

THE

PEACOCK

WEDNESDAY, 20 JANUARY 2021



WE SAW THE THUNDER, WHERE ARE THE RAINS?

BY DAMODAR MAUZO

When IFFI moved to Goa in 2004, among those to oppose the move was Uma Da Cunha. Her opinion mattered as she is considered an expert on Indian filmdom. "Goa has no film culture," she'd screamed. But the people at the helm took up the challenge to prove her wrong by bringing about the required change. Last year Uma was again in Goa and this is what she had to say, "The whole idea of a film festival is to inculcate film culture, and IFFI Goa has done a lot in that area."

A lot of water has flown through Mandovi since 2004 and IFFI in Goa has happily come to stay. Goans do have complaints about the Government not doing enough to promote film culture in Goa. The sentiments are not unfounded. Yet, there is no denying that Goa has marched a long way ahead. The films made in Konkani are traveling wide and being screened at various film festivals. Laxmikant's film *Paltadacho Munis* (The Man Beyond the Bridge, 2009), was premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and went on to bag the International Federation of Film Critics FIPRESCI Prize for Discovery. It was chosen as the opening film at the IFFI 2009. At the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles, it won the Narrative Jury Award. At the

57th National Film Awards, *Paltadacho Munis* won the Best Feature Film in Konkani. IFFI has made this difference, however the Goans aren't content, they want more. I felt overwhelmed when one day, the veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal was on the phone all praises for the film and asked me to convey his compliments to Laxmikant Shetgaonkar. One may get the impression that Laxmikant has minted money by making this film. He certainly didn't.

We do have young and passionate filmmakers like Bardroy Barreto and Miransha Naik who have the zeal to make out-of-box films. The musical by Bardroy, *Nachom-ia Kumpasar* (2014), has been a great success. It earned several awards and umpteen numbers of nominations. It swept ten awards at the 8th Goa State Film Festival (2015-2016) and also the National Film Award (2015). What is more important is that the Konkani viewers who shied away from Konkani cinema turned towards films. But, it did not earn enough money for the filmmaker to venture into more films. Thankfully, this film was funded by small contributions from the filmmaker's friends. How can such a scenario encourage probable enthusiasts to take an initiative?

Juze (2017) is yet another film that earned a name but failed to gross revenue. It highlighted the exploitation of migrants while boldly depicting the changing character of this tourist

destination. Premiered at the Hong Kong International Film Festival (2017), *Juze* earned a rare distinction of being commercially released in France. Konkani cinema has a long way to go. For that, we need many more Laxmikants, Bardroys and Miranshas.

We also have box office hits to our credit. Swapnil Shetkar, who directed the John D'Silva and Rajdeep Naik starrer *Home Sweet Home* (2014) ran in theatres for 101 days. Within two years, it completed 1000 screenings in theatres, which is a milestone record for a Konkani movie. It bagged six awards at the Eighth Goa State Film Festival. We have Rajendra Talak who had made seven Konkani and four Marathi films. Prasad Creations produced a few quality films -*Enemy?* (2015), *Martin* (2017), and *Glory* (2019). Going by the above yield, 2009 to 2019 looks to be the decade of thunders for Konkani movies. But where are the rains?

There is little doubt that the Entertainment Society of Goa (ESG) has played a stellar role in inculcating and furthering the film culture in Goa. But is it not what is expected of them? I am aware of a few schemes that are helping enterprising and talented film devotees who desire to give their best to Konkani cinema. But is it enough? Film City may be a distant dream. But film schools and infrastructure for filmmaking is an urgent need.

Press reports said that there would

be two short films screened at IFFI this year. It may be noted that ESG introduced the Goan Section in 2014, as the Government was committed to promoting the Konkani Film industry. Firstly, be it IFFI or ESG, they refer to the films made in Goa as Goan films. Last year, Laxmikant Shetgaonkar rightly pointed out in the media that there is nothing called 'Goan' films, they are 'Konkani' films. You don't hear of Maharashtrian cinema or Karnataka cinema. They are Marathi or Kannada films. Konkani films need not be called Goan films unless one wants to distinguish between the Konkani films made in Karnataka and Goa. If a film in Konkani is made in Mumbai, would it be called a Maharashtrian film? Secondly, as the eminent film director Dnyanesh Moghe, who made *Digant* (2012), rightly says, "There is no 'industry' here. It is only a 'scene' that we have".

ESG received only seven entries this year, five in the premiere section and two in the non-premiere. The jury comprising eminent professionals selected two films, both short, in each category. It is time ESG identifies the reasons for this shortfall. People will question - who is to blame for the poor crop of Konkani films?

Damodar Mauzo is the pre-eminent author of Konkani literature.

