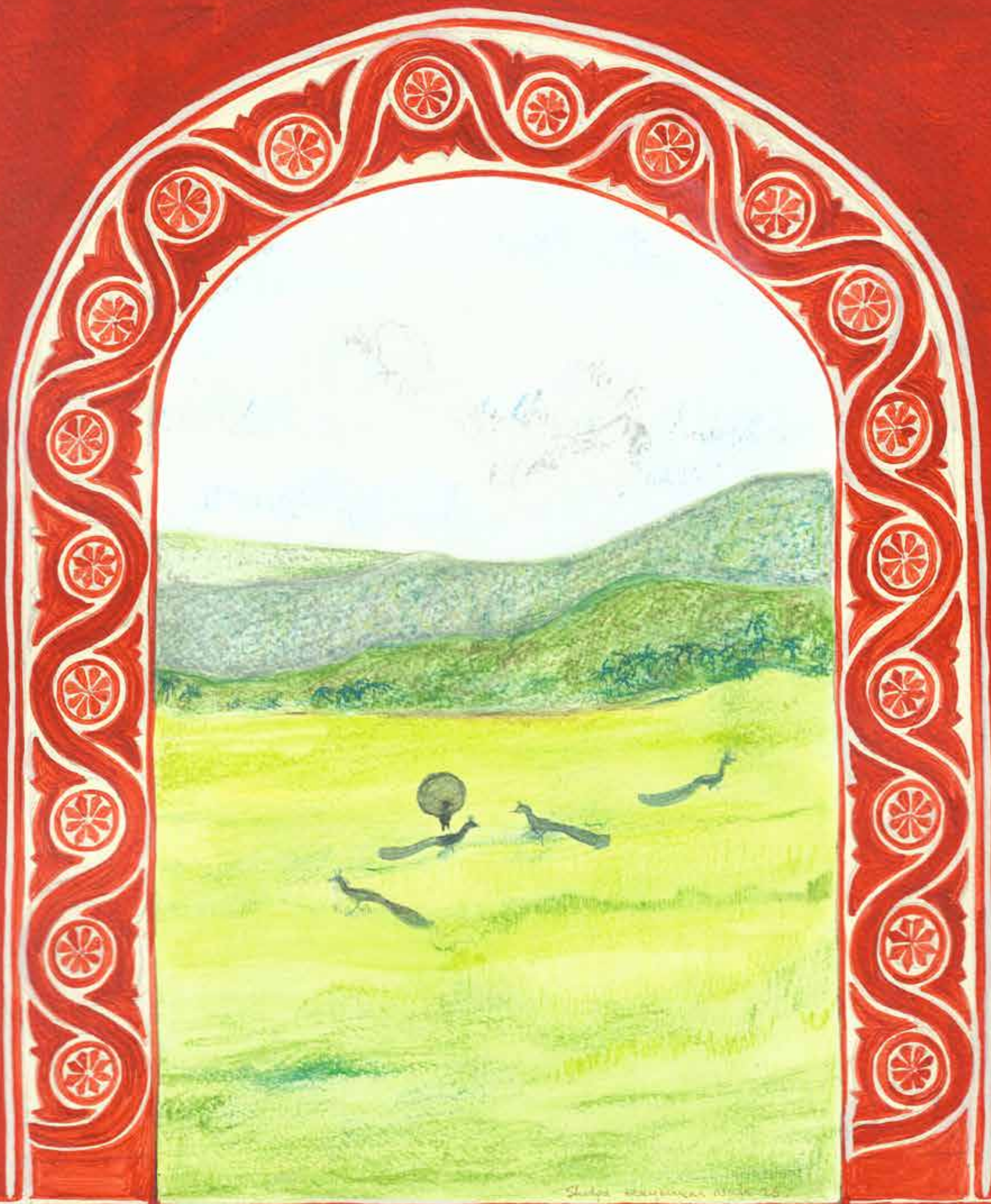


THE PEACOCK

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Rajendra Talak: “I’ve never wanted to be typecast”

BY DAMODAR MAUZO

Rajendra Talak was among the first few in Goan show business to recognize the opportunities presented by the arrival of IFFI. In 2004 itself, the very first year after the festival settled in Panjim, he premiered his debut feature *Aleesha* here, and it subsequently won the first-ever National Award for a Konkani film.

Others who were inspired back then include Laxmikant Shetgaokar, Bardroy Barretto, Dinesh Bhosle, and Rajesh Pednekar, all of whom went on to bag National Awards.

Some with more modest budgets like Shailesh Kamat, Aditya Jambhale, and Sainath Uskaikar ventured into short films, which also earned recognition at the national level.

Talak – a previous Vice Chairman of the Entertainment Society of Goa (ESG) – says that Goa has achieved around 8 National Awards for features and about 8 for short films, “that’s 16 national recognitions in about 20 years. I think IFFI has opened the doors for a new generation of Goan filmmakers, giving them the opportunity to showcase their talent on a global stage. I am confident that in the years to come, we will see even more exceptional Konkani films featured at IFFI.”

Talak says, “all my films have been well received in and across Goa. After *Aleesha* I made *Antarnad* (2006), my Marathi debut, which went on to celebrate a Silver Jubilee in Pune and won numerous state-level awards. This success opened a new chapter for me in Marathi cinema, giving me the opportunity to work with talented actors like Reema Lagoo

and Amruta Subhash, whose wonderful performances brought life to my stories”

Right into the 1990s, Talak was known in Goa as a theatre personality. It was when staging a play that he conceived an idea of making it into a film instead. He pursued it and when his first telefilm project *Shitu* (1994) was ready on VHS it was released at the hands of Shyam Benegal. It was Shyambabu who advised Talak to explore his potential by going in for feature films, and curious to know more, I asked him about that journey.

