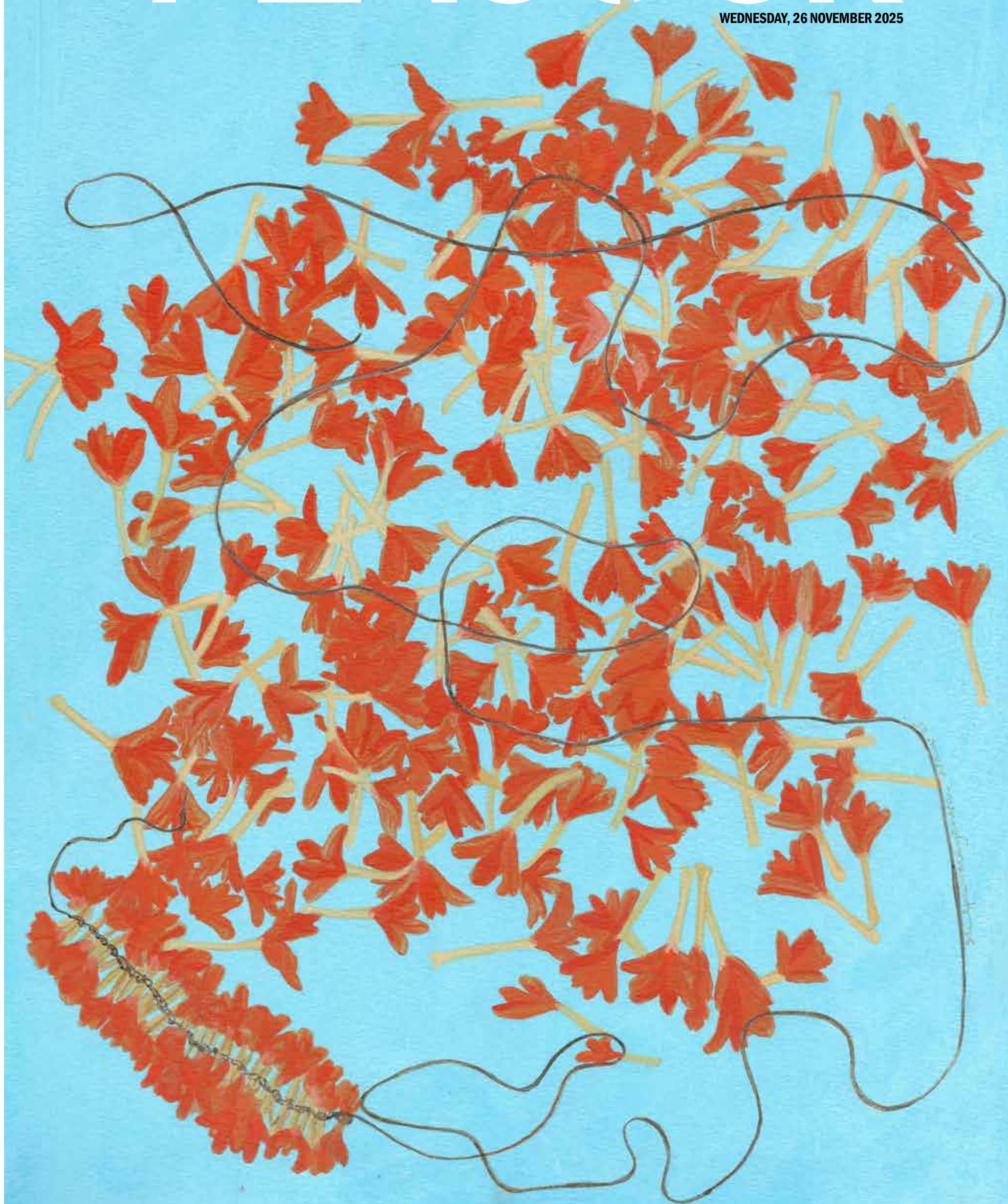


THE PEACOCK

WEDNESDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2025



रासभर परबीं प्रशांतीक

BY DAMODAR MAUZO

Goa has an abundance of talent in almost every field. To cite just one example, Fish Curry Rice Productions is a small-time enterprise started by three ambitious and enthusiastic artists. This is not an eatery, but a trio of aspiring filmmakers who graduated from the Vinsan Academy of Films and Media in Goa.

Manguirish Bandodkar, Alton Coutinho and Aresh Naik never restricted themselves to any particular segment. All three were capable of adorning any cap, be it of Director, DoP, Editor or Scriptwriter. They ventured together upon their first short *Shinvor* (2023), depicting how shades of rains closely reflect human nature. They completed the film despite the hindrances of COVID and the film was screened at IFFI. However, they could not get entry for the Goa State Film Festival because they had not obtained the censorship certification. It is odd that the film can be screened at the IFFI, but not our

own state festival, but though their spirits were dampened, they did not give up.

As Bandodkar puts it, "we have all the skills that are required in the world of filmmaking. We have the

expertise to navigate through the complexities. What we lack is not the technical proficiency but the spending power at our disposal." They learnt their lesson the hard way. New to the system, they found it difficult to avail of the Entertainment Society of Goa schemes too, and finding a producer was another impediment. He expresses his helplessness in getting sponsors or producers by bitterly narrating a Konkani saying which translates as "one can play any role but of riches". Yet, the trio was optimistic when they planned

Ancessao (2025), this time a featurette. Improvisations happened one after another, and the 14th draft of the script was finally ready. Nonetheless, the 30 minutes project took over two years to see the light of day.

It was on the 23rd October 2025 afternoon that Goan social media became aflame with the news of Prashanti Talpalkar winning the Best Actor Award at the International Film Festival of South Asia held in Toronto. All that buzz was soon followed by the bigger newsflash that *Ancessao* had been adjudged the Best Film. It is all the more laudable that our film from Goa earned accolades as the Best Film in a category that bracketed both featurettes and short films, and even more notable that our Prashanti won the

Best Actor irrespective of gender - male or female. "Right from the moment we conceived the story, we had Prashanti in mind - so versatile is she," said Bandodkar, "our hopes heavily hinged upon her. Once she accepted there was no looking back."

Talpalkar, a most proficient actor, is very much a part of Goa's film culture though she began her acting career in the inter-collegiate drama competitions. Later, she turned student activist, and began participating in social movements where she acted in street plays too. She has a lion's share in the evolution of Konkani film culture, that has been coming of age ever since Goa became the IFFI permanent venue. She has played diverse roles in a number of award-winning Konkani films - *Aleesha* (2004), *Paltadcho Munis* (2009), *Baga Beach* (2013), *Juze* (2018) - besides short films. So, when she won the Best Actor Award at the 14th IFFSA in Toronto, it did not surprise us. Of course, it is also true the international recognition has accentuated the talent of the actor and the filmmaker who made Goa proud. As Prashanti puts it, when regional cinema reaches global platforms, "it allows our local stories rooted in specific cultures to find a universal resonance. Every region has its unique rhythm, idiom and emotional landscape, and when these stories travel beyond boundaries, they enrich world cinema."

She is a theatre personality and acclaimed actress, but Talpalkar is also an accomplished writer and translator. Speaking of her artistic journey, she says, "theatre taught me discipline, presence and the power of the spoken word; Street plays taught me how to portray raw emotions when the audience is just an arm's distance away; Literature taught me the depth of human experience; and Cinema taught me the art of conveying emotion through silence."

Keep it up, our Toronto Queen!

Damodar Mauzo won the 2022 Jnanpith Award

Illustration by Chloe Cordeiro



The inclusivity for physically challenged people on the IFFI premises has improved over the last two years.

Ajay K.R.
Film Historian
Bangalore



So far, my favourite film has been *Khoya Paya*. I'm still trying to get over it because it was so emotionally overwhelming.

