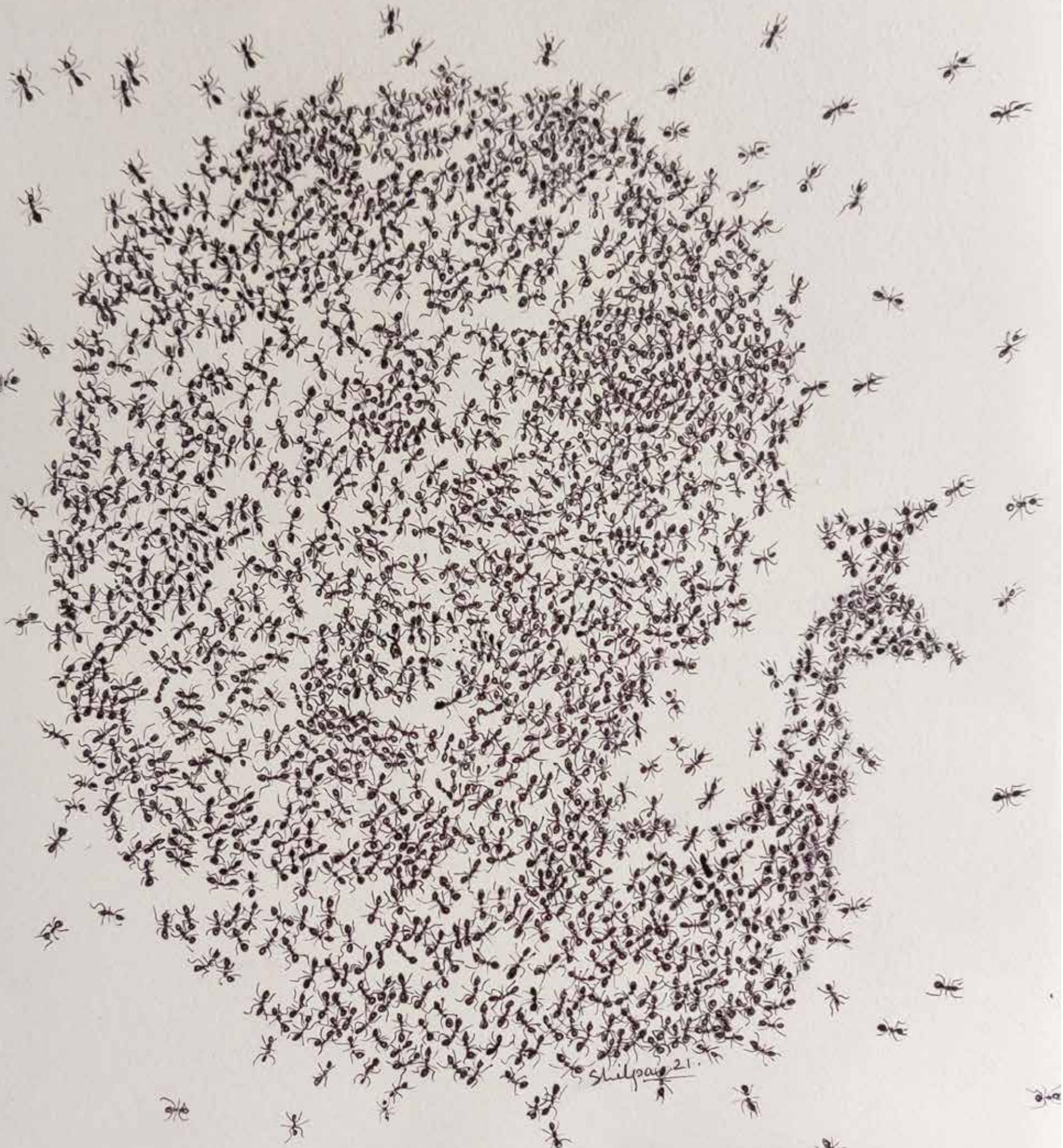


THE

PEACOCK

FRIDAY, 22 JANUARY 2021



MY DOOD-BHAAV'S NAME IS ANTHONY GONSALVES

BY DAMODAR MAUZO

For Jose Mestre's wife, Ana Quiteria, the way to Majorda's *Mhamai Saibinn* church passed by my house. So whenever she would return after attending the mass, she would invariably stop by to say hello to my mother. It was in the mid-40s of the last century and village life was a *sossegado* affair. One day, when I was a baby, as she was returning after mass, she did not find *Aayee* in view and heard the baby crying. She entered the house to find *Aayee* down with fever and the baby crying because the sick mother could not breastfeed.

Judging the situation, Ana Quiteria who was feeding her own son, Eugenio, proffered to feed the hungry babe. And soon the baby - that was me - stopped crying. Probably, there wasn't anything extraordinary in that act in the Goa of those days. What I remember now is Ida and Flavia, Anthony's sisters, calling me their *dood-bhaav*. Today, it certainly makes me proud that our families were so open-minded.

I vividly remember Jose Mestre going to the parish school where he taught music to children. Tall and handsome,

hair neatly combed backward and dignified as he was clad in formal wear, Mestre had an aura of a *bhatkar*. I don't remember having met Anthony until the early 80s when he returned from the USA for good. When I did, he reminded me of his father. The same stature, the same looks and dignified manners. I was told that he is a man of few words. He indeed was, but not with me. The first time I met him at his house, he offered me a glass of wine. 'Try this, I have made it.' It was a homemade wine using pure coconut feni as a base. 'I liked it' I said and then it became a regular welcome drink for me.

