

Ontario college offers course in Bollywood acting

BY LINDA NGUYEN, POSTMEDIA NEWS SEPTEMBER 22, 2010



From L-R: Student Shereen Mala, instructor Lucky Sanda, student Sachel Metoo and director Hanif Malek outside the Canadian Institute of Management and Technology in Mississauga, Ont.

Photograph by: Postmedia News, Photo Handout

TORONTO — The next big superstar to come out of Bollywood — India's version of Hollywood — may not be from New Delhi or Mumbai, but from Mississauga, Ont.

That's what a small technical college in the Toronto-area community is banking on with a unique 16-week course on Bollywood acting, believed to be the only diploma of its kind in North America.

Founder Lucky Sanda, who started the program last year at Canadian Institute of Management and Technology, said students in his classes learn everything from common Hindi phrases to acting, choreographed dance moves and lip-synching.

"The demand for Canadian actors in Bollywood is there," said Sanda, a former child actor in India. "You can go to any South Asian household and find someone who wants to be in a movie or loves to sing. They may not show it, but everyone wants to be a star."

He said the Toronto area was also the perfect place to launch the program, with nearly 600,000 South Asians living in the region, making them the largest visible minority group.

Canada's largest city is also set to host the International Indian Film Academy Awards — Bollywood's Oscars— in June 2011, the first time the show will be held in North America. The awards show is expected to bring 40,000 people to Toronto and be watched by 350 million TV viewers worldwide.

Eleven students registered for the \$9,000-course in its first year, with attendance expected to rise when the program starts up again in January.

Sanda, 46, said his former students have gone on to produce, direct and be cast as extras in Bollywood movies shot in Toronto and New Delhi.

"My students were a very diverse group of people," he said. "I had people who immigrated here, had families, achieved what they wanted and now are looking to follow their first dream. Others just graduated high school and want to do something different."

One student was in his 50s and owned a chain of furniture stores across the Toronto area. Another was an ex-private investigator. Not all spoke Hindi or were from India. His students commuted from Hamilton, Oakville and Markham, all near Toronto. Two were international students from Guyana and Fiji.

Sanda, who previously worked as a caterer in Canada, said more Bollywood directors are choosing to do their movies overseas because shooting can wrap in weeks and movie stars are forced to commit to only one project at a time as opposed to the standard Indian practice of multiple projects.

The only issue is that extras with experience are hard to come by, even in communities such as Vancouver and Toronto, where South Asian populations are high.

"Bollywood acting is very poetic. It's expressive and loud. There's a lot of body language that is used. When someone cries, they sob. There's lots of singing and dancing," he said. "You don't see much of that in Hollywood. Directors need actors who understand that."

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