



INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL
BHUBANESWAR

14TH FEB

JANUARY 22ND - 28TH

ODISSI RESEARCH
CENTRE



**14th INDIAN
FILM FESTIVAL
BHUBANESWAR**



CONTENT

About Nabagunjara 4
About FSB 6
Festival Coordinator's Note 7
Festival Design Note 9

Films at IFFB 13
Shorts at IFFB 34
Retrospective 44
Restored Classics 54

The Journey of a Filmmaker 96
We don't look for grey shades 106

Art Can Only Sensitise A Society, Not Solve Issues 116

Index
Film 121
Director 123
Languages 124

Festival team 125

About Nabagunjara

The festival logo is inspired by *Nabagunjara*, *Naba* meaning nine and *Gunjara* meaning sound. It is depicted in traditional Patachitra painting as a composite figure of nine animals. The images of this creature are found in the paintings of the Himalayan Princely states and of South India. The written version of the story of Nabagunjara is found only in the Sarala Das (15th century) Odia Mahabharata. Lord Krishna is revealed to Arjuna in Nabagunjara form, to test his devotee. The depiction of the creature is found in the Jagannath temple, Puri. It is also depicted in Ganjifa cards. It is the king card and Arjuna is the minister card.

In the Nabagunjara, Krishna expresses the plurality of approaches to reality and methods to understanding it. Ultimate reality, Krishna teaches Arjuna that there is one ultimate reality which is subjective. Its interpretation depends on a person's innate *swabhava*. The

Hindu tradition is neither monolithic nor unitarian, but it is instead plural and multifaceted, where *multiplicity* rather than *uniformity* is the watchword and, therefore, approaches to this reality have also to be varied.

Therefore, we think this symbol of plurality could be a way to define the composite form of cinema. Nabagunjara not only represents the essence of acceptance and diversity but also a representation of different perspectives that cinema enlightens through. The entire idea of several animals unified through an eternal soul shows the unpredictable nature of cinema that keeps exploring and surprising the human mind through image and sound.

About FSB

Film Society of Bhubaneswar (FSB) has been in existence since 2004, as a non-profit organisation registered with the Societies Act of India (1860) and the Federation for Film Societies in India (FFSI). FSB has focused on creating cinema literacy among its members, and has screened over 500 films from across the world and conducted master classes with leading visual artists nationally and internationally. It has organized 10 film festivals over the last two decades covering **World Cinema (2012)**, **Asian & African Cinema (2007)**, **Journeys and Migration (2010)**, **Short films (2011)**. It has curated retrospectives on **World Cinema (2005)**, **German Cinema (2007)**, **Spanish Cinema (2008)**, **Into the Darkness (2009)**, **Yasujiro Ozu (2012)**, **Anand Patwardhan (2019)**. The now reworked festival calendar of the Society covers two annual events, **the Indian Film Festival Bhubaneswar (2018, 2019, 2020, 2023,2024)** and **the Indian Documentary Film Festival Bhubaneswar (2018, 2019, 2022, 2023,24)**. Both these festivals showcase contemporary Indian regional cinema, in fiction and non-fiction respectively.

Unlike the other major cities of India, Bhubaneswar does not have a proper film festival in the cultural calendar. Despite all obstacles, FSB has managed to organize 10 film festivals and 10 major retrospectives, masterclasses, conversations with visual artists and filmmakers, with the continuing effort to take Cinema to newer audiences, cineastes and students.

Festival Coordinator's Note

In January, a resurgent Republic Party in the US came back to power and new policies have been announced on Citizenship and immigration, on gender relations, withdrawal from Paris Treaty of Climate accords and World Health Organisation, all 1500 people convicted of violence on January 6, 2021, have been pardoned under a presidential executive order. The inauguration of the new President saw a bevy of mega-billionaires cheering for him – the stage set for a new rule of Oligarchs, an Oligarchy of Social Media, Internet commerce, Crypto and Artificial Intelligence.

A ceasefire has been announced in Gaza after 15 months of war, we hope it holds and lives are rebuilt.

Couple of months ago, two indigenous women died after eating mango kernels in Mandipanka block of Kandhamal. We have been reading reports of infants sold by desperate parents from Odisha. We have embarked on a journey of Odia Asmita. Our city is marked by high level meetings of Prabasi and investors; the nights have been washed of darkness by lights burning from tree tops across the city. Our festival design is reflecting back on contemporary images emerging out of our neighbourhood.

In such an atmosphere, organising a film festival is always a task. However, the Film Society team has put together a retrospective of Girish Kasaravalli, a selection of four restored classics in collaboration with the Film Heritage Foundation, a collection of shorts and contemporary feature films that have been screened and discussed around the world.

The retrospective emerged after conversations with Girish about prints of films available with him. He did not have rights to all of his films, so we had to start with what was accessible. We managed to access five films from 1970s till 2020, a film making practice over five decades, tracking the social and political life of Karnataka, in particular and India in general. Girish's films have been made under very stringent conditions, some of his films have been produced by the leading actors who played the leading parts in Tai Saheba (Joymala) and Dweepa

(Soundarya). His films foreground the decaying social and political fabric of a society.

The restored classics (Ghatashraddha (1977), Thamp (1978), Maya Miriga (1984) and Ishanou (1990)) were made possible with the collaboration of Film Heritage Foundation. These films have been screened at major festivals around the world and now made available to our audience. The restoration process that was initiated by National Film archives is not made available to film societies after privatisation and its effects. To screen any restored Indian Classic is going to be a struggle.

The 14th edition of the feature film festival brings works from across the country that deals with issues of women, tribes, new technologies, intersections of uneven development and oppression of peoples. Feminichi Fathima, set in a small town in Kerala, explores the challenges of women in a conservative society. Appuram explores sensitively the issues within family from the perspective of a young adolescent. Angammal, based on a short story of Perumal Murugan, explores the choices of a remote village of Tamil Nadu.

10

Aranaya Sahay's "Humans in the loop" explores the world of Artificial Intelligence set in a rural Jharkhand, foregrounding the interstices of choice, control in the face of global control of AI. Sisir Jha's "Tortoise Under the Earth" explores the rural Santhali life set in Jharkhand bringing the conflicts of development and indigenous lived life of the community. Abhijit Chowdhury's "Dhrubor Aschorjo Jibon" is an interesting exploration on parallel worlds exploring the metaphysics of choice set in the worlds of Jamini Roy, Gaganendranath Tagore, Bikash Bhattacharjee and Binod Behari Mukherjee.

"Tees" explores the life of a family over a period of six decades exploring the interstices of state control, repercussions of inequality and tenderness through the lives of its characters set in Kashmir (1989), Delhi (2019) and Mumbai (2042).

We hope to survive in these difficult times as a film society and bring to you a viewing experience that starts conversations.

Design note:

TRAVELOGUE OF NABAGUNJARA

Entry no. 2025

As our Nabagunjara takes a leap in the air, it transcends time and goes back to one of the cradles of civilization. It lands on the riverbank of Tigris in 5500 BC Mesopotamia. It takes the form of a 8-pointed star and starts getting worshiped as Ishtar.

It leaps again. This time it ends up in the Sasanian Empire in 224 AD. He notices a teardrop motif with curved upper end is starting to appear everywhere. It makes a note of it.

And keeps traveling further in time. Kashan, Iran in 1600 AD Where the potters are using their peculiar luster painting on the 8-point star to cover a wall.

Next stop, Paisley, Scotland, 1820s. Nabagunjara stands under a bronze inscription that reads, "Pain Inflicted, Suffering Endured, Injustice Done", Probably the remains of the last witch trials that hanged and then burnt 5 women on the Gallow Green. It sees the people of the town in Kashmiri shawls with a similar teardrop pattern weaved in it. People back home call it the 'young mango' pattern.

From the horizon it witnesses a wave of protesting weavers of the Radical War. Raging in anger and singing in unison, against the employers over payment for "sma' shot" - a small cotton thread which, although unseen, was necessary in holding together garments.

Nabagunjara suddenly feels nostalgic and exhausted from all the time travel. It wants to return to the present again.

Mandipanka, Kandhamal, Odisha, 2024, two young women have died from consuming a gruel of crushed mango kernel. There was nothing else to eat at home. It deeply affects Nabagunjara. It wishes to undo the injustice. But Gods only have so much power when human lives are lost to illegitimate, violent and inefficient systems.

FILMS AT IFF

B 2 0 2 5

Feminichi Fathima

2024

100 MINS

Malayalam

Fathima, a housewife in the coastal town of Ponnani, lives under the strict control of her orthodox husband, Ashraf. When her son wets their old mattress, Fathima's attempt to replace it sparks conflict. Ashraf blocks her at every turn, despite her back pain and growing frustration. Eventually, Fathima realizes the mattress represents more than just comfort it's her chance to reclaim her independence. By finally buying it, she takes a bold stand.

DOP Prince Francis**MUSIC** SHIYAD KABEER**EDITOR** FASIL MUHAMMED**SOUND** SACHIN JOSE

15



Fasil Muhammed makes his directorial debut with the film **Feminist Fathima**. Fasil brings a deep understanding of local culture, infusing these elements into the narrative.

Poem of the Wind

2023 85 MINS Tamil

"Poem of the Wind" is about Bharani, an emerging theatre artist who is subjected to the stereotypical ways of masculinity from his childhood. The presence of femininity inside him confuses his stand on what society expects out of him. The film follows the three stages of Bharani's life, from his childhood to old age, as he regrets the choices he has made. The film is inspired by Charles Bukowski's poem "Blue Bird."

DOP Sanjay Sreeni, Kishore Karthik

MUSIC Neeraj M Selvaganapthy

EDITOR R Ramakrishnan, Kishore Karthik

SOUND Sriramachandran



Dharmasala International Film Festival

16



Ramakrishnan is a photographer and filmmaker with six years of experience, recognised for their impactful work through awards and accolades in prestigious competitions. Their work focuses on representing socially oppressed communities and their struggles.

Riptide

2024 83 MINS Malayalam

As college life comes to a close, roommates and lovers Suku and Charlie prepare to part ways. They spend their final days together drinking on the beach, discussing literature, making love and taking long drives down deserted roads. A health emergency forces Suku to leave town early, and when he returns following a near-death experience, he finds Charlie leading a spectral existence, intimate to him but invisible to everyone else.

DOP Abhijith Suresh

EDITOR Afrad VK

MUSIC Siraj M Shameem

SOUND Jithin Joseph



Afrad VK is an independent filmmaker and writer based in Kerala, India. His debut feature film Riptide, selected for IFFR 2024, began as a diploma film project and progressed into a feature film.

Angammal

2024

117 MINS

Tamil

In a remote rustic village in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, in the mid-90's, a city educated young man feels awkward because his mother doesn't wear a blouse. But this is how his mother always dressed. What changed suddenly? As he tries to find a solution before a visit from his prospective in-laws, a simple problem spirals out of control.

DOP Anjoy Samuel**EDITOR** Pradeep Shankar**MUSIC** Mohammed Maqbool Mansoo**SOUND** Lenin Valapad

IFFK

18



Vipin Radhakrishnan is an Indian filmmaker and screenwriter working predominantly in the south Indian film industry. His directorial debut *Ave Maria* was featured at the International Film Festival of Kerala. *Angammal* is his second feature film which had its premiere at MAMI 2024.

Ghaath

2024 124 MINS Marathi

Ghaath is a story told through elements of land, water, and jungle corresponding them with three characters - an undercover Maoist trying to track down a police officer, who is responsible for the death of his brother; a cop trying to secure the surrender of a Maoist guerrilla with the help of an aborigine; and a Maoist besotted by a tribal woman, while on the run from the Maoist cadre. As these about the characters, their psyche and the system.

DOP Udit Khurana

MUSIC Madhur Padwal

EDITOR Navnita Sen

SOUND Shantanu Yennemadi



Berlin International Film Festival



Chatrapal Ninawe was a Part of Berlinale Talent 2022. Nominated for GWFF Best First Feature Award at Berlin International Film Festival 2023 which is endowed with 50,000 euros. Recipient of German Honorary Giuseppe Becce Award 2023 for Best Director.

Dead Dead Full Dead

2024 110 MINS Hindi

Era is an eccentric, pseudo-astrologer and an Instagram influencer. She is found dead in her flat at a high-rise building. Suspects are ERA's husband RAHUL, House-help CHOTU, and the nosy neighbour MRS. BASANTI. Two newly-joined, incompetent young police constables BALRAM and ZUBEIDA are compelled to investigate Era's murder.

DOP Prabhdeep Singh

MUSIC Hiral Viradia

EDITOR Raviraj Singh

SOUND Hengul, Medhi, Nandlal Verma



Fantasia film festival

20



Pratul was born and raised in Sangli, Maharashtra. In his earlier days, his storytelling journey began with the stage plays.

Emuthi Puthi

2022

103 MINS

Assamese

A rebellious teenager Ritika needs money to escape home while her eccentric granny Makhoni wants to travel 500 kilometres in search of a mythical fish for a perfect exit from the world. Both elope together from home one night, chased by one very harried policewoman – Makhoni's daughter and Ritika's mother Indira.

DOP Ujjwala Viswanath

MUSIC Basshole

EDITOR Shweta Rai Chamling

SOUND Rukmajit Baruah, Bulganin Baruah



Best Tiwa Film award



Assamese filmmaker Kulanandini Mahanta scripted her name in the history books with the release of her debut film, *Emuthi Puthi* (A Very Fishy Trip), on June 17, 2022, with the film going on to become the first movie from the northeast to be shot entirely on iPhone.

Second Chance

2024 104 MINS Kullavi, Hindi, English

Nia, a woman in her mid-twenties, stands on a mountaintop on a cold winter morning, grappling with the weight of her deepest trauma – an illicit abortion. Seeking solitude, she retreats to her family's summer home in the Himalayas. The house's caretaker soon departs, leaving his mother-in-law, Bhemi, a 70-year-old indigenous woman, and his mischievous seven-year-old son, Sunny, in charge. As the harsh winter settles in, the unlikely trio, divided by age and class, form a bond that transcends their differences. Nia begins to smile again, but the demons of her past continue to haunt her, testing her resilience as she struggles to find healing.

