

Critique

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Tendlya



Tendlya, Marathi, 2023, directed by Sachin J Jadhav and Nachiket Waikar

Tendlya, a Marathi film released last month, is not a masterpiece. It's not even a great film. One can find quite a few flaws if one starts looking for them. But it comes straight from the heart, where it touches you. I was constantly reminded of the 2010 Marathi film *Tingya* while watching *Tendlya*, though as far as the story goes, there is nothing in common except for the rural background in the two. And like in *Tingya*, one of the protagonists from *Tendlya* is a young school-going boy too.

Tendlya, as the name might suggest, is also not about Sachin Tendulkar. But his presence looms all over the film. And it is definitely about cricket. Or the life lessons cricket or sport, in general, teaches us. It is the 1990s. Sachin Tendulkar has already arrived on the cricket scene and become the pride of Indians. Schoolboys have started emulating him. Cricket matches between two teams have reached the level of cutthroat competition.

A small village in remote Maharashtra is no exception. *Tendlya*, a teenager and his friends are obsessed with cricket. So are their opponents. The matches played between them aren't exactly friendly.

There is money at stake. Every player pools in Rs. 2 each, and whichever team wins gets to keep the money. *Tendlya* and his team, despite their best efforts, always end up on the losing side of this fierce rivalry.

But one day, *Tendlya* gets carried away, dares the opposition to pool in Rs. 25 each for the next game and vows to win it for his team. He doesn't have a decent bat or a decent team. How would he conquer this uphill task?

There is also a young man, Gaja, who is passionate about the game and worships Sachin Tendulkar. But in their village, television is still a luxury a couple of households enjoy. (And some prefer watching film songs on *Chayageet* or seeing Ajay Devgan fighting alone with twenty goons rather than seeing a few men hitting or chasing a ball.) Naturally, watching a test match is a big event. And to get a place in front of the small screen is a bigger challenge. Gaja and his friends run from one end of the village to another but can't get into a single household with a TV. The match hangs by a thread, and Sachin has walked out to bat. Gaja can't fathom

the fact that he is likely to miss out. He rides his bicycle and rushes to a neighbouring village, but his friends don't open the door. However, the insult and humiliation of the day plant a seed in his mind. When he returns home, he is not dejected but determined to buy his TV. That too a colour TV, and before the next match. He is already in debt for a tempo he has bought to ferry people in and out of the village. He barely makes ends meet. On top of that, how would he manage to raise Rs. 17,000 for a colour TV?

But then, what is the point of idolising Sachin Tendulkar if you don't have his grit, spirit, and tenacity?

The story of *Tendlya* is the story of the determination of Gaja and Tendlya— like gushing water in the desert. There is comedy, drama, love, passion and hard work. But it is incidental to the story. It is weaved in seamlessly, which makes the 120 minutes fly. The film has drawbacks, but you don't get too hung up on them because you get involved with its characters.

You can't control your laughter when Tendlya goes to buy a bat and insists on one that has an MRF logo. And you feel for him when his mother burns his beloved bat because he doesn't do his homework. The film's opening scene shows how Gaja makes his passengers wait in his tempo while he sneaks to watch Tendulkar's innings on the TV from a nearby shop. Whether Gaja attempts to win over a woman he likes or the efforts he puts in to raise the money, or whether it is Tendlya's dream where God gives him advice, you remain engrossed in their world. You feel their excitement, sympathise with their dejection and clap in their victory.

The movie has technical drawbacks, and there are legitimate reasons behind it, explained by director Sachin Jadhav and his team in a YouTube video.

Jadhav had been preparing for his MPSC exams and was on the verge of his interview when Sachin Tendulkar announced his retirement. To bid goodbye to his favourite cricketer, he thought he should do something special and decided to make this movie.

He had no background in cinema, no contacts in the industry. He sacrificed a stable career and jumped into this unpredictable profession.

He was joined by Nachiket Waikar, another ardent Sachin fan and an FTII pass-out. Both decided to write and direct the movie, while some more friends joined, and Tendlya was born.

But they were short on resources. They had to borrow money. And then covid-19 struck. The crew had to overcome every possible obstacle. But cricket journalist Sunandan Lele decided to help them out.

Of course, the struggles behind the camera shouldn't concern the viewers. We should judge the final product for its craft. Yet, despite its drawbacks, the film is a touching experience. It isn't melodramatic or preachy, just a beautiful story honestly told. And completely relatable too.

Most of the characters on screen are first-timers, the kids from the village of Islampur. Yet there is a certain ease about them.

The film has bagged five state awards and one national award.

The directors and their team have dedicated their effort to the great man. 'Sachin taught us to dream and inspired us to chase them' is what the makers want to convey, and while doing that effectively, they have also personified it in the process.

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