
Film Review:

Title	:	Chhava
Director	:	Laxman Utekar
Producer	:	Dinesh Vijan
Cinematographer	:	Saurabh Goswami
Editor	:	Manish Pradhan
Music	:	A. R. Rahman
Production House	:	Maddock Films
Duration /Running Time	:	161 minutes

Chhava, directed by Laxman Utekar, produced by Dinesh Vijan under Maddock Films, and featuring a screenplay by Laxman Utekar, is a historical drama that delves into the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. The film stars Vicky Kaushal as Sambhaji Maharaj, Rashmika Mandanna as Yesubai Bhonsale, Akshaye Khanna as Aurangzeb, and an ensemble cast including Ashutosh Rana, Diana Penty, Divya Dutta, Vineet Kumar Singh, Santosh Juvekar and Pradeep Rawat. *Chhava* focuses on Sambhaji Maharaj, the “lion’s cub,” who inherited a legacy and faced immense challenges in defending his kingdom against Aurangzeb’s relentless onslaught. This film primarily covers bravery, sacrifice, politics, and warfare themes. The film delves into the challenges faced by the protagonist, including betrayals, conflicts with the Mughals, and his ultimate martyrdom. The narrative highlights the strategic and emotional aspects of Sambhaji’s journey, blending historical authenticity with cinematic storytelling.

The primary objective of this film is to offer an engaging historical narrative that educates and inspires audiences. The film targets history enthusiasts, scholars, cinema lovers, and the general public interested in India’s rich cultural heritage. Given its historical significance, it also appeals to students and researchers in Indian history and cinema studies. Produced by a reputed banner, the film is crafted with historical precision and gran-

deur, showcasing the Maratha legacy with strong storytelling and visual appeal.

The film offers a compelling screenplay with well-researched historical depth. The writing effectively blends factual accuracy with dramatic elements, ensuring an engaging yet informative experience. The dialogues are impactful, often drawing from historical records to maintain authenticity. The research behind the film is commendable, as it reflects the socio-political climate of the era. The analysis of character motivations and political dynamics adds depth to the narrative. However, the pacing in the first half is slightly slow, which may affect audience engagement. While the film does introduce innovative storytelling techniques, some aspects, such as excessive slow-motion sequences, may have been overused, affecting the film's intensity.

The film remains highly relevant to its historical theme and target audience. It contributes significantly to the genre of historical cinema in India by bringing attention to an important yet often overlooked figure in history. The timing of the release aligns with a growing interest in period films, making the content both timely and impactful. The theoretical and practical value of the film is high, as it provides both entertainment and historical education.

The storytelling is clear, with a well-structured narrative. While some dialogues are heavily infused with historical references, they remain accessible to a general audience. Subtitles aid in reaching a broader demographic. The use of visual aids such as maps, animated battle sequences, and detailed set designs enhances understanding. However, certain scenes could have been edited for better pacing.

For the theatrical experience, the cinematography is visually stunning, capturing the grandeur of the Maratha Empire. The battle sequences are well-executed, though some may argue that excessive slow-motion reduces their impact. The costume design and set aesthetics are noteworthy, contributing to the film's authenticity. The background score complements the narrative but could have been more varied to evoke stronger emotional responses.

For digital viewers, the film is well-adapted, with high-definition streaming options. The sound design is immersive, and the clarity of historical dialogues remains intact. However, the film's length may require better structuring for digital consumption.

The film is easy to follow, with a logical sequencing of events. The transitions between different periods and battle sequences are smooth, ensuring a cohesive viewing experience.

Strengths of *Chhava*

Vicky Kaushal delivers a powerful and nuanced portrayal of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. He captures the character's strength, intelligence, and emotional depth, conveying the weight of leadership and the burden of his responsibilities. Kaushal's physical transformation and intense portrayal of Sambhaji's resilience, especially during the torture scenes, are particularly impactful. Akshaye Khanna's portrayal of Aurangzeb is equally compelling. He embodies the Mughal emperor's ruthlessness, ambition, and strategic cunning. Khanna's performance is characterized by a chilling calmness and a subtle intensity that makes Aurangzeb a formidable antagonist. The on-screen dynamic between Kaushal and Khanna creates a captivating conflict. The supporting cast also delivers strong performances, but these two stand out as exceptional.

