

#HIFAF

## Bringing the Mountains and the Winter Chill to Jaipur!

This isn't just a standard screening, it is a rare opportunity to experience a beautiful curation of independent cinema



Renault HIFAF (Himalayan International Film Festival) Caravan means cinema on the move! Jaipur has been chosen as the very first stop for the Renault HIFAF Caravan. This isn't just a standard screening, it is a rare opportunity to experience a beautiful curation of independent cinema that brings us closer to experiencing HIFAF in all its elements. What makes this evening truly special is the incredible privilege of having all three filmmakers present in person. They are traveling here to speak directly with you, hold post-screening conversations,



### The bully in yellow

here is a reason it is called a bulldozer. The first half of the word gives it away.

At the Gurjar Ki Thadi turn, I watched it behave exactly like the bully in every school I have ever known. It walks up to whoever is smaller and pushes. A shop front here. A tin shed there. A staircase that never harmed anybody in its life. Each time there is a crash, a cloud of dust and a small cheer from somewhere. I can never tell whether the cheer is for the bulldozer or against it. I am not sure the people cheering know either.

People stand on both sides of the road and watch. Some have folded arms. Some have phones held up high. Some have come out with a cup of tea, as if this were a Sunday matinee. It looks like the last over of a close India-Pakistan match, except that nobody knows which team they are supporting.

And right in the middle of all this, a woman from a television channel is speaking into a camera. Dust behind her, bulldozer behind her, a shop losing its face behind her, and she stands there with complete calm, holding her mic like a diya in a storm. She is the most composed person on that road. Then again, she is one of only two people there being paid to be there. The other one is driving the bulldozer.

### The most graceful U-turn in Jaipur

I have seen many U-turns in this city. Autos take them in the middle of Tonk Road without any warning. Politicians take them right after elections, also without any warning. But the most graceful U-turn I have ever seen was taken by that bully.

After all the crashing and pushing, the bulldozer reaches a small room sitting right on the road. It is a room barely big enough for an idol. You could not fit a priest inside unless he stood very straight and held his breath. The bulldozer stops. It looks at the room. The room looks

back. Then, the bulldozer goes around it, as quietly as a teenager tiptoeing past her mother's room at two in the morning. A little ahead, there is another one. Same size, same story same U-turn.

As the shops get pushed back, the little rooms stay exactly where they are, on the road, now more visible than ever. The widening drive has given them a front-row seat. Some people pay lakhs for a corner plot on a main road. These rooms got it free, with fresh demolition as a bonus view.

### The fastest builder in India

If you want to see how fast a building can come up in this country, forget the metro. Forget the expressways. Watch a roadside shrine.

Day one: a stone appears under a tree at the edge of the road. Nobody knows who put it there. Nobody asks.

Day two: the stone gets a coat of sindoor.

Day ten: a chabutra (a raised platform) comes up around it. Somebody lights a diya every evening. Month three: four walls, a gate and the most important part of



A roadside shrine is never called just 'mandir.' That would be too ordinary, and an ordinary thing can be questioned. So, it gets a name so grand that no officer, no inspector and no bulldozer driver will dare to read it out and then raise a hand against it. Chamatkareshwar Mahadev. Rozgareshwar Devi. Names that sound as if they have been granted by a higher court than the High Court. I have a theory about this. The smaller the shrine, the bigger the name.

the whole construction, a donation box with a lock.

No map was passed. No architect was hired. No JDA file moved. If our development authorities worked at this speed, every colony in Jaipur would have its own metro station by now.

And to be fair to everybody, this is not the speciality of any one faith. On our roads, Amar, Akbar and Anthony have all claimed their corners. In this one matter, India is perfectly secular. Every faith gets an equal opportunity to enroach.

### What's in a name

And then comes the final touch. The naming ceremony.

A roadside shrine is never called just 'mandir.' That would be too ordinary, and an ordinary thing can be questioned. So, it gets a name so



## Bhagwan Ka Plot PART:2

### #ATIKRAMAN UTSAV



will be the first to bow. At least that one will be telling the truth.

### Meanwhile, in Jagatpura

So, is the bulldozer always this polite? Not quite.

Not long ago, across the city, the JDA set out to widen a road near the Nandipuri underpass in Jagatpura to 90 feet. First, it cleared well over a hundred other encroachments. Nobody switched off the internet for those.

