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THE

PEACOCK

FRIDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2024

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JONATHAN HARRIS

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Why So Few Children's Films?



Illustration: Pakhi Sen

BY DAMODAR MAUZO

Along time back when I visited the residence of Vishal Bhardwaj in Mumbai, I found two certificates nicely framed and hung on a wall. Curiously, one was a letter of rejection from the Children's Film Society of India and the other was an award certificate from Chicago Film Festival. Both of them were from the film-maker's debut, *Makdee* (2002). When he wrote the script, he had sent it to the Children's Film Society of India for assistance in making the film. However, the CFSI rejected the proposal. But the aspiring film-maker was determined, and worked hard to eventually land the right producer.

His film then travelled to different festivals including Cannes and went on to win the Second-Best film at the Chicago Film Festival. Vishal's experience is a highly revealing story of the so-called

experts who only discourage new talent by underrating their projects. I believe this is the reason why children's films are continually mistreated in this country.

India is the world's largest film producing country, with an average of five films released every single day. Yet, it is distressing to know that every year there is never even a single dozen of children's films of any worth made in our country. The collective contribution of all children's films to the Box Office is less than 0.2%, I have been told by a film personality. Why is it so? The publication of children's books is on the rise, digital content on OTT and TV channels is growing, and the viewership of kids is swelling too. Nonetheless, despite all this positive context the children of India are deprived of good films that will make them enjoy, laugh, learn and think for themselves.

The 2004 movie *Shwaas* had a poignant story that had a universal

appeal. Can it be called a children's movie simply because a child artist played the central character? Nevertheless, it was a very good film worth watching with your entire family. How many more films of that calibre have been made since then?

One of our stalwart film makers, Gulzar has expressed publicly his concern over this state of affairs. "We have failed to understand and get involved in our children's lives. On the contrary we burden them with our expectations. The basic problem lies with us. We do not respect them nor care about them. We don't give them the right kind of books. We hardly have a children's theatre. We don't even think of raising parks and playgrounds to suit their taste. We don't give them entertainment facilities that would boost their imagination."

With no funds coming in, and with no guarantee of success at the box office, everybody wants to play it safe.

When cinema is controlled by the commercial houses, it may be too much to expect them to think that children's cinema is viable. There are films like *I am Kalam* (2010) which are huge critical successes. Yet, the film could hardly make 67 lakh at the box office. Another film personality who has contributed to children's cinema, Amol Gupte has the same views as Gulzar. He agrees that the mindset of parents has to undergo a transformation. The parents who share their TV set with their children have their own preferences of shows. When children may want to view an animation film the parents may be interested in something else. They presume that watching children's entertainment is a waste of their time, and avoid taking their children to cinema houses even when a good children's film arrives in town. In a situation like this, how can we expect children's cinema to grow in an adult-driven industry?



I strive to tell stories that we haven't heard before, about marginalized voices and especially feminism. I prefer impactful films made with deep intent.
Drishya Gautham
Screenwriter
Goa



My debut film, *Brinda Prayanan*, represents the culmination of my storytelling and the gritty reality of surviving breast cancer beyond just the medical realm.
Balaji Ram
Director
Hyderabad



What I love about IFFI is the focus on art and classic storytelling, which in many ways, we have lost in our high attention-deficit times.
Amanda Groom
CEO
United Kingdom



I'm hoping to foster some collaborations here. This is a great place to meet people in film.
Cameron Campbell
Producer
USA

"I am here for the audience"



Photo: Assavri Kulkarni

BY KINJAL SETHIA

"I said yes to this job only for the audiences. I am who I am only because of them," says Shekhar Kapur, who has taken on the mantle of Festival Director of the International Film Festival of India. "Festivals are not here only to celebrate films; they are an occasion to celebrate the audiences. There is something wonderfully obsessive in our culture about films and story-telling. And we are here to celebrate that."

Recalling the years when Indian audiences would watch films "with loud fans, crying babies and rats running across their feet", Kapur says, "with 1.3 billion people, or even if you count only the film-watching population, we have a fascination with all forms of story-telling. With films we may have

adapted a western medium, but Indian cinema has really evolved from the village nautanki. Mostly, that would be mythological stories like the Ram Lila, but these travelling groups with local actors would explore the nine forms of art, the Nautanki. And we have adapted all of that to cinema. That is why it sticks; it has become ingrained in our country."

Referring to the recent trend of millions of people making social media reels, Kapur says, "If we ban Facebook in our country, it will collapse. That's the number of people making and consuming content here. We are such a large market. And it is wonderful how people are making 30 second films to tell a story. Almost like the film pitches that were done when I began."

When he began coming to IFFI many years ago, Kapur would try to watch

six to seven films in a day. Now in his new role at the helm, he says he is here primarily as an observer at this point. "It is a government-run festival. My role so far has been more of an advisory nature, but by next year, I hope to set a certain template. The growth of the festival has to envision the next decade in cinema. It is a challenge, because the films in this format might disappear. Theatres will become shopping malls. Except in the south of India where theatres are cheaper, the audiences are not coming out to the theatres."

Kapur says these kinds of festivals are important to try and bring audiences back to theatres. But there are challenges for IFFI in Goa: "If you step out at night and roam the streets, you will see all the backpackers here for the festival. If we want to increase the number of people coming to IFFI,

we have to also think of where they will stay." He recalls his early days at Cannes, staying at a little apartment with others: "local support is needed for larger audiences. There is not enough accommodation. We need more theatres. We have one open air theatre venue, but then we need to be careful about the kinds of films we show there."

If it has the right infrastructure, Kapur says IFFI can host more than 30,000 delegates in the future, but what about sustainability? "The water tables in Goa have been going down every year. We have to find ways to respond to all these challenges."

There are already quick fixes for IFFI that Kapur has in mind. "I would suggest a shorter ceremony. People have only that much patience, and everyone wants a piece of the pie. This year was better, but next year we need to reassess this."



SHORT TAKES

It is super insightful for my own work to engage with such a gamut of people with diverse experiences. This festival helps us get outside of our bubbles.

Ann Peter
Archival Producer
Mumbai



The organization of the festival has been fantastic, and this is a wonderful location. I am excited to see how the Indian film industry progresses.

