

# The Daily Star

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## Tangents

### Telling *Visual Stories*

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Barry Braverman makes a point about lighting. Photo: Ihtisham Kabir

In this column, I try to tell stories with a visual theme. Pictures and words can often complement each other in a story. That, however, is not the only way to tell stories.

Barry Braverman has made a career out of telling visual stories. He is a cinematographer - a “cameraman” for the movies. He has spent over thirty years shooting films, including feature films and twenty-five National Geographic documentaries. He has also taught film-making workshops worldwide, including Egypt, India, Czech Republic and Uganda.

Barry is visiting Bangladesh for three weeks, his first time here. I meet him at BRAC University, where the Film Club (BUFC) is hosting his Visual Storytelling workshop.

I ask Barry about memorable experiences in Bangladesh.

“I have had many,” he says. “For example, we were returning from Cox's Bazar by night bus. The driver's two sons were working as spotters, looking out from either side of the bus, checking traffic, helping to navigate. I have never seen that before.”

How does he find Dhaka? “It is a telephoto-lens city to me. Everything seems compressed - for example, many rickshaws lined up against one another. A telephoto lens shows this well.” We compare photographers and filmmakers.

“Isn't it easier for filmmakers to narrate a story because the motion of the movie pulls the viewer?” I ask. “Yes, but a photographer fits a story inside the frames of one picture which gets undivided attention,” he says.

In the workshop, while sharing advice and technique distilled from his decades of experience, Barry emphasises that the filmmaker must guide the audience and retain control of their viewing experience. For example, the lighting should inform the viewer whether the film is a comedy, a drama or a horror movie. Every technical decision serves the purpose of telling the story.

A successful movie must have a “compelling premise.” The story must hold the attention of the viewer until the end.

On clarity, he says: “Your main idea should be expressible in one sentence.”

He shows examples of incorrect film-making. In one scene, an actress sits with a candle in front. But the light falling on her face is coming from the side, probably a window. This type of inconsistency can disturb a viewer.

Barry says that the dearth of cutting-edge filmmaking equipment in Bangladesh should not hinder. He mentions Oscar-winning cinematographer Nestor Almendros, who used only one light and one mirror to light many classic scenes.

His presentation is dynamic and compelling: a maestro in his prime.

During break, we watch “Before Sunrise,” a film made by BUFC. The fifteen-minute movie shows six months in a young man's life. He comes of age while exposed to mounting external pressures and expectations. His angst takes its toll before the climactic surprise ending. The musical soundtrack, composed by BUFC members, nicely complements the film. From the enthusiastic clapping, I can tell it is well-received.

I leave the workshop feeling richer and hoping that Barry continues exploring Bangladesh and expands his teaching here.

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