

Colorfront Transkoder delivers a masterful performance at Annapurna Studios

Passion and dedication will take you places. Come with us on a short trip to the heart of India, where Annapurna Studios is living-up to the inspirational words of its beloved founder with a flourishing, one-stop, state-of-the-art filmmaking complex, and where Colorfront Transkoder is making an impressive impact in helping to deliver movies to screens around the world.

“Cinema is our first love, and the desire to contribute to its growth is the foundation of Annapurna Studios,” said legendary actor and film producer, Akkineni Nageswara Rao (1923-2014) – widely-known as ‘ANR’ – when he first established the company in 1976 with the opening of an 11,000sq/ft sound stage.



The studio was inaugurated by the then President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, and this marked the beginning of ANR’s life-long effort to provide the infrastructure dedicated to producing films in Hyderabad, the capital and largest city in the Indian state of Telangana. Amongst other noteworthy achievements, ANR also started the Annapurna College of Film & Media within Annapurna Studios in 2011, which provides experience-based training to aspiring filmmakers via hands-on, in-studio training and learning programs.

The Telugu film industry, also known as ‘Tollywood’, has blossomed to become one of the largest film industries in India, shooting and releasing hundreds of features each year. Under the leadership of Nagarjuna Akkineni, a prominent actor and producer, Annapurna Studios has grown proportionately with Tollywood’s prolific output. It services not just physical movie production on 22-acres of sound stages and back-lots, but also offers end-to-end post-production on features, TV dramas, web series and commercials. To keep the facility up-to-date with emerging technologies, it will launch a fully-fledged virtual production stage in November 2022.



Annapurna Studios’ expansive post-production division was established in 2011, under the auspices CV Rao, now the company’s Chief Technology Officer, starting with a small NLE and audio recording facility. Today its enviable, state-of-the-art facilities encompass the full gamut of editing, dubbing, sound effects, foley, sound mixing, visual effects and digital intermediate/colour grading. There’s also a dedicated Dolby Vision/Atmos-certified SDR/HDR DCP/IMF mastering department for cinema and home entertainment releases, featuring Colorfront Transkoder.

During its near 50-year heritage, the company has financed over 60 movies and serviced over 5,000 feature films. A prime example of work flooding the post facility, and harnessing the power of Transkoder for deliverables, is director S. S. Rajamouli’s three-hour epic, RRR (2022,

DP KK Senthil Kumar ISC), a fictionalised account of two real-life revolutionaries fighting against the British Raj and the Nizam ruler of Hyderabad in 1920's India. Championed by critics for giving audiences riotous, big screen entertainment, RRR rapidly became one of the highest-grossing Telugu films in India and at the global box-office.

RRR was shot in-and-around the capital city and premiered on over 10,000 screens worldwide, in a large range of multi-language release formats, including IMAX, 3D-stereo and Dolby Cinema. After colour grading the movie, Annapurna Studios struck no fewer than 70 DCP masters for worldwide distribution using Colorfront Transkoder.



“When it comes to mastering we have traditionally averaged around three movies every month, normally making ten DCP versions of each title in different languages, either with subtitles or as dubs, and in different picture and audio formats,” says CV Rao.

“But with a major release, such as RRR, the number of DCP versions can easily rise to as many as 70 or more. More often than not, the turnaround has to be fast, as we have just a few days to deliver these different versions. In 2019, it got to the point that we simply had to create a dedicated mastering department, because of the increasing volume of work.”

Typically, Annapurna Studios' mastering team, led by deliverables manager Mehraj, receives a graded final from the colourist in TIFF 16-bit uncompressed, from which a variety of SDR/HDR DCPs are made in a range of cinema/TV, Dolby 5.1/7.1/9.1/ Atmos audio formats, with multi-language subtitled/dubbed versions, as per the distributor's requirements.

On adopting Colorfront Transkoder to support its mastering needs, CV Rao explains, "We initially launched our mastering service with a different software that had the necessary tools to produce the deliverables our clients wanted, but we quickly discovered that it did not have the speed of output that our growing workload demanded.

