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MYSTIC AURA

MAGAZINE

Love

Valentine's
Day Evolved

GAFF '2026
Film Festival

HEALING
Beauty Glow

Love is in the Air
Fashion that Flairs

FEELINGS
Language of the Heart

2026

MYSTIC AURA

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From Editor's Desk



February month, revolves around with the sweet scent of roses and the warmth of love. This month is the celebration of beauty and relationships, self-love, and the joy of connecting with others.

In this issue, we will dive into the world of romance, exploring what it means to love and be loved. In this issue we cover articles of love and tribulations, fashion and a few topics of lifestyle, offer tips on how to nurture your relationships and prioritize self-care followed by our regular Aura pages.

So, take a moment to cherish the people who make your heart skip a beat. Whether it's a romantic partner, a friend, or family member, let them know how much they mean to you.

Happy Reading

&

Happy Valentine's Day.

Regards

GITALI PATHAK DEKA
Proprietor & Editor-in-chief

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COVER

on the

Niha Das

Photography: Bikram Borpatra
Make up: Bimal gohain
Costume: CZ Rental



Niha Das

A bright, talented and very gorgeous actor ,model and a classical dancer from the beautiful city of Guwahati, that resonates with passion, creativity, and dedication. Niha is a multifaceted personality with a flair for the performing arts.

As an actor, model, and classical dancer, Niha has already made a mark in her community with her captivating stage presence and versatility. Her love for dancing is evident in every step she takes, and her acting skills are honed through her experiences in college and beyond.

Niha's future plans are not just about personal success, but also about giving back to society. She dreams of becoming a great actor, using her platform to inspire and touch the hearts of her audience. But more than that, she aspires to be a good human being, spreading positivity and kindness wherever she goes.

Her ultimate goal is to make a difference in the world. She wants to use her talents to bring about a positive change, whether

it's through her acting, dancing, or modeling. Her passion for social service is genuine, and she is committed to working towards making a better world for all.

With her talent, dedication, and passion, Niha is sure to shine bright in the world of entertainment. Her journey is an inspiration to many, and we can't wait to see what the future holds for this talented young & very admirable beauty.

Mystic Aura wishes her good luck in all her undertakings.

Aura Beauty

Model

Sangeeta Das

Photography

Kaushik Brahma





The Fashionable Side of *Love*

CELEBRATING
VALENTINE'S DAY

By Dipika Giri, Nepal

How can fashion be left behind when we talk of Valentine's Day? A trend at present we can say any celebration in India specially, fashion comes first. As before the actual date, planning for the dresses start is on air always choosing the best of it to look the ultimate you. Now yes, when it is just around the corner, and the air is filled with romance, love, and fashion. This day, dedicated to celebrating the beauty of love and relationships, has become a haven for fashion enthusiasts and romantics alike. From stunning outfits to exquisite accessories, fashion plays a significant role in making this day truly special.

Over the years, Valentine's Day fashion has evolved significantly. Gone are the days of traditional red and pink hues. Today, the fashion landscape is all about experimentation and self-expression. People are embracing bold colors, unique patterns, and statement

pieces that reflect their personal style.

Trendy Outfits for a Romantic Evening :

When it comes to Valentine's Day outfits, the options are endless. Let me share some trendy ideas to inspire you hope it works for all.

Red-hot dresses: A classic choice for Valentine's Day, red dresses are timeless and elegant. Opt for a fitted, floor-length gown or a flowy, midi dress that exudes romance.

Love-ly lace: Delicate lace details can add a touch of sophistication to any outfit. Try a lace-trimmed top or a flowy lace dress for a romantic evening.

Sweetheart necklines: Sweetheart necklines are a Valentine's Day staple. Pair it with a fitted bodice and a full skirt for a fairy-tale-inspired look.

Accessories can make or break an outfit and steal the show on Valentine's Day, they can add an extra touch of romance. Some accessories that really looks stunning if worned with a proper outfit.

Heart-shaped jewelry: A heart-shaped necklace or a pair of earrings is a classic Valentine's Day accessory. You can opt for bold, statement pieces or delicate, minimalist designs.

- **Rose gold accents:** Rose gold accents can add a touch of luxury and sophistication to any outfit. Try a rose gold clutch or a pair of rose gold heels to elevate your look.
- **Fresh flowers:** Fresh flowers can add a romantic touch to





any outfit. Try a floral crown or a single rose pinned to your hair for a whimsical look.

For a Romantic Glow:

On Valentine's Day, the focus is on looking and feeling your best. A Few beauty tips to help you achieve a romantic glow:

- **Glowing skin:** Exfoliate your skin to remove dead skin cells and reveal a radiant glow. Use a hydrating moisturizer to keep your skin soft and supple.
- **Luscious locks:** Use a hydrating hair mask to add moisture and shine to your locks. Style your hair in loose, effortless waves for a romantic look.
- **Bold lips:** A bold lip color can make a statement on Valentine's Day. Opt for a classic red or a bold, bright shade that complements your skin tone.

Fashion has the power to make us feel confident, beautiful, and loved. On Valentine's Day, it's all about embracing your personal style and expressing your love and appreciation for the special people in your life. Whether you're going on a romantic date or celebrating with friends, fashion can add an extra touch of magic to the day.

Celebrating Love in All Its Forms

Valentine's Day is not just about romantic love; it's also about celebrating the love and connection we share with friends, family, and ourselves. Whether you're single, in a relationship, or celebrating a special bond, fashion can be a fun and creative way to express your feelings and show yourself some love.

In conclusion, Valentine's Day is a celebration of love, fashion, and self-expression. Whether you're going all out or keeping things low-key, fashion can add an extra touch of romance and magic to the day. So, go ahead, get creative, and make this Valentine's Day a memorable one.



Love Across the Generations

How Valentine's Day Has Evolved

By **Vanessa Jacqueline Dcruz**, Loani Chairperson, Singapore

Once upon a February, Valentine's Day was simple—heart-shaped boxes, red roses, candlelit dinners, and the quiet pressure to be coupled up. But as Valentine's Day 2026 approaches, it's clear that this cen-

turies-old celebration of love has grown into something far more layered, reflective, and inclusive. Across generations, the meaning of February 14 has shifted—not because love has lost its value, but because our understanding of love

has expanded.

Gen Z: Redefining Love Beyond Romance

For Generation Z, Valentine's Day is no longer confined to romantic relationships. In fact, many would

argue that romance is just one small part of the picture. Research shows that nearly 70% of Gen Z believe Valentine's Day is evolving into a celebration of all relationships—friendships, family bonds, and even the relationship one has with oneself.

