

CINEMA

Voicing social issues

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Documentary filmmakers K.P. Jayasankar and Anjali Monteiro say that marginalised people resist the relationships of power in creative ways



Renowned documentary filmmakers K.P. Jayasankar and Anjali Monteiro were surprised when the Nigerian prisoner whom they met while filming *YCP 1997* said, “We live in small prison and you live in large prison.”

When the censor certificate was made mandatory for documentaries, they understood the wisdom of the prisoner.

Censorship is a major concern for documentary filmmakers. “If you are politically inconvenient you will not get the certificate,” says Jayasankar. “After a struggle you might

get it but with a lot of cuts. We have been fighting against the idea of censorship. Censorship is used to cut down political dissent. Because of this issue, television is also reluctant to show documentaries. What people don't understand is that even if you have a censor certificate the law enforcing agencies can come and stop the screening at any time in the name of threat to law and order situation."

"Here is where the prisoner's answer is interesting," says Jayasankar. "He was so sensible that his words got stuck with us."

Now, they carry the message wherever they go. "That is why we don't show our protagonist as free and as learned as we are," says Anjali. "We try to project them as dignified personalities. You cannot be too invasive and get into people's lives and show them as victims. Something we should be very careful about," she says.

Focus on marginalised groups

The husband and wife have been making documentaries since the mid-1980s, when videography first became accessible. They have handled a range of issues. They have made many films focusing on marginalised groups, highlighting their creativity and their wisdom.

They have worked in Kutch for the last four years on *Do Din Ka Mela* and *So Heddan, So Hoddan*. The films are about the Fakirani Jats of the Rann of Kutch, a community marginalised on many levels. That micro-minority community speaks Sindhi but the language of the region is Kutchi and the language taught in educational institutions is Gujarati.

The film project is about people who have adapted to their scarce resources and understood the importance of being one with nature.

"What is important is that they take very little from nature and their output is more," says Jayasankar. "We take a lot but our output is very little. There is very little resource. They don't waste and they are very inventive. There is no competition. They collaborate with other communities. For, without cooperation they will not be able to survive in those hostile conditions," he explains.

The documentary captured the essence of their culture and the music, which is disappearing fast. It also recorded the music of the lone surviving Surando, a stringed instrument in the region.

"This film has gone to the local communities," says Anjali. "They were happy that somebody is documenting and making it available for the next generation. It is one way of keeping the tradition alive."

Jayasankar and Anjali have also made films based in Tamil Nadu, one on transgenders and another on feminist women poets. "A lot of our films deal with the question of resistance,"

declares Anjali.

The couple also feel that there is a great deal of fluidity in fiction and documentary -- many documentary filmmakers are using fictional elements and vice versa. Jayasankar says, "Ultimately, it is a kind of story telling. Use of genre-specific devices is being disregarded now."

With the advent of digital technology, the filming equipment has become lighter and more accessible. That has influenced the kind of films made and those making films.

Says Jayasankar, "Earlier, there was a strong distinction between who produced and who consumed. There were filmmakers with specialised knowledge and there were equipment-intensive and resource-intensive activities." More people produce films now, he points out, and also have more opportunities to show their films. They need not wait for a forum but can upload it to a website right away.

They have an e-group and they regularly interact. "We organise regular screenings. There is a kind of loose interaction through email," says Anjali.

As teachers of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Anjali and Jayasankar work with many young people. At present, they are working on a documentary on Farooq Mapkar, a bank peon, who is singlehandedly fighting the case against police firing in Masjid during the 1992-93 Bombay communal riots.

Says Jayasankar, "While all others have withdrawn their cases, Farooq is the only person who is waging a lone battle. His words -- 'Nobody has the right to shoot me while I am praying' -- are disturbing."

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