Is your switching over from stage to films a natural corollary?

I never attended any film school or FTII. My 30 years of experience in theatre – working across various departments such as direction, music, lighting, costumes, and set design – helped me immensely in filmmaking. Theatre taught me how to identify and eliminate unnecessary elements during shooting and editing, which made my transition from stage to screen very smooth.

To what do you attribute your progression?

I have made eight films in Konkani out of which four are bilingual. My journey in cinema has been one of constant growth and exploration. For example, in my film *A Rainy Day* (2014), I wanted to try something completely different. When I first approached the Oscar award-winning sound designer Resul Pookutty for the project, he hesitated and asked, “Why do you want me to do a regional film?” I told him there was something very special about this project – there would be no background music. He was surprised: “How is that possible?” I explained that I wanted to use natural sounds – especially the sounds of rains – as the background score. The film takes place over a single day, and I wanted to capture the different moods and rhythms of rain to create the atmosphere instead of relying on music.

Convinced on reading the script, Pookutty readily agreed. We finished the film without using a single note of background music –

only sound design and natural ambience. These kinds of experiments are what I have been trying to do gradually in my filmmaking. I’ve never wanted to be typecast. My films span different genres and themes – from romantic stories like *Saawariya.Com* (2009) based on Internet marriages, to *O Maria* (2010), which focused on heritage preservation; from *A Rainy Day*, a strong statement against corruption, to *Miranda House* (2019), which was a bold experiment in performance, camera work, and lighting. With every film, I’ve tried to bring something fresh – a new idea, a new technique, or a new perspective.

What made you go for the new musical film, *Claudia* (2025)?

T: The main inspiration came from my deep fascination with the golden Konkani melodies of the 1960s and 70s. The songs in *Claudia* are inspired by those timeless compositions. I have always admired the artists of that era who were completely devoted to their art and lived for music. My goal was to balance the two aspects – music and emotion. As a director, I wanted to capture the feelings of someone who loses the most cherished part of his life and has to find a way to move forward. When I started working on *Claudia*, the two thoughts – my love for golden-era music and the emotional journey of an artist – came together. I believe I have done full justice to the film, to every character, and to the timeless music that inspired it.

Claudia will be screened today 9.15am at Inox Screen III, Panjim.

Illustration by Chloe Cordeiro





Chandran Rutnam: “You’ve got to lasso them and bring them in”

Photo by Michael Praveen

INTERVIEWED BY PRAGYA BHAGAT

Your work with the International Jury is almost over. We’d love to hear your reflections.

We didn’t agree on everything, but it was a very exciting experience for me, to work with such lovely, talented people.

You’re responsible for many films being shot in Sri Lanka, including Hollywood productions like *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) and *Indochine* (1992). What do you think makes Sri Lanka the ideal location for foreign films?

First of all, it’s beautiful. It’s compact. You can travel from balmy Colombo to the cooler Nuwara Eliya in two and a half hours. It’s got good technicians, and it’s a lot less expensive than any other location in the world. Those are the aspects of the location, but how do filmmakers come there? You’ve got to lasso them and bring them in. That’s what I do through my company, Film Location Services.

What is Sri Lanka’s relationship with Indian cinema?

We must accept the fact that in

numbers, India is the biggest producer of motion pictures. It’s an additional benefit that India is my neighbor. So, I should take advantage of the fact that I have access to excellent locations here in this country. India is our brother making movies, so my work also consists of lasso-ing them up and bringing them to Sri Lanka, to provide good services, good prices, good everything.

How did you learn about the business of film?

I was very lucky. I grew up in an affluent family. I went to the best colleges in Sri Lanka, and at seventeen, I ran away from home. My mother knew I was running away, my father didn’t. He’s a businessman, and he left town on a trip. That’s when I left home. I didn’t take any money from my family; I made the money I needed to survive on *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) with Sir David Lean. I did everything there. I made tea, I was a gofer, I was a prop man, a wardrobe man. I wanted to learn the business the best I could.

You’ve worked with stalwarts like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, amongst many others. Of all the film

makers you’ve worked with, who are the ones who’ve left the greatest impact on you?

That’s easy to say. Sir David Lean, who did *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, etc. I had the honor and pleasure of working with him when I was just seventeen. That means I stood by him, for six months. That was a better education than going to college. I was a young man learning how to make films, and I learned a lot from watching him. My eyes and ears were open. After that, I left for London and worked on films there, and then I went to Hollywood and spent forty years there. I’m inspired by Steven Spielberg; I worked with him on *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). I learned a lot from him, like how a movie is not made for the self, but for the audience. The whole idea is to involve the audience in the story. That’s important.

You lived in Los Angeles for forty years. What led you to move back to Sri Lanka?

I met a beautiful woman. I asked her to come to Hollywood with me. She said, *no, I want to live in my country*. It’s a long

story. I met her in India, on a plane. There was a party for my film in Delhi and I was entertaining a lot of people. I was only in Delhi for one day, so I rushed to the party, and as I was playing host, I saw the same woman from the plane, right there at the party. She’d been invited by another guest. She gave me a hard time, but I lasso-ed her in. I won her over. We’ve been married twenty-five years.

What does a typical day look like for you?

It’s always hectic. I get up around six. My wife and I take our fifteen-year-old daughter to school. I go to my film office and my wife goes to the airport, because she runs the Asian Aviation Center. There’s a pilot training school and an aerospace engineering college at the Center. We teach skills like aircraft maintenance too. My film office is on top of my mother-in-law’s house, so my wife comes there when she is done with her work. When we are ready, we all go home.