Jab Pace
Film Financier
London



It's great to have the Film Bazaar in a state where everything is a little more relaxed. I'm looking forward to hearing great scripts.

Archana Ghangrekar
Cinematographer
Mumbai



It's great to talk to other creatives in a beautiful country. India's such a fascinating place. I like the people, the food, the culture, the energy.

John Molloy
Producer
Australia

Can Festivals Save Cinema?

BY PANKHURI ZAHEER

“Films are not content. Films are art,” declared Giona Nazzaro, Artistic Director of the Locarno Film Festival, setting a defiant tone at yesterday’s IFFI panel discussion *360 Degree Cinema: Film Festival Directors’ Round Table*. His statement cut straight to the heart of the discussion: the survival and significance of cinema and by extension film festivals, in an era dominated by bite-sized media and streaming platforms. It was passionate exchange on the future of film and the role of festivals in preserving artistry, with the robust participation of several industry heavyweights.

The question of technology’s impact was a recurring theme. Cameron Bailey, Festival Director of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), was quick to emphasize that stories endure, not the medium. “Stories have been around since human beings have been around,” he said. “Technology will always change.” For Bailey, cinema’s magic lies in its collective experience—the amplified emotions, the communal reactions, and the lingering impact that shared viewing offers. “I think when you see films together, that’s just bigger,”

Nazzaro echoed this sentiment, but with a sharp critique of how technology is reshaping film culture. “We don’t refer to films as films anymore,” he lamented. “We speak of content. This is a scary word.” For him, treating films as mere content, no different from viral videos or influencer clips, threatens to strip cinema of its essence as an art form. Technology isn’t the enemy, he clarified, but “how you use the wheel” matters. The challenge for festivals is to keep the spirit of film alive in a rapidly shifting landscape.

Shekhar Kapur, the new Director of IFFI, challenged the panel to confront Western dominance in global cinema. “Do you think that the world narrative needs to change? Is it too Western?” he asked. Bailey responded by highlighting Toronto’s diverse audience, noting that the city’s multicultural fabric shapes TIFF’s selection. “Half the people in our city were born outside of Canada, our vantage point is already quite global.” Yet, he admitted, Hollywood’s gravitational pull is undeniable, often overshadowing the international films TIFF champions.

Reflecting on the emotional universality of Indian cinema, Nazzaro shared a personal story about

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan’s visit to Locarno. “Shah Rukh Khan is not a big star. He’s *the* biggest star that ever came to Locarno,” he said, recalling how Khan’s charisma transcended cultural barriers, which provided him an unforgettable reminder that the language of cinema can connect audiences on a deeply human level, challenging Western-centric narratives.

Emma Boa, festival producer at Edinburgh International Film Festival, spoke about the balancing act of programming. “A film festival program is a bit of a jigsaw puzzle,” she said, describing the challenge of curating lineups that honor both artistic excellence and accessibility. For her, festivals are about “amplifying the art” and inviting audiences to discover new perspectives, even when those films might not have mainstream appeal.

Kapur pushed the group on another pressing concern: with cinema increasingly losing ground to quick, easily digestible videos, do festivals have a duty to protect the traditional movie-going experience? “Only 10% of this world’s population is watching cinema as we know it,” he pointed out. Bailey’s response was firm: while formats evolve, cinema’s collective

experience must be preserved. “We crave experiences that connect us to something larger than ourselves,” he said.

Emma Boa’s strategy in Edinburgh aligns with this vision. “We’ve established new partnerships with the Fringe,” she said, referring to the iconic Edinburgh Fringe Festival. This integration aims to reach new, diverse audiences who might not usually attend a traditional film festival, creating space for risk-taking and experimentation in programming.

A key point of discussion was accessibility. An audience member raised a question about film festivals being a privilege for the few who can afford to attend, challenging the panelists to consider the limitations of their own platforms. Bailey acknowledged this and highlighted TIFF’s outreach efforts: “We bring the best of the films to remote areas across Canada,” he shared, emphasizing TIFF’s commitment to expanding access. For him, the future lies in a blend of festival prestige and grassroots reach, ensuring that cinema’s artistic spirit isn’t confined to exclusive red carpets.



Photo: Michael Praveen



SHORT TAKES

Everyone here is so diverse - from their attire to ways of speaking. It feels like the whole city has been turned into a campus community focused on film culture.

Devi Dang
Filmmaker
Mumbai



I am mostly excited about the upcoming VFX community events. I am impressed by how IFFI advances national film culture by bringing different people together.

Krishna Dusane
CEO
Pune



Movies that offer a slice of life are my pick. The Film Bazaar has been an amazing networking experience—one that felt organic.

Doyel Sengupta
Lawyer
Mumbai



Celebrities are my main attraction to IFFI. I look forward to watching every movie, especially thrillers and films of Goan origin.

Nabira Mulla
Film Student
Goa

“In the end, it’s not about the money”

BY CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY AND KINJAL SETHIA

“Vishal Bharadwaj once said that Gulzar offered him this invaluable piece of advice. ‘Kisi ko miltey ho, toh loaded revolver leke chalo.

When meeting someone for work, carry a loaded revolver,” quips the screen writer Rustom Irani over a fresh lime soda at the International Centre Goa. He is in Panjim to attend the NFDC Film Bazaar for a second year in a row to pitch a film project – very unusually, a Western – with his collaborator, Goa’s own Mandar Talauliker.

Confined to a wheel chair since the age of nine after an accident, Irani’s disability meant that cinephilia began for him at a very early age, with bootleg VHS tapes from his local video parlour, “including many films that no nine-year-old should be watching.” Many great film makers such as Quentin Tarantino and Ram Gopal Varma, he says, began their careers working at video libraries.

As for Talauliker, he belongs to the ninth generation of an artistic family hailing from Talaulim village near Old Goa. Growing up watching Westerns by Sergio Leone and John Ford, he was also fascinated by more lowbrow fare, with Jean-Claude Van Damme a particular favourite. After a degree in Fine Arts at the Goa College of Arts, his fascination with movie making took him to Mumbai and a stint at the new-generation production house Prime Focus.

Since then, his life’s journey has taken him in and out of cinema, but this is by no means Talauliker’s first appearance at IFFI. *Zuzari*, his 66-minute documentary film on Goa’s freedom fighter Mohan Ranade, was screened at the 2017 edition, and, last year, he was also a jury member (Western India) for the National Film Awards.

