

**“Ghar”
an experimental
short film.**

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18U130023

Guide

Prof. Raja Mohanty

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Approval

The project titled “Ghar” an experimental short film by Pratyush Negi, is approved for partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of ‘Bachelor of Design’ at IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay.

Guide:

Chairperson:

Internal Examiner:

External Examiner:

Date: 9th December 2022

Declaration

I declare that this written document represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission.

I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources, which have thus not been properly cited, or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Pratyush Negi | 18U130023

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Prof. Raja Mohanty for being my guide throughout this wonderful project, providing valuable feedback and criticism on my thoughts and set ambitions for this project and helping me steer this project till the end.

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Abstract

Ghar, a short film is a film that emerges from a personal loss of my maternal grandmother(Naani), my only grandparent left after the loss of my maternal grandfather(Nana) in 2011, while I was 10 years old. Being too young to process the loss of my Nana I grew up with the sole grandparent love of my Naani. An incredible person through and through, her heart and soul as pure as the glacial water of the Himalayas. Her unconditional love and warmth brought so much joy in all of our lives. With her unexpected demise in Feb '22 due to cancer, it was a grave shock for the entire family. It left a huge hole in everyone's heart. While I was in Bombay far away from home through the entirety of this, I was devastated with this news as I couldn't see her in her last moments nor could I visit her cremation being so far away from home.

This film is an attempt to try and capture the essence of what I went through from the moment I got the news to the time I actually visited her place back home.

A short film of 7:45 minutes is my first attempt of filmmaking. Planning, writing and shooting a short film from scratch is a challenge I undertook in this project. This project is my attempt to understand the art and craft of filmmaking.

1. Introduction

This project started with my initial interest in video form of self expression. I had few ideas in mind that stemmed from my personal life event(a break up), where I found a way of seeing mundane things differently. I related mundane objects like a simple plastic cloth hook to a person who is a stranger in your life now. What is the difference between that mundane object and a stranger that you will never talk to in your life again or even a complete stranger. They both are just numbers on a paper that justifies their existence. The difference comes once they become personal to you. Be it a mundane object/item or a stranger. Once they are personal you have a connection with it. So “can i create something out of this thought?” was the initial idea that led me to my art exploration. And finally landed me on a video art and art installation idea. The idea was to make short videos like quick advertisements that all relate to a similar idea that I am trying to highlight(idea as mentioned above). However it wasn't very well thought out and turned out to be a bit superficial once critiqued. Hence I had to rethink the course of the project.

One of the example of such video was titled “sensory overload”. A five minute short film that consisted of a young adult going through huge amounts of information on their working laptop to consuming endless entertainment content on their phone. Meanwhile

there is a shot of 2 mins of cup noodles being prepared in a microwave. The film sticks to the entire 2 mins of preparation of cup noodles in one shot forcing the viewer to question such decision. The idea was to make something that provokes questions instead of providing direct answers. However lacking in it's idea and execution this film was more or less a fail.

Further there was the idea of an art installation at the end of the semester of the props used in the film to give you an experience of the film just with the props.

However both these ideas failed to convince the panel jury and forced me to change the project path.

Then came the idea of short film. A short film emerged from a personal loss. Personal loss of my dear Naani(maternal grandmother). A short film to come to terms with the loss. A film to give the viewer an essence of the emotions I went through dealing with this loss while being far away from my home and then when I finally go back how I dealt with her absence and how did I recover from all that. A deeply personal film idea.

This project introduced me to the wonderful world of filmmaking and made me realise the nuances and details of this meticulous craft called film making.

My major inspirations being Amit Dutta, Chloe Zhao and Wong Kar Wai. These were the directors that caught my attention the most by their unique individual directions and inspired me deeply to create my own body of work in the similar medium.

Moreover after familiarising myself with good body of work I had to take up the challenge of telling my story in an authentic form while respecting the art of story telling and film making. A hard challenge of making a film all alone, film primarily being a collaborative effort requiring support of a cinematographer, sound designer, art director, producer etc.

It was a very ambitious project and opened my eyes to the insanely meticulous and demanding craft of filmmaking.

A little more on the inspirations

Amit Dutta

A filmmaker from Jammu, he is considered to be one of the most significant contemporary practitioners of experimental cinema in India. I particularly loved his ability to use the regional scenery of the Himalayas and tell interesting stories with minimal dialogues with his his personal touch. Vivid scenes. Painting like frames. Frames from “Nainsukh” 2010 & “The Seventh Walk” 2013.



