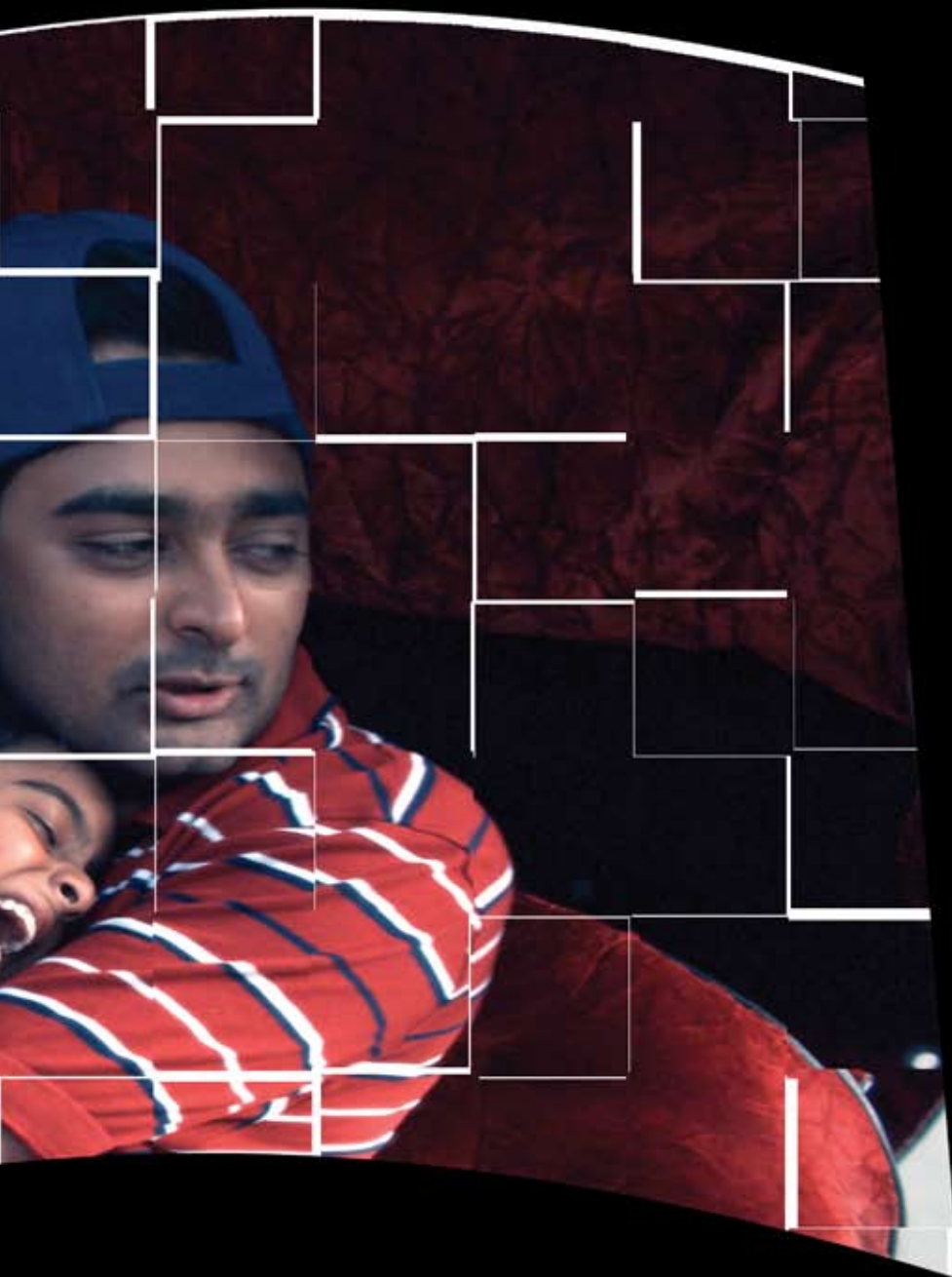


RED APPEAL

RED ONE has caught on among regional filmmakers in India. What is keeping the Hindi film industry from giving it a try?
Ankita Shreeram reports



As far as digital cameras go, RED ONE, an HD 4K resolution camera, comparable to the output of 35mm and with the added ability of digital editing and transfer systems, is one of the best choices available. However, the camera suffers from all the drawbacks that a digital camera does and at the same time, has affordability as its main advantage. This is the primary reason why the camera has become immensely popular among South Indian and Bengali filmmakers in India. Even Kamal Haasan's Tamil and Telugu adaptations of *The Wednesday*, titled *UnnaiPOL Oruvan* and *Eenadu* respectively, are being shot using the RED. However, why can't small budget filmmakers in the Hindi film industry give it a try as well?

