

PIFF Marathi Competition Takes a Layered Look at Reality

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The Tiger, the Man, and a Thriller in the Forests

“The problem is not the locals and tribals, it is the government and capital greed.”

“The tiger isn’t where the core area of the forest is. The core area of the forest is where the tiger is.”

With powerful dialogues such as these that address complex issues, and a suspense-filled story headlined by a talented starcast, the movie Raavsahab is a nuanced thriller waiting to hit the cinemas. Directed by National Award Winning Filmmaker Nikhil Mahajan, it is an exploration of the man-animal conflict in the forests of Maharashtra and the conundrum of development and environmental protection. Raavsahab is one of the seven films in the Marathi Competition category at the 23rd Pune International Film Festival.

In an interaction with the media at PIFF, Mahajan shared that the film was born of the need to create awareness about these deep and layered subjects. “If the audience feels the shame I felt at not knowing about the conflict and struggles of the people just five hours from the city, and if they start reading about the subject, my job will be done,” he said, adding that, “If we can look beyond our everyday lives and pay attention to the other elements that are parts of our world, it will be a better place for our future generations.”

The cast of Raavsahab is as vast as the subject is complex, with several stakeholders like NGOs, the mining company, police, Forest Department, and the media. “Raavsahab” is the name of the tiger T3, around whom a large chunk of the story revolves. “I chose to work with a big cast because as a filmmaker, I am always thinking about how I can increase the scale of my cinema, and how I can make it more ideal for the big screen. More important

than these challenges was the fact that the subject of the film itself has many perspectives,” shared Mahajan. These have been brought to life by Jitendra Joshi, Mukta Barve, Mohit Takalkar, Sonalee Kulkarni, Priyadarshan Jadhav, Sagar Deshmukh, Mrunmayee Deshpande, Rashmi Agdekar, Sahyadri Malegaonkar, Snehalata Tagde, Shubham Ugale, and many others. “People will come to the theatre for these stars. The subject of the film alone isn’t important. We have to think about how the movie will work commercially, and for that we need to create a buzz around it.”

Raavsahab was screened before a packed auditorium. “PIFF is like home for me! Every film I have made has been shown here, and every first show in Maharashtra of my films has been screened here. Screening at PIFF is important for the commercial release of the film, as word of mouth starts here,” he said, adding that, “I was so surprised by the great response we received at PIFF!” The film also saw an extraordinary response at IFFI, shared Mahajan, adding that many there recommended that the film be dubbed into Hindi as well as a south Indian language. “The subject is universal after all, and dubbing will help it reach a larger audience. This can even set a trend of releasing Marathi films in these languages,” concluded Mahajan. Raavsahab is likely to hit the screens around June or July this year.

As the suspense unfolds in Raavsahab, the scenes are peppered with very interesting music. For instance, a very disturbing scene is laced with a nursery rhyme. The songs used in the film are all tribal songs from different parts of the world, such as from Spain and Finland, shared Mahajan. “I wanted to use unexpected music instead of the more common tribal sounds. When the music contrasts with the visuals, it creates an interesting experience for the audience and makes the film more engaging,” he said. “It was a risk, but it paid off.”

It has been shot entirely at real locations in Tadoba, Chandrapur. It was shot in 25 days in challenging conditions – the heat of eastern Maharashtra, light that changed every two hours, and a limited budget. “Raavsahab was an exercise for me in pushing the boundaries of the medium of cinema, and I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge,” said Mahajan. His agenda was to showcase the Maharashtra that lives outside urban centres like Mumbai and Pune, and for this, it was impossible to shoot this film in the jungle at Film City, because the audience would not have got to see how huge a forest can be. It was important to shoot in an actual protected forest, in an actual mine, to create the experience of these places. Mahajan shared, “Cinema stays alive even after we have gone, so it is important to authentically represent the story. This makes shooting at real locations incredibly important.”

