



ARTS ILLUSTRATED



Step 1 Build four walls using baked bricks and cement, Punch equally spaced holes for windows. At bottom center take hole all the way to floor. Once walls have set place concrete lid above. Add steps to front door if desired, Preheat oven



Step 2 Fill holes with windows, and place rain protection above each. Support door projection on pillars and get contractor to add random horizontal lines wherever he wishes. Sleep over the horizontal lines and pillars.



Step 3 Remove columns and horizontal lines and decorate windows with fresh early morning outlook of Classicism. Run plaster bands around windows; check central window for possible crown. Place balustrade above door projection. Sit back, relax, flip through European magazines.



Step 4

For a moment forget comfort and practicality. Concentrate on 21st century ideals that should be stated on facade. Think Revival and Imitation. Knowing that the best things have already been done, start by building up cornices around windows in plaster. Add fake frame around door; stick traditional looking brackets under projection. Create artificial double corner to give depth to composition. Stir Spanish stucco onto surface. Let simmer.



Step 5

Open up Dictionary of Classical Forms. Borrow studied and known elements from the past and apply them with scholarly flourish. Plaster panels, pediments, medallions, curls, ionic and floral patterns - stick them self-consciously all over facade, keeping in mind that architecture is poetry in stone. Twirl plaster as window edging till it drips. Add delicate Italian balustrade to projection to resemble French balcony. With no door leading to it, it becomes a French balcony that can't be used. But don't fret. As long as it's art, it's OK.



Step 6

Finally release all pent up ideas from system. All images of building collected over years of foreign travel, bits of detail picked up from French cathedrals and Gujrati havelis, and other memories and lurking desires. Use Greek columns and capitals liberally to frame composition. Statuary may be applied according to taste. Sprinkle Indian terracotta and filigreed screens as garnishing. The final flavour should give off deep whiffs of European history emanating from a traditional Indian present. Let dry for a day. Serves family of six.



Beneath the divided sky

National award winning director Girish Kasaravalli talks about his cinema and how the constantly changing urban landscape is important, and extraneous, in keeping with the language of his cinema relevant

PRAVEENA SHIVRAM

In the documentary made on Girish Kasaravalli by O.P. Srivastava titled 'Life in Metaphors', which incidentally won the National Award for Best Documentary this year, we see Kasaravalli standing under an umbrella, light rain making everything intensely lush around him. The film begins and ends here, this imagery of a filmmaker with a whole reel of national and international awards to his credit, looking so disarmingly ordinary. You are almost disappointed by the lack of flamboyance, the quiet shunning of theatrics, his white shirt and brown waistcoat

and grey hair sitting on him with a silence of a tame bird. But, only almost, because there is such an irresistible aura of nonchalance around him that quite masterfully he pulls your gaze towards something unseen, towards something that holds the weight of a metaphor with an authority that can only come with vision, clear as the surface of the ocean and deep for all the life it holds within. You realise with the suddenness of an epiphany that this quality is what characterises all of his work and why he remains one of India's most celebrated film-makers. And you realise, how in

his own way, he has continued to root himself in the urban way of life, always observing and joining the dots, most of which remain invisible, to give us a wholesome cinematic experience that is infinite in its far-reaching impact and yet, quite easily traceable to the centre from where it began. 'He is global in his message, but in his choice of subject, detail, he is very local,' rightly says UR Ananthamurthy in the documentary, a celebrated Indian writer whose work, *Ghatashraddha*, Kasaravalli had adapted for his film.

I wanted to start with this whole term of 'parallel cinema' that's always associated with your work. Do you think this is a very intellectual tag? Does it bother you?

When we are making a film, you know, these things do not bother us at all. What we concentrate on are the characters, the situations, the politics, the images. We don't even bother if it's going to be a commercial success, whether it's going to be branded as popular cinema, commercial cinema, art cinema, parallel cinema. So these are actually coined by the journalists and critics because they want to categorise and classify and simplify it for the reader, to explain what they mean. Whenever they write about our films, they use these terms; when I write about my films, I just say 'my' films.

In one of your earlier interviews, you said your films are about people who aren't already politicised and aware of their situations. That they aren't what Marx calls as 'village idiocy' but they have an innate instinct on how to respond meaningfully to a situation. Is that an extension of who you are?

