

THE PEACOCK

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Illustration by Chloe Cordeiro

Born Free

BY DAMODAR MAUZO

“Dolphin Sightings Guaranteed” promise so many advertisements and signboards along the coastal tourism belt of Goa, where viewing these highly intelligent cetaceans has – quite paradoxically – become much less frequent from the beaches themselves, but also one of the most popular recreational activities, with scores of boats heading out into the Arabian Sea to chase them.

On my trips abroad, I have seen these magnificent animals being exploited for entertainment, and often compelled to jump high and perform tricks in penned-in tanks. It’s a degrading, repugnant practice, and I’ve always found these sights quite pathetic.

For those like me who grow up near the seaside – my village is Majorda in beautiful South Goa – we know dolphins as Bulguem in Konkani, and have always treated them as a highly protected species.

No Goan fisherman true to his salt would ever mistreat or kill dolphins. There are two species readily found in our waters, the relatively

elusive Indo-Pacific finless porpoise (*Neophocaena phocaenoides*), and the widely prevalent Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (*Sousa plumbea*) and none of us would even dream of disturbing them in any way. However, unfortunately, our traditional ‘ramponkars’ have been overtaken by mechanized fishing boats and trawlers, as the greed-ridden and heedlessly exploitative commercial seafood industry has extended its reach far into the Arabian Sea. They are unmindful of disturbing or even destroying the marine habitat.

Worryingly, to some extent, similar effects are also occurring from the “dolphin safari” outfits. In a recent study, the Bengaluru-based scientists from Indian Institute of Science revealed how the rise in fishing and touristic activities along Goa’s coastline have triggered significant behavioural changes in the protected species of the Indian Ocean humpback dolphin, which are otherwise absent in their undisturbed habitats. The researchers have attributed these distinct behavioural transitions

to the twofold extensive pressure exerted by intense fishing activity and the coastal tourism.

All this is a huge red flag to our state authorities who hold sway over these two prominent activities, fishing and tourism. It may be an exciting entertainment for tourists to chase dolphins, and enthusiastically spend hours to catch a sight of them surfacing in the waters off Goa. But for these sensitive, social animals it is clearly a nightmarish experience that they are tormented with every morning and evening. Scientists noted how dolphins “chased by up to twenty tourist boats were observed surfacing more frequently, likely due to exhaustion, increasing the risk of propeller injuries.”

There is something special about dolphins that have made them exceptionally human-friendly, and even curious about us. Of course, for many of us and certainly myself, the attraction is mutual. From my adolescent years on, I recall being fascinated by books like *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O’Dell, which left an everlasting impact on my thoughts. Later, in my friend Amitav

Ghosh’s brilliant *The Hungry Tide*, I realised how close these aquatic animals are to ourselves, and felt great anguish when learning more about their worsening plight, all over the world but especially in and near India.

Goa needs high-quality tourism, and I welcome all sensible, respectful and respectable visitors to our unique and lovely little state. There are so many wonderful things for everyone to do, see, and experience, but perhaps it is not the best idea to add chasing stressed-out dolphins to anyone’s bucket list. There are more eco-sensitive and carefully animal-friendly dolphin safaris available from some operators like Terra Conscious in North Goa, but I strongly believe we need to do much more. As a writer, I’ve tried to do my bit. My 2009 novel *Tsunami Simon* has an episode dealing with a dolphin of Goa – “the Brother of the Sea” – and I will take this opportunity to present it to you in tomorrow’s edition of *The Peacock*.

Damodar Mauzo won the 2022 Jnanpith Award

Prakash Magdum: “Waves Film Bazaar has been a real game-changer for Indian cinema”

BY CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY

This year, India's National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) turns 50. Once known principally as the funder of meaningful independent Indian cinema, it has over the past decade come closer to the common man than ever before, with major film restoration, distribution, market and outreach initiatives intersecting with the lives of thousands of film professionals and millions of filmgoers. *The Peacock* sat down for a chat with NFDC Managing Director Prakash Magdum who, after previous appointments as Registrar of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) and Director of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), took charge of NFDC in May 2025.

In recent years, many film-related organizations run by the Government of India, such as the Directorate of Film Festivals, Films Division, and the National Film Archive of India, have become consolidated under NFDC. How has that changed NFDC's sense of its mission?

These mergers have made NFDC an umbrella body involved with everything to do with cinema in India. Our prime objective remains that of supporting independent filmmakers to make meaningful stories. But we have many other goals today. Second is the preservation and restoration of our rich film heritage, and taking these classics back to the public. For instance, there are 18 Indian film classics restored under the National Heritage Film Mission (NHFM) being screened at IFFI this year, from Baburao Painter's *Murliwala* (1927) to Ritwik Ghatak's *Subarnarekha* (1965). Some of these films, we believe, also have commercial potential and are being re-released in theatres. Muzaffar Ali's *Umrao Jaan* (1981) was one such film this year. Preservation today includes the digitization of our film archives to protect our film heritage and hand it over to

future generations.

Third, NFDC promotes Indian cinema at home and around the world through initiatives like IFFI, Mumbai International Film Festival, and screenings at Indian embassies and film festivals worldwide. We also give grants to other film festivals within India. As technology changes, NFDC is changing with the times. This year, an extensive library of NFDC-funded Indian films have become available in the OTT space through NFDC—Cinemas of India, available as an add-on subscription

together, I believe, contribute to the all-round development of cinema culture.

In 2007, NFDC first began to organize the Waves Film Bazaar for filmmakers and producers alongside IFFI. What are NFDC's different initiatives at Waves today?

I would say that the Waves Film Bazaar has been a real gamechanger. Over the last few years, many Indian films from new voices that have caused a stir around the world have been nurtured in one way or another at the Film Bazaar. NFDC tries

The Viewing Room presents films which are recently completed or still in post-production, and are looking for sales and distribution partners. All these verticals play a very important role in shaping the future of Indian cinema.

