

Ameen Aslam about MOMO IN DUBAI

“Striving high and making the unlikely possible”

In his small village in Kerala, Momo tells his friends about his big dream: to one day see the Burj Khalifa. His father, who works as a labourer in Dubai, can make that dream come true just like that when he invites his family - whom he has been missing for two years - to the UAE for a holiday. Despite their financial struggles, they take a chance. Mum and the three children enjoy having Dad in their midst again, but life in Dubai is very different from back home. Momo meets new people there, sees things he has never seen before and... the Burj Khalifa suddenly seems very close!

With its charming modesty and delicate nimbleness, the travel adventures of Momo and his Muslim family also charmed local audiences.

To my surprise, the entire story turns out to be told... to an ant!

Ameen Aslam: Our approach shows how every creature, big or small, is important in our world. Even the smallest voices matter!

This self-assured (as somebody says in the film: “What a show-off”) and mischievous boy was lovingly embraced as “cute” by local audiences.

Aslam: Momo often took charge among his friends in playful ways; despite his limitations, he always aimed to lead. This mix of confidence, mischief and innocent charm is something people can relate to easily. The way Momo deals with challenges shows that it’s okay to be vulnerable while trying to be strong.

He injects plenty of energy into the story!

Aslam: We need his young energy and innocence not only to move the story along but also to remind us of the endless imagination and playful spirit that kids have. In Momo, I see the quirky behaviour of many of my friends’ children and my own child. Their ways of expressing themselves have even influenced how I see Momo’s character. This correlation with our own kids brings him even closer to our hearts.



A strong loving feeling lives within this family. Father and mother treat each other (and their children) very understandingly.

Aslam: Momo is growing up in a home that lets him be himself. Being showered in love and patience by his family helps him become brave and self-assured. This kind of support is something people everywhere can get behind. I think all parents enjoy seeing what their kids do, whether they’re full of beans or rather taking it easy, they just love to watch every single move they make.

Although this is a Muslim family in

India – a model family! - their religious background isn’t emphasised.

Aslam: Their day-to-day life is meant to be relateable to any family, regardless of religion. Their faith isn’t a main factor in the film, although it’s not being overlooked. The idea is to show how families all over the world, no matter where they’re from or what they believe in, go through many similar issues. These simple, shared experiences of life, love and bringing up kids connect us all.

One quote I found rather striking: “I’m flying on my own wings now.”

Aslam: This is what Momo’s mother



says at an important moment when she wants to become more independent and help her family. It shows her shift from depending on others to standing on her own two feet, aiming to motivate any woman who wants to be more proactive and independent in their life. It acknowledges the tough spots and wins in becoming more independent, much like growing up.

What exactly is the situation with Indian workers in Dubai? What consequences does this job situation have for their families?

Aslam: These workers come from different backgrounds but often face common difficulties. They work hard, yet balancing money earned with expenses is tough. What makes it harder is being far away from their homes. For Indians, who are usually emotionally close to their families, this distance can be extra painful. They push through the loneliness and hard times, hoping to make things better for their loved ones at home. Taking a closer look at their lives, our story depicts their financial and emotional challenges and the strong commitment to their families, which defines a big part of who they are.

Did you actually shoot in Dubai?

Aslam: With a team of 65 crew mem-

bers, we filmed in Dubai, Sharjah, Abudhabi, Fujairah, and Kerala in India. In the UAE, as long as you have the right permissions, filming is quite straightforward. The city's mix of cultures and beautiful scenes were perfect for our story. We really got into the spirit of the place and tried to show UAE's culture in an authentic way.

Did you feel supported by the local government?

Aslam: The great support we got from local authorities made our filming go more smoothly. We even had help from the police when we shot scenes on the road.

I've seen the Burj Khalifa on posters everywhere in India, I've heard songs about it, there are the stories that Momo tells to his friends... Where does the tower's magical appeal come from?

Aslam: Burj Khalifa stands as a symbol of great ambition, creative ideas, and the dreams that motivate people. It represents striving high and making the unlikely possible, just like Momo's own dreams. This story idea was inspired by my own experiences. My second son, who shares Momo's habit of sleeping early, eagerly wanted to see the Burj Khalifa. However, he fell

asleep early by the time we got there.

In Dubai, Momo's family gets in contact with all kinds of cultures. There is the Arab neighbour, a Korean family, other Indian temporary residents...

Aslam: That rich mix of cultures shows just how international that city is. They interact with various people, including Filipinos, Arabs and other Indians. Even though Momo's family doesn't always speak the language perfectly, they still manage to communicate through love and care, proving that you don't always need words to connect with others. In today's world full of negativity, they set an example of kindness and warmth.

Momo's teacher is another odd character, talking all the time about her own accomplishments.

Aslam: She tries to display her life as full of excitement, aiming to spark a bit of jealousy among her students. Yet, this trait is paired with her genuine love and concern. We've intentionally shaped her character to embody these dual aspects, her desire to stand out, yet at the same time her commitment to nurturing her students.

The ending of the film is surprising in several ways.



Aslam: It was decided after much discussion among our writing team, including Zakariya Mohammed, Ashif Kakkodi and myself. We wanted to leave the audience thinking about themes like destiny, choices and the effects of small decisions on our lives. We aimed for an ending that not only makes viewers reflect but also touches them and leaves them with a sense of joy.

— Gert Hermans