"It's a mindset," says Kiran Deohans, noted Director of Photography (DoP). "Small-budget Hindi filmmakers will definitely start using digital cameras. But with bigger projects, the transition will happen more slowly. With small films, you have to save money. But in a multi crore project, a crore here and there doesn't make a difference. These filmmakers prefer to rely on tried and tested equipment. When we have a digital camera on par with 35mm output, it will become more popular. Abroad, films like *The Collateral* and *Zodiac* have been



shot on high-definition (HD) cameras. In India, the entire equipment doesn't come together. Digital cameras are still in their infancy stage here. In a couple of years, we will be on par, including Hindi films."

Debutant director Arun Vaidyanathan needed a camera capable of handling the requirements of his thriller Tamil film *Achchamundu! Achchamundu!* "There was quite a buzz around the RED camera among independent filmmakers in USA. I shot a short film *One Soul* in HD format and was quite happy with results. In fact, we won the award for Best Cinematography at the Terror film festival Philadelphia. While we zeroed in on HD being the format, RED came as a first choice since people were raving about the possibilities in forums and discussions. We also did a test shoot and were happy with the results," says Vaidyanathan.

Talking about the reluctance in India to accept new technology, he says, "Cost is a huge factor why I chose RED. I also wanted to break the jinx in Tamilnadu that HD format is not suitable for feature film making. Usually, the producers are very scared in trying new technology because most of them always think of the worst case scenarios. But fortunately, my producers allowed me to experiment with these ideas. If we concentrate on proper lighting techniques and have a good DoP who understands the technology, HD format is a beautiful format to shoot. Chris Freilich my DoP and I have worked together in couple of my short films and we



DoP Sudhir Chowdhary on the sets of Tamil film *Thiruthiru Thuruthuru* with the RED ONE



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Sudhir Chowdhary,
DoP,
Thiruthiru Thuruthuru



know exactly that we can deliver good stuff with this camera."

However much the RED is exalted, it is not without its faults. "The biggest advantage in using the RED is cost reduction. You can capture a lot of details with this camera. It is also possible to review the footage then and there which makes the director more comfortable about the story telling process," says Vaidyanathan. "While we shot the film, we were using build 15 which was very sensitive to extreme weather conditions and the camera used to die for few hours. This really stalled the shoot sometimes and it was an expensive proposition while you have 80 people waiting on the sets because of technical issues. In the middle of the shoot, we got another camera with build 16 and it worked much better," says he. "Of late, I am told RED's latest builds are much stronger and more reliable."

Having had first hand experience with the RED, Vaidyanathan says it is like any other camera and there is no special equipment needed. The only difference is the need of hard drives and memory cards instead of film rolls. A minimum of three back ups are required and somebody on the set needs to be quite cautious about that. "If for some unknown reason the hard disk crashes, you will end up losing valuable footage," says Vaidyanathan.

Available at US \$ 17,500 (Rs 8,47,849), for all purposes, the RED is a good cost effective solution to shoot that offers high quality results. "You have to buy the basic body and then the other equipment separately. But the upside is that you can use a 35 mm camera lens with the RED too," says Deohans.

