

I rip off Steven Spielberg: Manoj Shyamalan

Manoj Night Shyamalan has been one of the few filmmakers of Indian origin who have made their mark in Hollywood and his work has been acknowledged by India, which has honoured him with the Padma Shri.

'It was great! It made me feel re-connected with my roots. It made me feel India understood the relevance of a journey that was so meaningful to me,' Shyamalan told IANS in an interview.

The man behind global hits like 'The Sixth Sense' and 'Signs', however, feels that India is obsessed with his box-office performance.

'You can't judge my career by the box-office alone. It feels like everyone is five years behind. When I go to [Europe](#) they talk mainly about my (newer films) 'Unbreakable' and 'The Village',' said the filmmaker who was nominated for the Oscars in 1999.

Shyamalan also disagrees with the criticism that he is a 'one pony trick' man as all his movies have a supernatural twist.

'I never had an agenda. All my movies are conversations about faith. The supernatural element just happened. I think my life illustrates a shift in culture where I may be American. But at heart I remain very Indian.'

When told that 'The Sixth Sense' remains a most ripped-off film, he said, 'At the end of the day we're all borrowing from one another. I was ripping off Steven Spielberg anyway. I even told Steven that.'

Excerpts:

Q: I am not going to ask you what you think of Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan.

A: Ha, ha, thank you.

Q: So how was it receiving the Padma Shri?

A: It was great! My family came with me to see me get the award. It was wonderful. It made me feel re-connected with my roots. It made me feel India understood the relevance of a journey that was so meaningful to me.

Q: You reached a critical and box-office peak with 'The Sixth Sense' in 1999. Has the momentum in your career been lost thereafter?

A: No! What you've just said is something I've not heard abroad for seven years. I hear this a lot in India. It feels like everyone is five years behind. You can't judge my career by the box-office alone.

Q: Well some of your films have been critical failures too.

A: 'The Sixth Sense' being one of them. Yes, it did get nominated for the Oscars. But if you're talking about Oscars, that's just 500 of my peers. My very next film disproved the myth that you've

portrayed about my movies.

'Unbreakable' is actually my most resonant movie. I feel I surpassed my previous film as a moviemaker over here, although it was my lowest-grossing movie for a while. That was an irony for me. And time has proven that it was wrongly received. It's my personal favourite.

Q: So would you say that 'The Sixth Sense' was in a sense your millstone rather than milestone?

A: Only in India. So I don't know what it says about the culture here. When I go to Europe they talk mainly about my 'Unbreakable' and 'The Village'.

Q: The first world has moved on, we're frozen in our perceptions of your abilities.

A: I don't know what the third world is. But there's a critical mass that believes there's no way 'The Lady In The Water' could be better than 'The Sixth Sense'. But I feel four of my films are better than 'The Sixth Sense'.

Q: Which ones?

: 'Unbreakable', 'Lady In The Water', 'The Village' and my latest film 'The Happening'. But I think 'The Sixth Sense' is better than 'Signs'.

Q: Where do you place your latest film in your oeuvre?

A: 'The Happening' is definitely my scariest movie. It's probably the most intense experience that I've had so far. The 90 minutes of playing time offer the most incredibly intense experience for the audience.

Q: 'The Sixth Sense' remains a most ripped-off film.

A: (laughs) Yes. When I see films like 'I Am Legend', I feel good about the fact that I was making an inspiring supernatural film, although mine was different. At the end of the day we're all borrowing from one another. I was ripping off Steven Spielberg anyway. No, seriously. I even told Steven that. After I finished my latest film 'The Happening' I watched 'Invasion Of The Body Snatchers'. The opening credits of both films are the same! It just happened.

Q: Have you grown up watching horror-supernatural films?

A: I definitely love them. But can you just ask one more question? My family is waiting for me.

Q: Ok...You make cameo appearances in your films. Are you inspired by Subhash Ghai?

A: I say no to the second part of your question because I don't know who that is. I'm content doing what I'm doing. But if I come across a role in my films that seems right or I fall in love with a character, I do it. But it gets trickier to play roles when I'm Indian and a certain age and now famous, it's hard to find myself roles in my films.

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