

‘When a single screen theatre becomes a character in Mayasabha’

Tumbaad director’s next feature, much awaited Maysabha screened at 24th PIFF

World competition films such as Spying Stars and Blue Heron have won accolades of the Film lovers in Pune

I always say that my film has five main characters, four are humans and the fifth one is the theatre where the story unfolds, expressed Rahi Anil Barve, director of the upcoming Hindi film Mayasabha. It is featured in the Indian Cinema category at the 24th Pune International Film Festival (PIFF).

Barve, popular for his much acclaimed film Tumbaad, has come up with a new feature film starring Javed Jafri. It is a psychological thriller that revolves around the theme of love, greed and trust traits associated with basic human nature. However, Rahi Barve opined that Mayasabha is not Tumbbad it is entirely different film, and does not follow the rigid film structure.

The story revolves around four characters Javed Jafri as Parameshwar Khanna, once an extremely powerful and wealthy film producer, now stands mentally broken-shaped by fading power, inside a crumbling, long-abandoned single-screen theatre Mayasabha in Mumbai.

Barve while speaking about the film further said, "The character of Parameshwar was tough to play, because it does not fit into the exact spectrum of protagonists or antagonists. Apart from the four characters, there is a fifth character, Mayasabha, the theatre which is usually overlooked by the audience," said Barve in interaction with the media. Mayasabha is set to release nationwide on January 30, 2026.

Spying Stars: nature as a reflection of a human mind

"Spying Stars explores nature as a reflection of a human mind. The ‘star’ is a metaphorical observer, while the transgender character represents a fluid, liberated consciousness beyond control and binaries," said filmmaker Vimukhti Jayasundara. He was speaking after a screening of his internationally acclaimed film Spying Stars.

Spying stars that competed in the Competition section at Busan International Film Festival in 2025 has been selected in a World Competition section at the 24th PIFF. A co-production between France, India, and Sri Lanka, the 99-minute film is presented in English and Sinhalese, reflecting its strong cross-cultural narrative and global cinematic vision.

Spying Stars follows the story of Anandi, a scientist who travels to Hanuman Island to perform her father’s last rites. Upon arrival, she is forced into quarantine at a remote hotel amid a pandemic triggered by a machine dominant world. As reality blurs, a mysterious star begins to follow her, compelling Anandi to escape confinement. Her journey leads her to seek shelter with a compassionate mother and her transgender daughter, opening up themes of survival, identity, and human connection in a fractured world.

The film stars Indian actor Indira Tiwari. While speaking about film she said, “As an actor, Spying

Star' was a deeply introspective experience for me. The film demanded silence, restraint, and emotional honesty rather than performance. My character exists in a fragile space shaped by fear, compassion, and survival, reflecting the uncertainty of a collapsing world. It challenged me to listen to nature, to people, and to what remains unspoken, making the role both demanding and profoundly transformative.”

Blue Heron: A Quiet Portrait of Memory, Motherhood, and Forgiveness at PIFF

Another film from the prestigious World Competition category at the 24th PIFF is the film Blue Heron. Directed by Sophy Romvari, it unfolds in late-1990s Vancouver Island, while its emotional core remains deeply universal.

Blue Heron tells the story of a family navigating the growing disturbance of the eldest child, Jeremy, someone who struggles to fit into social structures, constantly seeking attention, and unsettling the emotional balance of the household. Seen through the perspective of the youngest sibling, Sasha, the film slowly reveals how childhood memories carry anger, confusion, and eventually, compassion. What begins as resentment transforms into understanding as the narrator, through the act of remembering and filmmaking itself, forgives her brother and acknowledges his kindness beneath the chaos.

A key emotional anchor of the film is the mother, portrayed with remarkable restraint by Iringo Réti. In an interaction at PIFF, Réti spoke with humility and openness about the emotional demands of the role. She described her character as someone who feels intensely yet cannot afford to break down. “There were many moments where I wanted to cry,” Réti shared, “but the mother could not cry. I wasn’t allowed to cry on camera.”

Speaking about her experience at PIFF, Réti expressed immense joy at the audience’s response. She noted how attentively viewers engaged with the film and how warmly they reacted to her performance. That connection, she said, made the emotional journey worthwhile. At PIFF, Blue Heron emerged not as a loud drama, but as a gentle voice of reflection and the quiet strength it takes to forgive.

A Pregnant Widow and the Weight of Caste

At PIFF, Unni KR’s film quietly exposes how discrimination survives even in grief, and how resistance sometimes rises from the margins, not power. A film titled a Pregnant Widow, in the Indian cinema, the film follows a pregnant widow navigating everyday cruelty, bureaucratic apathy, and social exclusion, while finding unexpected solidarity among those society itself has pushed to the edges.

Speaking about the film, Unni KR was clear about his intent. “I am not trying to support or oppose anyone through my films,” he said. “I am only telling my point of view.” For him, cinema is not a courtroom argument but an act of witnessing. “If the film makes people uncomfortable, that discomfort comes from reality, not from my agenda,” he added.