IFFI this year has a wide variety of films, but also open-air screenings and a high-tech inflatable mobile theatre at Kala Academy. What is the thinking behind this?

India is the largest producer of film content in the world. But we do not have enough screens to match our production levels. There are 90,000 screens in China and 45,000 screens in the USA, but only 9000 screens in India. So we need to increase the screen intensity in the country and develop low-cost cinema screening like mobile theatres. Some of these experiments are on show at IFFI. In the end, our prime focus at this year's festival has been the delegate – to make sure that their needs are met both at the level of programming as well as logistics. The IFFI app has made it easy for delegates to choose between screenings and to book tickets. I'm happy to see that most of the shows are full. And there are many requests for repeat screenings.

You are a serious buff but not many know that you have also written a book, *The Mahatma on Celluloid* (2019). What drew you to this subject?

In his prime, Mahatma Gandhi was one of the most photographed and filmed men in the world. But the paradox was that Gandhi himself did not think very highly of films. He saw only two films in his life. This seemed to me to be a good subject for a book, particularly as I had access to so much rare footage of Gandhi during my time as the director of the National Film Archives of India. Even today, Gandhi continues to be an object of enduring interest for filmmakers, from biopics to films made on his principles and values.



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

on Amazon Prime Video. We're also looking to tie up with some inflight cinema services, and putting our content up on Waves, the government's own OTT platform. The goal of all these activities is to promote film viewership and film literacy in India and to make cinema more accessible to the people.

And finally, we promote film shooting in India through the India Cine Hub (ICH), a single-window facilitation and clearance mechanism for foreign filmmakers wanting to shoot in India. All these put

to give film professionals a platform at every stage of the process, from scripting to mentoring to gap funding to finding the right distributors and reaching out to the major festivals. We have initiatives like the Screenwriters' Lab, which gives screenwriters the opportunity to develop their screenplays under the mentorship of acclaimed international script and industry experts, and the Producers' Workshop and the Student Producers' Workshop, again with mentoring from domestic and international producers.

SHORT TAKES



In environmental filmmaking, you can move people through grief or you show them hope. Personally, I think the latter is a more effective way to create action.

Pooja Bhale
Educator
Pune



The culture, the people, the language and the honesty connect me to cinema. I think cinema is the bridge between the real and reel life.

Dr. Akhil Kumar
Producer
New Delhi



Pyasa, *Kaagaz Ke Phool*, and *Guide* are my favourite films of all time. They had already surpassed 2025 at that time.

Kanchan Awasthi
Actress
Mumbai



My favourite films are *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* and *Ardh Satya* because they are realistic and people can easily connect with the characters.

Rizwan Siddiqui
Filmmaker
Lucknow

Breaking the Bro-Code

BY PANKHURI ZAHEER DASGUPTA

Look closely at the rolling credits of most Indian films, and you will find a disquieting pattern. Behind the camera, in the heart of Indian Films, women continue to be absent from technical roles. At IFFI 2025, five women whose films are screening across sections spoke to me about the challenges of heading technical departments on a film. The conversations reveal a simple truth: The absence of women in film crews is not an oversight. The Indian film industry, as it exists today, seems almost actively designed to keep them out.

The exclusion begins in the classroom. Archana Ghangrekar, the cinematographer for *Shape of Momo* (2025), who trained at FTII, remembers the glaring mismatch in the gender ratio in her batch. "There were 2 girls in a batch of 14, it was the same across all technical departments; sound, editing and cinematography." Senior editor Jabeen Merchant, at IFFI 2025 with *Ru Ba Ru*, has observed the numbers for three decades and points to a worrying trend. "When I was a student at the Institute, no more than 10 per cent were women." Then something changed around the late 1990s and early 2000s. Indian filmmakers began to take note of the Hollywood trend of hiring exceptional editors like Helen Van Dongen, Thelma Schoonmaker and Margaret Sixel. Suddenly, there were more women editing students than hostel rooms at FTII could accommodate. Today it has reversed again. "It is pathetic. It has gone down again. Women are being pushed out of the field, and institutional decisions are to blame."

Navtika Sharma, editor of *Deepa Didi* (2025), was the only woman in her 2019 batch at FTII. She says "the next three batches had none. Curious, she investigated further to find "women candidates were not even applying." She traced it back to fear, reputation and visibility. Film institutes do not show women on their advertisements.

"If you look at NIFT and NID, there are always women in their ads. If you look at publicity material of FTII, you will often find men like Rajkumar Hirani or Naseeruddin Shah."

Film sets reflect the same pattern. Cinematographer Shelly Sharma (*Vimukt*, 2025) talks of the assumptions that accompany women crew and jeopardise their careers. "How will she shoot Kumbh Mela? We need to hire a man. People are so scared of women technicians. Not just men, even women are scared of women technicians." Sound designer Ankita Purkayastha (*Shape of Momo*, 2025) puts it equally bluntly, "People are just reluctant to rely entirely

on a female sound designer for a big project. The kind of work that comes to me is more independent films with small-scale budgets."

Gender stereotypes infiltrate the industry. Sharma mentions a well-known Bollywood director who recently said he prefers women editors for their "mother's instincts." She finds this insulting. "That is not how my editing should be defined. Whether I am a mother or I eventually become one should not be your reason to take me on."

What is heartening, though, is that every woman I spoke to was already envisioning or implementing change. Shelly Sharma recommends on hiring reforms where women's portfolios are placed on the table by default. "You have to start telling young women that their future can be here. How does one create a safe environment in the film industry? By having more women in the room," Navtika Sharma insists. Ghangrekar specifically mentions the empowering role that the Indian Women

Cinematographer Collective plays. She feels it is because of the collective "that junior women cinematographers do not feel left out the way that I did."

Merchant frames the issue at the level of the entire ecosystem, not any individual. "If it is a systemic problem, then the system has to intervene in some way. Take cognisance of it and change the way we work, the rights we give, the facilities we grant people."