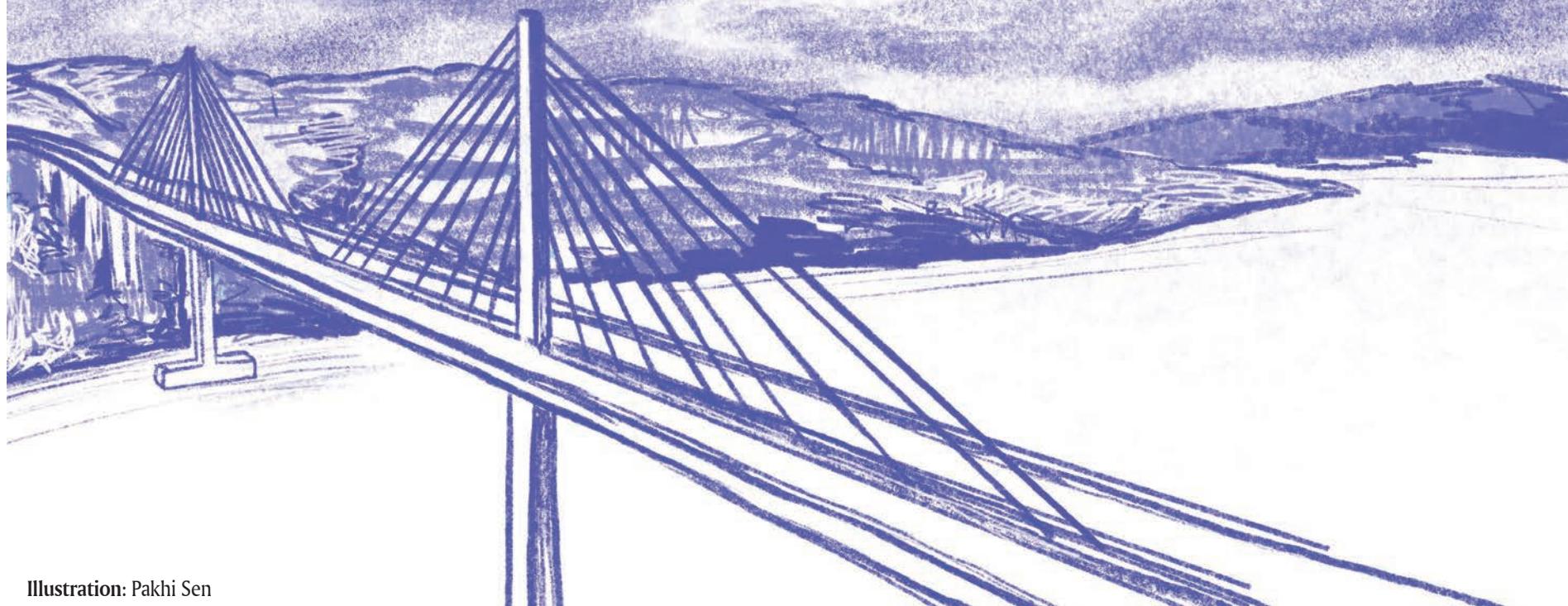


Illustration: Pakhi Sen

THE POLITICAL IN THE PERSONAL

BY SUYASH KAMAT

All over the world in an increasingly polarized social and cultural climate, the lack of nuanced, multifaceted probing of our complex cultural identities remains a daunting task. "In India, our stories are multilayered. Epics like the Mahabharat and Ramayan are our base. Everyday life in India is a multilayered crisis," remarks Farha Khatun, a documentary filmmaker, whose new documentary, *Holy Rights* (2019) is an attempt to probe into the patriarchy that plagues the personal and political struggles of Muslim women in India.

Farha's documentary is centrally about Safia, a deeply religious Muslim woman & her journey, as she struggles and negotiates through hitherto uncharted territory, exploring the tensions that arise when women try to change the status quo and take control of narratives that affect their lives. "It's about the practice of patriarchy in Indian society. It talks about how women are suffering human rights violations by society. Not just from men but the patriarchy that women have become a victim of."

Farha originally came across the idea in 2014 when she heard about women in Mumbai who were training to become Qazis (Muslim clerics who interpret and administer the Islamic personal law), which is traditionally a male preserve. "I met Safia in 2015. Till then, I was in touch with many Qazis, who were part of the learning process. But when I met her, I felt extremely inspired by her courage to counter the narrative and to do it at an age of 60 which was

a huge risk."

Set against the political backdrop of the abolishment of the Triple Talaq Bill, the form of the documentary shows the personal implications of the political struggle. "At the grassroots level, nothing much really changed. Women are still suffering the way they suffered before." While the documentary is set amongst the Muslim community, Farha believes that it's the patriarchy that is common across religions. 'Analyze almost any house in Indian society. If a girl wants to do something out of the way, wants to dance or sing or do something of her choice, the only free space she has within the family is with the women of the household. We don't have that kind of free space with the men.'

Making documentary films in India isn't the most viable career option, let alone making films that examine the critic of popular narratives. "My mother would warn me to do anything but touch these spaces, referring to the triple talaq & other Muslim issues. She thought it wouldn't be safe for us. She never verbalized this discomfort directly, but she meant it."

But despite all odds, documentary films have managed to find their own ground. "It's extremely difficult to make documentary films without relying on favors from your technical team, who, in my case, was my friends who believed in me. I was fortunate to have the support of Priyanka More, my producer.' Documentaries, however, are riddled with ethical and moral dilemmas given their preoccupation and intention of portraying the truth. Filmmakers and academicians

have often debated about the authenticity of the lived experience of a filmmaker and of those who see the world of the story as an outsider. 'I believe those who can make films are privileged; that those who are aware, have knowledge and sincerity, must use this privilege to make films, irrespective of their identity.' Drawing on the parallels between her film and *Invoking Justice* (2011) by Deepa Dhanraj, which also explores issues faced by Muslim women, Farha observed "It is a powerful film. Her sincerity showed in the film, irrespective of her identity. It is only through a sincere collective effort of society that we can bring change together. But having said that, we should also be accepting of the wrongs we do on this journey."