It's actually an understanding of my society. In fact, when Marx used that term, it's a bit condescending, I thought. This 'village idiocy' itself... there is no 'urban idiocy'. So they seem to think that the villages lack some kind of intellectual capacity to understand things, which is not true. My characters are actually my attempt to understand what, in Sanskrit, we call 'dharanai', which is something that is there, which makes you carry on with your life. Similarly, all the characters have their own worldview, their own comprehension of what is right and what is wrong. In that, some people are able to carry themselves with dignity, without losing their integrity. I see that more in women than in men. I'm trying to understand what it is that makes them so strong. That's why, the three films that I made in the middle period, *Thaayi Sahiba* (1997), *Dweepa* (2002) and *Hasina* (2004), are based on the concepts of fighting for justice propagated by Gandhi. Ashis Nandy said that Gandhi's greatest achievement was bringing femininity to the concept of politics and war —because war or

winning is always considered to be with power and force — whereas Gandhi said that one can also win over people by sacrificing, by Satyagraha or else by negotiating. Hasina is totally Satyagraha, she goes and sits in front of a mosque and asks for justice. Nagi (*Dweepa*) tries to negotiate and wins; she doesn't think it is demeaning, or losing her principles. And Thaayi Sahiba, by sacrificing her land, sacrificing her zamindari, she wins over the affection of her people. So these are three ways of winning, three triumphs.

How do you manage to keep the focus of the story's intent alive?

First and foremost, for me, is the emotional impact of the film. How does it work? I have a little convention in the sense that I need to have a very strong dramaturgy in the film. The second thing is the conceptual script. How does the concept emerge? What am I trying to say through this character, this situation, through this drama? Most of my films are based on Kannada literary works. So the plot line is there, but I am trying



Still from the film *Dweepa*, 2002

to build a drama, a screenplay. When I am reading or listening to a story, certain images start cropping up. When I say images, I don't mean visual images. Images that already have impressions on our mind; it could be a visual or a concept that is emerging. Like when I heard the story of *Thaayi Saheba*, I suddenly saw the possibility of the journey of *Thaayi Saheba* as a parallel to the journey of society. The personal politics and the politics outside that I can juxtapose. Once that was clear, I began wondering, where should *Thaayi Saheba* be? Then I thought of the zamindari background. Then I was wondering how do I make her adopted son, now a zamindari boy, stand out in a crowd? My wife, who is from the northern part of Karnataka, said they normally use attar in those parts. So that becomes the running thread in the film, that the boy cannot hide himself because of the attar. So the visual image of a zamindari town, the perfume,

which is a concept and then juxtaposing the journey of the freedom movement with *Thaayi Saheba*...these kinds of things slowly start occurring in my mind. My scripts, therefore, are written over a period of one or two years. Another example is *Koormavatara* (2012), which was based on a story I had read a long time ago. So, when the Anna Hazare movement began, everyone started calling him Gandhi, and I thought there was a need to rethink Gandhian ideology. Today, society has accepted consumerism with open arms. Gandhi was against that; he was one man who was saying we need to lead an austere life. So what kind of a dilemma does a man who wants to become Gandhi, face? Then I thought of this film, which is based on a film being shot, about an actor trying to play Gandhi and his personal life. That's how it emerges; it can start with anything.

