

CHANDRA GUPTA MAURYA

AN EYE OPENER

FOR TODAY'S YOUTH

GETS INSTANT EMPATHY FROM VIEWERS

by UDAYA TARA NAYAR
Former editor "SCREEN"

Heading for a well-merited place among the best productions of this year is the brilliantly conceptualized historical soap, Chandra Gupta Maurya, airing every Friday and Saturday at 9 pm on Turner Imagine.

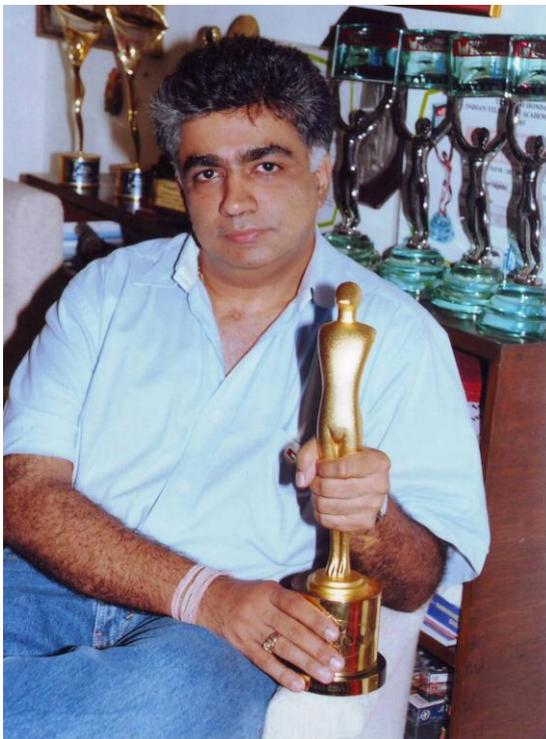


Purely on word of mouth recommendations the soap is

garnering a TRP of over 2 every week making it the most eagerly viewed serial on the channel after its equally popular Saturday show, Mahima Shani dev Ki, which enjoys the highest rating on Saturday 8 pm slot among all the shows across all channels.

By a wonderful coincidence, both the successful shows are produced by the reputed Sagar family which has a 25 year-old history on TV of consistent success as makers of mythology, historicals and fantasy after five decades of enduring success in the motion picture business as makers of purposeful entertainers.

JYOTI SAGAR AND NILANJANA



Chandra Gupta Maurya is a creative collaboration between Sagar Arts and 72 Degree Northe headed by Nilanjana Purkayasstha.

As the TRPs are soaring week after week and the word has spread that the soap could bring about the turnaround of the channel, Turner Imagine, the partnership has also begun to get stronger.

Says Nilanjana: “I have known the Sagars from a long time and consider them as family. I knew that it would be a rewarding collaborative experience for me. It is very important to have a symbiotic relationship when I am the creative producer.”

Nilanjana unhesitatingly admits that the Sagars have the expertise, the studio facilities of their own and post production support also of their own to give those rare assets to the production that make a difference. “But just facilities are not enough that anyone can give. It is the relationship that matters, she says feelingly when asked to explain why she chose to enter into a partnership with the reputed family & how she has been accepted by this reputed house.

Describing her role in the collaboration, she says she is committed to lead the entire creative process. “I guide my team of directors, writers, creative team in the making of every episode”, she adds.

Jyoti Sagar minces no words when he says that the toughest challenge for him and Nilanjana was the recreation of the period. “We had very scanty references to go by. Visually we had practically nothing to refer to. We had to rely on whatever texts and literature our researchers brought to us. Imagine going back

to 300 B C. We did not face this challenge when we made Prithvi”, Jyoti confides.

“We had a big challenge. The period being 300 B C the look and feel of the show had to be different from that of other historical on air. So we went for a very raw look. Rough, unfinished, large that was the brief we gave to the designers and we achieved that”, says Nilanjana.

Jyoti Sagar, the technical and financial head of Sagar Parivar, who helms the production from the Sagar family, says it was always a tradition in the family to welcome fresh and innovative ideas be it from within the family’s fold or outside. “We could foresee the potential in the idea brought to us by Nilanjana and more importantly the idea fitted very well into our mission of combining entertainment with instruction. If you go through our track record you will see that all our work has been driven by the mission of giving the audience an opportunity to learn something from our history, our culture, our mythology, our folklore, our fables. The story of the great Maurya emperor beginning from his childhood and his formative adolescent years appealed to all of us, my uncles, my cousins my senior staff, everybody. So we heartily moved ahead”, says Jyoti.