For Farha, her journey with the film was also a personal story about negotiating her own boundaries with her family. "I hadn't told my parents about this film. One day, my brother told my parents what my film was about. Over the course of the film, I have shared a lot of stories which I experienced myself." The film is full of these dark stories, some of which she couldn't keep in the final film. "One day, my mother fought with a religious cleric about a practice she believed was wrong. She called me and cried. That's when I decided to show my parents the film. They didn't oppose, they accepted it." This, in Farha's opinion, was her happiest moment.

Holy Rights is playing in the Non-Feature Indian Panorama section at 1 pm at INOX Screen 2.



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni



'Don't forget to lick your paws before you eat'

FILM IN THE 70s: A BALLET OF NEW INDIAN CINEMA



Illustration: Rai

BY KARISHMA D'MELLO

After beginning his career as an assistant to Raj Kapoor, Rahul Rawail made his own debut as a filmmaker with *Gunhegaar* (1980). By his own account, his first two films were an unsuccessful prelude to what later grew into a successful career as a filmmaker in Indian cinema. Having witnessed the evolution of Indian cinema first-hand, Rawail explained the creative revolution that spurred the golden age of films in the 1970s, in an online session of 'In-conversation' on the IFFI portal.

"There was a time when everything was stagnant. It became all about breaking the mould. To start a revolution, you need to go against the norm. That is exactly what happened in the 70s," says Rawail. "We had this herd mentality for a long time, and then suddenly filmmakers began to go against the grain. There was an influx of new

ideas, new performances, and different perspectives. It ushered in a ballet of new cinema."

Rawail firmly believes that experimentation is what drives progress in all creative fields. "People were inventing, they were looking at people in different ways. There were stories about a boy who spoke Tamil and did not speak Hindi, a girl who spoke Hindi and did not speak Tamil, and so on. The film *Bobby* (1973) was one that featured completely unknown actors at the time. It set the trend for taking on new actors and giving them a platform."

In other examples, Rawail noted the introduction of darker characters into Indian cinema. "The portrayal of complex, grey, almost black characters in *Memsaab* (1971) was a stark contrast to the goody-goody characters we had gotten accustomed to. It was fantastic. When you have a popular character and you make him do unexpected things that

deviate from his usual roles, that film will always score well in the public eye. That's what makes cinema resonate with the rest of the world. You do come to a point of stagnation and then you have to pull out of it," says Rawail.

Similarly, Rawail notes that films like *Arjun* (1985) set a new trend. "It was the first film that was more about a character than a story. The script was written in a single eight-hour-long night. It inspired a whole new wave of films. Everyone was committed to creating good cinema." Rawail adds that he felt an immense sense of learning among his contemporaries at the time. "There was always competition between actors to do better than the other, but there was never rivalry."

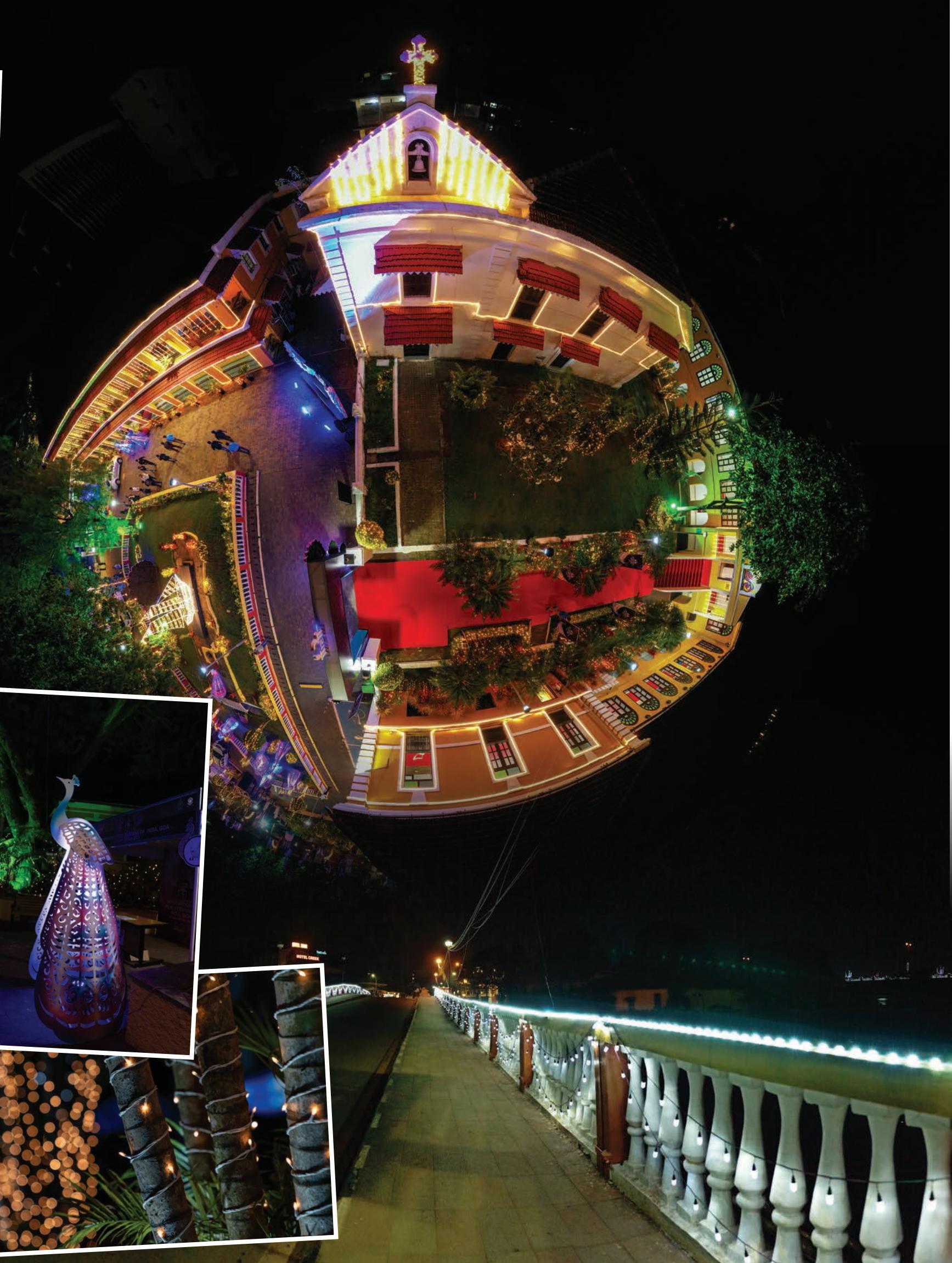
"We need to correct the narrative about 'mainstream' and 'independent' cinema. They are not mutually exclusive. There is no such thing as art cinema or commercial cinema. All films, commercial