Chathuri Chandrageetha
Actress
Kerala



The volunteers and human connection here elevate the entire festival; they take the experience beyond technology.

Rajeev Bhardwaj
Actor
Mumbai



I want to understand how filmmaking works in India. In the US, it's hard to find these kinds of people, and resources are so limited.

Sireesha Doddapaneni
Filmmaker
Andhra Pradesh

SHORT TAKES

Graeme Clifford: “AI is making us less human”

INTERVIEWED BY PRAGYA BHAGAT

Take us through the highlights of IFFI so far.

I love India, especially the food. They ask if the curries are too hot, and I tell them I grew up on chicken vindaloo. I've been on many juries before, but I really wanted to come to India, because it is one of the few countries left that really lives for the cinema. As a filmmaker, it's important to me that people see movies with other people, not home alone on their big screen TVs, looking at their iPhones at the same time.

What IFFI has done here is incredible. I never expected an Opening Day parade of that magnitude. Compared to other film festivals, this one isn't hidden away in big buildings. It's out and about in the streets, it's more accessible to people. As part of the International Jury, I've seen some really good movies, including from first-time directors. It's going to take some heavy debate for us to reach a decision. We've had some heavy-duty subjects. I'm just waiting for a comedy.

You started your career in films in the 1960s. What got you into the movies?

I was studying medicine at university. I got a summer job with the one film studio in all of Australia. The film was a documentary about sharks. It was so all-consuming, so exciting, that I took a break year from university to pursue movies briefly, not knowing this brief exploration would turn into a lifelong one. My mother was very supportive. My father was horrified.

You've had a prolific career in film editing, along with directing features, television shows, and plays. What are some projects that you are most proud of?

I love directing, but I have a soft spot for editing, because that's how I started my career in film. I loved editing *Don't Look Now* (1973) and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976). Editing is like the last rewrite of the screenplay; once I start editing, I never look at the script again. Strangely enough, I've never edited one of my own movies, because filmmaking is a genuinely



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

collaborative process. I invite inputs from others.

There are two movies I'm most proud of making. One of them is *Frances*

(1982). Because I felt so in touch with the character of Frances Farmer, an American actress from the 1930s, and what happened to her, I just had to make

that movie. The other film is *Burke & Wills* (1985). I made that because these figures were part of Australian history. They were like Lewis and Clark in America, only much more dramatic. Ever since I was a kid, their story had a big effect on me. So when I got a chance to tell that story—it was like a Greek tragedy—I jumped on the opportunity.

What do you believe the future of technology holds for cinema culture?

We are being separated from human contact with every new piece of technology that comes out, including AI. It's making us less human, and we are stuck with our phones. Young people in particular are isolated, and I think that's why they don't know how to communicate. They think a text is communication. Cinema is a participatory experience, and that's important not just for the movies but for us as human beings.

There's a movie I keep going back to, an animated movie called *WALL-E* (2008). Unfortunately, it shows us where we're going. We are going to end up on cruise ships in the sky, with televisions strapped to our chests. We can't get off the couch, because our legs are no good anymore. For me, that's where technology is leading us: to sit down, do nothing, and look at a screen. Sorry, that's not what I'm going to do. I don't look at my phone until after lunch. I want to wake up in the morning and have a clear head.

Do you have a dream project you'd like to work on?

In my twenties, I bought a retired London taxi, and I drove it around Europe for a year, as far as Istanbul. When I ran out of money, I put the meter on. People loved sitting in a London taxi. I'd drop them to their homes, and they'd invite me to dinner. I'd like to write the story of all the adventures that took place on that trip, which has impacted my life and choices more than any learning institution. If everybody had the opportunity to travel when they were young, we wouldn't have any wars.

What do you want to share with the younger cadre of film makers?

Spend more time on your script than on your phone.

SHORT TAKES



It is stimulating, but it is not an open, level playing field. We need good quality, meaningful stuff.

Ravindra Badhaiyan
Editor
Chhattisgarh



This time it is really good. There are many Goan films, and new filmmakers are getting their short films screened.

Bhumika Kuttikar
Student
Goa



Our movie, *The Odyssey of Joy*, is a part of the UNICEF selection, and I'm very glad to be a part of that. This is my first time in India, but I plan to come back.

Iñaki Lartigue
Actor
France



I loved the mood in Goa. I was in North India last year, and it was very different. I'm very happy to be here, with the sun and wonderful people.

Lucie Fagedet
Actress
France

Viva Festakar!

BY NICOLE SUARES

Right across the International Film Festival of India heritage “campus”, a man in simple cotton beige shorts and a colourful shirt is stopped for greetings wherever he goes. This is Marius Fernandes, the renowned ‘Festakar’ of Goa who has been an integral part of the cultural revival in India’s smallest state. For the past 25 years, this unassuming, but charismatic native of Divar has undertaken an incredible journey spanning over 100 grassroots festivals for the people, as is being immortalized at IFFI 2025 in *Meraki – By the Sea*, a 37-minute film directed by Himanshu Singh and produced by Dr Gwendolyn de Ornelas.

Fernandes focuses on sustainability, folk traditions, organic food, and true Goan *sossegado*. “It has been a lonely journey,” he says, “with a lot of ‘nos’ - no sponsor, no chief guest, no alcohol, very few volunteers. But if you believe in your dream, you can achieve it.”

The Festakar of Goa was actually born in Kenya, in the remote town of Laare, where his family (originally from São Mathias) ran a small bakery and market store. With a lack of decent schooling,

his early life was spent outdoors, but even then Goa was always in mind, as his mother kept reminiscing as she worked on her sewing machine: “her memories took me to a beautiful land filled with colourful fruits, vibrant feasts, and green beauty.” The family sang hymns like ‘San Franciscu Xaviera’ and Christmas brought out a lavish feast of cake, bebinca, and sorpotel.

In the late 1960s, things became unsafe, amid rebel attacks. Fernandes says it became very stressful, “being the eldest, I can vividly recall one attack. We heard pounding footsteps and screaming outside. We prayed desperately at the altar, and I feel it was Dad’s good deeds that saved us. The shots stopped right at our doorstep.” Shaken and homesick, his mother Antoinette made a bold decision: she would relocate with her children temporarily to Divar. They boarded the SS Haryana in 1968, uncertain, but hopeful.

Divar’s open fields and village rhythms brought solace. “It was a year-round festive calendar. Everything was so new to us,” Marius remembers. “Each month brought its own feast, cuisine, and distinct tradition. These early memories left a deep love for Goa.” However, by 1975, the Fernandes family reunited in the

UK. “The cold weather was shocking,” shudders Marius, still recalling the initial winter blast. The new adjustment proved a challenge but the spirit of Goa continued. “Mum taught Konkani, and even coordinated tiatr performances for Alfred and Rita Rose in the 1980s.” Later, in the 1990s, his family co-organized the Save Goa campaign from the UK.

A quiet tug toward Goa grew stronger, and Marius – by then married to late Sheela – decided to retire early and head to his ancestral land in 2000, with his children Ashley and Gemma. Now, he grew a bit restless, “I was aware of what was happening in Goa at the time. Big budget events with hardly any representation for women, the differently-abled, and marginalised communities. Alcohol flowed, making it unsafe for families. I wanted a different model of cultural celebrations—zero alcohol, zero sponsorship, powered by community.” Thus began the People’s Fests, powered by goodwill, volunteer support and social change.

It has been an amazing range, with each fest celebrating Goa in all its different dimensions, and every event rooted in its host community, with local performers, home chefs, artisans and dancers always centred prominently. “We discover new talent wherever we go,” Fernandes says with pride. “Our fests have become a living library of talent.”

