

Screenwriters Lab Participants and Projects

- **EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH**
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Writer/Director

(Co-written by Maitrey Bajpai and Ramiz Ilham Khan)
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Writer/Director
- **SHAKTIPUR CRUDE**
Gaurav Madan
Writer/Director
- **SVADHARMA**
Deepanjali B Sarkar
Writer/Director
- **THE LAST DAY OF WINTER**
Dylan Mohan Gray
Writer/Director

(Co-written by Vikramaditya Motwane)
- **THE RIVER MURDER**
Sanjay Talreja
Writer/Director
- **UD JAYEGA (FLY AWAY SOLO)**
Neeraj Ghaywan / Varun Grover
Writers/Director

EXPERIMENTS WITH TRUTH

Told through three separate stories, *Experiments with Truth* is a narrative about state sponsored violence, spanning from 1984 to 2002.

The first story, *When a Giant Tree Falls*, takes place over three days in November 1984 in Delhi, when the city's Sikh population was being massacred by the political establishment. During this time, a group of very young street urchins take on the responsibility of helping a young Sikh woman board a train leaving Delhi for Bombay.

The second story, *Younger Brothers*, is set in a Bombay chawl (tenement building) in January 1993. While the city is burned down by state sponsored actors after the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, a young boy of 14, loses his innocence and experiences heartbreak for the first time. Consequently, he is mocked at by his younger friends. In a violent reaction he demands that those younger than him be put in their place.

The third story, *Action Reaction*, is set in Ahmedabad during March 2002, in leading up to the planned massacre that took place after the burning of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra. An 18 year-old young man who is in love with a religious preacher, decides to participate in the riot and loot a computer store so he may secure a future for himself in the new India.

Experiments with Truth tracks the metaphorical child of India who grows up in an environment where the State has perfected its power by fostering communal hatred. When the State perpetrates a riot on its people and calls it political necessity we get a highly motivated, emotional, young army of citizens ready to kill at the slightest provocation. The State, then, only has to manage that provocation to its political advantage.

NAVNEET BEHAL



When Navneet Behal was ten, he was given a point and shoot camera and was exposed to cinema, which became the only thing that interested him. After graduating from the Xavier's Institute of Communication in Mumbai he left to pursue his Masters in Film and Communication Arts at the New York Institute of Technology. It was during this time that he started work in New York as a camera operator. He has also worked as a DJ in Manhattan under the pseudonym Orange Funk, performing live video projections and music performances.

Upon his return to India, Navneet started work as an Associate Director on a Hindi feature film, produced by Wild Elephant Motion Pictures. He is currently directing his first feature film, produced by M.A.S Universal Fin & Intra due for release in 2015.

NOOR

During the early 90s in the remote village of Lolab (a few hours by foot to Pakistan), Bashir Wani, an innocent Kashmiri Muslim, was illegally 'disappeared'-detained by the Indian army, leaving his young daughter, Noor. Several years later, Noor's mother Zainab and her fiancé Wahid, an influential bureaucrat, leave for a trip, leaving now six year-old Noor with her grandparents.

Noor discovers that her mentally ill uncle, Rafiq (30s) and her father were once actors in a theatre company. Under the delusion that Bashir is summoning him for secret rehearsals Rafiq sets off to Mount Harwan, a site of rumoured mass-graves of those who have been picked up by the army. Noor follows him, hoping to catch a glimpse of her father. They stumble upon soldiers and are nearly killed, until the troopers realise who they are. Noor's best friend Majid, reveals that he knows a way around the army check-post. Noor promises Majid her precious camera if he shows her the way. When they get there, they find the graves and Noor takes photos of them.

Eventually Noor shares her photos with a human rights activist who has been fighting Bashir's disappearance case. The media gets involved and the story becomes a sensation. Noor is present at a peaceful demonstration that the police come to breakup. Her camera, containing the incriminating evidence, is confiscated by the police and Noor is arrested. She is imprisoned in a dark cell with other children.

Zainab and Wahid rush to Srinagar to help Noor. They are shown a video in which Noor is seen throwing stones at police. It takes all of Wahid's influence to orchestrate Noor's release. Wahid stages a press-conference in which Zainab is instructed to say that Noor was not arrested, allowing the police to save face. However a journalist corners Noor and gets the real story. Wahid is furious as his career and reputation are at stake.