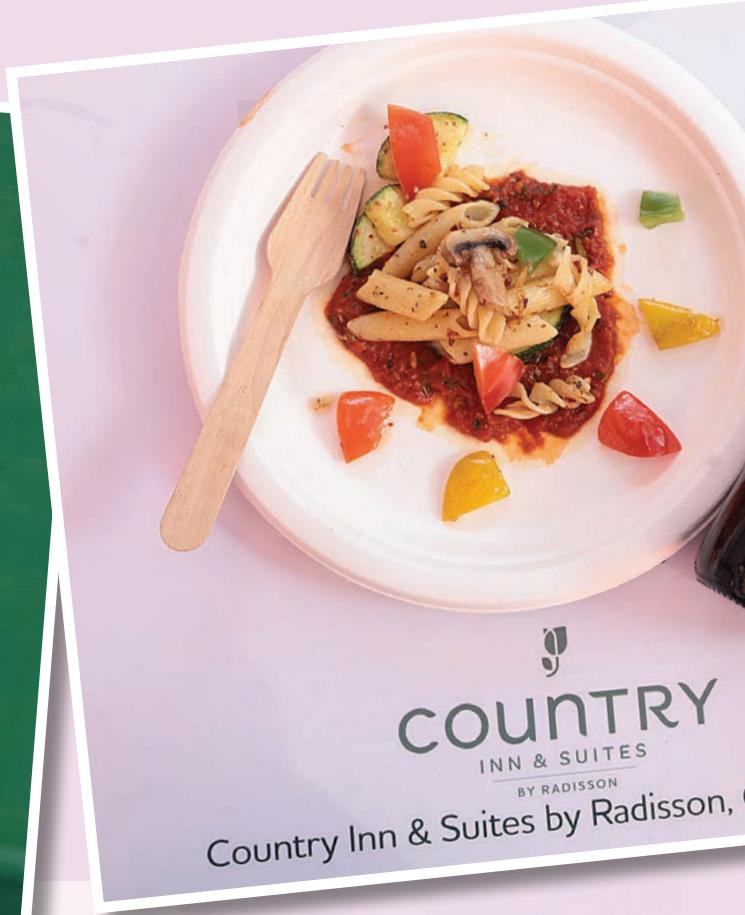
or otherwise, are art. There are films that find more commercial success than others, but they are still art," says Rawail. He measures the success of his own films in two ways. "The first is the satisfaction you get as a filmmaker, and the next is the response of your audience towards the film. A film that gives you pleasure and satisfaction for having created it is a great film."

Rawail defined the period between the 40s and the 70s as the golden age for Indian cinema. "There are plenty of films that have stood the test of time, and we may never know why. Films like *Aradhana* (1969) and *Ganga Jamuna* (1961) have nothing in common. There is no formula for creating a successful film." On the future of Indian cinema, Rawail said, "There are a lot of good directors today. They're not afraid to experiment, and that alone will keep things moving. Experimentation is the driving force behind every revolution."

SYMPHONY OF LIGHTS







SATISFYING OUR APPETITES

KARISHMA D'MELLO

At the centre of the festival venue, connecting the Inox multiplex, the Maquinez Palace, and all festival attendees, is the food court. Catered exclusively by 'The Country Inn by Radisson Hotels', you see stalls offering a diverse spread of cuisines, from Goan thalis to continental pastas.

"Indian dishes are time-consuming to create. The people here are in a rush to get from one venue to the other," says Mininath Dhumal. "They prefer fast food and continental dishes that are quick and filling. So far, the white sauce pasta is a popular choice among the festival attendees. It doesn't matter where we go; Italian dishes are always a crowd favourite."

Adjacent to him, Surendra Chandra stands behind a stall dedicated to Indian cuisine. "I like Indian food, and have spent the past few years specializing in Indian dishes," he says. "I'm from Uttar Pradesh; it's my first time in Goa. I don't know a lot about Goan cuisine, but I've learned a lot about Goan food and its culture in the last few days. The locals here seem to love their Goan fish thalis."