Strangely enough, Irani and Talauliker met in 2000 in faraway San Francisco,



where both were studying for a degree in film making. There, they connected over a shared love for Westerns. “As a

teenager, I used to love watching VHS tapes of old Westerns like *Mackenna’s Gold* (1969),” says Talauliker. Irani

added, “The themes of Westerns are very simple and elemental: good versus bad, morality, faith. Where do you have great villains in cinema anymore, except perhaps in South Indian cinema? Where are the Mogambos? Where are the Gabbars?”

For IFFI, Irani drove down from Bombay to Goa with his parents. In Panjim, he says, he can move independently without a caregiver or help, much more than in Bombay. “From the very beginning, Manohar Parrikar, who was instrumental in bringing the festival to its permanent venue in Panjim, made sure that IFFI and Film Bazaar are extremely disabled-friendly spaces,” he says. “Over the years that has trickled down to Panjim’s wider infrastructure. Even Panjim’s municipal market has a ramp which allows me to wander across all its levels.”

For Film Bazaar, this Bombay-to-Goa duo is pitching a project called *Rosh*. In Hindi, the word translates to white-hot fury. “When you lose all sense of good and bad,” explains Irani. The story is a Western-style period drama set in 1857, in which a renegade Indian soldier and a fanatical man of faith join forces against the British. “Last year, we learnt everything about how Film Bazaar works, and this year we have come back better prepared, with a more polished story and detailed story boards,” says Irani. “In fact, we are meeting some production executives for the second time.”

This year, Film Bazaar’s selection for the Co-Production Market features 21 feature films and 8 web series from 7 countries. More broadly, the bazaar is a platform for new and aspiring filmmakers to connect with producers and distributors around the world. Irani observes, “In the end, it’s not about the money, but finding someone who shares our vision. Someone who is as excited as us about this story, and wants to see it come alive on the big screen.”



SHORT TAKES

No matter where you are from, you can experience a story from across the globe in a language you may not speak but still feel. This IFFI, I’m looking forward to *Waves* and *Bramayugam*.
Abhishek Das
Screenwriter
Odisha



It’s my first time at IFFI. I hope to watch diverse films that give me some food for thought.
Prathima V.
Teacher
Bengaluru



I’ve been coming to India since I was around 18 months old; it’s like my second home. The festival has been beautiful so far.
Geraldine Hakewill
Producer
Australia



My choice of films is those that amplify unheard voices. Through my art, I love sharing my perspectives on various sociopolitical phenomena.
Milind K. Ukey
Director
Mumbai

“We took all the calls together”

BY JANE BORGES

Twenty years ago, the renowned ad man, playwright and theatre director Rahul da Cunha first staged *Pune Highway*, a comedy thriller he wrote about three friends holed up in a seedy motel room after having witnessed the stabbing of another of their comrades. The play had a very successful 10-year-run, touring nine countries, and opening at several leading theatre festivals. “One publication, after watching the play, compared me to [British playwright] Harold Pinter. It definitely made no sense to me, and I took it with a pinch of salt, but it makes for good copy,” smiles Mumbai-based Da Cunha, who has roots in the once-peaceful North Goa village of Arpora. Yet all through that time, Da Cunha remembers being pushed by his long-time associate and friend Bugs Bhargava Krishna — he is also cast in the play — to make a movie out of it.

“The play allowed for a lot of movement on the stage,” feels Krishna, “You felt like you were moving with the story, you were moving with the characters. I found that stunning. No situation in the 75 minutes of the play was the same. Every minute you were in a different place, either emotionally or physically. That’s what films are about, right? It’s all about movement.”

It took many years, a lot of nudging and the Covid-induced lockdown for Da Cunha to give Krishna’s seed of thought, a serious shot. “Theatre was a comfort zone, and I didn’t want to shake that up.” Things changed when Krishna made his first film *Barot House* in 2019, and followed it up with two more. “Rahul would come for these shoots. In a way, it got Rahul interested in the medium, and its many possibilities.”

Another two years of learnings and unlearning later, *Pune Highway* is now set to premiere at the International Film Festival of India on Saturday. “I always thought the play to be half-finished,” admits Da Cunha, who has co-written



Photo: Assavri Kulkarni

and co-directed with Krishna. “When I wrote the play, I was on a deadline, and in the process, I felt the end though shocking, became too hurried. So, what was meant to be a two-hour two-act play, became a one-act play. For many reasons now, I feel like the film has completed the play.”

Starring Jim Sarbh, Amit Sadh and Anuvab Pal in the lead, the movie is a lot bigger in scale from the original piece of work, says the duo. “Bugs was very clear that this can’t be a one-motel room film,” says Da Cunha. The drama, hence, moves out of the motel and spills on to the Mumbai-Pune highway. “We also wanted to introduce the other side of the highway, which is Bhor, Satara, Karad, and the other parts of Maharashtra. This is in complete

contradiction to South Mumbai, where the main characters are from.” And despite all this, says Da Cunha, *Pune Highway* still has its moorings in the play.

Da Cunha launched his own film company Drop D to make this movie, and says “every day as a filmmaker was an astonishingly new day for me. For instance, if I booked an eight-hour shift in early December, I got only six hours, because I had not factored in late sunrise and early sunset. Or the fact that I could spend two days shooting a two-minute scene, and throw it all out during edit. The fact that the writer’s hat is different from a director’s hat or the editor’s hat can be nerve-racking, especially when you are putting in all the money.”

He credits Krishna for having helped him sail through: “I am not going to make films without Bugs, and if you ask me why, it’s simply because I don’t know how to make films. I think I understand actors, and I think I understand screenwriting, but understanding camera seems to be taking a while.”

Krishna thinks differently: “I remember the first crack of the edits were way off, and Rahul didn’t like it at all. It wasn’t the film we imagined. We sat the guy [editor] down and acted the film for him, saying this is what we need. So, Rahul is excellent in post-production. Even during the shoot, we would discuss what a scene needs to deliver, and then, we’d break them up into the shots. We took all the calls together, never independently.”



I’m hoping to make a film in India. If the Bazaar is here next year, I’ll definitely come back again.

Jan Nowell
Director
Australia



The festival is fun. Goa is an especially approachable site for international audiences; much less intimidating than other parts of India.