ANAND SAGAR AND PREM SAGAR

Though the third generations Sagars are actively in the forefront of the production activities the decision making is led by the senior Sagars, Anand and Prem. As sons of Dr Ramanand Sagar, both Anand and Prem , have had the good fortune of assisting and working with the doyen .

Anand assisted Dr Sagar in the making of the epoch making Ramayan after making a mark as a writer and director in the motion picture industry with hits like Hamrahi, Ram Bharose, Pyara Dushman and Armaan.

Prem was Dr Sagar's eye figuratively speaking. Prem ,a Gold medalist of the Film and Television Institute of India,was cranking the camera for all the hits , including Lalkar, Hamrahi and Charas.He successfully directed and produced 'Hum Tere Ashiq Hain' inspired from Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion, which was made in Hollywood as My Fair Lady STARRING Audrey Hepburn. Prem's Hindi adaptation starred Hema Malini and Jeetendra.

As Dr Sagar moved to television, Prem too moved with him and wrote , directed and videographed Vikram Betaal, a runaway hit on DD that assured Dr Sagar to create Ramayan for the national channel. His real challenge however came when Dr Sagar entrusted the marketing of the family's TV productions to Prem at a time when the marketing of commercial time on the govt-run channel was the producer's responsibility. The two widely viewed serials, Ramayan and Shri Krishna tested Prem's newly acquired marketing skills and the cameraman – director turned marketing wizard came out with flying colors fetching DD unprecedented revenue.

Talking about Chandra Gupta Maurya, Anand Sagar says the concept and the script couldn't have been more acceptable to the production house which had its core competence in the making of period dramas. "We had made the story of Prithviraj Chauhan for STAR PLUS and it was very well received during its uninterrupted run in the midst of all the family dramas which were in vogue at that time. So we were confident that a well-made period story drawn from Indian history would surely get its targeted viewership. We did not see any reason for not going for a tie up with a creative Producer who had developed the subject with so much passion", says Anand.

CHILD ACTORS ARE VERY POPULAR ON TV



How did the Sagars discover the terrific young actor playing the boy Chandra Gupta?

Anand Sagar has a point to make about the search for the child actor for the role in the childhood chapters of the story. 'We had to bear in mind the essential character of Chandra Gupta as a bhoomi putra. He is a child born into a humble home whose world revolves round his mother and his playmates in the vast open fields and fertile lands he romps about freely. He is from birth a son of the soil, a child of the earth his nimble feet race over, a typical bhoomi putra destined for greatness and fame.'

‘We were in search of a boy whose eyes would mirror his feelings and aspirations, who had the looks that could convey the immense strength of mind that he possessed even as a child’, says Anand.

The search was all the more difficult, says Anand, because this child character was different from all the child characters that had become popular on TV. Like Phulva, Anandi, Tapasya and Ichcha, Child Krshna, Rani of Jhansi and so on. The boyhood of Chandra Gupta was replete with extraordinary situations and events. It was a role that demanded spontaneous emoting.

“It was pure luck”, says Nilanjana. **“Our actor, Rushiraj Pawar, had walked into our office asking for directions. Our casting director convinced him to give an audition, and he was perfect”**.

RELEVANCE OF CHANDRA GUPTA MAURYA AND CHANAKYA IN TODAY’S TIMES

Destiny couldn’t have been more helpful to the makers of the soap. All the other cast members too just walked into the show. **“We have a splendid cast”**, says Jyoti Sagar, referring to the principal roles. Manish Wadhwa as Chanakya and Sooraj Thapar as the debauche King Dhananand of Magadh, Tej Sapru as Amatya are already making waves.



Equal in importance to Chandra Gupta is the character of Chanakya. “Chandra Gupta and Chanakya were together responsible for creating Akhand Bharat”, explains Nilanjana. “In today’s times, it is very pertinent because we see a similar political situation where corruption is rife and disunity is being propagated. In these times we need the inspiration of heroes like Chandra Gupta and teachers like Chanakya. Our young generation should know

about such golden chapters in our history”.

