

THE

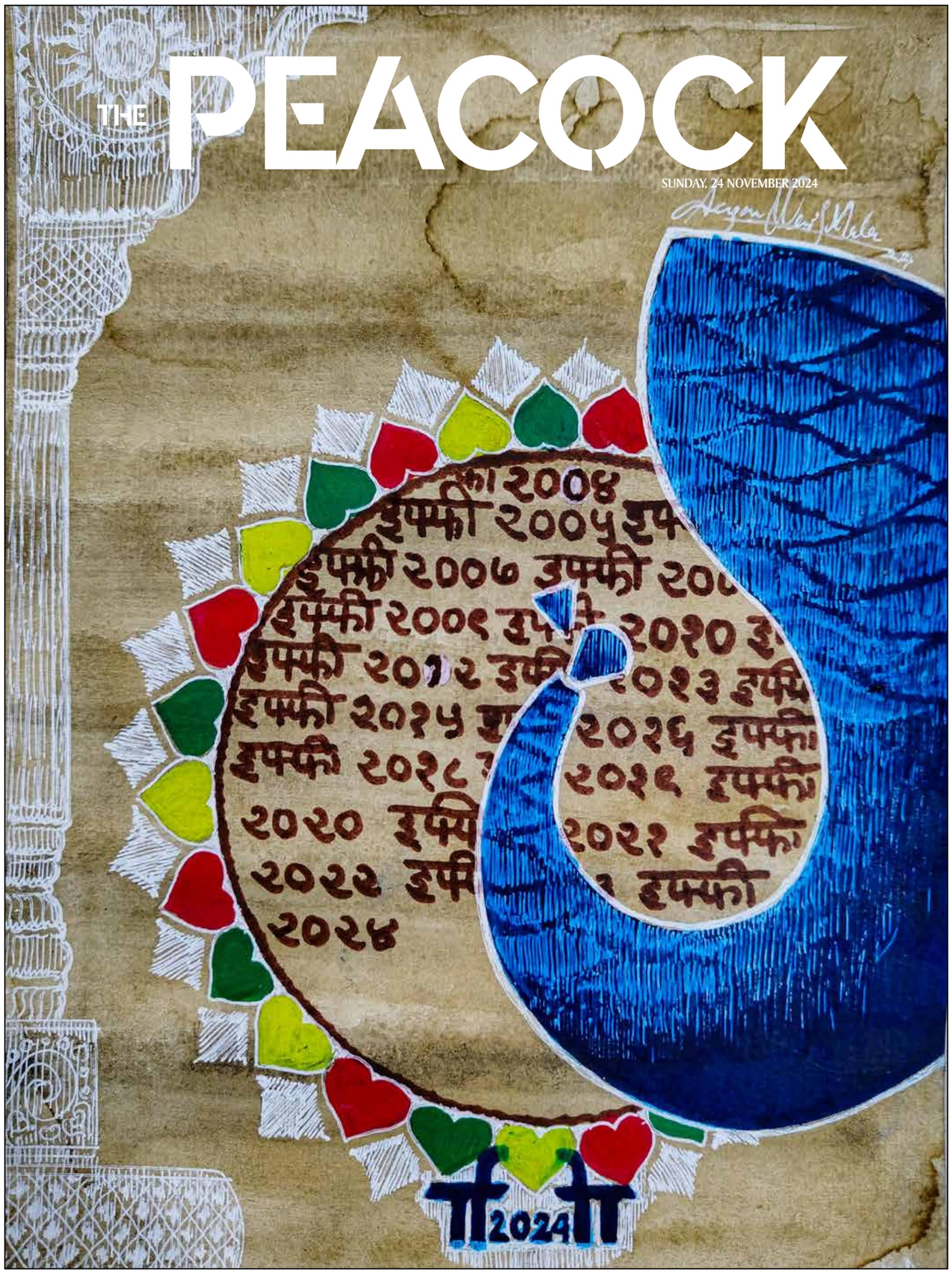
# PEACOCK

SUNDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2024

*Arjun Singh Malhotra*

इसका २००४  
इसका २००५ इसका  
इसका २००६ इसका २००७  
इसका २००९ इसका २०१० इसका  
इसका २०१२ इसका २०१३ इसका  
इसका २०१५ इसका २०१६ इसका  
इसका २०१८ इसका २०१९ इसका  
२०२० इसका २०२१ इसका  
२०२२ इसका २०२३ इसका  
२०२४ इसका

॥ २०२४ ॥



BY VIVEK MENEZES

Today's 16-page special edition of *The Peacock* is themed on literature, so it might seem paradoxical or even contradictory that our daily newspaper – for the very first time at this 2024 International Film Festival of India – does not carry any contribution from Damodar Mauzo, whose wonderful culture column *Itihaas* has been occupying this page (and will continue to do so from tomorrow). After all, our beloved *Bhaiyee* – as the distinguished 80-year-old Konkani writer is affectionately known by all in Goa – has won every possible literary accolade in India, including the Jnanpith Award, the oldest and highest honour available to any writer in this country. In fact, his absence today is an act of generosity, allowing more space for the rest of our team to express themselves more fully in prose, verse and artworks that we hope will give your Sunday substantial reading pleasure.

Team Peacock is named for India's national bird, but its inherent nature is more like the mythical phoenix. At the end of each IFFI, we disperse and disaggregate, then reconstitute in time for another November. This year, we're able to spread our literary wings wider than ever for this special issue, with an exclusive translation by Pankhuri Zaheer, and cinema-flavoured short stories by Jane Borges and Chandrhas Choudhury, all of whom are first-timers on our unique festival daily. In addition, there are short stories by Kinjal Sethia – *The Peacock* veteran who does it all with great panache – and Vincent D'Souza, the distinguished community newspaperman of Old Madras, plus striking full-page visual columns from Pakhi Sen and Sayali Khairnar.