A little more on the inspirations

Chloe Zhao

Chloé Zhao, is a Chinese filmmaker, known primarily for her work on independent films. She has her own unique cinematography style that feels very natural and her films are anchored on the main protagonist's experiences through the story. Her visuals and storytelling inspired me particularly in her film "Nomadland" 2020.



A little more on the inspirations

Wong Kar Wai

Wong Kar-wai BBS is a Hong Kong film director, screenwriter, and producer. His films are characterised by nonlinear narratives, atmospheric music, and vivid cinematography involving bold, saturated colours. I personally loved his way of showing intense movements or action scenes with the use of technique step printing. Stills from “Chungking Express” 1994.



2. Story Development

Ghar, is a story about loss and hope.

Logline:

"A young adult in his early 20s goes back home in a remote Himalayan village after the loss of his Naani as his family helps him heal and get back on his journey of finding a job in the city."

It encapsulates the feelings of going through a loss of a loved one, a family member and how the company of a family helps heal the grief and give new hope to the grieving.

Story is about a young adult studying in college, in a city far away from home. As he longs for home, one day his Naani passes away. He is shocked with her unexpected demise. He goes back home after months. Loss of his Naani finally feels real to him. He is depressed with her demise and questions why does he have to leave his loved ones and work in a foreign land far away from home? Going back home he heals with the love of his family and community around him. And he realises the true meaning of home. Home is something one carries with oneself. Re-energised he sets off again to the city. City is the place of the homeless, where the homeless find homes in the company of each other.

2.1 Ideation

The story ideation began with going through my personal events chronologically and jotting down key events and points. Initially the story became too big and I was expecting a 25-30 min movie. Having never made a film before I was unaware of the challenges of film making. After few discussions with Prof. Balan and friends who have made films before, they advised me to make it into a short film. A friend advised me to make it as short as possible while keeping the right emotion for considerable ease of production considering I was taking this project alone. And finally decided to go ahead with a film length of 7-9 mins.

Main Idea: The story is about a young man in his early 20s, studying far away from home in a city. He wants a job. Misses home and family. Want his family to be with him. But he also wants to achieve something on his own.

2.1.2 Character development

According to the principles mentioned in John Truby's book, The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller, the main characters were carefully designed and placed in an elaborate web of supporting characters. Each one of the side characters helps in strategically forcing the plot into its course, along with exposition.

3.2.1 Young Man:

Weakness and need; He is a young man away from his family and misses his home and Naani dearly. He needs a job to get his loved ones with him in the city.

Desire; To find a good job for him so he can bring his Naani to Mumbai with him.

Opponents; The distance between him and his family.

Plan; Try and find a good job that allows him to get a home in the city so he can bring his Naani to Mumbai.

Battle; Unexpected death of his Naani makes him consider his strive for a job and what makes a home.

Self-revelation; Going back home he realises home isn't made by the structure but the people in it.

New equilibrium; He finds hope in what is left and gets back on his path of finding a job.

There are two more characters in the film supporting the main character in this story. The Aunt and her son(young brother) in the movie.

The Aunt plays the role of a motherly figure especially after the loss of the Naani she is there to fill up the space and the younger brother is there to symbolise hope and joy a new day brings.

In the story the protagonist helps the younger brother make his school project a windmill power-plant playing the role of an adult helping the younger one and finding happiness in doing so with him.

While the aunt is always there to play the role of a caretaker.

2.1.3 Story world

The story world is set in three locations.

First is the iit hostel room of the protagonist. Where he dreams about a job and does his work.

Second is the family home back in the remote Himalayas, the one that he misses.

Third is the train that connect both his worlds.

Since it was a personal story inspired set it meant I had to shoot in locations outside far away from IIT campus. Being that far away required a lot of planning and cooperation of a lot of people. From my friends in providing me filming gear to my family members back home in their cooperation.

The story is set in the Himalayan mountains of Bushahar region in Shimla district. Place where I have grown up showcasing my home environment and culture to the world.

However having such far fetched locations for shoot meant it came with a lot of challenges, with also a lot of outdoor shots meant I was at the mercy of the outdoor natural lighting window. Shooting in train was another challenge.

3. Production

3.1 Screenwriting

Screenwriting it particularly was hard because having never approached a film writing I began initially with thinking of a 25 min film. But later on after talking about it with friends and pros I was asked to make it to a short film not more 12 mins or if i could even make it about 5-7 mins.

