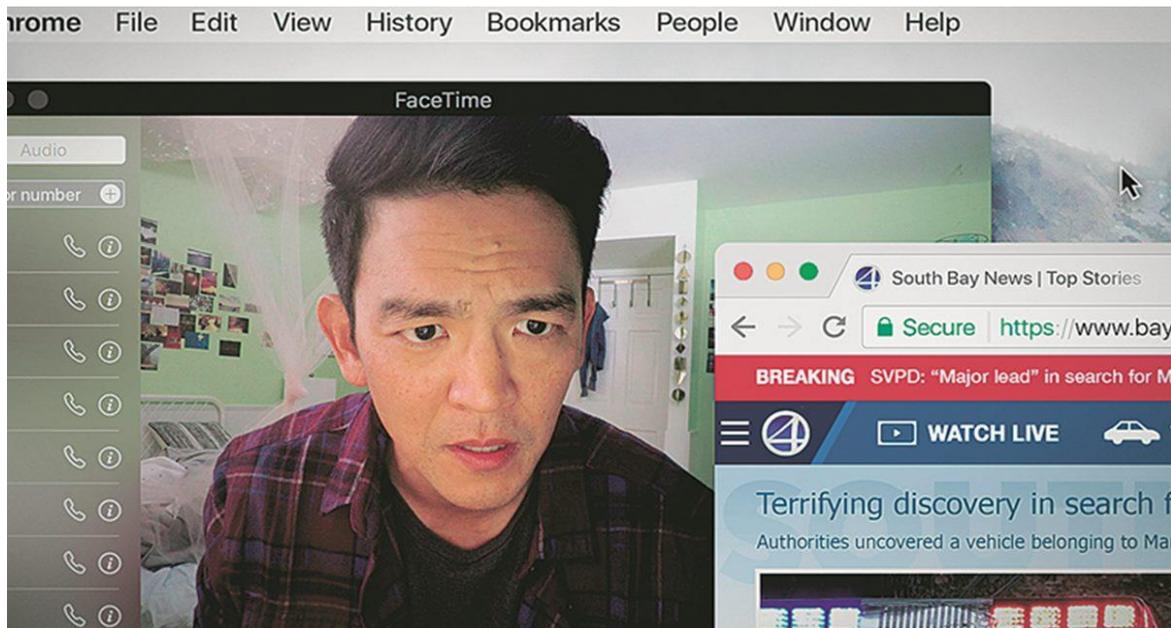




Aju Aravind

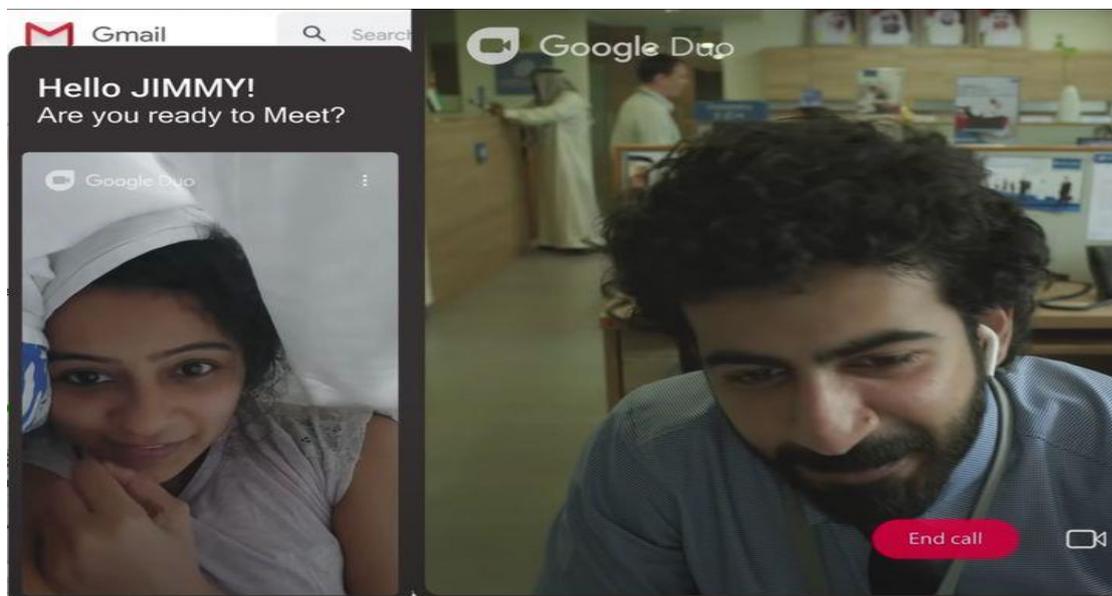
Technology is the application of science, which is the pursuit of knowledge, to create new things or accomplish a particular task. Experimenting with new concept of technology is perhaps one of the positive side effects of this Pandemic. Socially distanced, but not isolated, working remotely but still connected, the advantages of science yet remains unexplored.