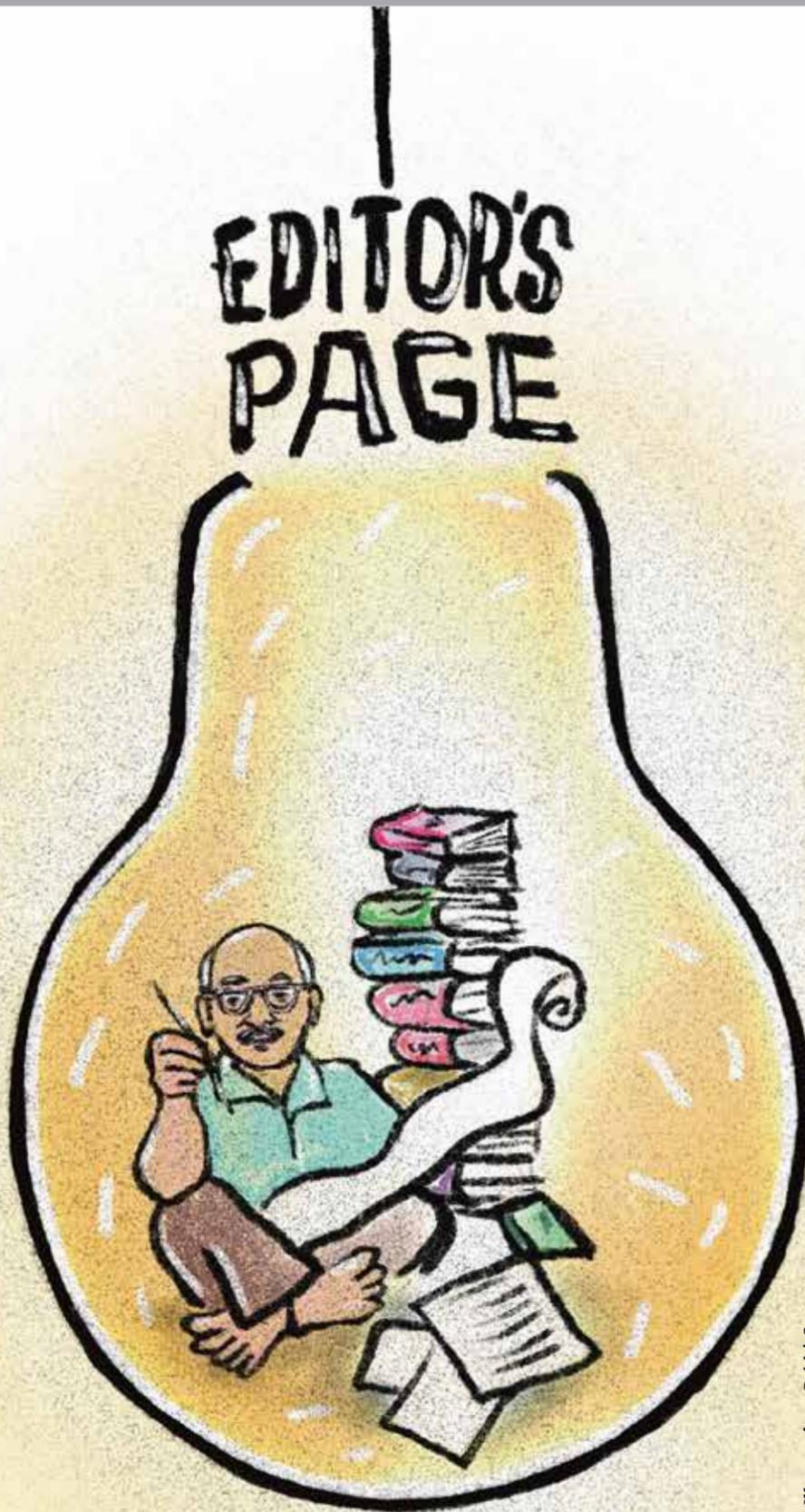


Illustration: Pakhi Sen

Although he is absent from this particular mix today, Team Peacock would like to dedicate our special edition – and true labour of love – to *Bhaiyee*, with our sincere gratitude for his daily inspiration, and living example of the profound power of the literary life well lived. Ramachandra Guha has pointed out with great acuity that he is “a rooted cosmopolitan in the best sense of that term; deeply embedded in Goa, yet alert and alive to the rest of India and the wider world. He thus writes with great authority and insight on Konkani literature and folk culture; and also with empathy and understanding about places far distant like Assam...Even when professing to espouse progressive causes, other famous Indian writers stand apart from their society; they have different lifestyles and move in a more restricted (one might say elite) social circle from those around them. What struck me about *Bhaiyee* in the couple of days I spent with him some years ago is how seamlessly he merged with his village, his neighborhood, his state.”

All this is true, and more, and it is hard to express just how much joy flowed from every possible corner of the literary world when the great news came about *Bhaiyee*'s richly deserved Jnanpith Award. The great novelist and writer (and 2018 Jnanpith Award winner) Amitav Ghosh exulted “I am absolutely delighted. Damodar is a great writer and a great soul, who has been unflinching in his embrace of Goa's richly pluralistic heritage. His courage in standing up to bigotry and communalism is truly exemplary. In choosing to honour his work, the Jnanpith Foundation has once again affirmed its commitment to the preservation and celebration of India's wonderfully diverse, multilingual literary traditions. Viva Goa!”



Illustration: Sayali Khairnar

## Side-tracked

A colossal evergreen crashed into darkness. Herons gone from the big lake and men struck to the ground by metallic greed. Women stuck on trees. Again. Forests trampled to slap on rails, power lines and concrete. Primal roars. Mangroves and old wooden houses spade in their roots. No one wants to move, and is pushed aside. Shell windows smirk with broken piano teeth. Balustrades limb out to fence in their families. The hornbills, drongos, orioles golden the light streaming through proud crowns, and flicker when their shadows fall on parched grounds. The Malabar tree nymph leaves the window before all the teeth fall. Its black on muslin white surrendering to the call of the saw drill. It flies past the beginning of the river and out of the forests before the khazans silt over. Who can say that our bodies are not coloured by the melanin translucence, by the shroud of its varnish? Who can tell the birds to check their wingspans, to make sure their flights don't damage fibrous rail lines? Who can tell me I don't belong? When the Malabar squirrel jumps arboreal, who will call it back to the mammoth green? Who will remind us this is home?

- Kinjal Sethia

# Her Time in the Sun

BY POULOMI DAS

**C**hhaya Kadam is having some kind of year. When I tell her that, she nods in agreement, “It really feels like the kind of year where I got to tick-mark most of my dreams as an artist.”

That is perhaps the most accurate encapsulation, considering the actress has been part of four films that have received unanimous acclaim, breaking records and setting new ones. In March, Kadam played Kanchan Kombdi, a foul-mouthed gangster in Kunal Kemmu’s *Madgaon Express*, the Goa-set comedy that eventually became the biggest sleeper hit of the year. The same month, she also appeared in *Laapataa Ladies*, Kiran Rao’s sophomore outing that is now India’s official entry to the Oscars for Best International Feature.

Then in May, news came out that *All We Imagine as Light*, Payal Kapadia’s feature debut would play in competition at Cannes Film Festival, a first for an Indian film after three decades. In the textured love-hate letter to Mumbai, Kadam plays Parvaty, a widow staring at the demolition of her house. At Cannes, *All We Imagine as Light* ended up taking home the Grand Prix.

“As an actor, you are essentially playing a waiting game for that one film or role that would allow you to exhibit your craft. The hope is that your filmography is stacked with characters that have a visceral effect on viewers. But to not only get both of these things in a film and then, realize you are also part of a film that made history, is just an icing on the cake,” Kadam says about the “surreal” experience she had at Cannes with *All We Imagine as Light*. After an award-garlanded run across the world, the film finally released across Indian screens on Friday. That same day, Kadam was at IFFI, premiering *Snow Flower*, her next Marathi feature helmed by National Award-winning director Gajendra Ahire.

Over the last decade, Kadam, who broke out with Nagraj Manjule’s *Fandry* (2013), has offered ample evidence of her talent in role after role, most notably



Photo: Assavri Kulkarni

in two collaborations with Manjule. But this year is certainly the finest display of her versatility and range: Kadam has straddled comic turns in *Madgaon Express* and *Laapataa Ladies* alongside realist portrayals of hardship and loneliness in *All We Imagine As Light*. Which other actor can boast of such plurality?

When we chat, Kadam is overjoyed to discuss and dissect *All We Imagine as Light*, a film that she calls a “miracle.” In between, she gushes about Kapadia’s process, her complete trust in her actors, and about the acting powerhouses that are Kani Kusruti and Divya Prabha. By her own admission, the experience of being a part of the cast, and shooting the film in Mumbai and Ratnagiri, made her

realize the importance of the company of creative-minded artists in one’s own artistic growth.

Kadam remembers a sense of déjà-vu taking over her when she heard the outline of Parvaty, her character in the film for the first time. “I don’t say this lightly when I say that Parvaty is me,” Kadam says, adding “My father was a mill-worker who shifted to Mumbai from the Konkan countryside to make a living. Once he passed away, my mother had no clue if there were any papers with us that legitimized our identities. I remember that distinct feeling of thinking that you could disappear in a city like Mumbai and no one would even know. There is so much of Parvaty’s pain that I recognise

very deeply.”

When I ask her about her favourite scene in *All We Imagine as Light*, she laughs and adds that performing the drunk dancing scene with Prabha was a hoot. “It was even more fun dancing to that song on the Cannes red carpet. And the song, which basically says ‘Look where I have come’ couldn’t be more appropriate because really, look where I get to go.” Is she nervous at all, about the pressure of having to live up to the high standard that she has set for herself this year? “I wouldn’t call it nervousness. I feel an even bigger responsibility now to keep honing my craft and give a face to the thousands of Parvatys hidden across the country.”

## SHORT TAKES



Cinema moves me the most when it captures the relatability, the existentialism, and the uniqueness of human life.

**Ankita Sorot**  
Script Supervisor  
Mumbai



In “Half of a Yellow Sun,” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie wrote movingly. Nigeria’s Biafran Civil War on ordinary people, served as a palimpsest for other conflicts.

**Bertrand Moullier**  
Film Advisor  
United Kingdom



“Siddhartha” by Hermann Hesse, follows a contemporary of Buddha. It resonated with me by describing how we need to find our own path to enlightenment.

**Geetha Bakilapadavu**  
Professor  
Mangalore



One single shot in a film can convey ideas to even the uneducated - something literature takes pages to describe.

**K Sree Kumar**  
Direction  
Assistant  
Kerala

# Shareef Auratein Aur Filmi Duniya

BY SAADAT HASAN MANTO  
TRANSLATED BY PANKHURI ZAHEER

*Translators Note: This is an abridged translation of the great Urdu writer's early 1940s essay*

Ever since Indian films have gained momentum, the question of whether respectable women should associate with this national industry has become a matter of debate in most sections of society.

Some gentlemen, to sanctify this industry from the impurity of whores and harlots, are in favour of making way for virtuous women to be on the big screen of cinema. At the same time, some people do not, even for a moment, want to entertain the idea and consider it the tabooest of taboos.

While impassioned by the great zeal to purify the national industry, the gentlemen seem to be forgetting that throwing out the prostitutes from the film factories does not close the markets where these women sell their bodies to men.