Meraki – By the Sea premieres at Inox Screen IV, Panaji today at 4pm.



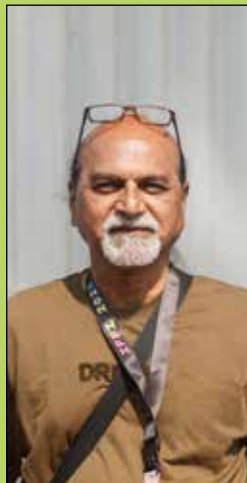
Photo by Michael Praveen

SHORT TAKES



The thing I loved the most about IFFI is that I got to watch old movies on the big screen.

Bhavana Paradkar
Homemaker
Goa



Every year, I watch about 30 films out of which I recollect only 4 or 5. This year, I really liked *Songs of Adam*. It will last very long in my memory.

Gajanan Dhavale
Retired
Nasik



The atmosphere is fascinating, and it is nice for filmmakers to be in the same space and connect over films.

Keerthana Yeshwanth
Screenwriter
Chennai



IFFI is one of the greatest festivals in India, and it has to be celebrated just like Diwali or Christmas.

Benjamin God's Gift
Student
Chennai

“Happiness is not absolute, and neither is sorrow”

BY KINJAL SETHIA

Ernesto Martínez Bucio teamed up with poet Karen Plata to write the script for *The Devil Smokes (and Saves the Burnt Matches in the Same Box)* (2025). “It is a poet’s world; fragmented, fractured, and blurry. It is not a single story with one lead character. It is about the children of a family, and we learn their stories from each of them,” says the Mexican filmmaker, who has travelled from the Basque country of Spain to IFFI with his film that won the Best First Feature Award at Berlinale earlier this year.

The story goes like this: five children are left in a house with their schizophrenic grandmother over a summer. While it is easy to associate childhood with summer light and innocent joy, this film meanders through light and shade, laughter and screams as the children and the grandmother are jostled into each other in their own world inside the house. “The story is not autobiographical and certainly fictional, but it has been inspired by some elements from our childhood. Both of us did not want to idealise childhood. We wanted to portray reality, the fact that all our childhoods are a mix of good and bad memories. Happiness is not absolute, and neither is sorrow.”

Bucio was keen on honesty, and relied on close-up frames and hand-held camera to create an ambience of alternate reality. “I wanted each of the fragmented and episodic pieces of the story to be told from the perspective of the children. Magic realism or surrealism is a label commonly applied to a vast amount of work coming from the Latin American region. I would call what happens in this film as alternate reality, because for the children, it is real. It is their story being told through their perspective.”

Within a collage of domesticated elements, Bucio manages to create an intimate cosmos. He says that “since my childhood, I have been intrigued by the world created inside every household. I like observing the details inside each house. How things are done differently in each family, the tiny details that make each house



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

unique.”

Bucio told *The Peacock* that “it has become so difficult to trust any institution in Spain, like the government or any other formalised system. But the family is very trusted. Grandparents continue to play the important role of nurturers. And that is why the film is based on our own childhood experiences. For instance, Karen and my grandparents did not express love in the conventionally warm and cosy way. We would interpret love in their harsh words sometimes.” He wanted to register that families have mythologies of their own; stories, fears, obsessions, trauma, all passed down through generations. “Parents don’t only lend their DNA to their children. They are also carriers of the culture and heritage of communities. Each family has their own construction and synthesis of our colonial history, Hispanic culture and

Spanish influences.”

The film has been a very collaborative project and the story went through many rewrites as Bucio and Plata navigated their own styles. Initially Plata, whose poetry collection *Retrato de Familia* won the Elías Nandino National Prize this year, wrote the script in her own style, while she was studying filmmaking at Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, Mexico. But when Bucio started writing he realised “it was very messy. My version was terrible. We went back to Karen’s version, and began rewriting from there. We would correct each other’s writing, and rewrite and rewrite, till it was time to begin shooting.” Both of them collaborated even at the stage of editing. “We moved scenes around. The version now is very different from how it was when we were writing it. The story was almost rewritten during the

editing process.”

Plata’s poetic practice guided the aesthetic construction, and episodic nature of their narrative structure. Even the title is a line born through one of her poems, writing parallelly while working on the script. At first, they were slightly apprehensive about an unusually long title, but decided to retain it as the element of the devil began influencing the narrative theme in their process of rewriting. Bucio confesses, “It is curious how a random decision can influence a process, how this fragment from a poem took us down a different road.”

The Devil Smokes (and Saves the Burnt Matches in the Same Box) will be screened today at Inox Screen III, Panjim at 12 pm and tomorrow at Inox Screen III, Porvorim at 4.30 pm.

SHORT TAKES



I saw the film *Chandni* which was for the general public in the Kala Academy parking lot and the quality was quite bad.

Astri Ghosh
Translator
Norway



I went for a film thinking it was a feature, and it ran for 11 minutes.

Joseph St. Anne
Filmmaker
Mumbai



I love the vibe and the enthusiasm. I am one of your staunch supporters, and will continue coming here till I drop.

Lizanne da Cuna
Fashion Designer
Pakistan



Pescador is my favourite so far. I got an opportunity to meet the director and we talked about how art connects the world.

Ravi Shankar Prasad
Student
Uttarakhand

Cinemela For All

BY CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY

“Akash, please don’t break the line!” A group of more 100 schoolchildren, marshalled by four teachers, are trooping single-file into Kala Academy at 8.30am. They’re headed towards a large yellow inflatable tent, the segments of its puffed-up walls resembling cubes of butter. PictureTime Cinemela is the most democratic screening space at this year’s IFFI, requiring viewers neither to be an adult, nor a delegate—nor even to buy a ticket. Just register on the Picturetime app, find the show you want to watch, and choose your seat.

This fun inflatable "balloon theatre" has been a part of IFFI for a few years now, showing a mix of recent hits and old classics. This year's offerings include *12th Fail* (2023), *Salaam Bombay* (1988), *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* (1977) and *Teesri Manzil* (1966). The mela vibe conceals a serious purpose and a very scalable business model. "India has only 9000 theatre screens, in a market with the potential for more than 150,000 screens," says Surajit Roy, 65, the President and COO of PictureTime Digiplex, echoing a point made in this paper earlier by IFFI festival director Shekhar Kapur and chairman of NFDC Prakash Magdum. "To frame the numbers another way, we have about 6 to 8 screens per million people, compared to about 80 to 90 in the USA. As a result, most Tier 3 to Tier 5 towns and rural areas have no cinema theatres. Going to the cinema has become an elitist concept and an urban concept, which is not fair, because cinema is actually a medium for the masses."

PictureTime was set up 10 years ago by the entrepreneur Sushil Chaudhury with the aim of taking the cinema to the masses in a cost-effective way. "Our patented mobile theatre weighs just 800 kilos. When we’re done, it folds up into a six feet by five feet space," says Roy. "And it has airconditioning, pushback chairs, Dolby surround sound, large screens – all at Rs.100 to 150 a ticket. Each unit costs about 80 lakh rupees, which allows us to break even fairly quickly. And we can set up in any open space. Just watch us turn the blower on, go away for 45 minutes, and come back to find a theatre."

A map of PictureTime's current locations in India brings up names which would otherwise never come together in one sequence. Roy starts the tour. "We have about 20 permanent cinemas currently on the civilian side, plus another five mobile ones in Arunachal Pradesh. We have the highest-altitude cinema in India, in Leh. Our cinema in Asifabad district in Telangana is run in partnership with local women’s self-help groups. We have a cinema in Naxalite-affected Gadchiroli. Then there's Kishtwar in Kashmir, Khatima in Uttarakhand, Nagaur and Sardarshahar in Rajasthan..."

