

By Anil Chintamani

If I had a hammer, sang US entertainer Trini Lopez long ago, I'd hammer out a warning.

The Bangalore Film Society and fellow organisations have no hammer. Still, for four days in early June, they hammered out a warning, with cinema as their tool. The purpose: to generate awareness about the vital importance of water, its destructive capacity and the havoc man wreaks on it through ill-conceived development.

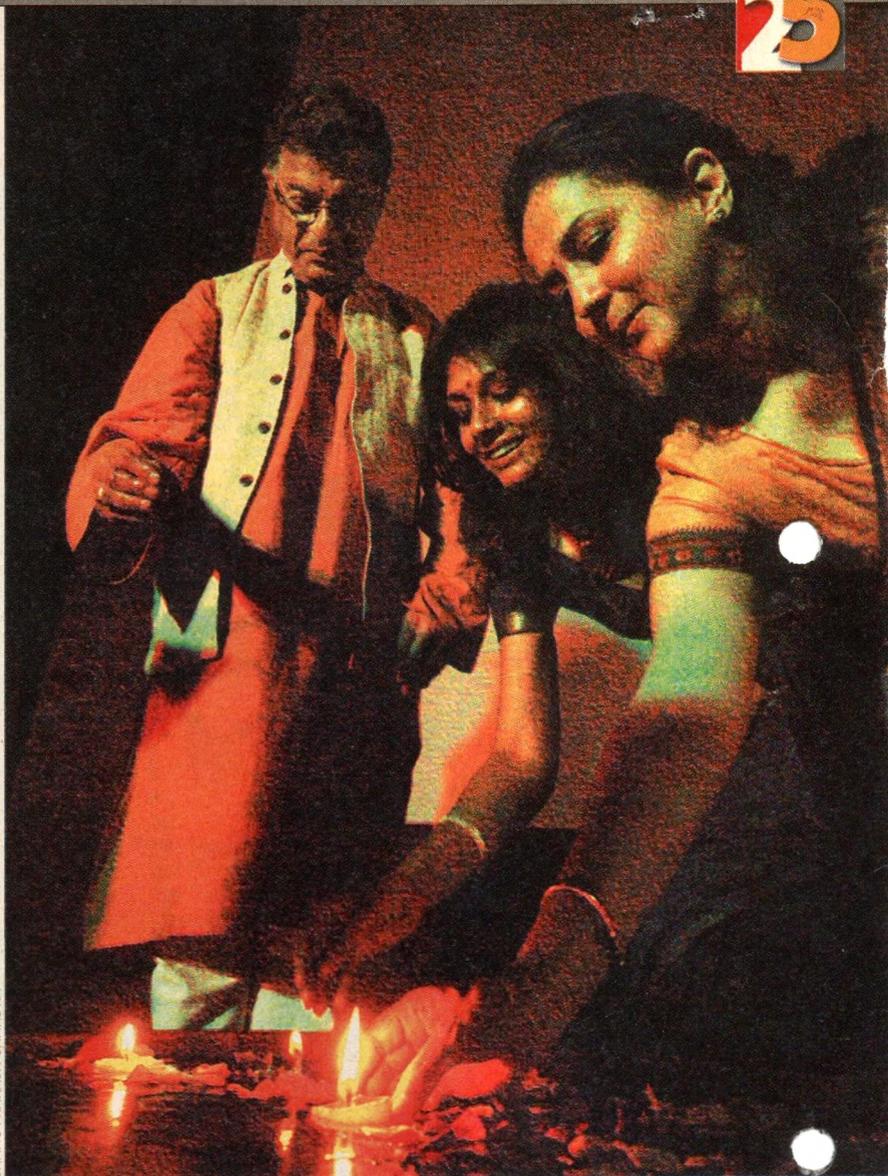
In the second edition of a multi-pronged exposition titled *Voices from the Waters*, five organisations screened documentaries and award-winning feature films based on water. Interactive sessions with common people who strived to find viable, eco-friendly solutions to their own water-related problems were also held.

The documentaries were from India, Nepal, China, Iran, Italy and Mexico. Many cast a spell on the viewers as much as cinema because of the message they sought to convey. The images on the screen had even the college crowd glued because of their sheer power and beauty.

Though most of the film-makers have to struggle for finances, they make no compromise on the quality of their creation. They pay keen attention to imaginative taking and cutting, shot mixing and audiography. *Let's not Disturb the Water* from Iran is a superb example.

Two other short films dealt with opposite ends of the water spectrum. *We Corner People* by Keshang Tseten from Nepal presented residents of a remote village of that country who saw water as a destructive force. *1000 Days and a Dream* by P. Baburaj and C. Saratchandran depicted the destruction of natural water sources by the establishment of a soft drink plant, as described by the villagers.