The Virus has transformed the way we use the internet. The inevitability to validate creativity has led to new adventures and experiments in cinema. A convention-breaking narrative format on the screen filled with video chats, emails, Messenger, and WhatsApp interfaces, probably makes Mahesh Narayanan's C U Soon... (2020) the first Indian attempt at desktop film or Computer screen film, a subgenre of film, where the action takes place completely on a screen of a computer or a smartphone. This genre gained popularity with excessive influence of the internet in our lives and is a part of the found footage genre.



A still from *Searching*

Anesh Changathy's Hollywood film, *Searching* (2018), starring John Cho, was shot entirely through virtual format, and the story unfolds through social networking apps, web-cams, laptop screens and video calls. For those who have not been acquainted with Computer screen film, *C U Soon...* would be novel experience.



A still from *C u Soon...*, Anu hiding herself inside a blanket and talking to Jimmy

The film begins on the mobile screen of Jimmy Kurian (Roshan Mathew) searching through the profiles of women on the dating App Tinder. Despite having never met Anumol Sebastian (Darshana Rajendran) in person, Jimmy, a Client Executive at Union National Bank in the UAE, soon falls in love with her. He introduces her to his mother and cousin and proposes to her via video call. His curious mother, asks Kevin (Fahadh Faasil), Jimmy's cousin, a software engineer to get more details about her.



A still from C U Soon..., Jimmy introducing Anu to his mother and sister before proposing her.

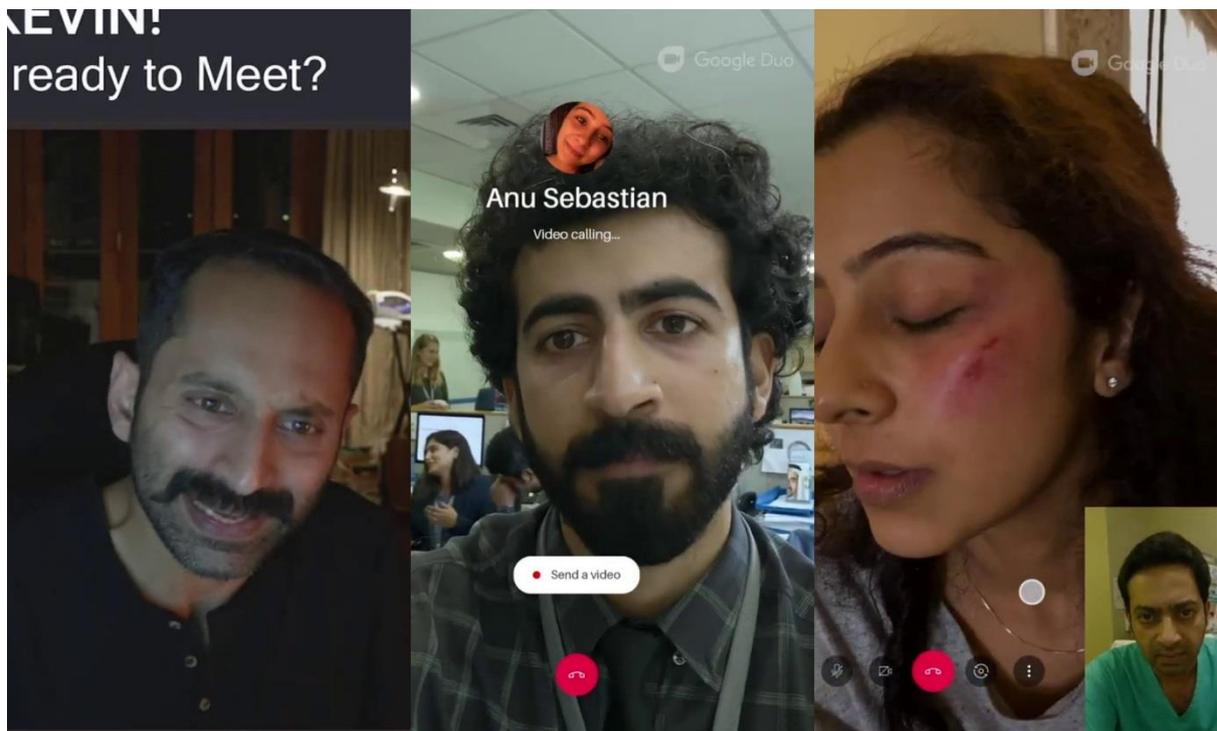
Though reluctant of invading someone's privacy, Kevin finally for the sake of his aunt agrees to hack into her IP address to find more details about her. But what fascinated and relieved Jimmy's mother (Maala Parvathi) more was that she was a Christian. Sanjana (Amaalda Liz), Kevin's boss and friend, places a bug on Anu's phone in order to understand Kevin's sudden interest in her. But things get complicated when Jimmy brings her to his house, as she complained that her father trashed her on her face.