Historically, theatres have always been social hubs, bringing strangers shoulder to shoulder in the dark and attracting other businesses and vendors. "When we set up a theatre in a small town, it brings many other energies

and economies into play," observes Roy. "We can have shows at unconventional hours – for example, I want to start doing a 10am show on Sundays of classic films – and for specific audiences, such as a children’s film festival. I’m a former civil servant myself. When we go to a new place, the first thing I do is go meet the local Collector and tell him, ‘We can do 8.30am and 10.30am shows for the kids. Please get all the children in the government schools to attend. When you have access to good cinema in your formative years, it sets you up for many

scheduled screenings are 14 shows at the Rezang La War Memorial Auditorium in Chushul village, Ladakh, not far from the setting of the film itself: the Battle of Rezang La between Indian and Chinese soldiers during the 1962 war. "I’m just passionate about films," smiles Roy. "And I feel there is a huge transformational context for this kind of work in India. So, please post our schedule in *The Peacock*, like you have for the other festival venues. I want everyone to come at least once to our



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

PICTURETIME PRESENTS CINEMELA 21-28 NOV 2025 (AT THE KALA ACADEMY CAMPUS)									
Time Slot	Category	21.11.25	22.11.25	23.11.25	24.11.25	25.11.25	26.11.25	27.11.25	28.11.25
8:30 AM	Children's Films	Kaphal Wild Berries Hindi 2011 90 mins Batul Mukhtiar	Sonar Kella Bengali 1974 136 mins Satyajit Ray	Banarasi Jasos Hindi 2017 82 mins Pankaj Parashar	1. Gattu Hindi 2011 75 mins Rajan Khosla 2. The Prince and the Crown of Stone English 2008 60 mins Gautam Benegal	Naal 2 Marathi 2023 117 mins Sudhakar Reddy Yakkanti	Happy Mother's Day Hindi 2015 90 mins Anjali Shukla	Banarasi Jasos Hindi 2017 82 mins Pankaj Parashar	Naal 2 Marathi 2023 117 mins Sudhakar Reddy Yakkanti
10:00 / 10:15 / 10:30 AM	Inspirational Stories	12th Fail Hindi 2023 157 mins Vidhu Vinod Chopra 10am	Salaam Bombay Hindi 1988 109 mins Mira Nair 10:30am	Chak De India Hindi 2007 153 mins Shimit Amin 10:15 am	Manjummel Boys Malayalam 2024 135 mins Chidambaram S. Poduval 10:30am	Srikanth Hindi 2024 134 mins Tushar Hiranandani 10:30am	Mrs. Chatterjee vs Norway Hindi 2023 144 mins Ashima Chhiber 10:15am	12th Fail Hindi 2023 157 mins Vidhu Vinod Chopra 10am	Srikanth Hindi 2024 134 mins Tushar Hiranandani 10am
3:00 PM	Indian Panorama Classics	Qissa Punjabi 2014 109 mins Anup Singh	Uunchai Hindi 2022 163 mins Sooraj Barjatya	Shyamchi Aai Marathi 2023 140 mins Sujay Dahake	1. Bhupen Da 62 minutes Bobbeeta Sharma Uncut... 2. New Delhi Times Hindi 1986 123 mins Ramesh Sharma	12th Fail Hindi 2023 157 mins Vidhu Vinod Chopra 10am	Shatranj Ke Khiladi Hindi 1977 113 mins Satyajit Ray	Gharat Ganapati Marathi 2024 149 mins Navjot Bandiwadekar	Mrs. Chatterjee vs Norway Hindi 2023 144 mins Ashima Chhiber
6:00 PM	Nostalgia	Teesri Manzil Hindi 1966 172 mins Vijay Anand	Kaala Patthar Hindi 1979 171 mins Yash Chopra	Chandni Hindi 1989 186 mins Yash Chopra	Darr Hindi 1993 177 mins Yash Chopra	DDLJ Hindi 1995 189 mins Aditya Chopra	Mirch Masala Hindi 1987 128 mins Ketan Mehta	Teesri Manzil Hindi 1966 172 mins Vijay Anand	Uunchai Hindi 2022 163 mins Sooraj Barjatya
SCHEDULE & PASSES AVAILABLE ON THE PICTURETIME APP		QR CODE		IFFI		NFDC			

Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

Lights, Camera, AI

BY PANKHURI ZAHEER DASGUPTA

Two panels at the Film Bazaar, two more in the Kala Academy, a dedicated micro Film Festival, and a 48-hour CinemAI hackathon — IFFI 2025 has chosen to meet the global AI tidal wave with intense engagement.

Festival Director Shekhar Kapur gently reminded every sceptic that cinema has survived every technological apocalypse predicted for it. “When sound came in, they said movies are dead. When digital came in, they said it’s not reality.” For him, AI is just the continuation of cinema’s evolutionary instinct. “Every new technology is overused first,” he remarked. “Then it becomes an art form.” He is optimistic that AI will democratise filmmaking so dramatically that a film costing \$300 million could now be made for \$3 million. At the Dharavi project that he runs with Music Composer AR Rahman, he said, “kids are already picking up AI tools to create music like it’s any other language.”

Kapur conceded there are still some limitations to AI. For example, it still cannot imitate the intricacies of the human eye. “We don’t understand how the pupil works. There are micro-variations every second... a great actor like Cate Blanchett or Shabana Azmi forms a connection with you in a close-up shot that AI can’t yet replicate.” He predicted AI would hit Marvel-style films first which “change the actor, keep the costume.” But “real storytelling is unpredictable. AI relies on patterns, it can never be unpredictable.”

Sten Saluveer, who heads Cannes Next, the innovation section of the Marché du Film at the Cannes Film Festival, shared some staggering numbers. “Netflix took ten years to reach 100 million customers, ChatGPT took five days.” He added that, “ChatGPT and Gemini have 680 million recurring daily users. That’s almost a billion people engaging with AI every single day.” This is not a passing trend, but a platform shift as big as mobile phones, streaming, and editing software. Except that its scope is expanding ten times the speed. “We are only three years into this,” he said, “and it’s already defining how we produce and distribute content.”

Saluveer also dropped a number that might haunt creatives for a while. “At least 52% of all written content on the Internet is already edited, moulded, or produced by AI.” And that content, he predicted, is about to grow 100x. Soon, the filmmaker’s real crisis won’t be craft, it will be visibility. “How will your film cut through automated AI-generated noise?” he asked. For him, the solution isn’t

romantic resistance, it’s literacy. “Start treating AI as software. DaVinci, Premiere. They all already have AI

components. It doesn’t make sense to discriminate.”

Maciej Żemojcin, an AI film and virtual production specialist who has worked with Bollywood bigwigs like Amitabh Bachchan and Salman Khan says bluntly “film is gone. TV is gone. Why are

we still calling it the film and TV industry?” He prophesied that the term used will soon be “technology storytelling.” He pointed out that the big players today aren’t film studios but tech giants like Nvidia, Microsoft, Apple, and Amazon. “Next week is already too late,” he warned filmmakers who want to resist this shift.

Berlinale director Tricia Tuttle offered clear-eyed reservations about the extractive nature of this new technology. “Capital keeps condensing into a smaller and smaller number of hands,” she said. “I worry about how people will make a living.”

As someone who watches 8,000 films a year to program 200, she’s bracing for an

overwhelming surge of mediocre AI-assisted work. She also observed that AI’s faultless sheen may not be the upgrade that we desire, and that art lives in flaws, “imperfect is beautiful. Perfect is boring.”

