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The 'write' influence

Ten young filmmakers are being mentored by the gurus of screenplay writing

ROHINI NAIR

THE ASIAN AGE

For aspiring filmmakers, the chance to be mentored by leading lights of the screenwriting world — including Shekhar Kapur, Guillermo Arriaga (*21 Grams*), José Rivera (*The Motorcycle Diaries*) and Kasi

Lemmons (*Eve's Bayou*) — may seem too good to be true, but a select few are living that dream. After a gruelling selection process, the authors of eight screenplays were chosen to undergo an intensive five-day workshop with Kapur, Arriaga et al as part of the Mumbai Mantra/Sundance

Screenwriters Lab. Mumbai Mantra chairman Rohit Khattar says helping young Indian filmmakers write better stories was the motivating factor behind the programme. "We began by asking potential applicants, 'Do you have a good story?' Before we knew it, we had 500 applications in English,

Hindi, Bengali...a jury comprising Zoya Akhtar, Shyam Benegal, Shabana Azmi helped decide on these eight." Speaking from the workshop, Kartik Singh, whose film *Public School* was selected for the Lab, "I am learning here how to go from good to great, and it gives me a lot of hope for my film."



(L-R) Mentors Shekhar Kapur, Michelle Satter, Kasi Lemmons, Alesia Weston

MUMBAI MANTRA/SUNDANCE INSTITUTE SCREENWRITERS LAB FELLOWS:

Vikas Chandra
(*Toothache*)
Toothache follows Kim, a North Korean expat wife who lives in Delhi during the Emergency. "I am obsessive about not losing the one trait that brought me into this — the joy of watching movies," he says.



Ajitpal Singh Dhaliwal
(*Manjhi*)
Ajitpal says *Manjhi* "is the story of a troubled soul's battle to find dignity and love". He was previously selected by the Goethe Institute to explore co-production possibilities with German filmmakers at the Munich Film Festival.



Prashant Nair (*Umrica*)
When Udai abandons his native Jitvapour for a better life in the United States of "Umrica", young Ramkant must follow in his footsteps to find out what happened to his brother. "The Lab is the best thing that could have happened to my script," says Prashant.



Shonali Bose with Nilesh Maniyar (*Margarita. With a Straw.*)
Margarita. With a Straw. is about Laila, a brilliant mind trapped in a disobedient body," says Shonali. Shonali's first film, *Amu*, about the Sikh genocide of 1984, won her two National Awards.





MUMBAI
MANTRA



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See it before others do

This quality needs to be inbuilt in every screen writer, believes Audrey Wells who has crafted cinematic delights such as *Under The Tuscan Sun*, *The Truth About Cats And Dogs* among many more



ROHINI NAIR

THE ASIAN AGE

From the sun-dappled coming of age film *Under The Tuscan Sun*, or the goofy romcom *The Truth About Cats And Dogs*, Audrey Wells has helmed some memorable films that the female movie-going public counts among its favourites. Audrey has not just directed these films, but also written them, in addition to other films like 2004's *Shall We Dance?* and the Brendan Fraser-starrer *George of the Jungle*.

In the city over the weekend, Audrey says she would love a chance to try her hand at a true-blue Bollywood film, although she admits she hasn't seen any. "However, I have seen bits of films that Aishwarya Rai has been in, and I'm a huge fan!" she says.

Being a woman writer-director — and having strong female protagonists in her films — means Audrey is often questioned about whether her gender influences her work. "Yes...but some of my films have animal protagonists but I'm not a dog, am I?" she quips. "My films have male, female, children and animal protagonists. Is my perspective influenced by being a woman? Yes. But I would say that my opportunities are also influenced by being a woman."



(Anti-clockwise from left) A still from *Shall We Dance?*; *Under The Tuscan Sun*; *The Truth About Cats And Dogs* and Audrey Wells



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Audrey says she is inspired by her own experiences and those of her friends in penning her stories ("It's dangerous to be my friend — you'll end up in one of my screenplays!"), as also by numerous literary figures. But does being a director also influence how she writes a screen-

play? Audrey replies, "I love to direct the movies that I write, but I think all good screenplay writers are already filmmakers. If you're a good screenwriter, you already see the shot when you're writing it. You write visually. This is what separates a screenwriter from a novelist or other types of writers."

Next up for Audrey is a film about a football team formed by African refugees in the US, a project she finds interesting because "these people are still living the American dream in a way we're not". It seems to be a different film from the romantic comedies she is best known for. "I don't make movies because I believe in making art for art's sake," Audrey says after a pause. "I make cinema as a way to help people live their lives. When people see something of themselves reflected on screen, it makes them feel less alone. So a romantic comedy can have the effect of holding a mirror up to society in the same way that a drama can, and a romantic comedy can give a feeling of connection to the viewer, that is just as important as what you might get from watching a tragic, social film."



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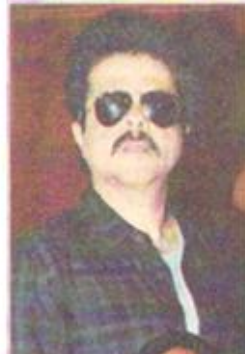


● Ramesh Sippy and Kiran Juneja

● Rohan Sippy

● Subhash Ghai

● Javed Jaffrey



● Anil Kapoor

Storytellers get together

✓ Filmmakers and Bollywood's famed storytellers came together to celebrate the announcement of Mumbai Mantra, an initiative to tap exciting screenwriters. Javed Akhtar, Ramesh Sippy, Sudhir Mishra, Subhash Ghai came to support new talent, as did Shabana Azmi, Suneeta Rao, Parveen Dabbas and Javed Jaffrey. Actor Anil Kapoor, free from Hollywood commitments and not much to do in Bollywood, too made it to the event.



● Parveen Dabbas



● Sudhir Mishra



● Suneeta Rao



● Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar and Zoya Akhtar