

Sendhil Ramamurthy tells Arthur J Pais about the kind of films he wants to be remembered for

In the decade he has been around, Sendhil Ramamurthy has had a busy career on stage in films and television, including playing the geneticist Mohinder Suresh in the NBC sci-fi drama *Heroes* and more recently Gabriel Lowen in *Beauty & the Beast*.

Chicago-born Ramamurthy graduated from Tufts University, where he started off as a pre-med major before deciding on an acting career.

His mother Dr. Rajam Ramamurthy, who picked up classical Indian dance when she was 50, and founded a school in San Antonio to train older and younger students, is among his biggest fans.

Ramamurthy is married to the actress Olga Sosnovska.

He recently turned producer on the independent film, *Brahmin Bulls* in which a Boston scientist makes a surprise trip to Los Angeles to visit his estranged son, but just as, the two begin a journey to mend their relationship, he discovers that his father has actually come in search of an old flame. The wounds inflicted by his mother's death and father's adultery flare up.

The film stars Roshan Seth (*Gandhi, Monsoon Wedding*), Academy Award winner Mary Steenburgen, Justin Bartha, Cassidy Freeman, Monica Raymund, and Academy Award-nominated Michael Lerner.

Your performance in *Brahmin Bulls* is exceptional. It is even more impressive considering you are sharing the screen in many crucial scenes with Roshan Seth. You have a very good chemistry with him.

Both of us went to drama school in London, though he belonged to a different generation, but we still had something in common.

Roshan helped me to elevate my performance. I was conscious throughout the shoot I could not let him down.

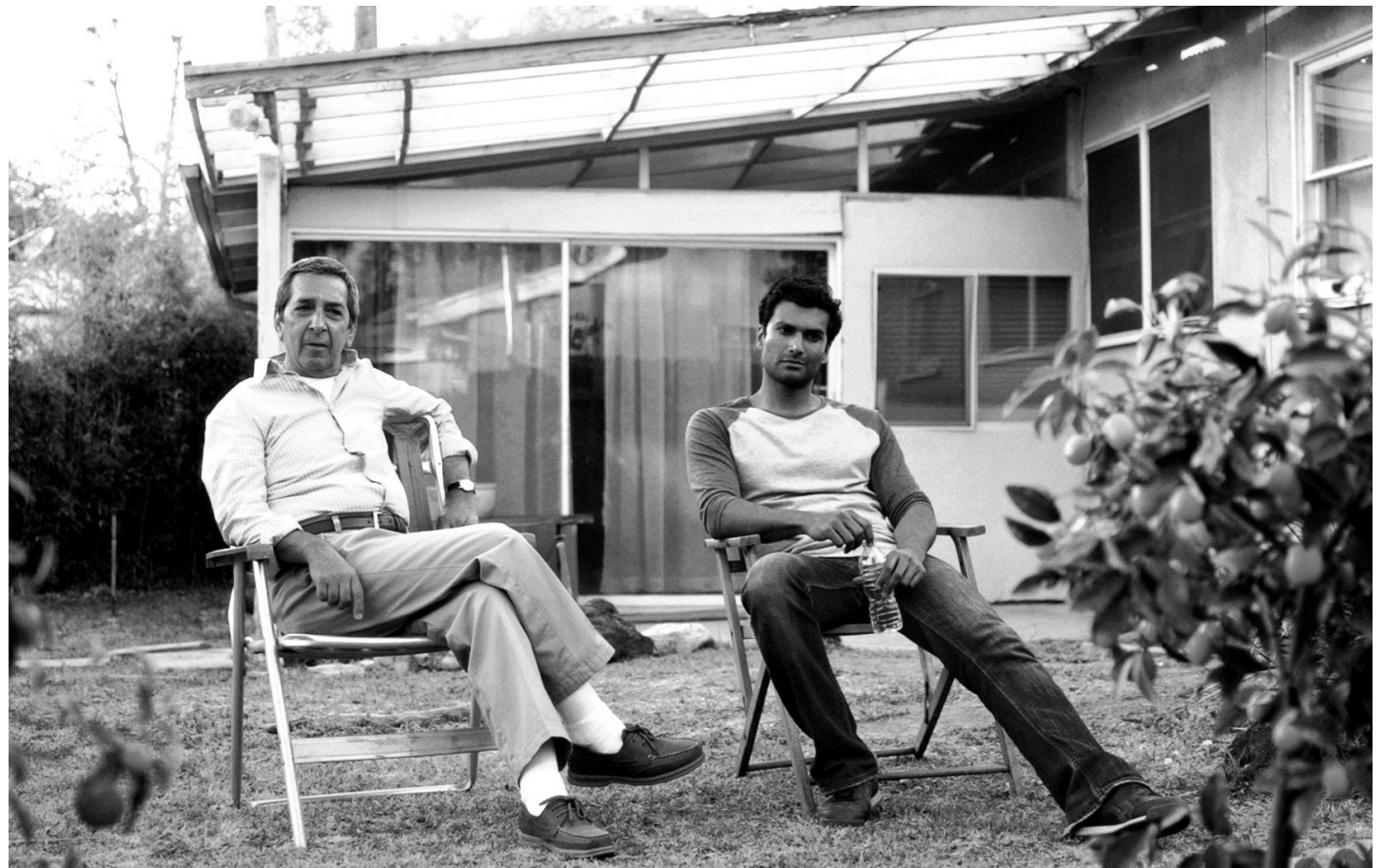
There were times I would be edgy and very anxious, but Roshan would calm me down and tell me I must channel my energy into my performance.