DOP Swapnil Suhas Sonawane

MUSIC Quan Bay

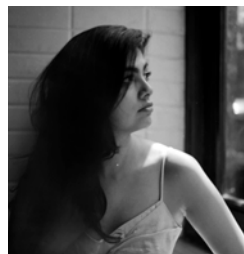
EDITOR Tinni Mitra

SOUND Anirban Borthakur

22



Karlov Vary, Busan, São Paulo



Subhadra Mahajan, born and raised in Himachal Pradesh and now based in Mumbai, She co-wrote *Angry Indian Goddesses* (2015). Her films explore complex social themes with a focus on elevating women's voices and stories.

Guras

2023

114 MINS

Nepali, Hindi

A nine-year-old girl embarks on a mystical adventure through the scenic mountains of Darjeeling, India, in search of her beloved pet dog, Tinkle, who has gone missing.

DOP K.R. Subal**MUSIC** Lokesh Kanithi**EDITOR** Saurav & Ankita**SOUND** Ankita Purkayastha**Karlov Vary**

Saurav Rai is an alumnus of the Satyajit Ray Film and T.V Institute, with specialization in Film Direction & Screenplay Writing. His diploma film 'Gudh/Nest' was the official selection at the 69th Cannes Cinefondation (2016).



23



Tortoise under the Earth

2022 97 MINS Santhali

In a uranium mining area of Jharkhand, India, a tribal couple cope with the loss of their daughter. For them, the land and forest are witness to their daughter's memory. The film explores the deeply intertwined connections between tribal communities and the forest that is their traditional home. Deftly interweaving the vivid colours of their festivals, their folk songs and the sense of community that binds them together, this film is a poetic elegy to a world that is rapidly disappearing, subsumed by unchecked development and displacement.

DOP Shishir Jha

MUSIC Durga Prasad Murmu

EDITOR Shishir Jha

SOUND Dhiman Karmakar

24



Kolkata People's Film Festival



Sisir Jha is a Mumbai-based Film-maker born in 1988, Bihar, India. He has received a Diploma in Filmmaking at the workshop of the late Abbas Kiarostami at EICTV (Escuela Internacional de Cine y TV), Cuba 2016. He has made many short films and 'Tortoise Under The Earth' is his first feature film.



Viduthalai

2024

252MINS

Tamil

Kumaresan is a newly appointed police constable in a district plagued by an armed resistance against the government's mining interests. His loyalties are tested not only by the harsh treatment from his superiors, but also by the daily violence against the local population, and an encounter with rebel leader Perumal forces him to make a choice.

DOP R. Velraj**EDITOR** R. Ramar**MUSIC** Ilaiyaraaja**SOUND** Prathap

V. Chitravel Vetrimaaran is an Indian film director, film producer and screenwriter who primarily works in Tamil cinema. He is known for his unique filmography with major commercial success and high critical acclaim works.



25



Tees

2023

142 MINS

Hindi

2042- Six months after his manuscript titled Tees is rejected for publication by the Literature and Arts Commission - Anhad Draboo, a young freelance prostitute, meets Niharika, a " Reader " from the Commission. Zia Draboo, a corporate lawyer living in Mumbai who has been renting with her partner Meera, finds out she cannot buy it because of the Housing Society's resistance to her name. In 1989-90, Ayesha, a Radio newsreader reaches out to her childhood friend Usha to solicit help from her husband.

DOP

EDITOR

MUSIC

SOUND



Dharmasala International Film Festival

26



Dibakar Banerjee is a film maker interested in exploring the nature of power, capitalism, inequality, gender, state, faith and their interrelationships.



Humans in the Loop

2024 74 MINS Hindi, Kurukh

Nehma, an adivasi woman from the Oraon tribe returns to her village with her children after her divorce. She works as a 'data labeller,' training AI models to recognise objects in images and videos. Finding AI childlike in its learning process, she imagines it seeing the world through her eyes. Unfortunately, she recognizes the fact that the AI has started showing human biases. Ultimately, Nehma realises she's battling for how technology and the world see people like her.

DOP Monica Tiwari, Harshit Saini

MUSIC Saransh 'KHWAGBAH' Sharma

EDITOR Swaroop Reghu, Aranya Sahay

SOUND Kalhan Raina

 **MAMI, Signs, Jaffna**



Aranya is an Indian filmmaker based out of Mumbai. He studied Direction at FTII, Pune. He went on to assist Imtiaz Ali and Patrick Graham as an Associate Director & Director's Assistant. He has directed five short films.

Body

2024 142 MINS Hindi

Months after the third wave of Covid pandemic, Manoj, a young struggling actor, is still trying to cope with his personal trauma. He joins his theatre peers on a trip to a village where he gets brutally bullied in the name of fun. His friends abandon him. Back in Mumbai, he carries the memory of the trauma and is seen walking naked on the road. His partner Khushboo tries to protect him but fails to save him from the wrath and anger of the public. He makes friends with a little boy who is regularly abused by his father.

DOP Vikas Urs

MUSIC Kanishka Sarkar

EDITOR Krishnendu Sarkar

SOUND Amala Popuri



28



Abhijit Mazumdar is a Direction alumnus of Film & Television Institute of India, Pune. He has written and directed features, short films, documentaries and commercials. His films have been selected in many national and international film festivals.



Kiss Wagon

2024

173 MINS

Malayalam

In tumultuous 'Mountland', ruled by a wealthy tyrant, Ms. Isla runs a parcel service. With the major religious festival, 'Atqaba,' approaching, she receives an unusual parcel destined for a strange address from a VIP. Isla, an extremely self-centered girl, never knew what a roller coaster ride she was about to encounter in her upcoming days. The question is: Will she complete this mission?

DOP Midhun Murali (Animation)

MUSIC Midhun Murali, Greeshma Ramachandran

EDITOR Midhun Murali

SOUND Midhun Murali



29

Midhun Murali, an independent filmmaker hailing from Kerala, India, fell in love with the art of film making thanks to his uncle who used to be a film projectionist. He used to thread and operate 16mm and 35mm film projectors all by himself when he was 8-9 years old.

Dhrubor Aschorjo Jibon

2024 135 MINS Bangla

"Dhrubor Aschorjo Jibon" is a crime drama film, which tells the captivating story of Dhrubo, a young man standing at a life-altering crossroads, faced with four distinct paths. As he struggles to save his girlfriend's family while uncovering the truth about his own origins, each choice he makes sets him on a vastly different course. Dhrubo's journey is a relentless battle between morality and love, justice and compassion. Each decision thrusts him into a unique and challenging world, where survival is the key to discovering the ultimate truth.

DOP Arnab Laha

MUSIC

EDITOR Abhijit Chowdhury

SOUND



KIFF, Atlanta Indian Film Festival

30



Abhijit Chowdhury is a writer-director from Kolkata, His notable works, including Dhrubor Aschorjo Jibon, Manbhanjan, Astey Ladies, Johnny Bonny, and Eken Babu O Dhaka Rahasya, have earned both critical acclaim and widespread popularity,

Baghjan

2024

78 MINS

Assamese, Moran

Manab refuses to accept his pregnant wife's death in the oil well blast and tries to find he Worried, his friends Bimal and Janeki try to help, but they face severe trouble as they struggle to cope with Manab's erratic behavior.

DOP Nihar Ranjan Gogoi, Jaicheng Xai Dohutia **MUSIC** Sourav Mahanta

EDITOR

SOUND Debajit Gayan



Third Eye International Film Festival, IFFK

Jaicheng Xai Dohutia is an Indian film director, editor, writer and cinematographer from Tongana Gaon, a small, isolated village in Tinsukia district, Assam.



31



Monsoon Breeze

2024

130 MINS

Tamil, Telegu, Hindi

23-year-old Deepu has just moved to the unfamiliar city of Mumbai with her mother to pursue her Master's. Her estranged father shows up at their doorstep to check in on them and attempt to make amends with his wife not realizing it is their wedding anniversary.

DOP Abdul Aziz**EDITOR** Abdul Aziz**MUSIC** Per-Olov Kindgren**SOUND** T.S Haraharisudhan

32



Aziz's foray into filmmaking was in the form of short VFX exercises, tongue-in-cheek takes on popular cinema with homemade CGI. Following his graduation in 2019, he set out to make a two-part fictional film exploring romantic relationships across age groups.



Appuram

2024

72 MINS

Malayalam

Set against the backdrop of a middle-class family, the film unfolds through the eyes of Janaki (Anagha Ravi), a teenage girl caught in the crosscurrents of love, fear and societal constraints. The opening scene, in which Janaki's mother Chithra makes yet another suicide attempt, sets the tone for the emotionally intense narrative- a poignant exploration of Janaki's life, shaped by the constant fear of losing her mother. Through this lens, "Appuram" delves into the fragile dynamics of a family grappling with mental health challenges, societal expectations, and the oppressive weight of superstition.

DOP Rakesh Dharan**MUSIC** Bijibal**EDITOR** Appu Bhattathiri**SOUND** P. Saanu

IFFK

33



Indu Lakshmi is a writer and filmmaker from India, now based in Germany. Her debut feature film, 'NILA'.



SHORTS AT IFF

B 2025

Dharam Sankat

2024 21 MINS Hindi

A darkly comedic tale ensues, unraveling the tangled threads of religious polarization, propaganda, and the pernicious influence of social media on impressionable minds. Rahul, finds himself ensnared by the allure of radical ideology. Fuelled by the fervor of his beliefs, Rahul, alongside his trusted friends Amit and Anuj, concocts a daring plan to craft an explosive device. However, their journey is fraught with misadventures and unexpected hurdles. As Rahul's obsession with recognition reaches its zenith, fate takes a whimsical turn.

DOP Humaam Arifeen

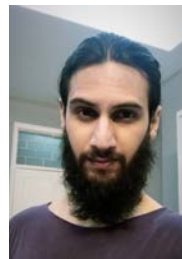
EDITOR Rida

MUSIC

SOUND Virendar



36



Humaam Arifeen, a filmmaker hailing from New Delhi, India, began his academic journey with a B.Sc (Hons) in Physics, later pursuing his passion for storytelling through a Master's degree in Mass Communication from the esteemed Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi.



Gagan Gaman

2024

30 MINS

Hindi, Rajasthani

Set against a surreal landscape, this is a tale of a woman's quest – in a world infused with myth and mystery, where each move opens up a new world. She meets people, lovers, riddles, world-warping questions and even a goddess as she wades through this haze of wonder and realisation and begins to see everything anew.

DOP Ashok Meena**EDITOR** Vibhav Nigam**MUSIC** Beatrice Thiriet**SOUND** Ajit Singh Rathore**National Film Awards**

Suruchi is an independent filmmaker from Rajasthan, India. She has been documenting the cultural diversity of Rajasthan as part of her folk film series.

Bobby Beauty Parlour

2024 19 MINS Hindi, Punjabi

On the hottest day of the year, Eelu drops by to see her best friend Manu, who works at the local beauty salon. When the owner of the salon suffers a heatstroke, the girls find themselves alone and unable to get out due to the severe heat. Trapped together in the claustrophobic confines of the salon, the girls get comfortable in their mumblecore haven. They chat, laugh, and dance, but their carefree revelry is punctured by the sudden arrival of a man, asking for Eelu.

DOP Janhavi Asthana

MUSIC

EDITOR Tanya Chhabria

SOUND



IFFK, Dharamshala International Film Festival

38



Shashwat Dwivedi is a screenwriter, lyricist, and filmmaker, a graduate of Asian Academy of Film & Television, with a specialization in Direction and Screenwriting.



If You Know You Know

2024 18 MINS English, Hindi, Gujarati

We follow Kusum, a trans girl on a series of dates with boys; As they find themselves trying to straddle the line of respecting her boundaries and expressing themselves and failing at it most of the time.

DOP Jyotsana Rajpurohit

MUSIC

EDITOR Bonita Rajpurohit

SOUND Abdul Aziz



DIFF, KASHISH Pride Film Festival



39



Bonita Rajpurohit is an actor & a director. Known for playing the lead in Dibakar Banerjee's 'Love Sex aur Dhoka 2', Bonita's keen interest lies in youth culture, gen-z lifestyles.

Bunnyhood

2024

9

MINS

English, Hindi, Gujarati

"Mum would never lie to me, would she?" Innocent Bobby discovers the answer to this question when she is surprised by a last minute trip to the hospital.

DOP Adam Pietkiewicz

MUSIC Marcin Mazurek

EDITOR Kaupo Muuli

SOUND Alexander Faingold



Cannes Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival

40



25-year-old director and animator Mansi Maheshwari is on cloud nine as her grad film gets screened at Cannes 2024.



Jooyein

2024 13 MINS Hindi

Roshni's world begins to crumble when she discovers an itchy, embarrassing secret: lice. Fearing social exile, she forms a desperate and deceptive pact with Chakor, the ostracized girl in her class. As they navigate this shared struggle, a fragile trust blossoms between them, offering both a sense of solace and companionship. However, the lie that binds them starts to fester, threatening not only their newfound friendship but also Roshni's carefully curated image. As the secret grows harder to contain, Roshni must confront the consequences of her choices and the true meaning of friendship.

DOP Maria Belen Poncio

MUSIC

EDITOR Kemal Burak Çuhadar,
Vindhya Gupta

SOUND Dhiman Karmakar

 Sundance Film Festival



Vindhya Gupta is an Indian filmmaker, currently based out of New York City. After studying literature, she wrote theater productions, radio plays and commercials.

