



FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

OCTOBER 28TH ,29TH & 30TH , 2021

HOTEL SEA PRINCESS, JUHU, MUMBAI

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Introduction: The Humsafar Trust (HST) is a community-based organisation (CBO) working on health & human rights of LGBTQ since 1994. Through targeted HIV interventions, we currently reach out to 7500 Gay identified, Men Having Sex with Men (MSM) and TG/Hijra communities in Mumbai every year through its outreach work on physical sites, social media and online programs. We build capacities of other CBOs in 27 Indian states on HIV prevention, treatment, care & support. We currently work in the field of health, advocacy, research and capacity building of LGBTQ communities across India.

Background: STUDIO DHANAK is an initiative of HST which brings together enthusiastic, aspiring script writers/ filmmakers of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies together - nurture them, guide them and train them to write their stories, which can be converted into short films. Stories that present authentic personal feelings, stories that express real life experiences, stories that become agents of social change. The workshop was conducted in English and Hindi by professionals from the Film/ Television and Digital industry; in various aspects of script writing and film making. The participants were exposed to various stages of short film writing and making procedures. At the end of the workshop each participant presented an idea of a fiction or a non-fiction short film. After the participants develop these ideas into completed scripts with the help of their Mentors, all 20 scripts will be evaluated and 3 to 5 scripts will be shortlisted. The shortlisted candidates will be awarded **STUDIO DHANAK FELLOWSHIPS** under which they will become an integral part of making these short films. STUDIO DHANAK will strengthen the advocacy program and the capacity building initiatives of The Humsafar Trust.

This workshop was meticulously designed by HST's Co-Founder and Chairperson Mr. Suhail Abbasi and supported by CONNECT project (Amplify Change) & TRANScend. The advocacy team members became a part of the execution of the event. The process started with an announcement of the workshop and a Call for applications on social media. The entries were collected with the help of a Google Form. Information requested included background details of the participants, any previous work/ experience, a short summary understanding the applicant's expectations from the workshop and a story idea that the candidate would like to develop to understand their writing skills and creativity.

The entries were accepted for a duration of 2 weeks during which STUDIO DHANAK received 56 responses from various parts of the country. Once the application entry closed, an internal selection committee was set up to evaluate these entries to ensure the potential candidates were screened thoroughly based on their application.

This committee was based on diverse perspective and included: Mr. Suhail Abbasi (The curator of this initiative & senior media professional, a filmmaker), Mr. Tinesh Chopade (Advocacy Manager at The Humsafar Trust with a 10+ Years' experience working with LGBTQ+ Communities) Mr. Sudhanshu Latad (Assistant Advocacy Manager at The Humsafar Trust with 5+ years of experience working with the LGBTQ+ Youth as a core member of Yaariyan - A Youth initiative). 23 participants were selected after due diligence and a creative check (Submitted story ideas) in this process. After checking the availability and logistic requirement, the workshop dates were finalized as October 28,29 &30 2021 in Mumbai.

The participants were informed about their selection and requested to confirm their availability for the workshop. 19 participants shared their consent and other personal details required for the logistics. An enthusiastic response was received along with this confirmation. In the meantime, the execution team carried out logistical activities such as identifying and finalising the venue and accommodation arrangements by following the organisation protocols and finalising the travel. This was carried out with minute details in mind to ensure the participants have a good experience and perform to their best potential during the 3 days of the workshop. The team also ensured the safety and security of the participants by following protocols and guidelines of COVID19.

The execution team also identified, connected with and onboarded 6 Film, Television and Digital Industry individuals as speakers who brought in different sets of experiences and perspectives for the participants to learn from. 4 of the mentors were also appointed to provide guidance & support to write detailed screenplay with dialogues of their short film.

All the pre-arrangements smoothed the execution process of the workshop.

STUDIO DHANAK Workshop Day 1: 28th October 2021

On the first day of the event, the participants, the STUDIO DHANAK core team, and The Humsafar Trust Board members gathered at the venue - The Chancellor, 1st Floor, Hotel Sea Princess, Juhu, Mumbai, at 11:00 am.

The session began with opening remarks by Vivek Anand, CEO of the HST, introducing the organisation, and articulating its focus on providing HIV/AIDS health services, Advocacy, Capacity Building, etc. to the LGBTQIA+ community. Mr. Anand then introduced the participants to the event - Studio Dhanak, and its curator Mr. Suhail Abbasi, and his motto to teach the youth about screenwriting and movie making.