Nicolas Chevaillier
Screenwriter
Berlin



I look for international films, especially films that teach me new aspects of culture and new ways of thinking.

Shreshta Puppam
Photographer
Hyderabad



So far it’s been a bit disappointing because I did not receive the market guide on time. I’m here with my film *Ajoni*.

Nilakshi Deka
Actor
Assam

Back To Africa

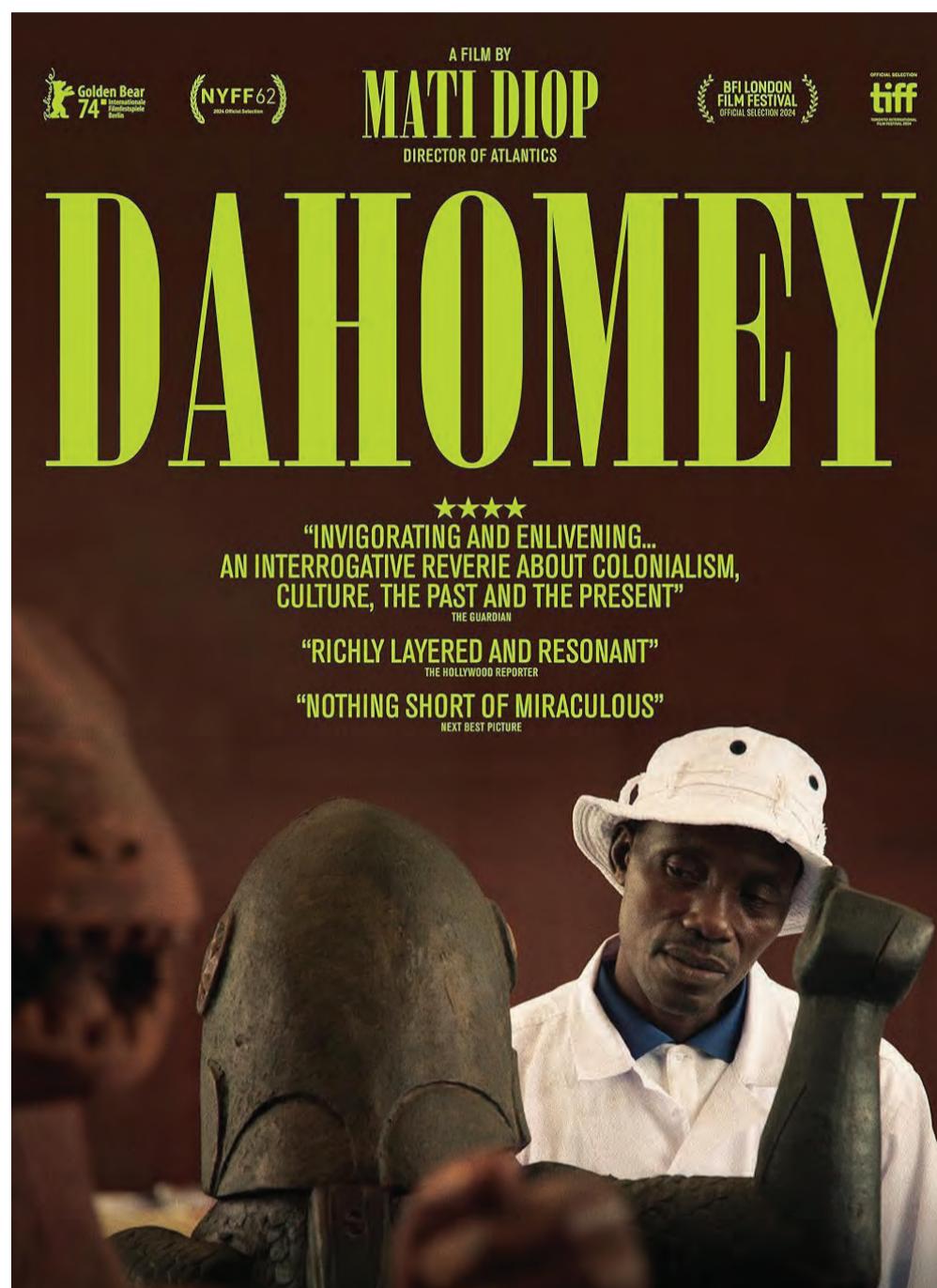
BY SACHIN CHATTE

At times, the most straightforward concepts can lead to the creation of deeply intricate and impactful films. *Dahomey*, a documentary centering on the return of 26 royal treasures from France to Dahomey, now a part of Benin, is directed by French filmmaker, Mati Diop. Earlier this year, it won the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, which follows Diop's debut feature *Atlantics* (2019) receiving the Grand Prix at Cannes Film Festival. While *Atlantics* was a supernatural romantic drama, Diop's latest work is a thought-provoking documentary that prompts viewers to deep and meaningful contemplation.

The documentary's premise is uncomplicated, yet it encompasses a wealth of complexities. Over the years, particularly in the late 1800s, French forces plundered approximately 7,000 artifacts from the Kingdom of Dahomey. Then, in 2021, the French government decided to return 26 of these items to the West African Republic of Benin. Diop's film chronicles the journey of these statues and artifacts from their location in the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, all the way back to their homeland.

The French essay film *Statues Also Die* (1954) by auteur Alain Resnais, experimental filmmaker Chris Marker, and cinematographer Ghislain Cloquet, previously examined African art history and the devastating effects that colonialism wreaked on how it is perceived. Despite its brief 30-minute runtime, it remains a powerful and incisive critique of racial imperialism, and is regarded as one of the most significant films on this topic.

Diop's storytelling presents another, unique and highly effective perspective. The wooden statue of nineteenth-century King Ghezo communicates through a voiceover, reminding me of James Earl Jones as Darth Vader, albeit this is in the indigenous Fon language.



The King identifies himself as Number 26, a designation assigned to him within the inventory of artefacts. This Number 26 expresses feelings of anger and occasional indifference, articulating a sense of bewildered indignation at being referred to merely as "26," while simultaneously acknowledging his impending 'homecoming.'