These women working behind the camera are not asking for special treatment or concessions. "We are not incapable in any way," Purkayastha repeats this twice. What they are asking for is better training, mentorship, opportunities and fairness. They are also asking for fair wages, clean toilets, humane working hours, and the dignity to say they are unwell without risking their careers. They are asking to be trusted to be in positions of power. The question is whether Indian cinema will catch up or will it keep pretending that physical strength, night shifts and bro-codes are logical reasons to keep women out.

Illustration by Chloe Cordeiro



SHORT TAKES



India has always been known for spiritual science and metaphysics, but that side of Indian culture has not been explored enough in Indian cinema.

Anand Annamalai
Director
Chennai



I make movies about human trafficking and the physically challenged in my native Mising language. Women are very free in Assam; we are a matrilineal society.

Bhawani Doley
Filmmaker
Assam



I genuinely enjoy the work produced by Weta FX. I really like the anime film *Princess Mononoke*, which has become very popular now.

Atharva Dokey
Film Student
Mumbai



There are a few mainstream films about the queer community, but they are mainly focused on pain, or struggle. But there's so much more to it; there's also a lot of joy.

Ishita Pradeep
Filmmaker
Hyderabad

Uttera Singh: “I thrive in chaos”

Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

BY PRAGYA BHAGAT

What does it take for an Indore born-and-raised girl like Uttera Singh to end up in Los Angeles? Pride in her hometown, for starters. “Every opportunity I get, I tell everyone Indore is the cleanest city in the country. It’s kind of obnoxious, how competitive us Indoris get about cleanliness. We even have a song about it.”

Behind Singh’s bubbly exterior lies a powerhouse of talent. She studied acting at New York’s Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute, and completed her Masters in Fine Arts from the University of Southern California’s (USC) School of Cinematic Arts, where she is currently an adjunct professor. She comes to IFFI with her directorial debut, *Pinch* (2025), a mother-daughter dramedy anchored in a sexual assault.

“In one of the Q and As for *Pinch*, somebody asked me, *Why make a dramedy about assault? Isn’t MeToo a bit too much?* To which I replied, *Stop raping us and I’ll stop talking about it.* We aren’t collectively here to hate men. Let’s not deny the reality of violence against people; it’s mostly women.”

On November 19, 2025, the World Health Organization and UN Partners

released a landmark report claiming that nearly 1 in 3 women—that’s an estimated 840 million women globally—have experienced partner or sexual violence in their life. This statistic, unfortunately, does not surprise me. What does surprise me is that this is the first report that includes national and regional estimates of sexual violence by someone other than a partner.

“*Pinch* was intense, especially when you have conversations with people every single day around assault. Countless women have come up to me after the film’s screening—including in India, Germany, and the United States—and said this is their story. It’s not an Indian issue. I mean, the Mexican president, she got groped two weeks ago.”

There’s no right way of fighting injustice, Singh tells *The Peacock*. “You have to find your own way.” Singh’s way relied on the power of her community, spread across Indore, New York, and California. “I get goosebumps thinking about it. *Pinch* was filmed in Indore. My best friend, my dad, my cousins, they all came through. I was very lucky to have access to locations there. My film school community from LA came through. From the colorist to the composer, everyone

offered their expertise because of the trust they had in me and faith in the story I was telling. My mother literally held my hand on the toughest day of shoot.”

I wonder if *Pinch* is inspired by Singh’s own relationship with her mother. “Sadly, she passed away in 2011, but she was a feminist icon in Indore. She started a school there. She was a badass, all about bringing education to our town. A very witchy approach to learning; she didn’t adhere to rules. Basically, she was a wild woman. I grew up with that sort of woman in charge. She never doubted me. That’s what I miss the most about her. I lost a person who trusted me unconditionally.”

Humor is Singh’s balm through both art and life. *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994) was her favorite film growing up; it’s the reason she decided to make movies. “I wouldn’t let anybody sing ‘Didi Tera Devar Deewana’. It was my song.” Singh is my kind of funny. Witty with a dash of wisdom. Silliness without the self-deprecation.

“We never wanted *Pinch* to be just focused on assault. Terrible things happen to people while we are living our full lives. Humor is still present in our film, because life is absurd. Shit will happen and then you’re running into the

funniest thing that’s happened to you. The scenes where we address assault are sensitive and careful, but there’s also burp jokes and poop jokes and all the madness of living.”

This is Singh’s second year teaching at USC. “My students are mostly college freshmen and sophomores and high school kids taking Advanced Placement courses for college credit. I love it, because they are not jaded yet. They still love film. We need the excitement of telling a story. I learn more by teaching than I did by being in school.”

Though she has acted in *Pinch*, Singh begins her directorial journey with this film. “I thrive in chaos. I’m always looking for newness in my life. The other day I was thinking about being a florist in Paris. I want to do it all.” Already, she refuses to be put in a box. “My next film is about vampires.”

Regardless of the genre of the stories she tells, Singh wants her audience to leave the theater feeling “unhinged joy. No matter how hard things get, we can still smile. There’s enough sadness in the world. When my mother died, four other people also died in my family. By the end of it, the cremation ground folks knew us a little too well. They were like, *you’re here again?* That’s so funny to me.”

SHORT TAKES



I really like *500 Days of Summer*. They used a lot of songs by *The Smiths* and it really added to the vibe.

Siddharth Pandey
Filmmaker
Delhi



Business, money and incentives matter, but if we forget that our job is to enable the telling of real stories, we are missing the point.
Jacqueline Rainers-Setai
Production Manager
South Africa



I’m most proud of being a part of a program, where we taught 60 young filmmakers in Nigeria that filmmaking has a business side if you want to survive.
Yemi Daramola
Film Distributor
United Kingdom



Acting for me is about learning the craft and not getting typecast - using different parts of my own experience and what I observe to bring a full range of emotions to each character.
Komal Daga
Actor
Los Angeles

Sainath Uskaikar: “You can’t teach someone to love films.”

