What other publication ever featured daily columns by the reigning Jnanpith Award winner like The Peacock's own Damodar “Bhaiee” Mauzo? Where else can you read new verse every day from poets of the calibre of Maaz Bin Bilal and Pragya Bhagat? Have you seen original artwork produced afresh on the level of our covers by Govit Morajkar, like today’s tribute to the written word? Team Peacock scatters and reassembles annually – we’ve been doing it for nine years – but its identity has always remained unshakably rooted in the literature and art of our profoundly rich cultural location in Goa and India. That is the theme of today’s 16-page special edition, and collective labour of love. We hope you enjoy every word and line.

PRAGYVERSE
by Pragya Bhagat

how should the way i die affect the way i live

he walks seven hours across the annapurna range
ziplines down a nepali valley
my sixty-eight year old johnny quest father
eats cinnamon momos for lunch
holds glee in his gums

i live by the sea
inhale with caution
place each sticky breath in the compost bin

sure enough, the ferment will fizz
blanch of hair, droop of chin
leaking tubes, ill-fitting skin
how many exoskeletons can fit in a closet?
is a question not meant for mountains
a purpose is better than a deadline
when all we do is climb

Illustration by Chloe Cordeiro
A Certain Tenderness

BY PRAGYA BHAGAT

Prior to meeting Alvina Joshi, I watched My Grandfather’s House (2023) and felt an immediate kinship to the young filmmaker. Both of us were close to our grandfathers, and as we grappled with the grief of losing them, we documented our family histories through our work.

When I asked Joshi to describe herself in five words, her answer was almost immediate: “Anxious. Control freak. Sensitive. Passionate. Persistent.”

Though she studied editing at Whistling Woods International in 2020, Joshi enjoys directing more. “I’ve made one short documentary. Now I’m working on my first feature documentary which I’m pitching here at the Co-Production Market.”

Her project, Tokora Sorai’r Baah (A Weaver Bird’s Nest), is an Assamese feature, co-directed by Rahul Rabha. It is one of twelve projects chosen by the Film Bazaar as part of the Market, which hopes to provide collaborative opportunities that will turn features like Joshi’s into powerful films. A Weaver Bird’s Nest has already won the “Best South Asian Project” award at the Dhaka Doc Lab, and it was selected for the Sundance Ignite Fellowship for which Joshi will be mentored and funded for. Other alumni of the Sundance Ignite Fellowship include Charlotte Regan, whose debut feature, Scrapper (2023), had its India premiere at IFFI this year.

Joshi is twenty-six years old, and she already knows what she brings to the table: “A certain tenderness in the gaze. That’s how I like looking at my subjects. And a lot of love for the characters. I don’t like loud and aggressive. There’s a lot of power in softness.” Her current cinematic inspirations include the South Korean Burning (2018), the Vietnamese Inside the Yellow Cocoon Shell (2023), and the Indian About Love (2019). “I really like Asian and Southeast Asian cinema.” This is Joshi’s first IFFI. The festival, she says, “is great exposure to what’s ticking in the industry right now.”

Critics often call out the self-indulgence in those who use their lived experiences for creative expression. In My Grandfather’s House, Joshi is a protagonist. So is her grandmother and deceased grandfather. Why should viewers care about her story? “I’m not special enough or important enough. I’m just like all the women around me. It is the story of the Indian family. The more authentic and vulnerable you are willing to be, the more relatable what you’re making becomes.” In her documentaries, Joshi adds, there is no suspension of disbelief. “I like it when people tell me their own stories. I like it a lot more than imagined realities. And I like engaging with the world around me.”

The criticism of naval-gazing, Joshi says, “stems from looking at cinema as a means to escape. It’s part of the narrative that after a long day, we go home and watch an action film. I don’t think cinema should be just that. Art is your means to engage with the world around you and to make sense of it. If we are not telling our stories, how are we making sense of this already very uncertain world?”

Joshi acknowledges both the challenges and opportunities for her generation. “For starters, we don’t seem to have winter anymore. The biggest challenge is what’s happening to the world at a very physical level. It’s frightening.” Global warming aside, she speaks of the mindset that Gen Z operates with. “We are unafraid. We are able to speak truth to power.” Joshi asks aspiring young filmmakers to not give up on their dreams. “The one thing that will never change is that your stories matter. If you don’t tell your stories, then all the publishing houses and production houses and theatres and YouTube, they will have nothing on their plate.”

