

'Marathi Competition' at PIFF 2024: A rollercoaster of emotions and struggles

Author: Advait

The Pune International Film Festival (PIFF) is being organized in its 22nd edition by the Pune Film Foundation for cinema lovers to experience global cinema, promote a healthy film culture in Pune and spark cultural exchange.

This edition, like the previous ones, has the categories Opening Film, World Competition, Marathi Competition, Global Cinema, Documentaries, Indian Cinema, Students Competition and Closing Film. The 'Marathi Competition' category has seven acclaimed films from 2023, that live up to the festival's theme 'Cinema is Hope'.

Among the seven is 'Shyamchi Aai' (Shyam's Mother), directed by Sujay Sunil Dahake, a film based on a famous autobiography of the same name by social activist Sane Guruji, who was fondly called 'Shyam' during his childhood. The film depicts the story of the mother and her son, and is a tale of her unbreakable spirit. It was released theatrically on November 10, 2023. Dahake is known for films like 'Shala' (2012) and 'Ajoba' (2014).

'Chabila', directed by Anil Amrut Bhalerao, portrays the struggle of Ganya, who belongs to the Labhan community, which traditionally works in stone mines. They stay far from civilisation, near the mountains in a commune. Ganya fights against generations of backwardness and a lack of education to fulfil his late mother's wish to send him to school, as she wished he wouldn't meet the same fate as them.

'Bhera' (Deaf), directed and produced by Shrikant Prabhakar, is a ray of hope. It is a story of three lost souls – Suresh, a man working in Mumbai, Anibai, a woman living alone in an old house across a stream in a remote village, and Vishnu, a naive, orphan and deaf boy. This is the story of their challenges and struggles during the Covid19 pandemic, and their struggle to be heard.

'Gypsy', written and directed by Shashi Chandrakant Khandare, is a tale of a young boy Jyotya, from a nomadic tribe, who is compelled to eat food that has been brought by begging every day. When he can't eat it, he only gets to smell it. This gets him used to smelling different food items, which gives him the opportunity to change his life. The film is a journey of an aspiration to a new life.

'Valli', written, directed and produced by Manoj Shinde, is based on Valli, a forced disciple of a Jogta – an outward female form possessing a male-body person. The film is his journey as he breaks free from the shackles of customs to reclaim his true identity, and to live the life he chooses, only to be engulfed by the new realities of urban life.

'Naal Bhag 2', written and directed by Sudhakar Reddy Yakkanti and produced by Nagraj Popatrao Manjule, is a film that explores the depths of human connection, the intricacies of family ties, and the unyielding power of love in the most unexpected of places. The story

progresses with Chaitu in Shankar's village, a place that had eluded Chaitu. The turning point of his journey arrives as Chaitu comes face to face with his biological parents.

'Sthal' (A Match), written and directed by Jayant Digambar Somalkar, unfolds in a village in the Vidarbha region of India, where a determined young girl Savita yearns for education and a brighter future. However, as her farmer parents anxiously struggle to find a husband for her, societal expectations place immense pressure on her to prioritize marriage over personal aspirations. The film exhibits the dark tradition of arranged marriages in rural India, and the rooted system of patriarchy and colourism, through the eyes of the young girl. The film premiered at the Dharamshala International Film Festival.

All these beautiful films are a rollercoaster ride of emotions with a variety of characters, and storylines that will make you smile and connect with each and every person on screen.