

director's forum

YOU may have heard of East African Indians fleeing to Mother England, and Dr Hastings Banda expelling 40 Malawi Asians. Ever heard of an Indian settled in Tanzania who came back to India and turned out to be a much talked-about Hindi film director in Bombay? He is Chandra Barot, a young man in his early 30's, a brother of Kamal Barot, the playback singer.

Chandra Barot stays on the first floor of a block of apartments off Pedder Road. The living room looks very lived-in. Chandra's other sister is learning Urdu from a moulvi-ish gentleman. She's the one who went to Raj Kapoor's Loni farm to see Zeenat's "resurrection." Two paintings by Shepherd, one of an African bull elephant, the other of a herd of dustlashed zebras, adorn the walls. There's a colorful parrot in a cage, looking vaguely Tanzanian. And, of course, there is Chandra himself, haggard, wearing a Carnaby St. T-shirt.

Chandra was a cashier in Barclays Bank in Dar-es-Salaam in the early 60's. He was born and brought up there. He knows the Masai country better than Bombay's backlanes, and can tell you the height of Mt. Kilimanjaro to the last inch.

He came to India in 1964, to visit Kamal, en route to London, where he hoped to make his home. Kamal introduced her brother to Kalyanji-Anandji, and the music duo took a liking to Chandra. No one knows how they foresaw his directorial capabilities. The fact remains that they introduced Chandra, in turn, to the great Manoj Kumar. Such things don't happen to everybody — the chance to meet Mr Bharat so easily.

Before Chandra could say *Roti, Kapada Aur Makaan*, Manoj had dissuaded him from proceeding to London. And Chandra joined Vishal International Productions as an Assistant Director.

But doesn't Manoj have a platoon of assistant directors? Yes, he does, and Chandra was the ninth and junior-most assistant. "Manoj used to call us his navratnas," he says. He worked with Manoj on four films — *Shaheed*, *Purab Aur Pacchim*, *Shor* and *Roti, Kapada* ... By the time the last film was complete, he had been promoted as Manoj's No. 1 assistant. It was the usual story of the Fast Rise, of a bank cashier discovering his metier in, of all things, film direction. Not plain film direction, but Hindi film direction. And Chandra Barot had the sense to learn all the ropes under the director cum scripwriter cum producer cum storywriter: "Manojji".

Chandra's favorite topic of conversation, next to himself is Manoj. Since we have already heard most of the platitudes aimed at Manoj, it would be pointless repeating them here. Suffice it to quote Chandra on one point: "Manoj always treated me as a close friend, (sic) not as

Chandra Barot was a cashier at Barclays Bank Dar-es-Salaam. He came in '64 to meet his sister, singer Kamal Barot. She introduced him to Kalyanji Anandji. They liked him and saw directorial capabilities in him. He worked with Manoj on four films. Now he is a director in his own right.



From Manoj-ji with love



an assistant. There was therefore no restriction of complexes, and I learnt a lot. And I learnt fast."

After *Roti, Kapada* ..., Chandra decided to branch out on his own. The decision was extremely painful, he recalls, and Manoj was the main factor in his ultimate breakaway. But, there was absolutely no bad blood, he

is quick to point out. He left with Manoj's blessings, and even today, he says, Manoj takes a great deal of (fatherly interest in Chandra's work).

The story of Chandra's departure from the Manoj camp is quite exciting. Manoj's No. 1 assistant, Sikandar Khanna, branched out independently midway through

Shor, and, Chandra says, "I took his place. And then Nariman Irani, Manoj's cameraman, decided to produce his own film. He asked me to direct it for him. I was reluctant, but Manoj himself advised me not to drop this chance."

Which is how Chandra Barot is directing *Don*. He's pretty excited about this film,

and, at the slightest provocation, proceeds to rattle off his credits: Starring Amitabh and Zeenat and Pran and Satyen Kappu, music by ... and so on. *Don* is one of those very Indian dhishum dhishum films. But "I will let you in on a secret," Chandra tells me. "All friends told me long ago to change *Don's* story. We foresaw the Censor restrictions, and so whatever shooting I did in the period after *Sholay* was released, has been on a script that should find no obstacles in the censoring theatre." At this stage, Chandra begins to resemble the cat that caught its hundredth mouse. I mean to say he looks suitably smug.

So *Don* is the only thing that counts in Chandra's life now. He's hoping it will be released around Diwali, and the way he has spoken about it, it promises to be a big thing—Amitabh playing *Don*, a gambler. Parts of the film are shot in a circus. The script is by Salim-Javed. Chandra thinks it's the best they've ever turned out.

Working with Manoj has not cramped his style, Chandra insists. He is "basically trying to direct in my own style. Manoj's perfectionism and finesse have naturally rubbed off on me. Moreover, the technical crew and even the cast is full of familiar faces. So the atmosphere is very much like those days as Manoj's Assistant Director."

Chandra Barot is very ambitious. He has no qualms about making out-and-out commercial films. He doesn't mind rejecting dozens of offers in the interest of maintaining his standard in the few films he does accept. And his reputation has already spread. The rumour is that if he signs a contract, the financiers immediately rush to him with money. Umpteen small producers have therefore besieged Chandra, often with wild schemes.

Three films in the future are what excite Chandra most. The first he himself is producing, under the Barot Films banner. The story is by Abrar Alvi, and he has signed up Dilip Kumar and Saira Banu, and Reena Roy, Amjad Khan, Asrani, Om Shivpuri, and Satyen Kappu. The second film Chandra is directing is a 70 mm presentation by Manav Mandir Movies, and the third under the Ashirwad Pictures (of *Roti* fame) banner. Both these films have Amitabh-Zeenat in the cast.

What else can one say about Chandra Barot? He is very friendly with "Amit-Jaya" (Jaya is considered a sister by Chandra's sisters), he has excellent vibes with "Zeenie." He takes life as it comes, and life has treated him well this far.

I bid Chandra farewell, and his parrot lets out a Swahili screech.

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