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Dev Benegal making third film

He is just two films old but director **Dev Benegal** is already a name to reckon with in Indian cinema's new genre of bilingual movies. Four years ago *English, August*, a satire on the Indian bureaucracy, became the first small-budget independent film to savour commercial success. His second venture, *Split Wide Open*, is doing very well on the commercial circuit and has been declared the third highest grosser among art films.

Now Dev Benegal, who cut his teeth in filmmaking while assisting his uncle, celebrated director **Shyam Benegal**, has embarked on his third venture -- *Ravan and Eddie* -- which he discloses is also based on contemporary Indian literature.

Following are excerpts from an interview with Dev Benegal:

Q. Did you expect 'Split Wide open' to be a commercial success?

A. Quite honestly, no. But what had happened was that *English August* was very successful, so we were hoping the same audience would come back to watch this film. What we did not realise was how wide it would be. Credit goes to 20th Century Fox and to Aditya Shastri who heads Fox in India, who saw the movie and instantly recognised its worth. He said 'I want to take it as wide as possible and don't want it to be an elitist art house movie.' He has been proved right. It has run in towns and cities where one never have imagined a movie like this -- which doesn't have typical songs, dances and Bollywood fantasy and melodrama -- to work. But it is running in its tenth week. It is a very tough movie in the sense that it is not a comedy. It is a dark movie. And that Fox has been able to do this suggests there is a new audience, a new India and they are looking at new movies and want new movies.

Q. What do you mean by new movies?

A. What I mean is they don't want movies of Bollywood style, movies that are pure three-hour-long fantasy. They are now open to looking and watching and paying money to go and watch different movies, new movies.

Q. Would new movies be synonymous with parallel cinema?

A. I think new movie is very different. The next generation of filmmakers is young, contemporary, urban, which draws on Indian tradition, melodrama and narrative as well as modern contemporary styles of filmmaking and subverts them, uses them and so on. It does not have ideological baggage that pulled down the 60s and 70s films in terms of what is real and what is not real. It says here's what life is, here is what a simple story is or a complex story is. Today what is really phenomenal is that audiences are open to this kind of film.

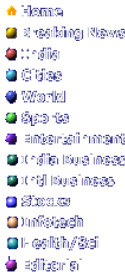
Q. Any particular reason for making bilingual films?

A. We are a multi-lingual culture. That is what I was saying very consciously in my first film, India is based on difference, not homogenous, it is the difference which gives us richness, difference which gives us meaning.

Q. Critics have said that Rahul Bose is too nattily dressed for his role and his Hindi is too sophisticated in *Split Wide Open*?

A. His character is based on lot of young people whom we met on the streets of Bombay (Mumbai), Delhi, Calcutta and Madras (Chennai), Bangalore, whom we also called into our workshops to check the dialogues. They taught him how to speak, how to walk, what to wear. In many ways it has

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their ratification, it is something that reflects their life.

Q. It has also been pointed out that the portrayal of issues in the film is exaggerated?

A. The film represents a cross-section of city that I live in. Everyday when I step out of Bombay this is what I confront, this is what I see happening right in front of me -- it is not something unusual or special that I pulled out or drawn out and want to split wide open. This is life in front of me. We tend to look at life with rosy eyes thinking that with five dotcom companies launching everyday in Bombay or other cities it is wonderful, but it is not really, is it?

Q. *English August* was based on a novel and so is your forthcoming film *Ravan and Eddie*. Any particular reason?

A. Both novels interested me. I made *English August* because I could identify with the protagonist, it was dealing with a lot of what I was going through. *Split Wide Open* grew out of what I was living through in an urban city in India and *Ravan and Eddie* is about my coming to terms with fantasy and reality. That in a country of extreme poverty the only reality is fantasy. That is what *Ravan and Eddie* is about, contemporary Indian literature is very original, very strong and moving.

Q. Have you finalised the cast?

A. No, it is still under wraps, but it will most probably be with mainstream actors and stars because it is about Bollywood, the underworld and stuff like that. (IANS)

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