



## ***A Report\****

### ***Samaanthara-A Festival of Parallel Cinema and Retrospective of Girish Kasaaravalli followed by a one-day Workshop on “Re-viewing Parallel Cinema: Continuities, Discontinuities, Influences”***

#### **The Context**

What has been termed as New Wave cinema or Parallel cinema from the late 1970s onwards has had a very important role in determining the trajectory of cinema in India. The Festival of Parallel cinema and Retrospective of Girish Kasaravalli was conceptualized by the Department of Film Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad (EFLU) under the guidance of Dr. Nikhila H. In the present-day context of emergence of new cinemas across different Indian languages such as Marathi, Telugu, Hindi, Malayalam, Kannada, it was thought appropriate to look back at the New Wave films that left a mark on Indian cinema more than four decades ago, in order to see the relationship, if any, between the new cinemas coming in different Indian languages today and those films from the earlier decades. Also, the film festival circuits now well established in cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata etc. have dedicated audience for experimental and non-narrative films, whose film-viewing sensibility was shaped by the New Wave or Parallel films of the earlier decades.

In the context of such ‘breaks’ from mainstream cinema, this Festival and Workshop was intended to bring together scholars and practitioners of film, to understand the continuities, dis-continuities and influences of Parallel cinema on contemporary film practice.



## **Concept**

A concept note for the Workshop and Festival was put together based on the state's definition of new cinema through its film festival booklets and the existing scholarship on Parallel cinema. Parallel cinema/ New Wave cinema has been broadly identified by the existing scholarship with -

- Films invested in social realism. Films which focussed on presenting the social problems of the society as opposed to the escapism of mainstream cinema.
- Most of what is termed as Parallel cinema was concerned with regional, local questions and engaging with the nation and its condition through these specific perspectives.
- The theme of intersections with modernity can be thought of as one significant aspect which several films of the Indian New Cinema were interested in.
- Films were produced with small budgets and government assistance; outside the film industry mode of production.
- Several of the directors of Parallel cinema were trained from the Film and Television Institute of India and were influenced by European neo-realist styles of film making.
- These films used lesser known actors, were shot in real locations and intentionally moved away from the mainstream melodramatic aesthetic.
- This moment included both narrative and non-narrative cinema and meditated on the medium of cinema and attempted to create a new aesthetic of cinema.



The Film Festival was a venue to revisit some of the films of this era and the Workshop was the stage to problematize the prevailing understanding of Parallel cinema/ New Wave.

## **The Film Festival and Discussions**

*Samaanthara –A Festival of Parallel Cinema and Retrospective of Girish Kasaravalli* was held from 19 January to 26 January 2018. The Festival had screenings of 13 films; the selections by the curators of the Festival, Yamini Krishna and Vishnu Vijaykumar, both research scholars in the Department of Film Studies, The EFL University, Hyderabad, were made based on the availability of the films within time constraints. Many of Girish Kasaravalli's films that were screened at the Festival were made available to the curators by Girish Kasaravalli himself. The films were intended as initiators for discussion among the viewers. The Festival was inaugurated Prof. Subramaniam Shankar, Professor of English at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, reading out his inaugural address titled, "Parallel cinema Comparatively Speaking", where he placed Indian Parallel cinema in the context of Third Cinema and international film movements. The screening schedule included *Bhuvan Shome* (1969), *Amma Ariyan* (1986), *Daasi* (1988), *Naseem* (1995), *Swayamvaram* (1972), *Mandi* (1983), *Tabarana Kathe* (1987), *Ek Ghar* (1991), *Thaayisaheba* (1997), *Kurmavatara* (2013), *Kanaseembo Kudureyaneri*(2010), *Hasina* (2004) and *Arrival* (1980). Each film began with an introduction by a faculty member, and the screening was followed by discussions on formal, aesthetic and social aspects of the films. Prof TT Sreekumar, Prof. Madhava Prasad, Madhumeeta Sinha, Dr. Tharakeshwar V.B., Dr. Srinivas Lankala, Dr. Parthasarathi M., professors in various department in The EFL University, along with the Film Studies department faculty Dr. Hariprasad A., Dr. Hrishikesh Ingle, Dr. Nikhila H., Prof. Thomas Waugh (Visiting Professor and Professor Emeritus, Concordia University, Canada) and Saren Chatla introduced the films and participated in the discussions.

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**Photo 1. At the Inauguration of Samaantara: A Festival of Parallel Cinema and Girish Kasaravalli Retrospective, reading the Concept Note of the Film Festival**

The discussions covered a wide range of themes, a summary of which is attempted below.