Films started with literature, all over the world. The Godfather is probably the best adaptation of a novel.

Shekhar Kapur
IFFI Jury
Mumbai

They’re two different languages. In film, everything is in the present, and in literature you have the inside voice.

Catherine Dussart
IFFI Jury
Paris

Poets try to form images with words, and if you make a movie about poetry, it is particularly important to get that image across.

José Luis Alcaine
IFFI Jury
Spain

If you adapt a book, the journey to creating a film is statistically more successful. The film adaptation of Catch 22 is really strong.

Helen Leake
IFFI Jury
Australia
From IFFI to MUBI

BY JESSICA FALEIRO

Svetlana Naudiyal began her career in cinema as an IFFI intern in 2010 and is now the Programming Director for Asia at MUBI, the streaming platform for cinema fans.

Tell us about your role?
I select South Asian content to show on our platform in India. I’m also responsible for presenting our global films in thematic ways that can be relevant to our audience. We recently did a theme called ‘Millennial Meltdown’ which showed films where the central characters are facing something akin to a quarter-life crisis. It was relevant to a lot of people and became a popular campaign of ours on MUBI.

What excites you most about your job?
As a cinephile, there are certain kinds of films I love, and I’m thrilled that I get to wake up every day and work with the kinds of films that I love watching. I studied Engineering, then moved into Advertising, but my first job was as an intern at IFFI in 2010. After that I worked at Katha Centre for Film Studies in Mumbai where I learned a lot about curating films.

Could you tell us about MUBI’s presence in India?
Over four years we have received a lot of love from the film and art community in the country. Whenever I go anywhere, people approach me to talk about how much they love and value the platform. The numbers aren’t crazy, but growing steadily. Our main demographies are college students to mid-career professionals, and people who are interested in arts and culture. This includes, those who don’t mind reading subtitles! We are very popular with engineering college students, too.

Tell us about MUBI’s distribution role?
We were distributors for The Settlers (2023), which is showing at IFFI. Our tentpole titles in the last two years are films like The Worst Person in the World (2021) and Aftersun (2022), which were acquired by our global team for everybody, including India. The conversations come to me when the films are handled by a local distributor in India. For example, films playing at the festival like Anatomy of a Fall (2023), The Zone of Interest (2023) and About Dry Grasses (2023) are handled by local distributors, so, I start the conversation about acquiring them for India.

What’s your strategy for acquiring content in India?
It has to be a good film. In India, we’re looking for finished films only, whether Indian or global. Ideally, they will have already started their journey with the audience and had a theatrical release or gone to film festivals.

What kinds of titles have you acquired in India so far?
We recently acquired Pokhar Ke Dunu Paar (2022) by debut filmmaker Parth Saurabh which explores a couple’s relationship in the wake of the pandemic. We also have Priscilla (2023) directed by Sofia Coppola, coming from the global team. We’ve partnered with PVR INOX Pictures for its first theatrical release in December, hopefully. We’re very excited about this first for us, after four years in India.

How have you managed to carve a niche for yourselves?
Two key things differentiate us. Every film has been carefully hand-picked with a personal touch by someone in the team who has watched it. We add ‘Our Take’ to every film, where one of our team members says why they think you should watch this film. We also have a service called ‘Movie Go’ which no other platform anywhere else in the world has, where we have partnered with a theatre chain. In India, it’s PVR. Through MUBI, a member can get a free ticket to see our movie of the week in theatre. We believe that streaming and theatrical viewing can co-exist because they both serve different purposes.

Is MUBI looking to produce films here?
Although we do keep an eye out for talent and projects, we don’t produce films in India and we don’t have any plans to venture into production for a couple of years. I’m always in research mode though.

Very often films are adapted from books; they inspire stories and scripts. I particularly enjoy French literature.

Jerome Paillard
IFFI Jury
Paris

I enjoy the writings of Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, Dharamvir Bharati, and Shakespeare.

Arpit Sarve
Actor
Pune

I liked Jon Krakauer’s Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster, where he explores whether or not the mountain is worth the climb.