Mr. Anand invited board member Dr. Subhojit Sen to provide his insight around movies and storytelling in general. Dr Sen expressed his concern about caricature of LGBTQ+ characters in mainstream Hindi movies and enlightened the participants about the self-imposed Hays Code in

mainstream Hollywood in the 1930's. He expressed the need for voices of LGBTQIA youth to be heard and requested the participants to tell a story that is close to their heart in order to empower other story tellers and viewers alike.

Further, Mr Abbasi explained the origin of the word Dhanak, (meaning Rainbow in Urdu) and the prefix Studio being added to transform these stories into movies. He strongly encouraged the participants to look deeply into the characters in their story and explained the framework of the event wherein 4 teams with 5 participants each will be provided a mentor. Every participant was to write their own story synopsis highlighting LGBTQ+ scenarios intending for it to be selected by the selection committee and convert the same into a movie. Mr. Abbasi disregarded the idea that language can be a barrier and underlined that there is no language restriction. In concern with documentaries, it was highlighted that the format cannot be left open ended. The characters, the subject must be well defined. For stories there must be a conflict - the idea is to establish a conflict and resolve it towards the end. He highlighted the importance of telling one's own story or someone else will do that and that would not be the most accurate representation of the individual and the community. One cannot wait on Bollywood to bring change - only creators from within the community can drive this change.



After this detailed excitement-inducing overview of the workshop, all participants were given an opportunity to introduce themselves. These introductions fetched expressions of gratitude from the participants towards such initiatives giving the marginalised community a push start in this highly competitive world. End of the session displayed excitement and curiosity towards the 3-day event by the participants.

The room then broke out for a small break before initiating the power packed sessions

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Session I: Editing: Giving the film a new shape

Speaker: Mr. Sankalp Meshram, Editor – Writer – Director

Mr. Sankalp Meshram who's writer, producer, director and winner of 5 national awards was invited to conduct the first session. Mr. Meshram provided immense insights on movie making in his two-hours session. The quintessence of this session focused on educating the participants on the notion of space and time through editing. The participants watched scenes from the movie *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and learned about compression and manipulation of time using the concept of parallel editing.

Mr. Meshram maintained that film making involves the knowledge of how the human mind makes sense out of succession and juxtaposition of images. The idea of time and space is formed inside the viewer's head and perception, thoughts and emotions are created in the mind of the viewer. He quoted: a word is worth a thousand images. Combined images create juxtaposition that can produce

shock, wonder, anger, surprise as well as complex emotions. It is much more expressive than a single image and therefore cinema is the art of juxtaposition of images that create an experience. He introduced the participants to the basic art forms: plastic, spatio-temporal and temporal arts with emphasis that cinema is a medium of juxtaposition of images that happen in time and space. Manipulating space is possible by manipulating time and the reverse is true as well. He asked the participants to leave it to the human brain to connect the dots and interpret images.



He strongly believes that a script that focuses on storytelling through dialogues solely is a failure and cinema shouldn't be dependent on dialogue. It is primarily a visual medium used to arrest the eye and capture an emotion. One of the most eloquent parts of the film is a part with silence, since emotions are not hidden in words, they are hidden in the texture of the sound and the volume. He guided the participants to follow the set of rules created by themselves in order to create their own aesthetics. After the session, a group photo was clicked and Mr. Meshram was given a token of appreciation in the form of a sapling.

Session II: Sharper Screenplays with an Editor's precision

Speaker: Apurva Asrani, Editor – Writer – Director



Mr. Abbasi introduced the next speaker Apurva Asrani. Mr. Apurva Asrani started his session with an atypical quote: There are no rules- one must write in the pursuit of truth. What one writes must come from an authentic place that is honest and empathetic. He underlined the importance of research before going into writing. He wishes to tell the kind of stories which he sees in his everyday life about things that don't fit in conventional settings. Mr. Asrani focused on the concept of editing and how it helped him understand the structure and rhythm of storytelling. He advised the participants to create a basic concept-then

develop a story, creating characters that come right once the basic concept is ready. Characters are more important than plot, thus focus on these characters -their conflicts and what makes them unique. Mr. Asrani strongly believes characters' personalities shouldn't be altered just to please a certain audience; audiences are evolving and changing.