However, it's not just the locals who gravitate to Goan cuisine. "When in Goa, you must try Goan food," says Ravi Shankar, a festival delegate from Maharashtra. With the rich assortment of sea-food thalis and delectable local vegetarian flavours, the delegates' appetites for film and food can both be satisfied here, with IFFI in Amche Goa!

BY ASSAVRI KULKARNI

WEDNESDAY, 20 JANUARY 2021

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“GREEN BLACKBERRIES DISCOVERED THAT WHICH IS HIDDEN, SOMETHING THAT DOESN’T EXIST”



BY CHRISTAL FERRAO

Green Blackberries (2020) is a short multilingual film based in North East India which got selected for the Indian Panorama category. The film is titled *Green Blackberries* after a conversation between Prithvi Raj Dasgupta, the director of the film, and a wise man from the village. The village wise man informed that usually raw fruits are green, but berries that grow widely in the region are red. “*Green blackberries* discovered that which is hidden, something that doesn’t exist.” He used it as an oxymoron to show a contradiction in life. This is a multilingual film due to the region it represents. North East is a place of multiple languages and dialects, and hence it is a combination of Nepali, Assamese, and Bengali.

The film is about a teenage girl Nishu, who travels every day via the river and forests and fights her way through nature to attend school. “When I visited the North East I saw school students of tender ages six and seven walk and travel via boats for eight hours to reach school. I was disturbed by this and could not bear to imagine their misery. I was eager to portray this through a film, and I made *Green Blackberries*,” Prithvi Raj said as he informed The Peacock about the concept and reason for the film.

The plot revolves around the life of Nishu. She is a bright student in the village and unlike any other. She is the hope of the village, someone who can overcome all obstacles. The film focuses on her final exam and the way she fights against nature and society to challenge conventional norms. This film is for everyone and not restricted to a certain age group. The director

wants people to understand the struggles of people living in the North East that are overlooked by filmmakers as it is not accessible. Struggles and issues of remote villages need attention. Mainstream cinema has not done much except for some like *Nil Battey Sannata* (2016). People celebrate the hills as an exotic region but seldom bother to know that sometimes one school has just one teacher who has just passed class ten and can barely pronounce the word banana. “I learnt more about the region as a documentary filmmaker for the Tribal Care Project,” Prithvi Raj said.

This is the first time his film has been selected for a film festival and he is delighted that it is IFFI, a festival of great stature. Previously, he has worked as an associate director and editor. All the members of the crew, their family and friends are proud of this achievement. He appreciates the efforts of his team, especially Gourav Roy, the director of photography. He shot the film using just two lenses.

The crew comprised four city residents and the cast was picked from amongst the locals. Being residents of the city, it was tedious for them to understand the geography of the region for filming. “The boats kept rolling in a strange way while the students lost their balance and fell frequently. We had to manage with a limited budget and resources, make do with one light and a torch as lighting. The film therefore took two years to shoot,” Prithvi Raj said.

Prithvi Raj wants people to focus on educating girls, rather than obsessing over getting them married at a tender age. He is in town to attend the screening along with Vaneeta Sridhar, the producer.

MAX VON SYDOW: COMPELLING POWER

BY KAVITA MASTHOFF

Many celebrities left us in 2020, leaving behind a legacy of their performances and works of art. One of the personalities, who left a gaping hole in the world of cinema, was Max von Sydow. No other actor can claim to have such a wide repertoire of filmography as him.

Born on 10 April 1929 in Lund, Sweden, von Sydow passed away on 8 March 2020 in France at the ripe old age of 90. His acting career spanned an incredible 70 years, after debuting in *Only a Mother* (1949).

Who can forget von Sydow as Antonius Block playing a deadly game of chess in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957), a blue-eyed Jesus Christ in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) by George Stevens, or the faithful Father Merrin in the iconic horror movie *The Exorcist* (1973)? His presence in a film added gravitas, and by the time von Sydow started acting in well-known and successful franchises such as *Star Wars* (1977 – 2019) and *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) he had already proved his mettle.

In an interview in 2012 with *The Wall Street Journal*, von Sydow said that he already knew what he wanted to do by the time he was 15 or 16. So, after serving the compulsory two years in the military in Sweden, he changed his name to Max and attended the Royal Dramatic Theatre for three years. He won the Royal Foundation of Sweden's Cultural Award, one of the many, for his theatre work before transitioning to films.

The prolific career of the late von Sydow is peppered with work across many countries and languages. He did not restrict himself to serious and character roles. Any sci-fi lover will remember von Sydow as Ming the Merciless, a flashy

space warlord, in the uproarious *Flash Gordon* (1980), which was based on the comic strip by Alex Raymond. He did not always play a heroic character and didn't mind stepping into roles that were different and negative. In *Minority Report* (2002), he plays the character of Lamar Burgess, a corrupt project director.

His costars were always praises for him. Linda Blair described von Sydow as a cool and unflappable gentleman, who seldom lost his temper while shooting for *The Exorcist* on an oft-contentious set.

If you've watched *The Exorcist* (which I'm sure you have multiple times), you should be as amazed as I am with the way von Sydow portrayed Father Merrin's age. The stooped posture, trembling hands and shuffling gait were so convincing, anyone would believe that the actor was an 80+ man in real life. However, von Sydow was 43, much younger than the character he played.

