

**INDIA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS
BANGALORE**

Memorandum

To : The Trustees

November 13, 2014

Via : Arundhati Ghosh

Extending Arts Practice

From : Shubham Roy Choudhury

Subject: Kaushik Mukherjee (2013-0-018): Grant Monitoring

This grant supports part production and post production of a film on the Bengali writer Nabarun Bhattacharya's life. The focus of the grant is to explore and document his work, his life and his sensibilities in a filmic form that is not just a documentary or a fiction but somewhere in between. The filmmaker will observe, converse, document as well as fictionalise various aspects of Nabarun's life and work. It will also try to figure out various alternative ways to disseminate the film bypassing the mainstream. The grant funds will pay for production, post-production, professional fees, production assistance, equipment and location hire charges and an accountant's fee.

Nabarun Bhattacharya passed away on 30th July, 2014. Despite his best efforts, Kaushik Mukherjee aka Q could not finish his film earlier and show it to him. Although work for the film begun before IFA's grant, it was always a race against time. Bhattacharya was diagnosed with cancer and every trip to the hospital could have been his last. It was probably the defiant in him that refused to give up till the last moment. Q finally made a rough cut of the film and took it to him a week before his death but he couldn't watch it properly. The final cut was ready a week after his death. But there is a problem with calling any version of Q's film *Nabarun* a 'final cut'. This will be discussed later in detail.

Q had already shot for the film for about a year before applying to IFA. When he started the work he found it difficult to contain his work in the traditional space of documentary. Nabarun as a writer dwelled in a very different reality than what he experienced in his everyday life. Characters of his novels are often bordering on the unreal. Q wanted to fathom Nabarun's psyche and not just the man. For any filmmaker it is difficult to portray the intangible especially when the film is about a real person. There is also the danger of falling prey to a celebratory mode. At some point in his process Q decided that he was going to film some fictional scenes based on Nabarun's novels. He filmed two short stories and parts of a third. He continuously kept on filming Nabarun and people close to him. However, there remains pieces he wanted to shoot, but could not due to economic constraints and Nabarun's untimely passing away. The soundtrack of the film needs special mention here. According to Q, he decided to intersperse the sound design with mechanical noises to reflect Nabarun's psyche, where he nurtures the dream of a communist future that doesn't make sense in the conventional sense. Q himself is a musician and he practices very edgy rap mixed with electronic sounds. His visual style reflects the noisy low-budget aesthetic that is characteristic of the digital medium. Q thinks the style corresponds to the literary world of Nabarun that represents the working class lumpen underbelly of a manufactured "bhadralok" society in Bengal.

It is debatable how this film will be received once it is released. Finding distribution for a film that is neither a documentary nor a fiction is always challenging. The stark use of mature content and abundance of swear words make it difficult to pass through the Censor Board of India. Given the political situation of the country and Nabarun's position as an anarchist-communist the film will find itself in a strange space where it will make its audience uncomfortable for a variety of reasons. In the last few years Nabarun had gained a cult status among a very niche audience. Q's own reputation is similar in terms of cinema. Thus the road ahead for the film is very complex and ridden with problems. However, one of the reasons why Q's proposal was considered under the Extending Arts Practice programme was because he wanted to think about new modes of distributing the film. For some time now, he has been thinking of treating films as performances. According to him, he will keep making changes to the film every time he screens it. Like any other music, dance or theatre performance, no two screenings of the film will be same. He is also planning to break the film into fictional and non-fictional bits, add whatever material he has collected from and about Nabarun during the filming process and make a small digital collection. This collection can be put in a pen drive and distributed in a matchbox. Looking at Q's earlier work, one can safely say this film is proving to be an important moment in his career. He has made the film in a shoestring budget while engaging with a politically charged figure like Nabarun who has pushed him to think beyond his stylistic exercise. Overall the project is turning out to be a fruitful one. One will have to wait to see how he manages to implement his very innovative distribution ideas.