“The AI Pandora’s box is already open,” said Ashwin Kumar, director of *Mahavatar Narsimha* (2024) and jury member for both the AI Film Festival and the CinemAI Hackathon. “You cannot do anything but embrace it. The sooner we embrace it, the better it’s going to get.” IFFI is simply acknowledging what’s already here. “AI is an enabler,” he said. “It’s the transmutation of what goes on in your mind into matter on the screen.” But it won’t replace film training or experience. “AI cannot feel. Storytelling, aesthetics, the soul. All that still remains with the artist.”

Keyur Kajavadara, the CinemAI hackathon’s Most Innovative Use of AI winner, has had a decade of projects getting stalled by OTT gatekeeping and lack of funding. And then AI arrived like a fairy godmother. “I didn’t want this dependency anymore,” he said. “Now, any idea I have, I can execute alone.” And yet he still works on sets, lights shots, still loves the old grind. AI is just a powerful tool that he has added to his filmmaking arsenal. “It’s simple,” he said. “I feel liberated. I feel powerful. Any story I want to tell, I can finally make.”

The AI film festival and CinemAI Hackathon film screenings are at 3 PM today at Auditorium 1 of the Maquinez Palace.

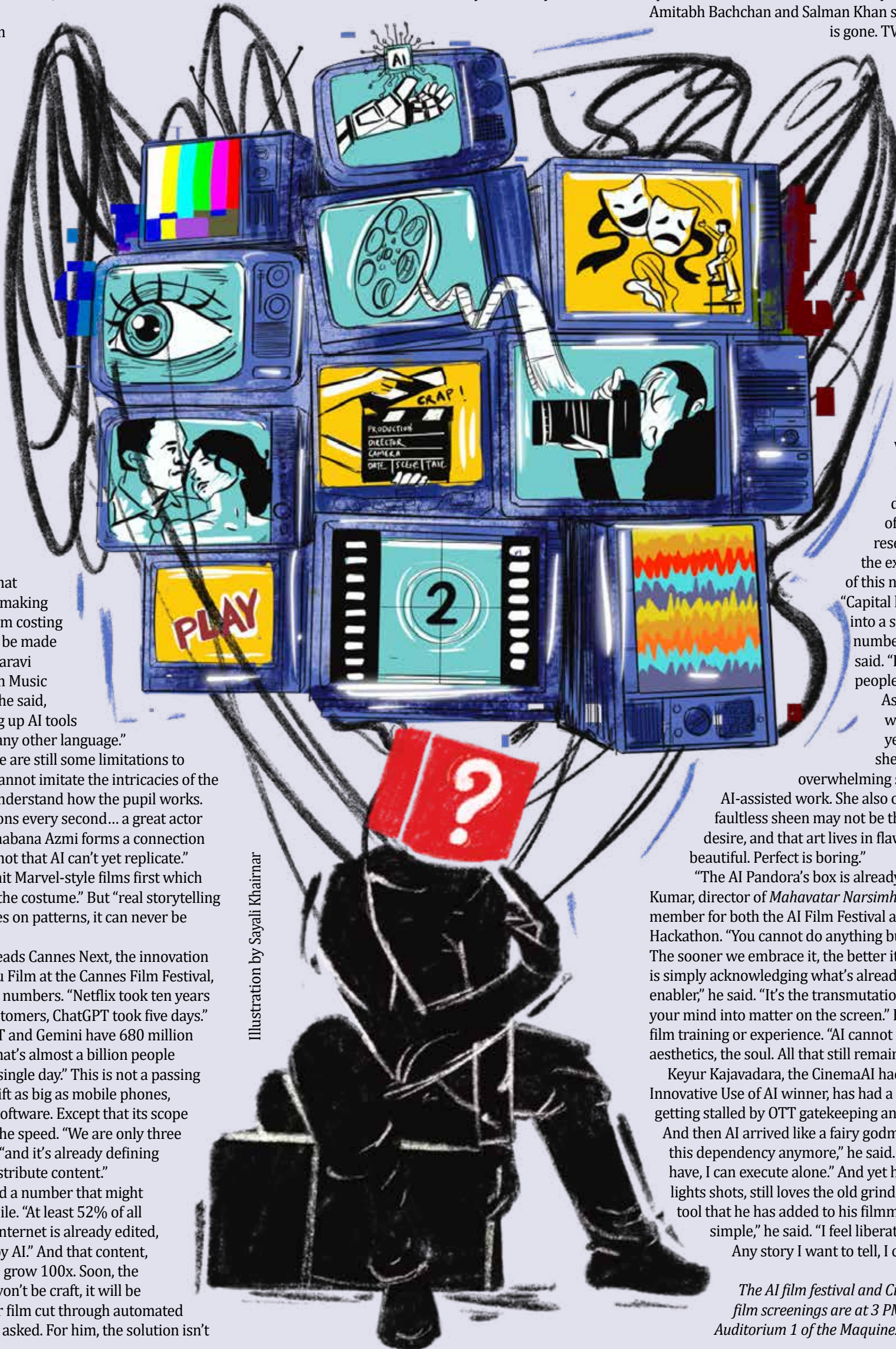


Illustration by Sayali Khairnar

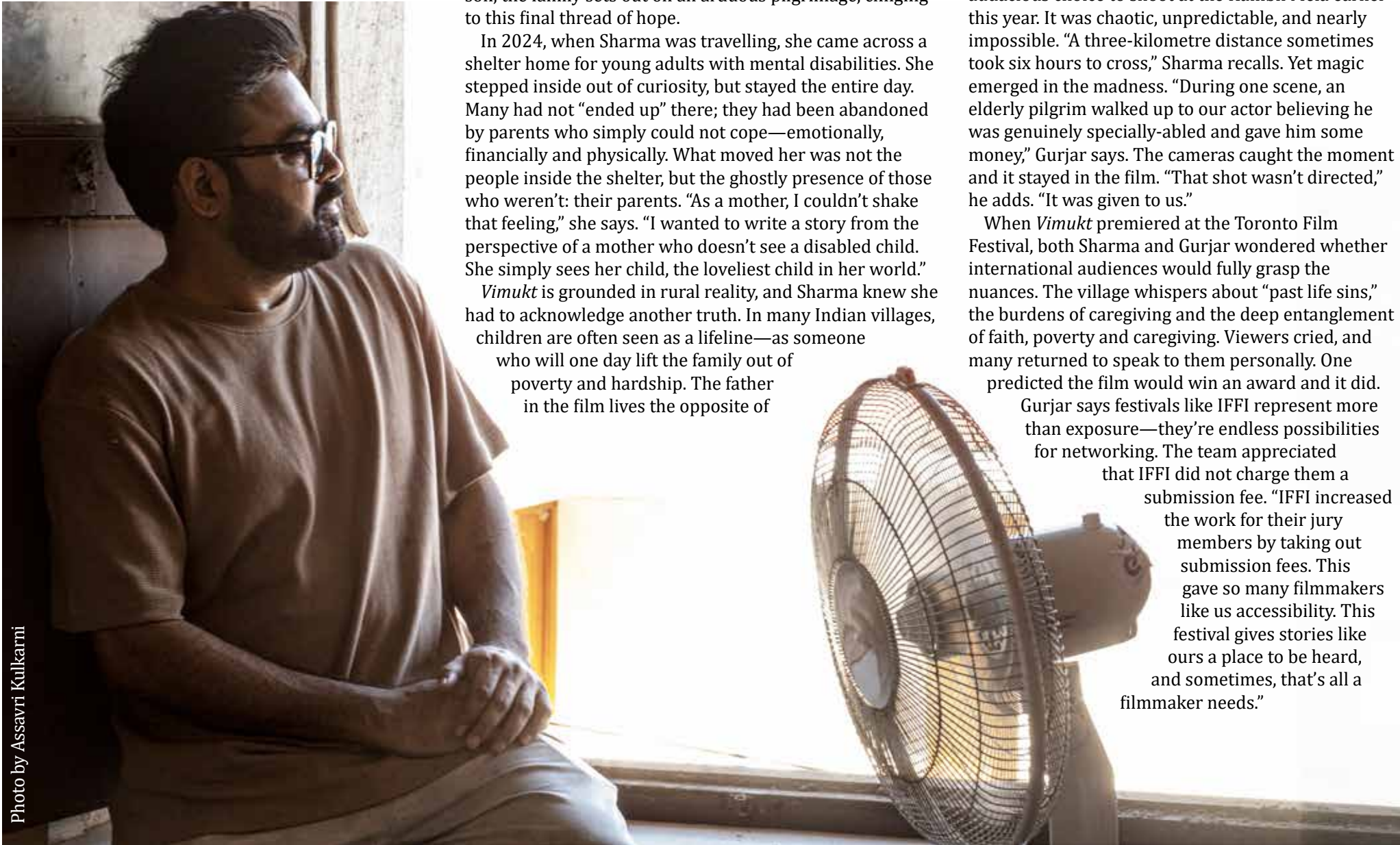
“IFFI gives stories like ours a place to be heard”