Aishwarya Singh
Architect
Goa

My favourite book-to-film adaptation is Charulata, where the filmmaker was able to connect with the soul and theme of the book.

Manish Sharma
Film-maker
Mumbai
“Women are natural producers”

BY SAACHI DSOUZA

Monisha Advani is sitting with The Peacock after an exciting session at the Film Bazaar on the technology behind her TV series Mumbai Diaries (2021). Along with Madhu Bhojwani and Nikkhil Advani, she co-founded Emmay Entertainment which produced Rocket Boys (2022), Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway (2023), and D-Day (2013), among other films.

Why films?
It’s a personal relationship. My brother Nikkhil Advani seldom asks for help. He’ll be completing 30 years in this industry in a week, and he likes to do things himself. So, when he turned to me to start this company, I realised this was important. Madhu and I saw this as an interesting challenge, particularly because our industry acquired sectorial status in its last several years, and we’ve seen a sort of renaissance in the last 15 years. I’d like to think it’s the preparation for the real renaissance. It’s also about serving an audience.”

What are some of the basics of producing?
Because I’m an entrepreneur at the core of things, my commitment never stops. It’s a 24/7 machine that’s working inside my head. Being a good producer means being a good enabler, and to do that, you need to be a good listener. Sometimes you have to listen to all the stories to find the right one that will resonate with you. And I think that if you bring authenticity to that listening, and you transfer it into being organised - because a producer has to realise that a creative mind doesn’t like to stay within the lines - a good producer can create a productive ecosystem for a film. A producer is a glue in this process.

You’re one of the few female producers of your level in the industry.
I credit my mother for telling me that “the world will tell you that they can run faster than you, but it’s up to you to prove them wrong.” I believe that it is possible to put your professionalism first. I often tell other women, and would want this for all marginalised groups: put yourself forth. Commit and show up. Your competency can be seen before your gender. I’m aware this is not always possible, and it might work for some people and not for others, but what will be left of us if we don’t try? And being here in the Bazaar, I’m so excited for the future. I’m constantly learning from people half my age. There’s hope here.

What would you say about the industry’s need for more women producers?
Today on the panel it was said, “women are natural producers because we’re nurturers,” and I thought that resonated. I think women producers bring a specific gaze and inclusivity to the industry that cannot necessarily be introduced by anyone else. When we started our company I once brought my niece to our office and asked her what she thought. She said, “what do YOU think about it? You’re two female producers and all your posters on the wall have men,” and that struck me hard. In one sentence, she taught me an important lesson.

What do you look for in a story?
Emotion. If a story doesn’t have emotion, if I can’t connect with it, I can’t produce it. And by that, I don’t mean I need to feel happy about it, I should be able to feel outraged too. A story is like a tuning fork, you knock it on different surfaces, and it has a different sound each time. I should be able to feel the vibrations of a story.

How do you balance the left brain with the right?
I’m blessed with Madhu and Nikkhil, where Madhu is the left brain and Nikkhil is the right. It’s a yin and yang relationship. I often find myself at an impasse, which is common, but I think that there’s creativity in managing a budget as well as in creating a story. We’re all creators in many ways. The best part about filmmaking is how the business side coincides with the creative.
ASSAVRI’S IFFI STYLEBOOK

SUNDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2023

[Images of people wearing different outfits]

[Images of people posing in various styles]

[Images of people wearing traditional and modern clothing]
Vishnu Surya Wagh

Vishnu Surya Wagh was not just an important poet for India, but for modern literature of our times. With his sharp and raw language that he used as a sword and microphone, he managed to tell the story of many marginalised communities in the most honest poetry. He stands like a roaring tiger for all of us who are trying to find our voice and gave dignity and recognition to many with his biographical rhymes. I am proud of being from a community that gave us such a courageous and honest poet.
A cool breeze blew in from the Arabian Sea, casting a chill over the upper deck of a casino boat anchored on the Mandovi river. It whispered through the palm trees dotting the site of the 54th International Film Festival of India and slipped through the open hallways of Goa Medical College as Vasquito D’Silva was bounding up the main staircase. He felt the chill wind and was still speaking into his walkie-talkie when he bumped into Francis. He snapped the radio back on his belt. “Show me,” he said to Francis. Vasquito slowed down to walk beside the elderly caretaker. They were only a few days away from opening night and Vasquito’s team suddenly seemed to have forgotten how to do their jobs. He hated the sounds of the radio crackle. It meant trouble.

