Director Suman Ghosh tries to decode Amartya Sen in his documentary for viewers who don't understand the complexities of welfare economics and social welfare theory.

Interview by Shoma Chatterji

FILMMAKER-ECONOMIST

Suman Ghosh, whose first film 'Puddledrophop' went the National award and stitched Soumitra Chatterjee his first actor award, has made a documentary on Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, 'Amartya Sen: A Life Reexamined'. The film is a tribute to a towering figure whose work in economics and philosophy has shaped the world of welfare economics and social welfare theory. It took him nearly two years to collate the material and fetch the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1998. The film, which is set for release next month, has been motivated mainly as a humanist.

What motivated you to make a documentary on Amartya Sen?

I was motivated mainly as a humanist. I thought the life of such a towering figure should be captured for permanence. Of course the fact that I am an economist and also an ardent film maker then, gave me confidence to take up the subject.

How long did it take to do the research?

Approxi 1 year. You see, when you are interviewing some of the greatest intellects in the world then you better be prepared very well. I also needed to plan the structure of the film carefully.

I agree it does not cater to the lowest common denominator and neither did I aim for it. There is a lot of academicism associated with Sen's work in Economics and Philosophy which I thought needed to be struck down. For example, as Sen himself mentions in the film, Social Choice theory and Welfare economics for which he got the Nobel is quite technical. But I tried to water it down as much as possible. I agree that even then it might be inaccessable to a lot of people. I carefully tried to balance the film with other topics such as his mother's reaction when she heard about the announcement of the prize from Sen himself, or his battle with cancer at an early stage of his life which should be palatable to one and all.

In what way did it an enriching experience for you interacting with such a great yet modest personality over a long period of time — as a human being, a film maker and a professor of Economics?

I look at life as a wholesome experience and not compartmentalised as an economist or a film maker. Interacting with Amartya Sen as such close quarters helped me to be a better person. His penchant for knowledge and curiosity towards a lot of things in the world is infectious and I have tried to imitate whatever little I can from him.

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