



# **Many Forms, One Vision: In MIFF Round Table, film festival veterans highlight Diversity, Innovation and Community in Film Festivals**

**Authentic Voices and Mother-Tongue Storytelling Are Reshaping Global Cinema, opines Anand Varadaraj**

**“Film Festivals Sustain Community Viewing and Strengthen Film Culture, says Premendra Mazumdar**

**Animation Needs Greater Recognition, Support and Global Opportunities: Savitri Hari**

**Growing recognition of films rooted in local traditions and languages as evidence that authenticity can transcend geographical boundaries, states Deepak Kumar Beshra**

**Documentaries Drive Public Discourse and Preserve Historical Consciousness: Nilotpal**

## Film festivals provide an important platform for experimental and non-commercial cinema: Patricia Sanchez Mora

Mumbai, 18 June 2026

Film festivals play a crucial role in celebrating diverse voices, nurturing emerging talent, preserving cinematic heritage and fostering cultural exchange, speakers observed during a round table discussion titled **"Many Forms, One Vision: Celebrating Diversity in Film Festivals"** held today on the sidelines of the **19th Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF)**.

Bringing together filmmakers, critics, festival directors and industry professionals, the discussion explored how film festivals continue to evolve in an era marked by technological innovation, changing audience habits and the growing demand for authentic storytelling.

Moderating the session, award-winning actress **Sheena Chohan** emphasized the power of storytelling in connecting people across cultures and experiences. A film festival allows audiences to see the world through different perspectives and engage with stories that can broaden understanding and empathy, she said in her opening lines for the discussions. The films that remain with viewers long after the credits roll are often those that express universal truths through local experiences, she noted.

Speaking on the unique experience of watching films in a festival setting, **Anand Varadaraj**, Founder and Artistic Director of the Bengaluru International Short Film Festival (BISFF) said, cinema remains fundamentally a collective experience. Watching a film in a darkened theatre with others creates a shared emotional journey that cannot be replicated elsewhere. The communal response of audiences to a powerful scene reflects the essence of cinema as an art form, he observed. He also highlighted changing trends in global cinema, pointing to the increasing number of films being made in non-mainstream languages. Filmmakers and writers are increasingly choosing to create in their mother tongues, resulting in richer and more authentic narratives. He noted that many compelling films are now emerging from smaller towns and remote regions rather than only metro cities. At the same time, filmmakers are adopting animation, visual effects and artificial intelligence as creative tools to tell their stories.

Discussing the growing popularity of short films, he said that audiences today seek content that fits contemporary lifestyles while still offering meaningful storytelling. In these times when time is a luxury, film festivals perform an important curatorial function by identifying and showcasing quality short-form cinema. Festivals also help introduce audiences to lesser-known works of legendary filmmakers. Ritwik Ghatak's short films were showcased by them in BISFF and then audiences came to know that the maestro made great short films as well.



*NFDC MD, Shri Prakash Magdum; film critic and author Premendra Mazumdar; filmmaker Nilotpal Majumder; Anand Varadaraj, Deepak Kumar Beshra, Savitri Hari, Patricia Sánchez Mora, and moderator actress Sheena Chohan, during the Round Table session on "Many Forms, One Vision: Celebrating Diversity in Film Festivals," at the 19th Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF 2026) on June 18, 2026.*

Highlighting the role of film festivals in shaping cinema culture, film-critic and Vice President of the Federation of Film Societies of India, **Premendra Mazumdar**, described cinema as a collective art form and film viewing as a community activity. He said film festivals are a natural extension of India's long-standing film society movement, which has played a significant role in promoting meaningful cinema across the country. He also noted that the digital revolution has contributed to the rapid growth of film festivals around the world. While this expansion has created more opportunities for filmmakers, it has also brought challenges related to quality and regulation. He stressed the need to preserve the values that originally inspired the film festival movement, including the promotion of artistic excellence and cultural dialogue.

**Premendra Mazumdar** also pointed out that film festivals continue to attract audiences across generations. Unlike commercial screenings, festival audiences often include filmmakers, critics and cinema enthusiasts, creating an environment that encourages deeper engagement with films. Many acclaimed filmmakers, he added, first gained recognition through festival circuits.

Addressing the opportunities and challenges facing animation filmmakers, **Savitri Hari**, Consultant with the Telangana VFX, Animation and Gaming Association (TVAGA), observed that animation is still often viewed primarily as a medium for children's entertainment. This perception creates barriers in financing and distribution despite the artistic and storytelling potential of animation. She noted that Indian animation is increasingly gaining visibility at international festivals. However, language preferences and distribution practices can limit the global reach of many projects. Savitri Hari encouraged filmmakers to be prepared not only creatively but also commercially by developing intellectual property strategies and understanding international markets. Film festivals can help creators connect with mentors, industry professionals and global audiences, she added.

**Prakash Magdum**, Managing Director of the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), highlighted the importance of preserving films for future generations. Film preservation, he said, ensures that cinematic history remains accessible to the coming generations and newer audiences. This explains why many major film festivals around the world now feature sections dedicated to restored classics. He also spoke about the impact of technology on filmmaking and film festivals.

Digital platforms have made it easier for filmmakers from diverse backgrounds to submit their work to festivals across the world. At the same time, advances in animation, motion graphics and artificial intelligence are expanding creative possibilities. Referring to MIFF's curated section on AI films, he said audiences ultimately respond to emotional authenticity rather than the technology used to create a film.

For award-winning filmmaker **Deepak Kumar Beshra**, founder of the Society for Adivasi Film Development Foundation (SAFDF) and the Baripada National Indigenous Short Film Festival, authenticity remains the key to audience engagement. He said film festivals provide invaluable opportunities for indigenous and tribal communities to share their stories with wider audiences. Deepak Kr. Beshra noted that audiences often connect most strongly with stories that reflect their own lives, cultures and experiences. He pointed to the growing recognition of films rooted in local traditions and languages as evidence that authenticity can transcend geographical boundaries and appeal to global viewers.

The evolving landscape of documentary filmmaking was addressed by **Nilotpall Majumder**, Founder-President of Docedge Kolkata, Asia's first documentary incubator. He observed that Indian documentaries have undergone significant transformation over the past decade, with filmmakers exploring a wider range of subjects and storytelling approaches. Documentaries, help create historical consciousness by bringing together issues, emotions and lived realities, he added. While many documentary filmmakers continue to work with limited resources, their commitment and passion have resulted in a growing body of impactful work. He emphasized the need for mentorship, skill development and institutional support to help emerging documentary filmmakers realise their potential.

Offering an international perspective, **Patricia Sanchez Mora**, Director of L'Alternativa PRO and EXTREMLAB Fest said, film festivals provide an important platform for experimental and non-commercial cinema. They enable filmmakers to discover creative practices from different parts of the world while fostering dialogue and collaboration across cultures.

The discussion concluded with a shared recognition that film festivals remain vital spaces for artistic exploration, cultural exchange and community engagement. By championing diverse voices, encouraging innovation and creating opportunities for meaningful interaction between filmmakers and audiences, film festivals continue to strengthen the global language of cinema while celebrating the uniqueness of local stories. In the concluding segment of the discussion, the panellists reflected on the fundamental purpose of filmmaking. A common view that emerged was that filmmakers must first be deeply convinced about the story they wish to tell and whether cinema is the most effective medium to tell it. They emphasized that films should be driven by authenticity and conviction.

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