Having come of age during a pandemic that disrupted human connection, Gen Z learned early that love isn't limited to couples. It's community, companionship, and care. Sixty percent of young adults aged 18–24 now buy themselves Valentine's gifts, unapologetically embracing self-love as something worthy of celebration.

They've also popularised concepts like Galentine's Day and Palentine's Day—friend-centric gatherings that replace romantic pressure with brunches, spa days, laughter, and shared experiences. Where earlier generations may have viewed being single on Valentine's Day as exclusion, Gen Z often sees it as freedom.

Their love language is digital—Tik-Tok tributes, Instagram aesthetics, Snapchat streaks—but there's sincerity beneath the screens. Interestingly, Gen Z is also the generation most likely to buy Valentine's gifts for parents and close friends, suggesting that their broader definition of love is deeply intentional.

Millennials: The Bridge Between Old and New

Millennials sit comfortably in the middle of this evolution. Sixty-four percent plan to celebrate Valentine's Day, and they remain the most active gift-givers across generations. They honour traditional



romance while fully embracing newer ideas like self-gifting and celebrating friendships.

This is the generation that shifted Valentine's Day from "things" to "experiences." Romantic dinners, short getaways, shared activities, and personalised moments often take precedence over generic gifts. While they shop primarily online, what they value most is meaning—gestures that feel

thoughtful rather than performative.

Millennials don't reject tradition; they reinterpret it. Their Valentine's Day often includes partners and friends, blending nostalgia with modern emotional awareness.

Gen X: Love, Practically Expressed

Generation X approaches Valen-



tine's Day with grounded realism. Among those aged 45–60 who are in relationships, 68% plan to buy gifts—steady participation without excess. Their expressions of love tend to be practical, consistent, and sincere.

Nice dinners, quality time, and reliability matter more than spectacle. Many Gen Xers are part of the “sandwich generation,” balancing careers, parenting, and caring for aging parents. As a result, Valentine's Day can sometimes feel routine—prompting relationship experts to encourage small acts of spontaneity to reignite connection.

For Gen X, love is less about display and more about showing up.

Baby Boomers: Where Tradition

Still Holds

For Baby Boomers, Valentine's Day remains rooted in classic romance. This generation is most likely to celebrate exclusively with a romantic partner, favouring flowers, chocolates, handwritten cards, and intimate dinners.

Nearly one in five Boomers decorate their homes for Valentine's Day, treating it with a ceremonial respect reminiscent of earlier decades. Their preferences lean toward timeless expressions—greeting cards, thoughtful notes, and meaningful conversation. In a fast-paced digital world, their approach feels almost poetic in its simplicity.

What Hasn't Changed

Despite generational differences,

one truth remains constant: love still matters. Americans spent a record-breaking \$27.5 billion on Valentine's Day in 2025, proving that affection—however expressed—is still worth investing in.

What has changed is not the importance of Valentine's Day, but its definition. No longer limited to romantic couples, it now honours love in all its forms—romantic, platonic, familial, and self-directed.

As we move into 2026, Valentine's Day feels less like a rigid tradition and more like a reflection of who we are today. Perhaps that isn't a loss of meaning—but its evolution into something far more honest, inclusive, and human.



Healing Is the **NEW GLOW**

By: Brian La Cour, Author/writer/Entrepreneur, US

There was a time when glow meant shimmer, mica dusted across cheekbones, glass skin achieved through chemistry and patience. Today, glow has

shifted. It no longer lives solely in highlighter or hydration. It lives deeper, quieter, harder to bottle. Glow, now, is healing.

Across continents and cultures, beauty is undergoing a reckoning. Women are no longer asking only What works? but What hurts? And more importantly, What helps me

feel safe in my own body again?

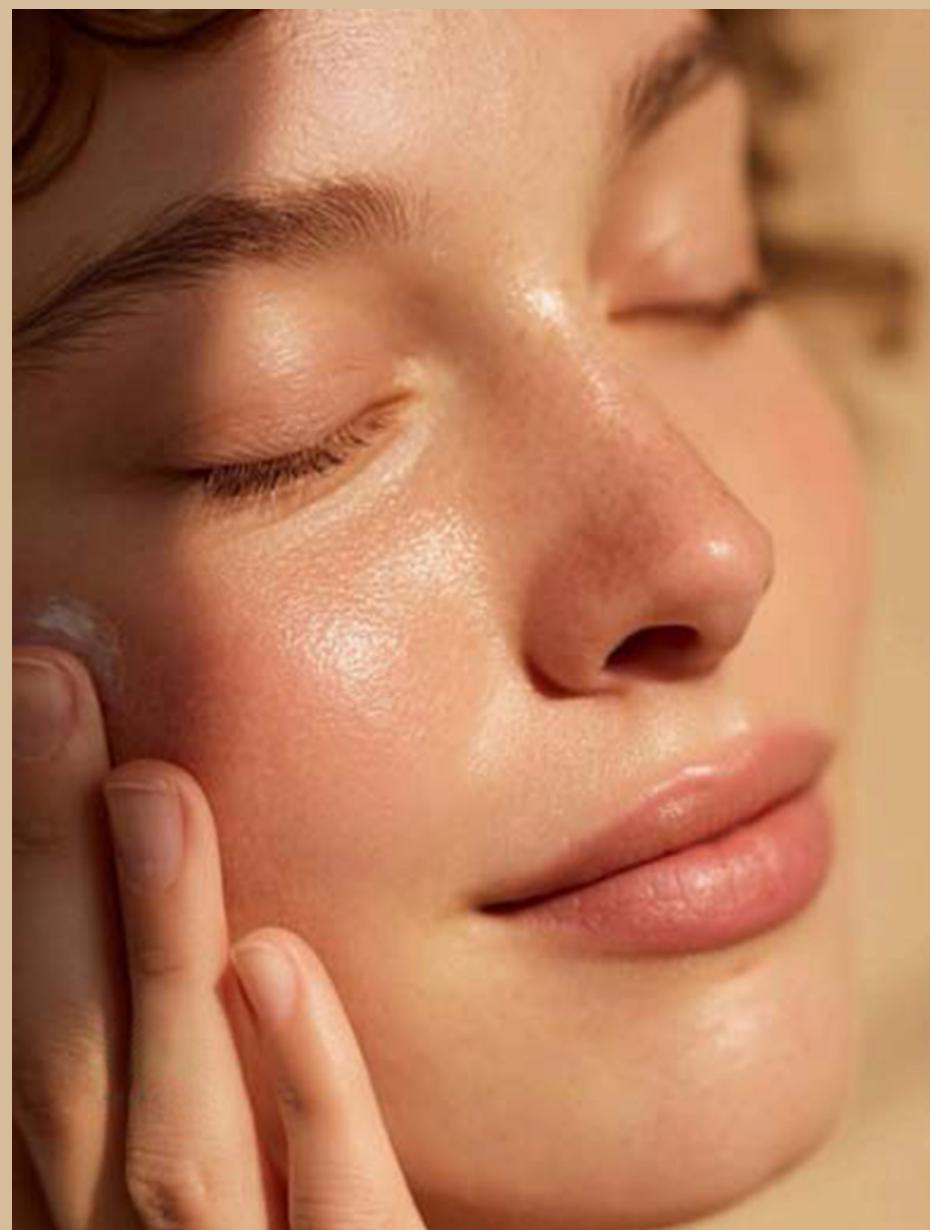
Dermatologists have long known what women intuitively feel: stress does not stay in the mind. It settles into the skin. Cortisol disrupts collagen. Sleeplessness dulls tone. Anxiety inflames. Trauma tightens the jaw, furrows the brow, accelerates aging in ways no serum can undo. The face remembers what the body has survived.