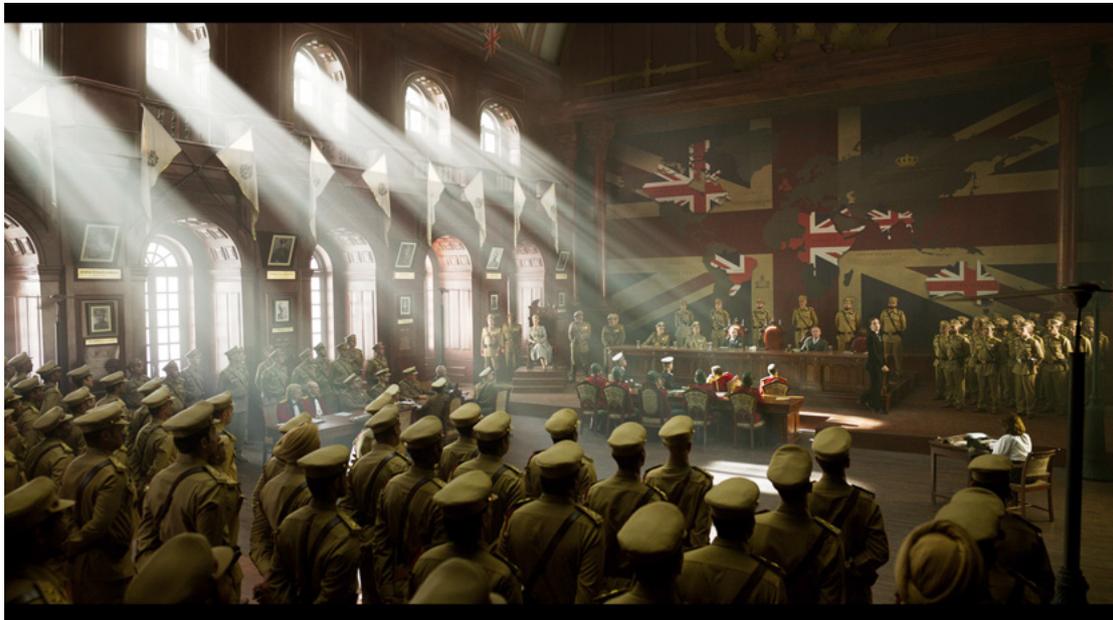


"We also became increasingly disappointed by that vendor's slow product development and low level of after-sales support as our business and our client expectation were expanding. Support is vitally-important in film industry. When you have any issues during a project, you need to know they will be promptly addressed and quickly fixed.

"So, we decided to enquire about other solutions, and enlisted the help of our friends at technology reseller ARK Infosolutions Pvt. Ltd. They arranged in-depth demonstrations of different mastering products, so that we could thoroughly investigate their features, and evaluate the level of support we could expect from each vendor to solve issues and develop new capabilities."

After a great deal of consideration, Rao says the decision was made, at the end of 2021, to switch the company’s mastering workflow operations in favour of Colorfront Transkoder, running on a super-fast Windows workstation.

“Transkoder seemed so much more user-friendly and much quicker than other software options for DCP/IMF mastering,” says CV Rao. “Running on commodity hardware, it proved easy to integrate and operate reliably within our workflow – very stable, always great quality – with no issues or errors when encoding the many different deliverables that we need to create.



“And, it was clear that Transkoder is always regularly updated to keep track of the latest developments in the industry. In delivering the huge number of versions that were required for RRR, always with short turnaround times, Transkoder proved its worth to us.

“Since adopting Transkoder, Colorfront have shown themselves to be fast and dependable whenever we have needed technical support, which is exactly what you need in a busy environment like ours. They are also responsive to our requests for additional capabilities that fit our evolving workflow – such as new routines to process and distribute from cloud services, such as AWS.”

CV Rao concludes, “I have to say that although we have been using Transkoder for just a short while, it has **been a most welcome addition to our mastering facility**, and we have complete peace-of-mind in its capabilities.



“I have only one word to say in summary about our experience with Colorfront and Transkoder, and that is ‘brilliant’. We have no complaints. It has been excellent and I hope that excellence will continue.

“Annapurna Studios was established, and is still run today, with a passion for cinema and the commitment to providing the best. It’s clear that **Colorfront are as passionate about cinema as we are.**”



ANR SOUND & VISION

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