

They're finally fulfilling life-long dream to become literate

Learning to read, write at India's 'school of grannies'

PHANGANE, India, March 7, (AFP): They wear uniforms, carry satchels and eagerly recite the alphabet in class, but the students here are different — this is a "school for grannies".

Deprived of an education as children, the women — most of whom are widows and aged between 60 and 90 — are finally fulfilling a life-long dream to become literate through this unique initiative near Mumbai.

"I never went to school as a child. It feels great to come now and study with my friends. We have so much fun," 62-year-old Gulab Kedar tells AFP, beaming with pleasure. She along with the rest of the class wear matching pink saris.

The school, which marks its first anniversary on International Women's Day on Wednesday, is challenging traditional attitudes common to many Indian villages and helping its women shed the stigma of illiteracy.

Every day, 29 pupils take the short walk from their homes in Phangane village, in the Thane district of Maharashtra, to Aajibaichi Shala, meaning "school for grannies" in the local Marathi language.

Grandchildren wave them off, or sometimes accompany them, not that this group need to be cajoled into going. They proudly carry matching satchels each containing a slate, a



This photo taken on March 1, shows Indian grandmother Draupada Kedar (center), 62, and other classmates attending a class at Aajibaichi Shala, or 'school of grannies' in the local Marathi language, in Phangane village in Maharashtra state's Thane district, some 125 kms northeast of Mumbai. (AFP)

piece of chalk and a textbook.

From 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm they sit cross-legged on the floor of the small outdoor classroom, which is made from bamboo, its roof thatched with hay.

Under the guidance of 30-year-old teacher Sheetal More they read simple text and carefully practise writing their names on their slates — two things none of them could do 12 months ago. They also learn basic arithmetic.

The women, many wearing bangles and elaborate nose rings, all have a similar story to tell. As youngsters they stayed at home or worked while their brothers got an education. They married young and were then expected to raise children and look after the home.

"My siblings went to school but I wasn't given that opportunity," explains 75-year-old Janabai Dajikedar. "At the bank I used to have to give my thumb print every time. There was a stigma attached and I felt shame. Now I am proud to sign my name," she adds.

The facility is funded by a local charitable trust and is the brainchild of Yogendra Bangar, a teacher at Phangane's primary school for the last three years.

He struck upon the idea early last year when some of the women complained that they couldn't take part in public readings during religious celebrations.

"We wanted to end their disdain and help them. We thought that if we could give these grandmothers a fair chance at education and literacy then it would make them very happy," explains Bangar, 41.

"At their age they aren't going to go looking for a job at a corporation but their joy at being able to provide a signature and read have increased their happiness manifold," he adds.

Bangar says the school — including its colourful uniform, which was purposefully chosen — is playing an important role in fostering respect for women. He also hopes it can be an example to other villages.

"Most of the grandmothers are widows and are meant to wear white to show mourning. We wanted to break this taboo and other older traditions to make every person feel they are equal and part of the community without any discrimination so we chose a pink uniform," he explains.

All 70 families in the village support the project and proudly dropped the grandmothers off on their first day of school.

GCC



Writers, directors, producers and stars who attended the 1st Int'l Konkani Film Festival in Kuwait are honored at the hands of Indian Ambassador Sunil Jain.

First international festival in Kuwait held for a cause

Konkani film fest unites Konkani community

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Latest

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2. Please write your story or memory and sign it with your full name, and your contact number.

3. It will be great if you send us your personal photos or those of the place related to the story (optional).

Your story will be part of a new book to be published by DAI.

I am confident that your contributions will be an essential part of the history of Amricani. Share with us!

March 24

IMA family desert picnic: Indian Muslim Association is organizing a 'Family Picnic 2017' on Friday, March 24, 2017 in a desert camp at the outskirts of Kuwait City under the theme 'Enter into Islam Completely' (02:208).

As usual it provides a unique opportunity for the entire family to rejoice in a fun filled interludes and educational discourses. Activities include variety of sports for children and elders alike, cultural event, skit, literary session (Mushaira) and prize distribution ceremony at the end. All basic amenities shall be provided for a comfortable stay for elders & children.