Then came the last five. A mosque, two temples, a satsang hall and a mazaar. All standing on the road.

The JDA gave their caretakers time to remove the constructions themselves. On New Sanganer Road, I am told, shopkeepers picked up hammers and broke their own staircases to save their Diwali stock. In Jagatpura, nobody picked up a hammer. Why would they? A shrine has no Diwali stock to save.

So, the JDA came prepared. Around 3,000 policemen. Companies of armed constabulary with extra forces called in from Kota and Bharatpur. Drones in the sky. Mobile internet suspended across two police districts. Movement restricted in the area. Let me say that again. To build a road on which

The bulldozer on New Sanganer Road goes through shop fronts, facades and staircases without blinking. Then, at the Gurjar Ki Thadi turn, it meets a tenant that it does not dare to touch. This tenant has never paid rent, never shown papers and never been served a notice. Across the city, in Jagatpura, the JDA did dare. It needed 3,000 policemen, drones and a switched-off internet to do it.



hours the city has seen in years.

The government knew exactly where the real danger lay. It was sitting in the family WhatsApp group, with its finger on the forward button.

Mind you, the Jagatpura bulldozer was perfectly secular too. A mosque, two temples, a satsang hall and a mazaar, all on the same list, all removed together. Equal opportunity to enroach, equal opportunity to be removed.

So much for politeness. The bulldozer on New Sanganer Road is simply doing arithmetic. Going around a shrine costs nothing. Going through one costs 3,000 policemen and a city without internet.

### Somebody please WhatsApp the bulldozer

The courts, meanwhile, have been very clear.

In 2009, the Supreme Court ordered that no unauthorised religious structure should come up on public roads, parks or other public places. In 2024, Justice B.R. Gavai said that any religious structure in the middle of the road, whether a gurdwara, a dargah or a temple, cannot obstruct the public. So, the



JDA is very good at one thing: housing schemes. Every few years, it announces one, people fill forms, pay fees, and a lottery decides who gets a plot. So, here is my humble proposal. Jagatpura has shown that when the caretakers are asked to move a shrine on their own, nobody moves it. They need somewhere to go. So, the JDA should launch the Devlok Housing Scheme, a proper, beautiful colony for every place of worship currently sitting on our roads.

people could move freely, the authorities first had to stop people from moving. For more than a hundred ordinary encroachments, ordinary arrangements. For five places of worship, an army, an air force and a digital blackout. Nobody in the history of Jaipur has needed 3,000 policemen to demolish a staircase. Somewhere, a constable from Bharatpur must have gone home after duty and told his wife that he had been called to Jaipur for a road widening. She must not have believed a word.

And the internet! For two days, half of Jaipur could not forward a single message. Good morning roses on WhatsApp piled up like unpaid bills. Aunties had to wish actual human beings good morning, in person, with their actual mouths. Some say it was the most peaceful 48

highest court in the country has said it twice, fifteen years apart. That is more patience than most Indian mothers show. The bulldozer on New Sanganer Road has clearly not been informed. Somebody should send it the judgment on WhatsApp. With a good morning flower GIF on top, so that it actually opens the message. Just make sure that the internet is working that day.

### A view from inside

Sometimes, I wonder what the gods themselves think of all this.

Jaipur is not short of grand homes for them. Govind Dev Ji lives in the City Palace complex. Ganesh ji sits at the foot of Moti Durgri, with a whole hill and a palace as his backdrop. That is prime real estate with a view.

And then, there is the god in the

little room at the Gurjar Ki Thadi turn. He breathes diesel smoke all day. Trucks honk at him all night. Now, he also has a bulldozer roaring two feet away and a crowd with phones.

If he could speak, I suspect he would apply for a transfer.

"Bachchon, mujhe kisne yahaan bithaya?" (Children, who put me here?) Nobody would answer. Because the person who put him there did not do it for him. A god on the road is the best security guard money cannot buy. No notice can touch him, no bulldozer comes near him and the land around him stays safe. Everybody bows, drops a coin in the box and drives on.

God never asked for this plot. We gave it to Him on the road so that we would not have to give Him anything from our own.

### The Devlok Housing Scheme

The JDA is very good at one thing: housing schemes. Every few years, it announces one, people fill forms, pay fees, and a lottery decides who gets a plot.