Though not very often, I did visit him on festival days or occasions like his daughter Laxmi's birthdays. Every time I met him, we could connect instantly, probably because, as he said, 'we both are writers. You write stories while I write music.' He was writing a book of 'New Notation System for Indian Music'. Today, my regrets are that no one has bothered to look into the incomplete project.

Anthony was an accomplished musician at 12, trained under his proficient father. He was just 16 when he left for Mumbai to explore opportunities in his career. Talented

that he was, he was instantly picked up as a violinist in Naushad's Orchestra. He then opened violin classes and soon was hailed as a master teacher. Among his students were R. D. Burman and Pyarelal who later became big names in the industry.

Anthony was always a learner. He was not content with his knowledge of Western music. He learned the nuances of Hindustani music. His passion for raga-based music encouraged him to discover new vistas of harmony. His understanding of both Indian and Western music propelled him to greater heights. But he had dreamed something different. He founded the Indian Symphony Orchestra and in 1958, he staged an impressive concert at the Quadrangle of St. Xavier College, with 110 musicians, wherein Lata Mangeshkar and Manna Dey sang his compositions. That fetched him the fellowship to travel to the US where he spent nearly 12 years.

When he was in a pensive mood, he'd lamented to me that he felt sorry that little has been done to salvage the efforts that had gone into the 1958 concert. He believed that it depicted the rich tradition of Indian music. It is common knowledge that Lata Mangeshkar has her roots in Goa. But

the singer who is reported to have sung in 36 different languages has no Konkani song recorded so far. But she has sung once at the insistence of Anthony Gonsalves. When I asked Anthony about it, he joyfully gave the details which are worth sharing.

In 1962, soon after Goa was liberated, a fund-raising performance was organized in Mumbai by the MG Party of Goa, wherein Lata Mangeshkar had sung a Konkani song. Because Lata did not want her name associated with the concert, it was called Laxmikant Pyarelal Night. Lata had agreed to sing and Anthony had composed the score. Everything was fine until the rehearsals. At the concert, the organizers suddenly reached Anthony's ear to tell him that Lataji had refused to sing. The language controversy was at the peak then. Anthony got irritated. Unmindful of that he went up to the mic and announced that the next Konkani song would be sung by India's nightingale Lata. Maybe hesitatingly, Lata came up and rendered the Konkani song. That happened because Anthony was irresistible.

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



Illustration: Pakhi Sen

STORYTELLING FROM IVORY COAST

BY SACHIN CHATTE

The variety of films at a festival, and the themes that they deal with, constantly amaze you.

Every region and country has its own stories to tell; the range of tales is always impressive. For instance, if you see films from South America, they have their own sensibilities and ways of telling a story. Films from Iran, Afghanistan, and that part of the world are known to use their resources in the best possible manner without compromising on the aspects of film making. Without sounding disparaging, perhaps the only industries where the quantity is far more impressive than the quality is Hollywood and Bollywood.

Not many films come out of Africa, it is largely under-represented. But every now and then, there is a film that makes waves. Given the size of the continent, the subject, and stories are also different – for instance, the films

from North and West Africa frequently deal with the issue of migration – violence and the social crisis have marred many countries forcing people to seek greener pastures.

At IFFI this year, *Night of The Kings* (2020), a film from the Ivory Coast was screened. It lived up to the reputation that preceded it. On the surface, the story is about a pickpocket who is sent to the much dreaded MACA prison. He earns the sobriquet of 'Roman', the storyteller, like a contemporary Scheherazade. Intentional or not, one could see an allegory to the MAGA crowd – they blindly follow what they are told and are a pretty unruly bunch.

The prison is in the middle of nowhere, the officials are hardly seen because this is the story of the inmates – they pretty much run the show in the prison. In fact, one could call it a story of our society, with all the power struggles that are involved. The present boss of the inmates is Blackbeard,

though his beard is no longer black. He is ill and the end is not too far, while the move to replace him and take charge is already underway.

The most fascinating aspect of the story is this – Roman, the storyteller, has to tell a story at night when there is a red moon. It is a big celebration and an event that all inmates look forward to. Roman's job is not easy, he has to keep going until dawn, or else the end could be rather unpleasant for him. He weaves a story and an intriguing one – very cleverly, the film cuts with a representation of the story and Roman's narration in the prison, with the inmates listening to it like a captive audience – some of them even enact and sing along.

From a tale woven on the spot, Ramon delves into the history and politics of the Ivory Coast while telling the story of the Zama and his tragic end. There are plenty of mystical elements in the film along with an almost surreal scene. The 52-year-old director has packed in a lot but he has done it so seamlessly that you watch with rapt attention in admiration of his skills.

On the technical front, the production design and particularly the lighting is from the absolute top draw

making this film one of the better ones at IFFI.

Ivory Coast hardly has any film school, funding doesn't come easy and they barely make a film or two every year. That makes *Night of The Kings* all the more special, making Philippe Lacôte, whose debut film *Run* (2014) premiered at Cannes, an established master storyteller.

While watching the film, this thought crossed my mind more than once – when are we going to see something path-breaking like this in Goan cinema? It has been more than a decade since Laxmikant Shetgaonker's *Paltodcho Munis* (The Man Across The Bridge, 2009) won a prize at TIFF Toronto International Film Festival, making it the first Konkani film to shine at one of the well-established festivals. It was a long wait till Miransha Naik's *Juze* (2017) which also did well in the international film circuit. Yash Sawant's short film *A Cold Summer Night* (2018) traveled to some festivals, but apart from that, there is nothing to write home about.