In Seoul, night routines have become less about perfection and more about restoration, layers applied slowly, intentionally, as a signal to the nervous system that the day is over. In Paris, facial massage has moved from indulgence to necessity, a way of releasing tension stored in muscle and memory. In parts of Africa and the Caribbean, beauty rituals have always included touch, rhythm, oils warmed by hand, care as communion, not correction.

What the modern beauty industry is finally catching up to is ancient knowledge: beauty does not begin at the surface. It begins where the body feels held.

The rise of trauma-informed beauty is not a trend; it is a correction. Brands now speak, sometimes clumsily, about cortisol, inflammation, vagus nerves, sleep cycles. But the real shift is happening in private spaces: women dimming lights before cleansing, choosing fewer products but deeper rituals, opting out of punishment disguised as discipline.

Healing shows up differently on every face. Sometimes it looks like softness is returning. Sometimes it looks like firmness. Sometimes it looks like a woman who no longer



needs to perform youth, desirability, or effort. Her glow is not loud. It is regulated.

There is a quiet confidence that comes with nervous system calm. Shoulders drop. Breathing deepens. The face opens. This is the glow that cannot be filtered or replicated, because it is not aesthetic. It is physiological. It is earned.

Perhaps this is why the most compelling beauty today feels honest rather than perfect. Skin with texture. Eyes that have cried and

rested. Faces that carry evidence of life, not resistance to it. Healing does not erase history; it integrates it.

The future of beauty will not belong to the most aggressive formula or the most extreme promise. It will belong to what restores. To what soothes. To what allows a woman to feel at home in her body again.

Glow, it turns out, is not about shining harder.

It is about finally being at ease.

The Fault in Our Stars

A Love That Chose Meaning Over Time

By Jishnu Vijayan Nair
Actor/Writer/Motivational
Speaker- Kerala

In an age where love is often measured by convenience, benefits, and social validation, The Fault in Our Stars continues to stand tall as a quiet reminder of what love truly means.

Released in 2014, directed by Josh Boone and based on John Green's bestselling novel, this coming-of-age romantic drama is not merely a love story- it is a deeply human experience of connection, vulnerability, and acceptance.

Even after a decade, the film feels fresh, relevant, and painfully honest. Perhaps that is why it still resonates so deeply, especially in today's Gen Z era, where relationships are often filtered through expectations, labels, and emotional shortcuts.

At the heart of the story is Hazel Grace Lancaster, a sixteen-year-old girl living with thyroid cancer that has spread to her lungs. Hazel is intelligent, introspective, and painfully aware of her own mortality. Unlike typical teenage protagonists, she does not dream of a grand future; instead, she tries to minimize the damage she believes



her existence causes to others. Her world changes when she meets Augustus "Gus" Waters at a cancer support group - a boy who has lost a leg to cancer but not his sense of humor, charm, or belief in meaning.

Their love does not begin with attraction alone. It begins with conversations, shared books, honest questions, and an unspoken understanding of pain. Hazel and Gus fall for each other not because of what they can gain, but because of who they are - flawed, scared, hopeful, and real.

One of the most beautiful aspects

of The Fault in Our Stars is how it portrays love without judgment. There is no attempt to "fix" each other. No promise of forever. No denial of reality. Instead, there is acceptance. Gus loves Hazel knowing she may leave him. Hazel loves Gus knowing she may lose him. Their love exists in the present moment - raw and unprotected.

The Amsterdam journey becomes a turning point in the film. What begins as a dream trip soon confronts them with disappointment, truth, and loss of innocence. Peter Van Houten, the author Hazel

idolizes, turns out to be bitter and broken. Yet, even in that heartbreak, Hazel and Gus find something more meaningful - each other. Their kiss at the Anne Frank House is symbolic: love blooming in a place that remembers loss, courage, and humanity.

The film takes a heartbreak turn when Gus reveals that his cancer has returned and is now terminal. From this moment onward, the story becomes less about romance and more about grief, acceptance, and legacy. Gus's "pre-funeral" scene is one of the most emotionally powerful moments in the film. It shows us that love does not wait for death to speak - it expresses itself while there is still time.

When Gus dies, the film does not glorify tragedy. Instead, it allows silence, pain, and memory to do the talking. Hazel's final reading of Gus's letter under the open sky - looking at the stars - is not about despair, but about peace. Love did not save them from death, but it saved them from emptiness.

Why This Film Still Matters in the Gen Z Era

Today's generation lives in a fast-paced, digitally driven world where relationships are often transactional. People are chosen for emotional comfort, social status, or personal gain. In contrast, The Fault in Our Stars presents a love that asks nothing but presence.

Gen Z speaks openly about mental health, anxiety, and emotional boundaries - and this film aligns



beautifully with that honesty. Hazel and Gus talk about death, fear, pain, and meaning without filters. Their vulnerability feels deeply relatable in a generation that values authenticity over perfection.

The film also challenges the idea that a short life is a meaningless one. In a time where success is measured by longevity and achievements, The Fault in Our Stars reminds us that impact matters more than duration. A few honest moments can outweigh a lifetime of shallow connections.

Most importantly, the film teaches that love is not about fixing someone or being fixed. It is about walking together, even when the path is uncertain.

The Fault in Our Stars is not a

film you simply watch - it is a film you feel. It lingers long after the credits roll, asking quiet questions about love, life, and loss. It tells us that even in pain, there can be beauty. Even in impermanence, there can be meaning.