This drastically changed how i approached screenwriting for my film. It was taking a long time particularly having never written a screenplay or a script before it was very challenging. So instead I sketched out the visuals of shots I had in my mind and later began describing those. To write a script for a short film I even took inspiration from poems like “ghar” by Hindi poet Agyeya and courses like “writing a short” by youngscreenwriters. However my main enemy was time and it was something I did not have enough to properly go through multiple iterations of screenplays and reiterate. Due to the ambitious shoot locations whatever little time I had from the third p2 presentation was spent on planning the trip and shoot.

3.1.1 Dialogues

Being a short film I knew I had to approach it with very little dialogues, or not a lot of dialogues. Being inclined more on visual story-telling I chose to keep the dialogues absolutely minimal, only used in case of utmost requirement. Rest I chose to convey story only visually and not orally.

Initially I thought of a poem narration narrative in the local Pahadi dialect of the region. However after talking Prof. Balan, he advised me to not use any poem narration in the background because it might take viewers attention from the screen visuals and rather let the visuals talk. So the challenge here was to create an interesting visual narrative.

“Ghar” by Agyeya (1911-87)

मेरा घर	दूसरों के घर	घर
दो दरवाज़ों को जोड़ता	भीतर की ओर खुलते हैं	मेरा कोई है नहीं,
एक घेरा है	रहस्यों की ओर	घर मुझे चाहिए :
मेरा घर	जिन रहस्यों को वे खोलते नहीं।	घर के भीतर प्रकाश हो
दो दरवाज़ों के बीच है	शहरों में होते हैं	इसकी भी मुझे चिन्ता नहीं है;
उसमें किधर से भी झाँको	दूसरों के घर	प्रकाश के घेरे के भीतर मेरा घर हो-
तुम दरवाज़े से बाहर देख रहे होगे	दूसरों के घरों में	इसी की मुझे तलाश है।
तुम्हें पार का दृश्य दीख जाएगा	दूसरों के घर	ऐसा कोई घर आपने देखा है?
घर नहीं दीखेगा।	दूसरों के घर हैं।	देखा हो
मैं ही मेरा घर हूँ।	घर	तो मुझे भी उसका पता दें
मेरे घर में कोई नहीं रहता	है कहाँ जिनकी हम बात करते हैं	न देखा हो
मैं भी क्या मेरे घर में रहता हूँ?	घर की बातें	तो मैं आपको भी
	सबकी अपनी हैं	सहानुभूति तो दे ही सकता हूँ
तुम्हारा घर वहाँ है	घर की बातें	मानव हो कर भी हम-आप
जहाँ सड़क समाप्त होती है	कोई किसी से नहीं करता	अब ऐसे घरों में नहीं रह सकते
पर मुझे जब सड़क पर चलते ही जाना है	जिनकी बातें होती हैं	जो प्रकाश के घेरे में हैं
तब वह समाप्त कहाँ होती है?	वे घर नहीं हैं।	पर हम बेघरों की परम्पर हमदर्दी के
तुम्हारा घर...		घेरे में तो रह ही सकते हैं।

3.2 Shot breakdown

Due the varied locations of shoot and unavailability of advanced filming gear I had to plan the shots accordingly. Since the location was so far away I could not pre plan the type of shots to be taken at what levels and from which angles. That happens by visiting the location and then analysing the situation over there. However due to unavailability of this facility I had to reach at the location and then start planning my shots.

With rough initial idea of how I wanted the shots to look like I began shot selections. Most of the shots were shot at slightly high level with 12 mm wide angle iphone camera lens hand held in order to add drama and tell the story through the space around the protagonist. A lot of shots were also shot at eye level with 52mm iphone camera lens hand held. While some shots used tripods most of the shots were handheld.

Most of the shots made use of natural lighting and were shot in morning and evening golden hour timings in order to keep visual coherence while looking aesthetically pleasing.

3.3 Location Scouting

Given the story was inspired from personal events shoot locations were already decided; The story world is set in three locations.

First is the iit hostel room of the protagonist. Where he dreams about a job and does his work.

Second is the Naani's home back in the remote Himalayas, the one that he misses.

Third is the train that connect both his worlds.

Unable to go prior to planning to the Naani's house I had plan shoot based on the memory of the location and then of course improvise while actually being in the location. However having such far fetched locations for shoot meant it came with a lot of challenges, with also a lot of outdoor shots meant I was at the mercy of the outdoor natural lighting window. Shooting in train was another challenge. Procuring train tickets to go back and the travel itself was a massive challenge. Getting train tickets confirmed in time was a huge distress. Being so far away it took me 5 days of travel just to reach at the location. Train shots were done in the morning and in th evening around the golden hour.