From Ground Reality to the Big Screen, Swati Kadu talks with PIFF about her film 'Nirjali'

“Not every time a movie is inspired by an incident; mine came from a place of feeling sad and hurt,” said Swati Kadu, Director and protagonist of Nirjali while interacting with the media at PIFF.

Nirjali, a film exploring the struggles of the marginalized Pardhi community, was screened at the Pune International Film Festival (PIFF).

The film is the result of three years of ground-level research into the challenges faced by the Pardhi community, a marginalized tribe in Maharashtra historically labeled as "born criminals" during the colonial era. Despite 75 years of Indian independence, the community continues to face socio-economic neglect, deprived of land, housing, education, and stable professions.

Nirjali follows the journey of a teenage girl from the Pardhi community who dreams of becoming a teacher despite societal, cultural, and familial obstacles. The film highlights issues such as the community's struggle to prove Indian citizenship, lack of access to education, and societal indifference.

“Whenever one works on sensitive issues, the biggest challenge is that you can't make things up. I had to study to make this film. Particularly because I am raised in a different family. It was important for me that my characters and the lives of people from the Pardhi community are portrayed authentically,” Kadu explained during the interaction.

She elaborated on her protagonist's aspirations, stating, “She dreams of becoming a teacher because, they do not have access to hospitals and healthcare, they do know how doctors are. They have recently gained access to education. This noble profession fascinates her.”

The film also critiques broader societal dynamics, including caste discrimination in schools, exploitation of farm laborers by landlords, and the politics of dominance in rural settings. Through these layers, Nirjali examines governance's indifference toward marginalized groups while offering a narrative of hope and transformation within the Pardhi community.

Kadu, born into a farm laborer family, completed her education while working as a laborer. She studied journalism and has been involved in writing for years,

publishing two poetry anthologies during her college days. Nirjali marks her debut as a filmmaker, blending her personal experiences with extensive research to shed light on the Pardhi community's plight.

The "Magic" of a Psychological Thriller

Renowned Marathi actor Jitendra Joshi's 'Magic' was screened at the 23rd Pune international Film festival. The movie is directed by Ravindra Karmalkar. After the film's screening, the director sat with PIFF media to discuss his film, where he opened up about his experience of his debut directorial.

When asked about the Idea behind making this psychological thriller, he was quoted as saying, "As you know, I have done a lot of television serials before this movie and our serials are majorly based on family drama. So, one thing I was very sure of was that I don't want my first film to be a family drama."

He continued that there were certain things from my personal life as well as some of my father's experience, the basic Idea of the film came. And when narrated to the writers of the film, Abhishek Deshmukh and Yogesh Joshi, they jointly decided to make this film a psychological thriller as it had psychological syndrome in it.

'Magic' is a psychological thriller movie. It revolves around a police officer Arun Raut, who is an encounter specialist in Mumbai police. Some life changing moments occur that start affecting him personally. Magic is all about how Raut fights his own battles.

The director further admitted that even though the motive was to make this as interesting as possible, he did not expect the outcome to be this good. And when he realised that, he knew that the film would click with the audience. Karmalkar further had some nice words about Kokan and its people. He shared his experience of shooting the film in this region in Maharashtra. "Shooting in Kokan is so easy, because the people there are so helpful. And the people have become very used to shootings because so many films are being shot there nowadays", he said. He even revealed that apart from the film's lead actors, all other characters were played by the locals after the auditions.

Karmalkar while speaking, highlighted budgeting issues while making a Marathi film. "The limited budget was the biggest challenge for me." He credited his DOP Vishwanath Phadke for making the most out of the resources.

He then spoke about what makes a good film. He said that every movie, be it comedy or thriller, has the same shots. "It's the subject, performance and the music that makes the difference. If you are not having fun, you cannot make it a good film", Karmalkar said.

When asked about his experience at the PIFF, he had some nice words to say. "I am very happy that the film got selected for PIFF. I never imagined that my film would get screened at this event but I'm glad that it did. So, it's a big moment for me". He further praised the audience for giving him an honest feedback to the film as it will help him to improve.