Some films become special because they are once shared in conversation with someone who mattered - spoken about with care, felt deeply, and remembered with a quiet smile.

In a world chasing benefits, this film chooses bonds. In a generation afraid of depth, it chooses truth. And that is why, even today, The Fault in Our Stars remains timeless.

"A cup of tea
makes everything
better,
The whole day's
stress just melts
away,
Refreshing
moments, every
single day."

AURA PHOTOGRAPHY

Model : Niha Das
Makeup : Bimal Gohain
Photography: Bikram Borpatra



When “Normal” Never Feels Normal

By Manikangkana Devi, Writer, Poet, Artist & Translator

There is a strange kind of suffering that has no emergency room, no dramatic diagnosis, no final name. It is the suffering of waking up every day in a body that technically works, but

never feels healthy. You can walk, talk, eat, think, earn, smile. From the outside, everything appears functional. From the inside, something is always slightly off; like a machine that runs, but vibrates in

ways it shouldn’t.

It begins quietly. Not with pain that knocks you down, but with discomfort that refuses to leave. A heaviness in the chest that doctors say is fine. A fatigue that sleep doesn’t

fix. A stiffness that has no visible injury. You start noticing your body more than others do. Not in admiration, but in surveillance. You scan yourself constantly, checking if today is better, worse, or just the same unresolved "normal."

People around you don't understand it. How could they? You look fine. You go to work. You attend functions. You reply "okay" when asked how you are. Even you hesitate to complain, because what would you say? That nothing is wrong, yet nothing feels right? That sentence alone sounds suspicious, even to your own ears.

Medical reports become both comfort and curse. Every "within normal limits" brings relief for a few seconds, followed by a deeper confusion. If everything is normal, then why does life feel so heavy inside this body? Why does energy disappear faster than it should? Why does recovery take longer than promised? You begin to realise that modern medicine loves clear problems and clean solutions, but your condition lives in the grey zone; where numbers look fine, but life doesn't.

Suspense builds not in dramatic moments, but in waiting. Waiting to feel better. Waiting for the next test. Waiting for the day you wake up and feel light again. Days pass, then months, then years. The body keeps functioning, but you start losing trust in it. You no longer assume tomorrow will be easier. You plan life around limitations that have no official label.

The most exhausting part is pretending. Pretending you're lazy instead of tired. Pretending you're

anxious instead of physically unwell. Pretending you're just overthinking. You learn to downplay your discomfort because explaining it takes too much energy and rarely results in understanding. Sometimes, even loved ones gently suggest that it's "all in your head." You smile, because arguing feels heavier than silence.

There is a unique loneliness in this state. You don't belong among the healthy, because you're always struggling to keep up. You don't belong among the sick, because you're not sick enough to stop. You exist in between; where sympathy is scarce and expectations remain high. Society applauds survival, not endurance. And endurance is all you're doing.

Over time, the body shapes your personality. You become cautious. You calculate effort like money. You choose seats over standing, rest over excitement, predictability over adventure. Not because you lack courage, but because you know the cost of overdoing it. One bad day can steal three good ones. So you live carefully, even when you don't want to.

There are nights when the suspense peaks. When the body feels unfamiliar, slightly alarming, just enough to keep you awake. You wonder if this is how it will always be. If this low-grade discomfort is permanent. If this is the maximum version of health available to you. These thoughts are quiet but heavy, and they arrive when the world is asleep.

Yet, strangely, this life teaches a different kind of strength. You become deeply aware of small im-

provements. A day with less pain feels like a gift. An hour of energy feels luxurious. You learn gratitude not from abundance, but from relief. You notice things others miss because they're too busy feeling fine.

Still, there is grief. Grief for the body you imagined you would have. Grief for the effortless health you once assumed was permanent. Grief for the life that could have been easier. This grief has no rituals, no condolences, no closure. It just sits quietly beside you, like an uninvited but familiar presence.

Living with a body that works but never feels healthy is not about drama. It's about persistence. It's about waking up and showing up anyway. It's about carrying an invisible weight without dropping it on others. It's about learning that functioning is not the same as living well.

When "normal" never feels normal, you learn that functioning is not the same as feeling well. You learn that survival can be quiet and exhausting. And you learn that strength is not always visible; sometimes it looks like showing up every day in a body that never quite lets you forget it's struggling.

And maybe one day, without warning, the body will feel lighter. Or maybe it won't. But until then, you keep going; not because you're strong in the heroic sense, but because stopping isn't an option. The body may not feel like home, but it's the only place you have. So you learn to live in it, carefully, quietly, and with a courage most people will never see.

Aura Style



Model

Bibika Bora

Photography

Kaushik Brahma

"BELIEVE IN
YOURSELF
AND YOU'LL BE
UNSTOPPABLE.
SHINE BRIGHT
AND NEVER
LOOK BACK."



Rekindling Old Bonds

A Heartwarming School Reunion

By Rimjhim Deka, Guwahati, Assam

A healing power for friendship where love & care resides.

The phrase "Friends are the siblings God never gave us" resonated deeply as our school reunion brought together cherished memories and rekindled bonds. It all began with a spark of initiative from one of our schoolmates, followed by meticulous planning through a buzzing WhatsApp group. After much discussion, we decided on the picturesque HM Resort in Dibrugarh, Assam, as the

perfect venue for our nostalgic trip.

It was like a journey down the memory lane. The reunion was a testament to the power of childhood bonds, paving the way for a beautiful, new sisterhood. The team executed the reunion in a very systematic way where enjoyment unfolded with

- A warm welcome at HM Resort, where familiar places felt both known and distant
- A serene river cruise at

Kanchanjangha under the moonlight, followed by music, laughter, and dancing

- A day filled with storytelling, giggles, and rediscovered ease
- Cultural performances and a spirited DJ night, where joy took center stage
- Heartfelt conversations and promises to meet again

A New Sense of belonging of the reunion was a healing balm, reminding us that even as life takes us forward, some connections



remain timeless. As we parted ways, we carried home not just memories but also renewed friendships, lighter hearts, and the assurance that some bonds never truly fade.

A Lasting Impact that the reunion left us was with renewed friendships that feel like a second family, cherished memories to treasure forever and a deeper appreciation for the bonds that tie us together.

The experience was a beautiful reminder of the healing power of friendship and love. As we look forward to the next reunion, we're grateful for the gift of friendship that continues to enrich our lives.





