

Questionnaires

1. Could you please recall when did you first came in contact with Sadhu Meher?

A private screening of 'Ankur' was held at Blaze preview theatre in Colaba. The lead actor Anant Nag who was a close friend, had invited me. Before the screening, the director Shyam Benegal introduced me to Sadhu. I remember shaking hands with this rather shy young man who hardly looked up while talking. I also recollect vividly how excited he was after being heartily congratulated on his stupendous performance. He embraced me and went on talking animatedly for quite some time. Subsequently, we met frequently in previews as well as in parties after the release of each other's films; the acquaintance grew slowly but steadily into friendship and continued over the years.

2. How do you perceive him as an actor and as a human being?
What are the strength and weakness of Sadhu Meher as an actor?

Sadhu was a shy, down to earth human being but he was not diffident. Although he had come from a small city, he was never overawed by the cosmopolitan culture of a metro city and over the top atmosphere of Bollywood. He, despite his slight stammer, was a very eloquent man; being a thinking actor, he knew his strength and was very confident. He approached a role in a methodical way and also had the necessary skill not to show the method or the craft behind his efforts to slip into the character. He made his performance look so natural that one thought it was absolutely effortless. We were part of a mutual-admiration-society since both of us belonged to the same gharana!

3. Could you please tell any incident that happened during the shooting of 'Gharonda'?

First day of our shoot of 'Gharaunda' was in a cramped room of a middle-class household in Vile-Parle, a suburb of Bombay. When I reached the location, I found Sadhu standing somewhere in the background. So I asked him not to hide among the assistants and light boys. His face lit up with my remark and he rushed to me. As we embraced each other, he murmured softly, "Yaar, You are such a big star...I didn't know..."; interrupting him I said, "Is this your way of pulling a friend's leg?" After that moment, I, Sadhu and Jalal Aga were labelled as 'three musketeers' on the sets. We played pranks with a straight face all the time and made life miserable for rest of the crew members.

4. Could you please share how you decided to organize Children Film Festival in Bhubaneswar? I am told that it was almost decided to organize the said festival in Bhopal.

How Mr Meher helped you to organize the festival in Odisha?

I have always believed that Children's film festivals must not be restricted at Metro cities since the kids from Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta & Madras (as those were called at that time) easily get exposed to National/International events whereas the younger generation from smaller cities don't get an opportunity to watch either the quality films made in our country or from other countries around the world. So as the Chairman of Children's Film Society, I organised the first Children's International Film Festival in Bangalore. It was a grand success in spite of the political tensions between the Central government headed by Rajiv Gandhi and Ramkrishna Hegde of Janata Party heading the State government. In his inaugural speech, the Prime Minister promised to be present again for the second edition. Naturally there were quite a few cities vying to host it. The credit for bringing the Festival to Bhubaneswar must go to my council member colleague J. P. Das, writer turned bureaucrat. He with his charming dignity and administrative efficiency managed the show. I had requested Sadhu to help as a trusted lieutenant of my core team, which he did whole heartedly. The unstinted support given by Chief Minister J. B. Patnaik also must be acknowledged. And of course, the Prime Minister did keep his word!

5. How do you want to remember Sadhu Meher?
Do you consider Sadhu Meher as an unsung hero in Hindi film domain?

Undoubtedly, 70s & 80s was a renaissance period of Indian cinema. Large number of low budget films were made during this era. Those were in sharp contrast to the 'larger than life' mainstream films and were patronised whole heartily by the middle class urban audiences. These films acknowledged as 'Parallel Cinema Movement' contributed magnificently took Indian Cinema to greater heights. Actors like myself, *Sadhu Meher*, *Anant & Shankar Nag*, *Naseeruddin Shah*, *Om Puri*, *Shabana Azmi*, *Smita Patil* were the product of that era. Each one of us defied the star system while creating a niche for oneself. None of us is 'unsung', having received the due respect and admiration from not only by the yesteryears' audiences but by the youth of today as well!

8. You have worked in commercial as well as parallel cinema. Could you please tell what made you to choose to act in commercial movies say 'Chitchor' etc?

I can certainly answer this question elaborately but don't you think it is out of place here while this interview is primarily about Sadhu Meher?

9. How do you feel about Odisha?

I continue to be fascinated with the magnificence of this beautiful state. Many years ago, as the lead actor in *Biplab Rai Choudhari's* film 'Ashray', I was exposed to the rich heritage of *Odisha*. Later as a director, I chose to shoot '*Daayraa*' completely in and around the remote corners. The film not only showcased the breathtaking locations but also the rich folk form of *Gotipua* as an integral part of the story. It's a matter of pride that '*Daayraa*' was selected in Time magazine's elite list of 'World's Top Ten Films of 1976' and went on to win a Grand Prix in France.