Back in Lolab, Noor stays awake all night, hoping to see her interview, but it is never shown. Wahid later reveals that he pressured the news channel to withhold the interview. Noor attacks Wahid furiously, cutting open his lip. Wahid insists that Noor's obsession with finding her father must end - there cannot be two fathers in Noor's life. To appease Wahid, Zainab agrees to a symbolic burial using Bashir's photo as surrogate. But Noor leaps into the grave, snatching the photo away, refusing to allow it. Wahid tries to stop her but Zainab rallies behind Noor. Zainab breaks-off the engagement and Wahid departs.

Noor gets a new camera. In the shadow of Mount Harwan, she presents it to Majid, making good on her promise, suggesting that it is up-to him to keep the quest for truth alive.

ASHVIN KUMAR



Kumar is the youngest Indian filmmaker to be nominated for an Academy-Award® for *Little Terrorist*, which played at 130 film-festivals winning 25 awards, including an honorable mention at BAFTA/LA and a nomination by the European Film Academy. In 2012, his feature documentary *Inshallah Football* was awarded the National Award, India's highest-honor for cinema; also Asian Cinema-Fund (Pusan), special jury-mention, Dubai; Silver Conch, Mumbai, audience-award at Asiatic Film Mediale, best non-fiction and best editing at IDPA (Indian Documentary Producers Association). It was in Doc-Liepzig selected for INPUT 2012, TV and Public Interest, Sydney and played in-competition at Pusan and Chicago International film-festivals. Its sequel *Inshallah, Kashmir* won the National Award for best investigative film 2013, a second award in two consecutive years, and was in-competition at the Al Jazeera Doc-Festival

2013. His other work includes a children's drama *Dazed in Doon* and thriller, *The Forest*, Indian theatrical release in 2012, also released in Brazil, Thailand and Greece.

Ashvin is a voting member of the European Film Academy.

NUCLEAR HEARTS

In the 1950s and 60s, Calcutta thrived as the jazz capital of India. Nightclubs on Park Street buzzed with the live acts of stars such as Pam Craine, Usha Uthup, Carlon Kitto and Louiz Banks. Today, only a handful of those clubs remain.

BOURBON ROSE is a young singer at one such nightclub. Her act is modern and electronic, with a powerhouse voice that conjures memories of the city in its musical heyday. But Bourbon Rose has a secret. She was born LEO BANNERJEE. Leo puts on his dead sister ROSIE's dresses and sings the songs she sang to him before she committed suicide at 16, when Leo was just a child.

Bourbon Rose's ethereal voice captures the fancy of JULES, a European expat living with wealthy Bengali relatives in Calcutta. Jules' best friend ALEX followed her to India out of love but now secretly works as a high-end escort. Alex yearns to return to France, but Jules is in no rush-she seeks to create a home in Calcutta, the childhood city of her mother.

The contradictions and complexities within Jules and Alex's relationship are bared when Leo, having run away from his neglectful parents and his abusive older brother MICKI, discovers a safe haven in the arms of these foreigners. Jules, already infatuated with Bourbon Rose, is surprised to learn the truth about her sexual identity, but quickly accepts her for who she is. Alex, initially wary of Bourbon Rose's charms (sensing competition for Jules' heart), is slower to warm up to Leo, but over time, comes to recognize Leo as a fellow outsider. As days go by, Leo comes to terms with his sister's suicide and his troubled relationship with his brother. As he finds positive, welcome support from Jules and Alex, his identity as a young man begins to crumble, and Bourbon Rose comes into her own.

But they eventually grow apart, each questioning the integrity of the other's liaison with Bourbon Rose – she's gay, he's straight and Bourbon Rose is...?

Unwilling to further jeopardize Jules and Alex's relationship and determined to make it on her own as a professional singer, Bourbon Rose leaves the familiarity of Calcutta for the unknown of Bombay. Jules is finally able to admit to herself and to Alex that she is in love with him. Their true home is meant to be together, wherever in the world that may be.