BY SAACHI D'SOUZA

Every sentence from Sainath Uskaikar lands with the weight of someone who has already stripped the unnecessary out of his life. “No one can teach you to love films,” he says. “It needs to come from within.” That single conviction—uncompromising, unfussy—is what shaped him long before attending the prestigious Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), long before his films began travelling the world.

Uskaikar’s entry into cinema began in the middle of an engineering track he already knew he didn’t want. “I was preparing for JEE. I wasn’t enjoying it,” he says. A single film changed the axis: *Dead Poets Society* (1989). “When he says the line, ‘But poetry, beauty, romance, love—these are what we stay alive for,’ that was the first time I resonated with a film.”

That shift opened a door. He began watching films which questioned the world rather than decorating it. Director Umesh Kulkarni’s work hit hardest. “He was raising the questions I was feeling as a 12th standard student,” Sainath says. He then confesses, “I conceived the 60-Second Film Festival (Creative Minds of Tomorrow) selfishly—just to get in touch with Umesh Kulkarni.” It worked. Kulkarni became a mentor and a friend.

Leaving Goa for FTII was the real rupture. “I’d never gone out of Goa. Suddenly, shit got real.” But he arrived with one rule already carved out: “If I have the power to make films, all my films will be in Konkani.” FTII had told him he was the first Goan direction student. He didn’t confirm it—“I’m not checking”—but he internalised the responsibility anyway. His documentary, short fiction film, and diploma film are all in Konkani.

Is he a Goan filmmaker? He rejects the easy tag. “I am a filmmaker from Goa,” he says, echoing what an Iranian



Photos by Assavri Kulkarni

filmmaker once told him: identity is birthplace, not definition. Yet nothing dissolves his connection to home. After 18-hour days in Mumbai, it’s the fish curry for dinner that fulfils him. “It relieves me. You cannot get Goa out of you,” he says.

This push-and-pull—identity without romanticisation—runs through *Wagro* (2022), his hit short that broke widely. He wrote it after a breakup tied to caste. “[In the film] I

said, caste cannot be apparent. It has to be passive. But it has to be there,” he says. The film’s eight minutes hold an entire power structure: a boy asking a girl to come with him, a girl unable to cross the boundaries around her, and a dignity that collapses under something larger than feeling. “It’s about dignity in a relationship,” says Uskaikar. “Dignity is not just emotion. It’s the power structures in society.”

Uskaikar’s latest, *My Dad Invented*

the Vada Pav, began at Virtual Bharat, where he worked after FTII. The assignment seemed simple: document a cultural icon. But “I was shocked when I read about it,” he says. The *pav* that makes *vada pav* has roots in Goa.

Another detail that startled him: the son now running the stall, with a commerce background, speaks to Sainath in English. “He stands there just to keep his father’s legacy alive,” he says. “It’s not an easy thing.”

Then a scene: “At 8:30 pm, a municipal van comes. The hot frying oil is lifted by his cousin with a cloth. The whole shop disappears. When the van goes, everything is brought back, and they start again.” He pauses. “A person who invented the vada pav—his son has to go through this.”

When he talks about the future of Goan cinema, Uskaikar doesn’t soften anything. “Short films survive on passion,” he says. “Features need finances. [Even] one rupee spent on making a film lasts forever.”

His latest project is a film on Waa, a Sufi music form from Kutch, of which there are only four living practitioners. “If they’re gone, the music is gone,” he says. The team behind the film is a patchwork: a Goan director, Malayali cinematographer, Telugu-Brazilian sound designer, and Marwari producer. “This is Indian culture,” he says. “It’s heart.” He shows me a short clip—and it’s true: it is all heart.

Throughout our conversation, the undercurrent stays the same: human stories, fragile traditions, cultural edges that fray if not held. I joke that this is the Goanness in him. “You can’t forget this land,” he says of Goa. And whether he accepts the label or not, that sensibility runs through everything he makes—the refusal to let stories vanish without a fight.

My Dad Invented the Vada Pav is showing on November 25th, INOX Screen 1, Panaji at 11 am.

SHORT TAKES



A lot of people brush *Pacific Rim* aside as yet another commercial sci-fi film, but it’s a really wonderful watch with a beautiful plot.

Tanya Tavora
Editor
Goa



Regional cinema depicts the real India. The more authentic and hyperlocal we are, the more global we can be.

Ram Patnaik
Founder
Mumbai



Every year IFFI gets bigger and better. I think we can actually compete with Cannes and the Oscars; we’re almost there.

Swati Bhat
PR Strategist
Mumbai



Cinema for me is emotional catharsis. Films like *Jojo Rabbit* and *Joyland* make me cry every time, and I keep recommending *Joyland* to everyone.

Bhuwan Somani
Director
Mumbai

Ioana Mischie: “My highest goal is to use cinema as a trigger”

BY KINJAL SETHIA

Ioana Mischie spent a lot of her childhood with her grandmother, whom she also considers her spiritual guru. One of the things that she learnt from her while growing up in the Arcani commune of Gorj in Romania, was a piece of deep cultural ethos ‘Haz de neaz’—to find humour in tragedy. This has been one of the core philosophies guiding Mischie’s creative career, including the writing, direction and production of *Catane* (2025), which has its world premiere at IFFI today.

A Fulbright fellow and innovative artist who uses the word Futurist in her Instagram bio, Mischie is involved in transmedia projects and sees *Catane* as part of an anthology of a series of feature films.

Elaborating on what she means by transmedia storytelling, Mischie tells *The Peacock* about Henry Jenkins, and how the idea is to carry the narrative arc across different mediums to offer a unified and coordinated experience. For instance, for *Government of Children* (2019), she interviewed 100 children about how they would redefine the next century. Then she used virtual reality to digitally created some of the futures the children imagined. The third part of this project was engaging with policy-makers about these future possibilities in future. Mischie says “this is part of my highest goal. To have some form of social impact with a film, to use cinema as a trigger towards a certain outcome.”

Mischie says she made *Catane* because “I looked at it as a metaphor for what is happening in Romania right now. We are in such a rush to judge others, unfriending people who hold opinions different from us. Whereas, I feel we should be more curious and understanding of differences. There should be room for debate and innovation.”