BY SHERRY FERNANDES

Before *Vimukt* (2025) became a festival favourite, and won the NETPAC Jury Award at the Toronto International Film Festival, its director Jitank Singh Gurjar was an 18-year-old theatre actor in Gwalior, trying to survive. He had already spent six years on stage, performing with local groups, but the financial struggle was relentless. “I loved theatre, but theatre didn’t love my bank account,” he laughs. To make ends meet, he began learning cinematography on the side. By 20, he wore multiple hats: as a sound recordist, film editor, and cinematographer. Gurjar worked with documentary filmmakers, picked up assignments for the ministries of culture tourism, kept on directing and writing plays, and eventually made *Baasan* (2023), his

debut feature film that wound up changing the course of his life. “I never went to film school,” he says, “but I was always drawn to this world”. *Baasan* first brought Gurjar to IFFI—his first major festival experience—and it was here that screenplay writer Pooja Vishal Sharma walked into his screening, and quickly decided she wanted to work with him. “There was something so honest about his filmmaking,” she recalls. Gurjar says “I have to be emotionally invested before I take on a film. But the outline Pooja gave me, I could already envision the film. All I had to do was translate it onto my canvas.” Their conversation grew into *Vimukt*—a film born in the dusty lanes of rural Gwalior, following the journey of a 26-year-old differently abled man and his aging parents. Convinced that a dip in the sacred Ganges during the once-in-144-years Mahakumbh will “cure” their son, the family sets out on an arduous pilgrimage, clinging to this final thread of hope. In 2024, when Sharma was travelling, she came across a shelter home for young adults with mental disabilities. She stepped inside out of curiosity, but stayed the entire day. Many had not “ended up” there; they had been abandoned by parents who simply could not cope—emotionally, financially and physically. What moved her was not the people inside the shelter, but the ghostly presence of those who weren’t: their parents. “As a mother, I couldn’t shake that feeling,” she says. “I wanted to write a story from the perspective of a mother who doesn’t see a disabled child. She simply sees her child, the loveliest child in her world.” *Vimukt* is grounded in rural reality, and Sharma knew she had to acknowledge another truth. In many Indian villages, children are often seen as a lifeline—as someone who will one day lift the family out of poverty and hardship. The father in the film lives the opposite of

that dream. He is a brick-kiln labourer, facing the painful fact that his adult son remains dependent on him. “But his exhaustion is not cruelty, it is human,” Shelly Sharma, the film’s producer says, “in rural communities, these struggles come with taboos and stereotypes. There is loneliness in caregiving that no one talks about.” Gurjar and Sharma spurned clichés. They visited Swarg Sadan, an NGO in Gwalior, multiple times to observe residents, and studied how they moved through the world. One scene captures the film’s gentle ethos entirely: the son brings home a pigling, convinced it is a puppy. “Gurjar says, “it really captures their innocence.” To honour the mother’s belief that a dip in the Ganges will heal her son, Gurjar and Sharma made the audacious choice to shoot at the Kumbh Mela earlier this year. It was chaotic, unpredictable, and nearly impossible. “A three-kilometre distance sometimes took six hours to cross,” Sharma recalls. Yet magic emerged in the madness. “During one scene, an elderly pilgrim walked up to our actor believing he was genuinely specially-abled and gave him some money,” Gurjar says. The cameras caught the moment and it stayed in the film. “That shot wasn’t directed,” he adds. “It was given to us.” When *Vimukt* premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, both Sharma and Gurjar wondered whether international audiences would fully grasp the nuances. The village whispers about “past life sins,” the burdens of caregiving and the deep entanglement of faith, poverty and caregiving. Viewers cried, and many returned to speak to them personally. One predicted the film would win an award and it did. Gurjar says festivals like IFFI represent more than exposure—they’re endless possibilities for networking. The team appreciated that IFFI did not charge them a submission fee. “IFFI increased the work for their jury members by taking out submission fees. This gave so many filmmakers like us accessibility. This festival gives stories like ours a place to be heard, and sometimes, that’s all a filmmaker needs.”



SHORT TAKES



I’ve been attending IFFI for 20-25 years. I like regional and world cinema because it gives us information about what’s happening.

Kuldeep Singh Bedi
Film Journalist
Jalandhar



I do not want to change anything. We come here for 8 days just to see what is there and I like it.

Savita Vilas Dhavalikar
Retired
Mumbai



They have done everything right. The stalls are interesting, but it would have been better if there were more people.

Dheeraj Mesta
Advertisement
Karnataka



It has improved a lot; the management team is very responsive and quick, and everything is very well managed.

Bobbeeta Sharma
Producer
Assam

In the elegant 'Divlyam Nach' of the Goan countryside, dancers balance tall brass lamps with lighted wicks on their heads without any support. Dr. Pandurang Phaldessai says that it used to be widely performed "at Shigmo festival along with other dance items. Folk musical instruments such as Ghumat, Shamel and Zanj and at times Shenai, Surta or Harmonium are used for the musical support."

Unfortunately, this favourite choice of rural folks for generations is increasingly rarely presented, and on the verge of losing its popularity. We need to take all necessary measures to preserve this valuable cultural heritage.

— Govit Morajkar



India's Next Big Films Start Here

BY POULOMI DAS

In this country, where studios and multiplex chains are increasingly dominating the theatrical landscape, independent filmmakers have learned to live by improvisation and working outside established systems.

However, for the last 17 years, WAVES Film Bazaar—launched in 2007 and held each year alongside the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa—has been the one place where this scattered ecosystem comes together. What began quietly, initiated by the country's National Film and Development Corporation (NFDC), has grown into South Asia's most essential film market. Today, it is a converging point where emerging filmmakers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka meet international festival programmers, sales agents, financiers, distributors and co-producers.

To put it another way, Film Bazaar invests in possibilities. Its verticals are purpose-built for a precarious ecosystem: the Co-Production Market captures films at the script stage. The Work-in-Progress (WIP) Lab shapes rough cuts into finished work. The Viewing Room enables film programmers from around the world to discover films that haven't yet premiered.

The Co-Production Market, in particular, lies at the centre of this story. For an Indian independent filmmaker, a film is rarely funded in one clean sum. Instead, it is assembled bit by bit: a regional grant from Kerala; a small infusion of private equity—money raised from individuals or private investors willing to back the vision in exchange for a stake in the film's profits; a European co-producer who helps unlock funds from France, Germany, or the Netherlands; a post-production lab in Mumbai; a festival development grant from Rotterdam or Locarno. Eventually, the film becomes a weave of belief systems. For many emerging voices, Film Bazaar is where that weave begins.