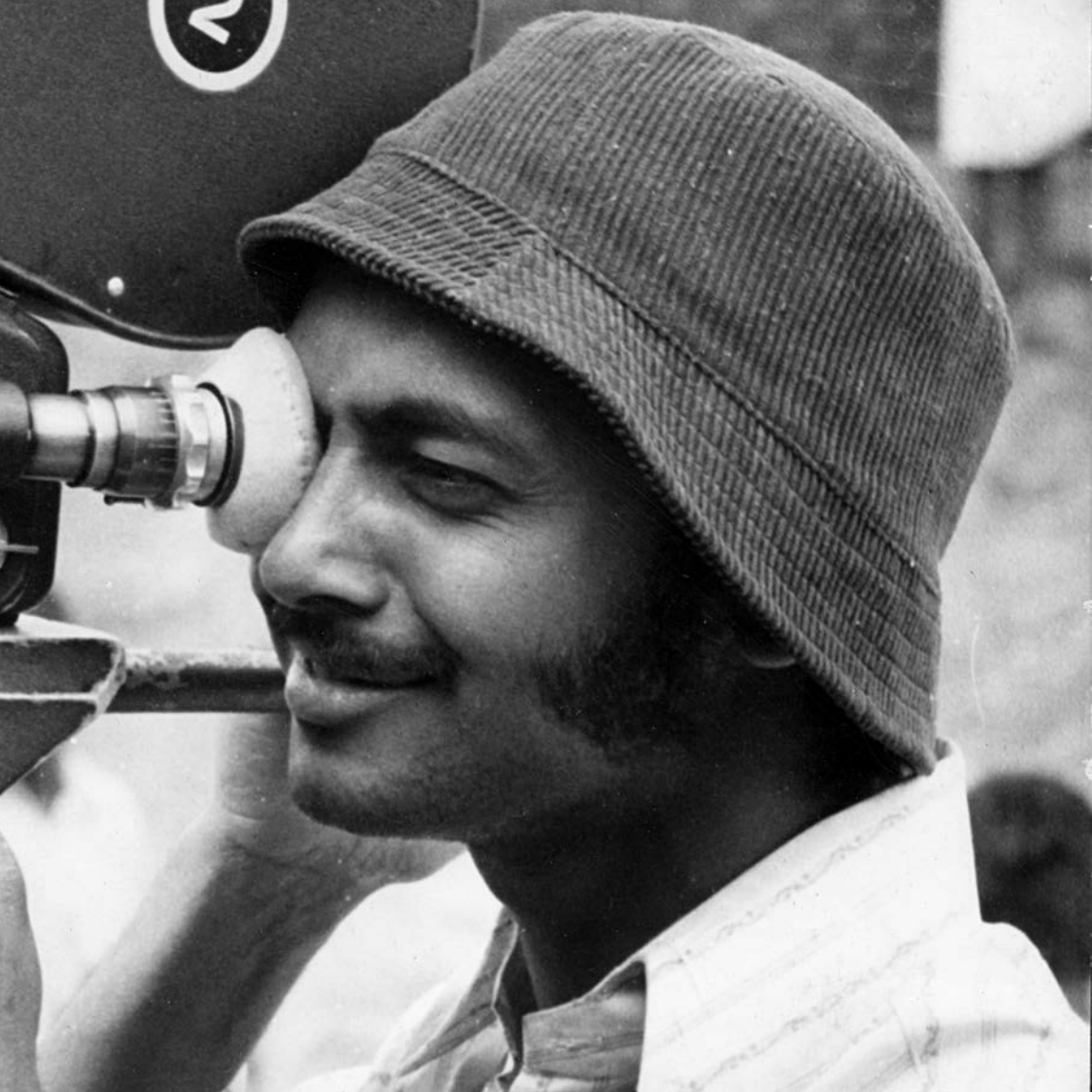


R E T R O S

GIRISH KASARAVALLI

P E C T I V E





Gulabi Talkies

2008 119 MINS Kannada

Gulabi is a discarded fifty something woman, an outcast living on an island with the fisher folk. Her obsession for films is fulfilled with the introduction of a television in her life and her village hut becomes a hub.

DOP S. Ramachandra Aithal

MUSIC Isaac Thomas Kottukapally

EDITOR M.N. Swamy, S. Manohar

SOUND Mahendran



IFFR 2009



Tai Saheba

1997

118 MINS

Kannada

The story of a Brahmin family during the pre- and post-independence periods of India.

DOP Ramachandra Halkere H.M

MUSIC Isaac Thomas

EDITOR M.N. Swamy

SOUND



IFFR 2003



Hasina

2004

117 MINS

Kannada

Haseena and Yakub have three daughters, one of whom is disabled. When from a hospital scan Yakub sees that Haseena's pregnancy is a fourth girl he becomes abusive, eventually leaving her to fend for herself. Seeking justice, she sits on the steps of the mosque and refuses to move.

DOP S. Ramachandra**EDITOR****MUSIC** Isaac Thomas**SOUND**

Kurmavatarata

2011

114 MINS

Kannada

In Girish Kasaravalli's gently philosophical character piece, a humble, low-level civil servant cast as the lead in a popular TV serial chronicling the life of Gandhi finds uncanny echoes between his own life and that of the legendary leader — and sets out to correct their mutual failings.

DOP G.S. Bhaskar**EDITOR** M.N. Swamy**MUSIC** Isaac Thomas, Kottukappally**SOUND**

Illaralaare Allige Hogalaare

2020

80 MINS

Kannada

The title means “neither can I be here nor can I journey beyond” by 16th century poet Purandara Dasa, on the eternal conflict - neither here nor there. The film explores the conflict between wants and aspirations located in the cycle of life.

DOP Ramachandra Halkere H.M**MUSIC** S.R. Ramakrishna**EDITOR** Gunashekhara**SOUND**

RESTORED CLASSICS



FILM HERITAGE

FOUNDATION

A film by Girish Kasaravalli

Ghatashraddha

(The Ritual, 1977)



RESTORED BY The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project and Film Heritage Foundation supported by Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation

PRODUCER — Sadanand Suvarna/Suvarnagiri Films CAST — Meena Kuttappa, Narayana Bhat, Ajit Kumar, Jagannath, Suresh, Shantha, Ramaswamy Iyengar DIRECTION AND SCREENPLAY — Girish Kasaravalli STORY — Dr. U. R. Anantha Murthy
DIALOGUE AND ART DIRECTOR — K. V. Subbanna CINEMATOGRAPHER — S. Ramachandra EDITOR — Umesh Kulkarni
SOUND — K. S. Krishna Moorthy MUSIC — B. V. Karanth

“

I'm delighted that the restoration of my debut feature "Ghatashraddha" will have its world premiere at the Venice Film Festival this year, 47 years after its release. It will be a matter of great pride for me to be in Venice to present the film. I am deeply appreciative of the relentless efforts of Shivendra Singh Dungarpur and Film Heritage Foundation to save and restore India's film heritage. I would like to thank Martin Scorsese, The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project and George Lucas and Mellody Hobson for supporting the restoration of "Ghatashraddha".

”

-Girish Kasaravalli

RESTORATION CREDIT

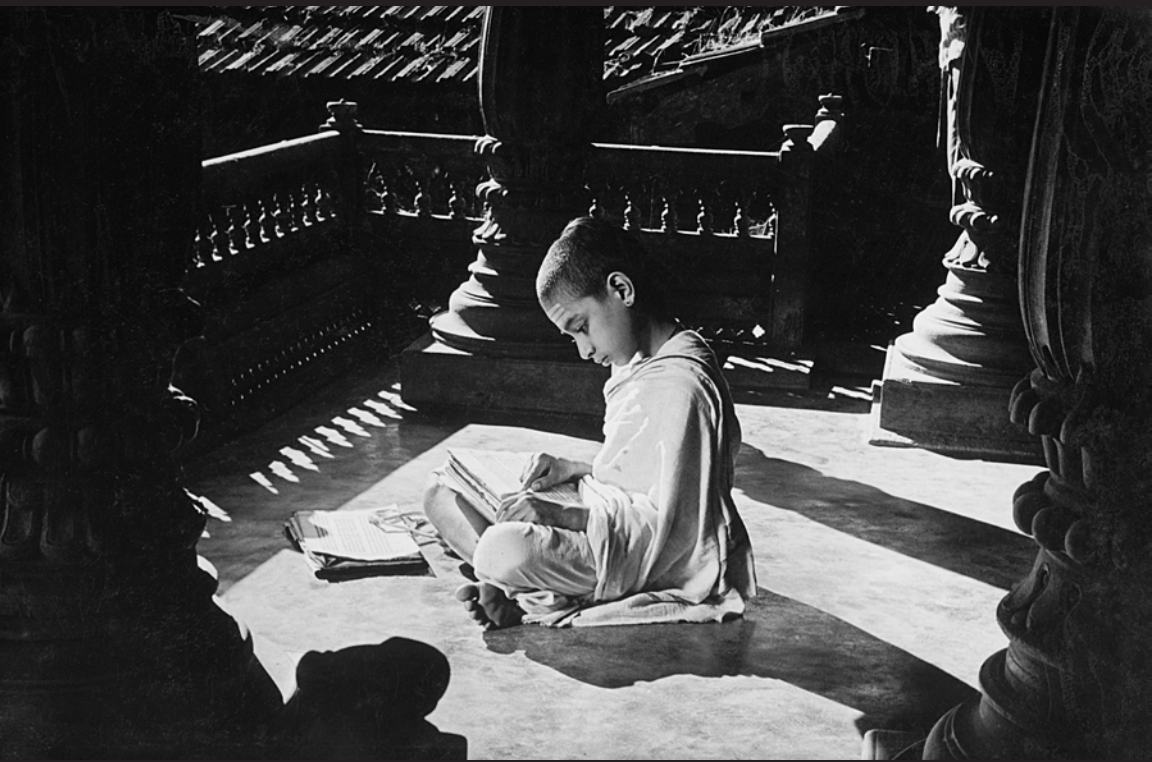
Restored by The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project and Film Heritage Foundation at L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory in association with Girish Kasaravalli. Ghatashraddha was restored using the 35mm original camera negative preserved at the NFDC-National Film Archive of India and the 35 mm print preserved at the Library of Congress.

Ghatashraddha

1977**108 MINS****Kannada**

Set in South India, the film describes the ostracism of a young woman who transgresses the rigid sexual code of the orthodox Brahmin society. The style is deceptively simple in telling the story of Yamuna, a child widow living with her father in the Vedic school which he runs. Seduced and made pregnant by the teacher of the local government school, Yamuna attempts suicide but is rescued by a young student of her father's called Nani with whom she has a deep bond of affection. She agrees to an abortion – equally suicidal, for, though she survives, she is left in pain and is made an outcast by her own father, who performs a funeral rite for his still-living daughter. In this rite, an earthen pot, symbol of fertility, is broken.

DOP S. Ramachandra**EDITOR** Umesh Kulkarni**MUSIC** K. S. Krishna Moorthy**SOUND** B. V. Karanth



Cultural Context:

The New Cinema movement in the state of Karnataka in South India which started in the late 1960s derived its ideational strength from the Lohiaite Socialism. Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, a towering figure in the Indian political scenario was a Gandhian socialist. His influence can be seen in Kannada literature, theater and visual arts of that period. He was one of the political philosophers of India who postulated that in Indian society the hierarchical caste structures is as stifling as the class structure. This also explains why so many Kannada films of that period have stories which deals with the injustice done to individuals in the name of religion and caste.

Ghatashraddha was a ritual practiced by the orthodox Brahmins in those days. Normally the son performs the death ceremony of his parents when they pass away. If someone has no male children, then he can opt for Ghatashraddha wherein he performs his own death ritual while still living by symbolically breaking a pot. This ritual of emancipation later on turned into a ritual of suppression. In the olden days, it was commonly used by the orthodox Brahmin society to excommunicate woman who went against the strictures set by the male dominant society.

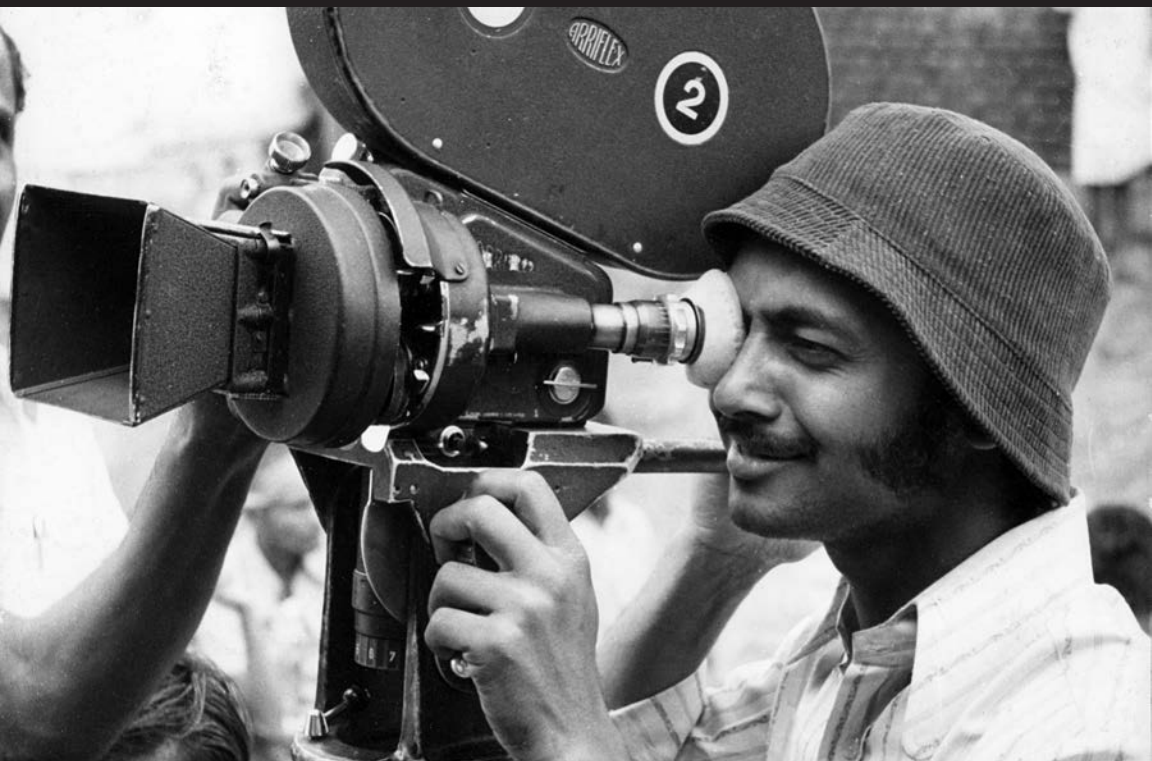
The subjugation of Yamunakka, the protagonist of the story by the Brahmin orthodoxy and subjugation of Nani by his colleagues are knitted so organically in the story that the personal and the political blend effortlessly. The pain and agony of the process of 'othering' became a common theme that ran through Kasaravalli's later films. The film brought into focus the contradictions that run through our society expressed not just by pitching one against the other in a didactic way but through the juxtaposition of events. More specifically in the case of this film that shines a light on how a Brahmin community revels in the fertility cult, but abhors it in practice.