The audience and speakers after this session broke out for lunch.

Session III: Episodes/short narratives: Challenges & Achievements

Speaker: Vinta Nanda, Writer – Director

Post lunch the workshop resumed with a session by Ms. Nanda. She mentioned that there's necessarily no story in a documentary, but there is an idea. Stories should not be told to appease or make a certain audience happy. As a documentary director, many different opinions come your way. But your conviction to tell your version of the story must never take a backseat. She divided the participants into three teams and gave them an exercise to build a story with the beginning and the end provided by her. Three teams came up with distinct and creative stories of their own making this session the most interactive part of the day.



Session IV: Production: A Creative Perspective

Speaker: Chhitra Subramaniam, Creative Producer

Followed an interactive session, Ms. Chhitra S continued the momentum. Ms. Chitra Subramaniam was introduced by Mr. Abbasi. Taking a rather amusing route, Ms. Chitra began her session with a dance exercise on a popular Bollywood number to get everyone to ease off a little. She believes absolutely everyone is a storyteller. To bring forth these stories on screen, one needs a lot of commitment and technical skill. She stressed on the importance of holding onto your story. The nature of the business is such that out of a million stories, ten go into production. A good story can be accepted on any platform and people will love it, so make your craft so strong and constantly evolving that no one can reject you. She emphasised on building relationships over the world since eventually people will work with people they like. She also emphasized on the fact that the only way to improve your writing is writing continuously.



All sessions through the day witnessed immense knowledge transfer from the panellists to the participants. This session marked the end of day 1.

STUDIO DHANAK Workshop Day 2 : 29th October 2021

Session V: Through a Cinematographer's Lens

Speaker: Dharam Gulati, Director of Photography

Day 2 began with Mr. Suhail Abbasi introducing us to Dharam Gulati, to share his experience with cinematography. Mr. Gulati started his session by explaining the difference between the role of a cameraman in a fiction v/s nonfiction film, while sharing his experience in shooting a documentary he explained, the cameraman has to play the role of a cameraman as well as a director. He shared his experiences while shooting documentaries and how with time, the developed technology has changed photography, and how it has become easier because of the availability of smaller cameras. He believes a documentary may not be perfect but it must comprise candid and real shots. Later Mr. Gulati explained the technological aspect of the camera, how a camera functions, functions of aperture (Aperture- depth of the field and focus) and shutter, Colour-temperature adjustment and difference between shooting in the day and night, Use of LED lights- cool lights, memory card and other equipment's. Further he explained the difference between a mirrorless camera and DSLR. At the end Mr. Gulati shared his experience while shooting commercial films.



Session VI: Experience Sharing: Debut Film

Speaker: Suhail Abbasi, Writer - Director

Next session was a community sharing experience by Mr. Suhail Abbasi. Mr. Suhail Abbasi was introduced by Mr. Sudhanshu Latad. Mr. Abbasi begins his session by showing his short film 'cover story'. He shared his experience while making the film. He talked about the role of the director in a film. He believes research is the most important equipment during making a film and how a director should be able to justify the film. He shared his experience with indoor and outdoor shooting and the essentials associated with it.



The floor was then opened up for questions from the participants. The participants showed enthusiasm while asking questions and took the maximum advantage of this moment of learning from other's experiences.

The room then jumped in for a group picture and then broke out for a Tea/ coffee break only to return in 15 minutes. Once everyone regrouped, we jumped to the next conversation.

Meeting the Mentors

Session VII: Style your scripts with Pradipta Ray

Speaker: Pradipta Ray, Writer-Director



Mr. Suhail Abbasi introduced the first mentor of STUDIO DHANAK Pradipta Ray. Ms. Ray began her session by explaining the meaning of the phrase 'vision of the director'. She explained how important it is for the vision of the director to reach the audience. She emphasised on the fact that why it is difficult for Indian LGBTQ stories to be understood worldwide. Later she shared her experience with storyboarding for 'Rang de Basanti' and how each shot is created on the screen. She also explains how to write a screenplay for an animation. At the end of her session, she shared with the participants, her storyboard and trailers of all her films. This was well received by the audience.

