

Continued from page 21

mascus rose—widely declared as the most fragrant of roses with origins in Central Asia-- and go on to explain how this one smells different from a regular red rose you encounter at your neighbourhood florist.

Shaikh, who is a Vadodara resident, says he had a nose for good perfumery. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, he began creating content with the perfume bottles he had collected. He goes by @Fragrancejam on Instagram and has 198K followers, which makes him one of the biggest scent-fluencers in India today. "I just did it [began creating content] to be able to justify why I was buying so many perfumes, which can be costly", he laughs. Shaikh started by checking perfume labels to understand the notes and ingredients; it's only after he watched influencers from the West, did he realise that others take fragrance seriously too.

Seehra had a similar journey. While she is already a 71k followers-strong fashion creator on Instagram, she began her scent-fluencing journey as @scentstories-bymeegha two months ago. "I'm very passionate about smelling good. I believe that a great outfit needs a matching fragrance", she tells mid-day. How does she match the two? "I spend time

I once tried a perfume that smelt to me like chocolate-drizzled strawberries. So, that's exactly how I described it

Megha Seehra, digital creator



with my fragrances. I usually pick one to match my mood. Do I want to feel sexy, happy, or powerful? I express myself with my fragrance."

Shaikh says that till a few months ago, he had not seen any women enter the category. Since it's still a niche category, is it wise for creators to venture in? "Diving into a niche segment, such as fragrance within the broader beauty category, helps creators establish themselves as experts in a specific area. This specialisation can lead to a more engaged and loyal audience, as followers often seek detailed and specific information that generalists may not provide. Additionally, niche creators face less competition, making it easier to stand out and attract brand partnerships that are highly targeted and relevant to their content", says Vaibhav Gupta, co-founder and CPO of KlugKlug, an influencer marketing software tool.



VAIBHAV GUPTA



MANAN GANDHI



JAMEEL SHEIKH

The scent influencers have helped India's perfume market that's rapidly growing. Exhibiting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.23 per cent during the forecast period between FY2023 and FY2030, it is all but promising. "There are a lot of indie brands cropping up. And, there's a premiumisation in this [fragrance] category", says Manan Gandhi, founder of Bombay Perfumery, the Mumbai-headquartered fragrance house that claims to put a modern twist on Indian ingredients. He adds that his brand has worked with influencers in the past, but now relies strongly on performance marketing. Apart from that, he also prefers marketing at events and creating experiences where customers can experience his products first-hand.

For Shaikh, being an early adopter of the niche has proved beneficial. He says that the growing number of perfume brands in India means he has several requests for brand partnerships. Seehra adds, "Unlike beauty, which is a crowded category on social media, this market [fragrance] has potential."

What's the future of scent-fluencing then? The answer lies beyond brand deals. Like in the West, it won't be long before we see creators craft their own unique fragrance.

smdmail@mid-day.com

# Trouble in Paradise?

Sri Lankan filmmaker Prasanna Vithanage speaks to Sunday mid-day about his award-winning film geared for release next week, about the island country's appetite for Malayalam cinema and how mythology becomes a way of putting the past and present in dialogue

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

IN between screenings of his new film at the Sydney Film Festival, Sri Lankan filmmaker Prasanna Vithanage speaks to Sunday mid-day about the making of Paradise, his first "Indian language" film produced by the Indian company Newton Cinema and presented by Mani Ratnam's Madras Talkies, and with Indian leads and crew members, including cinematographer Rajeev Ravi and editor A Sreekar Prasad. Indian support for the film came at a time when the inflation rate in Sri Lanka stood at a staggering 64 per cent. Paradise enters Sri Lanka, literally and figuratively, through the perspective of two outsiders, unconnected with and indifferent to the country's widespread economic turmoil, but ensures that it invades their lives in more ways than one.

Edited excerpts:

**Audiences in Sri Lanka will be watching the film for the first time. Are people going to the cinemas again? What kind of response are you expecting?**

I must admit that the buying power of the middle class in Sri Lanka has been diminished. The theatre-attending numbers have come down compared to earlier times, but I am hopeful that Paradise will be seen by 1 lakh people at least in Sri Lanka. We have got 42 screens all over the island, so that is more than I had expected. Distributors and exhibitors are positive about the film because there is a buzz. That's because Malayalam films are very popular in Sri Lanka, but no Malayalam film has recently released in theatres here. It's a paradoxical situation. Pirated versions of movies are very popular. And Roshan [Mathew] and Darshana [Rajendran] also



I have not sensationalised anything. As a filmmaker, I have always tried to seek the truth behind the surface. I'll stand by the film in any eventuality.

Prasanna Vithanage

are popular in Sri Lanka. Plus, there is the novelty factor of a Sri Lankan director making a film in an Indian language [of course, there are Sinhala and Tamil, too].

You can win awards at festivals, but the theatrical release is the final litmus test. I have made this film hoping that it'll touch spectators, so that has to be seen. I believe this is an audience-friendly film.

**Given that you've had to contend with censorship in the past, are you worried in any way with this film?**

Censorship in our part of the world [is of two types]. One has a face and the other doesn't. The one with the face is the Public Performance Board [censor board of Sri Lanka]. Paradise has been passed in both countries without any cuts.

But then there is the [faceless] censorship of the mob that gets touchy about the way

the filmmaker has depicted a country or a certain section. But the financial crisis and bankruptcy of Sri Lanka is a fact. No one can deny that there were shortages, that people were waiting in queues, and there was anarchy. I have not sensationalised anything. As a filmmaker, I have always tried to seek the truth behind the surface. I'll stand by the film in any eventuality.

**Why did you want to look at Sri Lanka's economic crisis from an outsider's perspective?**

I wanted the main characters of this film to be indifferent to their surroundings. Sri Lankans at that time weren't going anywhere. Even local tourism was not happening because there was a fuel crisis. Fuel was being supplied only to foreign tourists. But it is more than that. [The idea was to see whether those] who don't have any connection to the crisis and are not even bothered by it could have a life-changing moment when faced with it. [The film] is about a man who's upwardly mobile, who is ambitious and thinks that these social ills—the poverty, the injustice that is happening around him—will not affect him. But as a filmmaker, I'm saying, 'you are living a lie. One day, s\*\*\* will hit the fan'.

**You have spoken about how mythology is a big tourism industry. There is a strong sense of the exploitative nature of tourism in your film.**

The mythology of The Ramayana is exploited not just by tourists, but also by politicians in both countries. The Ramayana may not be history, but it has a place in history. In Sri Lankan politics, there is talk of descending from Ravana, and then in parts of India, Rama is so important. So, there are many narratives among the modern people of Sri Lanka and India, too, regarding this mythology, and my film is about how history is always a dialogue between the past and the present. There is also the idea that modern life with its ambitions is such that instead of enjoying something for oneself, there is a need to show others that we are having fun. There is also a middle-class consumerist attitude where there is desire to exploit a place.

If you see people in buses or trains in Mumbai, Delhi or Colombo, people are glued to their mobile phones. We are forgetting ourselves. We are forgetting the dialogue with our inner selves. It has become a secondary thing. It's because we want to achieve so many things in life. The mobile phone is so important because we are [always] waiting for something. I'm making a comment about how material things have become our God even while we are pretending to go on Ramayana tours.

smdmail@mid-day.com



Paradise, winner of the Kim Jiseok Award for Best Film at the 2023 Busan Film Festival, is slated for a pan-India and worldwide release on June 28. The film sets the story of a Malayali couple's travels through Sri Lanka against the backdrop of the country's economic crisis of 2022