Kasaravalli has said that his brother and few other visual artists of Karnataka threw more light on the fertility cult and Kundalini art while he was working on the stylistic treatment of the film. Hence, the womb, the pot, the snake, the rituals and the sound formed the basic expressive elements of the cinematic construction.

Released in 1977, and coming at the peak of the Parallel Cinema movement in India, Kasaravalli's seminal debut was an extension of the literary Navya movement in Kannada. The Navya movement was an influential Modernist literary movement that reached its creative pinnacle in the late 1960s with U.R. Ananthamurthy's fiction and developed an uncompromising political opposition to the hegemonic Brahmin elite. It extended directly into cinema with Patabhi Rama Reddy's film "Samskara" (1970) based on U.R. Ananthamurthy's 1966 novel of the same name. Girish Kasaravalli's film "Ghatashraddha" also has direct political and formal links to the Navya movement.







Ishanou | the chosen one





Ishanou

1990

90 MINS

Manipuri

Tampha, a pretty young woman with a loving husband and a small daughter is leading a tranquil existence in the Manipur valley, occupied with mundane details of life like preparing for her daughter's ear-piercing ceremony or discussions with her husband about the purchase of a second-hand scooter. Suddenly she begins to behave in a strange manner, talking to flowers, becoming afflicted with dizzy spells and wandering out of the house in the dark of the night. The family runs from pillar to post trying

to find a cure for the peculiar malady. Finally, they realize that she does not have an ordinary sickness, but is responding to the inexorable call of the deity. No woman becomes a Maibi by choice; she is chosen by the deity. As if in a dream, Tampha abandons her family to join the Maibi sect of priestesses.

Story, Screenplay and Costumes: M. K. Binodini Devi,
Cinematographer: Girish Padhiar **Editor:** Ujjal Nandy
Sound: Durgadas Mitra
Music: Aribam Syam Sharma

Cast: Anoubam Kiranmala, Kangabam Tomba, Baby Molly, Manbi, Soraisam Dhiren, Baby Premita

Additional cast: Nungshirei Maibi, Dhani Maibi Mema Maibi, Sakhen Maibi, Tekpicha Maibi, Bino Maibi Sakhi Maibi, Mema Maibi, Memcha Maibi, Rupobati Maibi.



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
CANNES CLASSICS
SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE 2019



FILM HERITAGE
FOUNDATION

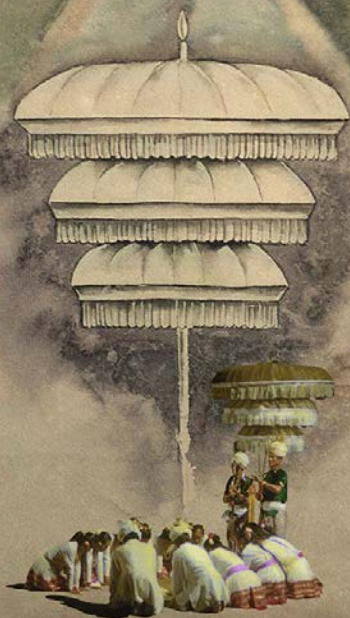
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Ishanou

(THE CHOSEN ONE)

A film by
ARIBAM SYAM SHARMA

Restored by Film Heritage Foundation at
L'Imagine Ritrovata laboratory and
Prasad Corporation Pvt. Ltd.'s Post - Studios, Chennai,
in association with the Producer and Director,
Aribam Syam Sharma and
Manipur State Film Development Society.



Director ——— ARIBAM SYAM SHARMA • Producer ——— ARIBAM SYAM SHARMA • STORY, SCREENPLAY AND COSTUMES ——— M. K. BINODINI
DEVI • CINEMATOGRAPHY ——— GIRISH PADHIAR • EDITOR ——— UJJAL NANDY • MUSIC ——— ARIBAM SYAM SHARMA • SOUND ———
DURGADAS MITRA • CAST ——— ANOUBAM KIRANMALA, KANGARAM TOMBA, BABY MOLLY, MANRI, SORAISAM DHIREN, BABY PREMITA.





Aribam Syam Sharma, the acclaimed filmmaker from Manipur, has done it all. Actor, singer, composer, theatre director, filmmaker and champion of Manipuri cinema – he is a true Renaissance man who displayed a mastery over every genre of filmmaking from blockbusters to arthouse cinema to documentaries. In a career spanning close to fifty years, Syam Sharma has directed 15 feature films, over 40 documentaries and scored the music for 25 films. He also played a key role during his three-year stint at the Manipur Film Development Council and as the first Managing Director of the Manipur Film Development Corporation towards improving the infrastructure for film production and the creation of avenues for the appreciation of cinema in Manipur.

“

I am so glad that Film Heritage Foundation chose “Ishanou” to be restored. It has been a learning experience for me to understand the meticulous process of restoring this film like a work of art, a process that has taken almost a year. I have seen the time and painstaking effort put in by Shri Shivendra Singh Dungarpur of Film Heritage Foundation to work closely with me to ensure that the film is restored keeping in mind my original vision. It has been a journey of discovery to work with Film Heritage Foundation and to see my film restored so beautifully and respectfully and given a new life after over thirty years.

“Ishanou” came into being organically and through a natural progression of events. When I look back, I feel “Ishanou” happened at the right time, even though it was after a gap of ten years since my last feature film “Imagi Ningthem”. M.K. Binodini Devi was keen to write a screenplay based on the life of the Maibis and I had already done a mammoth documentation project on the Lai-Haraoba which gave me the confidence to film “Ishanou”.

This extraordinary pull or quiet inner urge of the chosen one to abandon the home and immerse oneself in the Maibi culture may seem bizarre, but it is very real. And in this tragic sacrifice lies the sublime art of performance – song and dance attuned to elevate souls beyond the mundane. A chosen one undergoes extraordinary experiences and the experiences shown in the film are based on experiences related by the Maibis to M.K. Binodini Devi. The music that I have used in Ishanou is the traditional music of Manipur, the creators of which have been long forgotten with the passage of time but which has become a common treasure of Manipur. Perhaps, Manipuri culture is the only culture where a whole philosophy of genesis is propagated purely through the performing arts of Lai Haraoba. This unique aspect of Manipuri culture is the mystical canvas against which the human tragedy of the chosen one plays out.

”

- Aribam Syam Sharma



THE RESTORATION PROCESS

The restoration was a challenging process that took a year. The source film element used for the restoration was the original camera negative on 16 mm that was preserved at the National Film Archive of India (NFAI). When Film Heritage Foundation conservators checked the negative, they realized it was not in good condition. The negative had vinegar syndrome decay on certain reels, mould and warping, broken perforations, scratches, halos on the emulsion and base distortion. Film Heritage Foundation conservators worked tirelessly to repair the negative before it could be scanned at L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna, using a wet-gate scanner.

The real challenge was the use of portions of inter-negative in the original camera negative which resulted in wide variations in the image quality, making it very grainy in parts and not matching the other portions of the film. Additionally, there was no sound negative so we had to work on the sound from the two 35 mm prints lying with Aribam Syam Sharma. The sound design in this film is so important paradoxically because of the details in the quietness of the film as well as, of course, the music composed by Aribam Syam Sharma. The film had been shot on 16 mm on a low budget in fluctuating available light conditions as a result of which there were focus and lighting issues that impacted the image.

As a result of the challenges arising from the poor condition of the source material, hours of meticulous and painstaking manual work went into the digital restoration, clean-up, managing the grain and in particular the colour correction of the film - a process that took months and needed constant coordination between Shivendra Singh Dungarpur in Mumbai, Aribam Syam Sharma in Manipur and the lab technicians in Bologna. The filmmaker was

consulted and gave inputs throughout the restoration process and he worked on the subtitling of the film himself.

RESTORATION CREDITS

Restored by Film Heritage Foundation at L'Immagine Ritrovata laboratory and Prasad Corporation Pvt. Ltd.'s Post - Studios, Chennai, in association with the Producer and Director, Aribam Syam Sharma and Manipur State Film Development Society.

Ishanou was restored using the best surviving elements: the 16 mm original camera negative preserved at the National Film Archive of India and two 35 mm prints preserved by Aribam Syam Sharma.







FESTIVAL DE CANNES
CANNES CLASSICS
2022 OFFICIAL SELECTION

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THAMP
(The Circus Tent)

A FILM BY ARAVINDAN GOVINDAN (1978)

Restored by: Film Heritage Foundation, The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project and Cineteca di Bologna at Prasad Corporation Pvt. Ltd.'s Post - Studios, Chennai, and L'Immagine Ritrovata Laboratory in Bologna, and in association with Producer K. Ravindranathan Nair of General Pictures and the family of Aravindan Govindan

Thamp

1978 **129** MINS **Malayalam**

Thamp is a poetic, allegorical film, that gently explores the transience of human relationships and the rootlessness of the marginalized through the ripples created in the bucolic existence of a village on the banks of a river by the arrival of a roving circus troupe. In cinéma-vérité style, G. Aravindan rounded up a troupe of actual circus artistes and travelled with them to the village of Thirunavaya on the banks of the Bharathapuzha river.

Script: Aravindan Govindan, **Cinematographer:** Shaji N. Karun, **Sound:** Devadas, **Editor:** A. Ramesan,

Music: Kavalam Narayana Panicker and M.G. Radhakrishnan,

Production House: General Pictures, Kollam,

Producer: K. Ravindranathan Nair

Cast: Bharath Gopi, Nedumudi Venu, D. P. Nair, Sreedharan Chambad, Jalaja, Murikkoli Krishnan, Shreeraman, Kottara Gopalakrishnan, Njeralath Rama Poduval, Artistes of the Great Chitra Circus, Residents of Thirunavaya village on the river Bharathapuzha



Aravindan Govindan was one of India's most extraordinary filmmakers and a leading light of the New Indian Malayalam cinema of the 1970s and '80s. A true Renaissance man – he was a painter, cartoonist, musician, theatre director, and filmmaker. An autodidact, his films were free from the weight of film canon, marked by an entirely original approach to cinema. In a tragically short career spanning from 1974 to 1991, he made 11 films and 10 documentaries with almost all of his films receiving national or state awards.

RESTORATION CREDITS

"Restored by Film Heritage Foundation, The Film Foundation's World Cinema Project and Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna at Prasad Corporation Pvt. Ltd's Post – Studios, Chennai and L'Immagine Ritrovata Laboratory in Bologna, and in association with Producer K. Ravindranathan Nair of General Pictures, and the family of Aravindan Govindan."

Thamp was restored using the best surviving element: a Dupe Negative struck from a 35mm print preserved at the National Film Archive of India. A second 35mm print with English subtitles was used as a reference.

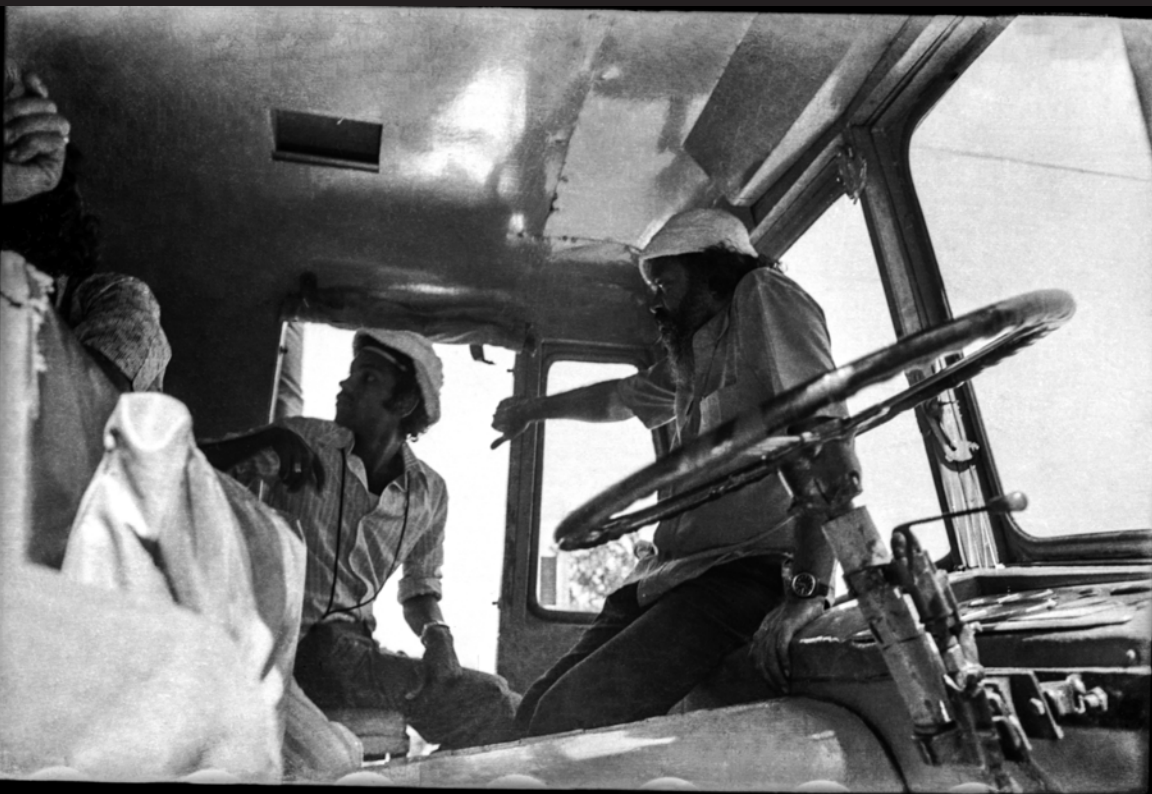
Funding supported by Prasad Corporation Pvt. Ltd. and Film Heritage Foundation.

