

## Cactus Pears [15]

2025 India/Canada/United Kingdom 113 mins

UK released **19 June 2026**

Director **Rohan Parashuram Kanawade**

Screenplay **Rohan Parashuram Kanawade**

Cinematography **Vikas Urs**

Cast **Bhushaan Manoj** (Anand); **Suraaj Suman** (Balya);  
**Jayshri Jagtap** (Suman)

Oh, repression – it remains a deathless subject matter in filmmaking, giving actors the subtlest and most delicate notes to play, and allowing directors to make their mise-en-scène vibrate with meaning. In the homophobic environs of rural western India – and absent of wardrobe like crimson suit ties and scarves – innuendo has to be sought someplace: there are those quite stylish, vintage-looking black motorbikes, whose revving punctuates the serene natural soundscape, not to mention the shapely regional fruit of the title, proffered from one lead character to another as a gift. Rohan Parashuram Kanawade's debut, *Cactus Pears*, shows flair accomplishing these gradations of attraction and hesitation. The aura of *Brokeback Mountain* and *God's Own Country* is undeniable in the premise: Mumbai boy Anand (Bhushaan Manoj) has returned to his home village to mourn his recently deceased father (who worked as a vet), yet as the sole remaining male in the immediate family, with his brother having tragically died young, his unmarried status draws attention to itself. His mother (charismatically played by Jayshri Jagtap) is cognisant of his sexuality, yet is obviously bridling at the social judgement and dismissal from her highly religious Hindu community, pointed the family's way. Anand's childhood friend and present love interest Balya (Suraaj Suman) is not so lucky: he's a sporadically employed goat herder, unable to live independently from his family, and a loveless marriage of convenience is being sought for him.

As a further level of social categorisation has it, Anand was "bright enough" to leave the village (and had ambitions to become a pilot), and he works at a call centre in Mumbai, for what we imagine are delicate and specialised interactions held in English. Yet he still carries the diffidence and internalised

burdens all twenty-somethings with unfinished personal business have, and the ten-day mourning period required in Hinduism – not unlike the restrictive mourning demands of a shiva in Judaism – feels like a final developmental stage in his ongoing self-actualisation process.

Kanawade, a self-taught filmmaker who worked in interior design previously, often flourishes visually, even if his hold on dramatic tension is too slack: his compositions are beautiful (but not oppressively so), elegant and symmetrical, all highlighted by an innovative motif where the back of a character's head is shot against a smeared, distorted-looking exterior backdrop, the light and shadow glowing with metaphysical portent. Especially in *Cactus Pears*' first act, we feel the director chasing after Yasujiro Ozu slightly: the coverage of ensemble scenes has the camera at the same floor-level perspective as the actors, with a cutaway insert of a household pot – an emblem of saintly domesticity – further inviting this comparison.

Whilst the content is personal, the visual schema enticing and the stigma against the LGBT community in India deserving a belated cinematic look, it's still fair to have an under-nourished reaction to *Cactus Pears*, as it would benefit from Anand and Balya having more severe obstacles on the path to reaching fulfilment. Yet Kanawade's optimistic credo – as the film reaches its conclusion – feels cathartic in its own right: that mores are changing in contemporary India, and spirituality, sexuality and geographic social divides can be reconciled.

**David Katz**, *Cineuropa*, 28 January 2026 (abridged)

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