To be fair, the onus doesn't lie only on the filmmakers – the audience, state support, and other factors also count. More musings on that in tomorrow's column.





'No, Billy, you cannot go to school today'

WORLD PREMIERE: *A Primeira Morte De Joana*



Photo by Michael Praveen

BY CHRISTAL FERRAO

A *Primeira Morte De Joana* (The First Death of Joana) has its world premiere at the 51st edition of IFFI today. Directed by Christiane Oliveira from Brazil, the film is about a 13-year-old girl Joana (played by Letícia Kacperski) on a quest to know how it was possible for her great-grandmother Rosa to die as a virgin at 70. Through this investigation, she understands herself and the women in her family. "Every woman has a way to know and live her intimacy and sexuality and for Joana, being in her early teens, she was beginning to explore this," Oliveira said.

Oliveira told *The Peacock* that she heard a story about an old woman who died without dating anyone, which inspired her to make *The First Death of Joana*.

She said that South Brazil is known for its macho and cattlehand culture, but the toxic masculinity is oppressive for women.

It creates a scenario where young girls are humiliated at school due to the social expectations from the female gender. Isabela Bressane (who plays Joana's friend Caroline) has experienced this humiliation as a schoolgirl. It hinders her development. Caroline subtly inspects and questions Joana about the hidden truth of her family, but her friend does not want to hide and expresses herself without shame. She also teaches Caroline to be more expressive about her thoughts and feelings. The film charts the journey of two friends on their discovery of relationships and desires of sexual intimacy of woman from their past. The process of making the film took the actor on a path of self-discovery too. "I learnt

a lot about myself; that I have a lot in common with my character Caroline. She is introspective and so am I," she told *The Peacock*.

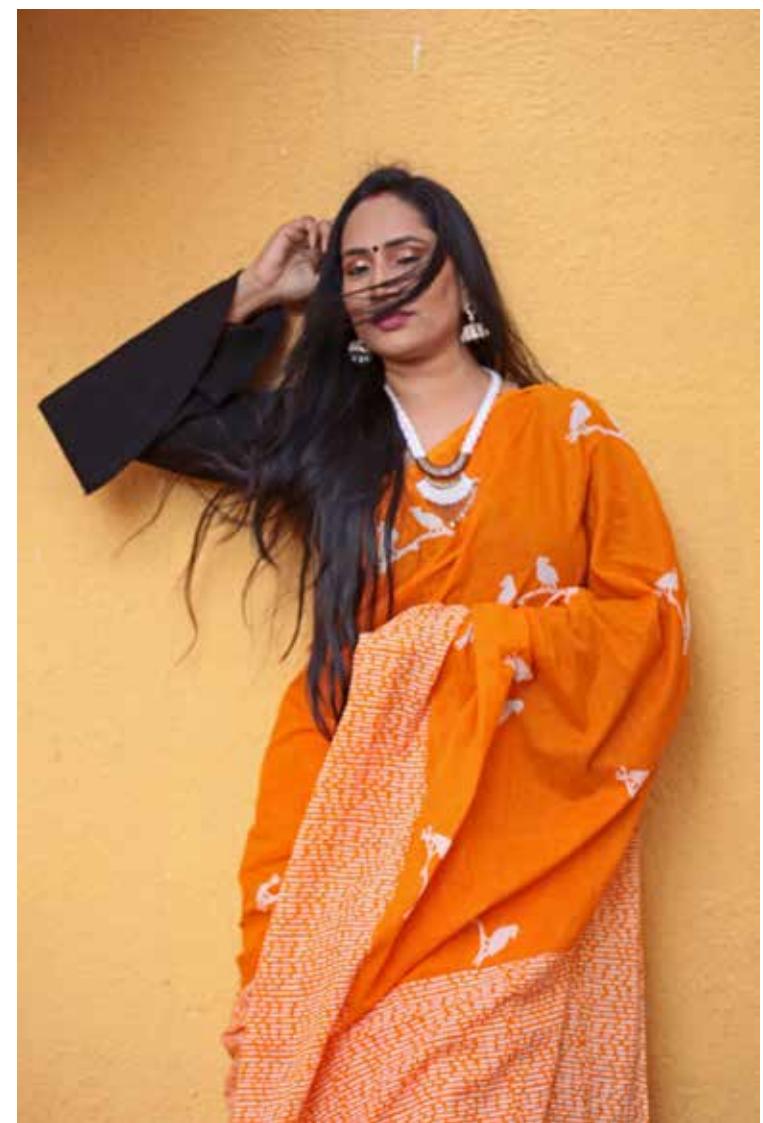
This is the first time Oliveira is in India, and attending the International Film Festival of India. She says, "Important festivals were either cancelled or reduced to a smaller virtual edition due to the pandemic. It is disturbing for us filmmakers as we cannot showcase our work on the big screen. Good films that need to see the light of the day are pushed under the carpet. I am very happy to begin 2021 with this premiere at IFFI with a physical screening at a cinema hall. It is an opportunity to meet people and know their perspective of the film. It is also a great moment as my husband Gustavo Galvao's film *We Still have the Deep Black Night* (2019) was selected for screening along with mine."

He is the associate producer of my film."

Informing *The Peacock* about the challenges in contemporary Brazil, Oliveira said that they were used to be living in good times, making films that were well funded, but it is more difficult now as the new government has incorporated changes in the funding of films. She was fortunate though, to receive funding before the changes were made, and also got some sponsorship from Avon, the famous beauty product company.