What do you look for in selecting which films to produce?

Story, story, story. You’ve got to get the story right.

SHORT TAKES



This is my third time at IFFI; Goa is nice. This time, especially so because you can go straight to Kerala for the next film festival in two weeks.

Andrei Grudinin
Film Enthusiast
Russia



The ambience, decorations, activities, and the various cultural dances of India at IFFI, are really amazing.

Adrija Roy
Student
Kolkata



Gustaakh Ishq was one of the best films I have ever seen, taking me back to my childhood through its language and dialogue.

C. Bajoria
Retired
Mumbai



I like old movies, so I’m really excited to see *Sholay*.

Anushka Ganiga
Student
Mangalore

“Visibility is still a process”

BY SAACHI D'SOUZA

For more than two decades, Vardhan Kamat has been a familiar presence in Goa's theatre circles—an actor who has built himself on stage craft, radio work, and the discipline of a performer who knows that visibility is never guaranteed. Even after becoming a recognisable face on social media—writing and enacting comedic skits on middle-class family dynamics—that reality hasn't changed. “It's always about proving yourself,” he says. “It's an ongoing process unless somebody finds you somewhere. The world is too big. You never know who is placed where.”

That instinct for visibility isn't vanity. It's survival. Years ago, Kamat admits, he lost an ad campaign because his follower count was too low. Since then, he has treated reels as a parallel craft, even as the medium shifts every day. Audiences now demand shorter, quicker bursts. “A 90-second reel is long,” he says. “People want 15 or 20 seconds. But how do you tell a story in that? You need a beginning, a middle and an end. It's too short for actors.” Yet the medium remains a training ground: a space to improvise, to write, to stay nimble. Reels, he agrees, are the new short films.

That agility has shaped his first, soon-to-be-released Konkani feature directorial debut, *Umesh*, a film he began imagining long before any producer came on board. The seed was planted in 2019 at a tea stall he frequented after rehearsals. Those post-show evenings—actors, labourers, village characters drifting in and out—became the early scaffolding of his screenplay. “There were people sitting there whose personalities challenged me,” he says. “I thought of having them in a film. That tea stall became an important element. We crafted everything else around it.” The story is not strictly autobiographical, but it emerges from lived memory: the small theatre of Goan life that rarely reaches cinema screens.

Umesh was first written for Marathi. But the tonal shifts didn't fit. “The nuances in language couldn't be

replicated,” he says. “We decided to wait until we found someone who felt this story should be told in Konkani.” That someone was businessman and first-time producer Sangramsingh Gaikwad. “Some parts of the story belong to me, some to him, some to people we know,” Gaikwad says. “All of us matched with the story. It became reality on film.”

Gaikwad was clear that he wanted newcomers. “My motive is that fresher actors should reach another level,” he says. The only established name in the cast is John D'Silva. “We also worked with kids from the village. They had never seen a film set,” Kamat says. When the crew arrived for the recce, word spread quickly. Neighbours drifted in to ask how they could help. “They were excited. It became a 19-day schedule, plus four more days. Twenty-three days total. The village carried the film.”

The film's world—tea stalls, roadside conversations, micro-dramas of work and

survival—sits squarely in the Goan everyday. That's the terrain Kamat excels in, both online and offline. “In Goa, so many stories happen around a tea stall, a bar, a 'ros omelette gaada,’” he says. “These places are characters themselves.”

For Gaikwad, whose day job is financial consultancy, filmmaking has opened another path. He already has new scripts waiting. But first, *Umesh* needs to find its route into the world. The team has begun sending it to festivals, and early signals have been encouraging. “We got an invite from the New York Indian Film Festival,” Kamat says. “We want to explore the international circuit for at least a year.” They are also speaking to distribution and sales agents. “A theatrical release is one option,” he says. “But the film can also be sold to airlines. Some distributors have approached us.”

What he is most certain about is that Goan filmmakers need to think bigger than the familiar festival loop. Kamat has attended IFFI since 2010; he knows the limits of its marketplace. “For Goa, it's more

beneficial to go to NFDC Film Bazaar,” he says. “People come from Japan, South Korea, Germany, and Portugal. They are looking for co-producers. They're ready to fund you if you have a good story.” This year, *Umesh* landed in the Bazaar's “Recommend” section—a curated list of 22 films watched by industry decision-makers from around the world. “It turned out to be a good decision that we didn't rush a local premiere,” he says.

“Visibility is still a process,” says Kamat. But *Umesh* signals something else too: a filmmaker stepping out of the 15-second reel frame to claim time and space for a slower form of storytelling—one that still begins, like many Goan tales do, at a tea stall after rehearsal.



Photo by Michael Praveen

SHORT TAKES



As a Kannada theatre activist, we're all for social change through art, culture, drama, and theatre. This happens at IFFI.

D. Gopalakrishna
Professor
Bangalore



I love feminist movies. I love how women's stories are told, even though they're usually in a patriarchal form.

Areej Lulu Ara
Student
Mangalore



This year's organisation feels especially strong, with women leading the major responsibilities and handling every situation with efficiency and kindness.

Fazal Edakot
Asst. Professor
Kerala



IFFI has a special energy for us. We return every year, meet our friends and fully immerse ourselves in films in a way we never do at home.