“Where is it?” Vasquito asked. “Old Annex...” “I thought it was cordoned off years ago.” “It was.” “Then what exactly is the problem?” “The Director said he could hear a dripping tap.” Vasquito frowned. “We shut off the water in that section decades ago.” Francis was silent. They reached a tall wooden door covered in white chipped paint. Francis pushed the door open and they entered.

The room was illuminated only by stray rays of sunshine streaming in. Dust motes disturbed by their entrance floated on the air. They both stood still, listening for the sound of a dripping tap. Nothing came.

“I don’t hear it. Do you?” “No sir.” “Then why am I here?” Vasquito exclaimed, turning to leave. “Because it isn’t from a tap, sir.” “What do you mean?” “The dripping sound” “Well, where is it from then?” “It’s a ghost, sir.” “Explain.” “Sir, this was much before your time, but one of the reasons we closed off this area was because people started complaining they could hear noises and no one could find the source.” “What noises?” “Well...at first, it was just the dripping. But then, there were wailing babies.” “Did you say...wailing...babies?” “Yes, sir. And also, a woman.” “Okay. What’s unusual about that?” “Well...she was dead, sir.” Vasquito folded his arms across his chest. “What do you mean?”

“People saw her floating around the Annex and when they got closer, she simply vanished.” “I told you if you don’t stop drinking, I’ll have to fire you.” “I haven’t touched a drop since the last time, Sir.” “Vasq!” Vasquito jumped when the radio crackled to life. “What?” “Bosco messed up again! We need more red carpet.” “Send Bosco out to get more and keep me informed,” Francis replied sternly. The crackle died off. Francis had wandered off and Vasquito was alone. He glanced out the window from the first floor and realised it looked in the dark beyond the room. It was a deep-throated howl. He ran back, pushed open the unlocked door and went inside. His radio crackled, fell silent again. He felt a chilly breeze on his face and shivered. One of the windows on the left had a huge gap between the expanded wood and the glass pane. Just when he had convinced himself that Francis’s story was all rot and his brain had been triggered into hearing things, he squinted to see something in the dark beyond the room. It was another door. Vasquito entered a bedroom. She’d told him, “Ghosts are just lost souls trying to express themselves to us in whatever ways are left to them. They haven’t been able to leave their earthly abode properly or enter the afterlife. They don’t know they’re trapped and they don’t want to harm you. They’re just lonely and reaching out the only way they can.” The memory calmed him down.

The door opened and Vasquito rushed out. Out in the corridor, Francis saw the look on his face and knew. Then he saw the blood on Vasquito’s hands. “Just superficial cuts. I’m fine.” “She’s never done that before.” “You’ve seen her?” “Yes sir. Plenty of times. Also heard the wailing babies, the dripping tap.” “Francis, I can fix a dripping tap but not this. Why did you call me?” Francis looked sad. He went to the door, pulled out a bunch of keys from his pocket and locked the door. “I’ll come to the clinic with you, Sir.” “I’m not going anywhere until you tell me.” “It’s Antonio... The other caretaker? The one who had been here longer than you?” “Yes. He passed away a few months ago.” “Yes. I know.” “He was my friend and the one who first shared this secret with me. After he died I just wanted someone else to know. I won’t live forever, Sir.” “I’m sorry, Francis. I didn’t know he was your friend.”

At the clinic, the doctor disinfected and band-aided the cuts. “No more accidents. The Director is relying on you, Vasquito.” “I’ll be more careful.” Vasquito’s radio crackled as he started to walk off, carefully manipulating the device with his band-aided hands. He saw Francis walking away and caught up with him. “I’ll come upstairs for chai later,” Francis grinned, and slowly walked away.
SUNDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2023

SHORT STORIES

BY AJAY KAMALAKARAN

‘Mamma, James Bond’s in Goa,’ Victor said, dashing into the living room of their home in Fontainhas. Philomena looked at her 14-year old with a sense of levity. “Okay, what about your homework?”