The same people, who do not allow respectable women to enter the dirty environs of the studios, completely forget the fact that the 'virtueless' women who appear on the cinema screen, whose songs and acting relieve tired minds, whose art creates knowledge, were also once respectable.

The respectability of certain women remains intact because they were brought up in a bubble. They left the care and protection of their parents and went to their wealthy husbands, remaining completely isolated from the twists and turns of life.

The 'respectable women' who *did not* get the protection of their parents, who were deprived of education, and who had to earn their living, rolled off like broken pebbles on a street. They had

to face endless hardships. Some could not bear the struggle and died. Some started begging on the streets, some started earning their living through hard labour and some, after passing through the hellfire of life, fell into a tandoor that is always blazing, and became prostitutes.

Prostitutes are not born, they are made or they become one. If something is in demand it will be sold in the market. The demand of a man's base desires is a woman's body. Hence, there is a brothel in every city of the world. If this demand were to disappear today, the profession would die out. The moral judgment that we

brandish these women with is nothing but the elites scampering to maintain their dignity, pride, and identity.

I ask, if a woman has honour, is a man devoid of this virtue? If a woman can be devoid of honour, can a man not? If the answer to these questions lies in human morality, then why is it that our arrows are only directed at women?

It is being said that the entry of prostitutes in the film studio should be banned, is this not a tacit admission that men have no control over themselves and that men are much weaker and more easily swayed than women?

Those gentlemen who want to invite only women from *respectable families* to join the film line, I want to ask them what do they mean by respectability. Is the woman who sells her goods in the market and does not cheat her customers, not respectable?

No respectable woman can reflect the grief of separation from her make-believe lover on her face in front of the camera unless she has faced it herself in life.

The facts are in front of us. If we want to progress the art of film, we need to raise the bar. It is important that our films mirror real life. Whether an actress is a prostitute from a brothel or a woman from a respectable mansion, in my eyes she is just an actress. I have no interest in her respectability or discretion. Art remains higher than one's moral judgments.

A prostitute from a brothel can be a screenwriter par excellence. Her thoughts and ideas can go on to change society for the better.

Lest we forget, the first bullet in the French Revolution was borne by a brave prostitute on her bosom.

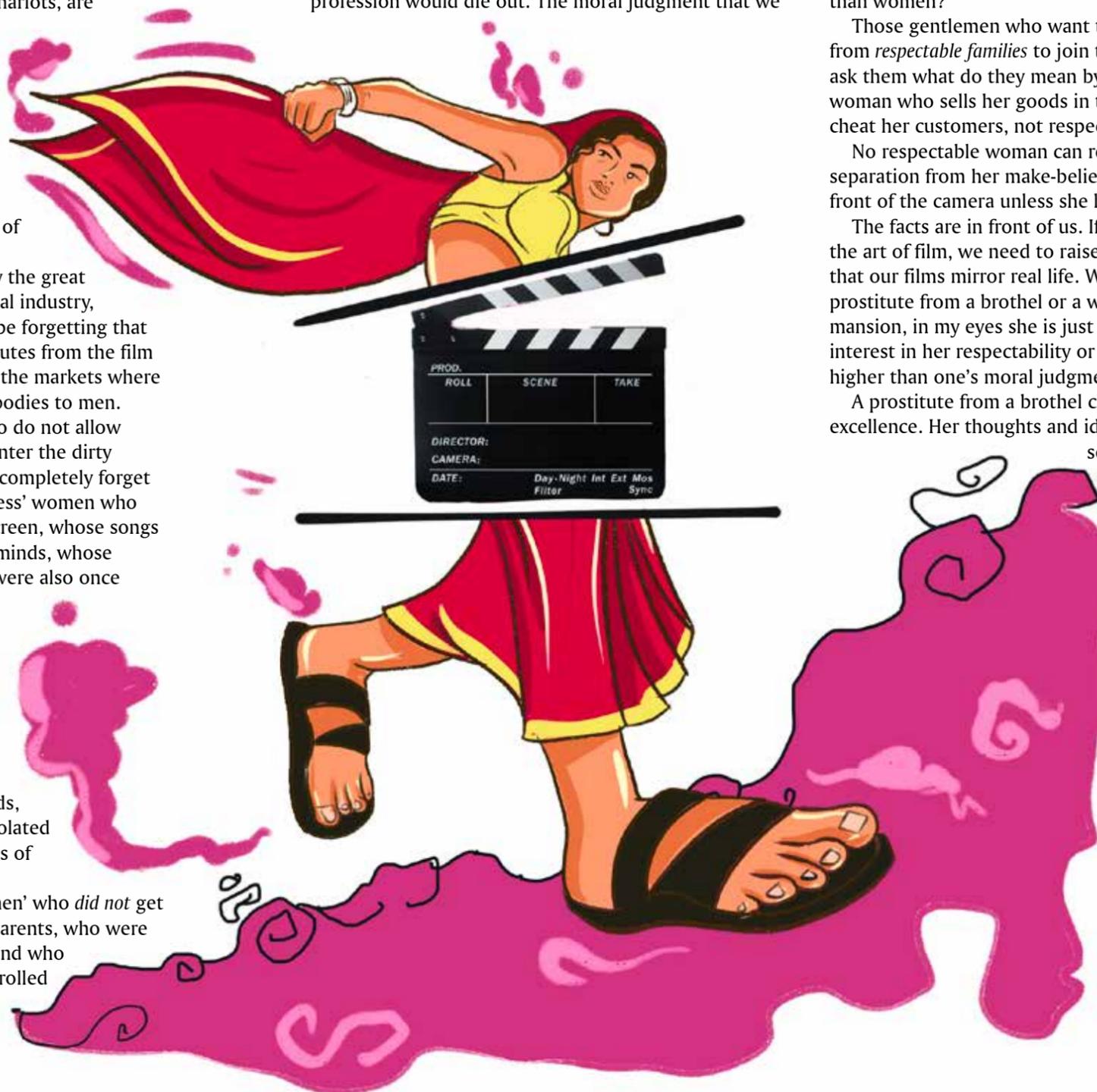
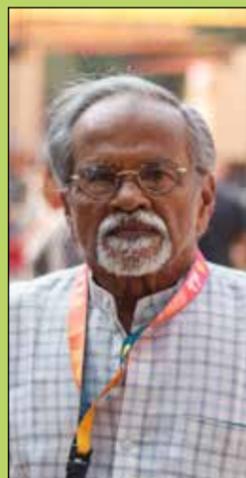


Illustration: Sayali Khairnar



Cinema is the most powerful medium, and it reaches the widest audience. It captures your imagination much more than any form of literature.

**Sujata Gothoskar**  
Social Researcher  
Mumbai



Marquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude" was a very deep and imaginative story about the lives of people and their culture, which impacted how I think about my own culture.

**Meera Sahib**  
Media  
Kerala



"Atomic Habits" by James Clear pushed me to start meditating, improved my diet and built the discipline in my life to ensure long-term success.

**Priyanka Khuman**  
Director  
Mumbai



I like Simone de Beauvoir because of the way she writes about interiority of the mind. She makes philosophy more palatable with fiction.

**Omkar Bhatkar**  
Educationist and  
Playwright  
Mumbai

SHORT TAKES



Photo: Michael Praveen

# Behind the Scenes

BY PANKHURI ZAHEER

**P**ankaj Saxena's path to becoming the Artistic Director and Head of Programming at the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) was far from traditional. Once a commerce student at Delhi's SRCC, he now leads one of Asia's largest film festivals, driven by deep love for cinema.

Securing an interview with Saxena was challenging—he's a man in high demand, especially in the midst of this huge festival programme. Yet, when we finally sat down, his insights made the wait worthwhile. Even as we were interrupted by staff needing his expert eye, he kept the conversation engaging. Despite the bustle, we persevered.

Saxena's move from commerce to cinema began with a stint in theatre, leading to the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). "I got tired of commerce and started doing theatre. Very little theatre," he chuckled. Quick thinking during an interview with filmmaker Shyam Benegal earned him a spot at FTII, setting the stage for a career in film.

His professional journey took him from documentary filmmaking to a decade at Discovery Channel before he rejoined FTII as a professor. In 2023, Saxena stepped into IFFI's team, shifting from festival enthusiast to management. He says it has been a great experience because "typically what happens is when we are teaching cinema is that we are teaching concepts and many of the concepts are based on the cinema of the past. Working for a film festival gives you an opportunity to become very grounded in the cinema of the present."

Saxena emphasized the scale of IFFI, which features 320 films from 81 countries. "Can you imagine showing 40 films a day?" he asked. This year's international section includes 47 women filmmakers and 66 debut directors,

highlighting its diverse scope.