Beena Vi
Professor
Kerala

“Grace flows in the direction of the orphaned soul”

BY CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY

There are at least two stories in every film: the story that it tells, and the story of how it got made. The 15-year-long back-story of *Axis of Life* (2025), the spiritual coming-of-age film from Bulgaria (and with strong ties to India) that premiered at IFFI this year, really compels attention. The film has its roots in a book by the same name written by Swami Tirtha, a revered monk born in Hungary and initiated into the Gaudiya Vaishnav tradition in India. The Bulgarian businessman Victor Francess, is an Indophile and film buff who runs a telecom company called Excitel from New Delhi — “I believe I’m one of only two Bulgarians running a business in India” — and is a staunch disciple of Swami Tirtha.

When Swami Tirtha raised the idea of turning the book into a film, Francess decided to dip his feet into the unknown waters of film production. He engaged three screenwriters to turn the philosophical premise of the book into a dramatic narrative; they came up with the story of a spiritual master testing his three disciples on an arduous walk through the mountains to work out which one of them deserves to be his successor. Even so, the project stalled for several years for want of the right director. Then Francess ran into his countryman, the director Atanas Hristoskov, in an ashram in Vrindavan. After some early reverses in his career, Hristoskov had himself almost turned his back on feature filmmaking. Now he was persuaded to helm the project.

The resulting film, shot in the rugged mountains of Bulgaria on a budget of less than a million euros, is a triumph. Each of the film’s four “chapters” explores the personality and existential situation of one of the four main characters. The film is made in English (although the dialogue is sparse); the international cast brings together Bulgarian actors Aleksandar Aleksiev and Vladimir Mihaylov, who are very popular domestically, with the Danish actor Lars Simonsen (who plays the master,

Vit), the Scottish actor Clive Russell, and the Italian actress Marina Suma.

“The production team had two units,” says Francess, “one for shooting the actors, and a second unit for shooting the other life forms of this world.” The narration also pulses with gorgeous sequences of grasses fluttering in the wind, lizards and ants climbing up the sides of trees and leaves, the moon rising above a mountain, water running over pebbles in streams. Everything seems alive and interconnected: a landscape watching four human beings pass by. “*Axis of Life* is a film about an archetypal journey,” Francess explains. “*Theek hai*, perhaps it is not for everybody. But in essence it communicates the message of the Upanishads — we all have a soul, and at root it is connected to the World Soul — in a more modern language.”

“Man is attracted to God,” says Vit to one of his disciples, who wonders how it is possible for someone who has never been loved to give love. “But God is also attracted to man. Grace flows in the direction of the orphaned soul.” You might hear dialogue like that in other kinds of drama, but here the flow of images generated by cinematographer Martin Balkansky, the meditative rhythms of the story, and the background music (composed entirely, says Francess, with traditional wooden instruments like the two-metre long flute called the *fujara*) reinforce the message.

There are no stereotypical character conflicts, usual in ensemble drama; the greatest battles in life are those we fight within. In one fine sequence, the fat, clumsy disciple Tomar, who is easily attracted to food and drink but also quick

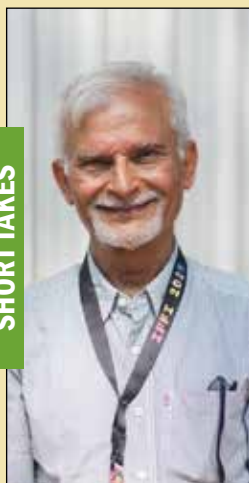
to love and serve, agrees reluctantly to join the group on a three-day fast, but is unable to resist picking up an apple lying on his path. Repeatedly, he comes close to biting it, before he finally gives it away as an offering in a shrine.

The beauty of the images in *Axis of Life* means that it really is best understood when seen on the big screen. Francess is now seeking a theatrical release in India, where the philosophical roots of the story lie. Hristoskov supplied another fine gloss on the film in a short speech before the screening. “Today humanity has realized that it is no longer king of the jungle when it comes to intelligence,” he said, referencing the rise of AI. “But there is a territory we can still keep to ourselves, and that is the place of our feelings, our emotions. The film is about that universal power within us and between us.”



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

SHORT TAKES



I was really touched by the film *Khoya Paya*. I was inspired by the courage depicted in the film.

Jogi Bhagat
Yoga Teacher
Pune



As a designer, I think the costumes need to match their script; they’re an essential part of a film.

Diana Linda
Designer
Goa



In terms of the organisation IFFI has improved a lot. It’s a mature film festival, but I think it could have had a better selection.

Rajiv D'Silva
Architect
Goa



IFFI changes every year, and with more venues and screenings, it feels like we get the chance to watch so many films we never find in Madurai.

Dr. Saleema Rabiya
Professor
Madurai

“My films are influenced by video games”

BY PRAGYA BHAGAT

“My family loved watching movies, so I went to the cinema often from a very young age. I started making short films on an iPod touch,” says Masaki Nishiyama, who began his film making journey at fourteen. Twelve years later, he comes to IFFI with his directorial debut, a supernatural feature called *The Invisible Half* (2025).

Nishiyama discusses the evolution of Japanese cinema with *The Peacock*, and the recent influences of manga and anime culture. “Manga is a sixteen-page comic, packed with emotions. Personally, my films are also influenced by video games, specifically their experiential nature.”

The way Japanese creators build entertainment might be something other creators across the world can learn from. *The Invisible Half* includes many features of a traditional Japanese horror, or J-horror, film: blood drips, lights flicker, and furniture moves mysteriously. Other elements include the breakup of a nuclear family, a haunted house, and leaving fear to fester in the viewer’s imagination. Notable J-horror films include Hideo Nakata’s *Ringu* (1998), Takashi Miike’s *Audition* (1999)—Miike’s film *Sham* (2025) is being screened at IFFI on November 27—and Kiyoshi Kurosawa’s *Cure* (1997).