The young man, whose enthusiasm for films was significantly higher than that for his studies, went on to explain how every single person was talking about the actors who had come to Goa for a shooting. “It’s not just Roger Moore, there’s David Niven and Gregory Peck! Some film they’re calling The Sea Wolves.”

The last of the big Hollywood names shocked Philomena, and she drifted into a trance. Did those two hours in Rome 26 years ago really happen? Was it a memory that was totally invented by the mind? A story to be told to future grandchildren?

Victor’s words and enthusiasm faded away as Philomena went from being the wife of a politician to a young, lively Portuguese Indian who was living her dream as a student in Italy.

“Oh, My Lord, it’s 7 already,” she said to herself, as she ran past her paying guest accommodation in Trastevere to the tram stop.

Philomena had regularly been admonished by her professors for being late to class and she feared a more severe punishment this morning.

There wasn’t any time to have an espresso and brioche this morning. Despite her natural fitness, running on the cobblestoned streets of this enchanting part of the Italian capital was an arduous task. The tram was now within sight. As she tried to make one final sprint to get on, her legs failed her. 30 metres still separated the one final sprint to get on, her legs now within sight. As she tried to make her way, I can drop you,” he said. The tram was an arduous task. The tram was already, “she said to herself, as she ran past her paying guest accommodation in Trastevere to the tram stop. Philomena had regularly been admonished by her professors for being late to class and she feared a more severe punishment this morning.

As she stopped to catch her breath the wind blew hard enough to add insult to mental injury. Philomena was clutching her white polka dot dress as she felt the studying glance of a man.

“Do you speak English, Signorina?”

The accent wasn’t anything like those of the British officers that she had encountered during her visits to Bombay. With her genes that had the best of Portuguese and Indian features, the 19-year old was more than used to attention from young Italian men, but this man who was sitting on a bench looked like he was on the other side of 35.

Yet, there was a magnetic attraction she felt to this stranger with piercing dark brown eyes and a jawline that could have only been crafted by Roman gods.

“Yes,” Philomena said, looking away almost immediately the way she would as though she saw the bright sun. “I couldn’t help but notice you running for the tram and was wondering if I could give you a ride.” After 6 months in Italy and being the recipient of propositions in varying degrees, she was about to refuse.

Then the stranger with the unusual accent stood up. This man towered over almost any local and the petite Goan tilted her head like a person sitting in the front row of a cinema hall. “I’m Gregory!” She didn’t want to give her name away but Philomena simply could not get over how handsome the man was.

“I have a Vespa…if you know you way, I can drop you,” he said. The Goan student knew that it was already late and was in two minds about just walking back home. Just when she was about to turn down the offer, Gregory spoke again. “Would you let me buy you breakfast?”

Maybe it was the warm sun that sliced the milky white clouds on the turquoise sky, maybe it was the calm of that morning or the fragrance of flowers that the wind carried with it, or maybe Cupid just happened to call in on Trastevere and work his magic.

“Yes…”

Salgao, with her conservative parents and irritating relatives, was thousands of kilometres away. Philomena sat on the back seat of the Vespa, putting her arms around this tall, dark and handsome American stranger.

Despite the large age gap, they seemed to be of a similar mental wavelength. Being a Catholic himself, the American was keen to know more about Portuguese India and its unique culture. What greater joy for a famous actor who was being chased by the paparazzi throughout his stay in Rome than to spend time with a gentle and kind brunette who had no idea who he was.

The two walked in Villa Borghese and went to a spot from where the Rome cityscape and St. Peter’s were visible. As a warm breeze descended on them, their eyes met before their lips. Philomena was awestruck, but she knew that this was as far as it was going to go.

As she got off the Vespa, Philomena put her arms around Gregory’s back and held him tightly one last time. And then he drove off.

Philomena only found out who Gregory Peck was several years after her romantic encounter, when Roman Holiday was screened at a cinema in Panjim, by then a part of the Republic of India.