Oliveira's first feature film was *Nalu on the Border* (2017), a story set on the border of Brazil and Uruguay. It premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival and went on to win 18 awards at 21 national and international film festivals. She is currently in the process of making her third film titled, *Until the Music is Over*.





PICKING UP THE PIECES

BY DR. LUIS DIAS

In this birth centenary year of Satyajit Ray (1921-1992), five films from his formidable oeuvre are being screened at the 51st IFFI. *Shatranj ke Khiladi* (The Chess Players, 1977) is among them.

Set in 1856, on the eve of what the British call the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857, and we call India's first Uprising or War for Independence, the chessboard becomes a metaphor for the ruthless scheming of the British East India Company (EIC), essentially a British joint-stock corporate company in its relentless, remorseless expansionism, toppling rajas, nawabs, and other potentates like pawns and capturing vast swathes of the Indian subcontinent in its insatiable hunger for ever more profit and power.

In 1856, the EIC annexed the state of Awadh under the Doctrine of Lapse, according to which any Indian princely state under its suzerainty could have its princely status abolished (and therefore, be annexed into British India) if the ruler was either "manifestly incompetent or died without a male heir".

Based on a short story by Dhanpat Rai Srivastava (better known by his nom de plume Munshi Premchand, 1880-1936), Ray makes an emphatic

point that the detachment of India's ruling classes assisted a small number of British officials and soldiers to take over Awadh without opposition.

Contemporary Indian chronicles have called this turbulent period "the Anarchy", which is the title of British author William Dalrymple's account of those times, a "timely and cautionary tale of the rise of the East India Company and one of the most supreme acts of corporate violence in world history." It might seem like a dusty historical flashback today, but corporate violence and greed are even more rapacious today than ever before, using rulers of nations as expendable chess pieces in a lethal game of manipulation and check-mating. This is why *Shatranj ke Khiladi* is such a powerful parable of our times. The EIC may be consigned to the dust-heap of history, but multi-national

corporations are their contemporary equivalent, even more power-hungry and with a far wider reach.

But as Dalrymple reminds us both in

'The Anarchy' and interviews about it, such overweening power would not have been possible without local collusion. As he told Reader's Digest last year: "The EIC while being extractive and plundering, was also collaborative. From the very beginning, it was in business with Indian businessmen; it almost never operated on its

own. It gained an enormous amount from its business with Indian partners."

The EIC, the first truly global joint-stock corporation, set the mold for the corporate hostile takeover, and all the ills that come with unregulated expansionism, the phenomenon of having to be bailed out when markets crash and corporate companies become in effect "too big to fail."

Dalrymple added: "We need to learn about the need to regulate these companies. Just as we need laws to control human beings, we need to develop laws and regulations that can control national corporations that span different jurisdictions and different tax regimes. Because at the moment, they find it very easy to wriggle out by playing one state and one tax regime against another, like the EIC did."