Aura
Style

Model
Karan Malik

Styling
Dipankar Kashyap



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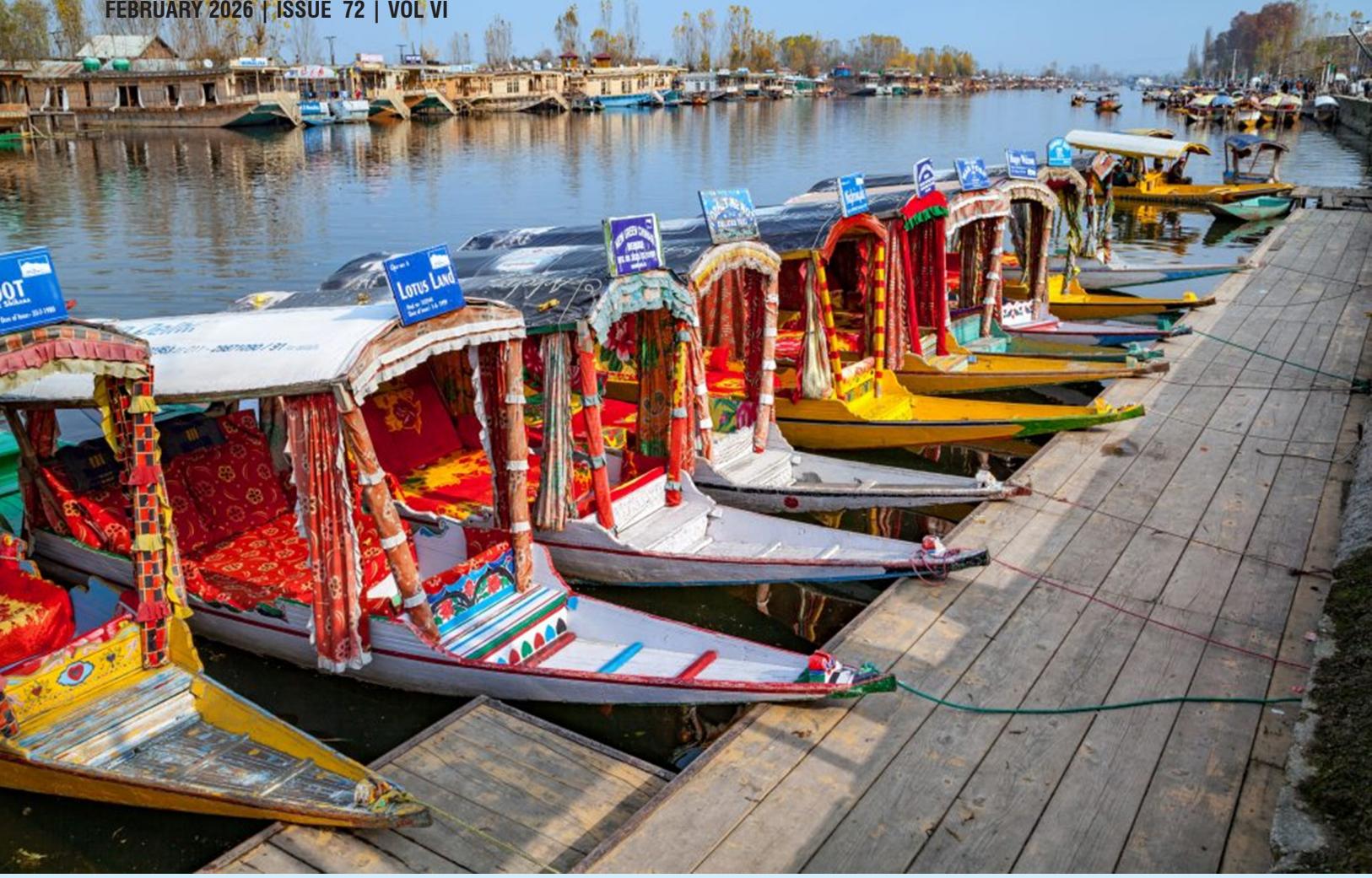
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Return of the Rightfull Owner

By Hanief Bin Aziz, Kashmir

Of all the rooms in the old, dilapidated house, the one in the western corner was my sanctuary. Its large, square window, its wood splintered and glass murky with the grime of decades, framed a perfect, dying view of the sun setting over the Srinagar skyline. Each evening, I would make the pilgrimage to this silent chamber, the floorboards groaning a familiar protest under my weight, and watch as the fiery sun bled into the jagged teeth of the Pir Panjal range, setting the placid surface of the Dal Lake ablaze with reflections of orange

and violet. It was a ritual of remembrance, a solitary communion with a past that felt both intimately mine and irretrievably lost.

On this particular evening, as the shadows lengthened and began to devour the overgrown garden below, a movement caught my eye. A figure wearing Pheran emerged from the thicket of untamed rose bushes and the skeletal remains of what was once a vegetable patch. He stood still, a tall, lanky silhouette against the fading light, his form seeming to absorb the twilight rather than be defined by it. My breath hitched. He was

looking up, directly at my window. Then, slowly, deliberately, he raised a long arm and waved, not a friendly, open-handed greeting, but a beckoning, a summons for me to come down.

A jolt, half of fear and half of a profound, inexplicable recognition, shot through me. The description, the one my mother had repeated to me like a sacred verse throughout my childhood, echoed in my mind with the force of a physical blow. He was so tall, beta, like a chinar tree himself. Lanky, with a kind face that even the wrinkles couldn't hide. And his eyes... his

eyes were the colour of warm honey, and they held all the sorrow and wisdom of our valley.

My heart hammering against my ribs, a chaotic drumbeat of anticipation and dread, I turned from the window. I didn't walk; I ran. I took the steep, wooden stairs two at a time, a reckless descent into the gloom of the house's interior. But in my haste, my foot caught on a loose, rotting board on the final landing. Time seemed to warp, stretching then snapping as I felt myself pitched forward, a cry torn from my lips. I tumbled down the last few steps in a jarring cascade of limbs, landing with a heavy, breath-stealing thud on the soft, damp earth at the base of the ancient chinar tree.

For a moment, I lay there, stunned, the world a spinning mosaic of dark branches against a purple sky. The scent of wet earth and decaying leaves filled my nostrils. Then, a shadow fell over me. He was there. The tall, lanky figure knelt, his movements stiff yet graceful. He didn't speak. He simply extended a long-fingered, weathered hand. I stared at it, at the prominent knuckles and the map of blue veins beneath the thin skin. Placing my own, trembling hand in his, I was pulled upright with an unexpected strength.

And then, our eyes met.

The description my mother had given me did not just come true; it came alive. His face was a landscape of deep-set wrinkles, each one a testament to a story, a worry, a lost smile. But it was his eyes that held me captive. They were indeed the colour of warm honey,

but now, flecked with the gold of the last sunlight, they seemed to hold a universe of memory. In their depths, I saw the ghost of the man I had known, and the weary reality of the man he had become. This was Rajindra Raina.