“Mamma, mamma…where are you?” Victor realised that his mother had long stopped paying attention to him. Shaken out of her flashback to 1953 Rome, the wife of a politician and the mother of a cinephile teen was mentally back in 1979 and asked her son to go and do his homework.
Braz Gonsalves, a living legend in the realm of jazz, possesses not only unparalleled musical prowess, but also a humility that sets him apart. Despite his remarkable achievements, he refrains from claiming credit, embodying a rare modesty. His belief in the potential of young musicians is inspiring, especially given his seasoned life as a musician. In an era where some of his peers may dismiss contemporary music, Braz stands out as a beacon of open-mindedness. He perceives the evolution of music with a keen eye, recognizing the beauty of jazz from its origins to the present day.

What distinguishes Braz is his ageless musicality. In an industry often influenced by “trends”, he remains a timeless force. His ability to appreciate and adapt to the ever-changing landscape of jazz reflects not just a connection to the past but an understanding of its future. It’s a rare quality that not only makes him a living legend, but also a source of inspiration for the youngsters privileged to collaborate with him.

As my team embarks on this journey to capture Braz’s life story, our hope is to do justice to this extraordinary saxophonist. We aspire to weave a narrative that mirrors the depth and richness of his experiences, ensuring that his legacy resonates with audiences for generations to come.

Text by Nalini Elvino de Sousa
No Film–Country for Poets

By Maaz Bin Bilal

It wasn’t always like this.
So many aspired
to be poets.
From Bombay too,
we’d hear the poet’s call,
and not just
in the film songs.
Our (film) hero was often
the poet.
And sometimes
heroine too.
Manto wrote the screenplay
Mirza Ghalib—the master poet
portrayed by
Bharat Bhushan.
Sahir wrote songs
for a bunch of films—
Pyasa, Barsaat ki Raat, Gazal,
and Kabhi Kabhie,
and also, Shakeel Badayuni
wrote for Mere Mehboob and Palki,
where the protagonist only
ever wished to be
a poet (and lover).
But with the 70s
came the Angry
Young Man, and poets
became less frequent,
Umrao Jan Ada
a courtesan,
and the lame man
of Saajan.
Muhafiz adapted
Anita Desai’s In Custody,
A tragedy of the rift
between Urdu and Hindi.
Shashi Kapoor played
a degenerate poet
wallowing in the loss
of poetry.
Instead, we got ‘action,’
as globalism found traction,
Gandaraj became truth
that is Satya.
By then there were
fifty six,
Ab Tak Chhappan.
A brief flutter with Farhan
whose heart wished
that You Only Live Once,
so, Imran recited,
through his father’s voice,
some poetry on the sea.
But the fearless cop Dabangg
came swiftly
(and not just once),
and the lion copper Singham,
along with Marvel and DC,
until Tiger(s) sprung,
and we had no longer our poetry
but a spy (uni)verse.
Although I must admit,
verse has had one more moment,
when from the ghetto emerged,
Gully Boy,
whose time came and went,
with lyrics originating
in the Black man’s bent
of resistance,
but now like all rap
he too wished to tap
and crack
global contests.
So, you see, there is no rest
for, nor the restlessness of,
poetry, no one for whom profound
brevity is enough.
Perhaps, all this
just goes to show
that in our (film) world
it is violence that sells,
not verse,
not poetry.
‘मरणयात्री’ हे दिर्घकथेचे एक वांटो
The Death Traveller

THE DEATH TRAVELLER

TRANSLATED BY XAVIER COTA

H

agitated. “Oh! You too are sailing in
themselves starving, have anything to
to eat?” Can those who are
remained silent. “Have you brought
want?” Seeing her predicament, he
at him. “Who are you? What do you
asked. Squinting her eyes, she stared
her youthfulness, was struggling to sit
ground, the young woman flush with
had withered away on the barren
to be attempting to sit up. Just like a
tree bereft of leaves, someone seemed
Suddenly he noticed that underneath a
anyone. ‘Come, come’. Again the weak
was it his imagination! He couldn’t see
you come?’ Did he really hear it or
just thinking about it.

