

A day of films that brought real life to the reel: 23rd PIFF Day 3

Finding the Middle Ground: Seenu Ramasamy's Balancing Act Between Realism and Market Demands

Pune, 16 February 2025 : Balancing Satyajit Ray with market demands: that's the tightrope walk award-winning filmmaker Seenu Ramasamy takes every time he makes a film. *Kozhipannai Chelladurai*, his film screened at the 23rd Pune International Film Festival, reflects this struggle, attempting to create realistic cinema while navigating the industry's push for "more blood, more violence". Ramasamy, whose film explores themes of forgiveness within the complexities of rural family life, explained, "I witnessed this story unfold as a teenager. The raw reality was stark, but I wanted to create something hopeful, a film that resonated with the human capacity for compassion." The Tamil film is part of the Indian Cinema category at PIFF.

Kozhipannai Chelladurai isn't Ramasamy's first foray into this balancing act. He acknowledges the influence of Satyajit Ray, striving for authentic portrayals of life, yet he also recognizes the pressures of the modern film market. "Audiences are bombarded with sensationalism," he commented. "It's a challenge to create meaningful cinema that also finds its audience. I'm constantly searching for that middle ground." He further elaborated, "The easy route is to give them what they expect – explosions, melodrama. But I believe cinema can be more than that. It can be a mirror to society, a catalyst for conversation."

The film's journey, from its screening at the Oakland festival to its availability on OTT platforms, speaks to the changing dynamics of film distribution. Ramasamy sees both festivals and OTT as vital avenues for reaching viewers. "Festivals provide crucial recognition," he stated. "They shine a light on films that might otherwise be overlooked. And OTT, of course, offers accessibility. It's a powerful tool for connecting with a global audience." He added, "These platforms complement each other. Festivals generate buzz, and OTT allows that buzz to translate into viewership."

While *Kozhipannai Chelladurai* leans towards a "feel-good" narrative, Ramasamy hints at a future exploring darker themes. "I'm drawn to the thriller genre," he revealed. "I'm eager to delve into the complexities of human nature in that space. But even within a thriller, I believe in the power of subtle storytelling, the kind that stays with you long after the credits roll." He

expressed his gratitude to PIFF for showcasing his work, emphasizing the importance of such platforms for independent filmmakers. "Festivals like PIFF are essential," he concluded. "They foster dialogue and celebrate the art of cinema, reminding us that film can be more than just entertainment – it can be a reflection of our shared humanity, a way to understand ourselves and the world around us."

Exploring Friendship, Tradition and Climate change ‘Against the Tide’ of mundanity

Against the Tide, Sarvnik Kaur’s heartfelt documentary, explores the tradition, technology and climate change in the Koli fishing community of Mumbai. Screened in the Documentary category of the 23rd Pune International Film Festival (PIFF), this film outshone itself by showcasing real life struggles faced by the community, who are working hard to live a regular life balancing norms and inhibitions.

The documentary follows two Bombay fishermen of the Koli fishing community, Ganesh and Rakesh, who are inheritors of an ancient knowledge system that aligns fishing practices with the moon and tides. While Rakesh remains devoted to traditional fishing methods, Ganesh embraces modern technology, leading to a deepening rift between the two men. Their story unfolds against the backdrop of the vast, once-generous sea, now increasingly hostile due to climate change.

Kaur, known for her skeptical take on modernism and scientific certainties, showcased how mundane life of the fishermen can also be filled with the uncertainty of bad governance and increasing climate change impacts, which lead to problems in earning their livelihood.

While in conversation with her, she talked about how her value system has been shifted during the direction of this movie. When asked about how she decided on the narrative of her documentary, she shared, “When you look back, everything changes – not the story, but the way you perceive it.” She compared the creation of her film to the process of osmosis, that indirectly affected her characters and narrative of the direction.

For her future projects, she happily shared that she is working with farmers and their lands, and she is later going to work with air-related issues. She shared that she wished to stick to environment-related projects in the future that

imbibe the human values at their core.

Taarikh: A film that delves on PTSD in a realistic manner

Set in the backdrop of serial bombings in Assam in 2008, the film Taarikh is a portrayal of anxieties that family members of victims endure. “The heart of the film Taarikh is about dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” Himjyoti Talukdar, the director of the film, asserted in a conversation with the media after the screening of his film. Durlov Dutta, a 70-year old man, is unable to cope with the untimely demise of his son. Taarikh was screened on the second day of the 23rd Pune International Film Festival.

Muktismaan Hazarika, one of the producers on the film shared, “In fact, with our planned release in Guwahati later this year, we seek to create a discourse on PTSD and residual trauma that may yet be unresolved in the public psyche.”

The film weaves its narrative around the symbiotic nature of the relationship between Dutta and a journalist, Anuran Hazarika. “He (Anuran) is one of the good ones (journalist), since the motivational challenges faced by such individuals do not always result in someone extending a helping hand,” commented Talukdar.

Taarikh is an indie film that prioritises efficiency in pursuit of storytelling. The producer of the film emphasized the tremendous undertaking they had to take on in terms of research. Interestingly, the character of the psychotherapist is played by a practicing therapist, who lent his expertise in guaranteeing that the film did not take its sensitive subject matter lightly.

