"Becoming Is a Spiritual Journey That Continues at Every Moment": Director Leena Yadav at IFFI 57

> Language is only one tool of communication; emotions transcend words, says filmmaker of Indian Panorama's opening non-feature film

Goa, 21 November 2026

Language is only one of the many tools of communication, while human emotions can transcend linguistic barriers, said filmmaker Ms. Leena Yadav, director of the Ladakhi non-feature film *Becoming*, at a press conference on the sidelines of the 57th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) in Goa. Selected as the opening non-feature film of Indian Panorama 2026, *Becoming* explores a spiritual journey through the cultural landscape and traditions of Ladakh.



Reflecting on her experience of directing local, non-professional actors, Ms. Yadav said she communicated largely in Hindi, while many of the performers spoke Ladakhi and had limited familiarity with Hindi. Despite the language barrier, the actors were able to understand and express the emotions of their characters. The experience, she observed, reinforced the importance of listening, sensitivity and communication beyond words.

Written and directed by Ms. Yadav, *Becoming* follows Agyal, a young boy in Ladakh whose unusual bond with nature and memories seemingly drawn from another life lead him towards the ancient Likir Monastery. When he identifies belongings associated with a revered Rimpoche, the monks begin to

believe that he may be the spiritual teacher's reincarnation. The film explores themes of rebirth, identity, destiny and the relationship between the past and the present.

Describing the film as a spiritual experience, Ms. Yadav explained that the idea of *Becoming* extends beyond the journey of its central character. It represents the continuous process of transformation in human life, which does not arrive at a definitive end. She also spoke about the influence of Buddhist philosophy and the distinctive landscapes of Ladakh on the film's narrative and visual language.



Recalling the origins of the project, producer and cinematographer Shri Aseem Bajaj said the film emerged from an opportunity to test camera equipment in demanding conditions. Rather than simply endorsing the equipment, he proposed making a short film in Ladakh. He offered Ms. Yadav three starting points: the title *Becoming*, the world of Buddhism and Ladakh as the setting. These elements gradually developed into a story as the filmmakers responded to the location and the people they encountered.

Speaking about the production process, the filmmakers said that a compact crew of 19 members from outside Ladakh worked with local collaborators to develop the script, cast non-professional actors and complete the shoot within 15 days, including the period required for acclimatisation to the high-altitude environment. Ms. Yadav noted that the process demanded flexibility, with the location and its people contributing to the unfolding of the film.

Shri Bajaj explained that the film used no visual effects, relying instead on the natural landscape and on-location cinematography. With temperatures reportedly falling to around minus 20 degrees Celsius, the team faced considerable physical challenges, although the equipment performed reliably. Both filmmakers spoke of being humbled by the scale of nature and by the warmth and hospitality of the people of Ladakh.



The filmmakers also reflected on local accounts and Buddhist traditions associated with reincarnation, which offered insights into the beliefs and cultural context within which the film is situated.

Sharing an interesting detail about the film's poster, Ms. Yadav recalled that its striking image of a young boy seen from behind and draped in red emerged from an unscripted moment during filming. The interplay of cloth, shadows and surrounding light created an image that, in the filmmakers' view, captured the spirit of *Becoming*.

Both Ms. Yadav and Shri Bajaj expressed gratitude for the film's selection as the opening non-feature film of Indian Panorama at IFFI 2026. The film's journey, shaped by human connections, cultural traditions and the natural landscape of Ladakh, offers audiences an opportunity to experience a story that reaches beyond linguistic and geographical boundaries.

The press conference was moderated by Shri Kiran Murali.

Watch the full press conference here:

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