

COMPANY
NY VFXWAALA

LOCATION
Mumbai, India

SOFTWARE
AUTODESK® MAYA®

Behind the visual splendor of Bajirao Mastani

In conversation with NY VFXWAALA Co-Founder Prasad Sutar

“The confidence that Autodesk Maya gives us to think beyond is unparalleled. At NY VFXWAALA, our entire CGI pipeline is based on Autodesk platform. And with Bajirao Mastani, our CGI team headed by Bhavesh Patel & Sr. SFX artist Viresh Raut, became the nucleus of an entire project for the first time. With most of the shots having some sort of CGI element, sometimes to add value and others being entirely created using CGI that was a must.”

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Image courtesy: NY VFXWAALA

Just 11 months old and NY VFXWAALA, a Mumbai-based VFX house, founded by VFX veterans Naveen Paul and Prasad Sutar with Bollywood star Ajay Devgn, has already delivered VFX for 5 Bollywood blockbusters. The young studio has also been recognized by various industry awards, mainly for its outstanding work on historical romance drama Bajirao Mastani directed by ace filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Almost all the frames of this period drama had a VFX component and each sequence demanded an essence of history, romance, and culture. NY VFXWAALA Co-Founder and seasoned VFX Supervisor Prasad Sutar reflects on the journey of Bajirao Mastani.

How did a relatively new studio like NY VFXWAALA land a mammoth project like Bajirao Mastani?

It was mainly because of my past experience of working on Ramleela with Sanjay Leela Bhansali. For most of our projects, it is primarily the people that have worked with us in past, have approached us. It is the faith they have in us work as VFX supervisors and although it is a new studio, the core team we work with has remained the same for 7-8 years.

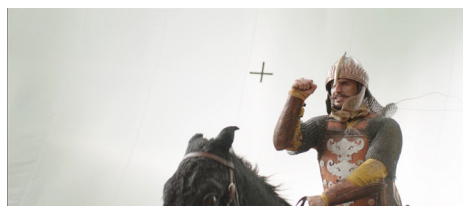
Tell us about the pre-production and planning that went into making the VFX of this film.

The pre-production work mainly took place after Sanjay Leela Bhansali shared the script with the various head of departments, primarily with the Cinematographer Sudeep Chatterjee, Production Design team of Sriram, Sujit, Salouni and Action Director Sham Kaushal. The whole discussion was based on two aspects, one was on the creative front and other was keeping in mind the viability factor from the film's production point of view. On the viability front, we discussed what all needs to be pulled off through actual shoot v/s what can be done with VFX, where the focus was on how real and accurate will it look through both the approaches.

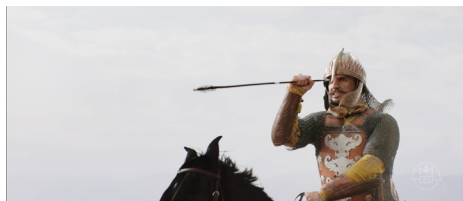
Based on these discussions, the entire shooting plan was decided. Like how much of the film was to be shot on an actual location, on sets and how much of the set should be built. For the action sequences, safety is an important factor in deciding what's to be done live and through VFX later on. These decisions also apply for the number of people needed in the crowd, the number of horses, and the size of the army that needs to be shot. To kind of plan the whole thing our matte painting, storyboard team headed by Chandrakant Shenoy sat together to design the scenes even before the shoot started.

On the creative aspect, the discussion was mainly based on the script and what the director was looking for, the colour palate, the designs of the set, the scale of the war, and how to make it look more spectacular in terms of visuals. Knowing Sanjay Bhansali the visuals always play an important part in the film, especially when it is a period drama with a historical background. And for him, VFX became another tool for adding to the magic that he brings on screen.

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Before



After

Image courtesy: NY VFXWAALA

Right from background creation, designing palaces to battle sequences, crowd multiplication, and costumes, the movie has a ton of VFX. What out of these was the most challenging and time-consuming?

In terms of the sheer volume of work and CGI involved, the opening war sequence was the most challenging of all. The entire war sequence had approx. 300 shots with duration of 7 min and to render out all the CGI passes was the biggest production task we had undertaken as a studio.

Due to some issues, the entire sequence couldn't be shot in one go at the outdoor location of Rajasthan and which later got shot at a green screen studio in Filmcity. This gave rise to a new set of challenges. Matching the lighting of both these locations was the first task followed by converting it into a night sequence. We had to replace the sky and add the CGI fort in the background of all the shots of the sequence.

As for the army multiplication shots, CGI soldiers and horses were created. The arrows flying all over the battlefield was CGI along with the other weapons. All along, the production pipeline was managed by our strong production team headed by Vinoth Ganesh, who along with Sandeep Mane did a splendid job of in-house coordination as well as of coordinating with the DI house. Our compositing supervisor Kaushal Shah handled the entire war sequence from the technical as well as creative aspect.