Taking J-horror to the next level, Nishiyama’s characters move slowly, sometimes too slowly, so that any movement—a walk, a head turn, a widening of the eyes—turns poetic, as if a painting was coming to life. *The Invisible Half* doesn’t shock the viewer with jump scares and other obvious tropes. Instead, it trusts the viewer’s ability to feel fear, even in silence and stillness. What makes the film doubly horrific is the use of the smart phone. The teenage protagonist, Elena, is addicted to her mobile device, more so because she moves to a new school. A monster starts to follow her around, and



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

the only way she can hear it is through her earphones. The only way she can see it is through her smart phone. The device that haunts her is also the one that alienates her from her friends and family.

“During the pandemic, I stared at my phone all day,” Nishiyama recalls. “I was a smart phone junkie. I wanted

to quit social media then, but it was difficult, because it’s so addictive. I wanted to make movies that exposed the issues young people have with social media and smart phones. Sometimes, I just wear earphones but don’t listen to anything, because I want to avoid people in big cities. The earphones became a metaphor for disconnection, both in my

life and Elena’s.”

The Invisible Half was screened at IFFI on November 24, at nine-thirty at night. A particular scene, one in which two school girls stand holding hands in an empty hallway, reminded me of a similar scene in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980). *The Peacock* learns that Kubrick is one of Nishiyama’s biggest cinematic influences. “Recently, I’ve also been inspired by the work of Yorgos Lanthimos and Denis Villeneuve.”

This is Nishiyama’s first time in India. “Goa is full of energy, both the place and its people. I feel a great vibe here. I wish I could stay longer.” Speaking of the audience’s reaction to his film at the IFFI screening, Nishiyama narrates how he took time to answer questions from viewers who waited to speak to him. “I took six years to make this movie. Viewers wanted to know about that. I also took four years to develop the visual effects, which were created by a single person, who was working on the big-budget *Godzilla Minus One* (2023) during the week and on my film during the weekend.”

The Invisible Half strikes me as unusual, because even though the film is directed by a man, all the characters in the film—every single one—are female. “The horror genre typically has a male protagonist and the heroine is female. There’s usually a love story, triggered by the fear that the unknown evokes. I didn’t want to make a love story, so I consciously decided to have all the characters as female. Even the school that Elena joins is a girls’ school.”

The Bechdel test measures the representation of women in film and fiction. There are three criteria the test must follow: One, at least two women must be featured in the story. Two, these two women talk to each other. Three, these two women have a conversation about someone or something other than a man. *The Peacock* is glad to report *The Invisible Half* passes the Bechdel test with flying colors.

SHORT TAKES



The film I’ve enjoyed the most is *I Only Rest in the Storm*. It was a lengthy 3 and a half hour film and I expected it to be boring, but it was actually brilliant.

Riju Paulose
Creative Director
Bangalore



The atmosphere is rare: cinema, climate, and the openness of Goa. Increasing theatre capacity would make the experience even better.

Harshada Vedpathak
Film Critic
Mumbai



I make films to tell new stories from my region and bring out the untold side of the world.

Shashank Sao
Filmmaker
Mumbai



Goa has always been India’s number one tourist spot, so an international film festival being held here, is also a good way to promote tourism.

Keona Crasta
Student
Mangalore

"I'm Not Interested in Perfection. I'm Interested in Mistakes"

BY PANKHURI ZAHEER DASGUPTA

Akinola Davies Jr.'s *My Father's Shadow* (2025) is at once personal and political, a memory-play of two siblings, a sensory map of Lagos, and a quiet, radical statement about fatherhood. Winner of the Cannes Caméra d'Or and the UK's entry for this year's Best International Film at the Oscars, the film is a must-watch at this year's IFFI.

The heart of the film is Davies Jr.'s rare creative partnership with his brother Wale. "He wrote the short version of *My Father's Shadow* and sent it to me completely unprompted. I read it, I cried in bed for about an hour," Davies remembers. Their process is simple and disciplined. "We go away, really secluded, we sit in a room, he writes, I show him pictures, I show him film references..." This deep creative trust and their own childhood memories drive the film.

The city of Lagos functions almost as the fourth character in the film, sometimes as the backdrop, sometimes almost engulfing the protagonists. Davies Jr. sees Lagos as "a place that exists with extremes... abject poverty on one side and super nouveau riche on the other side." A city marred by constant hustle and political turmoil, but also "humour and braggadocio." The film juxtaposes the city's charm and hardship seamlessly. "I try not to take anything in Lagos for granted," he says.

Davies Jr. and his cinematographer Jermaine Edwards chose 16mm to give the film an intentional roughness. The filmmaker also experiments with perspective as the audience sees the world through the eyes of the 8 and 11-year-old brothers. "There was an idea of staying very low, staying with the kids." The film's editor, Omar Guzmán, a "mad scientist", stitches the shots into memory-like fragments, incorporating roll-outs, glimpses of crew and camera carts, moments that feel accidental by design. "I'm not really interested in perfection. I'm interested in mistakes, serendipity, and spontaneous aspects that you can't really control."

The film's soundscape is an important

part of the film's emotional core. "People will forgive a bad picture, but they won't forgive bad sound," he says. Working with sound designer CJ Mirra and composer Duval Timothy, Davies Jr. speaks of creating a soundtrack that was like a rotten fruit, "so one side feels like everything is very optimistic, and if you just turn it around, it can get very dark and heavy." The filmmaker and the composers set out to create a score that felt like it was created by children. "We used instruments that go out of tune, we used a lot of voice." There are moments when the film hushes to silence "because it emphasizes the noise."

