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## NY filmmaker whips up a cool Bombay Summer

Saibal Chatterjee

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Photojournalist-turned-filmmaker Joseph Mathew Varghese has arrived in Goa fresh from his triple strike at the Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council (MIAAC) Film Festival in [New York](#), where his first feature, *Bombay Summer*, bagged the best film, best director and best actress awards.

*Bombay Summer*, screened in the Film India Worldwide section of the 40th International Film Festival of India, received a warm

response from a near-full house. The youth-oriented story of love, longing and loss in the western Indian metropolis has a rhythm that is all its own.

"This film is a means for me to explore a city that I did not grow up in but encapsulates a lot of the concerns of my youth," says New York-based Varghese, who left his hometown, Thiruvananthapuram, 15 years ago at age 22 to pursue a career in the US.

Explaining the film's free-wheeling narrative quality, he says: "About 40 per cent of *Bombay Summer* was scripted and the rest of it was improvised by the actors as we went along." That approach invests the film with a rare [degree](#) of spontaneity and freshness.

Tannishtha Chatterjee, the film's lead actress, says about one of the most crucial scenes in the film, a car journey that three characters undertake to a village 200 kilometres from Mumbai: "The screenplay just said 'road trip'. The actors were put inside the car and the [camera](#) was switched on. Joseph wasn't even in the vehicle because there wasn't enough space. So we were left free to improvise. Of course, the director then edited the footage to come up with what you see in the film."

Apart from Indian-American actor Samrat Chakrabarti, who plays an aspiring writer, the cast of *Bombay Summer* features two talented newcomers, Jatin Goswami and Gaurav Dwivedi, in the roles of an introverted [commercial painter](#) and his more gregarious friend. Goswami and Dwivedi are acting [diploma](#) holders from the Film and Television Institute of India. "We shared a room for five years," says Indore boy Dwivedi.

*Bombay Summer* is the story of three young people who have little in common. Jaidev (Chakrabarti) is an aspiring writer who is seeking independence from his wealthy family; Geeta (Chatterjee) is a career woman who is in a secret relationship with Jaidev; and Madan (Goswami) is an artist who makes some [extra money](#) by serving as an underworld delivery boy.

This tale of urban angst follows a trail of blossoming friendship, subterfuge, betrayal and finally self-discovery. "These are the very issues that I faced as I was growing up," says Varghese.

Interestingly, although the film is about Mumbai, none of the principal actors belong to the city. For all of them, as for the director, the making of *Bombay Summer* was a way of getting to know the megalopolis better.

So wouldn't he be interested in making a film in Malayalam some day? "Yes, of course," he says, "but not until I am absolutely sure that I'd be able to get the cultural nuances perfectly right. I would have to dig really deep to achieve that. I am working on two scripts at the moment but neither is Kerala-themed." That probably explains why a New Yorker from Thiruvananthapuram, on the way back to his roots, has chosen to turn his focus on Mumbai, a city of dreams and dreamers under threat from elements that represent the forces of social and cultural reactionism.

(Saibal Chatterjee is a National Award-winning film critic who has covered [film festivals](#) around the world, including the ones in Cannes and Toronto. He will be writing exclusively for NDTVMovies.com from IFFI 2009)

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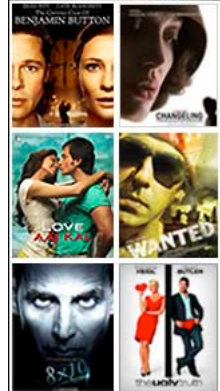


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