

# A Glimpse at Education, Alienation, and Success at PIFF

PIFF Day 5

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## **Education Through the Superpower of Cinema**

There's Superman, Batman, even Shaktiman, and now we have a new superhero – Cineman! This superhero, who could be a teacher or your average neighbour, holds the superpower of education through cinema. The film Cineman, written, directed, and produced by Umesh Bagade, follows the journey of one such cinefile and superhero through the hinterlands of rural Maharashtra, bringing joy to the children on screen and the audience in the theatre. The film was screened at the 23rd Pune International Film Festival.

Bagade emphasized in an interaction with the media at PIFF that movies aren't merely for entertainment. "Cinema is a universal language that transcends words, capable of educating and inspiring across numerous cultural spaces," he shared. Clearly in love with cinema and excited by the wonders it can bring to its viewers, Bagade humbly said that he didn't think of the story, "the story was meant to be told through me".

The movie follows the journey of Anand, a voluntarily retired teacher who screens films for school children in remote villages. Documented by Omkar, an aspiring filmmaker, the narrative bridges two distinct worlds – from the glamour of Hollywood to the simplicity of village life – revealing how cinema can connect diverse cultures and instill positive values.

Structured into three chapters namely Cinema, Man, and Cineman, the film delves into the transformative power of cinema. When asked about the significance of the final chapter, Bagade explained, "Chapter 3, Cineman, represents the man who uses cinema as his superpower to do good for children."

A pivotal scene in the film features a child led handicapped by unrealistic portrayal in movies where the twelve year old is inspired to drive a bike because of the hero. Anand poignantly remarks, "if right cinema would have reached him, then those things wouldn't have happened," highlighting the need for responsible film content and proper education for children.

Bagade explained that his approach with the children in the film involved allowing them to feel comfortable and open up about their own experiences. “There was only one proper child actor in the film,” he noted, emphasizing that the rest of the children were real villagers whose spontaneous expressions added an authentic flavor to the narrative. This personal touch ensured that the film remained grounded in reality, capturing the true impact of cinema on young minds.

Bagade’s debut at the Pune International Film Festival (PIFF) was equally memorable. Inspired by the festival’s vibrant energy, he is committed to returning to PIFF every year with new projects that further showcase how cinema can educate, inspire, and transform lives.

### **Interaction with the team behind Giran**

Giran is a story of a rural household from the Mang community in Maharashtra and their interaction with the deeply stratified society around them. The caste-based divisions, according to the director, Vijay Shrirang, “are daily realities that are based on my life experiences.” This portrayal therefore, is cognizant of the social fabrics that define the ritual of begging for alms. Importantly, a special emphasis has been placed upon the exploitation of women through the lens of the actress Bhakti Ghogre, who said, “it [acting] was difficult because I felt a rift between my personal beliefs and the method in which my character is beholden to the household.”

The film utilizes its limited resources with finesse. It compiled an original soundtrack that highlight key tonal shifts in the film. “We tried to reflect the audience's emotions with 5-6 minutes of BGM that was produced specifically for the film, including the theme song,” informed Mr. Shrirang.

Giran temporally articulates itself as a social critique since the cast believes that these “practices are still rampant in Maharashtra.” This adjustment allows the film to critique not just the violence within patriarchal structures but also the emotional labour put on women due to their social performance and an overbearing male gaze.

Despite all the limitations faced during filming, the crew believes that their efforts were boosted by this screening at PIFF, an event, which the director looks upon as a personal milestone. He added that, “5 years ago, I was here for the screening of my friend's feature film. And now, I am here with my own.”

Interestingly, the film's campaign against irrational faith is concluded with a modest symbolic action whose implications, the audience is sure to ponder upon.

### **A Cinematic Journey of Alienation in Maisam Ali's "In Retreat"**

In the quiet of the night in the mountains of Ladakh, a shadowy man walks about town. Everyone else is engaged in their own life, and he doesn't really matter to anyone. "I found it quite interesting to make a film about somebody like that," said the director Maisam Ali. The film was screened at the 23rd Pune International Film Festival, following which Ali shared insights into the film's themes and his creative process with the media.

Ali's directorial debut revolves around a man late in his 50s, who returns to his native place after being away from the family for several years. The movie starts with a lady saying, "Only those who are with us in good and bad times, are our people. Others don't matter." This gives us a clear view of what is going to unfold. As the old man arrives and explores his native place after a long time, he faces various challenges. His command over Ladakhi has faded, the place itself feels very foreign to him.

Ali revealed that the film's origin stemmed from his emotional connection to the protagonist. "The seed of this was my sadness for the lead character," he said. Ali further elaborates, "I was trying to create a lived-in experience. And if people are able to engage with this film and my character, then I feel the film has done its job."

The film employs two languages – Ladakhi and Hindi. "For many of us, due to work and education, we move to different cities. I was born elsewhere, grew up in Ladakh, and then traveled again for further studies. I know this language (Ladakhi), but if I have to write poetry or think poetically, the language I could do it better in is Hindi or English," he shared. There's thus displacement in two ways – physical, and in language.

"In Retreat" has been screened internationally at various Film Festivals. Most notably, it is the first Indian film to be screened at the Cannes International Film Festival at the ACID Cannes sidebar programme.

Ali also spoke about his approach to storytelling, highlighting the importance of representing marginalized voices. "For me, film doesn't have to be a popular

and mainstream experience. It could also talk about marginalized communities. Multiple people live in the same place, and there are multiple stories.”

The film “In Retreat” ends with the protagonist’s line: “Ajnabee kabhi kabhi apne hi hote hai (Sometimes, strangers are our own)”. A simple reminder of the distance we sometimes feel from ourselves and the places we call home.

### **Can't Believe the Success of “Level Cross” Success: Arfaz Ayub**

At the 23rd Pune International Film Festival, Arfaz Ayub's “Level Cross” grabbed the attention of many. Arfaz, the Director of the film, said the movie proved to be more successful than his expectations.

The movie is based on a crime by a person with psychiatric problems, and has been shot in Tunisia and India. While speaking to the media at PIFF, Arfaz said, “I wanted to make this film with very few actors, and wanted it to be shot in an open space, especially the desert.” He mentioned that he didn’t expect that so many people would show an interest in this film.

He selected very unique characters to make it a thriller. He said that the names selected in this movie are also not from the southern part of the country, except the name of Raghu. The film covers all the important aspects that show how people with psychiatric problems behave. The theme is perfectly selected and holds the interest of the audience till the end.

As the film was shot in the desert, the sandstorm and climatic conditions were considered and purposely shown. The characters in the movie include the diametrically opposite characters of a person living in rural parts of the country, who is involved with two urban people. The suspense of the film makes it more entertaining. Arfaz further added that he had a good time at PIFF, and would like his films to be part of such festivals, and expects such participation in the future too.