

Premier

Critically acclaimed 'Vanaja' premiere at a red carpet event in NY

By Bhargavi Kulkarni

After winning a remarkable 15 awards from over 60 film festivals around the world, the critically acclaimed Telugu film with English sub-titles, 'Vanaja' is scheduled to begin its theatrical run in the United States on August 31 when it opens in New York City at Cinema Village. The film is presented by Emerging Pictures.

The film was premiered at a red carpet event at the Bruno Walter Theater in New York on Aug. 22. A life-size elephant, dance performances and an appearance by Indo-Canadian singer Raghav, were the highlights of the event. Co-sponsored by the Columbia School of Arts and the Indo-American Arts Council, the coming-of-age drama about a teenage girl in rural South India was screened to a packed audience. A question and answer session with writer, director and co-editor of the film, Rajnesh Domalpalli followed. Also present at the event was Mamatha Bhukya, who plays the character of Vanaja, in the film.

The film's director, Rajnesh Domalpalli said, 'Vanaja' is not only his first feature film, but was his thesis at Columbia. "It was originally written as a project submission for my first semester at Columbia," he told the audience. "Inspired by a child's scream in the film 'Sophie's Choice', it was to be a tale about mother-child separation, but as it developed over the next three semesters, it gradually took on the elements of class distinction and conflict that continues to infuse our society and culture even today." After completing his B. Tech in EE from the IIT Mumbai in 1984 and an MS from SUNY, SB in 1986 he worked as a Computer Engineer in California's Silicon Valley before deciding to take up Film at Columbia University in New York and graduating with an MFA in 2006.

The film casts non-actors drawn from hutments, labor camps and the regular middle class to give it authenticity. Bhukya, the 'leading lady' of the film was studying in eighth grade when she was selected for the film. "Never having learnt dance or acting before was both intimidating and challenging, as she had to learn both within a year," Domalpalli said.

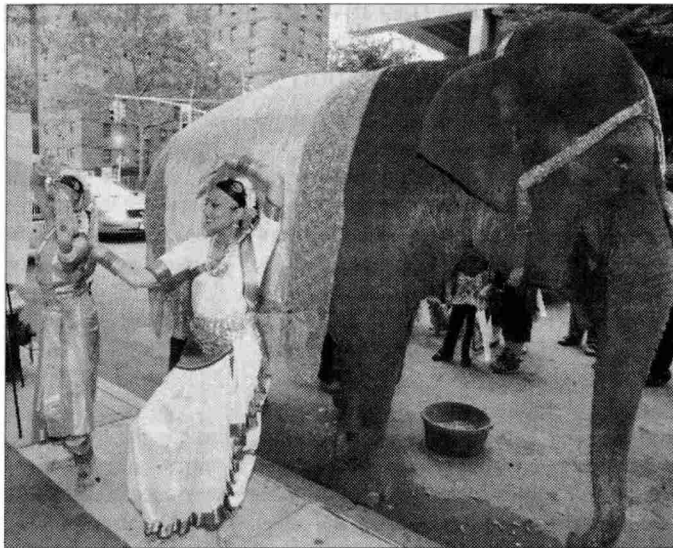
When asked about her experiences while filming 'Vanaja', Bhukya said, "I am now determined to make a mark as an actress and a Kuchipudi dancer, given the enormous amount of things I have learnt."

Winning more film festival awards than any other Indian film in 2007, the film is scheduled to open in Los Angeles and Chicago on September 14 and will debut in Boston, Philadelphia, Detroit and Austin on Sept. 21. Winner of the 'Best Feature Debut' award at this year's Berlin International Film Festival, the film has won over audiences and critics alike during its highly successful festival tour which took it to countries such as Australia, China, South Africa, Norway, Chile, France, Egypt and Thailand.





Director, Rajesh Domalpalli, left, with actress Mamatha Bhukya at the red carpet premiere of 'Vanaja' at the Bruno Walter Theater in New York on Aug 21. (Photos: Mobammed Jaffer/Snaps India)



An elephant and traditional dancers greet the guests at the red carpet premiere

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