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Software engineer turned dialogue writer, Jasdeep Singh is working on Gurvinder Singh's latest film.

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INDIA TODAY

Sukant Deepak

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It started in the year 2005, when he would put up Punjabi poetry by prominent poets like Pash and Surjit Patar on his blog Parchanve. It went on for some years. One day, this 31-year-old software engineer received a call from a woman in the US who asked him to translate some of the poems into English. Panchkula-based Jasdeep Singh, who studied in a small Hindi medium school in Jogewala village in Ferozepur district of Punjab, says that he easily travels in-between the worlds of complex computer languages and literary explorations.

"We all are many people inside, right? Moreover, I have always been a voracious reader of fiction and non-fiction," says Singh, who has just finished writing the script for internationally acclaimed Punjabi filmmaker Gurvinder Singh's short film Ghuspathia based on spy pigeons from Pakistan captured in Punjab a few years back and is also translating Punjabi poet Jaswant Zafar's works.

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Recalling how he got in touch with Singh, one of the few Punjabi filmmakers whose films are a rage in the international film festival circuit, the software engineer says, "When I saw Gurvinder Singh's documentary Paala in 2006, I wrote to him about how the film moved me. I received a reply asking me to transcribe the songs in the film. That is when the association started and went on to be sealed when he offered me to write additional dialogues for his first feature film in Punjabi Anhe Ghore Da Daan (2011), the only Punjabi film ever to be screened at the Venice International Film Festival held in 2011," says Singh, who also wrote additional dialogues for the filmmaker's second Punjabi film Chauthi Koot, official selection at Cannes (Un Certain Regard) in 2015.

He also helped the director and crew in different departments while they were shooting in Punjab. Stressing that working with the celebrated filmmaker has been an educative experience, and has also exhorted him to delve deeper into cinema, Singh says, "In the first film, working closely with non actor village folk was very fulfilling. Then, getting to know the various aspects of filmmaking process which are essential to make a good film and the dynamics of working as a team unit, the technicality of sound and camera and the extent of effort it takes to get the unit running has been revelatory.

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Not to mention getting to know about film directors who I would have otherwise not noticed. Later on I saw Turkish Cinema, Iranian cinema, and films by Andrei Tarkovsky and Bela Tarr that have become my favourites. I have not been to a film school where I could be guided step by step to watch films that really matter. So I make it a point to borrow and buy important cinema that can open new doors for me and give me a better understanding of this art form."

Talk to Singh about contemporary Punjabi films and the so-called boom of third-rate rom-coms boasting of sexist jokes, and the writer says, "Frankly, I have become oblivious to exigencies of commercial cinema, which curtails artistic freedom and produces assembly line formula films. It has its own place though, and can throw up possibilities for youngsters to experiment with alternate style of cinema. Something which can make people think, reflect and engage."

He says he thinks like this because he himself watches the kind of films that go beyond entertainment, Singh elaborates, "I refuse to believe that there are not enough people who are hungry for films that offer a different narrative and force the viewer to look at the story and treatment from diverse perspectives."

Emphasising on the need to have film clubs at different levels, the young writer thinks that they can go a long way in educating people about films that do not really find a major multiplex opening.

"A big problem is that most people cannot afford to buy world cinema DVDs. This can be solved if we have film clubs that encourage collective viewing of important movies from across the world and not just Hollywood," he says, Insisting that the major problem with Punjabi films is that they do not challenge any status quo, just like Punjabi songs, where consumerism and patriarchy reign supreme, Singh says he would like to work with young directors.

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"Frankly, I am more interested in work that explores uncharted territories and has a universal resonance which can be representative at international level," he says.

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