Supporting her, Prem Sagar says it has been the mission of Sagar Parivar to create awareness in the masses about the men and women who built our nation and gave us our great legacies of wisdom. “Chanakya’s contribution as early as 300 B C in the building up of a strong, unified and vibrant India is not known to the masses. He was the pioneering political strategist and economist. How many of our youngsters know this?”, asks Prem.



Sagar Arts
Estd.1950

SAGAR

MONOGRAM

and

RAMANAND

By Udaya Tara Nayar
Former editor SCREEN (Indian Express)

On December 29th 1917, a boy as fair and radiant as the moon was born to Lala Dinanath Chopra in Kashmir and his maternal grandfather Raliya Ram Bedi named him Chandramouli. Little did the family know then that the child was destined to create history and become the Valmiki of a medium known as television in the decades to come and would be renowned across the world by another Godly name Ramanand.

Dr Ramanand Sagar, the maker of the epoch making mythological serial Ramayan, which changed the fortune and destiny of Doordarshan in the Eighties, had to give up his original name in his childhood when he was renamed Ramanand which significantly means “ happiness of Ram”. For those who gave him the new name it seemed perhaps a better and more

appropriate name but in truth it appears today like Destiny's choice of a right name for the man in whose karma it was to take the inherent social, political and moral messages inherent in the epic story of Ram, the ideal man and king, to people in India and in countries of other continents.

It was in 1942 or thereabout that Dr. Sagar arrived in Mumbai (then Bombay) seeking opportunities as a writer.

The first thing he did on his arriving in Bombay was go to the Marine Drive chowpatty to take a good look at the sea. He stood on the kerb and watched the large waves rise and fall and spontaneously a prayer rose from his heart to Varun Dev , the sea God, asking him to accept and shelter him in the unfamiliar city he had come to live in. As if in response to Ramanand's prayer a giant wave rose and swung over the land and fell on the spot he was standing to encircle his feet and give him his first ever feel of sea water. Ramanand was overwhelmed with gratitude and he decided that he would call himself Ramanand Sagar from then on.

So Ramanand ,who had until then used affixes like Bedi, Chopra, Kashmiri etc to his name when his stories and articles were published in magazines ,became Ramanand Sagar.

The first film he wrote for Raj Kapoor in Bombay was the super hit Barsaat in 1949. Raj Kapoor had fallen in love with the script which played upon the eight emotions associated with love entwined in a story centering on two pairs of lovers and their lives best with trials and vicissitudes and Ramanand Sagar became a sought after writer.

With his success as a writer Ramanand Sagar was emboldened to set up his own production house SAGAR ARTS and make his own films from his own original scripts. As he toyed with the thought he saw a dream one night of an emblem depicting a lotus holding aloft a shank surrounded by seven seas. Ramanand Sagar described it to his wife and drew the symbol on a paper. It looked very good, indeed and he decided to adopt it as the

monogram of his production banner SAGAR ARTS. As it happened with his name the emblem had its own destined significance which surfaced in later years. He realized as his production house became one of the most successful and prolific houses in the motion picture industry and he changed the face of the television industry with blockbuster soaps like Ramayan and Shri Krishna that the logo of his banner which appeared in his dream had a special meaning. He realized that the lotus stood for beauty and art while the

shank stood for spiritual communication with the world and the seven seas meant across the oceans.

To Sagar's surprise and happiness he found the monogram engraved as it exactly was on the ceiling of the Ajanta caves during a visit. On another visit to the Somnath temple in Gujarat with his son Prem Sagar the latter stumbled over a stone and lo and behold the symbol of Sagar Arts, now famous all over the country and the world, was engraved on the stone in the precincts of the famous temple.

Sagar's belief in the mission he was divinely entrusted with to spread the sacred message of the Ramayan to the world was reinforced when he returned from the two journeys. In fact, he had decided at the very start of his enterprise as a filmmaker that he would only make films that provoked positive and elevating thoughts in the audiences. He had promised himself that his films would entertain families and the young and old could watch them together without embarrassment.

In the Eighties when Destiny egged him on to turn to the emerging, powerful mass medium of television he became even more sensitively aware of the commitment he had made to himself and it made him devote himself fully to the television medium.

Today, as Sagar Arts stands tall as the premier television software production house in the country, the second and third generation Sagars

are as committed to the mission as the founder, Dr Ramanand Sagar who was Destiny's handpicked soul to spread the " anand" of " Ram " across the oceans.