

A Journey Within for Hope

– Shatakshi Gawade

When Pandora, from Greek mythology, opened her box of gifts, endless troubles for humanity flew out and invaded the world. We still seem to be living in troubled times, don't we? Though geographically thousands of kilometres away, the war in Ukraine and the Palestine-Israel conflict has cast a deep shadow of doom, anxiety and sorrow in our hearts. The mind feels numb as images of smoking buildings and rising death counts pop up on the screen. And then there's climate change and the fact that we are in the middle of the sixth species extinction... we cannot ignore the implications of these global phenomena on our lives any more. But one needn't look so far to know that existence can be difficult – each of us faces difficult decisions and situations every day. For someone, it may be a choice between two full meals and educating their children. It may be about finding a job or finding a fair buyer for their produce from a long year of toiling in the sun. And for some, it may mean facing bullies owing to their gender.

However, troubles are certainly not what the world is made of. Back in the Greek myth, Pandora was able to keep one spirit in her box, called *Elpis*, which means "hope". Even if it is sometimes tucked away in a corner, we rely on [Elpis](#), hope, to make our way through life.

The Opening Film of the 22nd Pune International Film Festival will take you straight to hope. *A Brighter Tomorrow (Il sol dell'avvenire)*, an Italian film, is itself an ode to cinema through its story of a film-maker, who is in the throes of turmoil in his personal relationships and work. The comedy-drama takes us on a journey of personal discovery with Nonni Moretti, the director and the protagonist, as he discovers joy and works towards a bright future.

The 14 films in the World Competition segment at PIFF are also centred on this lovely, reassuring feeling of hope. After all उम्मीद पे दुनिया कायम है... the world is built on hope. The plethora of films shows us the big and small tragedies of life and the traits that make ordinary people extraordinary, irrespective of their geography, race and identity – their resilience, joy, the spirit to fight, discovery, ingenuity, and, of course, the different shades of hope.

Samar Nakhate, veteran film academician and PIFF Selection Committee Chairman, said about the selection, "In essence, being human is being a superhero. The common person is looking for hope. We are trying to show this search for hope, peace, and life's journey through the 14 films." These multi-lingual countries from across the globe are among the over 140 films from 51 countries that will be screened at the Festival this year from January 18 to 25.

For instance, the Czech film *A Sensitive Person (Citlivý Člověk)* is about a father and son's journey to look for his mother, hoping the boy can keep his childhood ideals as they go through a strangely dystopian world. The Bulgarian film *Blaga's Lessons (Uroctite na Blaga)* is the story of an old widow, who loses her life's savings to scammers but later dons the mantle of a scammer herself to take control of her life! The Georgian film *Citizen Saint (Mokalake Tsmindani)*, is a story of collective hope as a mining town celebrates the appearance of a man they believe to be a saint amidst them! But will their belief in a mortal hold strong as they lose hope?

A film to definitely watch out for is *Terrestrial Verses (Ayeh Haye Zaye)*, from Iran, which is likely to raise your spirits, as it follows everyday people navigating cultural, religious and

institutional constraints imposed on them in Tehran, with spirit and determination. The film, made around the time women in the country gathered to protest the dress code laws in 2022, is about individuals fighting for their personal rights in complicated political situations. Many of the films in the World Competition category in 2024 are centred around women and the multi-layered issues of their lives.

The film *Here*, from Belgium, is a quiet journey of discovery with Stefan, as he walks around Brussels after the sun sets, discovering the restfulness of a busy city, observing the light and wind, and feeling the present space and time. In the second Spanish film in the World Competition category, *Puan* is a tussle between two men for a coveted position in their University, raising a multi-layered and existential question for the professor of philosophy who has been removed from his job – is philosophy essential for living?

Many of the films in the World Competition category this year revolve around women's lives and their journeys through this life as they face odds with grit and determination. The German film *Schlamassel* follows a woman confronting her discontent and anger, presenting her with the question... how do you make sense of life? *The Burdened (Al Murhaqoon)*, a film from Yemen, is the story of a woman and her family as they deal with an unexpected pregnancy and the ensuing need for an abortion, against the backdrop of civil war and crushing poverty and lack of resources. Then we have India's own *Thadavu (The Sentence)*, a Malayalam film, about a woman's journey as she hatches a plan to go to jail to avail medical assistance!

The other films in the World Competition are *The Dreamer (L'homme d'Argile)*, *Toll (Pedágio)*, *Fly On (Hotsureru)*, *Oceans are Real Continents (Los Océanos Son Los Verdaderos Continentes)* and *Míng Tian Bi Zuo Tian Chang Jiu (Tomorrow is a Long Time)*.

To watch *Thadavu*, *Here*, *Terrestrial Verses* and any number of breathtaking films all in a single pass costing Rs. 800, you can register online at www.piffindia.com.