

### **1. What inspired you to make this film?**

*I am in the conservation world for the last 20 years and filming it. I had been silently observing the brewing crisis within it for all these years. Occasionally making films to document it. But the tiger crisis epitomises and subsumes the conservation world's apathy and lack of will. Tiger arguably is the most magnificent animal which walks the face of the planet. It's largest population is in India. It's India's national animal. It's top of the food chain and a keystone species of the natural world. In other words this animal is the icon of the conservation world. No wonder then it's made into the symbol of the conservation efforts in India. Project Tiger was constituted around this animal 30 years ago. This was another way to protect the natural world in the name of the tiger. But unfortunately I saw the decline of this charismatic animal- purely for lack of engaged governance and also the lack of people's will and effort. I really needed to document this disaster. And of course there were major lies which had to be nailed. Lies which the state had been telling us for years. Their lack of transparency, their lack of initiatives, their policy which were a clear indication of the things to come for the tigers. The story was not of the tiger alone. It was more philosophical and existential. It was the way we live and grow. It was also about the world we are changing even as we live in it. All these inspired me to tell the truth- finally. No film ever has told the story of Indian conservation and of the tiger in particular, as this one attempts to.*

### **2. Considering the physical obstacles involved, how did you manage to picturise it?**

*Luckily I had some footage from my last 20 years of shoots. But much had to be shot over a 14 month period. Interviews had to be collated from people who have dedicated their lives to conservation and tigers. Time schedules had to be synchronised. Wildlife shooting season scheduling had to be done. Eventually I went through 8 different states and canned 70 hours of footage over 14 months to finish my shoot. Though this wasn't a strictly a wildlife film but I did get a lot of Tiger and other wildlife footage. The first shot of the film, the tiger coming down to a few metres of me, was certainly the most thrilling of them all.*

### **3. Did you need permission to shoot? What kind and from whom?**

*This is a very tricky question. To shoot in the Indian national parks and sanctuaries, huge amounts of money is charged. Some parks like all in MP will charge 12000Rs/day. Some even more. This is complete anarchy. The state forest departments decide what to charge and no amount of cajoling would bring it down. This is an obvious way to keep out many and allow only a few like the foreign television crews who can pay this amount. So you are ensuring a certain kind of communication is kept out.*

*Obviously I couldn't afford to shoot in most National Parks and Tiger reserves and so had to scrounge around for footage and had to rely on some of my old tiger footage and some fresh ones from a small Handycam. But fortunately the presence of the tiger is so huge that the technical inadequacies of the visuals, get over shadowed when you see this magnificent beast on film.*

### **4. What locations did you shoot in?**

*In 8 states- Orissa, Delhi, Karnataka, MP, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Goa. The film also covers West Bengal, Tibet and UP, in sourced footage. This film for the first time covers the controversial mining project of the Niyamgiri Hills, Orisaa, which is threatening to denude the hills by Bauxite mining by a multinational company- Vedanta. The hills are the catchments of area of two major rivers and is the forest of the tigers. This is "on the edge" project ready to get the clearance anytime. The courts will decide this in July. So any lobbying will be good in the press against it.*

### **5. What research did you do before you began actual work?**

*I have been working on this subject for many years. But close to 6 months of research went into the film. When you see the film you will realise we have painstakingly collected a lot of data related to the tiger. I wanted to make this film rational and logical than just an emotional cry to save the tiger.*

### **6. Funding questions - who funded it? How much was the budget?**

*Public service Broadcast Trust funded this film. But I exhausted their money because of the canvas of the film. WWF-India pitched in with some additional funds. Many came forward to provide me with free still use and footage rights. Some even who I didn't know through the internet gave me footage. I spent a lot of my personal money (over 200,000Rs) on this film and didn't pay myself or my equipment for this film. This is one from the heart and one born out of passion and love.*

### **7. How long did you actually take to shoot the film?**

*About 9 months.*

### **8. Did your approach change during the shoot due to change in circumstances and changes in the physical environment if any?**

*Many new things happened during my making of the film which I tried to capture. Tigers were poached and made national headlines. Tiger Conservation Authority was formed which didn't have any tiger ecologist which I thought should be highlighted. Niyamgiri slowly was becoming a landmark development V/s environment conflict which I decided to capture. And several things which were*

contemporary were captured in the film.

**9. What do you hope to achieve with the wide dissemination of this film's screening?**

*As I said before for the first time in the world a film has attempted the truth, the complete truth about tigers in India. Whether this film has been successful in achieving this or not is for the viewers to say. But tigers and Indian conservation policies have never been laid out so bare by any film before. And there have been tons of films about tigers internationally- most of them pretty pictures and romantic. So the first thing is to achieve widest possible dissemination of this film. If DD broadcast happens then it would achieve this a bit. But the policy makers and politicians should see this as much as the lay audience. The civil society will finally decide whether to have tigers or not in this country by their action or silence. So we would want to show this film to as many people of India as possible. Hindi version is on the way (supported by Wildlife Trust of India) and perhaps more language version could be made and distributed to many corners of India. DVDs have already reached few influential pockets internationally- among tiger foundations and tiger scientists and NGOs. Hope in time to come this film, will make some difference in the policy and to the will of the people and the politicians.*

**10. What next? Just work on the dissemination of this film.**

*Festivals, workshops, mass audiences etc....DVD sales...schools colleges....*

**11. How is it different to shoot a wildlife film like this one from other environmental films you have made till now - ideologically, physically, emotionally, environmentally, in terms of aesthetic and creative fulfillment? Please elaborate?**

*The films I have made till now were of a very different kind. My style has always been subtle and sublime. I had enough spaces for the audience to always think about the narrative and engage with it in their own way. My films were always loosely structured and had a multiplicity of opinions to choose from. This film is more of a hard hitting television documentary. This is not my style and I had great debates about this form with myself. But finally the tiger won. The dire straits it was living out it's life, the state of our forests and the natural world and just the lack of understanding of how this all works for people who are so called experts and know it all...forced me to adopt this style of the film. I thought this film should tell the truth as I see it, in a straight simple but forceful way. I don't think the tiger has time anymore for debates and multiplicity of opinion. This was not an environmental issue which could be debated. This was a crisis, the last battle for an iconic animal. So I launched into the search for truth. All I had learnt for 20 years...all I digested and distilled in 20 years was poured out in the film. Being in the media makes you an 'outsider – insider'. That you are not a forest official, a scientist, a tiger expert or a social activist, dispenses you of any baggage to carry. But you can take a little of everyone and build an objective opinion of your own. And that's what I had done in the last 20 years. And that's what I have shared in the film. So in some sense this film has been 20 years in the making! Emotionally it was a very difficult decision to 'present' the film. Yes I am the presenter of the film. Now very grey and much older than you remember! But I thought finally if this is a personal statement and one which engages with the uncomfortable truth, then it's best to present the truth in front of the camera and take the system head on, than hide behind the camera. Which is what I did. Since I had never done this before, I was obviously was scared that this might take away from the content and the interest of the viewers. But this is the only way I could do it and left the rest to my kismet! It was of course physically very challenging...I had to do the direction, present the film, also do some shooting for the wildlife sequences and wrote and edited my film. I had able team to assist me, of course. But this was one of my most fulfilling experience till date.*