In more than one way, these films were revisiting the history of the nation and problematizing, if not always breaking the structures of family and nation carefully built by mainstream cinema. They presented a vision from the fringes of the nation.

Through *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) and *Tabarana Kathe* (1987), the figure of the bureaucrat and the question of bureaucracy in Nehruvian India were discussed. The ideas of freedom and nation and what they mean to women were debated, initiated by the films *Thaayisaheba* (1997) and *Hasina* (2004). These films were in conversation with *Mandi* (1983) and *Swayamvaram* (1972) which questioned the ideas respectability and the family structure. *Naseem* (1995) and *Ek Ghar* (1991) marked a rupture in the history of the nation. They

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presented the shock of demolition of Babri Masjid and neo-liberalization, after which nothing would remain the same. *Arrival* (1980) was thought to be prescient in juxtaposing the slaughter house with the city; the same issue was played up in domestic space in *Ek Ghar* (1991). *Amma Ariyan* (1986) was discussed not just for making a call for revolutionary aesthetics, but also for the critique of the left it presented. The critique of the left utopia was also seen in *Swayamvaram* (1972).



**Photo 2. Inaugural Address by Prof. Subramanian Shankar, Prof. of English, University of Hawaii at Manoa**

*Daasi* (1988) reminded us of the feudal slavery of Telangana women, *Kanasembo Kudureyaneri* (2010) foregrounded the question of faith and modernity and presented a new dream of tilling the land for Irya and Rudri, interestingly directed by the Siddha himself. With *Kurmavantara* (2013), the Festival came one full circle thinking about Gandhian ethics in a world led by money. The question of modernity, its modalities and methods underlined most of the discussions in the Festival. The films thus not just resonated with the audience

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but also helped them reflect on our own condition of life in the cities, of the lifestyles that have changed and of ways of life and thinking left behind. They were thought to be particularly relevant in the context of the visible cracks in the capitalist system as reflected by the occupy movements and failing social systems across the world.

The introductions and discussions on the films were documented in the form of a Festival booklet produced by the Department of Film Studies.



*Photo 3. Release of the Samaantara Festival booklet by Girish Kasaravalli*

## The Workshop

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The one-day Workshop was held on 29 January 2018 in The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU). The welcome address was given by Dr. Nikhila H.. The concept note was read out Vishnu Vijayakumar, and the Film Festival report was presented by Yamini Krishna, both research scholars in the Department and curators of the Festival.

Prof. Madhava Prasad inaugurated the proceedings with his opening remarks, he problematized the state's way of defining Parallel cinema/New Wave as being inspired by the neo-realists and pointed out the difficulties in categorizing Parallel cinema, as such. He dwelt on the question of the rural and the urban in the New Wave films. The eminent Parallel filmmaker Girish Kasaravalli, gave a talk on Parallel cinema from a film maker's perspective. He noted that there was a uniting spirit to challenge the mainstream amongst the film makers but also pointed to the diversity in what has been homogeneously termed as New Wave. He noted that it included all forms of film, narrative and non-narrative and had varied modes of funding. Girish Kasaravalli also released the Festival booklet on the occasion.

Uppender Apparasu, a filmmaker spoke on "*Ankur to Daasi*, a history of parallel cinema of Hyderabad, that never got written"; Muhammed P, Guest faculty at Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad presented a paper titled "Face to Face with the Communist Real: *Mukhamukham* and the Critique of Left Popular in Kerala", Agni Behara, PhD Scholar, Pondicherry University presented a paper titled "Portrayal Of Caste And Class In Hindi Cinema: A Narrative Analysis of Shyam Benegal's Films", Mythri B., postgraduate student, EFL University presented a paper on "Women and Tradition in Girish Kasaravalli's films", Gauri Nori, PhD Scholar, EFL University presented a paper on "Foregrounding Cinescapes: Aesthetic experiments with space in New Indian Cinema". Dr. Hrishikesh Ingle acted as the respondent to the papers presented.

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The workshop was attended by 50 participants from different universities in India. The participants were given a dossier on literature on Parallel cinema/New Wave that was put together by the Festival and Workshop organizers.

The Workshop was followed by a public talk by film makers Girish Kasaravalli and B.Narsing Rao who answered questions from the audience on Parallel cinema and spoke at length about their film making practice.

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\*The Report is prepared by Ms. C. Yamini Krishna, Research Scholar, Department of Film Studies, The EFL University, Hyderabad