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reach out to audiences with films made in my mother tongue'



Prachi Pinglay-Plumber Jan 25, 2020 09:48:37 IST

For his age, 28-year-old Akshay Indikar seems to already have a considerable number of achievements to his credit – three films, invites from several film festivals, and award nominations. However, if one takes into consideration his perseverance, commitment and hard work, the trajectory of his career doesn't seem surprising; perhaps, it is just the beginning.

Akshay hails from Solapur, a drought-prone arid region of Maharashtra with geographical and cultural proximity to the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. He belongs to the Gondhali nomadic tribe, who are practitioners of folk music and performance, and learnt early on that his community's traditional art was dying out because people had to take up other livelihoods to survive. He was also raised to believe that cinema was not a career option meant for the morally upright.

However, Solapur, which is populated by a diverse range of people, was home to one of the earliest multiplexes. "Within one space there were seven screens and it was the norm for films across Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi and Hindi to be played. We drew comfort and solace from films," says Akshay. "I always wanted to do something larger than life – like joining a circus or becoming a magician," he says, matter-of-factly. "We even inquired about schools that train magicians," he fondly says of his encouraging father, who works as a college lecturer.

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After his early education in Akluj, Akshay moved to Pune for further studies and to pursue theatre, only to realise that he wouldn't be able to break into the city's famed theatre circle, since he didn't speak '*pramaan bhasha*' (formal Marathi, largely spoken by Brahmins and upper caste people in Pune and Mumbai). "Books gave me confidence. I knew I needed to have a unique strength to succeed and realise my dreams. Pune opened up treasures of knowledge: the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), the Sahitya Akademi Library, the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). I studied film and cinema, and read biographies of many personalities, from Charlie Chaplin and Ingrid Bergman to Dada Kondke. I began assisting FTII students and after graduating in Mass Communication, I applied to and got into FTII."

He was one of the toppers when selected, but didn't wait to complete the course; he had already determined to finish it in three years and start working as soon as possible. This may make him seem like a man in a hurry, but he spent several months working on his latest film *Trijya*, conceived at FTII. It is now travelling to several prestigious film festivals across the world, and its next destination is Spain.

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"I wanted to create something that would resonate strongly with young people living in this post-modern world. I wanted to portray the frustrations, stress and ennui that result from moving into a multicultural city like Pune, in order to become a part of it. In the beginning, I titled it '*Yatra*' (journey). I wanted to capture the sense of claustrophobia experienced by a poet who is looking for a breath of fresh air in a journey that can easily seem worthless. Later, I changed the title to '*Aaranya*' (forest), which eventually became '*Trijya*' (radius)," Akshay explains.

The shooting and editing of this film was finished within a rigorous 50-day schedule which involved travelling through various parts of Maharashtra, on a shoe-string budget. Every year, five films are picked from South Asia for the NFDC Work in Progress program. *Trijya* was selected even before Akshay could finish shooting it.

Lines from poems by Bhalchandra Nemade have also been used in the film, he adds. Before *Trijya*, he made a docu-fiction film on the writer titled *Udaharnartha Nemade* ('for example, Nemade' – a term the writer employed very interestingly in his novel). It features elaborate interviews and visualisations of the characters the writer created. The idea for this film came to Akshay when he visited the Jnanpith awardee to seek permission to use his poetry in *Trijya*. "Our conversation was so engrossing that I felt the need to make a film on him, and when I asked, he agreed," he says.

Udaharnartha Nemade was made with loans from close ones, and the post-production was handled by Chitrakathi Nirmitee, a production house. *Trijya* was selected at Film Bazaar, and was made as a co-production with Chitrakathi Nirmitee and Bombay Berlin Film Productions. Amid ideation, filming

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...with audiences who appreciate the emotions in his film, which is shot in Marathi. For me, the primary function of cinema is to showcase our lives, our realities and our peculiar reactions to them. I couldn't find cinema that expressed this in my mother tongue – Marathi. After having watched films from different cultures made in different styles and at different periods, I began getting a sense of the kind of cinema I wanted to make. I don't consider Marathi as being a stepping stone to Hindi or English; I believe I can reach out to people with films made in Marathi," he asserts.



The themes Akshay is exploring in his next films reflect his cinematic vision. His second outing *Sthalpuran* is about an eight-year-old boy in search of his father. *Construction*, the love story of an architect and archaeologist, delves into destruction and loss, juxtaposed with construction and new creation. Human behaviour and society are the backdrop to the main plot. But beyond a discussion of the larger themes of these films, he does not give away much. Thus far, there have been no release plans for these films or public screenings. "I want my films to reach all Marathi people, but there is no system for this. My films won't fit in with the Friday-releases-with-songs. Digital

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may be best viewed on a digital platform."

The digital revolution enabled by social media excites him. "This is the only way that power equations will change. A young girl from a village in Nashik district can go viral on Instagram and get noticed. Otherwise, the systems are built in such a way that outsiders cannot survive. But now the world will truly become flat."

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