The theme of absent fatherhood is central to *My Father's Shadow*. And Davies Jr.'s take is beautifully nuanced. The film complicates the shorthand that fathers choose to be absent because of negligence, and centers the men who sacrifice spending time with their children to provide for them. "What does that cost the family, but also what does that cost the men who are having to go away?" The film mirrors this personal trade-off with the reality of a country with an absent leader.

The film was developed with BBC Films and funded by the BFI, Match Factory, Mubi, and Fremantle. "The co-production really defines the power of the film," he acknowledges. Co-production isn't just funding, it's also access. "UK investing in Nigerian film is important because we are where we are through the colonial exercise."

Davies Jr. is delighted about screening his film at the 56th edition of IFFI and his Golden Peacock nomination. Speaking about the importance of showing his film in festivals across the Global South, he says, "There are a lot of similarities in our stories, once we get over certain specifics, the stories can be transported." Asked which directors Indian Film enthusiasts should watch from Africa, he mentions Ousmane Sembène, Mati Diop, and Genevieve Nnaji.

My Father's Shadow is screening today at INOX Screen-1, Porvorim, at 4 PM.



Photo by Michael Praveen

SHORT TAKES



I believe the meaning of life is simply to enjoy it, because we have only one, and finding peace in small things like music and cinema keeps it beautiful.

Shripad Mode
Artist
Jalgaon



I love being here for the second time. The movies and the mix of people, from young to old, make it special.

Linda Sen
Entrepreneur
Bengaluru



Film festivals are where you pick up the newest independent voices and stay connected to the evolution of the craft.

Sivakumar Mohan
Filmmaker
Chennai



I am here mainly for new Indian films. I look for strong premieres and award-winning titles that can travel to Moscow and Kazan.

Nina Kocheliaeva
Festival
Programmer
Russia



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

“Each individual’s memory is part of history”

BY KINJAL SETHIA

Kazuo Ishiguro commented on the distortions of memory in his debut novel *A Pale View of Hills*, and the director Kei Ishikawa worked closely with the author in his adaptation, which premiered in the Un Certain Regard section at the Cannes Film Festival this year. Ishikawa, who is highly familiar with Ishiguro’s oeuvre, chose this particular novel as a commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombing at Nagasaki.

“The young have heard of this traumatic piece of history from those around them, from their elders. But there’s a gap between listening to someone else’s story and experiencing it. I wanted to bring this story back to the audiences now,” says Ishikawa, who always wanted to translate Ishiguro’s work on screen,

and picked this novel because he felt it would be a good way to bridge the past and the present.

The unreliable narrator in the novel, and its surreal elements also inspired him to adapt the novel. “Ishiguro’s work has this mix of vivid imagery and dreamlike affect. It has enough mystery and metaphors to leave space for imagination, while also commenting on relevant topics like gender differences, migration and nuclear weapons.”

Traversing time and continents, the story weaves through the lives of a young, pregnant Etsuko in post-war Nagasaki as she recollects her past and her daughter Niki’s present, who is attempting to navigate her own aspirations and trauma in England of the 1980s. From pastel-toned past to vivid colours of the present, from Etsuko’s Japanese in Nagasaki dialect to Niki’s English, Ishikawa manages

to recreate the effect of the novel in a sensitive and stirring evocation.

The long whirling click of a camera, the neighbour’s gossip, and rain enunciate the emotional landscape of the characters. Speaking of his formal technique, Ishikawa shares that “we placed the camera from the character’s viewpoint, especially for the parts that depict Etsuko’s memory. We tried to capture what the character would see and hear. For instance, it was not that colourful in Nagasaki, but because it is Etsuko’s memory, we see the flowers in those colours.”

Mother and daughter open boxes, a menagerie of letters, photographs and mementos. Each time the opening of a box is an invitation to the past. Ishikawa says, “each box is a Pandora of trauma. It is a form of inheritance. One cannot escape the scars, even if one escapes from the land.” Surreal

elements also hint towards the unreliability of memory; blurring them into dreams and dreams into secrets.

“Memory shifts shape. You might think it is something concrete, but it is more fragmented than one would like. Etsuko tells Niki the story as she remembers it or as she prefers it being told,” says Ishikawa, who reminisces that even his own grandmother’s fragmented story about returning from China to Japan during the war in very difficult circumstances, does not align with historical accuracy. He regrets not documenting her story, and says, “It may not be the history taught in text books. But each individual’s memory is part of history too.”

A Pale View of Hills will be screened today at Inox Screen IV, Panaji at 6.30 pm.

Goan folklore contains many stories about the Rakhandar, the protective spirit guardian who is believed to safeguard our villages, fields and homes. Sometimes referred to as 'Rakhno' or 'Devchar', these spirits are often depicted as a tall dark-skinned man who guides those who are lost, especially at night. They are also symbolized by formless shrines, or saffron flags tied to banyan trees. The Rakhandar is believed to patrol villages after dark, with heavy footsteps and the banging of staffs that villagers sometimes hear. One key belief is they will appear to guide lost or distressed individuals home safely, often warning them not to look back before vanishing. To appease and honor Rakhandars, offerings are made, like *bidis* or a bottle of *feni*.

— Govit Morajkar



Simón Mesa Soto: “Festivals should be launchpads”

BY KINJAL SETHIA AND POULOMI DAS

José Asunción Silva, the Colombian poet who wrote in the late 1850s, dominates the wall and thoughts of Oscar (Ubeimar Rios), the protagonist of Simón Mesa Soto’s *A Poet* (2025). Obsessed with his own aspirations as well as stifled by them, a sensitive and frustrated Oscar is confronted with his inner demons while his working-class origins stand before him as stark reality.