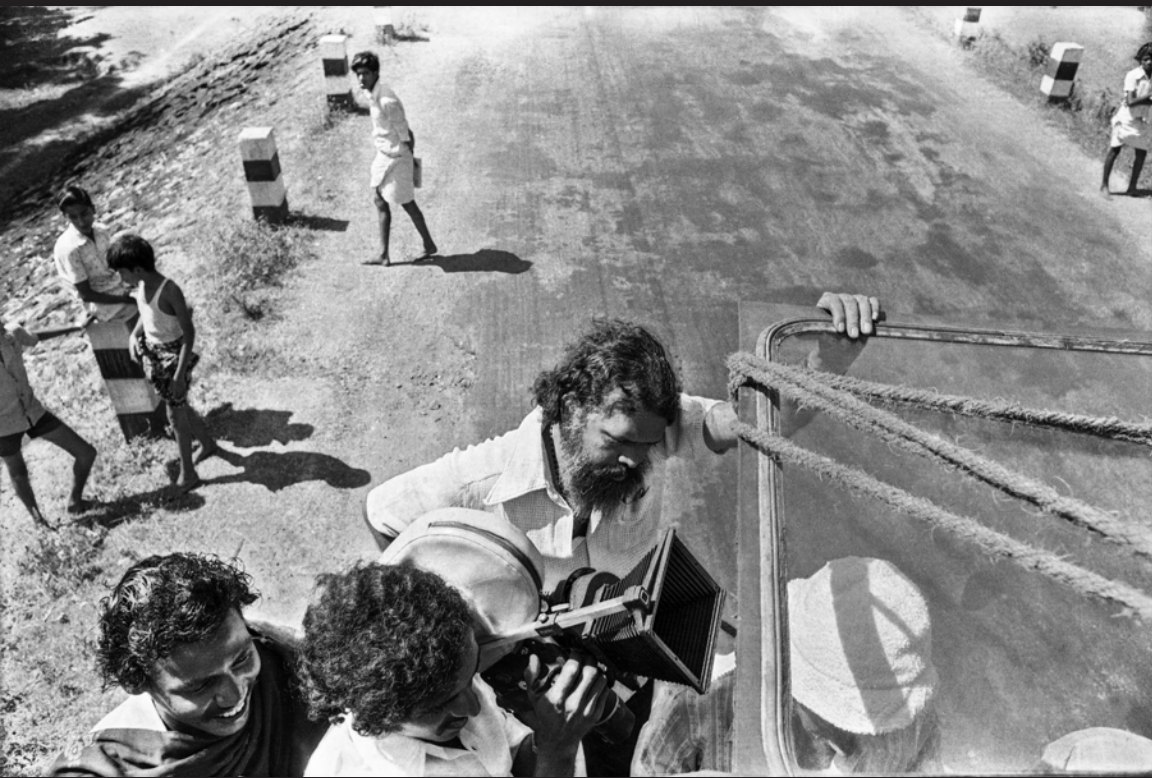
















MAYA MIRIGA



A FILM BY NIRAD MOHAPATRA

Māyā Mirigā

THE MIRAGE, 1984

ମାୟା ମିରିଗା

PRODUCER

Lotus Film International

SCRIPT AND DIRECTION

Nirad Mohapatra

STORY

Nirad Mohapatra and
Bibhutī Patnaik

MUSIC

Bhaskar Chandavarkar

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Raigopal Mishra

EDITOR

Bibekananda Saipathy

SOUND

R. Shrinath

CAST

Bansidhar Saipathy, Manimala,
Kishori Debi, Binod Mishra,
Manaswini Mangaraj, Sampad
Mohapatra, Sujata Mohapatra,
Bibekananda Saipathy,
Shriranjan Mohanty, Tikina

RESTORED BY

Film Heritage Foundation



Nirad Mohapatra was born on November 12, 1947, in Bhadrak, Odisha. He was the eldest of 7 siblings. His father was a freedom fighter (in pre-independence India), journalist and later entered politics in independent India and his mother was a school teacher. The foundation to Nirad's value system was laid with this background. His exposure to the rural and urban life while growing up made him very aware of the realities of middle class life. His interest in cinema was kindled from his childhood days and further strengthened by the cinema very near his house in Bhadrak, Orissa.





“The making of 'Maya Miriga' was an exciting experience of improvisation within the broad framework of a written story. The film was shot at Puri, a seashore town in Odisha. With a small crew and a team of non-professional artistes, we pitched our tents months in advance to dress up an abandoned house including its courtyard, which was to be our only set. We were lucky to have this house at our disposal and to have the best of both the worlds – a set on location.

I intended the film to be long and have a compassionate look at its characters, watching the members of a family inexorably progress towards their break-up. I belong there, to the small-town middle class joint family and have been fascinated by its dreams and agonizing nightmares. In it, I see a lot of warmth, fellow-feeling, sharing of experiences and a sense of responsibility. But I also see the tight-rope walking of the married sons, the bitterness of its locked-up daughters-in-law, their need for freedom, economic or otherwise, the maladjustment in marriages

and above all, selfishness that can damage its very fibre.

At one level, it is the emotional attachment to the family as against freedom for oneself that provides the mainstay of its conflict. At another, the conflict arises from the social reality of the middle class: its economic status as related to higher education, better jobs and higher positions in the social hierarchy. But ultimately the film is about certain emotional bonds which make up a way of life and the painful realization that they cannot last.

The balance that I ultimately wanted to achieve was between realism and simplicity on the one hand and my preoccupation with a certain cinematic form on the other. It is like building several layers, one over the other. Not everyone is likely to perceive all the layers but even then it should work. And my satisfaction is that it seems to have worked.

”
- Nirad Mohapatra







THE RESTORATION PROCESS

It's been close to three years since we began on the process to restore Nirad Mohapatra's film "Maya Miriga". It was on November 17, 2020, that I received the first email from Sandeep Mohapatra, introducing himself as the son of the late Nirad Mohapatra saying that he wanted to restore his father's film and hoping that I could help him. He had been referred to me by Surender Chawdhary, former director of the Film & Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune, who had also taught me when I was in FTII. I later found out that Sandeep had written to the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) several times regarding his father's film, but had no response. Finally, Mr. Chawdhary suggested he write to me.

The first step was to locate the original camera negative. Sandeep said he had no idea where it was, but thought that the negative might be in Chennai as the film might have been processed at Prasad Lab there. We reached out to Prasad Lab and finally on January 7, 2021, we found 12 reels of the 16mm original camera negative abandoned in a warehouse as they had been removed from the lab storage for non-payment of dues.

We transported the reels to the Film Heritage Foundation lab in Mumbai and were dismayed to find that the reels had deteriorated badly and were in a very poor condition. The inspection report stated that the reels had strong vinegar syndrome, broken perforations, high shrinkage, mould and halos on the emulsion, strong base distortion and colour fading. Reels 5 and 12 were classified as being in critical condition with the image completely or partially damaged due to plasticizer loss and mould. We knew that the film repair was going to be a daunting task for our conservators and that it would not be possible to scan the negative in India. Our conservators undertook the painstaking manual repair of the film over several months before we could send the negative to L'Immagine Ritrovata in Bologna for scanning.

When I was In Bologna in 2022, the lab showed me the scan of the negative. As a result of the high level of deterioration of the negative, the scanned material had a number of issues. The image was blurred, had scratches, tears, dust and dirt, frequent and long lasting vertical lines (sometimes very deep green lines) and halos. The situation looked grim.

We were aware that the NFDC-NFAI had two 35 mm prints and we wrote to them to access it. One was a subtitled print and therefore no use to us for the restoration. We decided to scan the 35 mm print at the Prasad Lab in Chennai so that we could use the best scanned portions from both sources for the restoration. The sound was also taken from the 35 mm print. However, the scan of the 35 mm print was disheartening too as due to deterioration the print had colour fading that had turned the colour magenta giving the film a pinkish hue. The faces were blurred and the film was very grainy. Some of the night sequences on the rooftop had turned blue-black where you couldn't see the faces. Just the grading took nearly two months to get some kind of balance in the colour and sharpness and to control the grain.

- SHIVENDRA SINGH DUNGARDPUR, DIRECTOR, FILM HERITAGE FOUNDATION

RESTORATION CREDITS

Restored by Film Heritage Foundation at L'Imagine Ritrovata laboratory, with digital restoration done by Digital Film Restore Pvt. Ltd. and scanning at Prasad Corporation Pvt. Ltd.'s Post - Studios in association with the family of the Director, Nirad Mohapatra. Funding provided by Film Heritage Foundation. "Maya Miriga" was restored using the best surviving elements: the 16 mm original camera negative preserved at Film Heritage Foundation and a 35 mm print preserved at the NFDC - National Film Archive of India.

The Journey of a Filmmaker

In Conversation with Girish Kasaravalli

September 18, 2023

98

We have an hour to talk to one of India's finest filmmakers. His films have been seen, admired, discussed and dissected for nearly five decades since 1977. During this period he has made just 18 films and each one has been masterfully crafted with the same care. Despite the fact that his last publicly released film was over 11 years ago, discerning viewers are expectantly hoping for yet another classic from him.

Girish Kasaravalli welcomes us into his home and settles down to answer our questions in his calm and unassuming manner. At the end of the hour of what

can be termed as a masterclass in film making, the heavens have opened up outside and the rain is clattering noisily on the tiled roof, drowning all conversation. He graciously fetches an umbrella and walks outside with us to ensure we are as dry as possible.

Still engrossed in the storm of insightful responses and enthralling memories swirling inside our mind, we hardly notice the storm raging outside.

Let us start with a question about the future. Many people are curious about what can we expect next from you?

[Laughs] You are starting with the wrong question. Now, it has become difficult to produce the kind of films I have been making. Producers still come to me but these types of films are not being released in theatres now, OTT (in Kannada) is not picking up and Doordarshan is not focused on movies. You would need at least 60 or 70 lakhs to make a film and the only financial incentive is from the State Government which is just 15 lakhs.

So, I don't want anyone to lose money on my film. Fortunately, barring the latest one ("Illiralar Allige Hogalare" which has not been released), none of my films have lost money. Even if they have not made huge profits, they have recovered their investments. It seems like there is no light at the end of the tunnel. So, my previous film could be my last one.

Your last film 'Illiralar Allige Hogalare' ('Can Neither Stay Here, Nor Go There') in 2021. It was shown in some film festivals but it was not released elsewhere. Any plans of releasing it for general viewing?

It is a 2019 film and not 2021. Soon after the film was made, within a few weeks the COVID lockdown was announced. Later it was sent to about four festivals and in three of them it won awards. After that, the producer became busy with other projects. He was involved in building a hospital and concentrating more on that project. The issue with films is that once the film is completed, it becomes the producer's property and responsibility. I don't want to interfere in that or take that burden of marketing the film.

What kind of producers approach you? Why do they come to you?

Many of the producers who approached me did so because my films usually won some awards. They were not interested in awards at Cannes or other festivals abroad. If the film won the National award, they would have an opportunity to receive it from the President of India and then proudly display the photograph. I was aware of this motive but it also enabled me to make films I wanted to. [laughs]

As producers, do they step into the creative process or do you draw the line on that?

Actually that way I have been very, very lucky. My last four films were produced by the same person, who is an industrialist and hotelier by profession. He would meet me sometime around the month of April and ask me if I had any thoughts of making any film. If I said yes, he would arrange for the money and not bother me after that. Once the film was completed, we would call and inform him that it was ready. He never questioned the story or the stars and that kind of freedom gave me a lot of strength. I made a very unconventional film called Kanasemba Kudureyaneri. He was not perturbed and just said if you have faith in the story go ahead.

You have been making films for about five

decades. When you look back from the days of FTII to your latest film, how has your work or film making evolved over time? Do you have creative satisfaction with what you set out to achieve?

That is a difficult question to answer. Whether a film is a success or failure all depends on the reference point. I set a high reference point for myself. My references were all great masters, so I cannot say I have reached that point at all. But within my capacity I can say that I have made a few films that will stand the test of time at least for another 30 or 40 years.

Creativity, visualisation are natural and come from within a person but techniques are scientific and can be taught in a classroom. You went to FTII and have also taught in a film school. Do you feel film schools are essential for a filmmaker? How important is it for a filmmaker to go to these schools and what value does it add?

When I joined FTII it was very essential because outside of FTII it was impossible to see the classic films. I had not heard of filmmakers like (Luis) Bunuel or (Jean-Luc) Godard. I knew of only some important films made in Kannada or Hindi. We had heard about Satyajit Ray but never had an

opportunity to watch any of his films. Even Ritwik Ghatak or Mrinal Sen were unknown to us. A film school like FTII was very important in shaping my aptitude for cinema and my understanding of the world around me. So, it was very essential during the 1970s. But today you can watch classics anywhere like on YouTube, so it is not difficult. But there are two points I would like to make. Today all classics are available but people are more interested in the technical aspect of the films than the creative aspect. They don't think in terms of the content, the idea, ideation or the strength of the film. Everyone just talks about how the shot was conceived. Technique is not cinema. Technique alone cannot make cinema, just as story alone cannot make cinema. Cinema is very complex and you need to know both sides. In the 1970s, there were filmmakers who started as assistant directors, climbed up the ladder, learned the tricks of the trade and then became directors themselves. The difference between a man who came up this way and a man trained in a film school is that in the school they teach about the philosophy of cinema.

