

When the going gets tough ...the tough get going

“Laxmira Abhisara is a dream-come-true film for me as a writer of Manoj Das’ stature permitted me to make a film on his story and appreciated the work. To me it means more than a national award”

HE holds a rare record. In his celluloid career spanning over 25 years, he has clicked both in mainstream and parallel cinema as well. He has also successfully handled several aspects of filmmaking - story, screenplay, camera, dialogue, direction and music - with effortless ease. Besides, he has been equally competent in making documentaries, short, corporate and ad films and television serials.

He is Raj Gopal Mishra, popularly known as Raju Mishra, whose latest film ‘Laxmira Abhisara’ received rave reviews following its premiere in Bhubaneswar recently. The film, based on a short story by eminent writer Manoj Das, is being applauded for its multi-layered approach to suit both critical and popular appreciation. Ironically enough, the film that has been getting invitation from film circuits in Kolkata, Delhi and Chennai for special screening, was disqualified from getting a berth in the latest Indian Panorama.

It was a passion for photography that landed the determined science graduate from Orissa at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), the Mecca of cinema studies in India. Here he excelled in his studies and availed the national scholarship besides bagging the gold medal in cinematography. Even his diploma film was selected for screening in the Indian Panorama in 1977.

Young and full of dreams, he started his career as the cinematographer in a Marathi

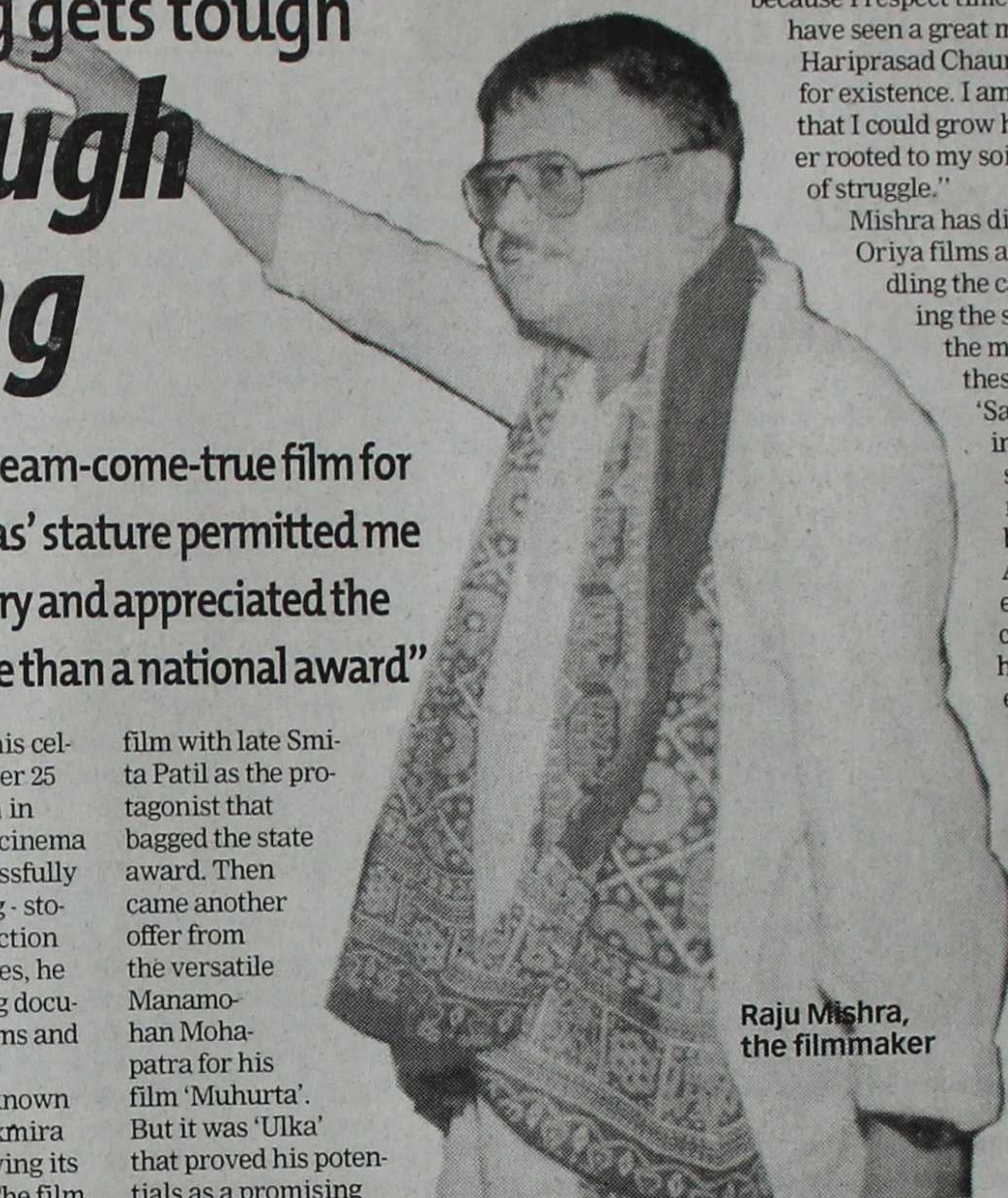
film with late Smita Patil as the protagonist that bagged the state award. Then came another offer from the versatile Manamohan Mohapatra for his film ‘Muhurta’. But it was ‘Ulka’ that proved his potentials as a promising and creative filmmaker beyond the boundary of a cinematographer. Made in shoe-string budget in 1981 with novice Mishra handling the camera, music and direction, the film claimed the state award and was regarded as a milestone in Oriya cinema today. Just two years later, he was the choice of Nirad Mohapatra to pan the camera for his internationally acclaimed movie ‘Maya Miriga’.

But dreams clashed against reality and relegated Raju Mishra to sheer commercial cinema in Orissa. “I dreamt of good cinema and did it too. For five long years I struggled here a lot for existence but there was none to offer me my kind of work. Finally, I had to make compromises and the trend continued for two decades,” he recollects with a heavy heart but adds quickly, “yet I am not ashamed of it

because I respect time and reality. I have seen a great master like Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia struggling for existence. I am rather content that I could grow here as a filmmaker rooted to my soil despite so much of struggle.”

Mishra has directed 10 popular Oriya films apart from handling the camera and scripting the story and scoring the music for most of these movies. While

‘Sata Michha’ made in 1999 swept six state awards, many have been box office hits too. At the national level, his calibre as a cinematographer has been acknowledged with films like ‘Maya Miriga’, ‘Aranya Rodana’, ‘Nirbachana’ and ‘Kalasandhya’ in Assamese by the celebrated filmmaker BN Saikia. He has also added another feather to his cap as the man behind the spectacular success of the mega



**Raju Mishra,
the filmmaker**

television serial ‘Duhita’ being aired on Doordarshan.

But what has given him maximum creative satisfaction is ‘Laxmira Abhisara’, that has heralded a turning point in his celluloid career, he admits. “It is really a dream-come-true film for me as a writer of Manoj Das’ stature permitted me to make a film on his story and appreciated the work. To me it means more than a national award. But the thing that pains me is it was not duly seen before being eliminated from the Panorama list. I am sure, the audience would have loved it.”

Going by the response to the premiere of the film, Raju Mishra’s inner convictions cannot go wrong.

—SHYAMHARI CHAKRA