Talukdar and Hazarika thanked Pune International Film Festival and highlighted the importance of such events in giving small-scale cinema a platform.

In conversation with 'Swaha: In the name of fire' director Abhilash Sharma after the film's screening at the Pune International Film Festival.

The director of the film 'Swaha: In the name of fire' engaged in a post-screening interaction with the media at the Pune International Film Festival. "The concept of the wider audience in Cinema is completely commercial" was the response from Abhishek Sharma when asked about why he opted to make his film in Maghi and not in Hindi. According to him, the moment we become commercial, we cannot showcase such important social topics with utmost

conviction. And that is the reason independent Cinema is better.

The session was filled with insights, director's vision for the project and making of the film among many other things. He was accompanied by co-writer and his wife Shilpee Bharadwaj along with Production designer of the film Nilesh Gorakhshe.

The film's idea goes long back with the director's past as he shared that there were some prevalent misconceptions about the Mushar community embedded in his mind during his childhood. There was a fear in his mind because of the things he heard about the Musahar community during his childhood.

"This film gave me a chance and an opportunity to know that the people of this community are just like us", Sharma confessed.

The movie showcases the extreme struggles of Phekan and Rukhiya, a couple from the Musahar community. In search of money to feed his newborn baby and his wife, Phekan goes in search of a job in the city. He is betrayed by the people in the city which in turn breaks him from inside. On the other hand Rukhiya faces her own struggles as she is haunted by despair and mystical whispers. This provokes her for an ultimate sacrifice. Swaha brilliantly portrayed the life and the struggles of the Musahar community, which is also known as rat eaters.

Abhilash stated that in recent years the community is portrayed and blamed for practicing witchcraft. There was news that came across the country, especially from Bihar of atrocities against this community. Movie is basically the (koshish) of destroying the wrong narratives spread by the upper castes people in the state at that time.

When asked about his experience of the PIFF, Abhilash had fond words to say. "This is my first time at the Pune International Film Festival. And for me, this is easily the top 3 Film Festivals of India".

This Abhilash Sharma directorial is set in rural Bihar and tells the story of a mother and child grappling with survival while navigating the challenges posed by their religion.

"So whatever you have or you have not, but life, you should enjoy your life."
Says Dr. Bobby Sarma Barua

Renowned filmmaker Bobby Sarma Barua has brought to life another poignant story with Radore Pakhi (Morning Sunshine), a film inspired by the real-life journey of Assamese writer Sarmistha Pritam, who battles Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). The film, which recently garnered attention at international festivals such as PIFF 2025 and IFFI 2024, showcases the strength of the human spirit and the power of perseverance despite physical challenges.

Radore Pakhi tells the story of Jyoti, a character based on Pritam, portrayed by Sulakshana Barua. Jyoti dreams of becoming a writer, and her journey is a testament to resilience in the face of adversity. Barua was moved by Pritam's determination, which inspired her to craft a film that emphasizes finding beauty and meaning in life, even when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

The film's director, Bobby Sarma Barua, played a crucial role in every aspect of the production. From scriptwriting to makeup design, Barua took on multiple responsibilities to ensure the film remained authentic to its source material. "It was important to me to tell this story with accuracy and heart," Barua said, describing the challenges of balancing these various roles.

In line with her commitment to highlighting marginalized voices, Barua once again draws attention to the struggles of underrepresented communities. Her previous works have similarly focused on indigenous cultures and women's stories, reinforcing her dedication to social impact in cinema.

Barua encourages young filmmakers to prioritize authenticity in their storytelling, advising them to thoroughly research their subjects and approach filmmaking with passion and commitment. Radore Pakhi stands as a powerful example of the transformative power of cinema, blending personal and societal resilience in a deeply moving narrative.

"Ghoda": A Story of Hope and Resilience"

Pune, February 15, 2025 : Day 3 of the Pune International Film Festival (PIFF) witnessed the screening of Marathi film "Ghoda", a poignant tale of struggle and aspiration. Director T Mahesh shared his inspiring journey of bringing this story to life.

The film revolves around Malhari, a construction worker who toils to provide for his family. His son's desire for a wooden rocking horse becomes a symbol

of their struggles and the ruthless pace of society. Mahesh explained that the horse represents speed and the relentless pursuit of goals, which often eludes the underprivileged.

T Mahesh revealed that writing the story took a year, and the team aimed to create something rooted in everyday life. The film's writer, Jameer Attar, also penned a soulful Abhang (devotional song) for the movie.

When asked about the film's title, T Mahesh said, "Everyone is in a hurry to achieve something, and the horse is an icon of speed. Ironically, the boy wants a toy horse to play with, but his father is the one running to get it for him."

The director acknowledged the challenges faced during casting, particularly finding the right child actor. He took special care of the young boy during filming, treating him like his own child.

Mahesh emphasized that the film highlights the stark contrast between the capitalist class and the working class. He also stressed that life offers multiple options, and one needs to explore them.

The screening of "Ghoda" at PIFF was a testament to the power of Marathi cinema, which continues to captivate audiences with its authentic storytelling and relatable themes.