Saxena's eyes lit up as he listed standout films at IFFI this year: Pedro Almodóvar's *The Room Next Door* (2024) which took the Golden Lion at Venice; *Dahomey* (2024), a documentary that won Berlin's Golden Bear; Indian filmmaker Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine as Light* (2024) which won the Grand Prix at Cannes. Saxena also mentioned the Chinese film *Black Dog* (2024) and Czech film *Sudden Glimpse to Deeper Things* (2024), which claimed prizes at Cannes and Karlovy Vary.

Selecting for IFFI is no small feat. "You need to watch maybe 3000 films to select the best," he shared, aiming to uncover hidden gems from unexpected regions. "To get a Zambian film, for instance requires extra effort, but it's worth it." This year's inclusion of films from Palestine underscores IFFI's ethos of fostering dialogue. "It's an article of faith for us," Saxena said, reaffirming the festival's dedication to free expression rising above political conflicts.

IFFI's choice of Goa as its home brings a unique flavor to the festival, says Saxena: "Goa is a melting pot of cultures." He acknowledged the paradox of limited visibility for Goan cinema despite the festival's presence. "It's a mystery why we don't see more Goan films," he admitted, hinting at potential gaps in funding or distribution.

Reflecting on IFFI's setting, Saxena compared it to Cannes and Venice, emphasizing a tradition of hosting festivals away from the industry's nerve centers. "You leave your movie hub behind and go somewhere scenic to appreciate cinema" By the time our interview concluded—without any further interruptions—Saxena's vision was clearly laid out. Under his guidance, IFFI aspires to be much more than just a festival; it is aiming to be a celebration of global storytelling, that blends cinematic excellence with Goa's relaxed, coastal vibe.

SHORT TAKES



"Sea of Poppies" by Amitav Ghosh incorporated uncomfortable themes caste in an approachable way, helping me learn about negative aspects of our culture.

**Smita Minda**  
Filmmaker  
Delhi



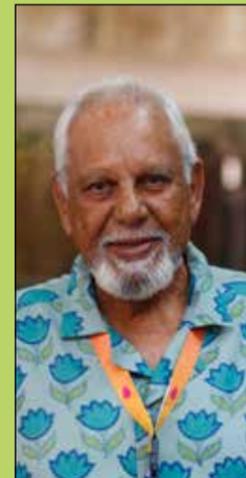
Reading is my passion and love. There is no limit - from small works to classics and political analysis.

**Vijayakumar S**  
Social Activist  
Kerala



Paulo Coelho's novels like "The Alchemist" really affected me, and encouraged me to pursue my dreams and what my heart wants over what others think.

**Sonia Balani**  
Actor  
Mumbai



"The Outsider" by Albert Camus discussed a totally new existential theory of how a man can live completely and simply in the present, not the past or future.

**Surindara Suri**  
Retired Filmmaker  
Germany



Illustration: Sayali Khaimar

## Bear 141

BY KINJAL SETHIA

I am sitting outside my friend Harshal's house, having returned with his family from the crematorium, and can still hear the mother sobbing loudly in his empty room. I want to go to the chai tapri outside his lane, where we both used to go to sneak a smoke. Most of the visitors have left.

I am very awkward at funerals, not knowing how to show grief in the right measure. If it is a relative, one of those that you have met only at weddings or someone else's funeral, it is difficult to feel the loss. Really, how sad will you feel at the death of a stranger. If it is someone close to you, like a real relative or even a friend, the situation is more difficult. I am genuinely sad, but am more worried that those attending the funeral will judge me by the number of tears I shed. There is some sort of a performance pressure. I can never grieve properly in front of others.

Last month, my brother's boss died of a heart failure while vacationing with his family in Kerala. His best friend was a heart specialist and travelling with him. In the same month my father's mother's sister died, never woke up. She was staying with her son in their ancestral house near Ahmedabad. I sat near my father when he got the phone call, and then went to make a cup of tea. A family friend's grandmother died in the same week. Two days after father's aunt. I had met this friend's grandmother whenever I visited their house.

She was old and ill. At the funeral, someone even said that death must have come as a respite after her painful health conditions.

It is difficult to be respectful about death when people are dying so frequently. Death loses its dramatic affect. The epidemic made us selfish in the face of death. People were falling like a good strike in a bowling pin game. I know it might be a clichéd phrase. The virus graphically shown as a green tentacled ball, humans frail and nameless as bowling pins. The drumroll of the throw, the cackle of the fall and then the loud mechanic thunk as a new set of pins is molded into shape. The comparison fits so fine that I am not going to bother with a cleverer simile.

I am sure those close to the person have their natural or unnatural grieving process. I am not surprised at their grief. In fact, I envy them.

I want to feel sadder about Harshal's death. It would even be apt to be depressed. It is difficult to feel anything because of the way he died. The first time we watched Herzog's *Grizzly Man* it was on a college mate's recommendation. I was bored. We had read about the movie before watching it, and knowing how it would end, took away the thrill for me. Harshal was surprisingly amused by the ending. "You will die here. You will fucking die here." He would shout excitedly even if something slightly eventful happened like a street urchin knocking Harshal's knee. "Love this planet." He would shout into the air, riding

pillion on my Activa.

I began to get scared of Harshal when he got into these moods. He insisted on watching Herzog's film every evening, and I would reject the idea. I would try to cajole him to join me at the chai tapri or even meet other friends. There was something voyeuristic about that eerie coroner dramatizing their death. The way the bear scratched Timothy's skull, the way it mauled his back. Harshal would stay inside his room, the same one where his mother is crying now, and watch *Grizzly Man* most evenings.

A boy cannot avoid being attracted to a woman who will follow him anywhere. It can even be cute. Harshal was a romantic. I hoped he would find someone who was more practical. That is what I hoped for myself too. Timothy did not make sense to me. The bears are practical. Hunger is natural, its basic.

Harshal would narrate Timothy's last day as if it had happened to him. Almost anecdotal, the way he spoke. Timothy sharing that there is a storm on the way. His reluctance to switch off the camera, the bear dipping into the pond for the last salmon. The way it climbed over the patch of grass above the girlfriend, who ducked to find a way out of the camera frame.

The camera topples, and Timothy screams, "Go away. Get away from me. Run." When they found Harshal, his body was unharmed. It was sitting by the computer desk, shirtless, drooling, the movie frozen on Timothy's face. A grizzly bear paused in the background. Death waiting to happen.

# The Burden of Grief

BY JANE BORGES

Today marks five years since she returned to Panjim. Matty D'Silva looks at the wall calendar, and then stares out of her grille window. The ivory lace curtain mellows the blinding sun, splitting it into hundreds of tiny pieces created by the gaps between the patterns of grape vines. "Jesus," she mutters, "they are back."

The calendar displays grids with dates that make no sense now — it is still on November 2019. Whereas, when the sun rose above Panjim earlier that morning, it was already 2024. Matty's relatives — the few and far between — who show up sometimes with pickles, papad and chouris from Margao market, have stopped asking her why this 12-page chart, an essential piece of time-keeping in every home, hasn't moved month or year in hers. Why is it stuck? Why is she stuck?

She is on the older side of 45. Maybe it is time to move on or move away. Whatever it takes to forget 2019. But Matty cannot. Not like she has tried. But she has decided, at least for now, that she won't. Those old feelings are still churning inside her body, flowing in her veins, often aimlessly.

Matty moves the curtain a trifle to see more clearly the chaos that's unfolding outside. She can see the workers. They walk in a file, ant-like, with obscure tools, nails, rods, ropes, bundles of jute cloth — anything needed for quick, makeshift building. None of their hands are empty; it feels like they each have not two hands, but three. For the next day and more, they will be at it, hammering away on plywood, fitting together odd pieces of some young artist's jigsaw to fashion floral murals and those resembling the long-feathered bird and its fan-shaped crest. "The peahen? The peacock?" she wonders.

And when it's all done, they will unravel endless rolls of carpet, hiding every edge and curve of concrete with red. A famous face will walk over it, and leave an imprint of their heel or shoe, before opening it to the flock that has flown down just for this annual spectacle. "What do they call themselves?" Matty probes her mind again. "Delegates... aah yes, delegates," she mumbles, and steps away from the window to finish the thriller she's been reading for the last month. Words and ideas give her the slip these days. They are slowly fading from her memory. She uses a wrong word often, sometimes even struggling to form a full sentence on her tongue.

