

KOHINOOR

A queer drama set in modern India

SCHIWAGO FILM

AMOUR FOU luxembourg

VK Art & Design Private Limited

SYNOPSIS

KOHINOOR (25) a transwoman, lives in a remote coastal village in eastern India where she is an outcast, shunned by society and family alike. Thus, her relationship with **MRINAL** (32), an heir to a powerful political family, can only exist behind veils; a deathly secret known only to themselves. When Mrinal marries a 'high born' woman, Kohinoor accepts it as her fate and is satisfied with the stealthy rendezvous that continue after his wedding. But as his loyalty to his family deepens, she realizes that her love means little to him. One fateful night, in a violent confrontation with her increasingly abusive lover, the relationship finds an unexpected end.

She flees to Mumbai. **SANDEEP** (25), a friend from her village, helps her settle in. She joins a new clan of Kinnars and delves into a search for her lost sister **MALTI** (11), who had been trafficked to the city by **HARI** (48), a man who once promised to marry her **MOTHER** (45). The search gives Kohinoor new purpose, causing her to almost forget the past. It's at this point that Hari returns: he is the man who broke up her family, because of whom she has been a virtual orphan, alone and haunted. In order to live, she must exorcise his evil presence and all that is buried in her past. It is this reappearance that makes a reckoning possible: to seek answers, to accept, to renew.

Though Kohinoor is but one of those millions invisible and dispossessed who pass through our cities each day, her journey is of a human being who assumes her place with glory within a fascinating, uncanny and always enigmatic world.





LOGLINE

Kohinoor, a transwoman, is rejected by her lover and she sets off on a journey to look for her sister who has gone missing when Kohinoor was a child. A story about love, loss, friendship and community in which Kohinoor overcomes the powerful ghosts of her past.

LENGTH: CA. 110 MIN

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY UDITA BHARGAVA

STATUS: CURRENTLY IN POST-PRODUCTION, EXPECTED DELIVERY SPRING 2027

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Most of my early life, I felt not boy not girl no body- no one. Afterwards, living a mixed identity brought me into contact with many people who lead similar lives- all locked in a struggle to identify ourselves and the creatures locked within our body. In Kohinoor, I want to create a character who chooses the creature inside herself before any other identity. A creature that is fluid, a life in transition, struggling to find its voice, asking the question: how does one fill up all the gaps of the self, unite all its parts, to be **human** in glory?

I strongly believe that (sexual) identities are far more complex than the few words that exist in our vocabulary to define them. With the support of the Robert Bosch Stiftung through their Grenzgänger Program, I was able to research and shoot extensively with Kinnar/ Hijra communities in India since 2019. **Kinnar** or the more derogatory **Hijra** are terms used in South Asia for transgender and intersex communities. Linguistically, Kinnars usually refer to themselves as female and dress accordingly. In India, many Kinnars live in well defined and organized communities called **Gharanas**, led by a **Guru Mother**.

Kinnars are outcasts; sealed off from family life and professional enterprise. Yet religion and mythology have bestowed on them powers of a “God” people; they are able to bless and curse, able to intervene in fate. This double edged relationship with society is very specific to the Indian subcontinent and the film opens a door to the life and milieu of a community rarely captured on film.

A Kinnar's powerful act of standing up against the storm of prejudice and condemnation, their courageous battle against a perilous existence and a harsh fate- this, and their strong sense of community- make them an icon of hope. My film 'Kohinoor' is an offering to this hope and beauty embodied by a Kinnar.