We Corner People, describes the surge that took a young woman's life again and again as 'black water'. Starting from different points, Tseten keeps coming back to the woman's death, with accounts of the incident



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Images with a message: (Clockwise from above) Girish Karnad, Nandita Das and Rohini Nilekani at the inauguration of the festival; stills from *The Shadows of the Tehri* and *Climatic Refugees*

from different relatives and friends. On rocks on either side of the river's course down the hill slope are two manual mills where women grind grain for flour. The day 'black water' thundered down the hill without warning, two women were working the mills. One escaped death but her sister-in-law lost her life.

The tragedy prompts efforts to build a bridge across the river to enable the children of the village to reach the school on the other side. As work on the bridge progresses, scepticism, ego



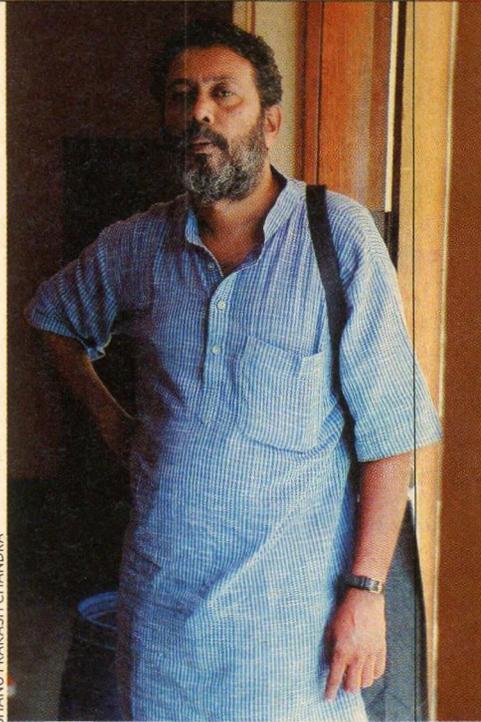


clashes, mistrust and rifts unfold.

Is water the villain here? Tseten makes no such explicit statement. In contrast, Baburaj and Saratchandran track the campaign of villagers who have no doubt about who the villain is. The soft drink bottling plant near their village has been responsible, according to them, for the depletion of drinking water bodies in the region. The documentary then traces the villagers' relentless campaign over 1,000 days and more to shut down the bottling plants, politicians' shadow-boxing over the issue, and some bureaucrats' role as handmaidens of money-bags.

Similarly, two feature films—M.S. Satyu's *Bara* and Girish Kasaravalli's *Dweepa*—represented the two opposite extremes. The first depicts the effects of a long spell of monsoon failure; in the second, a hillside homestead is in danger of submersion in the impounded water of a dam being built.

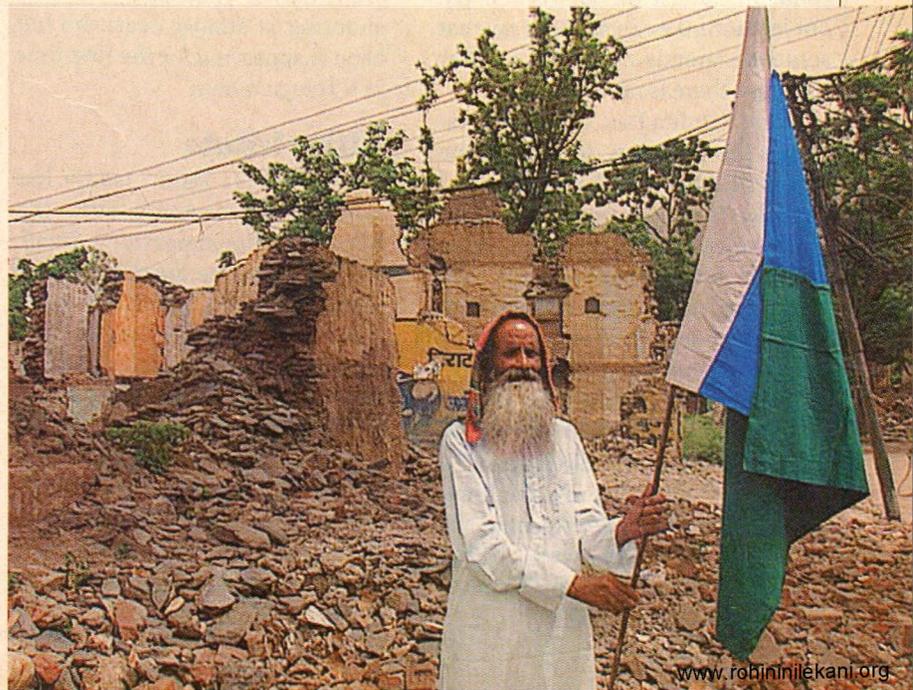
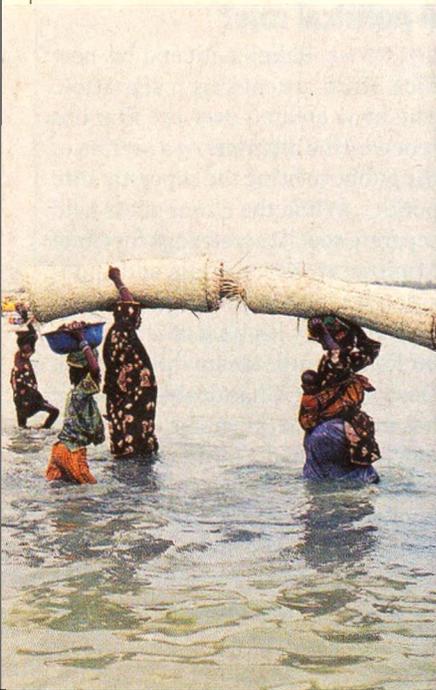
There were documentaries that took a keen look at positive efforts like rainwater harvesting, ground-water replenishment by contour bunding and water conservation. The scenes of damage by erection of bunds to contain floods, land erosion and the city dwellers' wasteful ways with water, were both stark and scathing.