You have made feature films, documentary biographies and television serials. Do you change your approach to each of these media?

They say television serials are a medium of closeups and words play an important role. I never bothered to go by that dictum. What applies to cinema should apply to television as much. Only difference is that the image size is smaller. But if the image size is smaller, the viewer will be closer to the screen. In a movie theatre the image is big but the audience is also relatively far away. So, the perceptual capacity of the viewer remains the same. We are talking about the physical aspect of the image but the physical aspect is not the one that decides the impact. The distance and angle is not important but how you get hooked to the image is what is important. When I was making Gruhabhanga I was told not to go for long shots or use silent shots. I did not avoid them and it still worked nicely. The grammar of the visual does not change or the grammar of the film does not change. Regarding documentaries, I am basically not a documentary filmmaker but I made a few biopics because I was approached to make them. When I made the one on Adoor Gopalakrishnan, UR Ananthamurthy or the third one on Pandit Venkatesh Kumar my approach was purely conventional where you ask the subject questions, seek answers and from that you build a narrative.

Women playing key roles in your films is a well-known fact. They are also

strong characters in many of your films (Aakramana, Dweepa, Hasina, Gulabi, Nayi Neralu). Was this a conscious choice?

Not really. I was not aware of that when I was making the films. My career started with Ghatashraddha where a woman Yamuna is the central character but she is not a strong woman. Later on the story and content demanded stronger women and I went by that. There was no design as such. Four of my films were produced by the artists (the female leads) themselves. While casting them I was concentrating more on the theme which invariably centered around them. My films like Tabarana Kathe, Koormavatara, Bannada Vesha, Kanasemba Kudureyaneri and Kraurya are not women-centric at all. For example, Tabarana Kathe is as popular as any of my other films.

Your stories depict conflict between tradition and change. disparity, discrimination or inequality (social or gender or caste or urban/rural). Even though the protagonists are strong characters, they often end up only with moral victories.

I don't want to talk about people who are very successful in life. There are many other people who don't come to our attention

because they are not in the limelight. So I concentrate on such people. Nagi, Yamunakka and Hasina are such characters. It may be a cliched statement but I make an attempt to give voice to the voiceless in all my films. Here are the people whose agonies are not in the foreground of mainstream cinema or mainstream media. At the same time, I don't want to talk about underprivileged people for the sake of it nor depict them in the conventional way. For example, the grave digger Irya in Kanasemba Kudureyaneri is not a pathetic figure at all. He is full of confidence and self-dignity which is the case even with Hasina or Venkatalakshmi. I don't want to get into that kind of simplistic patronising tone or painting them as helpless people. They are not helpless but it is the society that is making them victims.

You have stated that Ananthamurthy's thoughts inspired many of your films. Can you elaborate on this?

Ananthamurthy has written about various issues, not just those of political or social significance. His work makes the reader internalise and ponder over it. He does not say what is right or wrong. One of the terms he often used is problematise. He would say you should problematise everything, even the right answers. Even if there is a right answer

there is always a but. For example when Nazir Sab started digging borewells for the water problem people called him Neer Sab. It had a major impact on the water problem in Karnataka. But, what happened after about 10 years? The water table went down. Nehru said dams are the nation's modern temples. But now we are seeing problems in Punjab where water is saline and unfit for cultivation (Unravelling Bhakra: Assessing the Temple of Resurgent India, Report of a Study by Manthan Adhyayan Kendra). Ananthamurthy not only brought a new perspective of looking at various issues but he also forced you to question the final answer. When you read it you may or may not like it, but you start questioning the answer.

Literature and films have had a strong connection over the years. Good literature seems to be on a downward trend. Films are not based on literature as much. Is this a loss for the viewer?

A good film need not be based on good literature. Conversely, good literature is not the only source for a good film. In fact, there is no assurance that a good book will make a good film. If it were that simple all of Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky or Dickens works would have been made into classic films. Minor works of fiction can also turn out to be a good film.

Take for example *Mephisto*, a 1981 political drama film co-written and directed by István Szabó, is based on the novel of the same title by Klaus Mann. It was written by a man who was in a Nazi camp as just a collection of his personal experiences but turned out to be a great film. On the other hand *War and Peace* adapted from Leo Tolstoy's 1869 novel or Kanooru Heggadithi based on the 1936 novel Kanooru Subbamma Heggadathi by Kannada writer Kuvempu turned out to be unsuitable material for a film. Each does not reflect on the other.

How do you choose a story for your films? Do you visualize the story to determine its suitability?

I look for four different things in a story when I decide to adapt for a film. I want to make dramatic or intense films. So, the emotional quotient of the story is very important for me. Cinema is a performing art. In cinema you use concrete images to create abstract meaning whereas in literature you use abstract words to create a concrete image. The moment I read a story I must get the idea that this can be translated into images – both visual and aural – that carry the meaning. Third is how relevant the story is for the present time. At a given point in time, the society is talking of certain topics and issues – whether for or

against. Does the story reflect the aspirations of the time? Alternatively, I look for details that can be reappropriated or readapted to suit the aspirations of the time. Lastly, if the story just makes a statement about the contemporary world, then it would be like a journalistic report. So I look for stories that transcend time. The issue with contemporary Kannada cinema is that a lot of sincere films are being made but it does not transcend time. Just as you would not be very interested in yesterday's newspaper, these films would become irrelevant tomorrow.

The late Mani Kaul had once said films worked on the “principle of distraction” where the director does not let the viewer's mind dwell on any scene for long . On the other hand the gentle pace of your films, the pauses, the silences give the audience time to think, understand the character and let the feelings sink in. This helps leave a lasting impression on the mind even after the film is over. How do you plan the pace of your films when you write your scripts and shoot the scenes?

[Laughs] Did Mani Kaul really make this statement? His films are much slower than even mine but perhaps he was talking about films in general. That is the philosophy of popular commercial cinema. These films

do not let or want the audience to think or ponder about the situation. Because the moment you start pondering, they suddenly realize the narrative itself is faulty. Their tenet itself is not right. That is why they bombard with images, turns and twists and the audience is made to sit at the edge of the seat and see the film. But I don't subscribe to that theory at all. For me, the slower the film it is much more engaging. Then you think about it and question it. You correlate it with your own assumptions, your own principles. That way the viewer also constructs the film and becomes a co-maker and not just a receiver. I want to make films that give me this kind of space where I can intervene and question the film and my own perception. It is a kind of meditative space where you can meditate on the issues being discussed. Luis Bunuel said the pace of the film is a political statement of the filmmaker. Why does he say that? Because the pace decides how much time the filmmaker gives the viewer to intervene in the subject. When you look at the works of masters like (Robert) Bresson, (Ingmar) Bergman or (Satyajit) Ray there is enough time for you as a viewer to get involved in the story.

When you started your career, there were huge cameras, large lenses, massive lights. Filmmaking was a physical exercise

as much. Today we have a phone to make films and OTT is an instant platform for everyone to watch something. How has the language of films changed? How does it impact filmmaking overall because everyone can be a filmmaker?

I welcome that because anyone can make a film and it democratises it. Earlier one had to work for ten or fifteen years to become a director. Today if you have the knowledge why prevent someone from making a film? On the other hand it is easy to make a film but what we are trying to say through these images is more important. There are any number of filmmakers who know how to narrate a story. It is the vision of the filmmaker which is more important. What is he trying to say using these images? If it sharpens our intellect or sharpens our perception then I would say it is an important film. So anyone can use a camera but filmmaking is more than that. Only the economics have changed but not the philosophy of filmmaking.

Children play key roles in many of your films. Examples that come to mind are Nani in Ghatashraddha, Munni and Shabbu in Hasina, Babu in Tabarana Kathe and Kalu/Ravi in Aakramana. How do you direct children to get these wonderful natural performances?

Basically children are good actors. Until the age of about 12 or 15 they are really good. I have noticed that if someone is past 30, it is easy to get good performances. The actors in between are the ones who are very conscious of themselves on screen. When I direct a child, I don't treat them as just actors. I keep playing with them, throwing a ball or teasing them, so they become very friendly. There is no distinction that I am a director and they are an artist. During Gruhabhanga, one of the children came and sat on my lap. An assistant director immediately jumped up and said you cannot sit on Sir. I said it's okay, because the child is not hurting me. This helps to build a good relationship or bonding. I don't explain the philosophy or intentions of the character and all that. I explain what is happening here and ask them to relate to their own experience and they come up with a good performance. I still don't know how they act so beautifully in my films. The three children in Illiralare Allige Hogalare have turned in outstanding performances. There is one child, just about 8 years old – but what a performance she has given! I wonder who taught them the gestures, postures and all that. I wonder how they do it.

In the film Mane, Naseeruddin Shah imagines that the cart loaded with drums is chasing him. This is reminiscent of Alfred

Hitchcock's films where the hero is in danger. What was the thought behind this unusual scene?

Mane (House in English) was one film where I depict things through colours. Yellow is one colour where Rajanna played by Naseeruddin Shah starts hallucinating. More than Hitchcock I would say it is Kafkaesque. So as the film progresses yellow becomes more prominent in the film, the entire house is painted in yellow and the last scene where the slum is demolished by a yellow bulldozer manufactured by his company. So the cart with drums scene was kind of an introduction to the yellow colour motif (laughs). Once a filmmaker starts explaining his idiom then one tends to suspect the intentions. When I was in FTII there was one series of books which always fascinated me was "Filmmakers on Filmmaking" where each filmmaker is explaining his own films and it was a great learning for me. When I was asked to do a film on Adoor Gopalakrishnan that is what I tried. I tried to understand his idiom. We don't have that kind of book in India. Even a great filmmaker like Satyajit Ray we only talk about his content and his politics. But how does he achieve that kind of impact? If you need to understand that you need to understand the smaller images. And you do that by understanding how the elements of the film are orchestrated.

So it must have been difficult to work with actors who feel they are shaping the film rather than the director?

Yes it can be very difficult. Of course there are different ways of handling it. You can applaud and say the shot was great but can we have one more take? [laughs]

Do you visualise the entire film before it is made? Do you use any Storyboarding technique?

I don't use storyboarding because I am not good at sketching but I write down everything including the technical details. Fortunately I always work with the same technicians, so they don't get offended by that approach. Naseeruddin Shah said when you have written down everything, where is the need for me to interpret? When I said please don't interpret but just follow it, he was not happy. Today of course you can see it on the monitor as you shoot the film. I would normally stand next to the cinematographer while shooting. Once the shot was completed, I would discuss the shot with my cinematographer and no one else would know what we were talking about. The artists had to just stand around till I said okay. Naseeruddin did not

like this, so I had to explain that I could not tell if the shot was good until I made sure that what was intended had been captured.

John W Hood, who wrote a book *Mysteries of the Mundane on your films*, talks about a lost film that you directed. Which film is this?

I am not sure which film he was talking about. There was one film called Mooru Daarigalu (Three Paths). It was one of the last black and white films made in Kannada. We had to take the film to the lab for processing and we would see the rushes only after a week or so. When we saw it we were shocked because a lot of scenes had intermittent fogging. Someone had switched on the lights or lit a match and after every 8 feet there were about 10 frames fogged. (fogging can occur due to exposure to light or other environmental factors, resulting in a loss of contrast, increased image noise, and reduced image quality). Some of my artists had left for America and the producer said he could not afford to bring them back, so I had to change the film. We completed the film but it did not come up to my expectations. Later the lab closed down and they asked us to take the negatives. We did not know what to do with that and left it with someone. Finally I sent 8 of 15 reels to National Film Archive of India (NFAI). He may have been referring to that film.

What about the original prints of your films? Do you own the negatives?

No, it is rarely in our (director's) names. All the negatives of my films were with Prasad Labs and now they have closed down. They wrote to the producers to collect the negatives after paying some handling charges. Most of my producers are not from the film industry so they did not do it. Negatives of all my first nine films until Dweepa are gone. Ghatashraddha was produced by Sadanada Suvarna who was by profession a paint dealer with a small shop near JJ Hospital in (then) Bombay. The film was processed at Chamundeshwari Studios which also closed down in the 1980s. So, Sadananda Suvarna, the producer, took the negatives and kept them in the same paint shop! When someone pointed this out to him he moved it to Rajkamal Studios because Kiran Shantaram, the owner, was his friend. One of my friends saw that it was left near a toilet and informed me. When we went there, the eighth reel was missing. PK Nair who was the director of National Film Archive of India (NFAI) came to know about it and moved the remaining negatives and duped the missing reel from a good copy of the film and restored it. In other cases of my later films, soon after the film was made, the negatives along with the prints were sold to a third party who in turn sold it

to someone else. By the time we think about saving it, you would not even know who actually owned it.

Do you watch today's movies? Anything you liked in the recent years?

Quite a few Indian filmmakers, particularly youngsters, are making interesting films. I don't accept that the new film movement is gone. People who make those kinds of statements are not watching films made by these youngsters. That they may not have made something like Pather Panchali is a different issue as Ray himself could not repeat that. Unfortunately they make one very interesting film and then either disappear or go to mainstream cinema. For example, the film Coat was very good. Thithi in Kannada was very interesting but the director seems to have disappeared after that.

This interview was conducted by Jyotsna Murthy and Arvind Krishnaswamy.

'We don't look for grey shades': An Interview with Girish Kasaravalli

| INTERVIEW |

BY SRIKANTH SRINIVASAN

108

Srikanth Srinivasan: Your films are rife with rituals, ceremonies and legitimization games. This is perhaps most apparent in *Ghatashraddha* (1979), your debut feature. What interested you in dealing with such conservative constructs?