The sight of him unleashed a floodgate within me, pulling me back to a time when this very garden was not a tomb of memories but a vibrant playground. It was the late 1980s, and I was a boy of six, living with my family in our modest home just metres away from the grand, beautifully carved Pandit houses in our upscale downtown neighbourhood. Srinagar was a different city then, a tapestry woven with the vibrant threads of a shared Kashmiri culture. The air in our mohalla was thick with the aroma of my mother's rogan josh mingling with the subtle fragrance of lotus stems cooking next door at the Raina's. The sound of the azaan from the mosque seamlessly gave way to the gentle chants from the temple.

My father, Mr. Aziz, a man of letters and profound decency, worked in the education department. His closest friend and colleague was none other than Rajindra Raina – Rajinder 'G', as my

father always called him with deep respect. They were an unlikely pair – my father, compact and jovial; Rajinder Uncle, tall, serene, and intellectual. Every evening, my father would return home, his briefcase stuffed with papers, and over a cup of kehwa, he would regale my mother with tales from the office. "That Rajinder G," he would say, a smile playing on his lips, "he is the most brilliant mind in the department. Today, during the curriculum meeting, he presented such a nuanced argument for including more Kashmiri literature. The man doesn't just work; he strives for excellence in everything."

But for me, the heart of that world was not the adults and their serious conversations; it was Mohit. Mohit Raina, Rajinder Uncle's son, was my childhood shadow, my partner in crime, my brother in all but blood. Our days were an endless, sun-drenched adventure. We would race up and down the narrow, cobbled streets of downtown, our laughter echoing off the ancient brick walls. We built intricate forts from the fallen leaves of the chinar tree under which I now stood, its canopy then a vibrant, fiery red in autumn. We would sneak away to the Dal Lake,



hiring a shikara for a few coins and lying on our backs as the boatman, a grizzled old man named Ghulam, would pole us through the floating gardens, his voice a low rumble as he sang old Kashmiri folk songs.

I remember one sweltering August afternoon, we had spent hours at the Nishat Bagh, the Mughal Garden terraced down the hillside towards the lake. We played hide and seek amongst the cascading fountains and geometrically perfect flowerbeds, our clothes soaked and our spirits soaring. Returning home, dripping and deliriously happy, we were met by a furious Mohit's mother and my own. We were scolded soundly for our carelessness, for staining our clothes, for worrying them. We stood there, heads bowed, trying to look innocent while secretly exchanging triumphant grins. We never knew, in the innocent arrogance of childhood, that these very moments—the scoldings, the shared secrets, the unbridled joy of a day spent in perfect companionship—would become the treasures we would clutch at for the rest of our lives, the defining echoes of a paradise lost.

The turmoil of the 1990s arrived not with a bang, but with a creeping, insidious chill. The vibrant tapestry of our neighbourhood began to fray. The harmonious sounds were first punctuated, then replaced, by the distant crackle of gunfire and the unsettling silence of curfews. Fear, a new and unwelcome guest, took up residence in our hearts. The pressure from extremist groups mounted, a dark shadow falling specifically over the Kashmiri Pandit community.



The friendly debates between my father and Rajinder Uncle turned into hushed, worried conversations behind closed doors. The laughter in our garden grew scarce.

Then, one bitter winter morning in 1990, the inevitable happened. I remember standing at our gate, a confused eight-year-old, watching as the Rainas packed a few suitcases into their Ambassador car. The scene is etched in my mind with the stark clarity of a photograph: Mohit, his face pale and bewildered, clutching a small toy car. His mother, her eyes red-rimmed, trying to be brave. And Rajinder Uncle, his tall frame seeming to sag under an invisible weight. He shared a long, silent embrace with my father—a hug that spoke of a friendship fractured by forces beyond their control. There were no grand farewells, only a desperate, hurried urgency. As their car disappeared around the corner in a cloud of dust and exhaust fumes, a part of my world, the most colourful part, simply vanished.

The decades that followed were unkind. The beautiful Pandit houses, including the Rainas', stood

empty, their windows like sightless eyes, slowly succumbing to decay and the relentless advance of nature. Our neighbourhood was never the same. The symphony of coexistence was replaced by a monologue of loss.

And now, here he was. Rajindra Raina, in the flesh, standing before me in the ruins of his ancestral home.

“Beta,” he finally spoke, his voice a low, gravelly whisper, like the sound of dry leaves skittering across stone. It was a voice weathered by time and grief. “I saw the light in the window. I had to come.”

I could only stare, my own voice trapped in my throat. The boy who had raced through these gardens was gone, replaced by a man confronting a living ghost from his past. The last of the sunlight caught the silver in his hair and the profound sadness in his honey-coloured eyes, and I understood that his return was not just a physical journey, but a pilgrimage into a heartache that had never healed. The story, it seemed, was far from over.

The silence that hung between us was thicker than the dust in the

old house, a palpable weight of years and unshed tears. Rajindra Raina's hand, which had just pulled me from the ground, still held mine for a moment longer, his grip firm yet trembling with an emotion I could only guess at. The initial shock of recognition was ebbing, replaced by a torrent of memories and the overwhelming reality of his presence.

"Beta," he repeated, his voice cracking on the simple word, a fissure in the dam of his composure. "I had to come."

Finally, I found my voice, a hoarse whisper. "Raina G... Rajinder Uncle."

The formal address, a relic of my childhood, seemed to break a spell. He released my hand, his honey-colored eyes scanning my face, tracing the lines of the man who had replaced the boy he once knew. "Look at you," he murmured, a sad smile touching his lips. "The last time I saw you, you were no higher than my knee, always chasing after Mohit."

The mention of his son, my lost friend, was a blow to my heart. But his presence here also unlocked the next chapter of the story, the long, lonely years that followed their departure.

After the Rainas left, a profound emptiness descended upon our home, and upon my father. The car had barely disappeared from view when Rajindra Uncle, in a act of desperate trust amidst the chaos, had pressed a heavy, iron key into my father's hand. "Aziz, brother," he had said, his voice thick with emotion, "the house. Please. Just... keep an eye on it. Until we return."

My father, Mr. Aziz, had accepted the key as if it were a sacred relic. He was a man of his word, and this was the heaviest promise he would ever make. In the days that followed, he told us the whole story of their final, frantic hours—the threatening letters slipped under their door, the anonymous calls in the dead of night, the unbearable pressure that made staying a death sentence. My mother, a pragmatic woman forged in the fires of those troubled times, had been adamant. "We cannot move into their house, Aziz," she had insisted, her voice low and urgent. "Not now. The air is thick with fear and suspicion. It would be like lighting a candle in a storm."