Despite the advantages, the RED isn't as popular in the main stream Hindi film industry. "Regional filmmakers are very cautious about the budgets and that might be a reason for them to try RED. In addition, experimentation in most cases has been initiated by regional filmmakers anyways," says Vaidyanathan. He adds that the advent of

KIRAN DEOHANS, DoP ON THE RED ONE

"I've heard of the camera a lot and I've seen a demonstration. To begin with, a friend of mine called Mithun was telling me that all the digital equipment these days have too many cables around them. But the RED is so simple that if you can handle a cell phone, you can handle this camera. At the end of the demonstration I couldn't really confirm this but definitely it seems very user-friendly. Whatever I saw of the colour production, the contrast, the exposure value impressed me quite a bit. The design, the balancing and IPs of the RED is quite close to the comfort zone of a 35 mm camera. Directors of Photography would definitely like to work on this camera. The digital medium is getting more and more popular day by day. Many motion pictures are utilising them. I would say the RED is one of the best digital cameras on the net, though I've not shot anything on it yet. I've seen other cameras and manufacturers as well but by far, I'm convinced that RED is the right camera for small budget films. Because you can't use much of equipment and processing on a tight budget. So the RED is a good option. It has a very compact body. Slowly, we will have to network with post-production houses. The convenience of a camera depends on the Raw file. With RED, you can play with the Raw file later on too. There have been problems with conversion but now it is gearing up. Easy conversion will make the camera really practical".





A still from the film *Achchamundu! Achchamundu!*

RED doesn't mean an extinction of film cameras. "I don't see this camera as a replacement of film stock. If somebody gives me a good budget and my story needs a film format, I will still prefer to use negative. Both negative and HD are beautiful in their own ways. I also think both these formats can co-exist in this industry since each and every film comprises



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Achchamundu! Achchamundu!

of a unique story, needs and budgets. At the end of the day, content is going to decide the film than any technology."

DoP Sudhir Chowdhary is filming Tamil film *Thiruthiru Thuruthuru* with the RED camera. "The production house, Satyam Films has bought the camera. We tested it and found it quite interesting," says Chowdhary. "I didn't find anything in the camera that could stop someone from telling a story. Since it's a digital camera, you can see what you're getting on the spot, without waiting for the rushes from the lab. It's 4K resolution and can also shoot up to 120 frames per second at a 2K," he says. However, he cautions cinematographers about the light requirements for the camera. "Don't compromise on the light requirements for the camera. While you don't need any special equipment for the camera, if you do not use sufficient lights, the transfers on film negative will be grainy."

When will main stream industry begin to use the RED? "I think someone needs to start. I've heard of a couple of people from the Hindi film industry wanting to use RED. The fact that it's a digital camera is definitely not stopping people from wanting to use it. Once they see the result, everyone will use it. Until now, digital meant HD cameras or shooting on a digi-beta. Things have changed a lot. Technology has developed in leaps and bounds. 4K is the same resolution as a film camera. Earlier we had latitude issues but RED

ANIL MEHTA, DoP, DIRECTOR AND WRITER ON THE RED ONE

"I have not used the RED camera for any film but I have tested it. It's all over the place and I've known about it since it has been developed. People are discussing it over the net; I've spoken about it my friends too. I tested it for night available light because I had to shoot some scenes at night on the streets of Mumbai. So I tested it against my high standard Kodak 5219 film. I tested RED for a specific purpose but the film emulsion of my camera held up better in terms of the rendering and the shadows in the back. The recommended rating is 320 ISO. If you push it beyond that the tendency for the image to develop digital noise is a lot. So I didn't end up using RED finally. Definitely there is lot of scope for RED in Hindi films as well. Lot of people I know are considering using it for their features. It's not that Hindi filmmakers are any less ready to experiment with new technology. They use whatever is suitable and required for their films. If it doesn't require the use of a digital camera, there's no point in there?"

has eleven to one third stop which is quite close to a film camera," says Chowdhary.

Though the initial hype around the RED has died down a bit, Vaidyanathan says, "We rented the camera for our shoot since at that time getting a RED camera was a huge deal. Now I hear from people that there is no big queue to get your hands on it. The manner in which digital cameras are perceived also needs to undergo a huge transformation. "I think our country will benefit definitely since this camera can initiate lot of experimental films. New genres and different films can emerge as a result of this camera. I will feel very sad if people use this camera as a stop gap arrangement to shoot songs and comedy track since they over shot the budget due to lack of planning. This format should be respected and taken seriously. Also, the DI process is very important. While we use the RED ONE camera, a colourist with a trained eye and good knowledge is essential to accomplish good results. Also, the RED team is very supportive to the filmmakers and I think these factors will make this camera popular in India also," concludes Vaidyanathan.

The fact remains that Indian films will have to go digital sooner or later and with a camera like RED, the transition should not be too difficult. ■