She was once a journalist, an incisive one at that. Her words were like spring in the desert. In the bland Mumbai newspaper she worked for, she was

considered the only spark. Then, in 2019, Basil — her sculptor husband — died. He was a much older man. Their fate was obvious: He would go before her, unless a cruel disease came to her and spiked this plan. They'd discussed it. So many times. He'd rehearsed it, too: Sculpting new stories of his passing away on wood, metal and clay. It was only when he went that she realised that this dress rehearsal had been an absolute sham. Nobody can prepare you for the death of a lover. She was hurt, angry, and even ashamed that she'd learned nothing from their conversations about dying. Her grief made her want to run away. She couldn't see herself living in the same home in Bandra where she wrote stories, and he moulded them.

And so, barely days after she'd let slip his ashes into the soil, as he had always willed, she arrived in Goa, permanently giving away that manic life of the metro which had been her home for over four decades.

In Panjim, she did very little. She cooked sparingly, read hungrily, cleaned obsessively, walked down the Mandovi riverfront, and tried to write a book about the sculptor she had loved and lost. She hadn't found a way to replenish her savings. She didn't care for it. The stillness of this city she'd inherited from

her mother, somehow kept her going. Yet every year, in the month that she grieved her husband's death, she found her neighbourhood besieged by hordes. Everybody descended here for IFFI.

She hated that. She hadn't declared November as the month of mourning, but for her, it always was. But the season failed her. So did the tourists who swelled and spilled over, some right outside her quaint amber-washed house to take photos for their social media.

A knock on the door distracts her from her reading. It's Akshaye Kulkarni, her 18-year-old neighbour and the only friend she has bothered to make since she arrived here.

"You've registered right?" he asks, inviting himself in.

"For?"

"IFFI, of course."

"Yes," she says, grudgingly. "But I am honestly not interest..."

He cuts in immediately. "Good! We'll watch Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* the day after. Hope you downloaded the app? We have to book a seat."

"I will."

"Do it now," he insists.

"I will, when I feel like."

"Stop being so stubborn, Matt," he says, and walks out exasperated.

She doesn't want to watch a Bombay film. She has told him that. But he won't listen. He has seen the film before at another festival, and yet he wants to watch it again. With her. God knows why!

Inside the theatre two days later, she is a nervous wreck.

"What if I cry?" she asks Akshaye in a low voice, seconds before the opening credits roll in.

"Why will you?"

"I cannot think of Bombay and not think of him."

"Basil?" he asks. She nods.

"But Payal Kapadia's movie is about three nurses. And you know what?" he says, suddenly animated, "Two of them are Malayalis, like most of the audience in this theatre today."

"Everything is a joke for you, no?" she adds, and turns back hastily to look at the screen.

The lights grow dim, the audience falls silent. There's an unexpected blast of cold air, but only Matty, as anxious as she is, can feel it sting her skin.

The movie opens gently. But she soon realises that the shots are too tight for her comfort — there are scenes where inhabited rooms appear cramped like her mind, and closed as her body, which has long forgotten touch. The faces appear grainy, flaws of the skin stand out like a hormonal pimple. The city itself is a blur. It smells of Bombay in the rains — a pensive blue, dull, grey, where the sun disappears for an eternity, making the air musty and unbreathable. The local train that stops and pulls away again for the camera, is peopled with faces that look very familiar, even though Matty is sure she hasn't ever seen any of them. Nostalgia hits her in waves. This was the life she had left behind. There is nothing delicious about it, but Matty wonders now, if it was worth giving it up all for the grief she has been so patiently clutching on to. At one point, there's a scene that confuses Matty. Is the character hallucinating? Or probably, the scriptwriter? Or maybe, Matty herself? She can't say.

She is muddled, Akshaye can see. Because, when the movie ends, she leaves the theatre without him. He follows behind her, closely.

Her steps are brisk, hurried, but not purposeless, as he knows them to be.

"Matt," he calls out, "Where are you going?"

"To the market."

"To buy fish?" he asks, wondering if the food scenes in the film have left her hungry.

"No," she says, "I desperately need a calendar."



Illustration: Pakhi Sen





# The Darkness that is Light

BY CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY

Last December, I wandered down from Grant Road station in South Mumbai to Alfred Talkies, a senior citizen among Mumbai cinemas, a playhouse built in 1880 converted into a cinema in the 1930s. There, I found exactly the atmosphere that had once breathed light and life into the days and nights of my twenties. A few stragglers traipsed around in the lobby, which opened directly onto the bustling street. Inside his booth, the ticket clerk sat gazing down into his phone, beautifully framed by his own window, undisturbed by patrons, under a “Beware of Pickpockets” sign.

When the film ended, the door flew open, marshalled by an usher more used to shooing people out than welcoming them in. Out came a shabby and doleful parade: travellers with shoulder bags bulging with clothes, squat women with brightly painted lips, alcoholics blinking in the brightness. A man with one leg trussed up in bandages, and a blue plastic bag dangling between crotch and crutch.

A blind couple stood next to me, holding hands and murmuring into one another’s ears — as romantic in their own way as Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol. When we entered the bare and sad auditorium with its metal seats and paan spit-stained concrete floors and whirring wall-mounted fans, they found a little nook for themselves and began to pass a vada-pav back and forth. Another woman walked past me and settled down in the best seat in the house — middle row, centre seat — and put her feet up, toes pointing away from each other like a dog’s ears. I breathed deeply of the tubercular air, and as though by a wave of a wand, the hall suddenly split into zones of darkness and light. We were part of three intersecting worlds. That of the film, that of the cinema — and the small society of our own straggling selves, strangers and neighbours to one another in 12A, 16M, 21F.

Growing up in Bombay, I loved going to the cinema, but no more than millions of other Indians. Going to a theatre was thought slightly disreputable. The content itself was considered one hundred per cent corrupting. (When I got many answers wrong in an exam a day after pestering my father to take me to an Aamir Khan-Madhuri Dixit starrer in 1990, he hollered, “Next time, why don’t you just write *Dill! Dill! Dill!* in your answer sheet!”) To tell you the truth, I myself preferred reading

books and being a co-producer of images and speech and human faces in a story.

But all that changed when my family moved to Delhi in 1998. Not only did the professors in my degree in English Literature make frequent allusions to film, the newspapers often advertised film festivals and retrospectives, hosted by consulates and cultural centres. Here was cinema with an astonishing diversity of narrative modes and styles: Kurosawa and Kieslowski, Tarkovsky and Ghatak, Kaurismaki and Majidi. Very soon, my focus shifted entirely from books to films. When I won a scholarship to study English in Cambridge in 2000, I spent most afternoons of my first year at the Cambridge Arts Picturehouse. After watching Shyam Benegal’s *Manthan*, I even dashed off a letter to the director, asking if I could come work with him. But all this was all very naive (although sweet). As I would soon find out, I was just another cinephile maddened by the moving image, without a vision or theme or style or strategy.

Eventually, I returned to Bombay and began work as a cricket writer. Ill at ease with both life and work, I soon abandoned my job and set myself to a task I truly had some aptitude for: writing fiction.

But who or what was I to write about? Mumbai was already the most written-up of Indian cities!

One day, wandering around the city, I saw an old cinema hall playing a rerun, bought a ticket, and went in. From the moment that my hand, groping in the dark, found a hole in my seat, I was entranced. Here was an astonishing world, shabby and sordid, yet self-sufficient and serene. The rows of people in the audience had the familiar glazed expressions of cinemagoers worldwide. But their attention to the film was distracted and intermittent. Rather, they seemed rapt in some story or memory inside themselves.

In this segment of moviedom, the actual film was only one point of focus; it was the darkness that consoled and cocooned as much as the light amused and diverted. Hundreds of people came here each day to escape the harsh gaze of day — and now I was one of them. They needed a dark place to rest or ruminate, to pass time before a long-distance train journey, to arrange a rendezvous (I suddenly remembered kissing my first girlfriend in the dark of Siri Fort Auditorium in Delhi, and thinking that the cinema was such a delightful place for reasons that had nothing to do with film).

If one were to be a film projectionist in such a cinema, of course one might be provoked by such a tasteless audience, seeking the blanket of darkness and not the wonders released by a beam of light

arrowing down from above. But equally, one might see oneself as a sort of good shepherd of lost sheep, a master of ceremonies supplying the light that helped the immense darkness sustain itself and become a shaam-iana for lost souls.

From this insight came the story for my first novel, *Arzee the Dwarf*, about a very small man who works as a projectionist in an old cinema in Bombay, the Noor (“light” in Urdu). Arzee loves the Noor, but not just with the passion of a cinephile (which he is). Rather, the darkness of the cinema is a very specific gift to his own stunted body; in lighted spaces and on the street, he is continually exposed to ridicule, but in the dark, he becomes invisible and then his real qualities shine through.