She says *Catane* is one of the first green films produced in Romania, “in that we consciously made choices to avoid



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

polluting the raw beauty of the place. We have to understand the interconnectedness between things. This kind of spiritual relationship with nature weaves through the surreal tone in the film.” She has also repurposed elements from set design to reduce wastage and preserve the cultural significance of these items.

There are too many stereotypes about Romania, says Mischie, “people either look at the Roma community as smugglers, or Romania as a land of wild natural beauty. They don’t look at the nuanced and complicated social landscape. We have people like the modern sculptor Constantin Brâncuși, or the innovator Traian Vuia. Romanians are anchored in the idea of scarcity, and so we are very ingenious in finding solutions

with simple means. We have to rely solely on our creativity and persistence to realise a vision.”

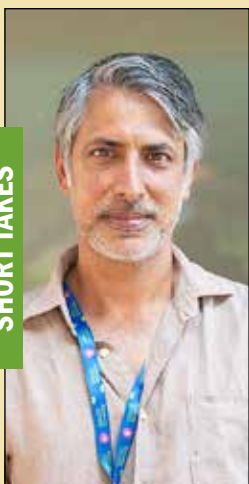
Mischie feels that the role of the artist is to portray the nuances of a situation, look at it from multiple perspectives and not delve into dramatic clichés. “In Hollywood films, there is a strict contrast between good and bad most of the time. So, I feel, what we need is a European sensibility to storytelling which is very craft oriented and poetic, but also learn from the American drive on how to make a film that will reach the global masses. Without this ambitious attitude, European films disappear. They win awards at film festivals, but then disappear after a few months.”

There were once hundreds of state-funded cinema theatres in Romania, but

Mischie says that number has come down to less than 20, which is catastrophic for the culture of film making. The only hope is shopping malls which have multi-screen theatres, but even there, the audiences want to watch American films. She says it is now “very hard to produce, direct and distribute a Romanian film in Romania. It is also difficult to distribute across the continent in Europe because each country has its own rules. It is also expensive to dub films in different European languages. I am very thankful for this premiere at a festival like IFFI, because it will help me reach out to international distributors.”

Catane will be screened at Maquinez Palace- Screen 1 at 2 pm today.

SHORT TAKES



If I’m free and if I’m in India then IFFI is the place to be. I work in the film industry, so everyone I want to meet is here and that’s why I come.

Viraj Singh
Cinematographer
Goa



Watching stories like *Thelma and Louise*, where women discover their own freedom, feels like seeing my own voice and experience represented on screen.

Mrdu
Screenwriter
Mumbai



I have always been a storyteller, whether in codes and algorithms or through cinema; the passion that drove me in tech pushes me in film.

Ravi Verma
Producer
Pune



Acting taught me how to put myself in different shoes, and that helped me learn new skills quickly.

Pallavi Singh
Actor
Mumbai

Jigar Nagda: "Issues around me shape the stories I want to tell"

BY SHERRY FERNANDES

“Every day, the mountain disappears a little,” Mumbai-based filmmaker Jigar Nagda tells *The Peacock*. “After five years, you look up and realise an entire hill has crumbled.”

In the rugged, dusty folds of Rajasthan’s Aravalli range—one of the world’s oldest mountain regions, dating back nearly 3.2 billion years, older than the Himalayas and older than the Alps, lies history almost unimaginable in scale. To understand their age: if the Aravallis had eyes, they would have watched the Earth form its oceans, seen dinosaurs come and go, and endured five mass extinctions. These hills have survived everything—except us.

Here, childhood often looks different. Children grow up breathing dust from mining trucks, watching hills disappear one blasted contour at a time. But they also carry within them something fragile and fierce: a worldview rooted in an instinctive urge to guard the land that sustains them. Jigar Nagda’s *Whispers of the Mountain* (2025) captures this perfectly.

Inspired by his ancestral village near Udaipur, the film follows 12-year-old Ragu, played by Rajveer Rao, who himself has grown up around the mining belt—a mute boy whose bond with the mountains is as unspoken as it is profound. His father, Tilak, a tea stall owner hardened by loss and the pressures of survival, sees those same hills as a source of income through relentless mining. A diagnosis of silicosis makes Ragu drop out of school to run his father’s tea stall. In a land where it hasn’t rained in years and drinking water is scarce, he rebels in his own way—planting saplings in the dusty, barren landscape with the little water he manages to save for each tender shoot.

To learn more about the current on-ground reality, *The Peacock* spoke with Neelam Ahluwalia, founder member of *People for Aravallis Collective*. Ahluwalia says “a lot of rural communities living in Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat in the Aravalli districts are now against

mining since they’ve seen the devastation caused by these activities. Stones just fall into the villages during the time of blasting of the hills because the mining leases are given so close to human habitation areas.”

Nagda discovered filmmaking at 20 and never looked back. Over the past 15 years, he has shaped his cinematic voice rooted in realism and empathy. His first film, also based in Udaipur, *A Boy Who Dreamt of Electricity* (2024) was about a young boy who defied norms and installed a solar panel to light his home. “Since COVID, I’ve observed my village much more closely than I ever did growing up, and the issues I see around me now shape the stories I want to tell,” says Nagda. Across his work, he returns to one essential truth: what we often

Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

call “sustainability” is a term coined in comfortable, urban spaces. On the ground, it is far more complicated. For many rural communities, the same activities that damage the environment are also their only source of livelihood. Sustainability, then, becomes less of an abstract ideal and more of a daily negotiation for survival.

Whispers of the Mountain resonates powerfully because Ragu is not an isolated cinematic character. India’s landscapes, be it mining belts, forest fringes or river valleys, are full of real children like him. In the Northeast of India, youth trained by programmes like Green Hub India become community filmmakers and conservation ambassadors. The Mud on Boots Project, initiated by Sanctuary Nature Foundation, empowers grassroots conservationists across India to protect their local biodiversity through micro-grants and mentorship. These children do not wear uniforms or wield scientific equipment; they carry seeds, notebooks, and inherited wisdom passed down generations. They are conservationists not in title, but in instinct.