NOTES ON STYLE, STRUCTURE AND VISUAL TREATMENT

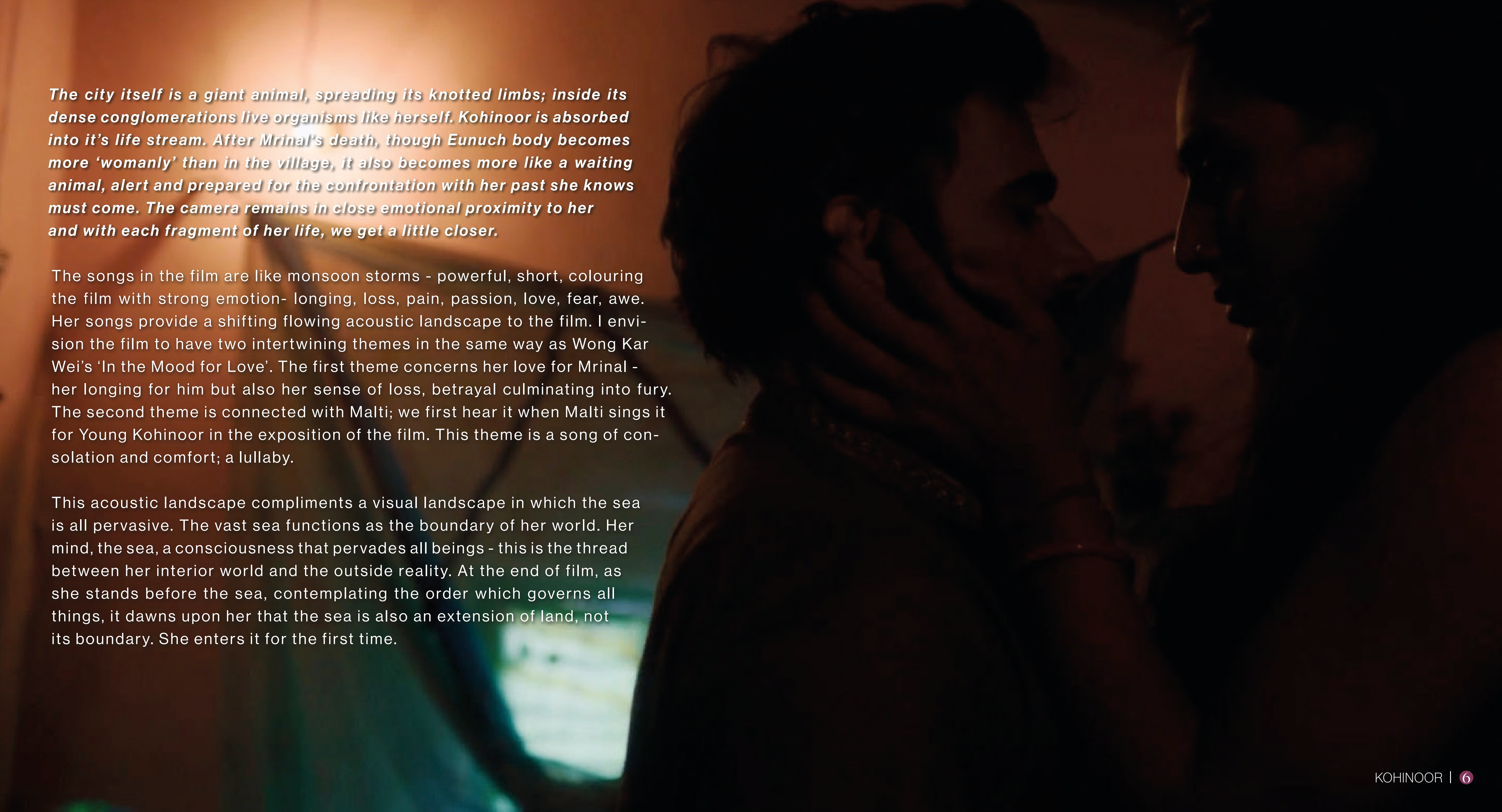
When the film opens, the landscape is dusty yellow, touched by an air of eternity. Here, “Rivaaj” i.e tradition reigns supreme. In this ageing world, with its ancient laws, there exist myths and ceremonies, whose meanings have grown obscure but their presence dominates the lives of people. The past of the community is preserved in a rich iconography, which flows freely into the visual language of the film, creating a universe both which is archaic and dreamlike.

In contrast to the stasis of the village, the forest is a place of transformation- mysterious, sparkling like emeralds, bursting with hidden life. As monsoon clouds gather, the landscape turns into a waiting monotonous grey. Rain pours out from the skies, buzzing like a thousand beehives around. Above this noise, she hears the madman’s words clearly: ‘you can make him love you’. The arrival of the monsoon changes the forest into a dark wet womb.

Inside this crystal world, mythological processes play out as Kohinoor transforms into Kinnar, Mrinal is reborn and finally, she transforms into the first human; she reaches the primordial origins of her being. The film is suffused with surreal and hypnotic elements; these elements heighten the psychological drama of the film. Inspirations include Lars von Trier’s ‘Antichrist’ and Albert Serra’s cinema in which reality is heightened and the entire filmic world is given a archaic magical quality.

As Kohinoor travels to the metropolis, the visual landscape becomes more undefined- glass, water, metal and lights create unending reflections and distortions. One can get lost here; one thing can be mistaken for another- like clouds swimming through glass, lights gleaming inside lights; a vast, expanding mirage, glimmering, a hope, an illusion.





The city itself is a giant animal, spreading its knotted limbs; inside its dense conglomerations live organisms like herself. Kohinoor is absorbed into it's life stream. After Mrinal's death, though Eunuch body becomes more 'womanly' than in the village, it also becomes more like a waiting animal, alert and prepared for the confrontation with her past she knows must come. The camera remains in close emotional proximity to her and with each fragment of her life, we get a little closer.

The songs in the film are like monsoon storms - powerful, short, colouring the film with strong emotion- longing, loss, pain, passion, love, fear, awe. Her songs provide a shifting flowing acoustic landscape to the film. I envision the film to have two intertwining themes in the same way as Wong Kar Wei's 'In the Mood for Love'. The first theme concerns her love for Mrinal - her longing for him but also her sense of loss, betrayal culminating into fury. The second theme is connected with Malti; we first hear it when Malti sings it for Young Kohinoor in the exposition of the film. This theme is a song of consolation and comfort; a lullaby.

