

There's Kung Fu in the air

CINEMA Get a taste of Kung Fu flavoured with the essence of Assam. Debutant director Kenny Basumatary tells BHUMIKA K. how his film, *Local Kung Fu*, is all "local" and at its special-effects-free best



SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF The actors, all Kung Fu students, did all the action, no cables attached. Director Kenny Basumatary (right)

film

These are normal podgy guys fighting in their jeans, tracksuits, sweatshirts, hoodies, barefoot, with sports shoes, fighting in courtyards, in grasslands. They execute some swift kicks, and then there's slow motion to add to the impact. There are kicks, punches, long lunges in the air. A big toe pops up on screen and the camera follows the foot to the grumpy man who's shoved up his leg in a Kung Fu pose, all ready to strike. There's a guy fallen on the ground, beaten, bursting out into a beautiful musical note with his eyes closed. Here's a girl threatening a boy that she'll have him kidnapped by her boyfriend and thrown away in the jungles of Singapore!

Anyone who's watched the trailer of *Local Kung Fu* should have been stirred enough by curiosity to see what's in store. After all, it's being pitted as India's first martial arts comedy. The film, in Assamese and Hindi, is being released with English subtitles. It premiered at Osian's-Cinefan Film Festival (the largest festival for Asian and Arab cinema) and had a repeat show on public demand, and also showed at the International Digital Film Festival in Mumbai.

But why choose to label the film "local"? "Pretty much everything in the film is 'local' — it was shot in Guwahati, the cast and crew is made up of local people, mostly my friends and family. We also wanted to communicate this is not a big-budget endeavour. It's like local fruits and vegetables," laughs the film's writer-director Kenny Basumatary, in a telephonic interview. The average age of the *Local Kung Fu* team was about 31 years, and some were even in their early 20s, says Kenny. His uncle, (perhaps the only member of the cast in his mid-50s), is a Kung Fu coach in Assam and it was his band of students who star in the movie, along with their guru. There's a special appearance in the film by Kenny's grandfather.

Local Kung Fu was shot over a period of 100 days on a Canon digital camera for Rs. 95,000. "I was too lazy to go knocking on producers' doors. Moreover, I knew I would have to make the film on my own. It would be too much to expect someone to put about three crore rupees on a first-time director." offers the self-deprecating Kenny. All the action is real, and rehearsed — there's no cables suspending the fighters, no special effects to prop them up. "For indoor scenes, we had three 200-watt bulbs!"

Kenny learnt Kung Fu for two years. "You can't make a film without knowing the subject in great detail. All films that are genuine, are those that take you into another world — like *The Hurt Locker*, *Rocket Singh*. You'll know the nuances. You have to be on the same page." He talks of current trends in Hollywood action films "where the camera is moving around so much you can't see anything. You have five cuts in one second...My gripe with *Batman* films is that you can't see who's hitting whom! We knew our techniques, we decided we will shoot in a proper way. We were not looking at blowing up cars and buildings," he says of the way he chose to make *Local Kung Fu*. He rates *Haywire* and *Jack Reacher* as good "real" action films.

"Movies like *In Search of A Midnight Kiss*,



El Mariachi, *The Untitled Kartik Krishnan Project* inspired us to make a film along similar lines," says Kenny. "Obviously Jackie Chan, and *Undisputed 2* and *Undisputed 3*, were primary influences. The tone of the film is very much Jackie Chan — neither completely funny nor completely action. I like entertaining people. I like hearing people laugh. Even my debut novel *Chocolate.Guitar.Momos* was like that. I was not a popular kid in school so I want to make up for it now," he laughs.

Kenny's been in the Hindi film industry for about five years now, after he quit IIT-Delhi midway. "I told my family about it over the phone," he pauses. He's done about 10 to 12 ads, "a few roles here and there", the role of a police inspector in *Shanghai*, and a 15-second role in *Phata Poster Nikla Hero*. "I hope to do work like Danny Denzongpa," he says. He attended a scripting lab in 2008/09 where his script (a different one) made it to the top six and was supposed to be produced; the entire project was shelved. "But the fact that my script was selected gave me some encouragement," says the cheery Kenny.

"It's not just about being from the north east. If you don't have a film background, if you're not a Khan or a Kapoor, or have the North Indian muscular look, it can be tough," he says of getting an acting break in Bollywood. His parents are both state government employees. "Let's see how it works in the field of direction!"