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The theatre was full and there were many children. At least some of them may understand the danger and save nature.

C. SARATCHANDRAN, DIRECTOR



SOUTH SPICE

New sensation

CHENNAI: The only other person who hogs the limelight in Tamil Nadu is Chief Minister Karunanidhi's daughter and Rajya Sabha member Kanimozhi. Mediapersons were disappointed when she wasn't spotted with her father, who had come to Delhi recently to decide on the presidential candidate. However, to their relief, the poet-MP arrived the next day. Apparently, Sonia Gandhi was keen on meeting her. Political observers speculate that the meeting might pave the way for Kanimozhi's induction into the Union cabinet after the Presidential election. Karunanidhi, too, hinted to the media that she might be part of the cabinet soon.

Waiting to sizzle

HYDERABAD: Rakhi Sawant of the 'kiss-in-public' fame will soon be shaking her booties for *Salaam Hyderabad*, a film produced by Ch. Nageswara Rao and Rafatunnisa under the banner of Sri Raghava Productions. The movie, which is based on Hyderabad culture, is directed by Anand and has a multi-star cast which includes well-known comedian Ali. The shooting is almost over; the hot babe is appearing for the first time in a Telugu movie.

Fitting tribute

BANGALORE: Rajini mania has reached a crescendo with the release of the superstar's *Sivaji*, touted to be the costliest movie made in India. Television channels have been relentless in their coverage of Rajinikanth's persona and his film. Even the print media has devoted a large amount of space to it. Now, a Bangalore-based journalist, Mahesh Devashetty, has written a Kannada book on Rajinikanth, tracking his journey from a bus conductor in the city to the country's biggest star. He has



ILLUSTRATION: HADIMANI

interviewed filmstars, Rajinikanth's friends and former colleagues for the book, which contains some rare photographs of the superstar. The book will also be translated into Tamil, Malayalam and Telugu. The author, who is a fan of Rajinikanth, feels that Rajinikanth is a superstar in real life, too, because of his simplicity and humility.

A political role?

CHENNAI: Rajinikanth and his new flick *Sivaji* are making a sensation. The hype created over the film has renewed the attempts by a section of the public to bring the superstar into politics. While the clever actor held separate special screenings for Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi and opposition leader J. Jayalalitha, the duo played safe by heaping lavish praises on Rajinikanth. Meanwhile, Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu has invited the superstar to join the newly-launched Third Front.

Rajinikanth, however, is a person known not to antagonise anyone—the Third Front just wait and watch.

Rajesh Parishwad, Kavitha Muralidharan, Lalita Iyer



BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA

Such events should reach a wider audience. We need many more knowledge sharing platforms.

ROHINI NILEKANI, FOUNDER, ARGHYAM FOUNDATION

The chief guest at the inaugural function, Girish Karnad, had some harsh words for the government-run agencies' poor support shown to documentary film-making. Karnad also mentioned interesting asides about the possible impact of environmental abuse on our vocabulary. For instance, we can no more say that someone spends money like water "because there is no water".

Actor Nandita Das, who was present at the function, too had some words of advice. "The privileged," she said, "should become the voices of the voiceless. Bigger steps are so difficult to take that we don't take even a small step." Documentaries, in her view, "open our eyes to life's surprises even more than feature films."

The four-day festival drew several hundred adults and 1,500 school children. How many eyes did it open?

Roshni of Sisugriha saw the films. Emerging from the auditorium, she said: "We must save water". "Yes," agreed school-mate Anuj, "We must start in a small way..." ■