Diop employs a range of cinematic techniques to great effect, such as the sound of a drill machine against a black screen as preparations for transport are underway, and the observational footage captured by CCTV cameras in the corridors where Number 26 and the others are housed. Despite their composition of wood and metal,

the film imbues these objects with character. They are transported from France to Benin, to be displayed at the Presidential Palace for public viewing, in an event deemed 'historique' by local newspapers.

Each frame and moment in the film is laden with meaning, culminating in a vibrant, diverse, and at times contentious dialogue about art, culture, heritage, and the surrounding politics. Although many of the participants are African students, the themes they discuss resonate on a global scale. When the political nature of repatriation is questioned, with only a portion of the artefacts being returned, one woman asserts, "Macron didn't send it back because we demanded it; he sent it back to improve their own image." In response, a young filmmaker counters that at least some artefacts have been returned, and questions the need for criticism.

I found myself reflecting on this film and its discussions within the context of our country. A few years ago, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya hosted an exhibition titled "India and the World: A History in Nine Stories," featuring artifacts that date back to 1800 BC. Interestingly, a hundred of these items, which are integral to India's heritage, were borrowed from The British Museum in London.

Nations that have experienced colonial rule grapple with these important questions: to what extent should one take pride in their own culture and history, particularly when it has been suppressed by colonial forces? How crucial is it to address the injustices brought by colonialism? In an era of rapid transformation, does our history truly constitute a part of our identity, or should we simply let the past remain in the past and move forward? Diop presents thought-provoking inquiries that merit further exploration.

Dahomey streams on MUBI from 13th December



It's my first time here; it's been a bit chaotic but extremely rewarding to connect with people, especially at the pitch market.

Preeti Bhattacharyya
Talent Manager
Mumbai



My movies aim to portray the reality of our times, representing the stories of the downtrodden and regular folk. These are the stories that I love.

Praveen Morchhale
Filmmaker
Mumbai



Indian films take my breath away. I love Bhansali's films and I've also been catching up on a lot of Shah Rukh's movies.

Karen Radzyner
Producer
Australia



Cinema, to me, is like a metaphor for life. I appreciate a compelling story—one that isn't necessarily complex but is well-performed.

Ritopriyo Saha
Director
Bengaluru

Illustration: Govit Morajkar



तुज्या विणे

आयज तुं न्हेसला बरें,
कपलांर फुल्ला सुर्य तुज्या

गळ्यांत हांर ल्हारांवें,
नाकांत चंद्राची नथ तुज्या,

आगो.. सोबीत पणजें म्हजें,
तुज्या विणे हांव कितें ?

Legend of Love

BY TINO DE SÁ

Further down the road from Miramar, to the left of the International Film Festival of India venue at Campal, is a promontory that pierces the sea and separates the mouths of the Mandovi and Zuari rivers. This ridge of rock, weathered by the full blast of the Konkan monsoon and beaten by the waves of the Arabian Sea, is the *Cabo de Dona Paula*, or the Cape of Dona Paula. Four centuries ago, it was chosen by the Archbishop of Goa to build his home and a convent, which was taken over by the Viceroy, who converted it into his palace when the capital of Goa was shifted to Panjim almost two hundred years ago. To this day, the Governors of Goa live here: the palace is now the Raj Bhavan – arguably, the most breathtakingly picturesque residence of any State Governor in India.

The Cabo was also the headquarters of the British, when they ruled Goa in all but name, for twelve years from 1803 to 1815. Invoking the thousand-year-old Anglo-Lusitanian Treaty, the Portuguese had invited them to assist in the defence of the territory from the ever-present Dutch and French threats during the Napoleonic Wars. Accepting with alacrity, the British brought along ten thousand troops and entrenched themselves in Goa, severely clipping the wings of the Portuguese administration. They were reluctant to leave, and it took a great deal of diplomatic pressure to finally persuade them to do so. The British Cemetery in Dona Paula bears testimony to this peculiar interlude.

A considerable portion of the 1981 Hindi movie *Ek Duuje ke Liye* was filmed here, even before the 1982

CHOGM made Goa famous as a tourist destination. Also shot here was an action sequence of Rohan Shetty's blockbuster, *Singham* (2011).

The legend of Dona Paula tells of the daughter of a Portuguese Governor who committed suicide by leaping off a rock into the sea, because she was prevented from marrying a Goan fisherman she had fallen in love with. Tourist guides point to two sculptures on the craggy rocks as proof of their tale.

The truth is probably more prosaic – the village, originally called Oddavell, was renamed by its grateful inhabitants to honour a noblewoman, Paula de Souto Maior, who was famed for her generosity and good works. She was a relative of the Portuguese Governor of Jaffna in Sri Lanka, and her father, a wealthy merchant, moved to Goa in 1744. The Souto Maiors and the Mhamai Kamats, a Goan Hindu family, owned most of the land between Panjim and Dona Paula.

As for the statues, so beloved as a selfie-point for tourists, they are the work of the famous German sculptress Yrsa von Leistner, created as recently as in 1969, and have nothing to do either with the real Dona Paula nor the legendary one! But then, legends are always so much better than fact – especially when they are about love.

