

Person of the Week

From IT to films with finesse: Arun Vaidyanathan

by Archana Chaudhary/
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Where there's will, there's always a way – this proverb best summarizes New Jersey based director Arun Vaidyanathan's passion for film-making. Arun studied computers in India because his parent's weren't too keen on their son becoming a full-time movie maker. But "persistence and patience" paid off, Arun's first feature film "Achchamundu Achchamundu" has garnered positive reviews in the international festival scene. We chatted with Arun on the eve of his departure to the prestigious Shanghai International Film Festival...

From software to films, how did the switch happen?

Arun: From childhood I was always interested in singing, dancing, theatre and especially films. My parents did encourage my extra curricular activities but they weren't very supportive of me making a career in films. After my under-graduate degree I wanted to join film institute in Chennai, India, but my parents were eager to see me taking a professional Post Graduate degree so I studied Masters in Computer Applications. But I satisfied my creative side by doing TV shows and participating in college level cultural activities. I took an oath that 'Films are going to be my life' and I need to attain it by careful planning. Once I landed an IT job and came to US, I joined the New York Film Academy. Soon I started making short films, which got into important film festivals and I was working on couple of feature scripts which excited investors/producers. It's difficult to describe the entire saga in one paragraph - There were many sacrifices and sleepless nights from my end and my wife's end.

Your first feature film

Lights, camera and action: Director Arun Vaidyanathan on the set of his film.



"Achchamundu Achchamundu" is creating huge waves in the international film circuit. Tell us something about it?

Arun: "Achchamundu..." is a Psychological thriller with many first of its kind attached to its credit such as: India's first RED ONE feature film and also the first Tamil film to have an Emmy award winning American actor (John Shea) in a prominent role. The mixing is done by Marti Humphrey of "Grudge," and "Exorcism Of Emily Rose" fame.

The entire film takes place in the US but yet it doesn't talk about any Diaspora issues like Green Card, immigrant problems or home-sickness. It's a roller-coaster ride with lot of emotions and subtle humor sprinkled all along.

Tell us about your trip to the Shanghai International Film Festival?

Arun: Shanghai International Film Festival is a top rated Asian Film festival and draws more than 300,000 people in audience. My first fea-

ture film "Achchamundu..." getting the nod at such a prestigious festival is an exciting moment for me and my team. My film is being screened under the International panorama section.

Is it easy to be an independent South Asian film-maker in the US?

Arun: Becoming a filmmaker is one of the toughest things in this world irrespective of the country you are in. Especially in US, because of the numerous amateurish attempts made in the past by some aspiring South Asian filmmakers, investors are very reluctant to get into this business. This industry is driven by passion and money is always a by-product. If somebody ventures into filmmaking for money, I'd advise them to choose another profession where probability is high. In this game you have to continuously play well without getting tired or losing heart. I used all my short films to showcase my talent and pitched various ideas and scripts. Convincing somebody to invest money on your talent – especially in films - is a tough job. If anybody differs from me, I'd want them to try it once (smiles).

Many South Asian film-makers stick to making films on life of immigrants. What are your thoughts about it?

Arun: It's okay as long as you avoid clichés and tell something refreshing. Good stories can happen anywhere.

Ang Lee, one of my favorite directors, started his career by making films based on the life of Chinese immigrants in the US namely "Wedding Banquet," but he slowly migrated towards mainstream films. Even "Achchamundu's..." story is set in the US but its concept is universal. It can take place in Germany or New Zealand or even India. I based in US because it was my first film and I am comfortable with the working style here.

Of all your films which is closest to your heart?

Arun: All my films are closer to me because each one has taught me something about my craft. Currently, my veins, cells and my entire body is filled with "Achchamundu..." be-



Scene from Arun Vaidyanathan's debut feature film "Achchamundu Achchamundu." The film be screened at the upcoming Shanghai International Festival.

cause I've put two years of my life into this film. The day it releases to the audience, I'll be relaxed and my next film will take over the special place in my heart where "Achchamundu..." is sitting right now.

Your message to upcoming film-makers would be?

Arun: Passion and persistence - Is the mantra to be successful in film making. A real film-maker will break all obstacles thrown in front of him and not rest till he accomplishes telling a story. Watching films with director commentaries, reading books related to film making and if you have the resources, joining a film institute for some formal education are the best ways to learn the tricks and trade of this craft. All said and done this industry is for thick skinned and mentally tough people. You will never find any encouragements till you are successful and you have to be prepared for it.

Personally what kind of films do you like watching?

Arun: I like all kinds of films: "Shawshank Redemption," "The Shining," "Rosemary's Baby," "Cinema Paradiso" and "Hotel Rwanda" are some of my favorites.

In Indian films I love Kamal Haasan because he's one creator who updates his knowledge then and there and has give back so much to the Tamil Film industry. **As a film-maker five years from now where do you want to be?**

Arun: I have so many dreams, I need to re-group my thoughts once "Achchamundu..." releases. I want to finish at least three films in the next five years and would love to try different genres.

A good film would be impossible without...

Arun: Good producers – I'd like to thank Ananth Govindan, Asma Hashmi, Ramzan Lakhani and Srinivasan Perumal for producing my debut feature film. I also want to thank my dear wife and my sons for not complaining about my dedication to this film for the past two years and not giving any personal time for our family.

Know someone worth watching?

Email us at:

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