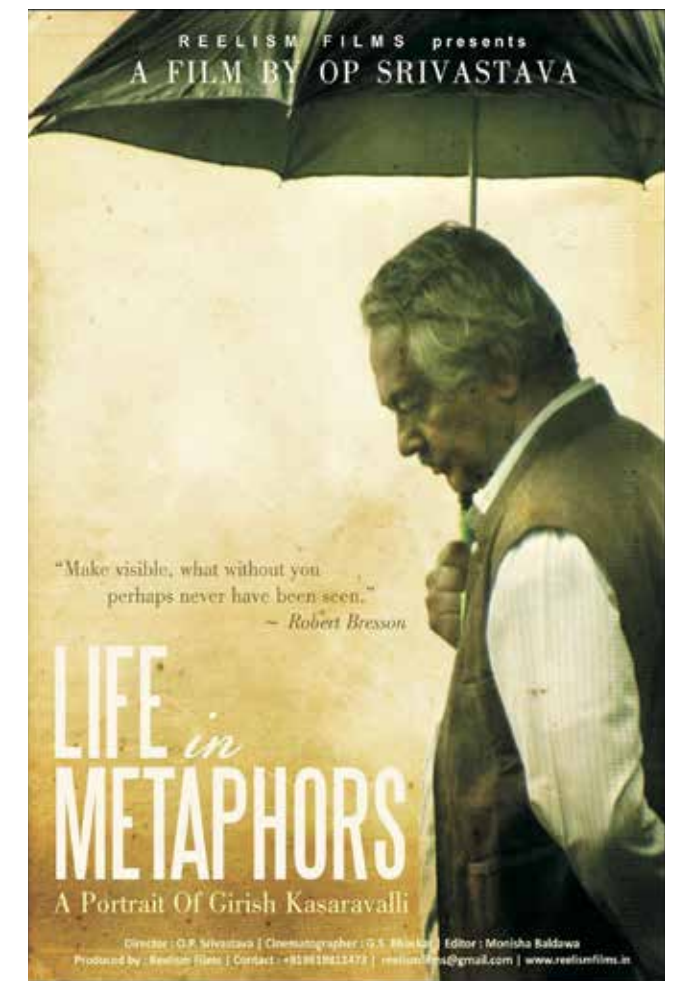
I met Girish Kasaravalli in Bengaluru for the interview in his house that is filled with little curios, photographs, paintings, plants, furniture and a lot of light, all somehow fitting themselves with designated ease like coins falling into a slot machine. It felt like bits from each of his films were right there weaving their stories around you, drawing their energy from the master filmmaker himself. He spoke in careful, measured words, at a languid pace that allowed you the space to invest in what he was saying. And gradually, almost unsuspectingly, you find that you have entered a neat little clearing in the deep end of the forest, so to speak, where thick possibilities surround you, allowing you the luxury to survey it all from the comfort of space he has created for you. It is something, I feel, all of his characters (actors) appreciate and function from, because his films are always an extension of the characters he creates. It is their world and worldview that we



Still from the film *Dweepa*, 2002



Still from the film *Thaayi Saheba*, 1997



Poster from the film *Life in Metaphors: A Portrait of Girish Kasaravalli*, 2015



Still from the film *Gulabi Talkies*, 2008

inhabit briefly, just as Kasaravalli did, transitioning with ease from creator to observer. In the documentary, Deepti Naval, who worked with Kasaravalli in the bi-lingual film *Mane* (1990) says, 'His films are going to remain; it's a statement of the times we are living in'. And they are. They help us navigate this world with the invigorating freshness of cold water on a hot day, giving us a short respite from the sometimes stifling claustrophobia of reality.

It seems like you are a filmmaker all the time, constantly observing and cross-referencing ideas. Do you ever stop?

I'm not fed up with this medium and think there are a lot of things

to be done from my side, but yes, I am constantly observing. When you're walking on the road, you notice certain things, something interesting, this dialogue is interesting, this is meaty; let me store it somewhere, it might work. Not only while walking on the road, while reading, some interesting things come and I store it in my mind. That's a constant process. Sometimes, I listen to music, close my eyes, and think about the film even though, as far as music is concerned, I am tone deaf, but I listen to music... it can take you to another place.

When we look at our childhood or the life that we had, those images and memories are static, but when we're living here in the city, everything is always in a state of

movement. As a filmmaker, how do you keep your films relevant all the time?

It doesn't come from the details, it comes from the concerns. Even if you are making a film about the village of your childhood, you can still make it relevant. Otherwise, why should one think about history at all? History is very relevant, Tughlaq is very relevant, mythology becomes relevant in most of the cases because that is how you can interpret it. Often, I find that the so-called contemporary films based on contemporary events fall flat. Though they are talking about a contemporary issue, they do not rise above the issue. It doesn't transcend the time and space limitation. The relevance

Still from the film *Kanasamba Kudureyaneri*, 2010



Still from the film *Hasina*, 2004



does not depend on whether it is contemporary, or what is happening today. Even something that happened hundred years ago, if you understand its conceptual content, it becomes relevant.