Soto created this titular character to echo his own frustrations that had crept in during the pandemic. His first film, *Amparo* (2021), was ready for audiences, but the world had other plans and went into lockdown. Fermenting in the suppression of his own aspirations, Soto was feeling disenchanted with filmmaking. “I was seriously considering whether I would ever make a film again. Perhaps, it would have been a more relaxed choice to live a satiated life as a full-time professor; a life devoid of any ambition. That’s when the idea struck me: to make a film visualising the worst version of myself.”

It was this exercise in imagining a character wallowing in the utmost depths of pity that triggered the character for *A Poet*, Colombia’s official Oscar submission this year. “The universe of poetry has always been fascinating to me. Not necessarily poetry per se, but the poets. How Colombian poets form a cosmos of these dreamy, erratic, and troubled characters. That was the seed for the main character.”

Soto reveals that he decided on poetry as the preoccupation of the film, rather than more performative forms of art, because he felt that poets are utopian artists. “They live in a world removed from their present. They look to the past for perfection. They are dreamers of utopia. It was not about idealising poetry. Instead it was about constructing a commentary on the life of an artist, told

through the struggles of a poet.”

Formally, *A Poet* carries the raw, unstable energy of its protagonist. Soto shot the film on 16mm and embraced a visual style that feels physically unsettling. The frame jitters, tightens, and seems to tremble with the character’s inner volatility. “The unsteady camera mirrors his imbalance,” he says. “He’s not a socially stable person—he has internal issues. The camera follows that.”

In that sense, *A Poet* unfolds as a tragicomic portrait of artistic ambition pushed to the point of collapse. Oscar is a middle-aged, middle-class poet whose dreams of literary greatness have curdled into something brittle and desperate. He haunts bars, libraries, and television studios with equal parts bravado and insecurity, clinging to the belief that poetry will save him even as the world around him tightens. What begins as a character study then transforms into a sharp and painful examination of what it means to insist on being an artist when

everything—money, society, one’s own mental stability—seems to argue against it.

That tension is not abstract for Soto, who also wrote and co-produced *A Poet*. He speaks about the bruising reality of making films in Colombia, where state support is minuscule. “In Colombia, the national film fund usually covers only 30% of a budget,” he says. “It’s a very tiny amount. So you have to look for co-productions, mostly in Europe.” European involvement also brings its own pressures and expectations, which often shape which stories are considered fundable. As he puts it, many filmmakers end up “making films to please funders or festivals instead of making exactly what they want.”

Yet, festivals are still essential for independent films like *A Poet*. But Soto doesn’t see them as the only destination. “Festivals shouldn’t be the end of a film—they should be the launchpad so more people can see it,” he explains. The success of *A Poet* on its home turf—it

was released in theatres in Colombia and met with acclaim—matters as much to him as its Un Certain Regard slot at Cannes or the film’s future as Colombia’s Oscar hopeful. His goal, he suggests, is that a film made with artistic freedom can move from those launchpads toward a larger audience.

Going behind the lens with a subject that was wrenching his mind was a cathartic experience for Soto. He admits, “The idea of success for an artist is very distorted. Artists are narcissistic in that they want to transcend themselves to get recognition for their work. But this success doesn’t always translate into happiness because artists also fixate on the future and forget to live in the present.” Making this film reminded him to slow down, to realise the importance of enjoying the process rather than chasing the outcome, “*A Poet* helped me reconnect with my love for cinema.”

A Poet will be screened today at Inox Screen I, Porvorim at 1 pm.



Photo by Assavri Kulkarni

SHORT TAKES



I’ve always been a movie freak, and here, after experiencing the film; you meet its creators. It’s the kind of access a lifelong fan really craves.

Ujjwal Sen
Sr. Account Manager
Bengaluru



The masterclasses, retrospectives, and cultural events make the festival feel like a true celebration of life, culture, and cinematic history.

Shailey Minocha
Professor
United Kingdom



To put it in simple words, my job as an actor is just fun. You have to wait 3-4 hours to do a scene, but it’s enjoyable.

Vijayakrishnan Nair
Actor
Kerala



I would love to watch every movie, but it’s not possible. My friends choose the movies because I have really bad taste.

Yashasvi S.M.
Student
Mangalore

Illustration by Sayali Khaimar



My IFFI Memories

BY DIWAKER BALAKRISHNAN

My first exposure to the International Film Festival of India happened way back in 1975, after I had joined the Film & Television Institute of India in Pune and the students were given permission to attend the festival at the Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi.

IFFI was an incredible experience for a young man who was just beginning to learn the ropes of cinema. I recall that Gina Lollobrigida was attending the festival that year, and was also in New Delhi. I also got to see *Ape & Super Ape* (1972) the famous

Dutch documentary film by Bert Haanstra, and *The Godfather* (1972), one of the great blockbusters of the times. Most unforgettably, I had the privilege of meeting Ritwik Ghatak, who used to sit on the lawns of Vigyan Bhawan talking about cinema while puffing away at his beedi. Nobody could touch him, for he had a hot line to the Prime Minister on whose personal invitation he had come. All this blew my top off, to become an ardent and dedicated student of cinema, exploring its immense possibilities for life.

