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FEATURED

Director Shuja Paul Brings Emotions of Arranged Marriage to Life in 'Tie the Knot'

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Director Shuja Paul and actress Tara Reid at the premiere of "Tie the Knot" in Los Angeles May 4. (photos provided)

LOS ANGELES — Of the many stereotypes affiliated with Indian culture is this idea of arranged marriage. There is much more nuance and depth to arranged marriage than two people showing up to the altar on the day they are to be wed simply because their respective parents said so. The emotions and tribulations felt among the men, women, family and friends is very real and captured on screen by Indian American film director Shuja Paul in his film "Tie The Knot."

Paul said the idea for his romantic comedy film on Indians and arranged marriage was inspired by a real life story of his friend worried a vacation to the motherland would result in her meeting prospective grooms.

“My East Indian American doctor friend was heading to India for vacation. She was concerned her family back home might try to arrange a marriage for her,” Paul told **India-West**. “It dawned on me that almost all East Indian women are faced with a similar dilemma. ‘Tie the Knot’ was born from this realization. I’ve also succumbed to the cultural sacrifices expected of me so the story has a little bit of my experience as well.”

Paul spent a few months writing multiple drafts and pitching to producers. He found Sanjiv Patel to produce the film and then cast Tara Reid and Karishma Ahluwalia to play the lead roles. Finding a producer who believed in the film and a cast who could realize Paul’s vision despite a small budget was a challenge.

“The biggest challenge was finding a producer that believed not only in the story but also in my vision of how to tell it,” Paul said. “Whenever I pitched ‘Tie the Knot,’ my only non-negotiable condition was that I direct the film. That was a turn-off for many potential producers, but I stuck with that condition until I met Sanjiv. He was gracious enough to allow me to direct the project.”

Another boost to the production was Reid, a veteran Hollywood actor who starred in films such as “Van Wilder” and “Sharknado” who plays Beatrice in “Tie the Knot.”

“Tara is amazing,” Paul told **India-West**. “I expressed our budgetary limitations and asked if she would be willing to drive the car without the usual trailer and other supporting vehicles. She not only agreed, but also drove exactly as I had imagined establishing Beatrice’s character perfectly. Tara fit the all American girl character in every way.

“I was a little concerned about having to direct such a seasoned actress in my first feature film,” Paul continued. “As soon as I met her she put me at ease. Tara was always prepared and contributed a lot by not just acting but being part of the ‘Tie the Knot’ team. She constantly provided valuable input.”

Reid and Patel were certainly patient with Paul as he brought his script to life despite a small budget.

“When I wrote the story I didn’t pay lot of attention to budget, but while filming I had to re-write ‘Tie The Knot’ to meet the monetary constraints. This is always one of the biggest challenges for independent filmmakers,” Paul explained. “For example, the opening scene of Tara Reid was

supposed to be on a busy highway with her character weaving through the traffic chasing an SUV that cut her off. I wanted to establish her frustration at not only losing her teaching job but also her annoyance with the daily life of L.A. traffic.”

Another challenge was casting Sonia Ahluwalia, who appeared in Netflix’s “Marco Polo” and TV Land’s “Hot in Cleveland,” played the lead actor and had to fully represents Paul’s vision.

“My biggest challenge was casting Sonia. We auditioned almost every East Indian actress in the U.S. Most of them are amazing, but we were looking for a young lady who could play a successful American laryngologist not so successful in her personal life,” Paul told **India-West**. “She had to be tough yet socially and culturally vulnerable. The moment I met Karishma Ahluwalia, I knew she was the one. She played the character very well.”

Through it all Paul hopes audiences have a deeper understanding of the nuances of how cultural roots interplays with making the best of everything life throws our way.

“‘Strong roots that drag you down also help you stand against the storms of life’ – I hope that’s what audience will take away from ‘Tie the Knot,’” Paul said. “It’s a fun movie; you can watch it with your family. The film caters to a diverse audience. Its ethnic and generational mash-up sets the stage for a unique floor stomping comedy that I hope leaves the audience enthralled at the calamity of old-school traditions mixed with contemporary reality.”

Looking ahead Paul is trying to parlay ‘Tie the Knot’ to fulfill his dream of being a full time filmmaker.

“‘Tie the Knot’ has certainly propelled me towards my childhood dream of filmmaking,” Paul told **India-West**. “I’m working on several projects at the moment and just completed shooting ‘Hollywood Diversity.’ It’s a comedy television pilot. The story focuses on ten illegal immigrants trying to make it in Hollywood. We plan to wrap post-production on ‘Hollywood Diversity’ by mid-August.”

“‘Tie the Knot’ was written and directed by Paul, produced by Patel, and has a run time of 90 minutes. The film, set in Los Angeles and Mumbai, delves into how Indian American women balance long-standing cultural mores with modern day demands and lifestyles. Sometimes the old traditions we feel slow us down in today’s fast pace world is what we need to truly stay grounded is the message the film aims to share with its audience.

Paul, Patel, Reid and many others were in attendance at the film's premiere in Los Angeles on May 4.