

QT Indian Experience



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'QATAR HAS STAMPED ITS MARK ON THE INTERNATIONAL SPORTS ARENA'

Gulf-based veteran sports writer makes his foray into showbiz with the record-shattering film '2018'

There are instances – very few though, you can literally count them on your fingers – of cricketers making their way into showbiz. Former Test cricketers Ajay Jadeja, Sandeep Patil, Sunil Manohar Gavaskar, Syed Kirmani, Salim Durrani (he passed away in April this year), and a few others. None of them made it big in the world of cinema. But foray they did make.

Sports journalist K.R. Nayar, however, could be in a different league. Known for his astute coverage of the game of cricket, Nayar has taken an out-of-the-ordinary turn. From a cricket journalist to the world of acting, he probably counts among the minuscule number of people having done so. But call it destiny or sheer luck, the film he chose to launch his acting career has just become a super-duper hit. Well, we are talking about '2018', the highest-grossing Malayalam movie of all time, that hit the cine screens recently.

'Nayar Saheb', as this writer calls him, is entitled to be on Cloud Nine right now. He's part of cinematic history now thanks to the box office records the movie is shattering every single day, and counting at that.

Nayar has donned the hat of a cop in this survival thriller film written by Jude Anthony Joseph and Akhil P. Dharmaraj, and directed by Jude Anthony Joseph.

Hasn't this transition been dramatic? "Undoubtedly!" he answers.

"It was a dramatic turn in my career. [But] despite being a sports journalist, acting in a film had always been a cherished dream of mine since my school days. Coincidentally, my schoolmates were none other than Mohanlal and director Priyadarshan, who later became legends in the film industry. While they soared to great heights in the Malayalam film world, I travelled the world as a cricket journalist. However, deep down, I always nurtured the dream of acting in a movie.

In this interview with Qatar Tribune, Nayar explains the complexity of this intricate journey of his. Excerpts:

How do you see Qatar as a sporting destination?

Qatar is set to flourish as another top sporting hub in the Gulf region. When I visited Qatar in March 2023 to cover the Legends League Cricket, I was not sure of what the turn-out of cricket fans would be at the stadium. But the first-day turnout shocked me as I saw a packed crowd at the Asian Town Cricket Stadium. The enthusiasm and cheers for the cricketers were on par with any popular cricket stadium in a Test-playing nation.

It was evident that the splendor of Qatar having hosted the mega FIFA World Cup event in November-December 2022 was still alive. Many of the posters created for the World Cup beckoning fans to the world-class football grounds were still there. No event can be successful without the ardent support of fans. Both, Qataris and expatriates living there, have shown that there is huge scope for all sporting events.

Qatar has stamped its presence in the international arena as a country with the capability to host mega-events, starting from the 2006 Asian Games to the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Boosted by these successes, the 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup has also been scheduled here. It is now well known that Qatar will leave no stone unturned to host an event successfully, and hence it should come as no surprise when outstanding sports stars too emerge from this county soon.

How did you land the role in this film ('2018')?

When Venu Kunnappilly, the producer of '2018', became aware of my acting skills in dramas and my talent during my school days, he encouraged me to pursue acting in a movie that he would produce. Using the skills that I had demonstrated in school and college, he urged me to draw confidence from them. While I was reporting the Legends League Cricket in India, he approached me to act in his film. The shooting was in Kochi. I was fortunate to get the opportunity to act alongside a legendary actor like Janardhanan who has appeared in more than 700 movies. It was a truly remarkable moment.



K. R. Nayar in Qatar in March 2023 to cover the Legends League Cricket tournament.

'2018': A FACT FILE

Jude Anthony Joseph's survival thriller is based on the 2018 Kerala floods

- ◆ Highest-grossing film in Kerala of all time
- ◆ The film's storyline and its authentic depiction of the Kerala floods have struck a chord with the audience
- ◆ '2018' beats the record of Mohanlal-starrer 'Pulimurugan'
- ◆ First Malayalam film to gross Rs150 crore worldwide
- ◆ The film is expected to do much better as its dubbed versions hit the screens on Friday
- ◆ Released in Telugu by Bunny Vas, this version too has garnered a massive response
- ◆ Apart from Tovino Thomas, the film stars Kunchako Boban, Asif Ali, Vineeth Sreenivasan, Aparna Balamurali, Kalaiyaran, Narain, Lal, Indrans, Sudheesh, Gilu Joseph, Vinitha Koshy, Aju Varghese, Tanvi Ram, Sshivada, and Gauthami Nair in the lead roles



Top 10 highest-earning films in Kerala so far (Source: Internet)

1) 2018	Rs 156 crore* (Day 24)
2) Pulimurugan	Rs 78.50 crore
3) Baahubali 2	Rs 73 crore
4) K.G.F. Chapter 2	Rs 66.50 crore
5) Lucifer	Rs 63 crore
6) Bheeshma Parvam	Rs 46.50 crore
7) Drishyam	Rs 42.50 crore
8) Romancham	Rs 42 crore
9) Premam	Rs 41 crore
10) Vikram	Rs 40.50 crore

How was your experience of working as an actor? Were you taken seriously on the set?