Girish Kasaravalli: Although they are present in the later films as well, rituals and ceremonies are central only to *Ghatashraddha*. I wouldn't say I am interested in rituals or castes as such. I liked the scenario of *Ghatashraddha*, which is about this pair of people Yamunakka and Nani who are

marginalized and outcast by this religious institution. She is a young woman who naturally feels the need for male companionship. Nani, otherwise rather sharp, finds it difficult to learn these scriptures. Both of them are ridiculed and outcast by the establishment.

SS: Your direction of Meena Kuttappa in the film is highly stylized. It is not exaggerated, but it is not natural either. It is almost Bressonian. This kind of acting is not found elsewhere in your filmography.

GK: Yes, we were familiar with Bresson's cinema that time and Meena's performance is similarly very stylized. It was a de-dramatization gesture. Much of our acting assumes that emotions are to be expressed. I wanted the emotions to be expressed not through the acting but the events of the story. Throughout the film, Yamunakka stays in a single register of suffering. Nani, on the other hand, undergoes a marked change. He realizes that he has to help Yamunakka. While he cannot do a whole lot, he does what his strength and age allows him to. That is why, his performance, along with other

characters, is more naturalistic. Even the lead performance in *Thayi Saheba* (1997) is stylized the same way.

SS: One of the students studying with Nani might be homosexual. Was there any backlash against this? I'm guessing it would have been scandalous locating such a character within such milieu.

GK: No, there wasn't because it was not overdone, it was subtle. Outrage occurs when a portrayal is sensational or too provocative. There were some who questioned me about *Haseena* (2004), but there really has been only one such provocative instance in all my films taken together: when Tabara curses the pension officials in *Tabarana Kathe* (1986)

SS: You mention *Haseena*, whose story is set in a Muslim community which has its own laws pertaining to marriage and divorce. Post 9/11, it does seem like a rather risky move. What was the reason to set the film in such an enclosed social setup?

GK: *Haseena* is not as much related to 9/11 as it is to our response to that event. *Haseena* is rallying for justice at the

mosque. She tries to achieve what she wants within the structure of the Islamic law. She does not attempt to come out of it and appeal to secular establishments. What I was trying to say is that there is a space in every religion in which one can address issues. Only when they are institutionalized that cover-ups happen. The character of the rich lady in the film points out just that.

SS: I think your point is very central to *Naayi Neralu* (2006). Even though Venku is within a rigid establishment, the intrusion of the man, who claims to be her reincarnated husband, comes across as a form of liberation. She is not completely averse to it.

GK: She is initially averse to the idea. She does not believe in reincarnation. But she realizes that one way out of this suffocating atmosphere is to pretend that as if she believes in it. That, in my opinion, is a form of protest. When we usually talk about protest, we only think of large-scale demonstrations, but in the world around us, we see a number of such small gestures which make life meaningful.

SS: In films of, say, John Abraham, social change is achieved through radical political change, whereas you take a bottom-up approach in your films. Do you believe that without large scale political change, a social overhaul could be achieved?

GK: In John's films, the characters are already politicized and aware of their situations. My films are about other people who aren't. Yamunakka, Haseena, Venku are not the kind of people who can take up placards and fight the order. Marx calls it "village idiocy". They are not. They have an innate instinct on how to respond meaningfully to their situation.

SS: In *Mane* (1991), which is unlike anything you've done and unlike other films dealing with marital relationships, there is so much happening around the couple, while the cracks are all within. It's very unreal. Why did you take a tale as personal as this and trying to view it through a sociological lens?

GK: *Mane* and *Kraurya* (1996) were two films that deal with changes that affect personal relationships. Rajanna keeps talking proudly about working in an MNC. India had just opened up their markets. I thought that agrarian society would be left behind in Rajiv Gandhi's "Leap into the 21st century". *Mane*, then, became a metaphor, with the rocking house, the walls, and the shed and so on. I don't show the people working in the shed. Rajanna thinks these people are a threat. He doesn't realize that the company he is working for is the real threat. He comes from a rural background. Initially, he doesn't want his wife to be with his aunt, who he thinks is morally questionable. But slowly, he starts pestering her to go to his aunt's house, knowing well that the inspector – who represents the state – will be there. There's a shift in his perspective. Such social changes also bring about changes in values. I wanted to register that. An extension of this is seen in *Kraurya*.

SS: You establish the dichotomy between rural and urban life, which you talk about, early on. Rajanna's rural life is just alluded to, and you shoot the suffocating

urban spaces, the decor in a completely unconventional manner. The sounds and the images, too, seem completely synthetic and shaped to precision. How did all this come up?

GK: In every film, one does that. But in Mane, you probably notice it because it's a little more stylized. For instance, the colour scheme in Mane and Naayi Neralu are the same. In the latter, it is more conspicuous while here I play with the colours. I felt that in Tabarana Kathe people got carried away by the narrative that they saw bureaucracy as the source of the tragedy. Where as what I wanted to say was Tabara is both the exploiter and perpetuator. So I thought that I should have a narrative that is more symbolic and one which doesn't exist in real life. I started working on a minimalist narrative, where you are forced to look at things. But the next film Kraurya, like Tabarana Kathe, is abundant with details. Naayi Neralu has the same red, green and white colour scheme of Mane. But I use it in a more realistic way there and in a more unreal fashion in Mane, which is why it became noticed.

SS: Even in Thayi Saheba, there is an abundance of red and deep brown in the indoor scenes. What was the motivation of have these scenes in such intense colours?

GK: One thing is that it was simply a detail. These are oil-lamps and would produce yellow/amber atmosphere. It was a period detail. And not all colors are red; there is just a dominance of red. Appa Saheb is always in white. Among all my films, Thayi Saheba wears the maximum number of colours, because it brings out the irony her character - An exterior full of colours but lonely within.

SS: You use perfume as a metaphor for the aristocratic legacy that the son carries. He tries to break out of it continuously. You are deeply empathetic towards him, but at the same time, you sympathize with Thayi Saheba. Is Thayi Saheba a revolutionary, a reactionary or a victim?

GK: When I was working on the script, I asked my wife, who hails from that

area, one detail that characterizes the aristocracy. She said Attar. I thought it was a good detail and I could use it in many ways. It is not a visual cue, but it has a strong conceptual presence throughout. What is Thayi Saheba? I wouldn't say she is a revolutionary, but she is not a reactionary either. We have this wrong notion of revolutionaries. Appa Saheb has a ideological clarity, while Thayi Saheba finds it impossible to understand these political terminologies. But in the realm of personal relationships she achieves everything that Appa Saheb doesn't. She's neither a reactionary nor revolutionary, but she's one with a very progressive attitude. The ideologue Appa Saheb takes to religion once he loses his legs. I gave another facet of it to other Zamindars, who want to retain their land after independence. Their notion of freedom is restricted to a political freedom from imperialists. So the freedom movement is not a part of women or the farmer class. It is restricted to a particular group. To highlight this historical reality, I wanted to take to get a period ambience. The film was made in 1997, 50 years of independence. I wanted to understand if we've really got freedom for everyone. The film is set in

a period between Gandhi's and Nehru's death and I wanted to raise to all those sociopolitical changes that took place and how it affected his legacy.

SS: With Dweepa, you jump right into a post-globalized India. The effect is established right in the first scene; indigenous people are being relocated, as in other third world countries. There is so much happening structurally in the film as well, with differences and splits manifest on many levels. Why the sudden shift from the minimalist, metaphorical modes of previous films to a confrontational one?

The film is not as much about relocation, which does happen in the background, as it is about submersion. We always talk about displacement, but we submerge more than just the geography: cultures, life-styles and, most importantly, self-esteem of the people. Ganapaiah's greatest shock is when he learns that his past does not count at all. Even his biggest supporter calls him a madman. Krishna hails from the city and represents the future in a way. He keeps talking about the world

outside the island. Nagi, on the other hand, has neither the burden of the past nor the enamored by the future. She is a person of the present. She thinks only about solving the current crisis the family faces. She tells her husband that she came to live with him in the island and can survive under any circumstance. I wanted to explore what makes this woman so resilient. That innate quality which Indian women have: managing with the little resource they have, negotiation with the time and situation. There are five characters in the film – I consider nature to be an important character because it is so directly involved in the family's lifestyle. Nagi is like the river, you can try to hold her with the dam, but she will overflow. Her essence remains the same. I wanted to construct the film like an inverted pyramid: first the village is submerged, then the island, then the family and finally it tries to submerge the couple. I'd say, even here, I work on a metaphorical level. I haven't gone after issues. It would have become another Tabarana Kathe. I didn't want to do that.

SS: When dealing with such a topic,

filmmakers often run the risk of exploiting their subjects. How did you negotiate this problem and decide on your limits and your approach towards the characters?

GK: Sometimes, we try to take a very easy approach. We don't look for grey shades. One of the problems with agitprop cinema is that they don't look for grey shades. The strength of films that are humanitarian in their concerns is that they always have grey shades. Sarbojaya in *Pathar Panchali* (1955) steals, Antonio in *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) steals. Yet we sympathize with them, because the directors succeed in diverting your attention from the acts of stealing towards the sociopolitical reasons of stealing. In agitprop cinema, you concentrate more on the action and don't go beyond that. Ray and De Sica make you understand the situation through this act. I, as a spectator, don't want Antonio to get caught because I have sympathized with him and understood the problem in all its dimensions. In other kinds of cinema, zamindars are evil. The real challenge for a filmmaker is to capture

the characters in grey shades, not pure white, not pure black. In Dweepa, when Nagi's husband dismisses her efforts, we don't become angry, we move to a higher space where we understand reality with much clarity. You realize that the male ego does not want to accept her sacrifice. You realize the gender politics between them. It's not husband beating the wife. He does not hit his wife, does not scold her, but there is gender politics going on,

SS: We can see this kind of grey portrayal in Kanasembo Kudureyaneri (2010), where some of the landlords try to help Irya out of the situation. In Kanasembo, you use an unconventional narrative structure which isolates the two classes, as if a person from one side can't see what's happening on the other side. Did you decide on the structure before developing the material or did you find a technique that suited the subject?

GK: I had wanted to make a fragmented narrative for some time. But are we going to use it for the heck of it? It shouldn't be the case. I was actually looking for a subject that demands such a narration. When I

found the story, it hit me because an event looks completely different when seen from two different places. I wanted to retain that structure because as a spectator, when I watch Irya's first dream, I think he is mad and that Mathadaya is a rational man. That is the attitude most of us have. We always think that the stories, dreams and myths of marginalized people are rubbish. When a man in coat and with a tie talks about "vision of India", we listen attentively. Today everyone is writing a book on a vision for India. In their vision, a large section of India doesn't exist. As a viewer, the first section is very convenient for me to criticize. When we see the same event in the second section, we learn a different truth. So, in a way, it makes me introspect about my attitude towards other cultures and myths. Rudri's dream is spoiled by not Mathadaya, but Basavanappa, who is more rationalistic. He has this wrong notion that if he destroys their myths, Irya and Rudri will progress. This is the biggest danger.

SS: In Gulabi Talkies(2008), you cover a lot of grounds, the film contains almost an excess of detail: fishermen's conflicts, communal riots, the Kargil war, the effect of Gulabi's TV on the neighbours etc.

Do you think all these events could be tracked to a single top-level problem?

GK: Gulabi is a unique film in my oeuvre. Gulabi is tied to the community, she is not the centre. She is as much important as the fishing community. It's a film about a community, not an individual. When you are talking about a community, you cannot just touch one point. I wanted to bring in all those elements, which has made our life complex, many of which cannot easily be solved. People very simplistically say that so and so is the reason for communal tension. Behind that there is globalization, behind that there is changed economic motivations. Hindus were bosses, Muslims were workers once. Then the situation changed. Then there's the exploitation of sentiments by the media. The original short story is set in 1930s. I shifted it to the 90s, which is a very turbulent period in recent Indian history. That's the period when economy was opened up, the Babri Mosque was destroyed, and private TV channels bloomed, which were blaring Vande Mataram in warlike tunes. I wanted to have the inner world of Gulabi and the outer world of the fishermen, each contributing to the other.

SS: There's been much talk about death of cinema. Do you think cinema is mortal?

GK: The media only looks at the dominant industries. When Antonioni came out with *L'Avventura* (1960), people criticized him because it was completely radical for its time. They were used to filmmakers like De Sica and Fellini. Even now we have directors from small countries like Taiwan making good films. These filmmakers are trying to find a unique idiom of expression that is only possible in cinema. I would say cinema is, in fact, becoming more cinematic. So I wouldn't be so quick to write the obituary of cinema.

SS: Your thoughts on digital filmmaking?

GK: In the olden days, directors needed to get the approval of the studio before they could acquire the equipment and start making their films. Then, in the sixties, the situation improved, with the waning of studio's power. That's how we could make films. Even then, we needed to get the various equipments before we could begin shooting. But, today, there is

no need for even that. You can make a film with a limited crew. I think it's a good thing; it gives everyone an opportunity to express themselves. But just because the resource is easily available, you should not misuse it.

SS: The 70s saw a boom in film societies, but they have gradually decreased in numbers since then. What do you think is the reason for this decline?

GK: You should look at it in terms of access to films. At that time, only film societies had access to world cinema. They used to file requests and get the prints. If a thousand people were registered in a film society and six hundred of those frequented it, only those six hundred had any knowledge about international cinema. Young people today have much more exposure to world cinema than those days. Nowadays, you can find any film sitting at the computer or walking over to your nearest DVD store. The need for film societies gradually went down. But at the same time, cinema-watching has ceased to become a communal activity. We watch it alone in front of our computers, instead of sitting with 800 people in a hall. The experience is totally different.

SS: So should film societies concentrate less on procuring films and more on making films a communal activity, generating discussion and debate along the way?

GK: Film societies should play a bigger role in culturing a viewer into a cinemate. Some film societies have not been able to do this, at least some of the societies I know of in Karnataka. They are familiar with world cinema but when it comes to a film from Kannada or Marathi they are not that enthusiastic. Discussions should be more inclusive and participatory. They should understand the cinematic and cultural norms of specific geographies. There is such discussion online. You watch a film and visit the web. You have forums where people discuss such matters.

