

Section 1 | Contact Information

Executive Producer: Amelyn Rani Ebeneizer

Writer, Director, Editor: Deepak Kumaran Menon

Whatsapp number(s): +6 010 829 8828

Email address(es): amelyn@diasporastory.com / deepak@diasporastory.com

Website: <https://www.diasporastory.com>

Section 2 | Project Information

1. Description of the project

"The Diaspora Story: Kalpavriksha" is an anthology of Tamil short films, exploring the paradoxically beautiful and chaotic issues of identity, culture, and nationhood in Malaysia - with a focus on the Indian diaspora.

The anthology brings a fresh perspective to diaspora literature with a quest for identity, described by a duality that is simultaneously embedded and detached, uprooted and re-rooted, insider and outsider - giving a voice to ethnic minorities that is too often marginalized and ignored.

2. Objectives of the project

- * To inspire one to do hard work for attaining success, despite the odds.
- * To bring communities together by providing perspectives, and challenging beliefs.
- * To enable social empowerment for all the sections of society to have equal control over their lives.

3. Tangible outcomes of the project

An anthology of Tamil short films.

4. Significance and impact of the project:

o How is this project new and experimental?

The anthology takes the coconut as a metaphor for Indian diasporas. It is generally accepted that the coconut originated from southern India and nearby regions. The coconut is a resilient fruit, whose shell can withstand the pressure of sea water. A hardy plant, the coconut would have been able to survive in relatively hospitable weather without much upkeep.

o How does this project break boundaries?

"The Diaspora Story: Kalpavriksha" inspires, informs, and engages. Our stories provoke empathy, provide perspectives, challenge beliefs, change minds, influence behavior, bring communities together, and catalyze systemic change.

o How is this project beneficial for the community?

"The Diaspora Story: Kalpavriksha" is a tool for broad reaching social empowerment - for all the sections of society, to have equal control over their lives, are able to take important decisions in their lives, to have equal opportunities, giving them a sense of identity and community in which they can thrive and grow. Without empowering all sections of society equally, a nation can never have a good growth trajectory.

o How will this project affect your development as an artist?

Filmmaking to me was a self discovery journey of family, hope, and dreams. The Diaspora Story is somewhat my comeback to filmmaking. I have been away from filmmaking for about 17 years to complete my Masters in Business, to develop new career skills, and to build a family. We have been blessed with 3 amazing kids.

I believe The Diaspora Story contains a good message to get out there. I believe it's the perfect time to do it. We've been working several years on developing the projects and now we're ready to cast and produce the films. I also wanted an honest and refreshing look at the real life of the Malaysian Indian community, that is rarely explored and intentionally buried.

It's a really independent piece, written, directed, and edited by myself, working alongside my wife, Amelyn Rani Ebeneizer, as the film producer to develop the budget, raise funds, schedule the production, and put together a team of talented cast and crew.

I wish one day, my kids would contribute on this platform as well. I want my films to serve a larger purpose - motivating diasporas and Malaysians at large to be proud of our cultural heritage, especially the things that remind us of how humble we once were.

This is an invitation, to identity, to culture, to nationhood - to finding your own voice.
So be a part of "The Diaspora Story". Help us bring it to life!

5. Time frame of the project.

Story Research & Project Development: 1st September 2022 - 18th October 2022

Pre-Production: 18th October 2022 - 30th November 2022

Production & Field Work: 1st December 2022 - 18th January 2023

Post-Production: 18th January 2023 - 8th February 2023

Project Distribution & Outreach: 8th February 2023 - 28th February 2023

6. Outreach, Awards & Screenings (last updated June 2023)

- ★ Official Selection, Life Screenings One Minute Film Festival, Florida, USA
- 🏆 Winner, 17th The Krishen Jit Fund 2022, Five Arts Centre, Malaysia
- ★ Nominee Best Director, AltFF Alternative Film Festival, Toronto, Canada
- ❤️ Honorable Mention Super Short Film, Best International Film Festival, Bucharest, Romania
- 🏆 Best Experimental Short Film, Mokkho International Film Festival, Pondicherry, India
- 🏆 Best One Minute Short Film, Poombukar Independent Film Festival, Mayiladuthurai, India
- 🏆 Best One Minute Short Film, Santa Dev International Film Festival, Ayyanar Nagar, India
- 🏆 Best One Minute Short Film, Sittannaval International Film Festival, Chennai, India
- 🏆 Best One Minute Short Film, Golden Horse International Film Festival, Sivaganga, India
- 🏆 Best One Minute Short Film, Diamond Bell International Film Festival, Chennai, India
- 🏆 Best One Minute Short Film, Thilsri International Film Festival, Sivaganga, India
- 🏆 Best One Minute Short Film, Athvikvaruni International Film Festival, Aranthangi, India
- 🏆 Best One Minute Short Film, Tamizhagam International Film Festival, Chennai, India

Section 3 | Personal Profile

1. Personal Statement - Objectives of your past/ present/ future work or Artist's statement (what is your philosophy as an artist?)

