More gloss, less substance?

ISSUE Have money, will spend on postproduction believes the Telugu film industry. Are scripts taking a backseat in the bargain? SANGEETHA DEVI. K explores...

NTR must be one happy actor. The success of *Rakhi* brought the smiles back to the Telugu film industry. The actor himself needn't have to do any fire fighting. Remember a few scenes in the movie shot in the backdrop of fire? You'll be surprised if we tell you that the actual scene was shot sans any fire. "At times, the film unit may not get permission to shoot with actual fire. In such cases, computer graphics can be used to generate artificial fire on screen that looks as good as the real one," says Hima Kumar, senior line producer of EFX, the company which worked on *Rakhi*.

Of late, more and more film-makers have been knocking on the doors of firms that fine-tune and package the movie with special effects or carry out digital grading. These are necessitated by the script (the use of *pushpaka vimanam* in Indraganti Mohanakrishna's *Maya Bazaar* for example), to overcome limitations while shooting (such as the case of *Rakhi*) or to simply pack a punch in fight sequences. Despite all this, producers are realising that special effects cannot salvage mediocre films.

"The film's script holds the key to success. Visual effects and digital grading can enhance the presentation but the content has to appeal. It's like preparing a good dish and then presenting it well. You don't need digital grading for a regular boy-meets-girl love story," says actor and CEO of Thinksmart, Vishnubabu. He isn't out to undermine the importance of visual effects though. He cites an example from the Sankranti release *Yogi* and says, "Two songs for the film were shot in Canada. When the unit returned and scanned the frames, to their shock they found that the image was constantly fluttering. We worked on the frames to make them appear natural. Visual effects, in such cases, need to be subtle. As far as digital grading goes, when used right, it can add to the visual appeal, like in the case of *Lord of the Rings (LOTR)* or even *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna.*"

Expensive affair

Digital grading involves scanning the film into a digital format and reconverting it into negative after the visual effects and colour correction are carried out. It costs anything between Rs. 25 lakh and 50 lakh. "This has to be used when necessary. For instance, *LOTR* opens with lush green ambience and as the story progresses, the colour scheme and the mood are dark and grim," explains Mohanakrishna.

He rues the lack of understanding of technology in the Telugu film industry. "There's no point in toying around with technology because you have money. It's like having an expensive TV set and not knowing how to use it. Visual effects should not

TECHNO SAVVY (Clockwise from top) Stills from 'Yogi', 'Rakhi' and 'Maya Bazaar'

overpower the frame. A lot of films use graphics to emphasise machismo of the hero – to show bulging biceps or to show 10 people flying in the air in a fight scene."

Himakumar sums up, "We worked on *Krrish*, which needed special effects. Not all stories require that kind of work."

Films like *Aparachitudu, Sri Anjaneyam, Okkadu, Sri Ramadasu, Jai Chiranjeeva, Sye, Annavaram, Maya Bazaar* and *Sainikudu* among others used visual effects.

Some of them opted for digital grading. We'll leave it to you to ponder over which films actually required them.