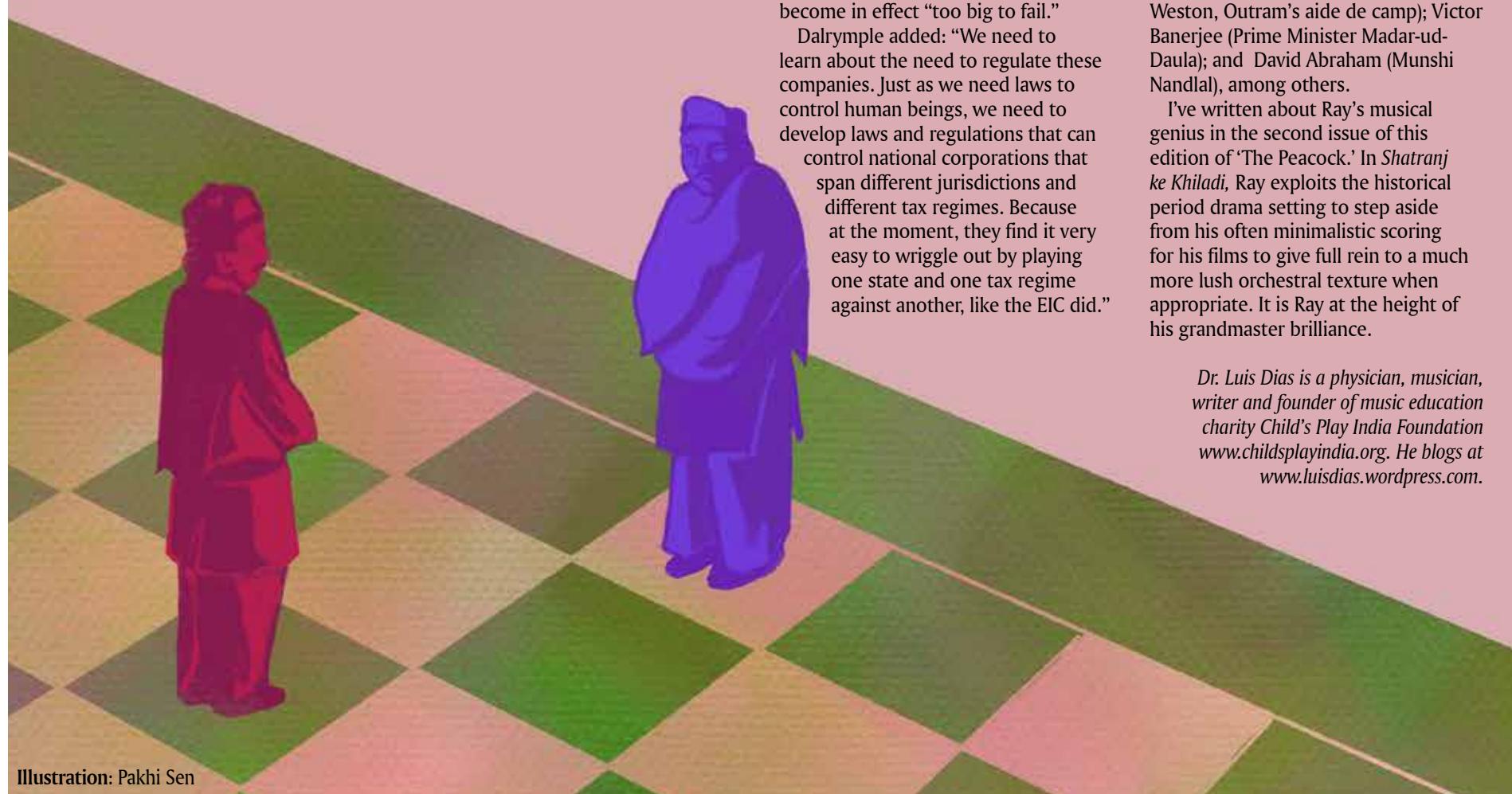
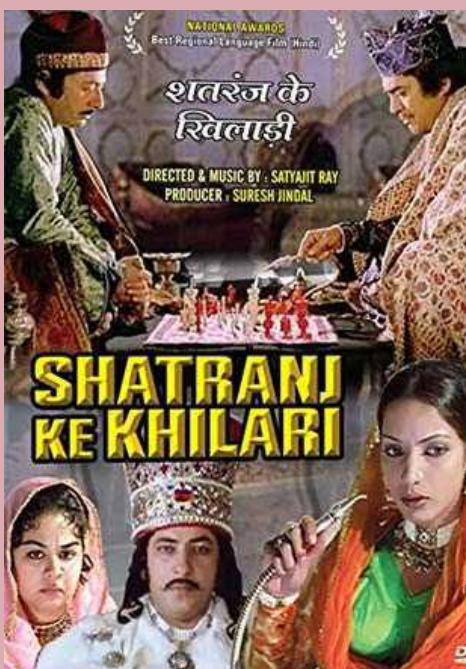
I've watched '*Shatranj ke Khiladi*' several times over the years, and never tire of it. Having chess at the centre of the narrative is particularly appealing to me because of my fascination with the game from my childhood, ever since my father taught me to play it, using the exquisitely carved wooden pieces, a family heirloom. That hereditary obsession has been transmitted to our son, who now derives much pleasure in trouncing me.

Chess has been on my mind a lot during this lockdown. Apart from playing my son, I re-read Stefan Zweig's novella *The Royal Game*, and I've just finished watching the absorbing Netflix mini-series *The Queen's Gambit* (2020) a coming-of-age period drama based on Walter Tevis's 1983 eponymous novel, which I'm going through right now and relishing every page.

For those new to *Shatranj ke Khiladi*, Ray's first Hindi feature film, it is a cinematic masterpiece. With Amitabh Bachchan's riveting narrative voice, it has a stellar cast, including Amjad Khan as the feckless Nawab Wajid Ali Shah; Sanjeev Kumar as his shatranj (the ancient form of chess) partner Mirza Sajjad Ali; Shabana Azmi (Khurshid, Mirza's wife); Leela Mishra (Hirya, Khurshid's maid); Saeed Jaffrey (Mir Roshan Ali); Farida Jalal (Nafisa, Mir's wife); Richard Attenborough (General James Outram); Tom Alter (Captain Weston, Outram's aide de camp); Victor Banerjee (Prime Minister Madar-ud-Daula); and David Abraham (Munshi Nandlal), among others.

I've written about Ray's musical genius in the second issue of this edition of 'The Peacock.' In *Shatranj ke Khiladi*, Ray exploits the historical period drama setting to step aside from his often minimalistic scoring for his films to give full rein to a much more lush orchestral texture when appropriate. It is Ray at the height of his grandmaster brilliance.

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.



CONSUMING HOPE

BY DR RACHANA PATNI

Watching *Trance* (2020) had all the highs and the lows one would associate with the ingestion of psychotropic and psychoactive substances. I was drawn to the description of because I have been accosted on a few occasions by peddlers of faith, and found these experiences very intense, sometimes frightening and overwhelming.

Those experiences of meeting powerful God-men trying to induce me into their fold, has often included a feeling of discharge of my own energy reserve to a sense of powerlessness that attempts to induce suggestibility. On one occasion, it was in a lift that I was told that my religion makes me a sinner and that I needed to convert. Another experience was of someone extremely powerful who prays (preys) on people in an authoritarian manner in his own religion and only talks about his God no matter what the conversation is about. Then of course there are the folks who arrive home to share the message of a 'better' path for the soul. The marketing executives are everywhere, but one time, I walked straight into the kind of hard-sell that happens for shared-holiday properties and of course I hadn't even signed up for it.

At the end of a visit, where my husband and I had gone to view a property, we were taken to this floor to show us something amazing about the building. For some reason, my intuition cautioned me against going there. However, we were being shown around and so we went along as we would need to make an informed decision. The floor basically looked like a huge banquet and function venue. Inside, there was soundproofing and some very expensive sound system and amphitheater arrangement, and there was space for a band, along with what looked like a modern pulpit. We were informed that this was a plush venue for a religious meeting that took place on weekends. We were also made the meet the God-man in-charge. Having a fair bit of idea about how to stay within my own energy vortex rather than being pulled in, I felt my legs being drained of all energy. This experience has made me seriously enquire about

the level of training these professional Godmen receive in the arts of hypnotism and mesmerizing.

