

By: Rahul Walia

Acclaimed director Santosh Sivan's first English language feature, "Before the Rains" released in the US on May 9th 2008. Produced by Echo Lake Entertainment, the film is presented by Merchant Ivory in association with Adirondack Pictures, Excalibur Pictures and Santosh Sivan productions and stars Rahul Bose, Nandita Das, Linus Roach (Law & Order fame) and two time Tony winning actress Jennifer Ehle.

The film is inspired by an Israeli short film and its story is set in the jungles of Kerala, a place rich with culture, history and awe-inspiring beauty. The story itself has been adapted to take place in the late 1930s against the backdrop of a growing nationalist movement. The film is a story about an idealistic young Indian man (Rahul Bose) who finds himself torn between his ambitions for the future and his loyalty to the past when people in his village learn of an affair between his British boss (Linus Roache) and a village woman (Nandita Das).

Says director Santosh Sivan, "Before the Rains explores the turmoil of a man who is torn between two worlds and the choices he makes to gain his own freedom and embrace his true identity. The film is layered with metaphors, the road being one of them as it depicts the act of violence on nature as the story unfolds. I illustrated this by shooting the film in a style reminiscent of pre-Raphaelite paintings in which the earth itself carries sentiment and is full of symbolism and meaning. The characters are thus miniaturized in the emotional landscape and imagery of the

CM: This is your debut film in English – what made you want to appeal to this genre of audience?

SS: Although the film takes place in India, it can be related to on a universal level. It deals with the struggle that different cultures face in order to live harmoniously in the same place.

CM: Why another film based on colonial India? What message or story are you trying to convey?

SS: It is a universal story about the clash of two cultures. This is something that is apparent to this day with many countries dealing with conflicts between cultures and different backgrounds.

CM: Tell us a little bit about what it took to put this movie together.

SS: I was approached by Echo Lake with a script written by Cathy Rabin. Cathy put in all her effort to insure that the aspects of the story were accurate to Kerala. These long winding roads are used frequently for transporting all sorts of goods. I remember wondering what it was like when they were built and the controversy that was caused during the construction of those roads.

CM: How did the cast and crew do in Kerala?

SS: It was interesting for the cast because they came from many different parts of the world. The crew was all from the UK and both cast and crew anticipated extremely hot weather. They were surprised at the variation in the climate because it is much cooler in the jungles of Kerala as opposed to other parts of the region.

CM: You are a cinematographer as well as a director – how do both these roles facilitate in delivering the ultimate film?

SS: As a director it is my duty to pull all the elements of the story together and ensure that those themes are conveyed through the actors' performance. As the cinematographer, it is my job to visually translate those story ele-

ments and capture those performances on the screen.

CM: "Before the Rains" has been shown in TIFF – how did it fare there?
SS: It did really well and there was a lot of interest from distributors. The festival definitely set forth in motion the plans for theatrical distribution of the film. The audience is also more global in nature, hence it's distinctly different.

CM: Your disappointment at not being able to make it to TIFF for "Asoka" would have been quite strong. How did it feel to finally make it there with another film altogether?

SS: It feels great to have films showcased at TIFF, and I have been fortunate to have my films featured there. *Asoka* was featured there too, but unfortunately, it was closely followed by September 11, hence the festival lost most of the interest surrounding it.

CM: What are your hopes with its slated release on May 9th in the US?

SS: I'm hoping it opens well in the US and fulfills its objective of appealing to a wide variety of audiences as it is a universal story. 🌸

