

# 'FOR PUNEKARS, THE FILM IS A CATHARSIS'

## PUNE MIRROR

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National Award winner in the Best Art/ Cultural Film of the Year category for her independent documentary *Modikhanyachya Don Goshti* (Two Tales of Modikhana), 47-year-old Gouri Patwardhan has been editing and making films since 1990.

In town for a screening of the film at the Cinematheque Film Club in Kothrud this weekend, Gouri is back at her alma mater, the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), where she studied film editing. Since she moved to Karachi in 2004, Gouri has been teaching as visiting faculty at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and the Szabist Institute.

### **How did *Modikhanyachya Don Goshti* come to be made?**

I first came to know of the existence of Modikhana in 1997, when I went there to help a German documentary maker with research on Babasaheb Ambedkar. Modikhana was a former servants' 'back alley' of the British Cantonment, now hidden away, omitted from Pune's mainstream history.

It was a revelation, as I became aware of the strong prevalence of casteism in my own city. Modikhana is an entirely Dalit neighbourhood, where vibes of animosity towards 'upper' castes are allpervasive. Till then, I had never thought of myself or anybody I knew in terms of a caste-based identity.

Over the next few years, I read plenty of Dalit literature, and was in touch with the family of prominent Dalit artist Sudhir Waghmare. In 2004, I got married and moved to Karachi — in all the travel back and forth, the documentary took years to materialise.

### **What are the stylistic elements of this film?**

*Modikhanyachya...* is the realistic picture of a Dalit neighbourhood seen through the eyes of father-daughter artist duo Sudhir and Kranti Waghmare. These two depict this culture beautifully in their paintings. But though their medium of expression and subject are the same, their styles are starkly distinct.

Sudhir's work is made up of colourful landscapes of the area, subtly revealing rich and overlapping layers of socio-political history. The process of the untouchables' metamorphosis into 'Dalits' and their politicisation under the aegis of Dr Ambedkar reverberates in his canvases.

He also paints portraits of Dalit leaders. Kranti's paintings, on the other hand, are abstract. She expresses the pain of her community not via forms and shapes but a violent destruction and resurrection of her tools, as if she is recreating suffering in her works. The 73-minute documentary is an artistic insight into Dalit politics, an interview-based film shot in two different styles to represent the two artists' discrete approaches.

**How has the response been so far?**

I've screened the film in the Delhi, Mumbai and Goa film festivals, as well as in Karachi. But my target audience is Pune-kars — I want them to experience the epiphany I had when I first visited Modikhana. The audience in the cities had a more intellectual response to it but for Pune-kars, the catharsis will be more intense.

The response in Karachi was quite interesting, for they could draw parallels in their own society.

**What did the National Award mean to you?**

I was delighted, but more about the prospect of how this award was going to help my film than about actually receiving it. There is no documentary culture in India — though the scene may have improved in the past few years, we still need the backing of a National Award to generate curiosity. The biggest advantage of winning the award was that people got to know of my film.