

Anurag Kashyap presents
Songs of Forgotten Trees
A film by Anuparna Roy



77 mins / India 2025 /In Hindi

**Anuparna Roy - Winner Best Director Venice Film Festival Orizzonti Section
2025**

Opening date 14th August 2026

FOR ALL UK PRESS ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:
Sue Porter/Lizzie Frith – Porter Frith Ltd
Tel. 07940 584066/07825 603705 porterfrith@hotmail.com

FOR ALL OTHER ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT
Robert Beeson – robert@newwavefilms.co.uk
Dena Blakeman – dena@newwavefilms.co.uk

info@newwavefilms.co.uk





SYNOPSIS

Thooya (Naaz Shaikh), a migrant and aspiring actress, spends her days moonlighting as a sex worker in her apartment, attending virtual therapy, and shedding her inhibitions in acting class. New to Mumbai, Thooya rents out her spare room to the quiet Shweta (Sumi Baghel), who works in a call centre and is also new to Mumbai.

Taking a little time to warm up, they soon start to build a connection, one in which they rely on each other, building their own cocoon far away from the noise and challenges of the oppressive city. But as the realities of how the two women live their lives begin to clash, the fragile bond is tested.

What unfolds is a quiet blooming of selfhood, survival, and a kinship between women navigating a world that rarely sees them.

BBFC cert tbc

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CAST

Thooya
Shweta
Nitin
Shweta's Boyfriend
Nitin's Wife
Guard
Thooya's Customer 1
Thooya's Customer 2
Thooya's Customer 3
Thooya's Customer 4
Cab Passenger
Psychiatrist

Naaz Shaikh
Sumi Baghel
Bhushan Shimpi
Ravi Maan
Lovely Singh
Debu K Banerjee
Pritam Pilonia
Moni Shankar
Shah Alam
Saurabh Yadav
Nikhil Lama
Abhilasha Paul

CREW

Director
Screenplay
Cinematographer
Editor
Sound Designer
Music
Second Unit Cinematographer
Location Sound
Re-recording Mixer
Production Design
Produced by

Co-produced by

Creative Producer
Production Companies

Anuparna Roy
Anuparna Roy
Debjit Samanta
Ashish Patel
Arka Dey
Nishant Ramteke
Sakyadeb Chowdhury
Pranjal Varshey
Alok De
Priya Shree
Bibhanshu Rai, Romil Modi,
Ranjan Singh
Navin Shetty, Anuparna Roy,
Sharib Khan, Vikas Kumar
Nikhil Lama
Flip Films
River Tales Films
Romil Casting
Nube Studio - Nube Cirrus
Khan & Kumar Media

India 2025 77 mins
Ratio 2.39:1, Sound 5.1
In Hindi

ANUPARNA ROY

Indian writer and director (b. 1994) from Narayanpur, a small village in Purulia, West Bengal, Anuparna Roy graduated in English literature from Burdwan University and later pursued studies in mass communications. Before entering the film industry, she worked as an IT sales executive. In 2021, deciding to change fields, she studied acting and eventually moved behind the camera to write and direct her first short film, *Run to the River* (2023). *Songs of Forgotten Trees* was her feature debut and earned her the Best Director Award in the Orizzonti section of the Venice Film Festival. She was the first Indian woman to receive this distinction.

Beyond cinema, Anuparna is also a published writer. Her article addressing the rights of minorities, the aftermath of the controversial new citizenship law and the lives of Bay of Bengal refugees was featured on Word is One News (a widely viewed news channel based in India). Now based in Mumbai, she is actively developing new scripts. Her current work explores themes rooted in Third World cinema, female agency, and marginalized narratives.



FILMOGRAPHY

RUN TO THE RIVER short (2023)

SONGS OF FORGOTTEN TREES (2025)

LOVERS IN THE BLUE NIGHT (2026)

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The society where I grew up in has long silenced the voices of women. Our stories were pushed aside, unheard and unseen for generations. From childhood, I sensed that our stories were never meant to be seen or heard. That absence pushed me to write about them.

Growing up as a girl in a country like India, I experienced how institutions from schools to family made gender-based discrimination feel normal. In my village school, boys received books and toys. We girls received rice rations based on our body weight until fourth grade. When we entered adolescence, we were handed iron tablets, as if our bodies were a burden the state had to manage, not minds it had to nourish.

Government schemes offered money for our marriages, specifically for Dalit women and girls. Career, education, freedom - those weren't the incentives. Marriage was. Through all of this, I began to understand how the personal is political. And how memory, too, becomes political.