Further, the projectionist always works on the top floor of the cinema. From his projection booth, Arzee looks down at the world, and cannot be looked down on. The cinema is like his second body, lifting him up into the heavens. Arzee is a custodian and benefactor of both light and darkness, and this is his black-and-white gift to the people of Mumbai — at least all those who will come to his door and settle in his cinematic dawakhana, “still and intent as statues”.

This week, at IFFI, I see once again scores of people who have travelled long distances from Goa in search of great cinema, but also harbouring a deep faith in the cinematic space itself, a conviction that the moving image is most beautiful (and moving) when projected to the largest possible size and savoured in a great dark cavern in the company of hundreds of other cinephiles. Watching a Netflix show at home, we consume cinema in solitude or with those whom we already know well (even sometimes responding to WhatsApp messages on the side). But there is something about the *ah-h-h* of four hundred people catching their breath at the same time or the ripple of laughter pulsing across a room, like a wind through wheat fields that reminds us of our shared humanity, our common emotional triggers and taste.

We are bright-eyed and fully alive in the dark, yet we lose our faces; we give them away to be part of a story-streaming commune for two or three hours. “IFFI is not just a celebration of filmmaking, it is also a celebration of the audience,” said IFFI’s director Shekhar Kapur to me earlier this week. We come together several times each day under that mantle of darkness — the enchanted dark that is itself a kind of light.



## 2 x 2 x 2

BY VINCENT D'SOUZA

**M**ake it two by two. It is easy to turn the sand. Sand? It cannot be easy. Two by two by two then? Let's start with it.

Miramar Beach was thinning early that late evening. So Ananth could start turning over the sand from 10. He had won over the civic gardener with fifty rupees, to source a shovel for the night's task.

Lost my wedding ring, he would tell a nosy patrolling policeman.

Thankfully, the clump of casuarina trees that had stood there five years ago, had survived. They were the markers.

That evening was fresh in his memory. He was early in the queue for the screening of a film at Screen One at Inox for the IFFI.

"Amma, vango!"

He turned to locate the source.

Thamizh.

It was a young woman behind him, dressed for the festival, her second bag sporting a dozen souvenir badges.

The 'amma', a woman who must have been in her late 50s, doubled up from her seat under a tree and joined the queue.

"There's time to let us in."

"Is it? I saw some movement and called out to mom"

"Time irukku ma..neenga poi vokkalaram", she advised her mother to regain her seat under the tree.

Ananth introduced himself. Rathi did so too.

And the five minutes they had before the ushers opened the gates and pointed their phones at the IFFI ID cards, were filled with over a thousand spoken words and some glances.

"You want to sit with us?"

"A pleasure".

The film ran for 2:12 hours.

"I have to run. Work is waiting"

And in a flash, she tugged at a badge on her second bag, rubbed one side of it and gave it to Ananth.

"A souvenir for you"

He stared at it in the semi-darkness of the cinema hall, could spot

the letters 'GOA' and when he looked up, the duo had exited.

Four films a day, across three days and Ananth was close to being a zombie. On that Tuesday evening, after the 8 p.m. film screening, he picked up a tin of chilled beer, slowed down near a dark street corner at Campal, enjoyed the drink and kept walking.

The chill was encouraging for a walk. He was in Miramar. Off the pavement and on to the sands. He would have to drag himself if he wanted to smell the sea and wet his feet. But he held himself back. He didn't fear water. But he half-trusted his mother.

"Water could be the cause of death," a trusted family astrologer had hinted to his mother; who revealed it to him when the family had been having a picnic in Mamallapuram. The others were dipping their feet in the water. But nobody ventured far - you couldn't trust the east coast.

He sank into the sand on Miramar's edge and in minutes, was asleep.

A policeman on patrol had woken

him up and it was while gathering his backpack that he faintly realised that the 'GOA' badge he had pinned to it, was not there.

He skipped MAMI, the film festival in Mumbai. But he booked the trip to Goa, to be at IFFI.

Five days he could afford.

And the first film he booked was Payal Kapadia's 'All We Imagine as Light'. Screen One at Inox, at 9 a.m. The clips, the film stills and the Cannes photos had made him a Kani Kusruti fan.

He doubled into the cinema hall, chose the aisle seat on Row 5.

Fifteen minutes into the film, he felt a hand touch him lightly, on the right side of his shoulder.

"Ananth illaiya?"

He turned momentarily and caught the folds of a sari.

Was it a Chennai friend who was also at IFFI who had touched him?

Nurse Prabha was pressing the rice cooker she had received in a mysterious manner, from Germany, between her thighs.

"Do you still have the GOA badge?"

Was that Rathi's voice?

Was she sitting behind him?

How could he tell her that he had lost it in Miramar?

Ananth slipped out of the cinema hall midway through the film.

He shut himself in his hotel room and slept.

Later that evening, he walked to Miramar.

2 by 2 took time. Turning over beach sand wasn't easy.

In an hour, Ananth had managed a dozen swipes.

"Your wedding ring is it? You cannot do it alone!", the hawker closeby said.

"I have lost my wedding ring, can you help?"

Ananth coaxed beach-goers.

Two people joined him, turned over two lots and gave up.

More joined. Soon, there were two dozen people around him.

The sands around the informal entry to Miramar Beach had been turned over in two hours.

As the night wore on, fewer people volunteered.

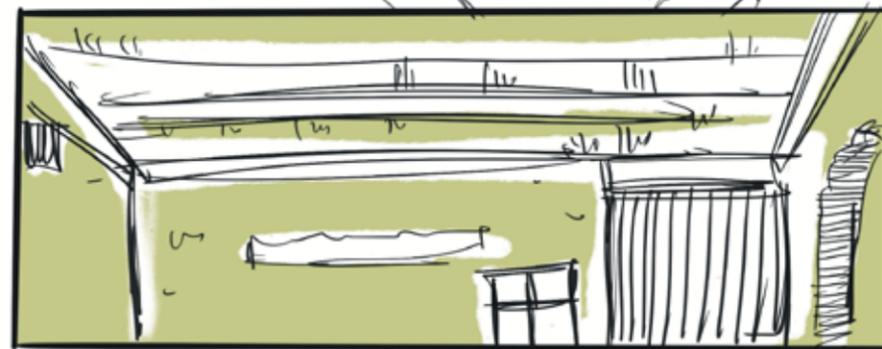
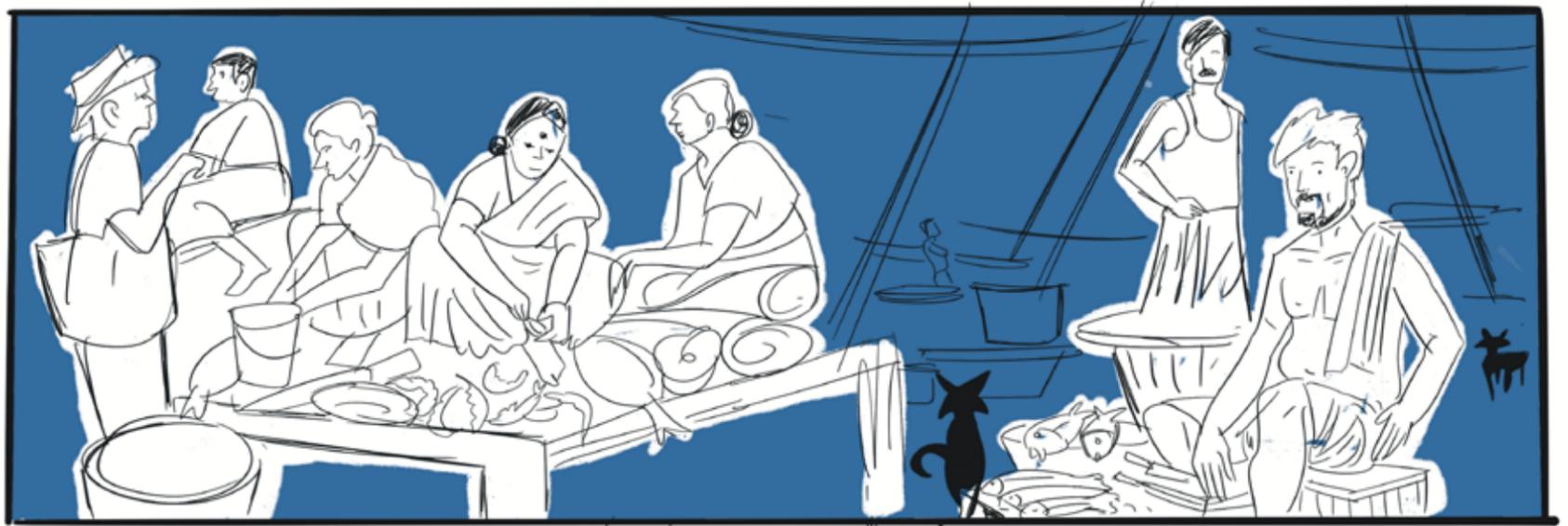
A woman in her 50s walked up to him. "I too lost a ring here some years ago," she said. "You won't find it beta!"