This was precisely the path that shaped Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* (2024). Long before the Cannes Grand Prix win, her film existed only as a delicate treatment. Through the Viewing Room, international labs, and the co-production network seeded by Film Bazaar, it gained the partners and infrastructure it

needed to become a fully realised Indo-French production.

Kapadia is not alone. The roll call of films that have passed through Film Bazaar reads like an alternative canon of contemporary Indian cinema. It is no exaggeration to say that nearly every Indian film that has made waves internationally can trace its origins back to Film Bazaar.

Take, for instance, Chaitanya Tamhane's *Court* (2015), which went on to win Best Film in the Horizons section at the Venice International Film Festival. Or Raam Reddy's blistering *Thithi* (2015), a WIP Lab alum that scooped awards at Locarno International Film Festival. Or Kanu Behl's *Titli* (2017), which premiered at Cannes Un Certain Regard. The list also includes Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* (2013), a Viewing Room discovery that became a global

breakout, visionary

filmmaker Gurvinder Singh's *Chauthi Koot* (2015), which played at Un Certain Regard, Amit V. Masurkar's *Newton* (2017), which became India's Oscar submission, and Pushpendra Singh's *Laila Aur Satt Geet* (2020), which premiered in the Forum section of the Berlinale.

This year's edition continued that momentum with a slate of projects that reveal the length and breadth of South Asian storytelling. In the mix were projects backed by Kiran Rao, Vikramaditya Motwane, and Shaunak Sen, spanning films pitched in Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, and Bengali. Marking the debut of Bosco Bandharkar, Rao's project examines the impact of Goa's real estate churn; Sen's project is set in Delhi; and one project with *Humans in the Loop* (2025) filmmaker Aranya Sahay attached, draws from the 2010 Mayapuri radiology incident.

Then there were the two winners. The top prize in the Co-Production Features category went to *Kakthet Idiot*, 2025, a Ladakhi feature that marks Stenzin Tankong's directorial debut. Set in the stark, wind-burnished Changthang region, the film follows Singay, an 18-year-old prankster and the lone Class 10 student in a remote government school. What begins as a wry coming-of-age story expands into a poignant portrait of a rural education system under strain—government school enrolments in Ladakh are steadily declining as parents opt for private schools in Leh.

Produced by Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam—filmmakers and co-founders of the Dharamshala International Film Festival—the project not only won the \$10,000 grant but also secured a French co-producer at Film Bazaar. “An uneducated generation cannot uplift its community. This film explores that truth—with honesty, humour and heart,” said Tankong.

The second project that won a cash grant of \$5000 was *Ulta Madam*, 2025, an India-France-Canada co-production that marks Goa-based Paromita Dhar's directorial debut. A genre-inflected thriller, *Ulta* peers into the lives of migrant domestic workers, mixing class politics, power dynamics, and a streak of the surreal. It represents the kind of film that Film Bazaar has consistently amplified: culturally specific, formally adventurous, and unafraid of the shadows.



Illustration by Sayali Khairnar

Film Festival Flashbacks

BY CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY

In 1998, my mother bought her first car, a royal blue Maruti 800. I had just turned 18. The new car radiated a beauty and glamour that my father's rust-coloured Premier Padmini, with its column-mounted gear shift and leg-press-style clutch pedal, didn't have a hope in hell of matching. I suddenly became highly motivated to convince both the RTO and my mother of my motor competence. At first, the aim was to occasionally get permission to drive north to Hindu College, where I was taking a degree in English Literature. But soon I realized that my car was even better aligned with a cinematic education.

In the nineties, the diet of cinema available to the average metropolitan moviegoer was nine parts Bollywood to one part Hollywood, the only note of dissent being the odd NFDC-funded arthouse film on Doordarshan. In my house, literature was seen as high art, films as lowbrow timepass, very capable of corrupting the entire soul if watched more than once a month.

Delhi, though, afforded astounding opportunities to widen one's cinematic horizons that I was only just beginning to discover. The India Habitat Centre had a film club and an annual film festival. In the newspapers, alongside tenders for government projects or prayer meetings for the dead, foreign embassies often announced screenings of the best new films from their nations, or advertised retrospectives of classic work. Suddenly it seemed as though all of Delhi was seeded with celluloid, waiting to sprout before my eyes. The Embassy of Finland gave me a gift of the films of Aki Kaurismäki: six in three days. At the austere Iran Culture House on Tilak Road, the films of Bahram Bayzai and Mohsen Makhmalbaf were projected from grainy VHS tapes onto a projector screen. The first biopic I'd ever seen, like every other Indian middle-class child, was Attenborough's *Gandhi* from 1982, but the second was about the Filipino patriot *Jose Rizal* (1998).

To my father's increasing alarm, I now found myself living in two worlds of art: literature by day, cinema after dusk. But the forces of darkness were slowly winning the battle. Sometimes the late show, or the second show of a double bill, was at 9pm. Ordinarily, it would be almost impossible to get a ride home afterwards. But with the Maruti as my wingman, I could even leave home after dinner and, rocketing down the broad boulevards of central Delhi, spinning giddily around the roundabouts, stride down the aisle of the India Habitat Centre auditorium as the opening credits rolled.

There was something marvellously open-ended and inviting about films seen in this way, with intention but without foreknowledge. The works of literature I studied by day were venerable, canonical, buried under decades, centuries of commentary and exegesis. Anything I said about them had been thought or said by millions before me. But watching world cinema in an entirely serendipitous and unsystematic sequence with the fresh, questing eyes of a new zealot was a great invitation

to precisely that training of the visual and narrative sense, that development of taste and judgment and rhythmic sense and *rasa-bhava*, that in literature seemed so demanding. Often, as I drove home, I would reprise the most striking images and sequences from what I had just seen (overrating their quality, as young people in love always do). Happiness was there, right there, rippling inside me: to thrill in the dark to the play of images, words, and music on screen, and then drive home with fireworks in my mind, the streetlights floating past, the empty roads, the sweetly humming car echoing my sense of freedom and lightness.

Matters came to a head in January of 2000, when IFFI arrived—where else?—in Delhi. By now my rebellion was complete. This promised to be the greatest cinematic explosion of my entire life. Although my finals were approaching, I bunked college for several days and sailed from one Delhi cinema to another, my back pocket stuffed with film tickets and parking *parchis*. At Golcha Cinema in Daryaganj in the old city, I saw the most mindbending film of my cinematic life: Abbas Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), the story of some city folk arriving in a remote Iranian village for a documentary film project, and being frustrated at every turn. They drive

repeatedly up a hill in search of a mobile phone signal. Each time this happened, there were groans of even greater frustration in Daryaganj, and a flock of people departed. At last there were just three of us left, birds of a feather, or festival. When the lights came on, we gazed warmly at one another, having earned our cinematic graduation degrees by proving that we could be exhilarated even by the dogged rhythms of anti-narrative.

Perhaps those fine souls are here at IFFI this year too, veterans waiting, alongside festival debutants and midlifers, for the world to go dark and a new story to begin.