SS: One perfunctory interview question - filmmakers who have had the greatest influence on you? You've mentioned Ozu elsewhere.

GK: I'm not influenced by filmmakers; I'm influenced by individual films. Some of my friends go after filmmakers and make sure they catch up with all their films. I don't do

that. I like Pather Panchali, but don't like some of Ray's other films. I mentioned Ozu because I admire his filmmaking. But that does mean I'm influenced by him. You can't see his influence in my films. Ozu is very minimalistic and his form is highly codified. You know that if three people are talking, he's going to go for a triangular composition.. If one character gets up, there will be a cut to a long shot instead of a dolly back or a moving camera. If there's a red, there will be a yellow somewhere in the image to balance it. If there are walls, they will be almost empty, without decorations. No character will break down dramatically. I can't do that. I need a little more drama in my films.

Girish Kasaravalli Interview: ‘Art Can Only Sensitise A Society, Not Solve Issues’

I met Girish Kasaravalli in Payyanur, a small Malabar town, where the 10th edition of the National Film Festival of India was held from June 9. He was among a bunch of celebrity guests on stage for the inaugural ceremony. Outside the venue, Kerala’s famous monsoon rain poured down mightily, much to the dismay of the festival organisers and young volunteers who whispered among themselves about the many guests who had to cancel their participation thanks to the weather.

The backwaters, marshlands and rivulets had spilt onto the highways leading to Payyanur, and the thick green canopy had collapsed and cut off railway connectivity to the town. Amid people who looked exhausted, either from the long journey or the harsh weather, Kasaravalli stood smiling. When it was his turn to address the gathering, the master filmmaker from Karnataka, recipient of 14 National Film

Awards, spoke eloquently about his delight to be at the festival that showcases Indian parallel movies.

“This is an important event,” he said. “There are international film festivals aplenty. We know who the major filmmakers from Iran are, but do we also know the parallel filmmakers from our own country?”

Post-ceremony and the screening of *Cinema Travellers*, an acclaimed documentary by Shirley Abraham and Amit Madheshiya about Western rural India’s travelling talkie culture, he sat in the lobby, and braving end-of-the-day fatigue, spoke at length about cinema as an art, the Kannada new wave, his admiration for contemporary Malayalam cinema, and his journey as a filmmaker.

■

We begin our conversation discussing *Cinema Travellers*. “Very interesting film,” he remarks, and after a gentle pause, adds, “... For us, filmmakers, it’s a nostalgic trip. Many of us have worked on celluloid, and have witnessed the changes that have come over filmmaking. We personally know many technicians who suffered when some technology became obsolete. This film is about those people too. Yet, it isn’t a sad story.

It is about resilience; about people's power to adapt to new things in indigenous ways. Like how that technician (in the documentary) uses an *agarbati* to unblock a clog in the machine..."

Kasaravalli has made two documentaries – one on his favourite writer UR Ananthamurthy for Films Division Of India (*U.R. Ananthamurthy, Not A Biography, But A Hypothesis*, 2013), and another on his fellow-filmmaker Adoor Gopalakrishnan (*Images/Reflections*, 2015). But, he doesn't identify himself as a documentary filmmaker. "Those were not real documentaries. They were biographies. I had a specific purpose, and a specific area to cover," he says. "I am not basically a documentary filmmaker. See, this film (*Cinema Travellers*) was in the making for several years. They followed the subjects tirelessly. I work in a stipulated time frame. I don't follow an issue or a subject the way they did."

The 67-year-old filmmaker, born and brought up in Shivamogga district of Karnataka, studied BA Pharmacy. He even embarked upon a career as a pharmacist, but left it behind rather soon, to join the Film And Television Of India (FTII), Pune, in 1975.

Cinema, he says, happened by chance. "I

grew up reading a lot of Kannada literature. I always wondered why these brilliant stories and novels were never adapted cinematically. When I got admitted to FTII – I must say, again, by chance – I wanted to adapt these pieces for my student projects. Even now, I am not a story writer. In my films, ideas come from the plot structure. They have to get reflected as a story, and identify the characters and their situation."

His diploma film *Avashesh* won the President's Silver Lotus Award for Best Experimental Short Film of the year. His second National Film Award came in 1977, for his debut feature *Ghatashraddha*, a tragedy based on a novella by UR Ananthamurthy.

In a career spanning four decades, Kasaravalli has made just 13 films. His last creation *Koormavataara* came out in 2011. Why the delay, I ask. "I am just lazy," he smiles. "I haven't started making another film yet. I have no trouble finding funds. There are many producers waiting for me to start making a film. There is no dearth of good material in Kannada literature for me to adapt. For me, filmmaking isn't a daily job or a compulsory exercise. I can't push myself to write or direct a film. If it is so, how will we, artistes, be different from say, politicians who have to make a statement every day?"

■

Quite a few writers in Karnataka have been murdered in the recent past for speaking their mind, and artistes such as Prakash Raj and Girish Karnad were recently revealed as targets of the religious fanatics who murdered journalist Gauri Lankesh. In the age of growing intolerance against writers and artistes, how should cinema talk about politics, I ask. A prominent member of the new wave that placed Kannada cinema in the forefront of Indian cinema, Kasaravalli says Kannada parallel cinema and literature have always addressed political issues. “I think this was the only new wave in Indian cinema that directly talked about politics,” he reminisces. “*Samskara*, for one, is a very sharp political statement. It started a new history in Indian cinema with its representation of reality without using ornamentation. Placard-holding politics isn’t what we did; we went in for artistic reinterpretation of issues,” he says. “Filmmakers who were part of Kannada New Wave, at least in the beginning, were socialists who looked at the structure of society from inside. They were not overtly political. They were not activists. But they were part of the system and were very critical of it. They were, as UR Ananthamurthy used to say, critical insiders.”

“There is nothing in our regular life which can be apolitical. Everything is political,” says Kasaravalli, whose films have always blended cinematic aesthetics with a subtle yet sharp critique of society. He says there has never been a question of choosing between cinematic form and the politics of the plot. “I am aware of that huge debate. But cinematic form for the sake of it or talking politics for the sake of talking has never interested me. Unless a film becomes a part of the ongoing dialogue in society – of the majority or the minority – I am not much impressed. For me, life is more complex than that,” he says.

“I am basically a *Renoirian*. And, Jean Renoir says that cinema is there to cover and interpret reality, and reality cannot be modified to suit your cinematic expression. I firmly believe that a work of art, while working out all complexities of the medium, should also have an eye on what is happening around us. Just having a stylistic approach is not an end in itself; it should somewhere reinterpret the conditions we are living in and, through it, make some metaphysical/universal statements.”

He firmly believes that art can only sensitise people, never solve issues. “Thanks to our busy daily life, we tend to overlook certain things in life, and gradually lose perspective. Art can help you gain that and make you

aware. If people are only able to see the positive side of development, films such as *Dweepa* say 'Look, there are negatives too'. We are not trying to dictate terms, but show things," he says.

I ask him about mainstream cinema in Tamil and Marathi that deal with subjects such as caste and identity; 'mass' films that put across socio-political statements loud enough for everyone to hear. "I must confess, I have not seen much popular cinema, not even the ones that create waves," he says. "I assume it might bring results. One of my objections to political films that are too loud is that they tend to lose out on subtlety. They turn everything into black and white; one against the other. But, is anything absolutely perfect or completely flawed? Art has to see the grey side and the many dimensions of issues. Even when we make statements, shouldn't we leave some room for analysis, debate and criticism? Instead of giving messages, aren't we here to initiate dialogues? Let the audience think. Let cinema generate a dialogue."

■

I tell him about watching *Tabarana Kathe* as a wide-eyed youngster, and how the final scene of the protagonist breaking down in fury and grief, his fiery gaze fixed at the camera, haunted me for days. The film is a stern

criticism of the apathetic system that turns a law-abiding man into a state of abjection.

"We, artistes are sensitive people who are always angry with the system," he says. "That anger is not a violent one, mind you. It is *satvik*," he says. "Violence is not the end-product of this anger, but contemplation about why things are the way they are. This emotion is there in all my films. *Gulabi Talkies*, for one. Gulabi is thrown out of society for her religion. In *Koormavataara*, the protagonist says he is fed up of playing Gandhi. 'Please kill me', he says."

In his oeuvre, he calls *Dweepa* the film that demanded the most physical strain. The film is set in a village on the fringes of a big dam, and speaks about the people whose lives are ruthlessly sacrificed for the sake of development.

"We had to create an ambiance; wait for the sun and the rain," he recalls. "But, it was a pleasure. When we get a good shot, all the effort and pain become worth it. For me, the real difficult part of film-making is to find the right way to capture things. Does this shot make sense? Is this story significant? Am I looking at the characters with all their complexities? I keep asking these questions. I have never been impressed by technical extravaganza, nor had the money to make a

movie using that. I have never used cranes, never done anything in DTS. Of course, today everyone expects cutting-edge technology, but I am more bothered about what I am trying to say,” he says.

■

Kasaravalli pins high hopes on India’s contemporary parallel cinema. “When people dismiss Indian parallel cinema and write obituaries about it, I feel it’s unwarranted,” he says. “We may not have another (Satyajit) Ray. We may not have made another *Pather Panchali* or *Charulatha*, but there are quite a lot of filmmakers who are doing things very differently, be it in using the medium, or looking at reality.”

“In 1979, at a film festival in Chennai, Ray said that the future of Indian cinema is Kannada cinema. Adoor has said that it was *Samskara* that inspired him to make *Swayamvaram*. Kannada off-beat cinema started its journey gloriously, but we failed miserably in between. But, in the past four-five years, I see new trends emerging. Digital technology has liberated filmmakers and enabled them to experiment with form,” he says. “Recent films such as *Thithi* take you to the place where the film is happening. *Harikatha Prasanga* creates cinematic tensions interestingly. This is how

Kannada cinema has been reinventing it’s own grammar,” he says.

Malayalam cinema, though, pulled off this feat much earlier, he says. “Cinema is not created in isolation, but in connection with culture, tradition and socio-political movements.. Malayalam cinema has maintained this connection intact. That is why these (Malayalam) filmmakers have been able to lift regional issues to a global level. Through local stories, they try to understand the universe, and the meaning of human beings’ metaphysical existence,” he says.

We talk about *Cinema Travellers* again. Isn’t it a painful irony that while meaningful cinema is getting confined to film festivals and niche platforms, money-spinners such as *Dabangg* are the ones that reach India’s rural heartlands, I ask. “Who should we blame for it? The filmmakers? I would say we need to blame the education system if the masses are watching trash,” he says. “Indian cinema is totally controlled by vested interests who have their eyes set on money. They would confer on parallel cinema many awards, but the fact is that they don’t want the audience to watch these films. These films are tagged as ‘award films’ and deemed ‘boring’,” he says.

Watching the groups of delegates hanging around the place, he says, “This is why film

festivals like this are important to me. We don't have many spaces that showcase serious cinema, where the audience can go in and receive films that show you unfiltered life and artistic experimentation."

Posted by Aswathy Gopalakrishnan on her blog page *Dhruvam* on April 27, 2020.

Originally published on Silverscreen on June 19, 2018.

Films

Angammal, 16	Ishanou, 64
Appuram, 31	Jooyein, 39
Baghjan, 29	Kiss Wagon, 27
Bobby Beauty Parlour, 36	Kurmavatara, 47
Body, 26	Maya Miriga, 87
Bunnyhood, 38	Monsoon Breeze, 30
Dead Dead Full Dead, 18	Poem of the Wind, 14
Dharam Sankat, 34	Riptide, 15
Dhrubor Aschorjo Jibon, 28	Second Chance, 20
Emuthi Puthi, 19	Tai Saheba, 45
Feminichi Fathima, 13	Tees, 24
Gagan Gaman, 35	Thamp, 75
Ghaath, 17	Tortoise under the Earth, 22
Ghatashraddha, 55	Viduthalai, 23
Gulabi Talkies, 44	
Guras, 21	
Hasina, 46	
Humans in the Loop, 25	
If You Know You Know, 37	
Illaralaare Allige Hogalaare, 48	

Directors

Abdul Aziz, 30	Nirad Mohapatra, 87
Abhijit Chowdhury, 28	Pratul Gaikward, 18
Abhijit Mazumdar, 26	Ramakaushalyan Ramkrishnan, 14
Afrad VK, 15	Saurav Rai, 21
Aranya Sahay, 25	Shashwat Dwivedi, 36
Aravindan Govindan, 75	Shishir Jha, 22
Aribam Syam Sharma, 64	Subhadra Mahajan, 20
Bonita Rajpurohit, 37	Suruchi Sharma, 35
Chattrapal Ninawe, 17	V. Chitravel Vetrimaaran, 23
Dibakar Banerjee, 24	Vindhya Gupta, 39
Fasil Muhammed, 13	Vipin Radhakrishnan, 16
Girish Kasaravalli, 44,45,46,47,48,55	
Humaam Arifeen, 34	
Indu Lakshmi, 31	
Jaicheng Xai Dohutia, 29	
Kulanandini Mahanta, 19	
Mansi Maheshwari, 38	
Midhun Murali, 27	

Languages

Assamese, 19, 29

Bangla, 28

English, 20, 37, 38

Gujrati, 37, 38

Hindi, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25,

26, 30, 34, 35, 36, 37,
38, 39

Kannada, 44, 45, 46,
47, 48, 55

Kullavi, 20

Kurukh, 25

Malayalam, 13, 15, 27,
31, 75

Manipuri, 64

Marathi, 17

Moran, 29

Nepali, 21

Odia, 87

Punjabi, 36

Rajasthani, 35

Santhali, 22

Tamil, 14, 16, 23, 30

Telegu, 30

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Mohit Tripathy

Special Thanks to

Partha Saurabh

Sneha Srikrishnan

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