Ragu mirrors them all—children who live closest to the land yet often farthest from formal recognition. For them, conservation isn’t a campaign; it’s a way of belonging. Nagda’s film honours their silence and resilience. *Whispers of the Mountain* is more than a story about a boy; it becomes a tribute to the unsung protectors of India’s threatened terrains. Like me, if you often find yourself wondering who will save our forests from being shaved away, the answer, unexpectedly, is often the hope and desire of a child—someone not yet beaten down by systemic injustices. This film is a reminder that nature heroes are not always scientists in remote jungles studying frogs. Sometimes, they are children in dusty villages.

Whispers of the Mountain will be screened at INOX Screen-II in Panaji on 24 November 2025 at 4:30 P.M. and INOX Screen-II in Porvorim on 25 November at 5:15 P.M.



SHORT TAKES



I started as a painter who was always driven by stories. After watching *12 Angry Men*, I began making short films, which eventually led to my first feature.
Vishal Patnaik
Director
Jeypore



Cinema lives in us all and all of us are actors, playing roles as we grow.
Neeha Garg
Actor
Mumbai



I really like *Dallas Buyers Club*; I love Matthew McConaughey’s acting in the film. I think Goa is the best place for IFFI.
Rishabh Joshi
Actor
Mumbai



My favourite film of all time is *Mayabazar*. The narration and the screenplay is par excellence, better than Hollywood films that are talked about in film schools.
Shivani Naidu
Film Director
Hyderabad

**Power porters of Goa**

We always associate men with carrying heavy things, while women labourers go unnoticed, as though we subconsciously don't want to acknowledge their heavy lifting. That whole narrative is turned on its head in Margao - the bustling market capital of South Goa - where professional women porters called Bhadels have been shouldering huge loads for at least two centuries. This graphic artwork is rendered in my version of the style of contemporary American artist Nate William, whose work I have come to admire recently.

— Govit Morajkar

BY SACHIN CHATTE

It is with a degree of reluctance that one discusses *Sholay* (1975). After all, there is no piece of trivia or detail about the film that is not widely known, and enthusiasts have already lapped it up. Questions such as, 'What is Gabbar Singh's father's name?' or 'How do we better recognize Hari Singh's (in)famous son?' and 'Which actor portrays two characters in the film?' have become part of quiz folklore. (The answers to the first two questions are obvious; regarding the third, it is Mushtaq Merchant, who plays both the train driver and the gentleman whose bike Jai and Veeru steal in the song 'Yeh Dosti').

Years ago, during a panel discussion at IFFI on the greatest Indian film ever created, I opted to speak about this classic, as the cultural influence it has exerted is unmatched. Whether it is 'Tera kya hoga Kaalia?' or 'Basanti, in kutton ke samne mat nachna,' the list is extensive. Mac Mohan, who portrays the character of Sambha, utters only three words throughout the entire film – yet nearly everyone is familiar with those three words – 'Poore pachas hazaar'.

This speaks volumes about our culture and language, particularly regarding how dialogues are utilized in Indian cinema, especially Hindi cinema, and how they become ingrained in our collective consciousness. I often remark, somewhat humorously, that between *Deewar* (1975) and *Sholay*, there are more memorable lines than in the entirety of Hollywood's filmography.

Considering that it lacked complete originality, and exhibited influences from various Western films, *Sholay* still succeeded in making a significant impression. *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) drew inspiration from Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), with the Japanese filmmaker making that film as a homage to the American Westerns of the 1930s and 1940s. The scene depicting the massacre of Thakur's family in *Sholay* is directly taken from Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), where the McBain family meets a similar fate.

However, *Sholay* offered much more than mere borrowed elements. It showcased camaraderie between Jai

(Amitabh Bachchan, for those unfamiliar) and Veeru (Dharmendra), a memorable antagonist (Amjad Khan), a retired police officer (Sanjeev Kumar) on a quest for vengeance, a talkative young woman (Hema Malini), and another character who suffered a tragedy, portrayed by Jaya Bhaduri. Salim-Javed, also introduced us to

Soorma Bhopali, the 'Angreezon ke zamane ke jailor', Hari Ram Nai (Keshto Mukherjee, in the role of the barber in the jail), Mausi, Imaam Sahab, and everyone is even familiar with Dhanno, the horse.

Every aspect of filmmaking harmonized beautifully in the movie—from the moment the train arrives at the station

accompanied by the strumming of the guitar in R.D. Burman's background score to the final scene—everything aligns seamlessly. Burman not only crafted remarkable songs but also delivered an outstanding background score; the scene featuring 'chal dhanno aaj teri basanti ki izzat ka sawaal hain' would likely not have the same resonance without the music, particularly the 'Relā' on the tabla by Pandit Samta Prasad, which added depth to the moment.

In 2023, in an informal setting, I had the chance to talk to Javed Akhtar who co-wrote the film with Salim Khan. I asked him whether there were any elements they had written that did not make it into the film, or if there were scenes that had been filmed but ultimately excluded. He responded negatively, stating that everything they had written was included and nothing that was filmed was omitted.

I then asked about the Qawwali that was recorded (Chand sa koi chera) and its intended placement in the movie. He replied, "That song was never shot." He explained that it was meant to appear at the beginning of the film, and although he did not elaborate, I suspect it would have been around the Soorma-Bhopali episode, given that the style of the Qawwali originates from the Bhopal region.

He continued, "However, there is one line in the film that was omitted, and it has been nearly 50 years since the film was made, yet I still regret that it was cut." After a brief pause, he mentioned that when Gabbar Singh declares, "Ab aayega mazaa," and vows to annihilate Ramgarh, the complete dialogue was, "Ab aayega mazaa, Ramgarh ka who haal kar dunga ki kisi bhi ghar pe ith pe ith nahi dikhegi" (I'll ensure that you won't see a house with any bricks left). "It was one my favorite line, but it was removed."