Pragyaverse

by Pragya Bhagat

mother

i remember her smile, her smell
the way i couldn't wait for my bones
to grow beyond her hip, her neck, her well-oiled crown
i remember her attention to detail
that quivering draw to an unstoppable story
who she became when she thought i was looking
her reversion when she thought i was not
to remember isn't enough
it's never enough

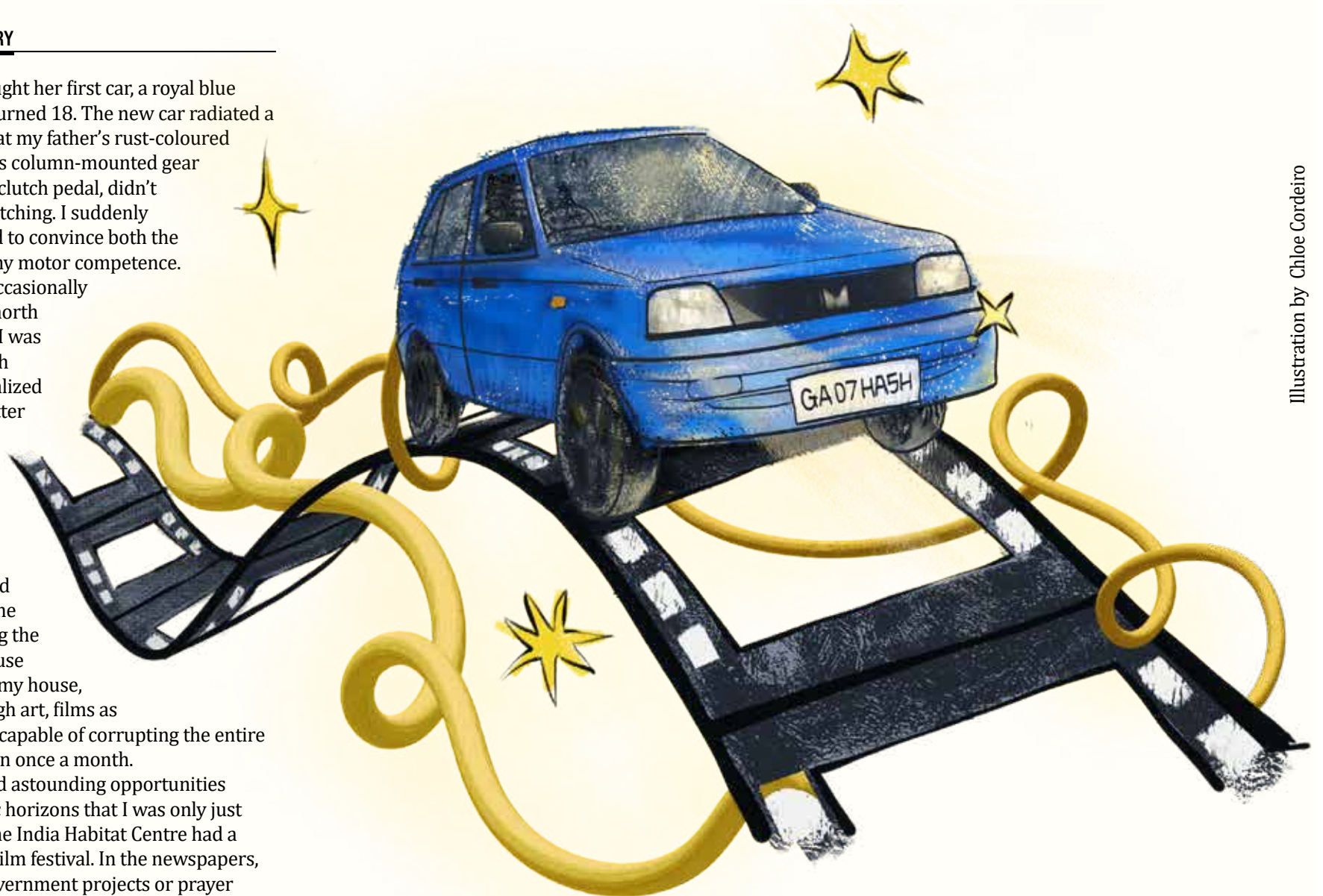


Illustration by Chloe Cordeiro

56th International Film Festival
Schedule - 26th November 2025

INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1 9:00 AM THE WAVE 12:00 PM A POET 2:45 PM MOI QUI T'AIMAIS 5:30 PM IT WAS JUST AN ACCIDENT	8:15 PM NEW GROUP 10:30 PM ATROPIA INOX PANJIM - AUDI 4 9:45 AM LEFT HANDED GIRL 12:15PM THE PILOT 4:00 PM MERAKI - BY THE SEA 5:30 PM SHIVA 9:00 PM BINODIINI EKTI NATIR UPAKHYAN	1:00 PM FURU 4:00 PM 2.0 7:00 PM ARIEL SAMRAT AUDI 10:30 AM JANINE MOVES TO THE COUNTRY 1:30 PM MACAI 4:30 PM AMOEBEBA 7:30 PM HUM TUM MAKTOOB	VANYA 4:30 PM PATRALEKHA IMBU 7:30 PM BHAIMON DA INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 3 10:30 AM DREAMS (SEX LOVE) 1:30 PM BECOMING 4:30 PM LIVING THE LAND 7:30 PM HANA
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 2 9:30 AM POKKHIRAJER DIM 12:45 PM OSLO - A TAIL OF PROMISE SHANGRILA 4:30 PM THE UNTOLD AGONY WHITE SNOW 8:00 PM GONDHAL	MAQUINEZ PALACE AUDI 1 9:00 AM FORENSICS 12:00 PM CHHATH 3:00 PM ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) FILMS AND CINEMAI HACKATHON SCREENINGS 5:30 PM EK HOTA VIDUSHAK 8:30 PM KIREEDAM ASHOK AUDI 10:00 AM HEN	INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 1 10:00 AM TWO SEASONS, TWO STRANGERS 1:00 PM SONGS OF ADAM 4:00 PM MOTHER'S BABY 7:00 PM BLINDSIGHT INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 2 10:15 AM THAT'S A WRAP AMRIT LAL NAGAR 1:15 PM CHALO INDIA WITH ERIC JI	INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 4 10:45 AM SAFE HOUSE 1:45 PM MAMA 4:45 PM FRÄNK 7:45 PM MY DAUGHTER'S HAIR RAVINDRA BHAVAN MADGAON 4:00 PM WHITE SNOW MAGIC MOVIEZ PONDA 6:00 PM WHITE SNOW
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 3 11:00 AM ZERO BULB 12:00 PM THE DEVIL SMOKES (AND SAVES THE BURNT MATCHES IN THE SAME BOX) 2:15 PM COMMITTEE KURROLLU 5:30 PM PENNUM PORATTUM			



Shilpa Mayenkar Naik says her *The Peacock* cover painting today “speaks about the simple and humble local Abolim” – the unofficial state flower of Goa – “which doesn’t have any fragrance, but possesses a vibrant pink-orange colour that stays fresh for days. It always played a significant role in Goan culture, and religious ceremonies, but is now becoming gradually sadly ignored, with its presence diminishing due to competition from foreign and exotic counterparts.”



PEACOCK PICKS

THE WAVE
9:00 AM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1

LEFT HANDED GIRL
9:45 AM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 4

A POET
12:00 PM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1

IT WAS JUST AN ACCIDENT
5:30 PM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1



Publisher: Asvin Chandru for the Entertainment Society of Goa | **Cover artist:** Shilpa Mayenkar Naik | **Editors:** Sachin Chatte, Michael Praveen, Daphne De Souza, Karishma D'Mello, Siddhartha Lall, Shivranjana Rathore, Vivek Menezes | **Columnists:** Damodar Mauzo, Govit Morajkar | **Editorial:** Kinjal Sethia, Pragya Bhagat, Poulomi Das, Saachi D'Souza, Pankhuri Zaheer Dasgupta, Chandrahas Choudhury, Sherry Fernandes, Sanskar Sahu, Shaunak Sardessai | **Lead photographer:** Assavri Kulkarni | **Art:** Sayali Khairnar, Chloe Cordeiro | **Distribution:** Rutik Naik, Shridutt Kantak