



Making Noise on the cinema circuit

Raj Nidimoru, right, and D K Krishna



Arthur J Pais meets the makers of *Shor*, which opens the MIAAC Film Festival

Like many filmmakers who returned to India after giving up comfortable jobs in America, Raj Nidimoru and D K Krishna love to make films with Indian-American characters.

In their latest film, *Noise (Shor)*, which opens the Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival, Sendil Ramamurthy (*Heroes*) plays a non-resident Indian, trying to make a sense of a Mumbai he has just begun exploring.

"In some way, our film is inspired by our experiences," says Nidimoru.

Krishna, who grew up in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh, studied computer science at SV University, Tirupati. Nidimoru, who was born in Tirupati, did his mechanical engineering at the same university. The two became friends and collaborators as they took part in college activities.

In America, they found good job opportunities, but life was monotonous. "We did not want to do drugs or drinking," Krishna said. "We wanted to do something that interested us for a long time."

They read about movies and took courses in film editing and related areas. Their first film, *Flavors* which examined the lives of half-a-dozen NRIs went to many film festivals and nudged the two to return to India to make bigger films. They returned to India about four years ago. Krishna, script partner Sita Menon and Nidimoru now live in Mumbai.

Aroon Shivdasani, founder, MIAAC Film Festival, remembers their early days as filmmakers, before they made *Flavors*, and the hit *99* in India. In between they made the short film *Shor* in 2008, which would lead to the new *Shor*.

"They won an award at MIAAC for their short film (*Shor*) a few years ago," she says. "They have expanded on that kernel and come up with a gritty story, *Noise (Shor)*, which forces a young Indian-American to realize the reality of India."

"It is an experiment of sorts," Nidimoru and Krishna had said about their short film in a statement two years ago. "The challenge for us was in dealing with a sensitive, very relevant subject with a unique sense of humor. We took plenty of risks when we shot on the streets and in the trains without permissions, because we wanted a certain raw, gritty feel to capture the true spirit of Mumbai. Of course, we made things more difficult for us by wanting to do the whole process ourselves — from scripting to producing to editing. That is why it is great to know this effort has been appreciated."

The new *Shor* will be screened at festivals before it hits the big screen in India possibly in early January.

"Ours is a film with ensemble casting," Nidimoru says. It has Tusshar Kapoor, Prachi Desai and Nikhil Dwivedi, and has been produced by Tusshar's sister Indian television mogul Ekta Kapoor.

How do they like working in India? They say they are very impressed with the technical facilities now available to filmmakers and the actors who take their work very seriously.

"But shooting a film in the streets makes you feel like you are about to commit a crime," says Nidimoru. "We stay focused on what we want to get out of a location, and not let day-to-day complications demoralize us."

Ganesh, boy wonder

Arthur J Pais meets the filmmaker behind the extraordinary journey of a wonder boy

Srinivas Krishna, a Toronto-based filmmaker famous for his 1991 Diaspora film *Masala*, had just about a week to journey to India to make a documentary on a boy with an unusual physical deformity.

Sanjeev Kaila, who lives in Sarnia, Canada mentioned to producer Alfons Adetuyi two years ago that he was considering operating on a child in India whose facial deformity made him resemble Lord Ganesh.

Kaila met Adetuyi when she and her team from Inner City Films came to his clinic to shoot an episode for their *Skindeep* television series.

Adetuyi asked Krishna if he was interested in directing the film on the boy for Inner City Films. "I thought it would be shot in a few weeks. But, on and off, we spent more than a year," he says.

Dr Kaila, a plastic surgeon, was leading a team of Canadian doctors to operate on the boy in a hospital run by NRIs, mostly doctors, from the Guntur Medical College, he heard.

The seven-year-old boy's parents Jayamma and Krishna Yadav had prayed to Lord Ganesh to give them a son; their first born was a daughter. "Frankly, I did not know how I would be received by the parents," remembers Krishna.

"I knew they were very poor and I have, having grown up in Canada, just a little bit of Telugu. But they warmly welcomed us. They had been, I realized, benefitted from many stories on them in the print and electronic media in India, and because of the stories they were getting the free medical help."

The father told Krishna and his small Canadian crew to go ahead and shoot but when they took a lunch break, he wondered why they were coming back. Apparently he had not heard properly they were going to shoot their story for the next 10 days and follow the parents and the boy to the surgery room.

What is a documentary, he asked them. "He was used to journalists and camera crew spending half an hour or so and going away," Krishna says with a chuckle.

"As I began to work on the film, I came to realize there were many unscripted moments in the lives of Jayamma and her husband, who sold milk and yogurt, that made it possible for the boy to get help from thousands of miles away."

The story had come to the attention of a television reporter for a network run by Ramoji Rao, the media magnate in Andhra Pradesh. Kaila, who was visiting Hyderabad, happened to see the film studio Rao ran and being very impressed with it sought out a meeting with the media mogul. "Over lunch, Rao asked Dr Kaila if he could operate on the boy."



Srinivas Krishna

The physician wanted to help, Krishna says. "But he also wondered if he would be able to assemble a team in Canada, raise money and spend over a week in India. He was also concerned if his practice can take the risk of being shut down for so many days."

Srinivas felt his documentary should give some space to Kaila. He also knew there would be a big difference working on a non-fiction film or documentary as opposed to the fiction film.

"As a director of fiction, I interpret an already scripted narrative and create a film from it," he mused in an interview at the Hot Docs festival. "Directing this documentary, I found myself having to interpret an unpredictable and ever-changing reality and, at the same time, create a film that illuminates that reality. It demanded a different set of personal resources, especially when it came to my subjects, who were not actors but people simply being themselves and sharing their lives with me."

He shot many heart-tugging scenes: A group of neighbors who had traveled with the boy and his parents about 12 hours to the hospital, only to be stopped by security to proceed beyond a point. They were sobbing, but soon they were allowed to go up to the surgery room.

"One of the most touching scenes we witnessed was when the parents kissed the feet of the surgeons and nurses in the surgery team," he says.

The surgery was successful and after a few months later the documentary team returned to Hyderabad to shoot a happy ending.

"But the reality shocked me," Srinivas recalls. "The relationship between the husband and wife had deteriorated. He had tried to commit suicide several times. I could not complete the film with-