The story of Assam, where Kenny hails from, doesn't seem too different from the rest of the country when it comes to cinemas — a lot of theatres have closed down. Multiplexes are there in the three of the bigger cities. "There are about 40 to 50 Assamese films made every year, and only a handful are good. Jahnu Barua is our best filmmaker. Growing up, we watched pretty much everything — Assamese films, rarely! In college it was the usual Hollywood fare, and Hindi films also. Every Friday I would bunk class to watch movies. There are a whole lot of young people who want to be part of the industry in Assam but it's not economically viable. We have only about five TV channels. We're not a huge population. And it's the same with films."

Local Kung Fu releases through PVR Director's Rare tomorrow.

History de-coded

BOOK Sudipto Das' debut novel combines ancient history, linguistic palaeontology, mathematics, music and a mystery story

If you are a history buff and a thriller aficionado, then *The Ekkos Clan* by Sudipto Das might just be the book for you. Ancient Indian history, linguistic palaeontology, mathematics and interesting insights on music are held together by a gripping mystery in Sudipto's debut novel.

The Ekkos Clan (Niyogi Books, Rs. 350) tells the tale of how Kratu, a graduate student at Stanford, his best friend Tista and linguistic palaeontologist Afsar Faaredi, discover that the bed-

time stories Kratu's grandmother Kubha inherited from her ancestors, have hidden within them linguistic fossils and layers of history. This leads the trio on a quest to trace the origin of her stories and in the process they make some fascinating discoveries.

It took Sudipto intensive research to put the novel together. "I read up on ancient Indian history between 2008 and 2010.

By July 2010, I thought I would start writing because as Newton said the more

you know, the more you realise how little you know. I thought I had to start writing," says Sudipto who holds an engineering degree from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, and is also a member of a music band Kohal.

The first draft was written in six months. Sudipto then chose a sample of 25 readers, which included his friends, acquaintances and relatives, between the ages of 18 and 60, and gave them the first draft to read for feedback. He also sent in the

manuscript to the Literary Consultancy, London. "They are known to be one of the best literary reviewers. They gave me detailed feedback." The book was released recently at Oxford Bookstore.

The first two chapters of the novel, which also have an autobiographical element, are set against the 1946 Noakhali Riots. "I thought I had to write about the Partition of Bengal, as not much is written about it. I wanted to write about the survivors of the Noakhali riots. My father and his family came to Kolkata when the riots broke out. My father went onto become an engineer and provided well for his family. There were survivors who made a life for themselves despite being affected by the riots; I wanted to explore such stories in my novel."

Sudipto developed an interest in music, history, mathematics and literature as a child. So, combining these aspects in *The Ekkos Clan* seemed only natural to him. "I knew the right thing about Indian culture. I have closely read Tagore's works and had studied at the Ramkrishna Mission Institute. I have also always been fascinated by the poetry in the Rig Veda and the historicity of it. There is an inner meaning in the poems that are simple, yet profound. I wanted to demystify the Rig Veda in this book," says Sudipto.

Speaking of the relevance of linguistic palaeontology in ancient Indian history, Sudipto says: "Historical proof is very limited in ancient Indian history, but linguistic palaeontology proof is plentiful."

SRAVASTI DATTA



INTENSIVE RESEARCH Was the key to writing, for Sudipto PHOTO: MURALI KUMAR K.

YOUR DAY



Food
Godrej Nature's Basket is organising a cooking demonstration by chef Manohar and Ankur from *Mist At The Park*.
Venue: Godrej Nature's Basket, C.M.H. outlet
Time: 4.30 p.m. to 6 p.m.



Meet
It's called Meet the Artist, which will be Jatin Das, who will talk with art critic Giridhar Khasnis.
Venue: NGMA, Palace Road
Time: 5.30 p.m.
Contact: 22342338

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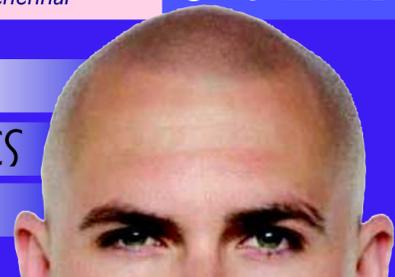
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