Working as an actor was an incredible experience for me. In my blog, I described it as akin to walking out to bat and playing an inning, the only difference being that, on the cricket field, I am surrounded by opponents who want to get me out. On the film set, however, everyone, starting from director Jude Anthony Joseph, supported and

encouraged me to display the emotions required for my role. Since everyone was aware that I was a cricket writer, some even engaged me in conversations about cricket. I vividly remember entering into my role through heavy rainfall created by water splashing from enormous tanks onto the Cochin Club, a bungalow located in Fort Kochi. The first scene, a cabinet meeting with Janardhanan as chief minister and myself as the DGP, was shot there.

Given the dramatic career shifts seen in the post-Covid world, how would you categorise your move into acting?

Throughout my life, I have always been committed to whatever I do. I enjoyed the acting opportunity I got. As a cricket writer, I never felt like it was just a job; I genuinely relished every day of it. I firmly believe that one should be prepared for any career and, once undertaken, give their heart and soul to it. I will continue cricket writing since I work for various cricket councils in the UAE and also report on many franchise leagues. Reporting has been my profession for nearly four decades. That said, I would be delighted if more film roles come my way. With my well-honed time management skills, I believe that I can balance both cricket and acting.

Have people appreciated your role in the film?

The most fulfilling moment was when I realised that I would be acting alongside the legendary actor Janardhanan, who has previously worked with the late Malayalam hero Satyan. I have always tried to remain fit through regular yoga, so it wasn't difficult for me to appear fit for the role of a DGP. The director, Jude Anthony Joseph made me feel really comfortable on the set. Also, the entire team, including line producer Gopakumar and managers Sasi Kumar and Dileep Kumar, supported me throughout and helped instil confidence in me. Janardhanan was so friendly that I never turned nervous at all while acting alongside him. Another heartening moment was when the entire crew applauded after I had delivered a long dialogue. Those moments will forever be etched in my memory.

You have spent a major part of your career as a journalist in the Gulf region. Can you share insights into the connection between Kerala expatriates and the Gulf? Has the allure diminished after the significant job losses due to the pandemic?

The connection between Kerala expatriates and the Gulf region is timeless. When I joined Gulf News some 28 years ago, Malayalam was practically the second language there. As a joke, we used to say that one could find a Keralite in every corner of the country. Today, people from various states and other countries have come and taken up different jobs, but Keralites still stand among the leading expatriates. The Gulf has rebounded from the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and although there were job losses initially, the employment situation is gradually returning to normalcy.

Are you considering taking up more acting roles in the future?

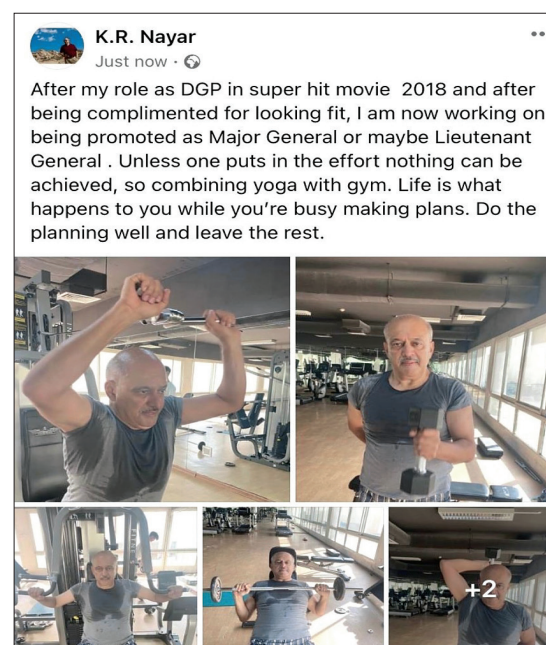
Absolutely! If more acting opportunities come my way, I will gladly embrace them. Although my role as the DGP was a small one, I have received compliments from many, including those in the film industry. Additionally, the fact that this film has become the biggest hit in the history of the Malayalam film industry has been a tremendous boost for me. I can proudly share with anyone that I was a part of this movie.

Were you anxious about the reception of the film at the box office?

I was quite anxious about the film's success. However, on its release day itself, it became evident that it would be a hit. I was thrilled when producer Venu Kunnappilly called to inform me that most shows were running to full houses. He even extended his congratulations to me. A special screening was held at the Al Ghurair Centre cinema, and at the end of the screening, the audience applauded the movie. Kavya, Venu Kunnappilly's daughter, introduced me to the audience as the actor who portrayed the DGP. It was a special moment when everyone clapped and I addressed the gathering expressing my belief that the hard work put into creating such a movie could well result in it being sent up for the Oscars. The applause from the audience still resonates in my ears, and each day since then has been filled with joy as the movie continues to break collection records.



Nayar (right) in an intense scene from the movie. Also seen is Janardhanan.



A recent social media post by Nayar outlining future goals.



Nayar with '2018' producer Venu Kunnappilly (left).