Session VIII: Thrills of Non-verbal Communication

Speaker: Prabal Baruah, Writer-Director

Ms. Ray's session was followed by Mr. Prabal Baruah's session. Mr. Prabal Baruah was introduced by Mr Suhail Abbasi. Mr. Baruah began the session by questioning the audience 'how to write'. With this he wanted to explain how the meaning of this phrase differs from person to person. He believes, that the main agenda of the writer should be to reach a wider audience, and therefore the story should be written in the simplest possible words. He believes that a idea of a story should be as simple as explainable in 3 lines. He also believes a concept can lead to various ideas, so there can be a number of ways the same concept can be introduced on

the screen. Later he showed us the trailer of 'Surbhi' and shares experience while making the film. He later comes to his favourite form of writing which is thriller. Mr. Baruah believes, first get the crime right and then weave a story around it. The most important part while writing a thriller is that it should be engaging. Work on the crime, never sum up scenes; one scene should always lead to another. He quotes, "Be criminal, be a detective and then create obstacles". He believes it is important to have twists after frequent intervals to keep audience engaged. While sharing his experience about



writing a murder mystery, he mentioned, there are three important parts to a murder mystery: The character, Motivation and the back story. Thriller is magic on screen - he quoted. There are two ways of writing a crime, first one is - who did it and second one is - how it was done. He believes the director should allow the audience to be the detective - allow them to predict the story, only then it is engaging for them. Towards the end of his session Mr. Baruah shared experience of making 'Gutar Gu'. While writing a silent film he explained, one first needs to find a story or characters which doesn't need audio. He later played an episode from 'Gutar Gu'. He concluded his session by saying, 'A writer should always focus on the narrative and not on the language of the story'. The room then broke out for Lunch, during which the participants got a chance to informally introduce themselves to the mentors and network with other participants.

Session IX: Breaking Boundaries and Creating New Avenues

Speaker: Sridhar Rangayan,, Writer-Director

The workshop resumed after Lunch and started with Mr. Sridhar Rangayan's session. Mr. Sridhar Rangayan was introduced by Mr. Suhail Abbasi.

Mr. Sridhar Rangayan started his session by talking about the type of LGBTQ+ films made in India and the rest of the world, and why there is a difference between them. He believes all films, especially the ones having a social message must comprise Advocacy & entertainment. He emphasised on how it is important to have a message when you write a story, and how this message should reach the audience, loudly and clearly. Later he played the trailer of his first film 'Gulabi Aaina' and shared his experience while making the film. Further he shared his experience with the films 'Project Bolo' & '68 pages' film on HIV and AIDS with The Humsafar Trust (more than hundred screenings). Later he shared his experience with 'Kailash' (Mumbai International Festival 2010), 'Breaking free' (also won National award for best editing and human rights award), 'Evening Shadows', etc. It is a film about coming out to parents (won 24 international awards, 75 film

festivals). He believes the most important part of a film is dialogue and it is the most important equipment to make a story believable. The right ingredients of a film are sensitivity, universality, script, collaboration, functioning, media presence and distribution potential, he added. He spoke about how the narrative of Indian cinema is changing over time. At the end he shared experience with forming parents support groups, Sweekar, 'The Rainbow Parents' with The Humsafar Trust.



Once this fruitful conversation took a break, we changed the momentum and moved to our next speaker

Session X: Mainstreaming LGBTQ+ stories

Speaker: Hitesh Kewalya, Writer-Director

Mr. Hitesh Kewalya was introduced by Mr. Suhail Abbasi. Mr. Hitesh Kewalya began his session by sharing with us his journey towards cinema, he shared his experience with writing for radio before he started writing films. He shared his experience of making his first short film, 'Sameer Ahuja TV dekh rahe hai'. This self-sponsored short-film won an international award as well. He also mentioned about his other work, 'Shubh Mangal Savdhaan', 'Shubh Mangal zyada saavdhan'. He says each story can be divided in three parts (beginning-middle-end). There should be an important shot between beginning and middle and middle and end and this shot should be a conflict or a twist in the tale. This shot should be



the one changing the plot of the story. He believes the most important job of the director is to direct the audience to your vision of emotion which results in the feedback from the audience. He

believes emotion makes it easy to deliver harsh or unorthodox ideas, while talking about 'Shubh Mangal savdhaan' he quotes, "It was a fearless expression and was accepted well by the audience because of the humour". He states it is the films like 'Shubh Mangal zyada saavdhan' which attempt to question the bias of the society and helps sensitising the local crew and people. This conversation ended on an interactive note which converted into a tea break.