So, here is my humble proposal. Jagatpura has shown that when the caretakers are asked to move a shrine on their own, nobody moves it. They need somewhere to go. So, the JDA should launch the Devlok Housing Scheme, a proper, beautiful colony for every place of worship currently sitting on our roads.

Typically, migratory birds begin arriving in larger numbers at Chilika as temperatures fall and winter sets in. Flamingos are generally spotted at the lake between November and December, with another period of sightings between February and March. This year, however, their early arrival has surprised observers, as the weather continues to remain hot and humid.

The sight of flamingos gathering against the backdrop of Chilika's expansive waters has

address. And it will cost a lot less than 3,000 policemen.

The gods will happily accept. Unlike government employees, they will not ask for a posting near their home town, because they are everywhere anyway.

The only people who will object are those who were using the gods as security guards. They will have a very hard time explaining why God prefers a bus stop to a garden.

To be continued...

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

#HOPE

## Chilika Turns Pink Again

Winter may still be some time away, but the waters of Odisha's Chilika Lake are already witnessing a splash of pink



Odisha's Chilika Lake has welcomed its feathered visitors earlier than usual, with migratory flamingos arriving despite the prevailing hot and

humid weather. Their early appearance has raised hopes among birdwatchers for a promising migratory season.

Winter may still be some time away, but the waters of Odisha's Chilika Lake are already witnessing a splash of pink. Migratory flamingos have returned to the famous lagoon earlier than usual this year, bringing excitement among bird lovers and nature enthusiasts who eagerly await the annual arrival of these elegant visitors.

Typically, migratory birds begin arriving in larger numbers at Chilika as temperatures fall and winter sets in. Flamingos are generally spotted at the lake between November and December, with another period of sightings between February and March. This year, however, their early arrival has surprised observers, as the weather continues to remain hot and humid.

The sight of flamingos gathering against the backdrop of Chilika's expansive waters has

address. And it will cost a lot less than 3,000 policemen.

The gods will happily accept. Unlike government employees, they will not ask for a posting near their home town, because they are everywhere anyway.

The only people who will object are those who were using the gods as security guards. They will have a very hard time explaining why God prefers a bus stop to a garden.

To be continued...

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

once again drawn attention to the lagoon's importance as a habitat for migratory birds. Their presence offers a welcome spectacle for birdwatchers, photographers and visitors hoping to witness one of nature's most fascinating seasonal events.

### Early Arrival Raises Hopes for a Better Season

The return of flamingos has generated optimism among bird lovers, particularly because the birds have reportedly been spotted in smaller numbers over the past three to four years. Their early appearance has renewed hopes that more flamingos could visit Chilika during the current migratory season.

However, it is still too early to predict whether the number of birds arriving this year will increase significantly. The total population expected at the lake remains uncertain, and observers will have to wait for the season to progress before drawing conclusions about the scale of the migration.

The early sightings have nevertheless added excitement to the annual birdwatching season. For those who follow Chilika's avian visitors, every returning flock is an opportunity to observe the changing pat-

terns of migration and the natural rhythms that connect distant regions.

### Why Chilika Matters to Migratory Birds

Spread across Odisha's eastern coastline, Chilika is one of India's most prominent coastal lagoons and an important destination for migratory birds. Its diverse wetland ecosystem provides feeding and resting grounds for numerous bird species that travel long distances during seasonal migrations.

Flamingos, known for their distinctive pink plumage, long legs and curved bills, are among the most striking birds to visit the lagoon. Their colour, combined with the sight of flocks moving through shallow waters, makes them a major attraction for wildlife enthusiasts. The arrival of migratory birds also highlights the importance of protecting wetland habitats. Water quality, food availability, climatic conditions and the overall health of the ecosystem can influence the suitability of a wetland for visiting birds.

### A Season Bird Lovers Will Watch Closely

With flamingos already making an appearance before the usual winter period, expectations are building around the months ahead. Birdwatchers will be keen to see whether more flocks arrive as the weather changes and the migratory season gathers pace.

For now, Chilika's early visitors have offered a glimpse of the natural spectacle that makes the lagoon special. Whether their numbers rise substantially this season remains to be seen, but the return of these pink-feathered guests has given Odisha's celebrated wetland an early touch of winter magic.

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

### BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

### ZITS