Max von Sydow did not shy

away from roles in comedies, either. His reprisal of roles in *Rush Hour 3* (2007) is also something that film buffs love. For me however, von Sydow's greatest role is that of Lankester Merrin in *The Exorcist*. It is, perhaps, the greatest performance by a younger actor playing a character that is decades older than him. While makeup by Dick Smith had a major role to play, it would have fallen flat without von Sydow's stunning performance by.

The incredible body of work that von Sydow has left behind speaks volumes of him as a performer. He acted for 70 years and essayed many memorable roles. With his passing, the world of film lovers and movie enthusiasts have lost a fine actor, who could work in any genre. The gaping hole left behind can never be filled. It wouldn't be wrong to say Max von Sydow may have passed away but his acting and performances compel us to remember him, always.

Max von Sydow – gone but never forgotten.



Stock photo: AP News



OLD WORDS, NEW MELODIES

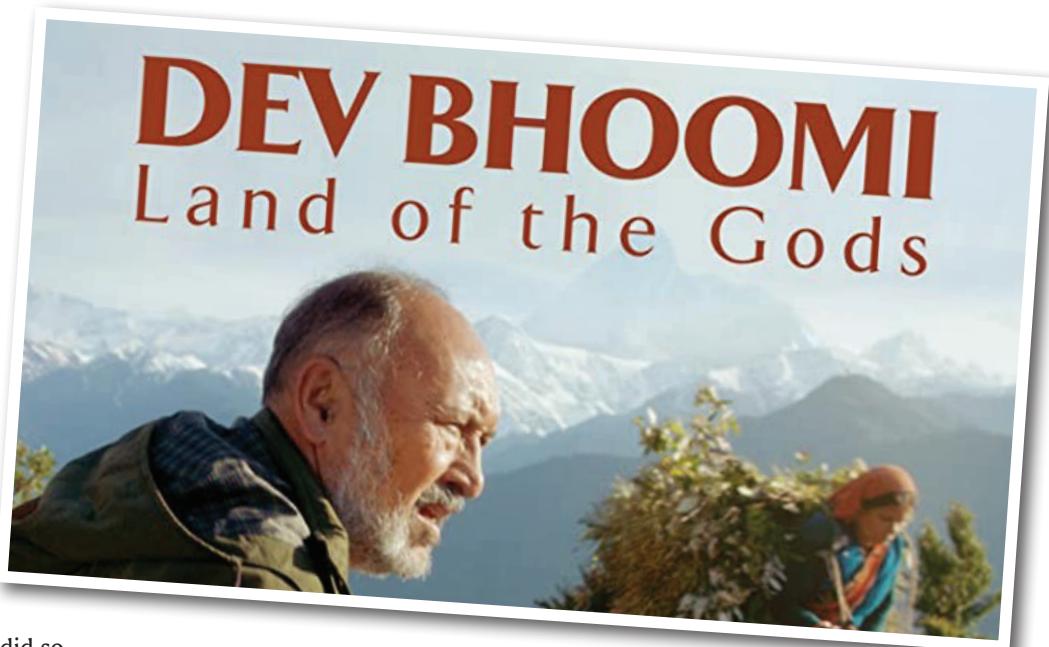
BY DR. LUIS DIAS

So far, I've not had the opportunity to visit Uttarakhand, but I've come close. In the last few years, I've joined expeditions to the Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh and more recently to Ladakh. So I could relate to some of the breathtakingly beautiful landscapes, the mountain ranges in the distance in varying shades of white-and-blue, and having to cross scarily swaying bridges slung at dizzying heights across plunging valleys and gorges with crystal clear rivers gushing forth busily as if in a mad race to get to the bottom in 'Dev Bhoomi' (Land of the Gods, 2016) by Serbian director Goran Paskaljević.

The reference at the beginning of the film to the devastation caused by a flash flood, brought to mind our own good fortune during our visit to Spiti. Literally days after we left the area, there were punishing flash floods, roads swept away by landslides, or buried in snow

avalanches. Our 'lucky' charm was our driver (whose name was also Lucky); ever cheerful, optimistic and an excellent driver, navigating treacherous almost non-existent narrow winding roads hugging mountain slopes with a sheer drop and certain death on the smallest wrong move. More than once, Lucky miraculously did a three-point turn on such roads. As the van overhung the cliffs as he did so, those of us at the back were afraid to even look out the window.

Other aspects also resonated - temporary 'roadblocks' caused by obstinate cattle or the unique species of goats being taken out to pastures and the simple lives of the mountain people. A difference I noticed at once was the greeting 'Namaste' instead of the 'Julley' one hears in Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh. The community we encounter in



Dev Bhoomi is Hindu, not Buddhist.

As the film unfolds, the idyllic setting begins to reveal a dark underbelly. Rahul Negi (played by Victor Banerjee, who also co-wrote the script with Paskaljević) returns to his native village after a long self-exile of four decades abroad but is shunned by most of the villagers.

Without wishing to reveal too much and spoil it for you, *Dev Bhoomi* touches upon a variety of social ills, from caste prejudice to patriarchy and associated gender discrimination in the form of curtailing education of the girl child and forcible teenage marriage.

Paskaljević got acquainted with India over the years by presiding over juries at several film festivals in India and was, in fact, in Goa as recently as the last edition of IFFI in 2019 with his Serbian-language film from the same year, *Nonostante la Nebbia* (Despite the Fog). An Indo-Serbian collaboration was, therefore, in some ways, perhaps inevitable.