A still from C U Soon..., Anu cries for help

His friend Prashanth (Saiju Kurup), a doctor by profession prescribes medicines for her and advises him to report the incident to police as live in relationships are illegal in UAE. Through Jimmy, she was trying to escape, but while staying with him, she dreams of starting a normal life which is shattered when he confronts her father. Her father apologizes for his behaviour and asks for her phone number. Police takes Jimmy into custody, as she mysteriously disappears leaving a suicide note-video after spending a week with him. Anu gets a call from Jimmy's mother, who learnt all the truth about her from her father, and decides to leave Jimmy, take shelter in the consulate and expose the racket. To establish Jimmy's innocence Kevin uses his cyber-security skills to decipher the CCTV footage of Jimmy's flat and unravels several dark secrets behind Anu. He hacks her Facebook account and finds that she was brought to UAE as a housemaid by an agency and that the person Joseph Tharakan (Kottayam Ramesh) who was introduced as her father was the owner of the agency. He was a pimp who trafficked girls from India to UAE as housemaids and forced them into prostitution.

Kevin mistakes her as the daughter of Joseph Tharakan. He had a daughter who was also named Anumol, settled in Bangalore, and it was her identity that she stole to speak to Jimmy, and Kevin mistakes her as his daughter. Jimmy and his mother were angry at Kevin as he did not inquire about all of this in the beginning and thought that was taking benefit of her relationship. Kevin finds out that her last known location was the Indian Consulate General in Dubai. Later we find that she had reported about the prostitution racket and all those involved were caught.



A still from C U Soon..., Kevin, Jimmy, Anu and Prashanth during a live video call after she is thrashed by her father

While Anu is sent back to India, Jimmy goes to U.S to join his mother. Kevin traces her number and speaks to her. In Kerala, in an interview to channels she gives more details of the racketeers, leading to the arrest of a few. Kevin manages to talk to Anu, and asks her why she did not leave early from Jimmy's life when she had the chance. Her response gives him the idea that she was in love with him, and was not merely using him. When he realises that Jimmy still has feelings for her, the movie ends with Kevin sharing her number with Jimmy and asking him to call her.

Kevin is basically the audience surrogate. It is through him that we track each bit of information as he hops from one website to another and keeps us guessing throughout the film. Much of the plot unfolds through phone or computer messages and action is limited within the four walls of a house or sometimes Kevin's or Jimmy's office.



A still from C U Soon..., Kevin.

The film narrates the dark side of the Gulf imagination by retelling the story of girls trapped in a fake employment racket and forced into a prostitution ring in UAE. A recent film *Khuda Haafiz* (dir. Faruk Kabir) (2020) also recounts the similar plight of a young woman who migrates to the to gulf and ends up in the hands of the flesh traders. While *Khuda Haafiz* is packed with a lot of action, *C U Soon...*, narrates the same story by limiting itself to the space of the room.

The film highlights the changing idea of relationships in the new digitalized age and invites the audience to differentiate between the real, hyperreal and the factiously glamourized networked identity generated on the social media and

dating platforms, at a time when the role of technology is yet to be vindicated. C U Soon ... illustrates the two sides of technology and the life of consumers sandwiched on the screen.

C U Soon... is an innovative experiment in Cinema utilising technology at a time when budgetary constraints and physical restrictions are forcing filmmakers to think out-of-the-box. And also a hope to C U Soon....

Aju Aravind, is a faculty with the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. His area of interest includes Popular Culture and Cinema Studies. He can be reached at aaju@iitism.ac.in