

## Building Blockbusters - A Conversation with Aashish Singh

Aashish Singh is a seasoned film producer and media executive with over two decades of experience in the Indian film industry. Currently a Producer at Red Chillies Entertainment, he is responsible for developing a strong content slate for the studio. Singh has previously held senior roles at Yash Raj Films, Netflix India, Lyca Productions, and Balaji Motion Pictures, and has been associated with major films such as Chak De! India, Sultan, Tiger Zinda Hai, and the Dhoom franchise. Known for his deep understanding of film production, distribution, and global content strategy, he has played a key role in shaping some of the biggest projects in contemporary cinema.

**Moderator: Larisa Magkaeva**

Head of International Cooperation Department, Moskino

**Larisa Magkaeva:** Let's start, amazing career path... over 35 countries... I am honoured, please share with us the highlights and your best experiences.

**Aashish Singh:** I have been lucky to have worked with some of the best companies, Yash Raj Films, Balaji Telefilms, Lyca Productions, and now with Red Chillies, and in the middle with Netflix.

I want to talk about the promoters of the companies from whom I learnt... that's an experience that I cannot forget. Each one of them had passion for making great stories. So sometimes in the mix of everything that we do, the business side takes over. But each one of these people are more interested in telling stories that can travel the world and do well in India.

So that's the first learning for any of us. Business side is important, but if we handle the creative side well, the business will do well in any case.

I have had a good fortune of shooting in 35 countries and each one has been unique.

Over a span of 25 years, things have changed for India, in terms of how we were perceived. Earlier, people used to think that Indian producers are not professional, they bargain a lot. (chuckles) And rightfully or wrongfully, at the end of the day, everybody wants best for their company, so people did do that from Indian perspective.

But now, in 25 years, there's a huge change. People see value in Indian productions. People know the number of eyeballs that watch an Indian production and what that does to tourism in their countries. So, it's a very different world now and a good Indian film is welcomed in any country.

This makes it a lot easier for us in terms of approaching the film commissions, availing the rebates, and convincing local people how important it is to bring an Indian film to their country.

**Larisa Magkaeva:** Speaking about the passion, the writers, who probably must have a look at the location to create the story, but if we go back to the business, at the end of the day the producers are numbers guys. The film commissions offer different incentives, apart from the rebates. What else is interesting for you as a big producer to choose one destination over another?

**Aashish Singh:** This is an important question that we get asked very often by film commissions & tourism boards.

So one is the creative side of it. A location can inspire a writer or the geography of the location can dictate where you want to shoot. And there are scripts that are only directly related to a certain location. But in my learning, eventually the commerce always wins. So, the creative can kind of dictate where you want to shoot, but commerce books the tickets and decides where the unit will land.

But there are some exceptions like 'Befikre' produced by Yash Raj Films, Where we could have gone to another country and saved a lot of money but

we ended up shooting in Paris as the Director thought Paris is the best backdrop for the film.

**Larisa Magkaeva:** Can you give an advice to new destinations who are trying to bring big productions into their city or country... what should we emphasise on and how should we sell ourselves (destination)?

**Aashish Singh:** What helps is the kind of support you see from the film commissions, tourism bodies, people who are responsible for clearances. And very importantly, the local line producers. Because at the end of the day, the producer is dealing with that line producer from that country. If you feel secure with them and feel that your money is safe, you tend to deal more with that line producer and indirectly with that country also.

For newer destinations, it is important to come and meet the Indian producers. While you can Google everything, it's personal interaction that

is so important and so is your delegation coming to India.

Most of the countries now have rebates which always helps but what may also help is (supporting) smaller films which are equally important. While some of the rebates are related to a minimum spend so may be exceptions can be made for those films where threshold to qualify for a rebate is much lower.

Also it's not just about the Hindi market, a lot of focus should also be given to the other markets of India where great films are being made, in terms of scale, size and their global reach. So one should look at reaching out to other states and regions as well.

Overall, I think it's about building the confidence in terms of locations, what does the producer get in return in form of rebates and ease of shooting.

**Larisa Magkaeva:** Let's speak about something else. You have to feel at



Larisa Magkaeva

home in the country that invites you for a project. How can they adapt to make your crew feel at ease? And how the Indian crew can also adapt because we are coming from different cultural backgrounds. Can you give us some inputs on this from your amazing experiences?

**Aashish Singh:** The answer is very simple. Give them good Indian food (Chuckles).

While the director or the actor may be very passionate and has a lot to gain by putting in that extra effort but what about the light man who is working for 12 hours? He needs good food!

Then, there is another thing I should have mentioned before. There are unions that become a little negative for the producers in terms of hours of shooting and the turnaround time etc. That should be taken care of. The authorities say that don't apply all union rules on Indian productions as they have a different way of working. As we also want to maximise the work and save money.

But the bottom line is keep the unit happy by giving them good food.

**Larisa Magkaeva:** Thank you for such an insightful conversation and sharing your expertise and memories with us.



Aashish Singh