

Tuesday, February 18th 2020

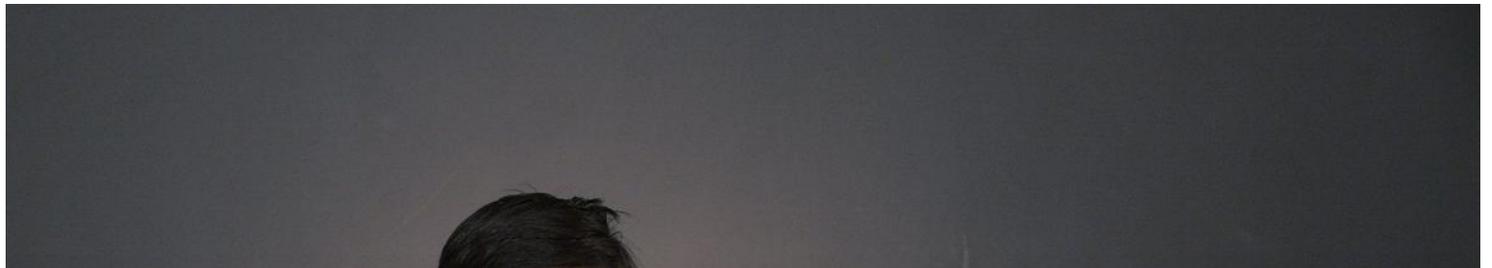
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In Berlin festival-bound Marathi film 'Sthalpuran', a boy seeks his place in a new world

'Trijya' director Akshay Indikar's movie will be screened at the reputed Berlin Film Festival.

Nandini Ramnath

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Sthalpuran (2020) | Courtesy Sanjay Shetye

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On-the-up director Akshay Indikar, who is all of 28, has completed two Marathi films in as many years and is tearing towards his third. The second one, *Sthalpuran*, will be premiered at the reputed Berlin Film Festival (February 20-March 1). It's a big honour for Indikar, a film school dropout, and yet another booster shot for the wider community of independent-minded Indian directors who seek to share their vision on a global stage.

Although *Sthalpuran* will be shown in the [Generation K-plus](#) category, which features films about children and teenagers, it's really for grown-ups. This exploration of the inner life of a child is guided by a contemplative approach that is expressed through long, unhurried takes and numerous silences. *Sthalpuran* is, as the title suggest, a chronicle of a place seen through the bespectacled eyes of the young Dighu. Forced to relocate with his mother and sister from

The monsoon is in full flow and the countryside is heaving with beauty, but Dighu is too unsettled to be impressed. He records his thoughts in a diary, noting that unlike Pune, the new neighbourhood has “the roaring sound of the sea”.

Subsequent entries reveal that this quiet child is observing everything around him and taking it all in. His mother, who has found a job at a factory to support herself, is “talking longer than usual” to a male colleague, he gripes. Another entry marks an impasse in Dighu’s quest to learn the truth about his absent father: “Nothing.”



Sthalpuran (2020). Courtesy Sanjay Shetye.

Indikar’s observational portrait, which sometimes has the quality of still-life painting, draws immediate comparisons with [Killa](#), Avinash Arun’s 2014 Marathi feature about a boy who relocates with his widowed mother to the Konkan for a school term. *Killa* was more of a narrative film that followed a plot, Indikar pointed out during an interview. In *Sthalpuran*, the first line of dialogue comes nearly 10 minutes into the narrative. The camera is both curious and distant as it records Dighu negotiating his new surroundings,

The ravishing cinematography, by Jagadeesh Ravi, captures the unhurried rhythms of the village that Dighu gradually learns to embrace as well as the minor moments that make up the new reality – tender close-ups of Dighu listening to the rain, a shot held just long enough of

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“Cinema can create a whole new set of movements,” Indikar observed. His challenge while writing the screenplay as well as editing the film and designing the sound was to “say what cannot be said with words”. Dighu is “an extension of nature”, which is why he is frequently framed against the landscape.

The boy is memorably played by Neel Deshmukh, a first-time film actor from the Kalyan suburb on the outskirts of Mumbai. “I needed a boy who would work for me in the scenes where the camera keeps rolling until something happens,” Indikar explained.



Sthalpuran (2020). Courtesy Sanjay Shetye.

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which traces the protagonist's journey from adulthood back to childhood, was another inspiration.

In many ways, *Dighu* appears to be a younger avatar of the main character in Indikar's 2019 debut feature *Trijya*. Produced by Bombay Berlin Film Productions, *Trijya* was screened at several festivals, including Talinn Black Nights Festival in November.

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Trijya explores the rupture caused by migration from the village to the city. Avdhoot (Abhay Mahajan) reacts badly to Pune, and his loneliness and dislocation take him on a journey without a destination. If *Dighu* writes diary entries with a literary flavor, Avdhoot is a poet killing time as a journalist.

The figure of the existentialist-minded loner seeking refuge in prose or poetry is a familiar one in Marathi literature and cinema. For Avadhoot, the writings of the Jnanpith award-winning winner Bhalchandra Nemade act as a lodestar during his search for meaning.



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Abahy Majahan in *Trijya* (2019). Courtesy Bombay Berlin Film Productions.

Among the similarities between *Trijya* and *Sthalpuran* is the relationship between the protagonist and his physical surroundings. In *Trijya*, the clamour of the city accelerates the retreat inwards, while in *Sthalpuran*, Dighu gradually ventures outwards as he forges an uneasy peace with his new world.

