



# 'Sanjay's Super Team' Arrives

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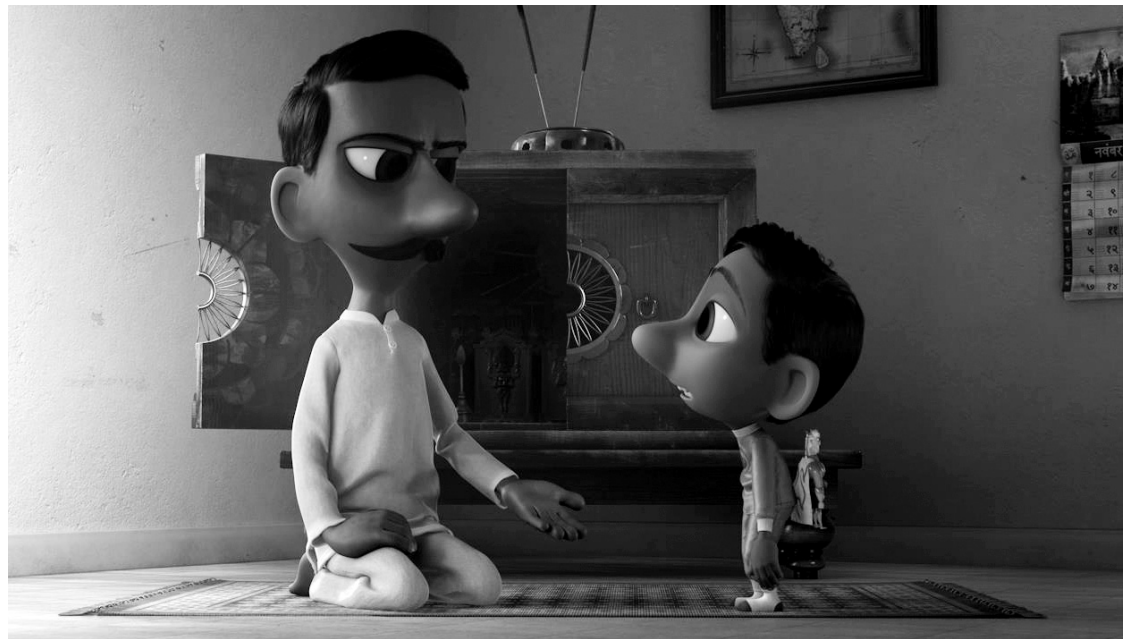
**W**hen Pixar artist Sanjay Patel was growing up in the 1980s, not many Indian faces looked out at him from his American TV screen. His conspicuous Indianness embarrassed him, and he camped out within mainstream pop-culture, day-dreaming about comic book characters and watching Saturday morning cartoons.

His parent's culture and religious practices were also a source of mystery. Elaborate prayer rituals and chanted names remained obtuse to Patel for years, and separated him from his peers.

These days, the media world has changed; Aziz Ansari and Mindy Kaling are familiar comedic faces on the small screen, and Priyanka Chopra sets hearts aflutter across races.

This November, Patel will be adding a new story to the screen.

On Nov. 25, Pixar will be releasing "Sanjay's Super Team," a short film that will appear at the start of the newest Disney-Pixar feature "The Good Dinosaur." In the autobiographical short, a reluctant Sanjay follows his father into a magical world populated by the superhero-like characters of Hindu mythology, and returns with a sense of awe and pride in his culture. "I'm hoping that the 8-year-old version of me finally



finds a mirror of their experiences, and hopefully feels more connected to the culture of America," said Patel in an interview with Desi Talk.

A decade ago, outside of his day job as an artist for Pixar, Patel began quietly working on graphic novels based on Hindu texts in the evenings. Even as he published books – "The Little Book of Hindu Deities" came out in 2006, and "The Ramayana" followed in 2010 – and displayed his images at art galleries, Patel felt embarrassment and shyness about his side projects, and kept his day job and night work separate.

Pixar, however, is always mining its gifted staff for inspiration. In a hallway in the studio, the artists display their personal

work, and Patel was convinced to hang some of his creations.

"John Lasseter [Pixar's Chief Creative Officer] loved it. He went crazy for it, and insisted that Sanjay make a film," said Nicole Paradis Grindle, the Producer of "Sanjay's Super Team."

Though Patel initially demurred, he was ultimately convinced to pursue the film. "Only when this short got made do I finally feel some level of comfort about being South Asian and exposing that side of my identity," said Patel.

Like Patel, the protagonist of the short uses art to understand and appreciate his parent's beliefs. For the young cartoon-version of Sanjay, his love of comic book superheroes gave

him an foundation to appreciate the superhero-like qualities of the mythological figures in the Hindu pantheon.

For Patel, his education in western art prepared him to find the beauty and inspiration in the culture of his motherland.

"I went to three different art school, but I was never introduced to South Asian art, let alone philosophy," recalled Patel.

"After I burnt out on European and Western art, that made space to check out South Asian art, and I found the art to be an incredible gateway to the philosophy and mythology."

As Patel learned more about Hindu mythology, he began to see some of his parent's habits in a new light.

"Every time I sneezed, my parents would say 'Sitaram,'" explained Patel. "It took me 30 years, but when I finally read the Ramayana, I understood that they were evoking these auspicious figures, and it was their way of giving a blessing. The stories unlocked different parts of my parents, and ultimately led me to appreciate and love them."

In the short, young Sanjay takes a parallel journey into the magic of the mythology, and come back with a new perspective of his parents and his heritage, all enhanced by the fantasy-land of Pixar magic, with lively animations and music from Mychael Danna, a composer who scored "Life of Pi."

The short became a multicultural project, shared Grindle. Danna, who is married to a Bengali woman, has a son named Arjun and carries a copy of the Ramayana in his bag; Peter Sohn, a Korean American and child of immigrants, served as the Art Director.

"So many children of immigrants are resistant to their parent's culture," said Grindle. They don't understand why they are being taken away from their peer group. The film is not just for Indian immigrants; it's a story that a lot of immigrants can relate to."

"I just think it's a big deal to have Walt Disney put their names right alongside this foreign, immigrant story," said Patel. "It makes it feel like part of the fabric of America."