

BY ROLAND MASCARENHAS

I'll be a great journalism school," an editor advised me on why I should join *The Peacock*.

Over the past decade, I have written over 15 essays in India, and my home in Canada, as a freelance writer. Yet on my first day at *The Peacock*, I felt out of my depth: not only did I need to buy more work-appropriate clothes, I found the fast-paced cycle of selecting an idea, justifying the selection, finding interview subjects, transcribing, and writing multiple drafts within a few hours to be disorienting. Thankfully, I settled down two days later.

For me, writing for *The Peacock* was less about pay cheque, but more about the ability to connect with my Goan heritage. Born and raised in Canada, attending picnics, socials, and volunteering in the diaspora community, I'm even on the executive committee of Toronto's Goan Soccer League (about which I intend to develop a documentary) and have presented at academic conferences on diasporic cultural differences in Nairobi, Karachi, and Mumbai. Nonetheless, my case was of 'American-Born Confused Desi,' where second-generation immigrants are unable to locate their sense of 'home' between East and West.

All that changed when I lived and worked in Mumbai from 2016 to 2020 – only leaving because of Covid. I was living the "reverse Canadian dream," as my brother joked at his wedding in 2017. "We have all heard of the young boy, growing up in India, saving enough money to move to Canada with the hope and dreams of a new life. Roland is the only person I know that would grow up in Canada, have everything, give it all up and move to India to start a new life."

What started out as a journey of intellectual curiosity, novelty-seeking and the rush of dopamine that comes with it, unexpectedly brought inner peace. In "*Planet Canada: How Our Expats Are Shaping the Future*," John Stackhouse alludes that some Canadians may feel more at home outside the country than within.

As I observed my extended family residing in Mumbai's Salsette Catholic Housing Society in Bandra, and the Lobo Mansion in Byculla, I saw remnants of Goa. I also saw many people who rejected the immigrate-to-Canada narrative in favour of their current

lifestyle. Indians in Canada are known to be hard-working and technical, but the personal warmth, desire for community, argumentativeness, and tolerance for ambiguity were new experiences for me.

There is so much I witnessed, from the zen-like disposition of passengers on the Virar train at Churchgate; the wine-and-cheese book club overseeing Juhu beach; or the weekly football group that devotes most of the time arguing about the offside rule. They became a psychologically-safe outlet for expression, in comparison to the political correctness and formality that has gripped Canada's concrete jungles. "It's like a big high school, where there are degrees of connection," is often how I would describe the relationship-links between India's urban English-speaking lot.

My ongoing tryst with India has been undoubtedly transformational. Perhaps it's a moment in time, or the natural progression of age. When I first arrived in 2016, I was a blank canvas, absorbing the senses and trying to make sense of them. Now, I am more of an artists' sketch, fully-formed but continuously adding color and texture that may have been overlooked the first time around.

BY PRAGYA BHAGAT

Most mornings begin with poetry. Today's words come from Mary Oliver. "You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves."

There is a family of peacocks that loiters in the rice fields in front of my apartment. Most mornings, I sit in the balcony, cradle a cup of lemongrass tea, and watch them squawk. This past week, however, I've observed a different breed, printed on glossy paper with that delicious new-car smell, saturated with just as much colour as its warm-blooded counterpart. Working with *The Peacock* as part of my first IFFI can be summed up by the kindness of the Aunty that roams the corridors of Maquinez Palace. She reminds me of Lalita Pawar. On my first day with *The Peacock*, the aunty led me to a quiet room in a different wing and offered me a cup of chai. Today, she smiles; we banter. I compliment the rose in her hair. She blushes. There is a kindness here, combined with a focus that the team carries into words and images that end up in the daily paper. Most mornings begin by reading the newest issue, pouring myself a cup of dark roast coffee, and performing the role of a writer.

Make no mistake; it is a performance. As an introvert, it's a role I'm well suited to. I offer my attention so that you may feel heard. I file away your epiphanies, turn them into my building blocks, and shapeshift into a mosaic of what I absorb. To do so at a film festival—an environment bustling with thousands of bodies, avian sculptures, *dhinchak* beats, and evening strobe lights—overwhelms me. I prefer

the quiet of paper and pen.

In one of our first staff meetings, an editor tells us writers to report as objectively as possible. "No one is interested in your opinions," he says. I watch three films, attend four masterclasses, and interview four filmmakers, a jury member, and two feminists. Every day, I write a poem. Among the voices I amplify, I find my own.

Gloria Anzaldua, in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, defines the term *nepantla* as a state of in-between, a displacement. *Nepantla* is a transition state between gender, occupation, geography, or any other label we may identify with. At IFFI, I inhabit this liminal zone between listening and telling, learning and offering, and make it my home.

So far, I've been asking the questions. In this last issue of *The Peacock*, you ask what the festival has been like for me. I find the spotlight jarring. I don't know. I need time to process the plethora of experiences I've had. A week from now, maybe a month from now, memories will solidify and resurface. Shared tiffins, last minute edits, listening to Kendrick Lamar's *Damn* on repeat during the forty-minute commute. As I return to my peaceful, rice field, lemongrass mornings, I'm left with more questions—three in particular—than answers.

On the spectrum of story tellers and story receivers, where do I place myself?

What is the word that describes the combination of satisfaction, pride, and cringe when you see your work printed on a page?

Where in the body does a film live after it's watched?



Illustration by Govit Morajkar