I've been literally carrying lights and cables for a long time - since I was 10 because my dad was in video production since 1979. After graduating with a degree in Media Arts & Sciences in 2001, I pursued writing, directing, and producing short film and television projects in English, Mandarin, and Malay.

The mainstream media stereotyped Malaysian Indians as robbers, gangsters, and drunkards. That stereotype annoyed me. More so when an Indian role in movies was played by a non-Indian because he is dark skinned and behaved moronic.

When I was a kid, my mother shared her struggles as a young girl from the rubber estate and her determination to escape the cycle of poverty that trapped her parents. My mum wanted to further her studies at the university, and it was an almost impossible thing to achieve in the 1960s, not only because she was from a poor family but also because she was a female child in a largely patriarchal society.

My mother's stories inspired me to make a film that my parents' generation could identify with, while at the same time, show the present generation a glimpse of what the not-so-distant past was like. I also wanted an honest and refreshing look at the real life of the Malaysian Indian community, that is rarely explored and intentionally buried. Filmmaking to me was a self discovery journey of family, hope, and dreams.

If I could give my children three things, it would be the strength to follow their passion, the confidence to always know their self worth, and the ability to know how deeply and truly loved they are. I never want my children to lose their smiles because that is what makes them the best of all.

I came across a lot of discussion on the plight of the Malaysian Indian community on the Internet. At first I was wondering: Why doesn't the community do something constructive instead of complaining on the internet? Then I started to realize that we don't have a place to complain, to share our struggles.

The Malaysian ethnic Indians have been suffering from institutionalized discrimination, social segregation, and denied the opportunity to display their talent in almost every field, namely; sports, arts, sciences, economics, politics, education, religion, and business.

As the years pass, Malaysia is becoming more and more hostile towards its Indian population. While Malays control the government and the Chinese dominate business, Indians are at the bottom of the society with little wealth, education, or job opportunities because of government policies that give preferential treatment to Malays.

Many Indians still do menial labor similar in nature to what the British brought them to Malaysia to do. Indians lag behind other ethnic groups by almost all measures. Though Indians form just 7% of the total Malaysian population, they account for 63% of those arrested under the Emergency Ordinance for violent crimes. They also constitute 41% of beggars and 20% of child abusers. Indians rank lowest in national elementary-school examinations; about one in every 12 Indian children does not even attend primary school.

The more I read about the plight of Malaysian Indians, the more I realized the importance of sharing these stories. Especially when I came across the quote by Malcolm X: "A race of people is like an individual man. Until it uses its own talent, takes pride in its history, expresses its own culture and affirms its own selfhood, it cannot fulfill itself."

In 2005, I decided to make a feature film project - a Malaysian Tamil film "The Gravel Road" as there was literally no Malaysian Indian film content at that time. It was a project close to my heart, a self discovery journey - themed family, hope, and dreams. In 2007, I released my second feature film "Dancing Bells". Both films received rave reviews, won international awards, and has been screened in more than two dozen countries.

Back home in Malaysia, even though we ran a 3-month full house in cinemas, my works were criticized by Finas because the film language was not predominantly in Malay, and they said: "Kamu mencemarkan budaya Malaysia."

I want my films to serve a larger purpose - motivating diasporas and Malaysians at large to be proud of our cultural heritage, especially the things that remind us of how humble we once were.

This is an invitation, to identity, to culture, to nationhood - to finding your own voice. So be a part of "The Diaspora Story". Help us bring it to life!

2. Main activities/ past history.

Deepak believes in continuous skills improvement and is determined to achieve his greatest potential. He earned a Masters in Business (2012) and a degree in Media Arts & Sciences (2001) from Multimedia University, Cyberjaya.

2020 to present, Deepak is the Founder of The Diaspora Story - an anthology of films about Malaysian Indians told in a Malaysian way. He is also the Founder of Supa Friday - devoted to increasing world happiness with yummy healthy vegan friendly snacks.

He got his start with Telekom University (2001 – 2011), where he showcased his skills on establishing business and industry relations, research and development of curriculum and strategic implementation of technology-based learning systems.

Among his employment was with TalentCap - a startup within the WMA Group - leading the business unit product, sales, and marketing for the conference and public training portfolio. He developed the business plan, market strategies, product roadmap, operational plan, and financial budget/projections.

Previously, he was with Marcus Evans (Malaysia) leading the Product Development for their in-house training portfolio. He developed and implemented the in-house training product positioning roadmap for AFRICA, MIDDLE EAST, APAC, and Australia.

Prior, he was with Siemens Malaysia, Manager Communications and Government Affairs. His forte includes; leadership communication, strategic communication and market intelligence, events and exhibition, corporate publishing and advertising, employee engagement, media and public relations, corporate citizenship & sustainability.

Deepak is deeply grateful for his amazing wife who he fondly describes as his beautiful mystery. They have been blessed with three wonderful children.