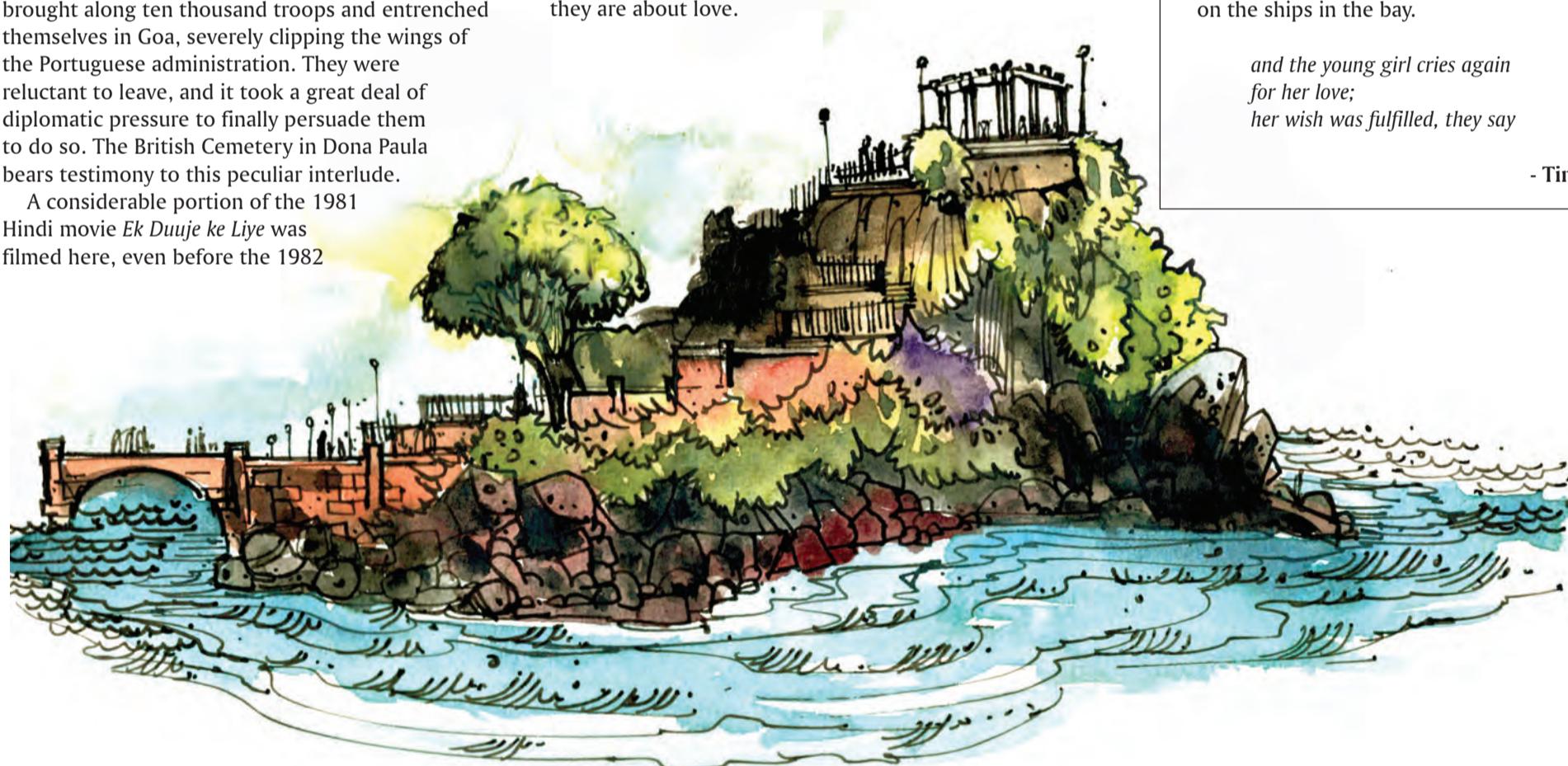


Illustration: Govit Morajkar

Dona Paula Sunset

The sun dissolves in smudges and streaks
Like the tear-stained cheeks
of a painted crying circus clown.

*and the young girl calls for her love
just this once,
wishing her sorrows would drown*

Flotsam-fatted gulls worry the rocks that sing
In the spray and wring
the sand-shrimps from their stubborn shells.

*and the girl in the Cabo anxiously waits
for the peal
of the angelus bells*

Then blotches of night singe the pink,
Spilling ink
on the ships in the bay.

*and the young girl cries again
for her love;
her wish was fulfilled, they say*

- Tino de Sá



I'm moving into more lighthearted movies - ones that address serious topics in a manner more palatable to the public.

Katerina Mikhaylova
Producer
Russia



Goa plus stories equals love! It's sheer euphoria that I have to try and contain.

Rochelle Potkar
Screenwriter
Mumbai



I went to the feature presentation and saw some really good content. I'm scouting for projects that I can take back to Europe.

Malaika Bova
Programmer
United Kingdom



This is my first time here and I am completely clueless. I've heard from a lot of people that I need to be here, so let's see how it goes.

Nidhi Saxena
Writer
Jaipur

Mylapore <> Mandovi

BY VINCENT D'SOUZA

This column would have better described all that was to follow in its name.

There was promise of much synergy in its content too. Naturally.

There was the Portuguese connect. There was the Catholic Church connect. And there is saint Francis Xavier in our midst at both ends. And Goa and Chennai are water cities.

San Thome de Meliapur is how the area in old Madras was called. In pre-Madras time.

Today, the Portuguese and the saint's heritage is almost zilch in Chennai.

But here in Goa, the saint, lovingly called Goencho Saib, will grab all the attention for the next few weeks as the 'Exposition' gets underway at Se Cathedral in Old Goa, November 21 onwards. And lakhs of pilgrims are expected here through the weeks.

To the millions of tourists who treat Goa as a weekend or a week-long getaway, a trip on a boat down the Mandovi at sunset is a must. I have done that and found it a loud, distasteful experience though the sunset experience sank in memory.

Some years ago, travelling with D. Hemchandra Rao, now no more, who was documenting India's light houses, we managed to hitch a river ride to get a view from the Mandovi at the lights and light houses on either side.

There is a small light at Betim, on the hill: there is the abandoned light house in Miramar, the heritage lighthouse in Reis Magos, and the light from Fort Aguada.

And there is the last vestige of a light that survives on the pavement of the Campal - Miramar road which was meant for boatmen on the Mandovi, in the age when the waters washed the zone where the road runs today.

These lights are of little or no relevance today for fishers and sailors in the new-tech age. The stage has turned these towers and spaces into high-

security surveillance posts of our seas and borders. And yet, the flashes, every 20 seconds, carry some significance to different people.

I revised this column after watching Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* (2024) at IFFI 2024 on Wednesday morning; the multiplex hall was more than 80% full. Lots has been written on the film which won the Grand Prix at Cannes, but I was curious to know how the director came to name the film. She says somewhere that she borrowed the line from Nalini Malani, her famous artist mother.

I filled myself with Payal's Mumbai.

The broader, bigger Mumbai you get to see is familiar. As are the people in the trains, at the markets and in the bazaars. But it is the world of the nurses, the Keralite nurses in Mumbai that got me in. Kerala's nurses are all over the world, their recent favourite destination being Japan.

Sometime ago, I was working on a story for my newspaper, on teen girls whose families were displaced by the state agency that was cleaning up the Buckingham Canal and river banks in my city, and dumping these families in state-built tenements far, far away: of girls who chose to travel long hours by state-run buses to attend their 'old' schools where they had familiar teachers and close friends.

