



## Arun Ashok: Navigating finance, film, and an award-winning diasporic voice in Australia

WRITTEN BY: AMRITA PRIYA

**(February 23, 2025)** Melbourne-based banker Arun Ashok expertly balances his weekdays in financial services with weekends devoted to his true passion—filmmaking. His ability to navigate both worlds is paying off. The filmmaker's dedication to storytelling recently earned him first prize in the Indian Diaspora category at the ICCR & Routes 2 Roots International Film Festival, which saw participation from 35 countries.

The film, *The Throw (Beyond Borders)*, also won him the prestigious Guirlande d'Honneur at the 40th Sports & TV International Festival in Milan, an event affiliated with the International Olympic Committee.

"I grew up obsessed with movies, acting in school and college dramas, and always dreamed of becoming a filmmaker. But I ended up in a corporate job, which now helps me self-fund my weekend filmmaking endeavours," the banker-filmmaker tells [Global Indian](#) in an interview.



### A story woven across continents

When Arun left his hometown of Thrissur, Kerala, in 2013 to migrate to Australia, he was uncertain whether he could keep his passion for filmmaking alive in a foreign land. His primary goal was financial stability, which meant setting aside his creative aspirations to pursue a more traditional career path.

His migration was facilitated through the Queensland Government's skilled migration scheme, which provided him the opportunity to settle in the region, secure employment, and by the end of two years, apply for permanent residency.

"I took the opportunity to explore a new country and its possibilities," says the filmmaker who moved to Australia armed with a B. Com and an MBA.

Queensland, a state in northeastern Australia, was Arun's first home before he later moved to Victoria, located in the southeast. Now based in Melbourne, Victoria's capital, he works as a banker at National Australia Bank while making waves as an award-winning filmmaker. Far from being a limitation, his diasporic experience has instead shaped a distinctive storytelling voice.

### Touching the chords

The two prestigious awards he won for his short film, *The Throw (Beyond Borders)*, recognize his expertise in emotional depth, cultural resonance, and powerful storytelling.

The ICCR & Routes 2 Roots International Film Festival featured two categories: Foreign Alumni and Indian Diaspora, with three winners in each. Prizes were distributed by the Indian embassy in each country under ICCR's directive.

The film's gripping cinematography and heartfelt performances resonated with a broader global audience as well and helped Arun win Guirlande D'honneur at the 40th Sports & TV International Festival in Milan much to his surprise. "When I got an invitation from The Federation Internationale Cinema Television Sportifs (FICTS) to attend the film festival in Italy, I never imagined I would win," he says. "That moment fueled my passion and motivated me to write my next short film."

### Journey into filmmaking

Despite spending over a decade in banking and financial services, Arun's true passion has been storytelling. "I have always been drawn to cinema and envisioned using my experiences to shape my voice as a storyteller," shares the banker, who honed his craft by attending film workshops in Melbourne. These sessions helped him develop technical expertise that complemented his innate storytelling ability, laying a strong foundation for his directorial journey.

Inspiration for the award-winning short film struck him unexpectedly in 2022 when his son, Adivev, a young athlete specializing in discus throw, was selected to represent the state of Victoria at the under 10 national championships in Brisbane. "During the national event around 100 kids from each state participated and there were 50 multi-class (special needs) kids as well," he says. At the championship, Arun was awe-inspired to witness the athletes with special needs perform exceptionally well. "I was astonished to see all the multi-class kids surpassing national records," he recalls. "That moment triggered the story for *The Throw (Beyond Borders)*, a film about sportsmanship, perseverance, and how human connections transcend barriers."

Around the same time, Ashok came across an advertisement for the ICCR & Routes 2 Roots Filmmaking Competition, which was inviting entries for the *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—"The world is one family" category from filmmakers in his age group.

Motivated by the competition, he wrote the film script and directed it not only as a submission but also as a way to inspire children to support one another and encourage parents to motivate their kids in athletics. "I have noticed that children from our diaspora in Australia are not very involved in athletics," says the filmmaker, who aimed to deliver a powerful message to the Indo-Australian community through his film.

### Exploring resilience and inclusion

His second short film, *The Pinnacle Whisperer*, is a psychological thriller centered on a mute child. Apart from being a script writer and director, Arun is also one of the actors in the film.

When asked why his themes revolve around individuals facing unique challenges, Arun smiles and says, "Maybe I'm just drawn to exploring human resilience. I want to inspire viewers by creating a sense of connection, reminding them of their own capacity for perseverance, and cultivating empathy and compassion."

Arun considers *The Pinnacle Whisperer* as a kind of CV. "I have written the script of a thriller feature film and this film is my C.V to the potential film producer," he says with the hope of directing the film under the banner of a major production company. "A Bollywood actor has expressed interest in a key role. But I'm searching for a producer to fund the project," he mentions.

### Navigating opportunities and challenges as a filmmaker

Being an Indian-origin filmmaker in Australia comes with unique opportunities and challenges. "It's been a great learning experience here, with advanced technology at our fingertips," he says, citing Melbourne-based companies like Blackmagic Design and Atomos, which are revolutionizing filmmaking.

However, funding remains a major hurdle. "For independent filmmakers like me, securing funds means relying on savings, sponsorships, and the goodwill of crew members," he admits. Additionally, Australia's unpredictable weather presents challenges for outdoor shoots.

Despite these obstacles, Arun embraces the diversity of Australia's cultural landscape. "The experience of bringing different stories and perspectives to the forefront is invaluable," he says. "That's what makes cinema universal."

### Balancing art and life

Juggling a full-time banking career with a passion for filmmaking is no easy feat, but Ashok credits his support system for making it possible. "I am surrounded by understanding peers, mentors, and most importantly, my wife and child, who help me manage the stress of filmmaking while balancing my corporate work."

From Thrissur to Melbourne, from banking to cinema, Ashok's story is all about being dedicated to one's dreams and passion, and the joy of reaping its rewards.