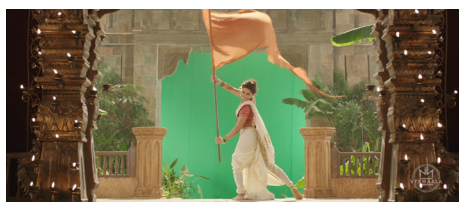
How did you manage to make a director like Sanjay Leela Bhansali who is known to be wary of VFX and green screens, comfortable and confident about what was being done?

This is my 2nd film with Sanjay Leela Bhansali after Ram Leela. And I have seen the change in him, from a person who disliked green

screen to a person who has started using VFX to conceptualize his imagination. The most important part was he gaining confidence from the concepts and visuals we as a VFX team were presenting. My concept team comprising of Prashant Sarpate and Nistant Jog were a step ahead of the shoot. Every time, before the shoot started, based on the set design we used to present the visual concepts on how it was eventually going to look in terms of the final shot. And 99 % of the time we were able to match his vision. That was our success.

You mentioned that production pipeline for Bajirao from the producer's point of view had evolved around VFX, how did that help you as a VFX Supervisor, being involved in the planning stages of the film?

Earlier VFX was a postproduction thing for filmmakers. But now producer are looking at it as an integral part of the film production rather than a post-production process. For me, this mindset change happened during the production of Bajirao. As a VFX supervisor, I became an integral part of the process and not just a post person. You are now involved in all the decision made on the creative as well as production level, which actually becomes an added responsibility because it is you who has committed to the decisions being taken from the VFX perspective. Another important factor which I personally am enjoying is being part of the filmmaking journey, watching it up close, being part of the process, understanding the production issues and trying to help them sort that from a VFX perspective. Eventually, that's what one wants to do, be an integral part of filmmaking.



Before

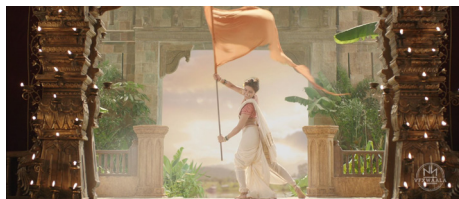


Image courtesy: NY VFXWAALA

After

How has Autodesk Maya helped this project?

I have been an Autodesk user since I started my career with Autodesk 3D Studio on a DOS platform. And with Autodesk integrating Maya in its armory, we all were bound to shift to it. The confidence that the software gives us to think beyond is unparalleled. At NY VFXWAALA, our entire CGI pipeline is based on

Autodesk platform. And with Bajirao Mastani, our CGI team headed by Bhavesh Patel & Sr. SFX artist Viresh Raut, became the nucleus of an entire project for the first time. With most of the shots having some sort of CGI element, sometimes to add value and others being entirely created using CGI that was a must. We extensively used CGI in the opening war sequence to create the army, storm water in another sequence and in a lot of places for the sets extensions.

What are you most proud of with Bajirao?

One can divide that sense of pride into two parts. One where we as a team were able to match up to the visual splendor of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's vision. That was the toughest part I felt. And I always get a sense of satisfaction when someone of Bhansali's stature appreciates that. Secondly, from the production perspective, NY VFXWAALA was just a startup when the project came in, and we managed to deliver this mammoth production task in the span of 6 months and that was the biggest achievement as a team. Also, personally, I take immense pride in achieving on screen what I had visualised while reading the script. The similarity between the final shots and the concepts we had done is worth taking a note of. And that's what it is all about.

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Before



After

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Before



After

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NY VFXWAALA has received many awards for Bajirao so far. How does this impact the studio?

Between Naveen Paul and me, the whole idea of starting NY VFXWAALA was that of having a studio where we got to do what we wanted to do in a way we wanted to do, which is every creative person's dream. And fortunately for us, we found a like-minded collaborator in the form of Ajay Devgn to set up this studio. Additionally, we also have a core team which works with the same passion, enthusiasm and dedication as we do. We also try and keep the production pipeline viable so what we concentrate on and work with the producers and directors who want to work with us and vice versa. The awards always give a sense of achievement as they come from the film fraternity. It also adds a sense of responsibility, especially when you and your work are honored with something as big as the Asian Film Award. It also gives a possible platform where we are at par with Chinese, Korean & Japanese films, which are much better technically. And hopefully, this limelight will give us a chance to get projects with VFX as a key component.

Currently the studio is working on Ajay Devgn FFilms' *Shivaay*, Aamir Khan Productions' *Dangal* and Anurag Basu's *Jagga Jasoos*.



Before



After

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