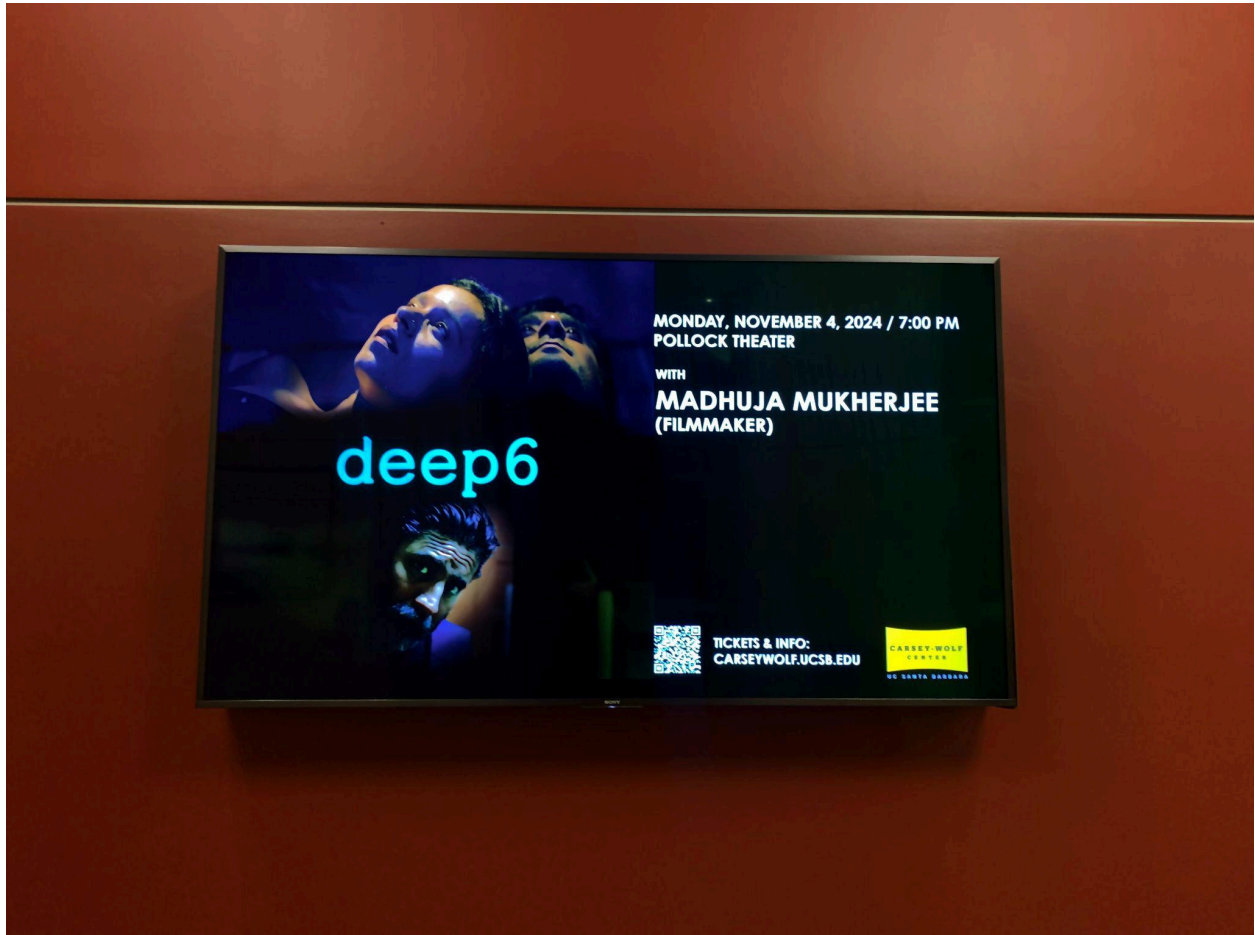


## Deep 6 at the Carsey-Wolf Center: An Evening with Director Madhuja Mukherjee



Celia Bueno  
Senior Staff Writer

On Nov. 4, the [Carsey-Wolf Center](https://www.ucsb.edu/cwc) (CWC) hosted the Indian film “Deep 6” as part of its CWC Global series. Following the screening, director Madhuja Mukherjee participated in a brief discussion moderated by Professor Bishnupriya Ghosh from the Department of English and Global Studies. From the fall of the West Bengal communist government to the concept of collective memory, Mukherjee discussed the hidden details of the film’s plot, which carries a profound political and existential message: the struggle against the past during a period of collective and individual change.