I suggested to a student film-maker that the stories of two teen girls of this community would make a good, small film. The bus would be a character too. As would be the city. Imagine this Light.

Vincent D'Souza edits and publishes a neighborhood newspaper in Chennai, and has been a journalist for over 40 years.



Illustration: Sayali Khairnar



SHORT TAKES

Cinema is about experience, be it real or reel. *Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know* and *All We Imagine as Light* excite me the most.

Akshita Vohra
Director
Mumbai



When a filmmaker puts something out there, you'll find a bit of their personality in the film; it gives you insight into their psyche.

Sumel Brar
Filmmaker
Punjab



I'm looking for meaningful connections that result in tangible collaborations. The people here are very humble.

Meghna Katheria
Screenwriter
Delhi



Cinema is unique in its ability to help us empathize with people who aren't us and to understand situations that may never happen to us.

Sharmistha Mitra Chakraborty
Filmmaker
Calcutta

MOG ASUNDI

BY VIVEK MENEZES

In mellifluous, ever-sweet Konkani, the beloved *maim bhas* of this stretch of the western coastline of India, our beautiful greeting translates to “let there be love between us.” Used most often in farewell, the sentiment bonds friends and neighbours into heartfelt community, very much like Plato commended in his famous *Symposium* more than 2000 years ago: “Love is the pursuit of the whole.” In exactly the same way, saying Mog Asundi to each other enjoins us to seek love as the highest possibility of being.

I have been thinking of love after watching Payal Kapadia’s intensely soul-stirring *All We Imagine as Light* in its only screening at IFFI 2024. This moody, poetic masterpiece – and first Indian movie to win the Grand Prix at Cannes – is suffused with love and longing, and my viewing experience was both intimate and cathartic. It felt a privilege to enter the world of Malayali nurses in Mumbai, which – just like the director has told many interviewers – I also became curious about after spending time in hospitals with an unwell relative. In addition, however, there is an even more personal factor at play here, because Suyash Kamat – the brilliant young filmmaker who served as Kapadia’s Director’s Assistant and also the Second Unit Cinematographer – was once the youngest member of Team Peacock, and an integral factor in the early success of this one-of-a-kind festival daily

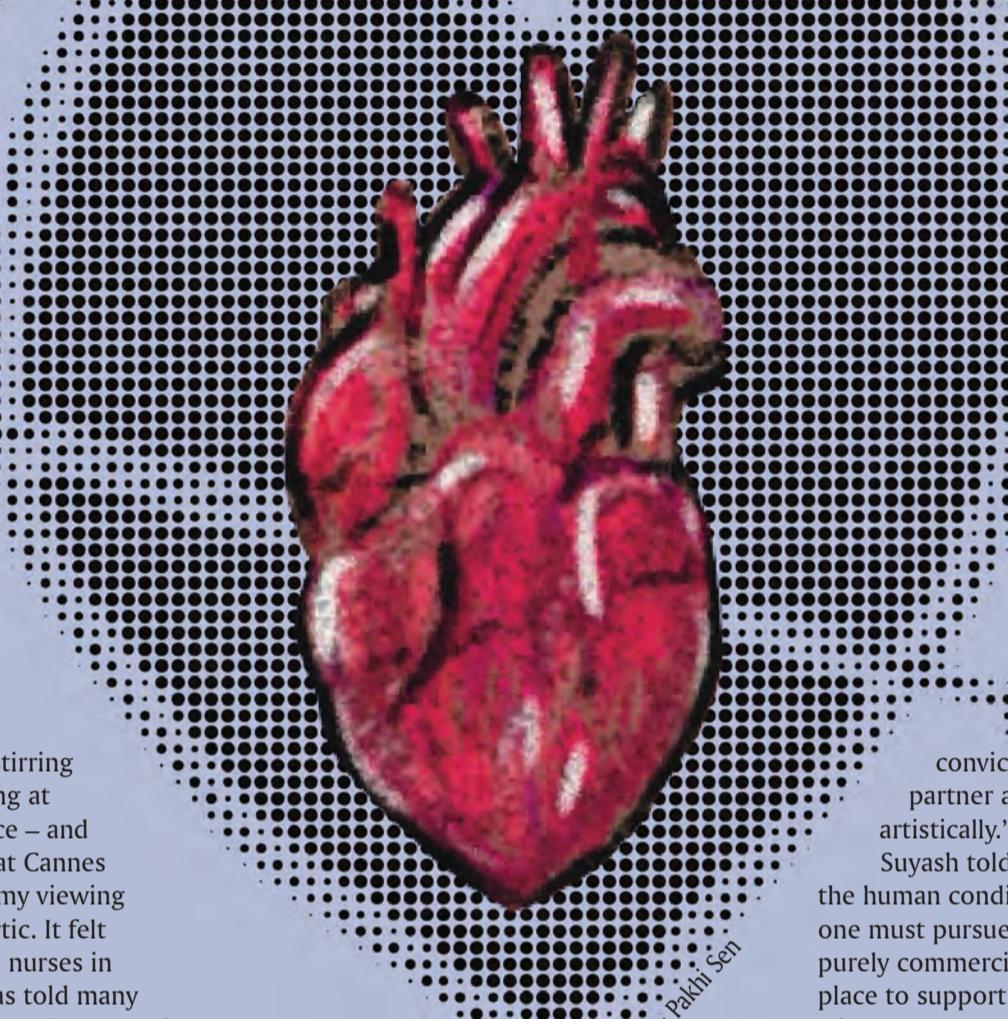


Illustration: Pakhi Sen

newspaper, and we are incredibly proud of him.

“IFFI represented discovery to me,” said our Suyash, when I reached out to tell him I had been blown away by *All We Imagine as Light*. “I joined *The Peacock* at the age of 23. I had some experience in films, but writing for a publication wasn’t exactly my forte. Nonetheless, it became a space to learn and articulate our thoughts.” He left Goa to study film in Kolkata, but this newest role on Kapadia’s team was another “front-row view” that became “a second film school of sorts, to witness her approach to films; the hard work, dedication and meticulous attention to detail.

The virtue of finding tenets of one’s own practice and to have conviction in that process. One felt like an equal partner and contributor so it was very fruitful artistically.”