The film *Trance* gives shape to all of these strange experiences and so it was comforting to watch the film, even though at another level it is deeply disturbing. It is about the life of a motivational speaker, who is an atheist and habitual user of psychotropic drugs, and how he gets inducted into a high-profile job as a Pastor performing miracles. He uses his knowledge about human motivational systems to create a dependence on faith in order to grow a major commercial empire that is based on people wanting to consume hope and miracles.

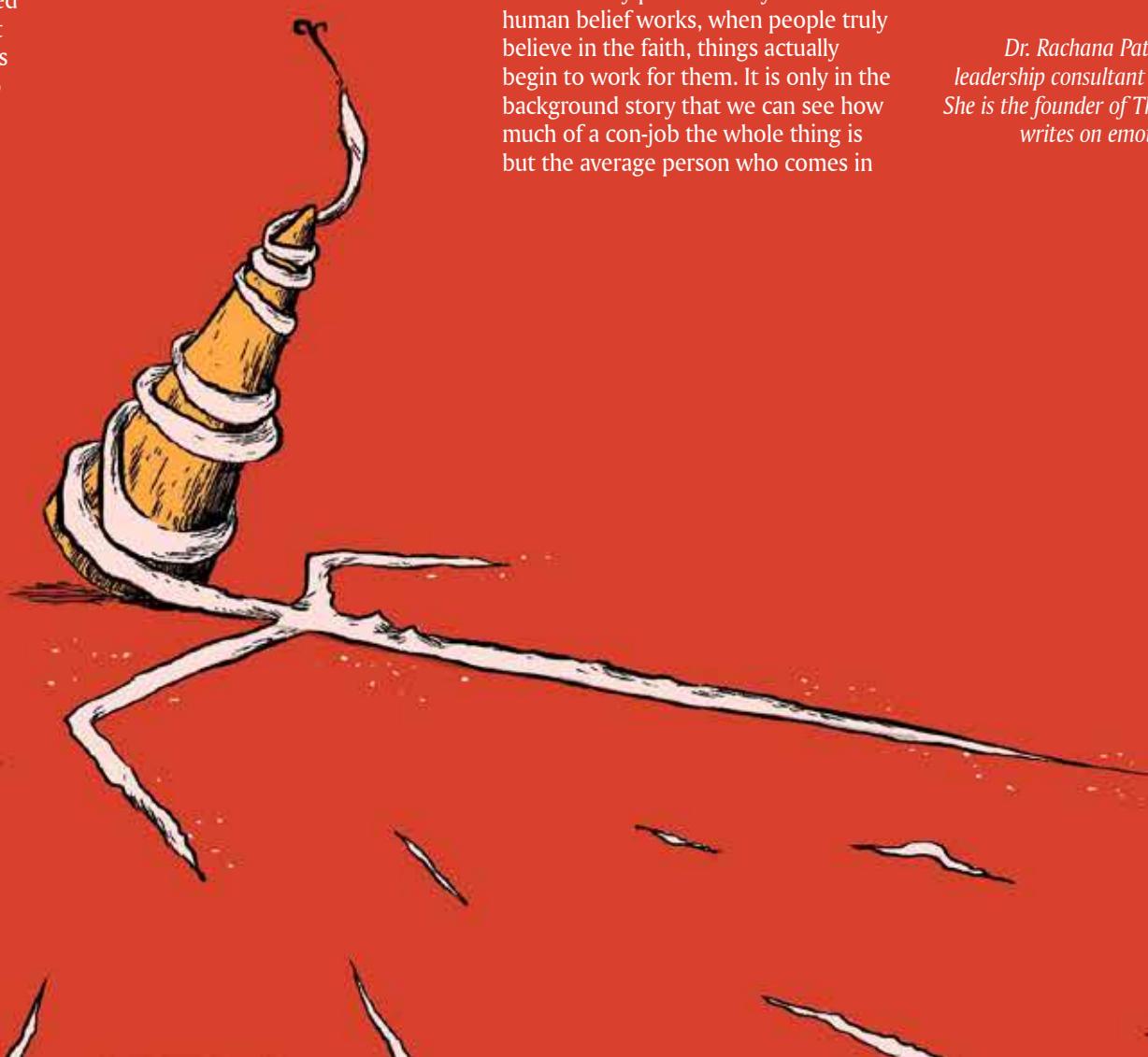
This film exposes several of the things that connect the commercialisation of religion to the high that religious experiences may provide. Theatrical performance, using props, scripts, actors, and cues as well as suggestibility induced through timely musical interludes, that creates a sense of euphoric faith in people is something that people consume as much as they are consumed by their experience. It creates a sense of upliftment and empowerment, and as with the very powerful way in which human belief works, when people truly believe in the faith, things actually begin to work for them. It is only in the background story that we can see how much of a con-job the whole thing is but the average person who comes in