So, we waited. For months, then a year, my father would walk the few metres to the grand Pandit house every day, a solitary figure performing a sombre ritual. He would check the locks, sweep the front step, and sometimes, just stand in the silent garden, under the very chinar tree where I now stood with its rightful owner. He was a guardian of a ghost, tending to the shell of a life that had fled.

When the sharpest edges of the conflict had dulled into a grim, enduring normality, and the immediate chaos had subsided, we finally moved in. It was not a victory, not a claim of spoils. It was an act of custodianship, a burden shouldered out of love. The house felt vast and echoingly empty, a museum of a vanished world. Mohit's room remained exactly as he had left it, a small model aeroplane still suspended from the ceiling by a frayed thread. The faint, familiar scent of sandalwood from Mrs.

Raina's puja room still clung to the air, a ghostly perfume that would make my mother pause and sigh with a deep, unassailible sadness.

We waited. We waited through the changing seasons, through the long, silent winters and the brief, hopeful springs. We waited for a letter, a phone call, a sign. But none came. The Raina family had not just moved to Jammu or Delhi; they had vanished into the great, anonymous diaspora of exile, becoming ghosts in their own land, their absence a permanent hollow in the heart of our Kashmir.

I missed Mohit with a child's pure, aching grief. I missed the way his mother would feed us both equal pieces of sheermal, her love a boundless, inclusive force that knew no division of faith. But most of all, I watched my father. The jovial, talkative man who would praise Rajinder G's intellect over evening kehwa was gone, replaced by a quieter, more introspective figure. The friendship he had shared with Rajindra Uncle had been a cornerstone of his identity, a meeting of minds and hearts. With that cornerstone removed, a part of him crumbled into silence.

It was then that he turned to poetry. In the dead of night, I would often see a sliver of light under his study door. I would hear the soft scratch of his fountain pen and sometimes, a muffled sob. His grief, too vast for ordinary words, had found its expression in verse. He wrote in Kashmiri and Urdu, filling ledger books with his elegant, looping script, pouring his longing, his despair, and his unwavering hope for his friend's return into lines of metre and



metaphor.

The years piled on, each one layering more dust upon the memory of that happier time. Then, with the cruel suddenness that life sometimes employs, my father fell ill. It was a swift, brutal sickness that consumed him within a week, giving us no time to process, to prepare, or to inform the few close ones we had left, let alone track down the Rainas in the vastness of India.

A day before he died, he called me to his bedside. His face was pale and gaunt, but his eyes burned with their old intensity. He pointed a trembling finger towards a small, locked wooden box on his desk. "Beta," he whispered, his breath labored. "The house. You must take care of it. Until Raina G returns. You promise me." I nodded, my throat too tight for words. He then gestured again to the box. "The key... around my neck. When he returns... when you see him... give him this diary. It is for him alone."

The next day, he was gone. The silence he left behind was absolute.

Since that day, the diary had remained with me, a sealed tes-

tament to my father's innermost soul. I had never dared to open it. It felt like a violation, a trespass into a sacred space between two friends. It sat in its box, a tangible weight of unresolved history, a promise waiting to be fulfilled.

And now, standing here in the twilight, that moment had arrived. The long vigil was over. Uncle, I said, my voice stronger now. "There is something. Something Abbu left for you."

I led him into the house, through the dark, familiar halls to my father's old study. The room was exactly as he had left it, a shrine to his memory. I retrieved the wooden box, used the small key I had worn around my own neck since his death, and opened it. Inside, nestled on a piece of faded velvet, was a simple, leather-bound diary.

I held it out to Rajindra Raina. His hands trembled violently as he took it, his long fingers tracing the worn leather as if it were a holy text. He looked at me, a question and a profound gratitude warring in his eyes. He slowly, reverently, opened the cover.

The page was filled with my

father's distinctive script. Rajindra Uncle's eyes scanned the first lines, and then he began to read aloud, his voice a bare, broken whisper that filled the silent room.

"Kahan kahan doonda maine tumhe..." (Where all have I not searched for you...) "Tum yaad to bohot aaye..."

(You came to my thoughts so often...)

He paused, a tear tracing a path through the wrinkles on his cheek. He took a shaky breath and finished the couplet, the words hanging in the air between us, a perfect, heartbreakingly summary of a lifetime of friendship and loss.

"Phir yaad aaya, tum dil mai baste ho, Saamne hona zaroori nahi."

(Then I remembered, you reside in my heart, Your presence before me is not necessary.)

A sob escaped him, a raw, unfiltered sound of grief and love that had been held back for decades. He clutched the diary to his chest, his tall frame folding in on itself as he wept—for the friend he had lost, for the years they had been robbed of, for the love that had endured even the long, cruel separation.

In that moment, the two ghosts—the one who had returned to his land, and the one who had never left his friend's heart—were finally reunited. The house was no longer just a relic of loss; it had become a bridge across time, and the diary was not a record of an ending, but a testament to a bond that not even death could truly sever. The long wait was over, and a new, quieter healing could finally begin.

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GUWAHATI ASIAN FILM FESTIVAL 2026

Mapping Asian Cinematic Conversations

By Dr. Dipsikha Bhagawati, Film Critic | Author | Translator, Member, FCCI

The second edition of Guwahati Asian Film Festival (GAFF) was more than just a continuation; it was a bold statement of the North-eastern region's cinematic identity and its rightful place in the Asian film landscape. Spanning four days, the festival at Jyoti Chitraban, Guwahati was a melting pot of culture and creativity where a fine selection of 26 films from ten Asian countries was presented, thus reiterating the festival's dedication to regional diversity, cinematic plurality, and the fostering of deep

cross, cultural understanding. Trending Now Media was the principal organizer of the festival with supporting grants from the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. The festival was more of a focused, deliberately curated platform than a spectacle, driven event.

Opening the festival: Tone, Texture, and Transnational Cinema

GAFF 2026 took off with the feature from Uzbekistan, *Sunday*,

by Shokir Kholikov. The film which was selected as the first screening at the festival by a panel of judges set an even yet powerful tone for the festival, depicting the simple human lives in a subtle cinematic style. *Exhuming Sunday* as the first film the festival of film artists hinted at the festival's inclination towards the kind of films that are grounded in reality, thus avoiding any sort of grand narrative. Such a choice corresponded to the festival's overarching theme of cinema as a mirror reflecting culture.

