

Short film 'Gudgudi' brings a message of hope, self-acceptance and emotional well-being, at MIFF 2026

Mumbai, 20 June 2026

The Hindi short film *Gudgudi* made its Asia Premiere at the 19th Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF 2026) on Friday (June 19, 2026). This 21-minute Hindi short fiction film marks the directorial debut of Manisha Makwana. The cast and crew including the director, producer Harwardhan Patel, lead actors Ahaas Channa and Hridaansh Parekh and crew members were felicitated by NFDC at the gala premiere of the film.

Ahead of its gala screening, director Manisha Makhwana and producer Harsh Patel also interacted with the media at the festival venue and shared insights into the making of the film, its themes and its festival journey.

Explaining the significance of the title *Gudgudi*, Manisha Makhwana said that it symbolizes a feeling of joy and hope. "The film concludes with the child character Aarav saying that he feels 'gudgudi' in his heart. That emotion captures the essence of the story," she said. "It's a piece of my heart, and I hope everyone feels gudgudi on watching the movie" said director Manisha Makwana at the Red Carpet which was followed by the screening of the short film.



The film follows Ritu, a young woman working as a mascot at an amusement park. Embarrassed by her profession and burdened by personal responsibilities, she struggles with her self-worth. Through her interaction with a child named Aarav, she begins to view her life and work in a new light. According to the director, the mascot costume acts as a metaphorical filter that conceals Ritu's true emotions and inner struggles from the world.

Gudgudi's central character Ritu is not an individual story, rather it is a story of every middle-class child. Her quiet bond with Aarav, a young boy who sees through her costume, becomes the film's emotional core, gently drawing her voice back. The director's detailing could be seen in the use of high-angle shots to mirror Ritu's diminishing sense of self, while overlapping, chaotic scenes to echo her inner disruption. In a quiet subversion, the mascot usually voiceless speaks only in voiceover, deepening the contrast between her public mask and private vulnerability. Ritu finally removes her mascot head before Aarav, the only one who has truly seen her, literally and metaphorically. The film closes on an open note, leaving audiences to discover their own "gudgudi", that stands for hope and joy, inviting personal interpretation of joy rediscovered. Towards the very end, the movie extends a special thank you, appreciating the hard work of real life mascots.

Calling *Gudgudi* a bold script, the director said the story draws inspiration from her own deeply personal experiences. "Ritu and Aarav's journey shows that it is okay to put down one's emotional baggage at times. The film leaves the audience with hope and encourages people to open up to their loved ones," she said. The movie has Gujarati undertone woven in the dialogue, thereby adding the director's personal touch to the film which, as she said, is inspired by her deeply personal experiences.

The film was shot at Bal Vatika Park in Ahmedabad and incorporates several candid moments and improvisations that emerged organically during filming. The director described the most powerful moment in the film as the scene where Ritu finally accepts her life as it is and experiences a sense of liberation.

Addressing the film's central message, producer Harsh Patel urged people to pay attention to their inner world. "People should open up to trusted friends and family members. Emotional well-being begins with honest conversations," he said.



Speaking about the casting of actor Ahsaas Channa in the lead role, director Manisha Makhwana said that the script was written with her in mind. "Ehsaas is not one of those actors who throw weight around. Actors generally love showing their face, but in this film her face remains hidden behind a mascot mask for most of the runtime and is visible only for a few minutes. Her confidence in her craft perhaps made her choose this role," she said.

The director also spoke about the casting of child actor Hridaansh, who was selected after the casting director was impressed by his performance in an earlier project.

Director Manisha Makhwana observed that mental health challenges are increasingly being shaped by the pressures of balancing online and offline lives. She noted that the film seeks to encourage reflection, self-acceptance and emotional openness.

The director also shared that she has previously worked on acclaimed productions such as *Stree* and *The Family Man*, and acknowledged filmmakers Raj Nidimoru and Krishna D.K. (Raj & DK) as her mentors in the industry.



Poster of the Short Film *Gudgudi*

Gudgudi has been receiving positive responses on the international festival circuit. Besides its screening at MIFF 2026, the film was also showcased at the Short Film Corner at the Cannes Film Festival. Emphasizing the importance of authentic storytelling, Ms. Makhwana said, "Honest stories always find their space."

Producer Harsh Patel informed that the makers are exploring possibilities for a theatrical release and are considering packaging three to four short films together for exhibition in cinemas. The film will participate in various festivals for sometime now, informed the producer and director.

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