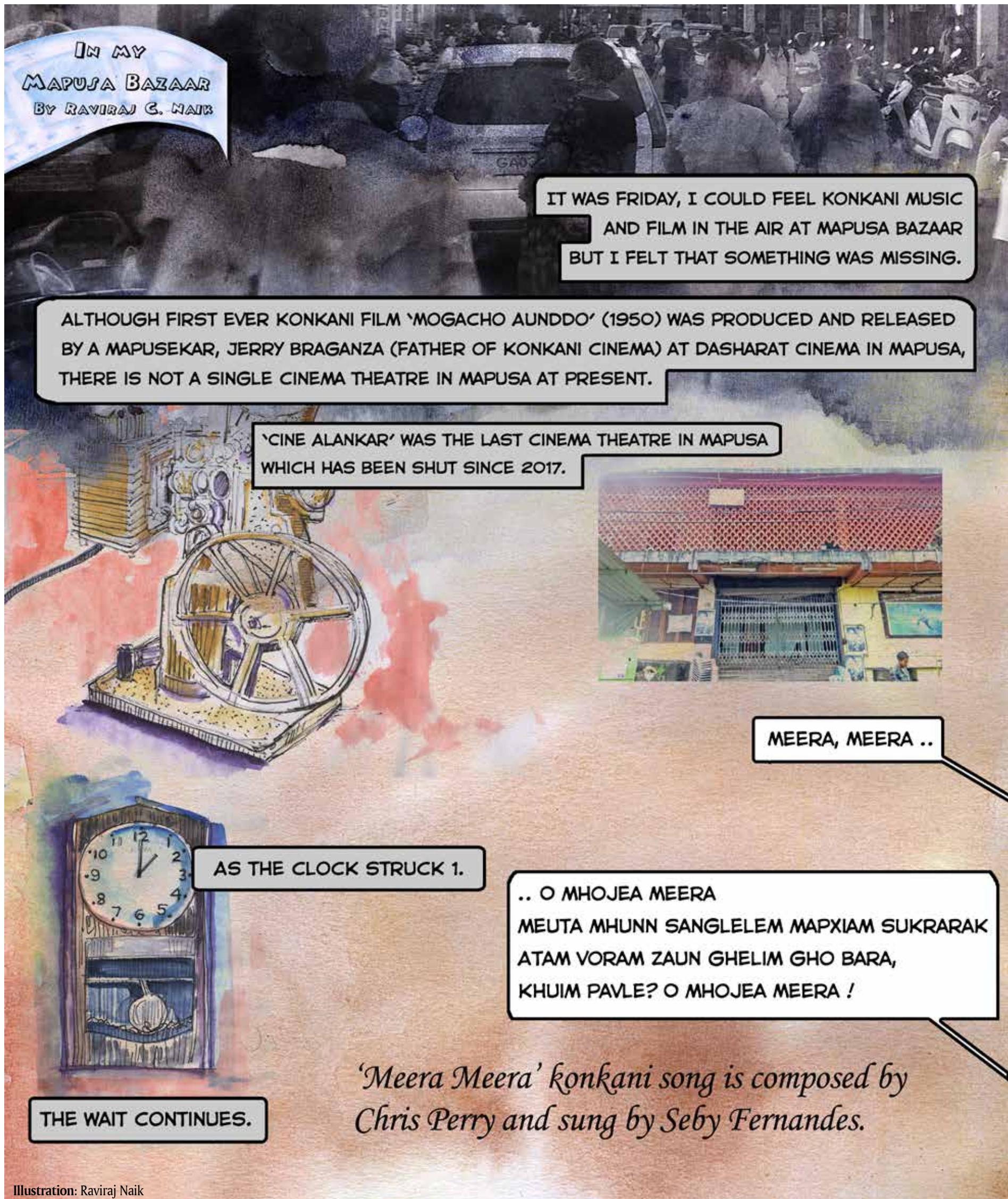
for their weekly fix of hope, miracle, and faith, goes out rejuvenated to face the harsh realities of the world outside.

There is one aspect in *Trance* where a child's father chooses to treat her illness with only holy oil and holy water, and she succumbs owing to his blind faith. This very troubling part of the storyline does not seem to adequately impact any of the people involved in the commercialization of miracles. The brutality of this undertaking makes it far more dangerous and takes it to another level of callousness and brazen exploitation of the people in the system.

But then I sit to think about how all of us are constantly being given half information about everything. Things that we consume that come bottled and stamped may also misinform us. For example, I may go to buy a carton of almond milk and it claims to be free of additives, preservatives, sugar, and yet when I read the fine print, it is another story. Experiences, which is currently the 'thing' being commoditized and commercialized, need to be consumed with much care and vigilance. We may, otherwise, pay a lot more than we bargained for.

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.





THE HILLS WE CLIMB

BY VIVEK MENEZES

In its 1992 obituary for Satyajit Ray, the New York Times called the great Indian director “a cinematic poet.” It recalled an earlier review by its acclaimed critic Vincent Canby, who noted, “no matter what the particular story, no matter what the social-political circumstances of the characters,” his cinema “is so exquisitely realized that an entire world is evoked from comparatively limited details.”

That “austere delicacy” is in fact the stuff of poetry, which deftly underlines the ongoing, profound and continuously powerful connection between cinema and verse. Both pare down the subject matter and tend to rely on bursts of visuals: rhythm is all-important, and there is plenty of room for both abstraction and metaphor. Just a few lines ignite the imagination.

Some years ago, the poet Sridala Swami wrote, “If cinema, like poetry, is understood intuitively, poetry – like cinema – is kinetic. By this I mean that poetry, by its linguistic short-circuitry, can move in the way cinema does. It can change location, perspective, time and voice. It can be what Coleridge called “plastic and vast”.

