

I just wanted to make a damn good movie: Ramesh Sippy on 'Sholay'

Fifty years after the blockbuster, Bollywood's veteran director reflects on timeless storytelling, Nepali cinema, censorship, and debunks a popular cinema myth.

How often does a "two-line idea" turn into a timeless project? It happened for **Ramesh Sippy** and his team 50 years ago when 'Sholay' was made.

Released on August 15, 1975, a special day in India, the movie still lives among the young and old for its gripping storyline, unforgettable characters, and jaw-dropping action.

Sippy, the director of this classic, is a veteran of Bollywood as an actor, director, and producer. He is in Kathmandu to attend the Nepal International Film Festival (April 2 to 6).

Ramesh Sippy speaks with the *Post's* **Anish Ghimire** about directing 'Sholay', Nepali cinema, film festivals and sets the record straight on a well-known myth.

You're here to attend the Nepal International Film Festival. Do you think festivals like NIFF can actually shape a film industry, or do they mainly showcase what already exists?

The festival itself is a learning experience. Seeing the work of others, both past and present, provides essential food for thought, allowing filmmakers to refine their own visions. It serves as a guide, showcasing how the global film community is evolving. With that knowledge, crea-

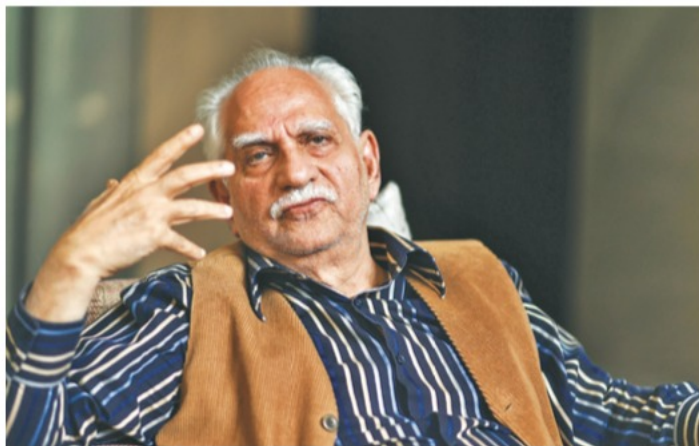
tors are empowered to forge their own paths. Overall, it's a very healthy and vital process for the industry.

Following up on that, how important are festivals in giving smaller industries like Nepal a global cinematic voice?

I believe they are vital because they showcase such a diverse range of films, especially smaller productions. This provides immense encouragement to filmmakers, no matter where they are from. A young filmmaker in Nepal might see something that truly resonates; even if they don't like everything they see, there is no loss—the exposure itself is valuable. It provides the impetus to think: 'If they can create something like this, why can't I do something unique as well?' When a film has the right emotion and substance, it inspires people.

Taking you back a few decades, among your many iconic films, 'Sholay' stands out as the most memorable. Looking back, would you say that without its success, Amitabh Bachchan, Dharmendra, and Hema Malini would have gone on to have the remarkable careers they did?

I'm sure they would have. 'Sholay' was



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not their only success; they all had hits both before and after. However, 'Sholay' became a masterpiece because of them. Their performances added so much depth.

Moments like Dharam ji (Dharmendra) on the water tank—the way he performed that scene was marvellous. Then there were Amitabh Bachchan's touching moments, like the lamp-lighting sequence with Jaya Bhaduri.

Each character lived in their own

world, yet they came together to fight for a man who had lost everything, Thakur. I couldn't have made this film without these actors; it simply wouldn't be the same. From the leads to the smaller roles like Jagdeep and Asrani, every single person contributed something vital. It remains a milestone in all of our lives.

Even those who are no longer with us, like the legendary Amjad Khan and Sanjeev Kumar, contributed immensely. Their work was no less

significant than anyone else's.

The film was released in August 1975, and many reports say you immediately held an emergency meeting because it didn't perform as expected at the box office. Is that true?

Actually, that's not true.

The idea that it didn't get a strong opening is ridiculous. By the second week, I saw people repeating the lines because they were returning to theatres to see it again. Some newspapers did carry headlines calling it a 'disaster', but it took them a long time to retract those words. That created a perception that it picked up only later, but that's not true. Yes, it continued to grow in popularity over time—but it was never rejected at the start. People loved it from the beginning.

Since 'Sholay' became a blockbuster early in your career, do you think it was a bit of a curse in disguise because it overshadowed your later works?

I don't see it as a curse. The level of success 'Sholay' achieved is a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon; even if I wanted to replicate it, it wouldn't be possible. As a filmmaker, your job is simply to do your best with every

project, and I have loved working on all of them.

While my later films may not have matched the sheer scale of Sholay's success, my personal satisfaction was equal across all of them. Each project was different, and for me, the reward was in the challenge of trying something new and bringing it to life. I'm very happy with the body of work I've created.

How has directing changed over the past few decades? How does your first film differ from your latest in terms of style or process?

Directing remains essentially as it has always been. It begins with a complete vision, which you then bring to life by capturing performances on set. While post-production—soundtracks, special effects, and modern technology—has evolved significantly, the core process hasn't changed.

Everything still starts on paper. Once you have your script and your vision, the goal is to execute it. For any filmmaker in any era, the challenges are consistent. You learn from the past—how audiences responded to previous work—and carry those lessons into the future. Every film is a new learning experience.

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