"Despite all this search?"

"You won't find it. The crabs carry these rings to the sea."

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

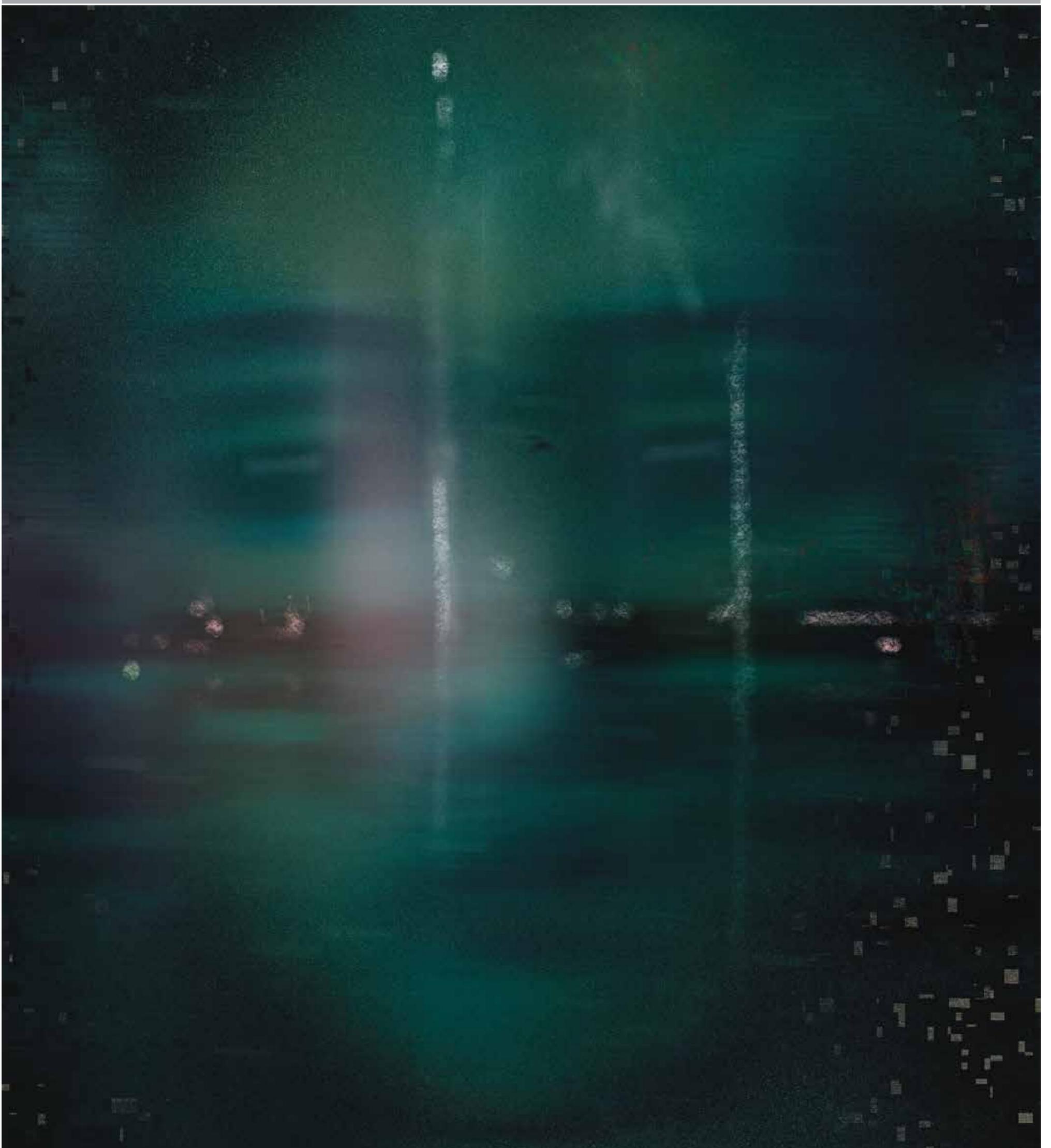




AND WORK  
i SOMEHOW  
MANAGED TO  
FINISH.



BOYS of  
PUNE to GOD



You should not let yourself be confused in your solitude by the fact that there is some thing in you that wants to move out of it. This very wish, if you use it calmly and prudently and like a tool, will help you spread out your solitude over a great distance. Most people have (with the help of conventions) turned their solutions toward what is easy and toward the easiest side of the easy; but it is clear that we must trust in what is difficult; everything alive trusts in it, everything, in Nature grows and defends itself any way it can and is spontaneously itself, tries to be itself at all costs and against all opposition. - Rainer Maria Rilke

# Palace of Dreams

BY TINO DE SÁ

The Maquinez Palace, in its various avatars during its 322-year existence, has been a crucible of dreams: the dreams of merchant princes, the dreams of aspiring doctors, and finally, the dreams of cinephiles and film aficionados. IFFI is probably the only film festival in the world to have a venue that is embedded in a three-and-a-quarter centuries old palace complex, virtually dripping with history and heritage.

The *Palacio dos Maquinezes* was built in 1702 by two brothers, Diogo and Cristovao da Costa Ataide Teive, sons of the Count of Maquizeze. It is possible that the family was descended from Sephardic Jews from Marrakesh in Morocco; hence the moniker. They had established themselves in Goa as merchant-princes, conducting a vast trade, supplying the Mughals and Deccan kingdoms with horses imported from Arabia, and exporting to Europe spices procured from the Malabar coast, diamonds from Bijapur and brocades from north India. With the wealth they accumulated, they built for themselves a lavish manor on the outskirts of Panjim, with a splendid view of the Mandovi river. Ensnared between the two wings of this stately home was a private chapel, distinct from the surrounding ochre-and-white buildings in that it is entirely painted a luminous white. With its exquisitely carved baroque interiors embellished with gold trimmings, the chapel is a little gem.

Whether the cause was just the decline in Goa's trade or affliction by a pestilential illness still remains a mystery, but the Maquizeze family seems to have vanished from historical records at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century without trace. Their palace, fortunately, remained.

In 1842 the palace assumed its second avatar, when the colonial administration decided to formally establish a college of medicine and surgery, the *Escola Medico-Cirurgica*, and house it in the palace. Goa's medical college is the oldest in all

of Asia – at the time, not even British India or China or Japan (or Australia, Africa or Latin America, for that matter) had a college teaching allopathic medicine and surgery. To accommodate the needs of a growing institution, a magnificent new wing was constructed in the neo-classical style, with arched windows, sweeping marble staircases edged with handsomely worked balustrades, ornamental tiles, moulded pillars and romanesque porches. For a hundred and fifty years this charmingly beautiful complex of buildings saw generations of doctors graduate (among them, my own grandfather in 1897), until, thirty years ago, the Goa Medical College was shifted to its present premises on the Bambolim plateau. To this day, each year in February the stethoscopes of graduating doctors are blessed in the Maquizeze chapel during a solemn high mass.

The palace lay unused for a while, and temporarily accommodated a few government departments. There was even one philistine proposal to convert it into a mall. Fortunately, better sense prevailed, and the complex was sensitively adapted to house the offices of the Entertainment Society of Goa, the organizational partner of IFFI. Through the year, it also serves as a venue for various other cultural activities – but the star of them all, of course, continues to be IFFI.

## Maquizeze Transitions

i

cargo

ships merchant princes

horses silks pepper cotton gold

trade warehouse [plot money credit] treasures untold

*the river curls in sweet embrace  
as shadows lengthen on the palace face*

ii

cure

drug agony blood bone

death disease remedy medication caduceus task  
fracture operation [theatre cast set heartbeat] surgeon [mask]

*shadows lengthen on the palace face  
as pain's relieved by a scalpel's grace*

iii

lights

camera action scene tinsel town

mood song [theatre cast set heartbeat] sequinned gown  
motion dialogue character [plot money credit] titles [mask]

Bollywood Hollywood very very jolly good

*silver screens their peacock magic trace  
as the river curls in sweet embrace*

- Tino de Sá



# ओ हरीहरा

हरीहराचो फेळ फेळोता,  
फेळ दुर्गाभायर शिंवोरता ओ,  
फेळ दुर्गाभायर शिंवोरता.

