



Title SIKHARAM (THE PEAK)
Year of Production 2011
Length of Movie 90 MINS
Language TELUGU
Sub Titles ENGLISH

THE MINDCRAFT PRODUCTIONS

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Produced & Directed by NĀG GOTTAP

Making of 'Sikharam (The Peak)'

'Sikharam (The Peak)' was made in a very organic manner, to say the least. Firstly, the story is inspired by real life incidents that took place and are still taking place in the various tribal communities of the world. Secondly, the setting of the film, Paderu, is a real tribal village on the East Coast of India. Thirdly, the cast does not comprise a single actor and was handpicked from in and around Paderu village. The protagonists –the children – however, were selected from a group of state-run juvenile homes in Andhra Pradesh, India.

One cannot overstate the importance of casting for this project. Even before we started scripting the film, we were absolutely sure of one thing: that every member of the cast has to bring a raw freshness to the role, devoid of any pre-conceived notions that trained or experienced actors tend to bring. While it would have been great to just cast real tribal children for the roles, owing to the very different accents and diction, it would have been next to impossible for any of us in the crew to be able to communicate with them. Since the children were the mainstay of the story, it was critical for us to find raw and innocent talent that can speak our language. It was this constraint that set us off on a four month journey across schools in Andhra Pradesh, screen testing more than thousands of children. Yet, the kind of raw innocence we sought was elusive. In cases where we did find some promise, it was tough to convince the parents of the logistics involved in the shooting. Suddenly, one of the crew members suggested we visit a state-run juvenile home. The idea was disruptive and all of us eventually became enthused by it. Over the next two months, we toured all the seven branches of the juvenile home, casually interviewing and screening close to 60 children from a total of about 800. These children were a revelation. There was a passion and abandon about them that we did not spot amongst the urban school children we had screen earlier. We were confident that our final 11 were going to emerge from these children. After further shortlisting, we arrived at nine boys who made the cut. Each with a distinct character, and yet blending in with the overall theme of the story. One of the things we discovered during our visits to the juvenile homes is that, unfortunately, the girls had to get their hair cut very short in order to help easy maintenance. This was very unfortunate for us, because this meant that we could not hire any of the talented girls we saw there for the shoot. So, for the two girl parts in the group, we cast real tribal girls from Paderu. The shortlisted children were given a month's training in speech, posture, dance, stage magic and other acting basics – all without clamping them up or restricting their natural expression.

Another aspect of the making that we were very careful not to compromise on the background score. Wanting to capture the native sounds of the tribal communities in and around Paderu, two of our crew members set off on foot exploring the dispersed settlements in the hills. Armed with some basic recording devices and loads of passion, they chatted up with people of all ages, encouraging them to sing, individually and collectively, folk songs and traditional songs of their culture. After a little over a month, they came back with hours of recorded audio, which we all heard out at one stretch. That evening was one of the most enchanting experiences of our lives. A language we could barely follow set in tunes that tugged at the strings of our souls. Based on the quality of the voice and the workability of the tune, we shortlisted three songs. The tribal singers were then taken to a studio in Vizag and the songs were recorded in a few hours. In reproducing the songs for the background score, we have kept the digital manipulation to the minimal – focusing only on enhancing the sound rather than adding to or subtracting from it.

So, there it is – a film without actors, without an art director, without sets, without a choreographer. We sincerely hope that the rawness and the passion of the cast and crew help get across the larger message of an ignored tribal community to the audiences.