

South Indian Cinema Claims Center Stage in PIFF's Indian Cinema Category

- Vinaya Kurtkoti

Since the global attention received by 'RRR', South Indian cinema has undergone a seismic shift, now claiming a prominent seat in the landscape of Indian cinema. This year's "Indian cinema" selection of the Pune International Film Festival (PIFF) stands as a testament to this newfound mainstream popularity, showcasing the socially relevant and impactful contributions from South India.

Of the fourteen films showcased in the Indian Cinema category, six are from Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Kaathal – The Core, Jeo Baby's critically acclaimed and commercially successful Malayalam film about a loveless marriage between Mathew Devassy (played by Mammootty), an aspiring politician, and Omana (played by Jyotika) explores the consequences of the burden of societal expectations on non-heteronormative individuals. Mammootty has been praised for being the first Indian megastar to portray a gay character. The film's nuanced exploration of the complexities arising from a husband's homosexuality within a heterosexual marriage has propelled it to box office success, earning acclaim for its sensitive depiction.

Vetri Maaran's *Viduthalai (Liberation Part 1)* is a Tamil nail-biting cop drama that serves as a sociopolitical commentary on the struggles of an activist group trying to protect an ecosystem through any means possible against a mining company. This film has garnered praise from both critics and audiences alike, celebrating the exceptional talent both in front of and behind the camera.

Another critically acclaimed film to watch out for is Dr. Biju Damodaran's Malayalam language film *Adrishya Jalakangal (Invisible Windows)*. This Tovino Thomas starrer is a dystopian anti-war drama that follows the life of an unnamed protagonist living in a society where the state is preparing for war. Magic realism has been used to narrate the story and the film feels both Kafkaesque and Orwellian. Thomas delivers an exceptional performance, marking a standout in his career, while Nimisha Sajayan's portrayal has equally captivated critics, earning praise for its depth and authenticity.

PIFF's Indian cinema category also includes the Tamil film *Kathal Enbadhu Podhu Udamai* which portrays a lesbian relationship. Directed by Jayaprakash Radhakrishnan, whose previous credits include *Lens* and *The Mosquito Philosophy*, this film features a stellar cast including Lijomol Jose, Rohini, and Anusha.

Adding to the PIFF lineup is Rohit M.G. Balakrishnan's "Iratta" (Twin), a Malayalam thriller set to captivate audiences with its intriguing narrative. *Iratta* stars Joju George, Anjali, Arya Salim, and Srikant Murali in lead roles. Having directed short films previously, "Iratta" marks Balakrishnan's debut in the world of feature films, showcasing his transition to a full-length cinematic narrative.

Seenu Ramaswamy's *Idi Muzhakkam*, an action thriller in a rural setting, is another Tamil language film to be screened at PIFF.

The director of the festival, Dr. Jabbar Patel expressed, "The evolving preferences of the Indian audience have driven our film selection this year. We aimed to mirror this shift in cinematic tastes through our curated lineup."

Other films from the Indian cinema category that moviegoers can enjoy include "Deep Fridge" by Arjun Dutta, "Joseph's Son" by Haobam Paban, "Rimdogittanga" by Dominic Sangma, "Rahgeer" by Gautam Ghosh, and "Outhouse" by Sunil Sukthankar.