Picnic event kicks off with the breakfast at 07.00 am followed by Sports and other varied activities to keep you engrossed until 5.00 pm. Friday Sermon as well as sumptuous Lunch will also be arranged in the same tent.

Ladies are provided with separate adjacent tent to have enough privacy and segregated activities like Sports, Mehendi, Calligraphy, 1 minute games etc.

For convenience bookstall and emergency medical services are made available during the occasion.

Picnic spot is located at 85.5 Milestone on Road No. 30 or 40 towards Nuwaiseb. Free Bus Services are arranged to reach the location from Kuwait City, Salmiyah, Jaleeb al-Shoyukh/ Abbasiya, Khaitan and Mangaf / Fahahel. All are cordially invited to attend this joyous occasion.

For entry passes and for further details please contact below numbers:

Kuwait City — 99117842; Khaitan — 60069583; Abu Halifa — 66971934; Fahahel — 66891841; Salmiya — 99426664; Abbasiya — 97223941; Youth Wing — 97124000; Ladies Wing — 90020221 (Sisters Only).

March 31

FOCUS to conduct TIPS 2017: FOCUS International Kuwait has been conducting TIPS for the past four years with the support of a students' organization based in Kerala. TIPS was established in 2010 with venues at a few nominated centers. To date TIPS is the only model entrance examination recognized with centralized valuation and centers within and outside the country. TIPS model entrance aims at providing hands on experience for students attending various competitive exams to professional courses. The test will follow the pattern of NEET/JEE medical-engineering entrance exams and shall be conducted in as many as 50 centers across Kerala, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi and every gulf country. Hoping to arm the students with an experience that would help them to assess and prepare themselves, the examination is evaluated in a centralized manner. The test should foster

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By Gasper Crasto

KUWAIT CITY, March 7: The first ever International Konkani Film Festival held in Kuwait is a celebration of cinema par excellence that will certainly be talked about for years to come.

The festival spread over 2 days (Feb 25-26) brought a continuous flow of audience to the American International School auditorium.

The fest's forward-looking heart is apparent from the words of chief organizer Carmo Santos who expressed a dream to make the event an annual platform for Konkani film premieres and award ceremonies.

While sharing his happiness on the success of the festival, Santos stated, "We are delighted to unite Goans and Mangaloreans through the medium of cinema. The 'winner' of this film festival is our mother tongue Konkani, and the talented, smart, innovative people involved in the field."

His Excellency Sunil Jain, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, chief guest at one of the movies, had a word of praise for Goan Cultural Centre (GCC), who arranged the festival in association with T-Bush International Films and the Konkani Community of the Holy Family Cathedral.

"It is a delight to know this is the first international Konkani Film Festival and Kuwait is the host," stated Jain further adding, "we shall support Konkani art, language and films, always."

It should be noted Konkani films has a limited scope. Just a handful of Goan and Mangalorean films are produced in a year. Limited audience, difference in dialects and lack of resources has been a drawback to Konkani cinema for long.

However, this has gradually vanished with the release of some spectacular movies in recent times. Many Goan stars are seen in Mangalorean movies while Mangalorean artists are working together in Goan films too.

Ester Noronha, lead actress of Noshibacho Khell, who was present at the festival, has sung for Nachom-ia Kumpasar and is lined up to feature in a forthcoming Goan film.

A special massive L.E.D screen and Dolby sound provided in the auditorium brought out the best of all movies and quirky independent features alike.

Colors never faded, and details remained vibrant as ever.

Kuwait-based filmmaker T-Bush who was in charge of the technicalities, ensured each sound and image was reproduced with digital accuracy, just as the directors intended.

Select movies that were screened at the Kuwait festival included Big Ben, Nirmon, Home Sweet Home-2, Enemy, Noshibacho Khell, and Nachom-ia Kumpasar.

A number of dignitaries, personalities and artists representing the films were on visit to Kuwait as part of the festival.

Present among the delegation were Glen Barretto, and Simon D'Silva - Producer and Co-producer of Nachom-ia Kumpasar; Swapnil Shetkar - producer/writer/director, and John D'Silva - lead star of Home Sweet Home-2; Nilesh Newalkar and Armando Fernandes - producers of Nirmon; Mark de Araujo - producer/writer/director/lead star of Big Ben; Henry D'Silva - producer and Ester Noronha - lead actress of Noshibacho Khell.