Having such locations certainly came with a lot of uncertainty and I had to be very spontaneous and on my toes to make the most out of it. A very challenging task especially for doing a film project for the first time.

3.4 Casting

Casting people was another challenge. Initially I had planned to act myself in the film however more than that it was really important to shoot the film in the right way. Being the director I had to approach someone else to play the role of me for the film. Shoot being back at my Naani's home and a Himachali protagonist I wasn't left with much options but contact my few cousins and brothers who would be willing to act and work on this film with me. Thankfully upon various requests my younger brother agreed on playing the lead role of the film. Rest for two more there wasn't any casting required since the characters were built around my real family members back at Naani's place and so they just had play themselves given they were convinced rightly and persuaded to act accordingly for the scenes given their convenience, little negotiations and cooperations.

3.5 Shoot scheduling

With the location and lighting in mind along with the availability of the cast the shoot was scheduled accordingly. Most of the shots were taken in the evening around 3:30pm to 5pm, making use of the golden hour time. With the main character most of the shots were taken relatively easily due to his all time availability however shoots of the aunt and younger brother were much harder. Aunt had daily chores plus being in the village this is the peak season of fresh grass harvesting at the place so managing time amongst all that the shoots were planned. With the younger brother a one day shoot on the Sunday was planned because of a morning shot scene which was not possible on the other days due to early morning school timings. A problem when working with real people in their environments and not actors on a set. Quite a challenge to be taken on my very first endeavour of shooting a film. Learning how to shoot with non actors/ real people was a big part of the shoots.

3.6 Equipments

I had with me an iphone 12 pro, that bears a 52mm telephoto lens, 26mm lens and a 12mm wide angle lens with capabilities of shooting in 4k 60fps. I mainly used handheld shots directly holding the phone in my hands and at times utilising a tripod stand for certain shots.

Sound was recorded primarily with the iphone mic itself however a Boya lapel mic was also used to record few high quality audio and ambient sounds.

Naani's home shoot



Train shoot



Hostel room shoot



3.6 Cast & Crew



Akash as Young Man



Sandeepa as The Aunt



Unmukat as Young brother

3.8 Post Production

3.8.1. Editing and colour grading

Most of the editing was done on iMovie. I tried to keep the editing process as simple as possible and planned it accordingly beforehand so it's not very hard to edit it on the software. Hence for most of the editing the software iMovie was more than sufficient. I also tried using DaVinci Resolve however since I work on a MacBook I don't really use a mouse and DaVinci editing being mouse heavy wasn't a favourable choice for me.

Basic colour editing was done on DaVinci Resolve.

3.8.1. Sound design & music

Since I have never approached sound design before I chose to eradicate this part of the film and made a decision to use just music instead. However there are scenes with mild ambient sounds left on.

Music used was procured from youtube, first one by a Turkish indie band on youtube called "Balmorhea Music". Music used was "Remembrance"

Second music was an old classic Hindi song "Ye Jeevan Hai", provided by youtube channel "Bollywood Classics".

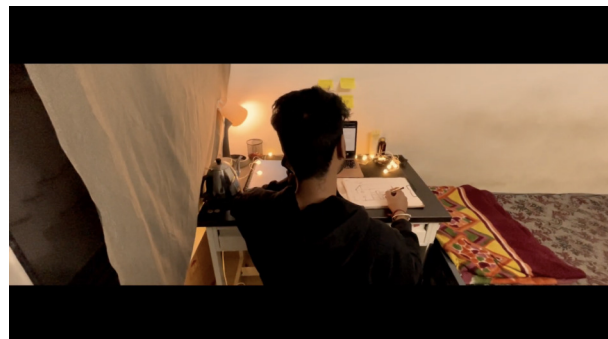
Both the channels allow the use of music on youtube without monetisation.

4. Final Results

4.1. Title & Poster



4.2. Frame Highlights



5. Reflections & next steps

The challenge of solo film making was a very challenging one. It is when you go making a film you realise how much of a collaborative work this craft is. How every little detail influences the end result and results in making a fantastic product in the end.

So far the process has made me learn a lot technically, managing, planning, understanding details that I never understood before etc. and yet there is still a lot more to do and to learn.

From shooting to finishing the first draft of the film it was the most satisfying feeling I have ever had. To be able to finally see a product of my brain in reality was magnificent and to be able to bring it to reality was a challenge I felt I handled well.

In the future I wish to work on more such creative endeavours and create & put a lot more work out there in the public.

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