Swami recalled, “Perhaps cinema’s century has changed the way people write – not just poetry, but anything at all. At the Goa Arts + Literature Festival last December, an author read out a passage in which he imagined Sachin Tendulkar walking back to the pavilion for the last time. He described the walk, the distant roar of people cheering; and listening to it, I was sure the writer imagined the moment in slow motion, with the cheers muted, only the footsteps loud. To me, the moment was imagined and written cinematically.”

But this relationship actually flows both ways simultaneously, as we see in our brilliant 26-year-old colleague Suyash Kamat’s *Writing in The Corners*, which is already his second film featured at the International Film Festival of India. In theme and approach, and its innovative juxtapositions of different time frames, he

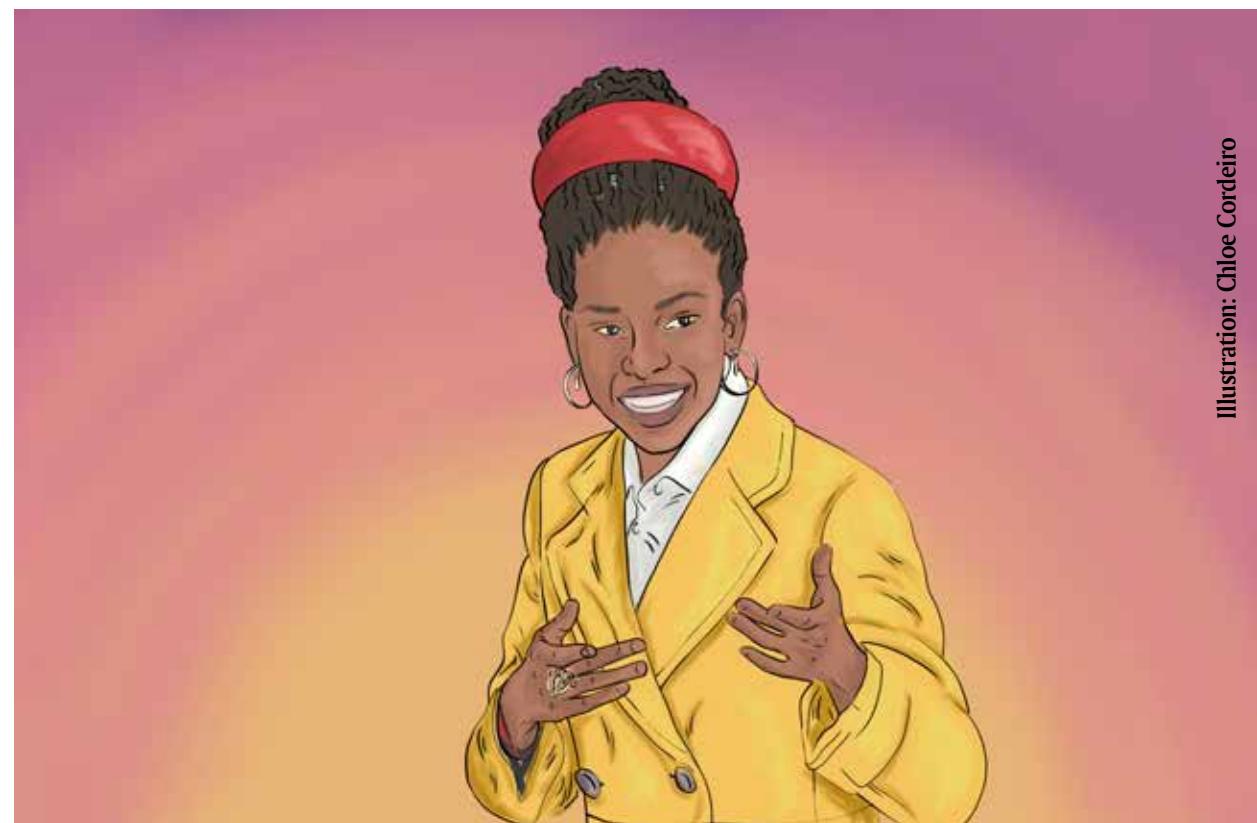


Illustration: Chloe Cordeiro

has delivered poetic realism in the direct footsteps of Marcel Carné and Jean Renoir.

Kamat’s movie – which makes excellent use of Frederick Noronha’s hand-held documentary archive - is about the Panjim landmark, Café Prakash: once hotbed of journalists-on-break and “the unofficial press club of Goa”, but latterly deserted, which suffered a partial collapse during last year’s monsoon. It’s the portrait of a city nook, but also of hope, and the comity that comes from open-minded co-existence.

Which brings us the greatest cinematic moment of this year-in-the-making, which did not happen on any of

the big screens at the International Film Festival of India, but played out instead at the inaugural ceremony of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Resplendent as the sun in her brilliant yellow coat, the bright young poet Amanda Gorman seized the day, and the global imagination, with her stirring delivery of words to live by:

When day comes, we step out of the shade of flame and unafraid.

The new dawn balloons as we free it.

For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it.

If only we’re brave enough to be it.

PEACOCK PICKS



Force majeure (2014)
Dir: Ruben Östlund
120min Norwegian, Italian, Swedish,
English, French
12.30pm Inox Screen 4

Gold For Dogs (2020)
Dir: Anna Cazenave
99min French
16.00pm Inox Screen 3



Karnawal (2020)
Dir: Juan Pablo Felix
95mins Spanish
16:00 pm, Inox Screen 1



Only Human (2019)
Dir: Igor Ivanov
90min Macedonian, Albanian
11.00 am, Kala Academy