Nuclear Hearts explores our complicated relationships to sex. Set in the ever-changing modern India, it is a story about young people coming of age amidst clashing cultures and changing times. Bourbon Rose is the reluctant crucible of Jules and Alex's friendship, driving the story of their relationship to this foreign land and to each other.

BORNILA CHATTERJEE



Bornila Chatterjee graduated from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts with a BFA in Film and TV in 2008. Her debut feature film, ***Let's Be Out, The Sun Is Shining***, premiered at the 2012 New York Indian Film Festival, where it won the Audience Award and received a Best Actress nomination for lead Lipica Shah. From 2010 to 2013, Bornila was the Managing Director of Stone Street Studios, a screen acting school and advanced conservatory in the Department of Drama at Tisch. Bornila is a curator and essayist for Vyer Films, a Brooklyn-based film streaming service, and a writer for Overdose Art Pvt. Ltd, a progressive art platform and production company in Calcutta, India.

SHAKTIPUR CRUDE

A prosperous village at the disputed Indo-China border is oblivious to the fact that it is sitting on a huge reserve of oil.

An oil company is desperate after three failed attempts at finding oil.

A dowser (water finder) is unaware that he will stumble upon the largest oil resource in Asia.

The villagers, who were content with growing Shaktigandha flowers, are forced to leave their land, because oil is more beautiful and lucrative than any flower in the world.

A Chinese army major leaves no stone unturned ensuring that the oil reserve belongs to China. His young daughter tries to convince her father that he is wrong.

And finally, one man fights for his land and his flowers, the last man standing while everyone around him chases the oil.

These characters and events are at the heart of ***Shaktipur Crude***, the story of one man who stands up to the greed, lies and desperation. In the end, will we be left with a glimmer of hope that the village will prosper again and beautiful Shaktigandha flowers will blossom in the holy land of Shiva.

GAURAV MADAN



Gaurav Madan grew up in a small town in Haryana. He received his Masters in Communication Studies from University of Pune and came to Mumbai to make films. He has won several awards for his commercial work, and owns an advertising production company based in Mumbai. His first screenplay was ***3 nights 4 days***, which was completed in 2009.

SVADHARMA

Svadharna is the true story of an army officer who tries to warn his seniors of an impending attack by China in 1961. Instead, he is betrayed by the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, shot at and arrested by the Pakistani military, and sentenced to eight years of rigorous solitary imprisonment in Dhaka, then East Pakistan.

The protagonist is a non-believer who always joked with his deeply spiritual wife that he would turn to religion only after the age of forty. As destiny would have it, he finds his spirituality in order to keep his sanity while in prison. He turns to the Quran and the Bhagavad Gita, the only books allowed for high security prisoners. At this point he is forty years old.

A man of action, who abhorred religious rituals so much that he did not even want to take the customary *saptapadi*, the seven steps around the fire, for his own wedding ceremony, discovers God, and himself, in prison. It is a story of resilience and hope.

Svadharna is based on archival material, newspaper reports and the army officer's own richly documented memoirs. Its back-drop is the Indo-China war of 1962. While in prison in Dhaka, the hero is witness to another political upheaval of historic proportions. His co-prisoner is Mujibur Rehman, the founder of Bangladesh.

A story about love, patriotism and courage, ***Svadharna*** is inspired by the countless, unsung soldiers who put country first.

DEEPANJALI B SARKAR



Deepanjali B Sarkar is a digital media content specialist with experience, ranging from internet and telecom content to corporate communications. She has worked with ITC, Indiatimes.com and Mobifusion. An alumna of Presidency College Kolkata and Jadavpur University, she blogs regularly at <http://filmandbookclub.blogspot.com/>.

THE LAST DAY OF WINTER

A group of young people hike along a mountain trail, singing a marching song. Snow-capped peaks rise in the distance.

Elsewhere, 15 year-old Vinit and his younger brother Rohit are hurried by their mother, Seema, to get ready for school. Leaving their cramped, dark flat, they walk through bleak, dingy streets to a checkpoint manned by soldiers and dutifully present their passes. Seema heads to work aboard a cramped, rusty train.

The marching song can now be heard as if it is being played through loudspeakers. In school, Vinit and his classmates are lectured by the strict, pro-regime Housemaster about the glories of the country and its wise, all-knowing President – as well as its ubiquitous enemies, known simply as ‘militants’.