After the break, the participants were summoned back to the venue. Mr. Abbasi then explained the process of segregation. Allocation of the mentors was done with the help of chits. 20 chits with 5 chits for each mentor was made. Participants picked 1 chit each and thus were allotted mentors. Once the sorting was done, all the participants introduced themselves again informally. Participants were then given time to sit with their Mentors huddled up and present their ideas to them in a cluster form of seating.

Following are some snippets of conversations observed:

- Prabal Baruah guided the participants with the importance of a writer to think from the audience's point of view. A writer should know what the audience is seeing as a thriller should be non-predictive and conclusive. He advised the participants to have a message while writing and to focus more on the story than the script.
- Pradipta Ray advised the participants to have a political stand in their writing and not just an idea and the story should communicate the message 100% loud and clear.
- Sridhar Rangayan advised the participants to have a proper transition; the story should not be scattered. He advised to always try to have a happy ending; with every character having a hope element at the end. This was reasoned with having a positive note to be given to the under-privileged communities.
- Hitesh Kewalya advised that a conflict should be paired with an emotion in order to make it easy for the audience to relate to it, these conflicts should have one powerful shot. While guiding the participants about how to frame a title for their story, he stated that the title of the story should deliver the emotion of the story.



STUDIO DHANAK Workshop Day 3 : 30th October 2021

Opening of the day was done by Mr Suhail Abbasi. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, Chief Guest Hansal Mehta could not be present for the event. The day began with resuming the mentor-mentees conversation left open the previous day. These conversations targeted preparing a synopsis of the screenplay to be presented during the closing ceremony of the event.

Session XI: Writer comes first

Speaker: Anuraadha Tewari, Writer-Director



To enrich this session, we had another speaker address the teams: Anuraadha Tewari. Anuraadha Tewari was introduced by Mr. Suhail Abbasi. Anuraadha Tewari opened her session by throwing a question, ‘What is a script?’. Later answering her question, the script is a combination of Story-screenplay-dialogue. She further added that she believes the script is a blueprint, a guide of the story. Script should be simple and structurally reachable to a wider range of audience. She further explained how writing a script is different from writing a book. The story should always be linear and then it can be shuffled while turning it into a script. The dialogues should be matching the script. A story idea should be as simple as expressible in 3 lines she believes, and these 3 lines should indicate plot, goal and conflict of the story. She shared her experience while working on movies like ‘Fashion’ and ‘Heroine’. She quoted ‘Writing unconscious essays helps her to find the desire of the story’. This address then ended on a thought for the participants to take home.

Mr. Suhail Abbasi then served gratitude to Anuraadha and explained further process, and communication with mentors. The participants were also asked to email their final synopsis to studiodhanak@humsafar.org for documentation purposes. All the Participants then got an opportunity to present their synopsis. After every synopsis presentation, the floor was opened for inputs and feedback. This enriched a lot of stories with individual community perspectives and also factual information from highly researching individuals such as Alpana Dange, Dr. Subhojit Sen and Shruta Rawat. Mrs. Dange talked about HIV and the fear associated with it, along with her experiences. Shruta highlighted technical aspects of PrEP and PEP along with advances in medical sciences.



This was followed by Certificate distribution of all the participants.



Mr. Vivek Anand then served a vote of thanks, expressing gratitude to the speakers, the mentors, the participants, the planning and execution team, the HST team present with their expertise and any technical support team available. This was concluded with a group photo and a timely dispersal of all participants for their respective cities.

The participants left the workshop with instructions on the further process of STUDIO DHANAK Fellowship. This included guidelines on communication with mentors, the timeline of submission of the final screenplay (December 10th, 2021). The participants will sign a contract which will ensure all IPR lies with The Humsafar Trust. Once these screenplays are finalised by the mentors and received, they will be evaluated on set parameters by a selection committee appointed to ensure this process is bias free. This committee will comprise industry experts. 4-5 of these screenplays will be selected to be transformed into short films portraying the LGBTQ+ experiences. These will be directed by the mentors along with their mentees' support and produced by The Humsafar Trust under the project Connect funded by Amplify change. Along with the short films produced the rest of the screenplays formed will also be stored for future productions.

First batch of STUDIO DHANAK - 2021



PUBLICATION DETAILS

This report is published by The Humsafar Trust to document the STUDIO DHANAK WORKSHOP as a part of documentation efforts and achievements.

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Our Initiatives