3. CV

Awards and Outreach (Selective): <https://www.diasporastory.com/outreach>

Film Title: Chemman Chaalai (The Gravel Road)

Duration: 88 minutes Feature Length

Genre: Fictional Film

Credits: Writer, Director, Editor

Status: Project Completed, World & International Premiere 2005

Website: <https://www.diasporastory.com/chemman-chaalai>

Film Title: Chalanggai (Dancing Bells)

Duration: 88 minutes Feature Length

Genre: Fictional Film

Credits: Writer, Director, Editor

Status: Project Completed, World & International Premiere 2007

Website: <https://www.diasporastory.com/chalanggai>

Film Title: Panjara

Duration: 88 minutes Feature Length

Genre: Fictional Film

Credits: Writer, Director, Editor

Status: Fund & Project Development Stage, Expected Completion Mid 2023/24

Website: <https://www.diasporastory.com/panjara>

Film Title: Karma Bhumi

Duration: 88 minutes Feature Length

Genre: Documentary Film

Credits: Writer, Director, Editor

Status: Fund & Project Development Stage, Expected Completion Mid 2023/24

Website: <https://www.diasporastory.com/karma-bhumi>

Film Title: Matamaha

Duration: 88 minutes Feature Length

Genre: Fictional Film

Credits: Writer, Director, Editor

Status: Fund & Project Development Stage, Expected Completion Mid 2023/24

Website: <https://www.diasporastory.com/dear-grandma>

4. Profile of those involved in the project

Team Profile: <https://www.diasporastory.com/team>

Executive Producer | AMELYN RANI EBENEIZER

Brings extensive experience in financial planning and analysis with major MNC and SSC to optimize performance by negotiating terms with stakeholders, vendors, and business units. She enjoys travel, food, and art. She adores her three amazing children and greathearted furkid doggo.

Writer, Director, Editor | DEEPAK KUMARAN MENON

A third generation Malaysian Indian diaspora, Hindu by birth, raised in a Muslim country, happily married to a Christian. His film direction has received rave reviews, his writings have won international awards, his films have been screened in more than two dozen countries.

Voice Over | SARAN NARAYANAN

Self taught award winning singer, song writer, musician, actor and worked on commercial composition under the late Yasmin Ahmad, and numerous multinational advertising giants like Leo Burnett, DraftFCB and brands like ASTRO, Celcom, Telekom Malaysia, Maxis, DIGI, Baba's - among others.

Cinematographer | MALEK HUE

Over 22 years cinematography experience. Started at the bottom as Production Assistant and worked himself up the proverbial ladder. Part of the Malaysian New Wave Cinema - lensed for Amir Muhammad, Deepak Kumaran Menon, Liew Seng Tat, Tan Chui Mui, Khoo Eng Yow, and Bernard Chauly, among others.

Cinematographer | RUPESH KUMAR

Internationally acclaimed documentary filmmaker on issues of caste discrimination prevailing in India. Directorial ventures include 'Underworld memories of Untouchables', 'Don't be our fathers' and 'By the side of a river'. Malayalam novel writer 'Cinemascope', film reviewer, actor, & creative director.

Music Composer | HARDESH SINGH

Hardesh Singh has composed music for many of the 1st generation of independent filmmakers in Malaysia, including Yasmin Ahmad and Amir Muhammad. He also ran an audio post production company and worked on sound design installations at home and abroad.

Section 4 | Photos, Videos, Articles, Media Coverage

Official Website : <https://www.diasporastory.com>

Kalpavriksha Page : <https://www.diasporastory.com/kalpavriksha>

Kalpavriksha Short Film (Google Drive): Please request permission to access

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xMRfKMzXz_poT9Y_1Ly-uw01gDox9OGi/view?usp=sharing

Poster & Still Images & Media Kit (Google Drive): Please request permission to access

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EM9isGijHQWi_eHlArbUY4S97hFZateb?usp=drive_link

BFM89.9

<https://bfm.my/podcast/evening-edition/evening-edition/merdeka-what-i-hope-for-malaysia-deepak-kumar>

Utusan Malaysia

<https://www.utusan.com.my/rencana/2023/03/diaspora-india-dan-buah-kelapa>

Short Synopsis:

- ❖ OPULENCE (**வலிமை** البذخ 丰裕). The palm tree strives ever upwards when it is most burdened.
- ❖ VOYAGE (**பயணம்** رحلة 航程). Can coconuts travel on their own?
- ❖ DREAM (**ஸ்வப்னா** حلم 梦). She is constantly dreaming. Not only at night. Not only while she sleeps.
- ❖ EQUALITY (**சமத்துவம்** المساواة 平等). To grow a coconut tree, one has to sow the entire coconut with the husk.
- ❖ ROOTS (**வேர்கள்** الجذور 根). Where do we find our true identity?
- ❖ HUMILITY (**அமானித்வம்** التواضع 谦逊). When does humility become servility or obsequiousness?
- ❖ TIME (**சமயம்** الوقت 时间). Is living in the moment a good thing?
- ❖ EGO (**அஹம்காரா** الغرور 自我). What is the function of Ahamkara?