Vinit's neighbourhood is a ghetto for people on the government watch list, and when a new family moves in across the street, Vinit takes pity on and befriends their frightened son, Kabir. He confesses that his father, Sameer, was a well-known militant, who is the reason Vinit's family was placed on the watch list.

The Housemaster proudly announces to the assembled students that the school will mount an elaborate pageant to celebrate the President's birthday, and that leading party officials will attend. That night, the Housemaster pays Seema a visit, and we learn that he is first cousins with the exiled Sameer.

Eavesdropping, Vinit is shocked to overhear that his mother might denounce his father in order to improve the family's prospects, and as he drifts off into a fitful sleep his thoughts go to the group of young people singing in the mountains. He comes to realise that some kind of accident has befallen the group; some among them have gone to get help.

Back in school, the Housemaster is becoming concerned that the pageant might fail to impress the higher-ups and his lofty ambitions might be dashed. He repeatedly scapegoats Vinit and brutally ridicules the hapless Kabir.

Late at night, Vinit dozes off and sees the mountain group again. Having given up on help from those who left, the remaining children try to make their way through the forest with their injured friends, but soon lose their way and are encountered by rebel scouts, who take them to their camp. There Vinit meets the militants' leader, whom he comes to believe might be his long-absent father, Sameer.

The next day, Vinit shows Kabir his drawings and tells him about the dreams. The Housemaster, having had his crude advances rebuffed by Seema, convinces Kabir to condemn Vinit. Kabir betrays his only friend, and Vinit is viciously flogged and expelled from school for sedition.

In a desperate attempt to save Vinit from further punishment and irrevocable condemnation, Seema begs the Housemaster to take pity on her and, though repulsed by the very thought, agrees to marry him.

Both on the mountain and in Vinit's hometown, the situation is increasingly fraught and Vinit is faced with a series of harsh choices. Struggling desperately to save his little brother, Rohit, who is blocked from getting medical attention in the middle of a severe asthma attack, and at the same time fighting for the life of a seriously injured classmate in his dream, Vinit is transformed from boy into man as he comes to realise he can only save one of them.

Consumed with rage, Vinit sabotages the school pageant for the President's birthday in spectacular fashion, humiliating the Housemaster in front of the high-ranking party officials from the capital.

Facing severe rebuke, but for the first time genuinely at peace and unafraid, Vinit walks along the seemingly endless wall near the checkpoint, heading home.

DYLAN MOHAN GRAY



Dylan Mohan Gray is an award-winning producer, writer and director, best known for the documentary feature ***Fire in the Blood***, which in November 2013 set a new all-time record for the longest theatrical run by any non-fiction feature film in Indian history. Selected for the 2013 Sundance Film Festival and over 50 international festivals since, ***Fire in the Blood*** has won major awards in Washington, Hamburg and Vancouver, and earlier this month received the award for Best Debut Film at the 2014 Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF).

Trained as a historian, Dylan has worked in various capacities on feature films in over two dozen countries worldwide, in close collaboration with many celebrated directors including Fatih Akin, Peter Greenaway, Paul Greengrass, Deepa Mehta and Mira Nair.

Dylan Mohan Gray founded the production company Sparkwater India in 2005 and lives in Mumbai.

THE RIVER MURDER

A man is thrown off a bridge in the mountains of Uttarakhand.

That morning in a small North Indian city, four different men are reported missing to the police. Later that afternoon, news come from a nearby village that a body has floated onto the river banks.

Gobind Pandey, a cynical Havaladar, and Constable Sujan Singh, a cop on the verge of retirement, are assigned the task of finding out if the body is that of one of the missing men.

Could the missing man be a journalist who has not returned from Nepal? Could he be a young Sikh auto parts dealer? A nearly bankrupt businessman? A jeweler whose shop has been burgled?

The families conduct their own searches, mounting pressure on the police to solve the case quickly.

Unknown to them, the investigation is being monitored by strangers with sophisticated listening devices. Some of the families are receiving strange calls and messages.

The body is identified. While Pandey is content to label the case a suicide and move on to solving the cases of the other missing men, Sujan Singh is not as easily convinced. Despite warnings from Pandey that powerful forces are at play, Sujan decides to find out what really happened.