Chhava boasts stunning visuals that capture the grandeur of the historical period. The cinematography effectively showcases the landscapes, forts, and battlefields, creating a visually immersive experience. The war sequences are particularly well-executed, depicting the intensity and brutality of the battles between the Maratha and Mughal forces. The choreography and special effects are impressive, bringing the historical conflicts to life. The production design is also excellent, accurately recreating the costumes, weapons, and architecture of the era.

The film's dialogues are a significant strength, reflecting the historical context and the characters' personalities. The writers have crafted powerful and memorable lines that convey the themes of bravery, loyalty, and sacrifice. The dialogues between Sambhaji Maharaj and his advisors, as well as those between Aurangzeb and his court, are particularly impactful. The exchanges are often filled with political intrigue, philosophical insights, and emotional depth. The dialogue helps to build the characters and move the story forward.

The film accurately and beautifully depicts the Maratha's guerrilla warfare tactics. The filmmakers successfully portray the agility, intelligence, and adaptability of the Maratha warriors. The scenes depicting ambushes, surprise attacks, and strategic retreats are particularly well-executed. The film showcases the Maratha's ability to utilize the terrain and their knowl-

edge of the local environment to their advantage. These scenes are very engaging and help to show the strength of the Maratha army.

Weaknesses of *Chhava*

The film's first half suffers from a noticeable lack of momentum. While establishing historical context and character introductions is essential, the extended exposition and numerous dialogue-heavy scenes contribute to a slow and often tedious pace. This sluggishness significantly impacts audience engagement, potentially causing viewers to lose interest before the more dynamic second half begins. The deliberate pacing, intended to build tension, ultimately becomes detrimental, as it fails to maintain consistent viewer interest. Some scenes depicting courtly intrigue, while potentially historically accurate, could have been condensed or streamlined to improve the flow of the narrative.

While slow motion can be a powerful cinematic tool for emphasizing dramatic moments and visual spectacle, *Chhava* relies on it excessively. This overuse diminishes the impact of key battle scenes, as the prolonged sequences become repetitive and predictable. Instead of enhancing the sense of urgency and intensity, the constant slow motion creates a sense of detachment, preventing viewers from fully immersing themselves in the action. The impact of the slow motion is that it makes many action scenes seem drawn out, and less impactful. A more sparing use of slow motion would have made those scenes more powerful.

The background score, while generally appropriate for a historical drama, lacks the necessary variation to elevate emotional moments. The music often remains consistent in tone and intensity, failing to effectively underscore the nuances of different scenes. A more dynamic and nuanced score, with a wider range of musical themes and motifs, would have significantly enhanced the emotional impact of the film. The music does not always match the emotional tone of the scene.

Several sequences throughout the film could benefit from tighter editing and scene trimming. Redundant dialogue, prolonged pauses, and unnecessary establishing shots contribute to the film's overall length and slow pace. By streamlining the narrative and eliminating extraneous material, the filmmakers could have improved the film's overall pacing and impact. Some scenes that contain much exposition could be cut down, or combined with other scenes.

Chhava is a well-crafted historical drama that successfully brings an important chapter of Indian history to life. Despite minor pacing and editing issues, it stands out as a strong cinematic representation of Sambhaji Maharaj's legacy. The film effectively balances historical authenticity with engaging storytelling.

The film is highly recommended for history enthusiasts, academics, and general audiences interested in India's rich past. It serves as both an educational resource and an engaging cinematic experience. For future improvements, the filmmakers could focus on better pacing and refining certain cinematic elements to enhance impact. Overall, *Chhava* is a significant contribution to historical cinema and a must-watch for those interested in Maratha history and the valour of Sambhaji Maharaj.

Rama Choudhary