He heard someone say faintly, ‘Have
you come?’ Did he really hear it or
was it his imagination! He couldn’t see
anyone. ‘Come, come’. Again the weak
voice. He looked towards the sound. Suddenly he noticed that underneath a
tree bereft of leaves, someone seemed
to be attempting to sit up. Just like a
sturdy young coconut sapling which
had withered away on the barren
ground, the young woman flush with
her youthfulness, was struggling to sit
up. Unable to bear the pitiful sight, he
rushed to her side in a couple of
strides. “You?” She asked him blinking
her eyes. “You’re not the one…”

“Whom are you looking for?” he
asked. Squinting her eyes, she stared
at him. “Who are you? What do you
want?” Seeing her predicament, he
remained silent. “Have you brought
something to eat?” Can those who are
themselves starving, have anything to
eat?

However, his own hunger which
had fallen asleep all this while, was
aroused by her questions. He became
agitated. “Oh! You too are sailing in
my boat…” she said in a momentary
attempt at humour. The prospect of
company, had sparked a hope in her
and she attempted to sit up. Seeing her
struggle, he supported her back and
helped her.

“He had gone to fetch something to
eat, and I’m still waiting for him.”

“He will come,” he said reassuringly.
“Perhaps he will not come.” Her
disappointment was palpable in her
bleak tone. “How long back did he
go?” he inquired. “How long back?
Well! After he went, the moon came up
and now it’s morning…”

“Who is he? Your husband?”

“No, I don’t have a husband.” Pausing
a while, she added, “I had asked him
for something to eat. He promised that
he’d get me. But first, he wanted this-
She ran her hand over her midriff till it
stopped below. He felt pity for her. The
buttons on the young woman’s kameez
were undone. As he gently buttoned
her kameez, he asked, “Was there
no one else with you?” Struggling to
speak, she said that her mother had
been with her. On the way, a truck had
stopped which would take people to
the next town on payment of money.
Her mother had sent her in the truck
because she would reach nearer to
their village faster.

She couldn’t speak anymore. “I can’t. I feel drowsy. You speak. Tell me
your story,” she said as she put his
hand into hers, as if she feared that
he would go away. “I will tell you my
story. My father was a native of Bihar.
When he was still a youth, he had left
the village. He’d trained as a mason,
so when he came to Goa, he got a job.
He got married there. Then I was born.
Bapu got me admitted to school. He
saw that I got an education. I went to
college. But I couldn’t get a job. I might
have got one, but all of a sudden this
Covid happened. Covid…my Bapu…”

Gently she squeezed his hand. He
stopped.

“Don’t say anything more. Sing a
song for me…any song.” He wondered
what sort of a weirdo he was saddled
with. But in the next instant, he had
dusted off the thought. He had seen a
lot of movies. He’d heard hundreds of
songs. But he sang whatever came to
his mind. He Chhandmama, Are avo, Pare
avo, Nadiya kinare avo, Sona ki katari Ma
Dudh bhaat lene avo… As he was singing
the song, he was transported to his
childhood days. Bapu would sing the
lullaby in his native Bhojpuri to put
him to sleep. He too liked it a lot. He
felt that she had pressed his hand for
him to continue. He glanced at her.
She’d fallen asleep. He put his hand on
her head and ran his fingers through
her hair. He was wondering how she
was so peaceful, so he examined her
closely and found that her breathing
had stopped!

For a moment he was shocked. But,
what now? Should I just leave her
here and go? But as he looked in all
four directions till the furthest points,
nobody could be seen. Only that dog
was squatting a short distance away,
looking in this direction. He too was
hungry. Were he to get up and go, the
dog would rip off chunks of her flesh
and eat her up. He got up in search of
something to cover her. He couldn’t
find anything. But then, why cover
her up? She won’t come back to life?
He didn’t have the strength to bury
her. Why should he feel bad about the
dog eating her body? It’s better if the
body is eaten rather than letting it rot.
At least the dog will fill his stomach.
Otherwise, the dog’s death too will be
next on the list.

Hunger! To forget about hunger, he
had to keep walking. He got up hastily.
The sun was tilting to the west. Hoping
that as the sun’s rays turned gentle,
and he would be able to reach a safe
place, he set out once again.

**IFFI Screening Schedule – 26th November**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Film Title</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Me Captain</td>
<td>INOX Screen-I Panaji</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Aaraarar Aar</td>
<td>INOX Screen-I Panaji</td>
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<td>13:00</td>
<td>INOX Screen-II Porvorim</td>
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<td>15:00</td>
<td>Bosnian Pot</td>
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**DON’T MISS OUT**