SANJAY TALREJA



Sanjay Talreja is an award-winning writer, director and editor whose work has appeared on television and at film festivals.

Sanjay has directed and edited several documentaries and recently wrote and directed the feature film **Surkhaab**, which won Best Director for foreign language feature at the 2013 London International Film Festival.

Sanjay also teaches at various colleges and universities in Canada, the US and India. He has a MFA in Film.

UD JAYEGA (FLY AWAY SOLO)

Ud Jayega (Fly Away Solo) is the story of five characters in small town India navigating the emotional, financial and existential concerns of contemporary life.

Devi Pathak, a computer instructor in the holy Hindu city of *Varanasi*, is caught in a seedy hotel by cops while in the middle of her first sexual encounter, which happens to be with a teenaged student. The student, feeling ashamed, kills himself in the hotel bathroom, leaving Devi scarred for the rest of her life. Devi's single father **VC Pathak**, a book-seller and ritual priest at the river bank (*ghaat*), is being extorted by the police to silence the case. Following the scandal, Devi and Pathak's already strained relationship becomes even worse. She makes attempts to connect with the family of the dead student to apologize, but her overriding guilt keeps her from following through with the confrontation.

Persecuted for act, she's thrown out of her existing job. She gets another job as a ticketing clerk at a railway station where she meets **Sadhya Ji**, a cheerful, worldly loner. Sadhya and Devi, over the next few weeks develop a bond, fantasizing about long, aimless train journeys. Her relationship with Sadhya allows Devi to begin healing.

Meanwhile Pathak, in his desperation to get the money to silence the police, uses **Jhonta**, a kid he picked from the streets years ago. Jhonta is an expert at diving in the river and collecting coins thrown by religious devotees. Pathak uses this skill in the daily betting games around the diving kids at the *ghaat*. Pathak's greed one day results in a drowning accident that changes his perspective, not just for Jhonta but for Devi too.

Deepak Chaudhary, a student of government polytechnic, belongs to the lowest of castes – *Doms*. His family business is cremating the dead bodies by the riverbank and he could be the first in his clan to escape the drudgery if he studies well. He meets and woos **Shalu**, an upper-caste girl way out of his league. He persists and she gives in to his charm.

Deepak is about to secure an honorable job, but one night on the cremation *ghaat*, he finds Shalu's body among the victims of a major road accident. As a rage against destiny, he abandons his dreams of escaping and starts working on the *ghaats* full-time. The gold ring he took off Shalu's finger before cremating her is his last connection to her. When his family's financial problems escalate, Deepak's only way to save them is by selling Shalu's gold ring.

But faced with the memories his past failings, Deepak chucks the ring in river in a moment of madness. A night of emotional churning and introspection follows and he decides to start afresh – leaving the city and *ghaats*.

The ring thrown by him is found by Jhonta during one of his coin finding matches, which becomes Devi's ransom money. She escapes *Varanasi too*. Deepak and Devi bump into each other in a new city.

NEERAJ GHAYWAN



Neeraj Ghaywan worked with Anurag Kashyap on the veteran director's two-part opus ***Gangs of Wasseypur*** and as the second unit director on *Ugly*. His short films as writer-director include ***Shor*** and ***The Epiphany***. ***Shor*** won the grand jury prize at three International film festivals.

VARUN GROVER



Varun Grover grew up in a typically middle-class family in Dehradun and Lucknow. His parents were thrilled when he quit his software job for a career in writing. He has written stand-up comedy for various TV shows like ***The Great Indian Comedy Show, Ranvir Vinay aur Kaun, Aisi ki Taisi, Oye It's Friday, & The Late Night Show*** on Colors.

Grover currently performs stand-up comedy at the biggest venues in India, writes fiction and graphic series for children in ***Chakmak*** (published from Bhopal, by Eklavya), and has written lyrics for Anurag Kashyap's ***Gangs of Wasseypur*** (2012), Vasan Bala's ***Peddlers*** (2012), Rajat Kapoor's ***Aankhon Dekhi*** (2013), and Fahad Mustafa/Deepti Kakkar's ***Katiyabaaz*** (2013).