What have you taken most from your theater training in London?

I have seen some of the best actors of our generation with the Royal Shakespeare Company, prepare for their work. You cannot help but absorb something out of it.

It was a huge decision to study acting and give up medicine. My parents had this perception of acting as not being a valid profession. But in less than a year, they had changed their mind and telling everyone about my progress.

What have you most consistently advocat-



Sendhil Ramamurthy with Roshan Seth in *Brahmin Bulls*.

'I get scripts set in the Indian community, but I reject most because they are poorly written'

ed for yourself right from the start?

Not to accept stereotypical roles or roles which meant nothing to me. Fortunately, I have an agent who never asked me to take up the roles which I did not want, never questioned me when I said no. He never stopped me from taking up the roles I coveted, even if it were a small film or a television show.

I have been lucky to have had a steady diet of television roles and an occasional film or two in the last eight years.

What do you look most closely at when deciding on a project?

Of course, the script. We had an excellent script for *Brahmin Bulls*, a story of estrangement, reconciliation and re-examination of lives. Anu Pradhan, and my director and New York University friend Mahesh Pailoor worked on the script.

But we did make some changes as we went along, and since this was a very small budget film, we had to think very fast and make the changes.

I like to work more in films like *Brahmin Bulls*, which tell the stories of our own communities and the interaction with the larger

community.

But such projects are rare. Every third month or so, I get scripts set in the Indian community here, but I reject most because they are poorly written and the would-be filmmakers have not prepared well for their film career.

Give me a good script and I am there.

I worked with a lot of Indian artists for *It's a Wonderful Afterlife*. It was written and directed by Gurinder Chadha, who did *Bend It Like Beckham*.

I even went to India a couple of years ago to do *Shor in the City*. It's like a really gritty crime drama. It kind of follows my character's descent into a kind of hell, if you like.

And that was probably the hardest thing I've ever done, the physical toll of it was huge. The heat... I was shooting in the largest slum in Mumbai for a lot of it. It was, again, just a very different experience for me and working with a whole different crew and a whole different culture of filmmaking.

Did you feel despair at the start of your career that things weren't going smoothly?

Several times I did ask myself, did I do the

right thing in giving up on medicine and go to drama school. But I was lucky to get support from my friends and family.

I had a lot of friends in New York, many were my college mates, who had become doctors, corporate executives, lawyers and entrepreneurs. They would take me out many times in a month and help to keep my morale up.

They would tell me, 'Don't give up on your goals.' I suspected some of them were not happy with what they were doing.

Was there any pressure on you to change your name?

Believe me, there was. But then I said to myself, had I been a blond white guy and had this name, Sendhil Ramamurthy, I might have changed it to something like John Smith. But I would still remain an Indian with the name change. So....

You will be turning 40 soon. But it doesn't show. Sign of leading a good and healthy life, we are sure. What gives you the most joy?

Being with my family, especially my daughter and son. If I were not to work this summer at all, I won't regret it. I would have a wonderful time with my children.