The film's climax was also altered after the censors refused to approve it; however, on the 26th, when a 4K restored version is screened, we will finally witness it with the original ending, as it was intended. The film will also be re-released in theaters soon. After all, it continues to be the greatest story ever told.

Sholay is showing on 26th Nov 6.00pm INOX I, Panjim.

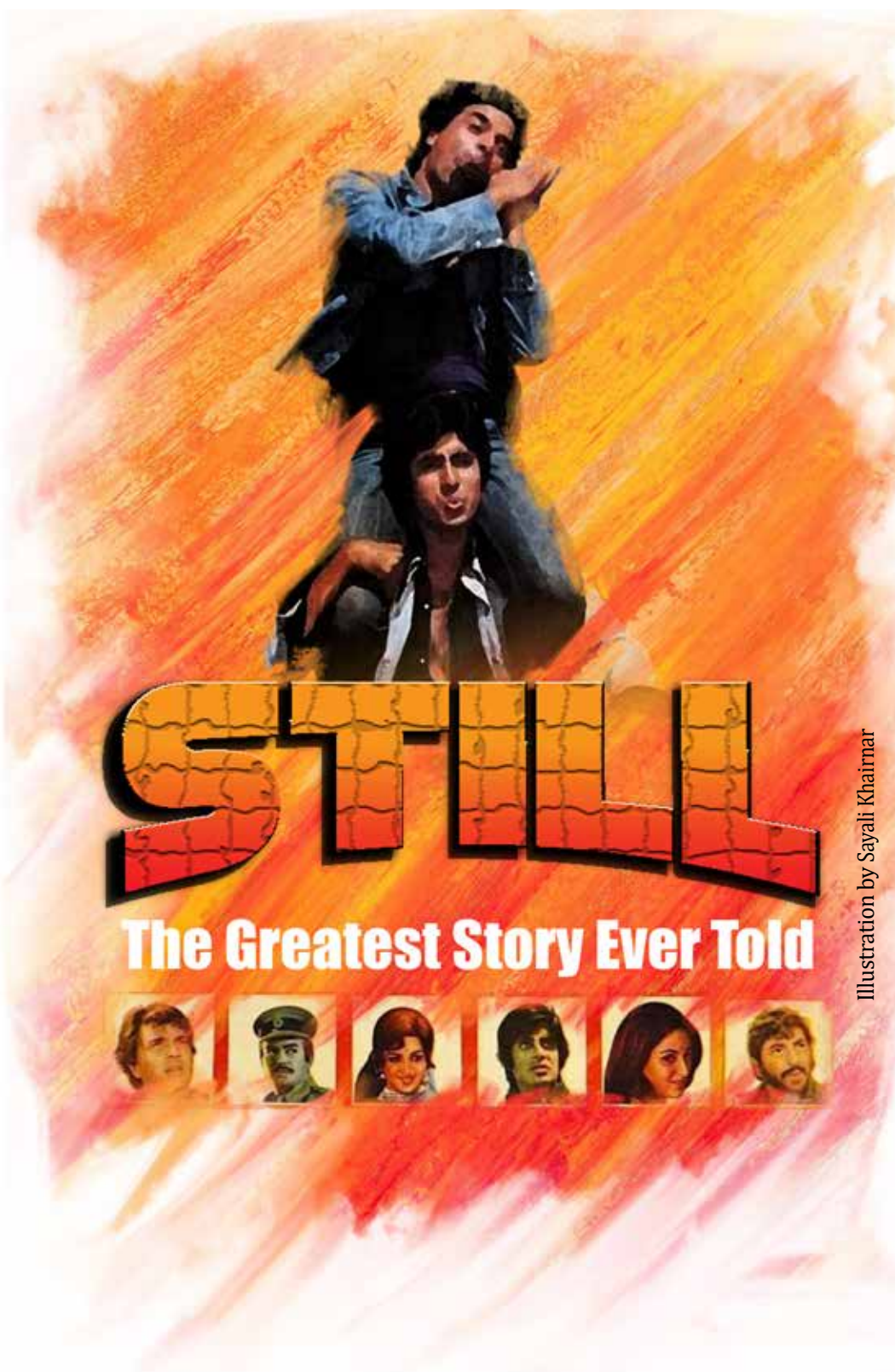


Illustration by Sayali Khairnar

SHORT TAKES



Cinema today is no longer bound by geography; a rooted story told honestly anywhere can resonate everywhere.

Kaushik Das
Producer
Odisha



My purpose is to bring Bengali literature out of its boundaries and showcase the depth of this culturally rich region to national and international audiences.
Debaline Mukhopadhyay
Founder
Kolkata



My favourite movie is *Sholay*, and it moves me because it depicts Indian emotions so well.

Ranjit Mohanty
Founder
Bhubaneswar



I love SRK; we've distributed a lot of his films in Germany. *Om Shanti Om* is one of my favorites. I like the emotion in it, but it's also so fun, exciting, and surprising.

Stephan Holl
Film Distributor
Germany



Illustration by Sayali Khairnar

Cinematic Connections

BY VIVEK MENEZES

We have shot past the midpoint of the 56th International Film Festival of India, this lovely laid-back banquet of world cinema, and Team Peacock is again inspired by the co-operation and collaboration we can see all around us. Social media tells only about the opposite – the world is in flames, fracturing, building walls and unleashing hate – but here we only see the precise opposite in operation. Co-production, international operations, intense engagement across every barrier. This is the power of cinema.

Although he is not a big part of this year's festival, our thoughts often return to the great Indian auteur Satyajit Ray, the subject of today's lovely original cover painting by Shilpa Mayenkar Naik, who has painted the master in the blue-and-white aesthetic of the iconic azulejos, the Islamic-Iberian ceramic tiles that have been used in Goa for centuries.