Part of *Songs of Forgotten Trees* reflects my memory of a lost friend, Jhuma Nath, whose presence still echoes through my life and this film. Her marriage was fixed at the age of 13, and how the government paid her father an amount to settle her marriage as she was Dalit and more than a woman. I lost her, as if she had been disappeared, abducted by the whole elite political system.

In cinema, we women are rarely seen as we are. Instead, we are often sugar-coated through the male gaze, packaged, labelled, and filtered through imposed political, religious, and social frameworks. The film resists that. It attempts to reclaim the space where women exist not as symbols, metaphors, or vessels of ideologies but as themselves. I often quote to describe my film "I hold a pen not to craft happy endings, but to tell of miseries, of wounds that linger, of life as it unfolds in a third-world country".

Interview with Anuparna Roy by Surela Chakraborty

8th October 2025

The Space Ink:

How did you come up with the idea for this film?

AR: As I have already mentioned, my grandmother had a child marriage to a thirty-year-old man, my grandfather. As soon as she entered her new house, she discovered that she had a stepdaughter who was the same age as hers. But they bonded well and I have seen them running the family dynamics without my grandfather after he passed away. With four female children, they both handled the family without any male around. And that gave me hope thinking, is it possible to run a family without a man? I overimagined it and thought to develop something that would talk about women and their intimacy. That is how this idea came about.

The Space Ink:

Did experiences from your own life shape the story in any way?

AR: The seed started from my grandmother's relationship with her stepdaughter which was platonic and definitely sisterhood. I sort of imagined their relationship in that way and I liked it, and it led me to think that direction. And obviously the reference of Jhuma Nath, who was my childhood friend, and the way our friendship was abandoned by my father- that guilt stayed with me. The film carries her memory in bits and pieces, and a reference to her is there in the Hollong trees. Those trees are called the forgotten trees.



The Space Ink:

You have assisted on different film sets, and your first film also received critical acclaim—did those past experiences help while making this one?

AR: Definitely, experiences always add benefits, and I have assisted on short films as well. I am a terrible AD. The first film taught me a lot as a director, I came to know of a lot of things, such as how to handle actors, set, production and everything. It was not a role of a director, but a role of a team member trying to put all her effort together along with the other team members. This is how it happened.

The Space Ink: Who were the key people who supported you in bringing this film to life?

AR: As mentioned, the key people are three of my producers Bibhanshu Rai, Romil Modi and Ranjan Singh. These are the people who have helped me to shoot the film not only as producers but as friends. At the same time team members of mine, Debjit Samanta, the great DOP, Ashish Patel who stayed inside the apartment for one and a half years to edit the film and Sakyadeb Chowdhury who is the second unit DOP were amazing. And then there was the gaffer who was 80 years old and Navin Shetty.



Navin Shetty did a lot for the film as well, he colour-graded the film and helped us with the DCP. And it's not the first time Navin Shetty is helping indie filmmakers. He has been helping indie filmmakers for so long, for a decade or more than a decade now. I want to mention two more names, Vikas Kumar and Sharif Khan, as they sort of inspired me, they joined as co-producers and the journey has been amazing you see. So, I believe these are the people. And then obviously my family, my mother was always there. My father never directly denied me in anything I said, he even started coexisting with dreams of mine. And obviously Anurag Kashyap the moment he got on board, August 20, 2025. He helped us a lot with advice which was very helpful in taking the film forward. Ranjan Singh for me is not just the producer but a guardian. He always knows the next move and therefore showed us the path. So yes, these are the people who helped me shape the film.

The Space Ink: Walk us through your creative process.

AR: I don't have any such big creative process, but I do take a lot of time thinking about the story before writing. You know I read a lot and try to understand a lot of perspectives. I try to get my motivation from here and there...That factor is always there and the second thing is I don't believe in having a strict script. I make changes here and there whilst on the set. If I instinctively feel the situation is not going with the dialogue, or the dialogue is not going with the actor, I don't believe in repeating the same written dialogue. I can modify accordingly. So, during shooting the 'Songs of Forgotten Trees' I had only fifty scenes already written.

When Ashish was editing the film, I sat with him and went through A to Z of the film and made changes in the narrative there and then. Therefore, I can't say I have a particular creative process, but I believe in modifications, a lot. For instance, while shooting outside I had to modify certain scenes as there were restrictions in some public areas and we could not hire every location. I had to figure that out and make changes as we went along. So, I very much believe in the process while on the set. And that is how I do things, without a full script. I believe in and let my actors do their own take first, that is the process.

The Space Ink: Did you face any challenges while making the film, and how did you overcome them?

AR: I faced a lot of challenges like a random director does while shooting in Mumbai or inside India or outside India even. So, we had not told people that we would be shooting inside the apartment, which was the first challenge, so we were secretly shooting the whole film.