Banerjee, of course, needs no introduction to Indian film buffs. The western media remembers him for his role as Aziz in David Lean's 1984 *A Passage to India*, a film adaptation of English author E. M. Forster's eponymous novel. But we know him much more intimately for his many riveting performances in, to name just a few, Satyajit Ray's *Shatranj ke Khiladi* (The Chess Players, 1977) and *Ghare Baire* (The Home and The World', 1984), both of which also feature in this edition of IFFI to commemorate Ray's birth centenary; *Hullabaloo Over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures* (1978, dir. James Ivory) and *Kalyug* (1981, dir. Shyam Benegal).

In *Dev Bhoomi*, he comes across as someone happy to be home again, yet not quite at home after so many decades away, (a common symptom among expats returning home after far too long), wandering once familiar terrain looking rather lost, and the injured look of a martyr when accusations are hurled

at him, whether of wanting to reclaim the family property, bringing dishonour to his family, or disturbing the village equilibrium.

Other noteworthy cast members are Geetanjali Thapar (Shaanti, the earnest, idealistic schoolteacher) and Raj Zutshi in a cameo role as a taxi driver (filmgoers my age will remember him as the trusty sidekick to the hero in many a Hindi film before the label Bollywood gained such widespread currency).

Dev Bhoomi offers a glimmer of hope at the end, with this quote by Rabindranath Tagore:

"I thought that my voyage had come to its end
at the last limit of my power,
that the path before me was closed,
and the time come to take shelter in a
silent obscurity,
but I find that thy will knows no end in
me,
and when old words die out on the tongue,
new melodies break forth from the
heart..."

Five years on, caste and gender discrimination and violence in India seem to be worsening rather than receding, so one could argue the optimism was misplaced. But when hope is lost, all is lost, I guess.

The soundtrack for the most part has just ambient sound save for some meditative pentatonic soliloquies on bansuri flute by Ramesh Mishra that stay with you long after you've left the auditorium.

Dr. Luis Dias is a physician, musician, writer and founder of music education charity Child's Play India Foundation www.childsplayindia.org. He blogs at www.luisdias.wordpress.com.



A LIFE MORE ORDINARY

BY DR RACHANA PATNI

India has worrying statistics and ranks high in the number of people who kill themselves using suicide as a method. The highest number is for those aged 15-19, and it is that group of people who may have the most to look forward to in life but critically the group which is under immense pressure to perform. Entrance exams of various kinds are definitely part of the story of deaths by suicide in India. When I used to work as a volunteer with Childline, a free counselling service for children, in the late 1990s, we were made aware of the real figures and the risks for teenagers, and I had found the statistics overwhelming. Things have only become more difficult for Indian teenagers since then, who do not have the capacity to study abroad or in private colleges to pursue their dream vocation.

With cut-off rates at 100%, the entry to colleges and institutes of repute has become a cut-throat competitive environment. It seems if people cannot cut other's throats then they are prompted to cut-off their own throats out of a desire to avoid the tag of failure or 'loser'. This has been a long-term

phenomenon in India. It was the case when one needed a minimum of 85% to get into studying for an undergraduate degree and it is the case today when sometimes one needs 100% to get a seat for a course. Competitive exams pose the highest risk because often teenagers sacrifice the rest of their lives to attend expensive and arduous coaching in order to 'make it all happen' before their teenage ends, as admission in certain institutions is akin to winning a lottery which has a ticket, a passport, and a marriage card in it, with the map of the entire future laid out clearly.

When things do not go well and students have to deal with failure, it can be a hard hit, with many choosing to end their existence rather than face the pain of having not made it. The fragile sense of self that is based entirely on how one performs in competitive exams becomes the definitive player in many students' lives. Even when parents do not seem to push their children in any compulsive way, the pressure that is absorbed by the children through the subtext of the competition preparation is toxic and can have terrible consequences. This has been explored in some depth and detail

in the film *Chhichhore* (2019).

The film has taken on the label of a 'loser' and done something interesting with it. It is reminiscent of *Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikander* (1992) but it does not work on the class dynamics as much as purely on how much our performance in competitions determines our view of ourselves, the friends and allies we have access to and, therefore, holds the key to the rest of our lives. This means that young people often sacrifice their capacity to feel anything other than the need for victory, and the salvation that comes with it. Sporting cultures and bullying cultures are all part of this heady mix that creates alienation of young people from commitment to their own wellbeing.

Working in mental health in various countries in the West involves having a preventative approach to suicide, as suicide figures are taken very seriously and each suicide is seen as one that could have been prevented with adequate and timely care or response. There are definitive check-lists that are used with patients in mental health care and also with any new referrals. There are evidence-based studies on the kind of interventions that successfully reduce suicide attempts and all health professionals are given basic training in noticing when to raise an alarm. The licensing of psychologists, counsellors, and others who work in private practice also requires them to forgo their confidentiality agreements with clients in case they seem to have any ideation or plan related to suicide. Despite such

elaborate safety nets, several people may attempt and several others may successfully attempt to kill themselves through suicide. Each is treated as a case study to learn from and changes the base-line practice on prevention considerably.

In India, we do not have a systemic approach, but even in the absence of that the message of *Chhichhore* is that 'the most important things about life is life itself'. This poignant message is often skipped over when our horizons begin to appear concave. In addition, the film industry and the entertainment industry also subscribe to the norms of toxic competition where appreciation and acknowledgement of talent become larger than life and take over as the only reasons to be alive. The loneliness and isolation that is composite of all highly competitive spheres is perhaps the backbone of this exodus of wonderfully unrealised lives. However, it could well be a mental health problem too, and in India, we are often reluctant to receive timely help in this regard.