Suyash told me that “Goa is potent with stories of the human condition that are waiting to be told. But if one must pursue it as an artistic endeavour, and not a purely commercial enterprise, an infrastructure must be in place to support the film-makers. Film-making is plagued with the crude practicalities that come with dealing with people, money and uncertainties. To truly foster a thriving film culture, we must lower barriers to entry, and create opportunities for diverse voices to share their stories. Only when concentrated effort can be made at both the artistic level and at an infrastructural level can we imagine for a film to come forth that can hopefully dream of scaling to these heights.”



Bird's eye

A purple sunbird dips its curved beak into the stem of the honeysuckle spray.

Perched on the thread thin vine, it hovers frail when the shrub sways. Agile.

Speed of the wings spread like a pulsar beam. The bird flies into the rays of the sun

and its crest blooms into a purple spin, an iridescent blaze. A blink of the sublime.

It empties the nectar and flies away. Swift as Jara’s arrow that pierced

a jamun foot. A windbreak to music, the battle won. A prayer on a purple tongue.

- Kinjal Sethia

55th International Film Festival Schedule - 22nd November 2024

INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1	INOX PANJIM - AUDI 2	INOX PANJIM - AUDI 3	INOX PANJIM - AUDI 4	MAQUINEZ PALACE - AUDI 1	KALA ACADEMY
9:00 AM SHEPHERDS Dir: Sophie Deraspe French	9:30 AM Ballad of the Mountain Dir: Tarun Jain Hindi	9:15 AM GODSTERMINAL Dir: Georg Tiller Swedish	9:45 AM SUNFLOWERS WERE THE FIRST ONES TO KNOW Dir: Chidananda S Naik Kannada	9:00 AM THE REBELS Dir: Vladimir Alenikov Russian	12:30 PM LIVING MOVIES: FILMMAKING AND THE CREATIVE LIFE Vidhu Vinod Chopra & Shantanu Moitra
11:45 AM LOCUST Dir: KEFF Mandarin, Hokkein, Hakka	12:30 PM Level Cross Dir: Arfaz Ayub Malayalam	12:00 PM 12th FAIL Dir: Vidhu Vinod Chopra Hindi	11:45 AM SNOW FLOWER Dir: Gajendra Vitthal - Ahire Marathi	2:30 PM SOUND DESIGN : THE AURAL UNIVERSE OF CINEMATIC STORY TELLING Nakkul Kamte and Eric Hoehn	
2:45 PM * RED PATH Dir: Lotfi Achour Arabic	12:45 PM Praan Pratishtha Dir: Pankaj Sonawane Marathi	3:45 PM IN VITRO Dir: Tom McKeith, William Howarth English	2:45 PM THE SLUGGARD CLAN Dir: Rastislav Boroš Slovak	2:15 PM HOUSE Dir: Jamshid Narzikulov Uzbek	4:30 PM TRANSFORMING LITERARY MASTERPIECES INTO ENGAGING FILMS Mani Ratnam & Gautham Vasudev Menon
5:45 PM MRS. Dir: Arati Kadav Hindi	4:30 PM Batto Ka Bulbula Dir: Akshay Bhardwaj Haryanvi	6:30 PM ROLL NO 52 Dir: Saroj Kumar Telugu	5:00 PM SAALI MOHABBAT Dir: Tisca Chopra Hindi	5:15 PM THE DARK CASTLE Dir: Kirill Kuzin Russian	8:30 PM TARA & AKASH: LOVE BEYOND REALMS Dir: Srinivas Abrol Hindi
8:00 PM HUNTERS ON A WHITE FIELD Dir: Sarah Gyllenstierna Swedish	4:30 PM Karken Dir: Nending Loder Galo	9:15 PM BOUND IN HEAVEN Dir: Huo Xin Mandarin	8:15 PM * PAPER FLOWERS Dir: Mahesh Pailoor English	8:30 PM INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 4	10:45 AM LAZARO AT NIGHT Dir: Nicolás Pereda Spanish
10:30 PM # THE WAILING Dir: Pedro Martín - Calero Spanish, French	8:00 PM Jigarthanda Double X Dir: Karthik Subbaraj Tamil	10:30 AM HAPPY HOLIDAYS Dir: Scandar Copti Arabic, Hebrew	10:00 AM # MEXICO 86 Dir: César Díaz Spanish	10:30 AM ELBOW Dir: Aslı Özarslan German, Turkish	1:45 PM MANAS Dir: Mariana Brennand Spanish
ASHOK AUDI	SAMRAT AUDI	11:00 AM THE FALLING SKY Dir: Eryk Rocha, Gabriela Carneiro Da Cunha Yanomamö, Portuguese	11:00 AM MOVING Dir: Shinji Sōmai Japanese	1:30 PM ME, MARYAM, THE CHILDREN AND 26 OTHERS Dir: Farshad Hashemi Persian	4:45 PM NORAH Dir: Tawfik Alzaidi Arabic
2:30 PM # ARCHITECTON Dir: Victor Kossakovsky Italian, English	2:30 PM THE RIM Dir: Alberto Gracia Spanish, Galician	4:00 PM # JULIE KEEPS QUIET Dir: Leonardo Van Dijl Dutch, French	4:30 PM # AFTERNOONS OF SOLITUDE Dir: Albert Serra Spanish	7:45 PM EK CUP CHA Dir: Kishor Arjun Konkani	
		7:00 PM Swatantrya Veer Savarkar Dir: Randeep Hooda Hindi	7:30 PM HOUSE Dir: Jamshid Narzikulov Uzbek		



Sagar Naik Mule managed to paint today's lovely cover while on the move en route back home from Delhi – where our uniquely gifted young Goan artist was invited to the Global Soil Conference to represent the contemporary Kaavi tradition – and his striking artwork represents the concept of endless love, radiating from home base of the International Film Festival of India in the Old Goa Medical College heritage complex on the Mandovi riverfront of Panjim, and ribboning out from India to encompass the comity of nations, as represented by the world map in the crown of our favourite bird.



The Marching Band

13:00 pm
INOX Screen-I Porvorim



Be Qayaam

19:30 pm
INOX Screen-III Margao



Happy Holidays

10:30 am
INOX Screen-II Porvorim



Shepherds

09:00 am
INOX Screen-I Panaji