Madhuja Mukherjee is a writer, screenwriter, and director from Kolkata (Calcutta, India). Her work combines different artistic disciplines, blending film, music, and visual arts. As a former journalist and TV producer, her work is infused with strong political and social messages that leave an indelible impact on the audience. She currently teaches film studies at Jadavpur University in Kolkata.

“Deep 6” premiered at the Busan International Film Festival on Oct. 7, 2021. Set in Kolkata in 2011, the film follows Mitul (Titoltana Shome), a journalist navigating a period of transformation and change similar to that of her hometown.

In May 2011, [West Bengal's 34-year communist government](#) — at the time, the world's longest-standing elected communist administration — was voted out of power. This change marked a major shift for Bengal, a region in India inhabited by 90 million people. Mukherjee develops her film's plot around the parallels between Matul's life and the city of Kolkata itself, making the city another character in the film.

While Kolkata undergoes a complex period of political transition, Mitul faces the ghosts of her past — both figuratively and literally. The story opens at Matul's grandmother's funeral, where Matul reacts to death with extreme coldness and cynicism. Upon returning home, Matul finds her grandmother's spirit waiting for her on the couch. Mukherjee establishes the movie's central theme within the first moments of the film: confronting ghosts of the past in times of change and transformation.

As the movie progresses, subplots emerge that deepen Matul's story and support her character's development without detracting from the main narrative. The story of Matul's ex-boyfriend's deceased brother and her romance with one of the publishers at her newspaper are some of the storylines that unfold beyond the main plot of the film. All of these tales are, according to Mukherjee, a collection of personal experiences and those of her closest acquaintances. “The story came to me as autobiographical experiences of living through times,” Mukherjee stated. “It is a grid of collective experiences that I wanted to structure as something watchable,” Mukherjee responded, explaining how the idea of collective memory is embodied in this collection of real-life anecdotes from her own experiences.

Change and transition are always part of those experiences, thus, they are represented as turbulent and inevitable phases, marked by loss: “The loss of spaces, cities that are changing. People that are moving away, values that are gone.” she observed.

The narrative structure of “Deep 6” is remarkably repetitive. Several scenes take place at Matul's newspaper office. Many of them simply show Matul at her desk, accompanied by a voice-over dialogue between two of her coworkers, whose faces the audience never sees. Those two unnamed characters

frequently engage in deep political discussions. Although these dialogues don't connect directly to the plot, they're essential to understanding the film's broader themes. In one such conversation, those voices even allude to the meaning behind the film's title, "Deep 6." After the screening, Professor Ghosh explained to the audience, "It is an idiom in English that means get rid of something."

Along with a peculiar narrative structure, magical realism is one of Mukherjee's signature elements in her work, and, naturally, one of the defining traits of "Deep 6." Magical realism combines paranormal and fantastical elements with a realistic, narrative tone: headless pedestrians, characters who seem to have supernatural powers, and, most notably, Matul's deceased relatives that still inhabit her house and interact with her as if they remain on the earthly plane. In the discussion, Ghosh asked with a chuckle, "What's up with the ghosts?" as the audience laughed in relief, observing that the ghosts are portrayed as "ordinary and substantial." Mukherjee explained that these ghosts symbolize the concept of death as pure loss, rather than serving as a mere supernatural touch.

The three-hour event concluded with a Q&A session from the audience. The most interesting questions were thrown by students and faculty that presented a real, personal connection to the movie. In one of her final comments, Mukherjee stated, "The target audience of this film is Bengali people. This is a local movie that is aimed at local people." It was already clear, however, that "Deep 6" is for those not only familiar with Kolkata's political history but also aware of what West Bengal's political transition meant to the Bengali people. Once again, the CWC succeeded in creating an ideal space for learning and the exchange of ideas at an international level.