Ray showed the way for Indian films, but he was the antithesis of provincial. The initial sparks for his cinematic creativity, he took pains to describe, came from watching movies from around the world, "I learned mainly from watching films – mostly American – of directors like Ford, Capra, Lubitsch, Wyler, Wilder and Houston." Later on, of course, so many international film-makers would go on to cite Ray for inspiring their own work: Martin Scorsese, Abbas Kiarostami, James Ivory, even Christopher Nolan.

In an interesting 1958 essay entitled *Film-Making As I Understand It*, written when he was still in his 30s and after having made precisely two films, Ray acknowledged "influences, direct and indirect, have contributed to the totality of my vision." He said "I have been deeply impressed

by the work of directors like Chaplin, De Sica, Renoir, Clair, Pudovkin and Eisenstein. I think Renoir's *The Southerner* (1945) had a great influence on my conception of *Pather Panchali* (1955)." But it wasn't just sitting in cinemas that fed his vision: "I consider the two years I spent at Santiniketan under Nandalal Bose to be the most fruitful of my formative years. His way of looking at nature, his profound humanisms, the documentary humanism in Cartier-Bresson's photography also taught me to look at people and places selectively."

There is such an interesting paradox here – and Team Peacock feels the same thing very keenly every IFFI – because it is only by embracing the entire world that we can begin to understand our own neighborhoods in real depth and perspective. Ray explained this very well in an interview with BD Garg in 1966: "film-making is exciting because it brings me closer to my country and my people. Each film contributes to a process of self-education, making me conscious of the enormous diversity of life around me. I find myself trying, through my films, to trace the underlying pattern that binds this life together."

Ray said he got to know rural Bengal much better after making *Pather Panchali*, and "my own city of Calcutta, too, I know much better now that I've made a film about it. It isn't quite like any other city in the world to look at. Yet, people are born here and live and make love and earn bread as they do in London and New York and Tokyo. And this is what amazes you most and makes you feel indebted to the cinema: this discovery that although you have roots here – in Bengal, in India – you are at the same time part of a large plan, a universal pattern."

Pragyaverse

by Pragya Bhagat

it takes a village

of movers and shakers
and meaning makers
to birth wonder
let's remember
(just for a moment)
the crossroad of a single choice
then another
and another
the sedimentation of inevitable failure
the excavation required to try again
then again
and again
the currency of trust
its barter and exchange
the pass of belief from one palm
to the next
to the next
to the next

56th International Film Festival
Schedule - 24th November 2025

INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1

9:00 AM
FIUME O MORTE!

11:45 AM
THE VISUAL FEMINIST
MANIFESTO

2:30 PM
LITTLE TROUBLE GIRLS

5:00 PM
SIRÂT

8:00 PM
PULP FICTION

INOX PANJIM - AUDI 2

9:30 AM
PIPLANTRI: A TALE OF
ECO FEMINISM

BATTLEFIELD

12:45 PM
HAMSAFAR

BAROBABU

4:30 PM
RU BA RU

WHISPERS OF
THE MOUNTAINS

8:00 PM
THUDARUM

INOX PANJIM - AUDI 3

9:15 AM
TWO SEASONS,
TWO STRANGERS

11:30 AM
K-POPER

1:45 PM
FRÄNK

5:30 PM
GUSTAK ISHQ

8:30 PM
SHAKTI

INOX PANJIM - AUDI 4

9:45 AM
PARTY

12:30 PM
HANA

3:00 PM
GHAR

4:00 PM
RUDHIRVANA

7:15 PM
A TEACHER'S GIFT

9:30 PM
THE INVISIBLE HALF

MAQUINEZ PALACE
AUDI 1

9:00 AM
CMOT SLOT

2:00 PM
CATANE

4:15 PM
CID

7:30 PM
PYAASA

ASHOK AUDI

10:00 AM
ON YOUR LAP

1:00 PM
LUCKY LU

1:00 PM
LUCKY LU

4:00 PM
GODS OF STONE

7:00 PM
RAINS OVER BABEL

SAMRAT AUDI

10:30 AM
SHE BOARS

1:30 PM
THE MASTERMIND

4:30 PM
BAASHHA

7:30 PM
REEDLAND

INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 1

10:00 AM
KONTINENTAL '25

1:00 PM
RENOIR

4:00 PM
SENTIMENTAL VALUE

7:00 PM
SKIN OF YOUTH

INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 2

10:15 AM
CHAMBAL

PIRANTHANAAL
VAZHTHUKAL

1:15 PM
DRUSHYA ADRUSHYA

4:15 PM
WHERE THE HEART IS

VIMUKT

7:15 PM
CHHAAVA

INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 3

10:30 AM
MIROIRS NO 3

1:30 PM
YAKUSHIMA'S ILLUSION

4:30 PM
DEAR STRANGER

7:30 PM
REFLECTION IN A
DEAD DIAMOND

INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 4

10:45 AM
I ONLY REST IN THE STORM

4:45 PM
BLACK OX

7:45 PM
THE BOTANIST

RAVINDRA BHAVAN MADGAON

4:00 PM
PIRANTHANAAL
VAZHTHUKAL

MAGIC MOVIEZ PONDA

6:00 PM
PIRANTHANAAL
VAZHTHUKAL



In today's exclusive *The Peacock* cover painting, Shilpa Mayenkar Naik pays tribute to the great auteur Satyajit Ray – besides directing his famous movies, he was also an author, lyricist, magazine editor, illustrator, and music composer – in the blue-and-white aesthetic of Azulejos, the iconic Islamic-Iberian tin-glazed ceramic tilework that spread out from the erstwhile Al-Andalus throughout Spain and Portugal to their colonies in North America, South America, the Phillippines, Lusophone East Africa, Timor and Macau. Here in Goa, we have been using them for hundreds of years.



PEACOCK PICKS



Fiume O Morte
9.00 AM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1

THE VISUAL FEMINIST
MANIFESTO
11.45 AM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1



LITTLE TROUBLE GIRLS
2:30 PM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1

SIRÂT
5:00 PM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1



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