This acoustic landscape compliments a visual landscape in which the sea is all pervasive. The vast sea functions as the boundary of her world. Her mind, the sea, a consciousness that pervades all beings - this is the thread between her interior world and the outside reality. At the end of film, as she stands before the sea, contemplating the order which governs all things, it dawns upon her that the sea is also an extension of land, not its boundary. She enters it for the first time.

THE DIRECTOR

UDITA BHARGAVA

Udita Bhargava lives and works between India and Germany. **KOHINOOR** is her second feature. Her debut feature **DUST**, a German-Indian co-production, premiered at the 69. Berlinale 2019. Her shorts have been screened and awarded at film festivals across the world. She has worked on several international film productions including Danny Boyle's **Slumdog Millionaire**, Lars von Trier's **Antichrist** and Mira Nair's **The Migration**.

Udita has studied film directing at the Film University Potsdam Babelsberg Konrad Wolf. She holds a Master's Degree in mass communication and a Bachelor's Degree in English literature. She is an alumni of Berlinale Talents and of the Into the Wild Mentoring Programme. She has worked with several cinema institutions like the Deutsche Kinemathek and the Berlinale.

Currently, she is developing a coming-of-age drama feature **‚O‘** and a sci-f mystery series **‚GOA‘**. The former project has received the BKM grant for script development, the latter was part of the Medienboard Artist-in-Residence-Program. She is also working with UFA Fiction in Berlin to develop their German Indian feature **‚TARA- der Kleinste Stern am Himmel‘**.



THE CAST



Kohinoor SURUJ RAJKHOWA

BORN IN A COASTAL VILLAGE IN EASTERN INDIA, KOHINOOR JOINS A KINNAR COMMUNITY AS A TEENAGER AND TRANSITIONS INTO A WOMAN. A GIFTED DANCER AND SINGER, SHE BECOMES A RISING LOCAL PERFORMER. HER PASSIONATE AND TURBULENT RELATIONSHIP WITH MRINAL REVEALS BOTH HER INNER STRENGTH AND A SELF-DESTRUCTIVE SIDE. THROUGHOUT THE FILM, KOHINOOR LEARNS TO OVERCOME THIS PART OF HERSELF, ULTIMATELY RECONNECTING WITH THE WORLD THROUGH HER VOICE AND MUSIC.



Mrinal GHANSHYAM LASA

BORN INTO A WEALTHY AND POWERFUL FAMILY OF LANDLORDS AND POLITICIANS, MRINAL IS A PRIVILEGED YOUNG MAN TRAPPED BY HIS SURROUNDINGS. HIS SECRET AFFAIR WITH KOHINOOR AWAKENS HIS SEXUALITY AND OFFERS A CHANCE TO ESCAPE THE EXPECTATIONS OF FAMILY AND POLITICS. DRAWN TO THE RELATIONSHIP'S MIX OF DANGER, PLEASURE AND TRANSGRESSION, HE KEEPS RETURNING TO HER. LATER, MRINAL REAPPEARS AS A GHOST - FINALLY FREE FROM THE TIES THAT BOUND HIM, BUT ULTIMATELY EMPTY.



Akash MITHIL RAJ

PROUDLY GAY, AAKASH IS AN ORPHAN WHO GREW UP IN A MUMBAI SLUM WITH A FOSTER MOTHER WHO LATER ABANDONED HIM BECAUSE OF HIS SEXUALITY. DESPITE THIS REJECTION, HE RECEIVED A GOOD EDUCATION AND IS NOW PREPARING TO BECOME A CIVIL JUDGE. A DREAMER AND IDEALIST, AAKASH REMAINS HOPEFUL DESPITE THE HARDSHIPS HE HAS FACED. PRIVATE AND RESERVED, HE KEEPS ONLY A FEW CLOSE FRIENDS, TO WHOM HE IS DEEPLY CARING, COMMITTED AND LOYAL.



Sandeep AAMIR AZIZ

BORN INTO A LOWER-CASTE FAMILY IN RURAL ODISHA, SANDEEP STARTS WORKING YOUNG TO SUPPORT HIS MOTHER AFTER HIS FATHER'S DEATH. HE FORMS A CLOSE FRIENDSHIP WITH KOHINOOR, CONNECTED BY THEIR EXPERIENCES OF SEXUALITY. SMART, AMBITIOUS AND OBSERVANT, SANDEEP MOVES TO MUMBAI IN PURSUIT OF SOCIAL MOBILITY. STARTING OUT AS A PERSONAL DRIVER, HE RISES TO BECOME THE RIGHT-HAND MAN OF A PROMINENT FIGURE WHILE EXPLORING HIS SEXUALITY AND EVENTUALLY FINDING LOVE WITH AAKASH.

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