Something's got to give, and we wish that it isn't life that loses, and, perhaps, the lesson of *Chhichhore* is that each one of us has to deeply believe that we are worthy of living our ordinary lives and that ordinary lives are worthy of being lived with love.

Dr. Rachana Patni is a Panjim-based leadership consultant who works globally. She is the founder of The Centre of ME and writes on emotional wellbeing and mental health.



Illustration: Rai



Nachom-ia Kumpasar (*Let's dance to the rhythm*) was a Konkani drama film based on the lives of two jazz musicians, Chris Perry and Lorna.



ONE CANNOT TAKE AWAY RHYTHM FROM GOANS.

SEEING A GHUMAT AMONGST THE EARTHEN POTS AT THE MAPUSA BAZAAR,
I COULDN'T RESIST MYSELF PLAYING IT.

A SLIGHT SOUND FROM THE BROOM ADDED THAT NECESSARY TEXTURE TO THE GROOVE.

AS THIS RHYTHM ECHOED ACROSS THE MAPUSA BAZAAR

KAI BOREM BAND HEM VAZTA,
KALZAK SANTOSS BHOGTA,
MOJOI MODKOI ANI CUNLEAN SUDDA NACHTA,
MAKAI KAMAR HALOISHI DISTA

AGO TEM TUKA NAKA, AGO TEM TUKA NAKA,

HMMMM... .

SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL

BY IMPANA KULKARNI

As Vatsala Aai struggles to remember movie names she exclaims, "Maherchi Sadi (1991)! I saw it with my husband at the National theatre here. We had ice-cream and chhaa in the interval." How intrinsic movies and theatres have become to the beginnings of many a love story! A simple tea in the interval builds anticipation – for the movie as well as the couple. For my own mother, this film festival is the time she gets to pull my father out to watch a string of films back-to-back (read – spend a whole day with him without working).

Fondly called by everyone as 'Aai' or mother, Vatsala is one of the few ESG staff who visits our office many times a day. Not to meet us, but to get to the pantry at the end of our office to make tea and wash utensils. But the daily visits since the inception of The Peacock has made her an invisible part of our family. She doesn't talk much, but she notices when the team members change, and asks quietly if the older ones will return this year. She smiles widely and waves across the corridor when she sees the same person again the next year. We make our own tea and coffee, but she helps



us out in the pantry, so it is still counted.

An international film festival runs on the shoulders of so many departments – technical, administrative, hospitality, transport etc – all equally important of course. The helping

staff is probably one that employs the largest man-power; taking care of the broken décor, dirty streets, filthy toilets and grumbling stomachs. For these 9 days of all-day all-night work, what a difference a warm glass of water or steaming coffee makes!

Photo by Siddhartha Lall



Vatsala Aai's husband is retired and owns an electrical shop, but makes it a point to down the shutters and pounce onto the bike the moment Aai calls to come pick her up. She smiled shyly when I asked his name, "Gurudas Parwatkar" she said. To ensure safety, she is avoiding the bus, keeps a distance while talking, and wears a mask at all times. Like most others, she cannot be scared of working here during a pandemic. "If something has to happen, it will happen!" She hits the ripe young age of 60 next year, would you believe looking at that youthful smile? It is retirement age, but she would like to continue working.

She has been working in this

campus for the past 15 years, switching between different jobs. She was moved to the present one of serving food and tea three years back. "I now have to make tea for Phaldessai sir, and serve tea and water for others. I don't mind making upma and tea for any number of people! Many a times, a large group of people suddenly show-up for a meeting. I like serving everybody." Often these staff don't have clearly specified tasks or hours. But they work sincerely with all their heart. It doesn't matter if

they are overlooked by most of the public, squatting tired in the grass or by the window. They are content looking at the bright colours, beautifully clad delegates, sharing their day's troubles with one another, and being a part of this grand a festival.

Vatsala Aai recollects one memorable trip with her husband all the way till Karwar by bus, to watch *Ek Duuje Ke Liye* (1981). Now, even though on duty, she thrills in the 10 minutes of movie she gets to watch when she enters the theatre for cleaning or assisting. The film festival can be special in so many unpredictable ways.

PEACOCK PICKS



Holy Rights (2019)

Director: Farha Khatun
India 53 min. Hindi
13:00 INOX Screen-II

Berlin Alexanderplatz (2020)

Director : Burhan Qurbani
Germany Netherlands 183 min.
English, German
17:15 INOX Screen-IV



Acasa, My Home (2020)

Director : Radu Ciorniciuc
Finland Germany Romania 86 min.
English, Romanian
15:00 INOX Screen-I

The Trouble with Nature (2020)

Director : Illum Jacobi
Denmark France 95 min. English
14:00 INOX Screen-III



Publisher: Amit Satija for the Entertainment Society of Goa | Editors: Vivek Menezes, Impana Kulkarni, Sachin Chatte | Exclusive Cover Art: Shilpa Mayenkar Naik

Editorial: Damodar Mauzo, Luis Dias, Rachna Patni, Suyash Kamat, Karishma D'mello, Kavita Masthoff, Christal Ferrao, Rohan Menezes, Chloe Cordeiro

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