Indikar supplies a few more common links – the idea of roads and journeys, the notion of “water and its absence”, the blurring of lines between dreams and the waking state, the idea of taking control. “Both films are based on personal memories and draw on autobiographical elements,” he said.

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A member of the nomadic Gondhali community, Indikar was born in Solapur, but traces his roots to Karnataka. “We were folk artists, and we kept moving and migrating and eventually landed up in Solapur,” he said. As a child, Indikar was attracted to the stage and wanted to be a magician at one point. He arrived in Pune as a teenager for his college education and continues

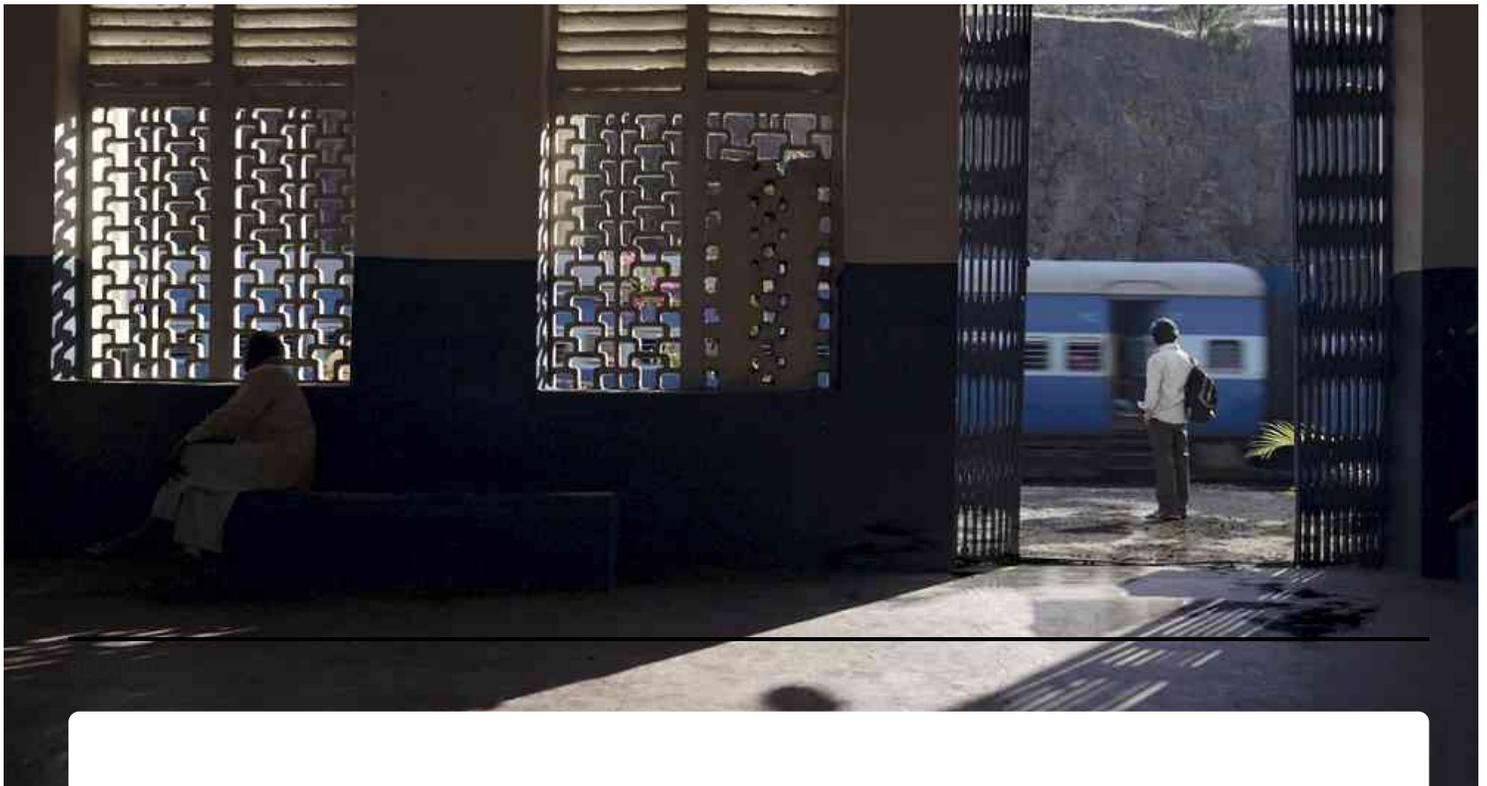
“I developed an inferiority complex,” Indikar recalled. He sought refuge in literature and poetry, veering towards the rooted prose of Bhalchandra Nemade, especially his landmark 1963 novel *Kosala* (Cocoon). “Nemade spoke about young people who had recently migrated, and I could relate to it,” Indikar said. “I was influenced by the idea that you could create your space with your own roots and your own native approach.”



Equally influenced by Solapur's rich tradition of movie theatres, Indikar enrolled at the Film and Television Institute of India in Pune in 2011 for a degree in editing. Cinema, he felt, would provide a more secular and less discriminatory platform than theatre. He had devoured the autobiographies and writings of acclaimed filmmakers, including V Shantaram, Charles Chaplin and Satyajit Ray, and felt that cinema, like literature, had a "lasting quality".

The film institute proved to be a disappointment for Indikar, and he dropped out after a year. His self-education has continued through the docu-fiction *Udaharnartha Nemade* (For Example, Nemade), made in 2016, and through his two features.

Even as he prepares to attend the Berlin Film Festival, Indikar is writing his next feature, titled *Construction*. His third feature will explore "identity through the theme of archaeology", and will commence shooting over the next few months.



Trija

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