The first day of the festival further widened its international reach with the Indian premiere of the Japanese filmmaker Masahiro Ota's *S* under the Asian Cinema category. The screening of the film marked the festival's effort to introduce modern Asian cinema to Indian viewers, especially in a state where the availability of such films is limited. The day ended with *An Evening Ballad* by Bishal Swargiary, which was screened under the Indian Showcase (non-competition) category, and which strongly resonated with the local audience through its poetic treatment of memory and emotion. The inaugural session was marked by the presence of renowned filmmakers, critics, journalists, and delegates, which gave the festival both credibility and intellectualism. The presence of Padma Shri awardee Girish Kasaravalli, the chief guest, who carried with him the wisdom of decades of filmmaking experience, along with the presence of renowned film critic and filmmaker Christopher Dalton, filmmakers Manju Borah and Anupama Bose, film researcher and Media Academic Prof Shashwati Goswami, and festival director Monita Borgohain (IAS) marked the inclusive yet selective nature of the GAFF.

Curated Diversity: Programming Across Regions and Languages

Over the course of four days, GAFF 2026 presented films from Vietnam, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Myanmar, Iran, Kazakhstan, and China. This pan-Asian presence was complemented by a rich array of Indian films spanning multiple

languages and regions, including Marathi, Bajjika, Malayalam, Hindi, Tulu, Nepali, Assamese, Karbi, Bodo, Mising, Manipuri, and Bengali. Such linguistic and cultural diversity was not incidental but central to GAFF's identity as a festival rooted in plurality.

The diversity of the festival was evident on the second day of the festival through its strong programming of six films. These films included *The Lost Path* (Kangbo Aloti), a Karbi-language film directed by Khanjan Kishore Nath, which dealt with themes of identity and displacement; Bobby Sarma Baruah's Assamese-language film *Morning Sunshine* (Rador Pakhi), a very sensitive treatment of human relationships; *Cu Li Never Cries*, a film directed by Vietnamese filmmaker Pham Ngoc Lan, which was characterized by its emotional depth; *The Woodcutter* (Gos Kota Manuh), another Assamese-language film directed by Prakesh Deka, which was very much rooted in social realism; and the Manipuri-language film *Phouoibee* (The Goddess of Paddy), directed by Rakesh Moirangthem, which engaged with themes of myth, ecology, and cultural memory.

These films, taken together, illustrated the manner in which regional cinemas engage with local concerns even as they are rooted in universal human experiences. GAFF's programming, in this sense, challenged the tendency to marginalize regional narratives in favor of placing them at the forefront of cinematic discourse.

Indian Showcase Awards 2026: Recognising Cinematic Excellence

One of the key highlights of GAFF 2026 was the Indian Showcase Awards, which celebrated outstanding achievements in Indian and regional cinema. The awards reflected the festival's core philosophy: to recognise films that combine artistic integrity with narrative depth, irrespective of scale or market visibility.

The Best Film Award was conferred on the Malayalam feature *Victoria*, directed by Sivaranjini. The jury cited the film's compelling narrative structure and strong visual language, noting its confident cinematic voice. The film also received additional recognition when cinematographer Anand Ravi was awarded the Jury Special Mention for his exceptional cinematography, underscoring the film's technical and aesthetic accomplishment.

The Second Best Film Award went to the Nepali film *Shape of Momo*, directed by Tribenay Rai. Applauded for its sensitive storytelling and fresh perspective, the film stood out for its nuanced portrayal of everyday life and emotional complexity, marking an important moment for Nepali cinema within the Indian festival circuit.

Highlighting cinema from the Northeast, the NE Spotlight Award was presented to the Assamese film *Noi Kotha* (River Tales), directed by Dr Pankaj Borah. Rooted in the cultural and ecological landscape of the region, the film was recognised for its strong narrative engagement with local realities, reaffirming GAFF's role in foregrounding voices from the Northeast.

The GAFF jury was chaired by Girish Kasaravalli, with noted film personalities Utpal Borpujari and Anupama Bose serving as jury members. Their collective experience lent the awards both credibility and critical rigour. GAFF advisory committee is comprised of noted film personalities - Manju Borah, Dr. Santwana Bordoloi, shrinivasa Santhanam, Nayan Prasad and Christopher Dalton.

Speaking on the occasion, Monita Borgohain IAS, Festival Director of GAFF, remarked that the Indian Showcase Awards reflect the spirit of the festival itself- celebrating bold storytelling, regional diversity, and meaningful cinema. She emphasised that the winners exemplified how powerful narratives can emerge from distinct cultural contexts while remaining universally resonant.

Lifetime Achievement Honour: Acknowledging Legacy

GAFF 2026 also conferred its Lifetime Achievement Honour on veteran actor Bishnu Kharghoria, in recognition of his extraordinary and enduring contribution to Indian cinema. Instituted as an annual honour, the award celebrates artists whose body of work has significantly shaped cinematic culture and inspired generations of filmmakers and audiences alike.

In addition to film screenings, GAFF 2026 hosted a series of masterclasses, panel discussions, and interactive sessions led by filmmakers, critics, and industry professionals from India and other Asian countries. These sessions transformed the festival into a dynamic space of learning and



exchange, where emerging filmmakers could engage directly with established voices.

According to the organisers, the final selection of films was curated from over 200 submissions, including nearly 90 films from outside India. This rigorous selection process ensured that GAFF remained a curated festival rather than a broad showcase, prioritising quality, thematic coherence, and diversity of cinematic expression.

Positioned as the only Asian film festival of its kind in this part of the country, GAFF has carved a distinctive space within India's cultural landscape. By bringing Asian

cinema to the Northeast, the festival not only broadens cinematic exposure for local audiences but also situates the region as a vital meeting point for transnational cultural exchange.

As GAFF 2026 concluded on January 25, it left behind a clear impression: the festival is steadily evolving into a significant platform for Asian and Indian cinema, one that values restraint over spectacle, dialogue over display, and diversity over uniformity. In doing so, GAFF continues to reaffirm the Northeast's growing stature as a vibrant and intellectually engaged cinematic space within Asia.

FROM MY HEART TO YOUR'S

I wake up every morning imagining you beside me.
Dreaming of your warmth encircling me
A smile slowly spreads on my face
I know it is a dream world.
Where you are only mine
And i am your girl you love.
My wounds are healed in this world.
It is a warm feeling,soft and healing.
My dreams are filled with thoughts of me and you.
I open my eyes,I know the reality.
But I still love this world
Cause love is precious
And you are my love in my dreamy imaginary world.

- Monali Bhuyan

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