Senior citizens interest me a lot. I have friends who are 70-plus. We are losing that generation. Their values, their sense of life and their observations - everything fascinates me. They have seen so much of transformation - the Partition, the politically charged 60's and 70's., the economic liberalisation, everything. You can see society reflected in them. They present a condensed form of history. I learn a lot from them. Maybe that reflects in my characters and work.

You do not care for starry names as seen from your two films. Why?

I am not against starry names. If a character demands a starry name, I will go for it. But I will not cast anyone just for the attention and the name. I have to be more astute about the economics of film. I have seen a lot of miscasts in Bengali cinema over the last 10-15 years. I cannot sacrifice my artistic integrity like that.

Looking back on Dwando, do you feel you have achieved what you set out to establish?

There are two things I wanted to explore in Dwando. One, the genre is different from that of Podokkhep. Dwando is basically a chamber drama. The structuring of Dwando was a novel attempt for me. The first part of the film follows an episodic story-telling form while the latter has more of a classical treatment. What is the point if I don't experiment with form? Two, I wanted to explore certain things with Soumitra Chatterjee. His role was diametrically opposite to that in Podokkhep. It needed a radically different performance. It was fun working with him in Dwando. I am happy about the reactions of the audience to his performance in Dwando.

What is your next film?

I have a couple of ideas on which I am working on. One is a satirical comedy and the other is a film on farmer's suicide. This horrific phenomenon is affecting me a lot.