Subsequently, I had worked with the DOP, Shaji N. Karun while I was a student in the second year, for G. Aravindan's Malayalam film *Kanchana Sita*

Pragyaverse

by Pragya Bhagat

the anatomy of remembering

if you ever write a book, remember
that memory is an unreliable narrator
she's bent on the propagation of nostalgia
if the good-old-days smelled of orange zest
reality would be the rind you refuse to chew
(no one likes an unpleasant aftertaste)

let me be clear, memory is critical
crumpled into a fetal past
it harbors all that is honest
this is why we dig for truth, scrounge for facts
cross-check story with photographs

so if you ever write a book
remember with caution
ask questions of others, start with yourself
sharpen your knife, slice thin
just begin

(1977) which was a memorable experience, but it couldn't come for the Indian Panorama then. However, my maiden film as a DOP, *Prakriti Manohari* (1980), which was completed immediately after my course in Motion Picture Photography – a black and white film shot on ORWO in Malayalam – did get screened in the Indian Panorama segment of that year's IFFI, followed by *Akkare* (1984), and my documentary film on the literary giant Basheer entitled *Basheer the Man* (1987) was blessed with a National Award in 1988.

Later down the line I was on the jury for Cinema of the World, and the Indian Panorama, and I have been especially keen on coming to IFFI since it moved permanently to Goa. I always remember how the dynamic CM Parrikar would come by constantly to find out what is required, sometimes even by scooter. Those days, when he created the IFFI heritage precinct headquarters, are now part of an indelible history.

Now in 2025, we are a team of 5 in the IFFI Technical Committee comprising SMPTE, CUBE and PULZ, whose function it is to ensure that the viewing experience at IFFI is on par with state-of-the-art international standards set by the SMPTE in terms of screen brightness, the audio quality and managing the hundreds of DCPs received at IFFI which goes through a meticulous quality check before it reaches the theater. As a part of these duties, we are alert 24x7 while the screenings are on, at all the venues including the outdoor locations at Miramar, Vagator and the Ravindra Bhavan in Margao. While the delegates enjoy screenings, there is a team of people working behind the scenes, almost happily invisible, and I have been one of them since 2010 to the present 56th IFFI.

56th International Film Festival
Schedule - 27th November 2025

INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1 9:00 AM AMRUM 11:15 PM FURY 1:45 PM SHAM 5:45 PM RAAT AKELI HAI: THE BANSAL MYSTERY 8:45 PM KONTINENTAL '25	4:30 PM DR. KOTNIS KI AMAR KAHANI 6:45 PM SHAPE OF MOMO 9:30 PM CALAMITY INOX PANJIM - AUDI 4 9:45 AM SUSMAN 12:45 PM A. R. M 4:15 PM TEMPTING MADNESS 6:30 PM A PALE VIEW OF HILLS 9:00 PM KESARI CHAPTER 2 MAQUINEZ PALACE AUDI 1 9:00 AM PUNKU 11:45 PM MANUSHYA 3:15 PM TRANQUILITY BASE 5:45 PM GEETHANJALI 8:30 PM THOSE WHO WHISTLE AFTER DARK ASHOK AUDI	9:30 AM MORICHALES 11:15 AM A SUMMER IN BOUJAD 1:00 PM BELOW THE CLOUDS 4:00 PM SOUND OF FALLING 7:00 PM SAND CITY SAMRAT AUDI 10:30 AM SOLOMAMMA 1:30 PM SLEEPLESS CITY 4:30 PM WHITE SNAIL 7:30 PM WHISTLE INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 1 10:00 AM ORENDA 1:00 PM A POET 4:00 PM MY FATHER'S SHADOW 7:00 PM GLOAMING IN LUOMU INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 2 10:15 AM COTTON QUEEN	1:15 PM FAMILY MATTERS 4:15PM THE WOMAN 7:15 PM JAILER INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 3 10:30 AM BACK TO THE FAMILY 1:30 PM MOI QUI T'AIMAIS 4:30 PM THE DEVIL SMOKES (AND SAVES THE BURNT MATCHES IN THE SAME BOX. 7:30 PM THE WAVE INOX PORVORIM - AUDI 4 10:45 AM PERLA 1:45 PM FOLLIES 4:45 PM ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) FILMS AND CINEMAI HACKATHON SCREENINGS. 7:45 PM OMAHA RAVINDRA BHAVAN MADGAON 4:00 PM POKKHIRAJER DIM MAGIC MOVIEZ PONDA 6:00 PM POKKHIRAJER DIM
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As we head into the last screenings of the 56th International Film Festival of India, our wonderful cover artist Shilpa Mayenkar Naik has depicted Kaavi – the traditional red-brown earth-based wall mural technique of the Konkan that has been used in Goan homes, temples, and churches for hundreds of years – and the verdant landscape of India’s smallest state, saying “our cultures, tradition and nature are all precious, and it is very important that we preserve it all for future generations.”





ONE ACRE-ONE VILLA

LUXURY IN NORTH GOA

PRIVATE RESORT COMMUNITY.
TWO SOLD OUT.
ONLY SEVEN LEFT

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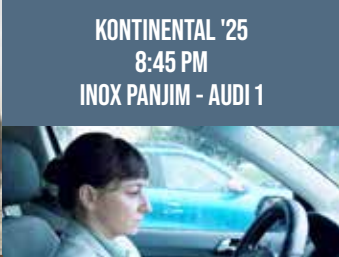
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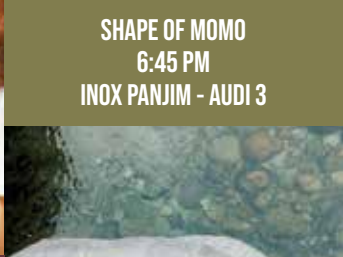
AMRUM
9:00 AM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1



KONTINENTAL '25
8:45 PM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 1



A POET
1:00 PM
INOX PORVORIM- AUDI 1



SHAPE OF MOMO
6:45 PM
INOX PANJIM - AUDI 3

Lounge Partner



Beverage Partner



Tea Partner



Airline Partner



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