The other challenge was that there would be a lot of camera movement inside the apartment, so Debjit and I decided that we wouldn't go for structural mid wide and close type of shots. And since it was a small cramped up apartment, we could not move the camera a lot. Also, the camera was very new to us and very heavy. It was a Panasonic SH that was tough to carry around, but Debjit did a marvellous job. We were shooting in 6K and had less hard drives, and the data size was very big, so these were the technical issues we faced. But we managed to do it well, and here we are.



The Space Ink: Can you share a memorable anecdote from the shoot?

AR: I mean the most memorable or the best memory from the shoot would be the bathroom scene. So basically, there is a long take shot inside the film where the two women express themselves. I don't want to give any spoiler away, but you know it is a very intimate scene. It is a very romantic and emotional scene. And the moment both actors did their part I had to say cut

but I couldn't. I let the shot go on for more than 5...6 minutes. I let the actors play with each other and do whatever they wanted.

I mean that memory stuck with me. And the last day of the shoot, when we were outside of the apartment for the very first time. We went to the sea beach. We were all very emotional because we knew from the next day, we were not going to see each other, and you know the process will not be happening again, and then the shoot is over. So that was a very emotional moment for me, I'd say.

The Space Ink: This is your second film as a writer and director—how have you grown as a filmmaker since your debut?

AR: I think I have grown as a filmmaker, but it is not the kind of growth I am having. I am talking about the recognition and everything else. I am talking about internal growth as a writer and director. I think there is a long way to go, a lot to learn, a lot to unlearn. I am a young filmmaker and this is my debut feature film, so, I think I need to learn a lot of things and I am waiting for such experiences which will give me more strength.

The Space Ink: As a filmmaker and writer, who have been your biggest influences?

AR: I love Iranian films. I like Jafar Panahi and I like Jia Zhangke, the Chinese filmmaker. I like the kind of realism they have used inside their films. I like Ritwik Ghatak and Satyajit Ray, obviously one cannot overlook them. And if I talk about films, some of the films that never went away from my mind are – 'Close', 'Hot Milk', 'Manta Ray', 'Still Life' and then 'Roma'. These are the films that stayed with me and taught me a lot. I love all of them and watch them again and again.

The Space ink: How are you feeling about the film's wonderful critical reception? What was your first reaction when you heard about winning this award?

AR: The moment I received the award it was definitely surprising for me. I mean they told me that I would receive something, as is the ritual to let filmmakers know eight hours before. But they didn't tell me in which category or what award. They just told me that you have to attend the ceremony. I think

it was a bit surprising for me as it was very much unpredictable. And I actually believe in unpredictability a lot and I love to be, you know, in doubts.



So, I mean it was amazing to receive an award at such a big platform which is in Venice. And the first thing that came to my mind was I must thank all the team members because they did a lot and without them, I couldn't be here. I was sort of emotional. I was expecting my whole team to be there, and we tried to take all of them, but some of them couldn't manage it. It is great, but it brings a lot of responsibility. You know now I am under pressure. That fear always stays after the first film, my first short. So that fear is something I really like. So, there is nothing to worry about. But yes, I mean, everything came during the time of receiving this award. It was a mixed feeling.

The Space Ink: As a writer and filmmaker, how do you envisage contributing to an India that is more gender-fluid and accepting of diverse voices beyond the city perimeters?

AR: I don't think as a film maker, I can contribute to society very much because it's a very privileged profession. We can make films, and we can portray experiences and society as it is, but I don't think we can bring changes inside that society. I mean, there's a responsibility to showcase the reality of society, but I doubt that I can bring any changes or any filmmaker can bring changes inside their society by their films.

I mean, if that happens, then I'd be the happiest one, you know. But then definitely there's a struggle from every filmmaker who somehow tries, you know, likes to believe the same. But I'll be honest with you, I don't think it's possible. But yes, my film will be around the sort of experiences I have been

through earlier, I am going through right now, or my relatives went through. Everything will be summed up inside my next film or upcoming projects. We cannot ignore society.



The Space Ink: What would be your message to upcoming indie filmmakers?

AR: I don't think I'm in a position of advising anything at this moment. But one thing I would love to say is to dream big and make films. If you want to make films, just make them. If you want to write, just write. If you want to direct, just direct. So, I think that's that. That will be the advice I give.

The Space Ink: And finally, what are your plans going forward?

AR: Going forward, my plans are nothing but to make another film and to talk about what I wanted to talk about for so long, to write, which I wanted to write for so long. And like my sort of things, I direct what I write basically, so, I want to write and I want to direct again. This is my current plan.