Religious clergy who were special invitees at the event included Fr. Antony Lopez, Fr. Franco Pereira, Fr. Xavier D'Souza, etc.

Big Ben

Written, directed, edited by Mark de Araujo, who also plays the lead role, Big Ben is a film which will surely capture hearts of Goans connected to friends and families living in the UK.

The film reveals some of the unspoken lifestyles of Goans, their hardships, lustful addiction, immoral bondages related to their life, and their influence on families back home in Goa.

The movie showcases some of London's landmark monuments including the famous Big Ben tower clock (reminder of life in the glittering city), and explores into a number interesting must-see facts that are well presented by Mark de Araujo in words that weep and tears that speak.

Some of the dialogues and language used in the movie has a true-to-life flair and alluring effect on the audience to watch the film with delight.

Big Ben's title track 'Eio London-cha Xharant' penned by Mark de Araujo himself and sung by playback singer Veeam Braganza is perhaps one of the best title tracks among the screened movies.

Nirmon

A remake of the 1966 classic, made with a fresh cast, new screenplay and improved dialogues, NIRMON retains all the elements of the original movie from the storyline to the soulful songs, although with a few improved pinches and twists.

Anagha Joshi's perfection in the role of Claudia, impeccable selection of all characters, beautiful 'photography', perfect edit, and the immortal songs and dialogues of the film is what makes the film so iconic and popular.

The film's songs including the everlasting hits 'Claudia' and 'Dol Mhojea Bai', which are so synonymous with every Goan household as the most favorite lullabies for kids, were released in an audio CD at the festival.

The original Nirmon remains the only Konkani movie to be remade into a Bollywood film, and dubbed into 7 different languages.

It will surely remain one of the best films in Konkani.

Home Sweet Home-2

Home Sweet Home-2, a sequel to its earlier part, is attractively done like an A-Grade commercial Hindi movie.

A mixture of dialogues in different languages, variety of songs, brilliant background music, etc, makes the film spicy. However, the movie sounds extremely 'noisy' at times.

The script based on alleged scams unleashed

by 'Goan' politicians in the state makes the film a must watch for 'locals'.

If truth be told, the movie seems to have drawn audience (out of interest) purely on the basis of its earlier episode which was far superior than the concluding part.

Aryan Khedekar who has played such 'photogenic' roles in both the Home Sweet Home films looks great enough for a place in Hindi film industry.

Prince Jacob plays a role of Goan CM which is exceptionally enacted and portrayed.

Rajdeep Naik and John D'Silva have played their part to perfection, however, they do not seem naive and demure enough like they did in the first part which made them popular with the audience.

Enemy?

The movie should stand documented in the annals of Konkani cinema as the best 'non-fictional' film.

The unique subject is wisely explored and studied. It is sure to catch the eye of national media and international audience alike.

No wonder the film won the Best Konkani Film Award at the National level and was awarded Best Foreign Language Film at the Milan Film Festival in Italy.

The movie is a must-watch for Goans as it is alleged in reality that Indian Home Ministry has identified over 250 'Enemy' properties worth more than Rs 100 crore in the state that belong to Goans who have acquired Pakistani nationality.

'Enemy' properties are those whose survey numbers are registered in the names of Goans who migrated to Pakistan decades ago.

The dialogues are executed to realistic excellence and interest by Meenakshi Martins playing the role of a 'mother'. The actress who also plays an important role in Nachom-ia Kumpasar could be nominated for the best actress role if there was one at the festival.

Salil Naik rightly justifies his role as the army captain and young son in Enemy, while Samiksha Desai presents attraction to the film by her beautiful presence.

'Enemy' audience are bound to stay glued to the screen and enjoy the movie. It is the script, dialogues and on screen treatment that makes the movie so over the top.

Given the subject is so valuable to other Indian states as well, one wonders why the movie has not yet been dubbed in other languages?

Noshibacho Khell

The Mangalorean-made film meaning 'a game



Indian Ambassador Sunil Jain seen at the movies amidst a section of the crowd.

Photos by Pearl Vaz