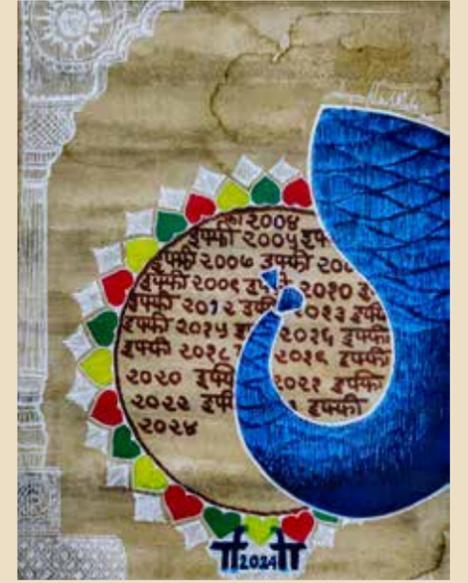
*The army of Harihara is assembling,  
ready to spread outside the rampart walls,  
Yes, the army... is ready to spread  
Outside the rampart walls.*

Nestled in a corner of Salcete is the village of Chandor that plays host to the unique tradition of Mussoll Khell. Chandor was once home to great dynasties, including Bhojas, the Shilaharas and the Kadambas. This dance is said to have originated as a victory celebration of the prowess of ancient warriors, as recalled by Zenaides Morenas in his book *The Mussoll Dance of Chandor*, which serves as one of the major sources of documentation for this ancient tradition.

Illustration: Govit Morajkar

## 55th International Film Festival Schedule - 24th November 2024

INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1	2:45 PM	KALA ACADEMY	7:00 PM	4:45 PM	7:30 PM
9:00 AM	<b>HOLY COW</b>	11:00 AM	<b>SUNFLOWERS WERE THE FIRST ONES TO KNOW</b>	<b>VERA AND THE PLEASURE OF OTHERS</b>	<b>BOBO</b>
<b>MOON</b>	5:00 PM	<b>LASER FOR POST PRODUCTION AND EVOLUTION TO HDR</b>	INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 2	7:45 PM	INOX MARGAO - AUDI 4
11:15 AM	<b>BARTALI'S CYCLE</b>			<b>HOUSE</b>	11:00 AM
<b>THE END</b>	<b>WHEN OPPURTUNITY KNOCKS AT THE RECRUITER'S DOOR</b>	12:30 PM	10:30 AM	INOX MARGAO - AUDI 1	<b>NORAH</b>
2:30 PM		<b>FROM BIG SCREEN TO STREAMING</b>	<b>Ballad of the Mountain</b>	10:00 AM	2:00 PM
<b>THE ROOM NEXT DOOR</b>	7:15 PM		<b>Mo Bou, Mo Gaan</b>	<b>ROLL NO 52</b>	<b>HANU-MAN</b>
5:15 PM	<b>THE EMPIRE</b>	2:30 PM	1:30 PM	<b>FAUJI 2.0</b>	5:45 PM
<b>THE ROOSTER</b>	9:45 PM	<b>CENTENARY SPECIAL: CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND WORKS OF RAJ KAPOOR - 'THE GREATEST SHOWMAN'</b>	<b>Praan Pratishtha</b>	<b>KICKING BALLS</b>	<b>THE WAILING</b>
7:30 PM	<b>LILIES NOT FOR ME</b>		<b>6-A Akash Ganga</b>	1:00 PM	8:00 PM
<b>THE SECOND ACT</b>	INOX PANJIM - AUDI 4			<b>SKY PEALS</b>	MAGIC MOVIEZ PONDA AUDI 1
9:45 PM	9:45 AM	4:30 PM	4:30 PM	4:00 PM	1:00 PM
<b>PUSHER</b>	<b>ON MELTING SNOW</b>		<b>Rador Pakhi</b>	<b>LOCUST</b>	<b>WAITING FOR DON QUIXOTE</b>
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 2	12:30 PM	<b>CULTURE AS CONTEXT FOR CINEMATIC STORYTELLING</b>	7:30 PM	7:00 PM	4:00 PM
9:30 AM	<b>AMERICAN WARRIOR</b>		<b>Kalki 2898 AD</b>	<b>Swatanrya Veer Savarkar</b>	<b>BITTER GOLD</b>
<b>Amar Aaj Marega</b>	3:00 PM	ASHOK AUDI	INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 3	INOX MARGAO AUDI 2	7:00 PM
<b>Swargarath</b>	<b>KARUARA, PEOPLE OF THE RIVER</b>	11:00 AM	10:30 AM	10:15AM	<b>Praan Pratishtha 6-A Akash Ganga</b>
12.45 PM	5:00 PM	<b>DEVADASU</b>	<b>AS THE RIVER GOES BY</b>	<b>Karkhanu</b>	MAGIC MOVIEZ PONDA AUDI 2
<b>Amma's Pride</b>	<b>THE QUIET SON</b>	2:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:15 PM	1:15 PM
<b>Onko Ki Kothin</b>	8:30 PM	<b>ANIMALIA PARADOXA</b>	<b>FAMILIAR TOUCH</b>	<b>Kalki 2898 AD</b>	<b>KABULIWALA</b>
4.30 PM	<b>SOFIA, THE POSSESSION</b>	SAMRAT AUDI	4:30 PM	5:00 PM	4:15 PM
<b>Saavat</b>	10:30 PM	11:00 AM	<b>EAT THE NIGHT</b>	<b>Chanchisoa</b>	<b>MILK TEETH</b>
<b>Mahavatar Narsimha</b>	<b>THROUGH ROCKS AND CLOUDS</b>	<b>KIX</b>	7:30 PM	<b>Google Matrimony</b>	7:15 PM
8.00 PM	MAQUINEZ PALACE AUDI 1	2:30 PM	<b>THE SLUGGARD CLAN</b>	7:15 PM	<b>Mo Bou, Mo Gaan</b>
<b>Manjummel Boys</b>	9:00 AM	<b>GODSTERMINAL</b>	INOX PORVORIM AUDI 4	<b>Rador Pakhi</b>	OPEN AIR SCREENING SCHEDULE
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 3	<b>CMOT SLOT</b>	INOX PORVORIM AUDI 1	INOX PORVORIM AUDI 4	INOX MARGAO - AUDI 3	<b>MIRAMAR BEACH</b>
9:15 AM	1:45 PM	10:00 AM	10:45 AM	10:30 AM	7:00 PM
<b>BLACK BOX DIARIES</b>	<b>AWAARA</b>	<b>GULIZAR</b>	<b>THE EDITORIAL OFFICE</b>	<b>LOONIES</b>	<b>Gulmohor</b>
12:00 PM	5:45 PM	1:00 PM	1:45 PM	1:30 PM	<b>ANJUNA BEACH</b>
<b>HAZZAAR VELA SHOLAY PEHELILA MANUS</b>	<b>CHHAAD - THE TERRACE</b>	<b>MEETING WITH POL POT</b>	<b>TAN CERCAS DE LA NUBES</b>	<b>BASSIMA'S WOMB</b>	7:00 PM
	8:15 PM	4:00 PM		4:30 PM	<b>The Secret Life of Pets 2</b>
	<b>SAM BAHADUR</b>	<b>TRANSAMAZONIA</b>		<b>DEAL AT THE BORDER</b>	<b>RAVINDRA BHAWAN</b>
					7:00 PM
					<b>Sirf Ek Banda Kaafi Hein</b>



For today's 16-page special edition of *The Peacock* themed on literature and poetry, Sagar Naik Mule has painted an enigmatic cover artwork with the feel of ancient parchment, to represent the vast and centuries-old literary legacies of Konkani, the only language in the world that is in regular daily use in five different scripts: Devanagiri, Malayalam, Kannada, Roman and Perso-Arabic. He says "I have also tried to symbolize the shifting times, from traditional to modern, and the continued impact of the passage of the years after the International Film Festival of India first came to Goa in 2004."



FT. ASEES KAUR | PARADOX | WHEN CHAI MET TOAST | THE YELLOW DIARY  
ANUMITA NADESAN | CHOR BAZAAR | REUBEN DE MELO | THE SPINDOCTOR | TSUMIKIYO | THE GOA TRAP CULTURE

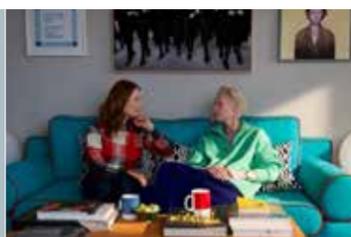


PEACOCK PICKS



**The End**

11:15  
INOX Screen-I Panaji



**The Second Act**

19:30  
INOX Screen-I Panaji



**Black Box Diaries**

09:15  
INOX Screen-III Panaji



**The Room Next Door**

14:30  
INOX Screen-I Panaji