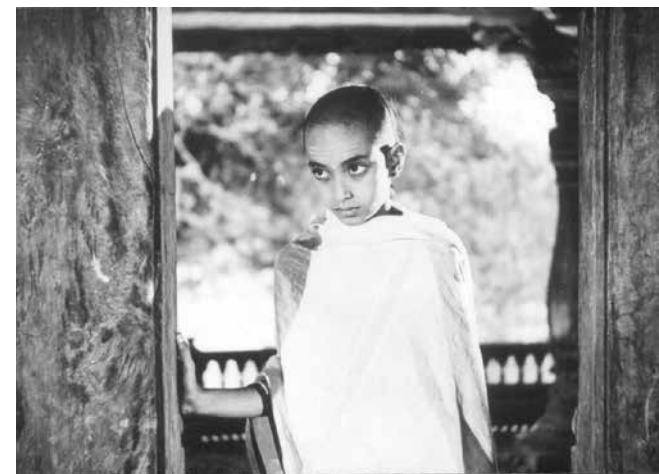
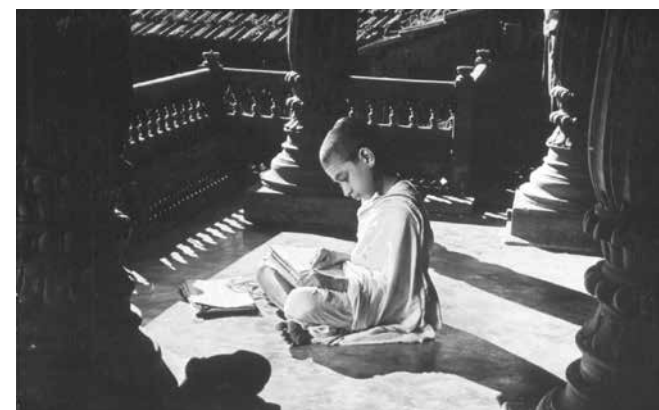
Do you look at cinema as a viewer? Is it one of the banes of a filmmaker, that you can't ever see it as a viewer, you have to see it only as a filmmaker?

I don't know what this 'viewer' is. While watching a film, I'm a viewer. I don't look at being a filmmaker as a stumbling block. I'll take the same analogy... I listen to music, but I do not understand music. But if a man who understands music is there, his enjoyment is more than mine. He can also understand how the singer is moving from one swara

to another. This, I can only read and understand, but he can experience it. The knowledge enhances the experience; it doesn't become a stumbling block.

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If last year was the year of the small-budget Tamil film *Kaaka Muttai*, then this year seems to belong to *Thithi*, a small-budget Kannada film by Raam Reddy, which after making waves internationally, is being released in theatres across the country, at least the metros. In a country largely crazy about big-budget, larger-than-life bonanzas, such films usually fall through the cracks. Early this year, Kasaravalli found himself embroiled in a controversy when he said it was 'insensitive' to award the Best Film National Award to *Baahubali*, the opulent mythological drama in Telugu, by 'ignoring the best regional language films, which touched upon issues plaguing society'. 'When you discuss the film, you need to look at the other politics that operates in the industry,' he says. 'That's nothing to do with the work of art, nothing to do with the film, that's another kind of politics, which is the politics of film culture. There are big-budget players, there are small-budget players, there are players who use this medium to make money and there are players who use this medium to say something. Unfortunately, in India, the whole industry infrastructure is in the hands of the people who are using cinema as a business. It's not in the hands of the people who think of it as a tool for self-exploration or art or whatever it is. And so, exhibition and



Stills from the film *Ghatashradha*, 1977

distribution is devised to suit their purpose. In Europe and America you have small theatres. For the past 100 years, we have never thought of having theatres like that, it is always bigger the better. And, the bigger the better not only in terms of the size of the theatre but also the budget, and so on. If we understand this politics, then we know why our films are not doing well. Not that the audiences are rejecting them. Audiences don't even get a chance to see them,' he says.

But Kasaravalli, for all his meticulous analysis of how the film industry in India functions, for all his muted fervour for change in how cinema is consumed, remains undeterred when it comes to his practice itself. 'My third film, called Three Pathways, based on a novel by Yashwant Chittal, was a very ambitious film. It was the last black and white film in Kannada, and the lab where I was processing the negatives closed down, and something happened in the process where half of my negatives got exposed and I couldn't complete the film the way I wanted to. It took me eight years to get over that and make my next film.'

It is, perhaps, something he has learnt from his characters – this will to move on, this *dharanai*, as he called it that remains unfazed even when he loses half his film. But then, Kasaravalli is safely cocooned within his definition of filmmaking, keeping the unpredictable, the uninformed and the unevolved at bay when he says in 'Life in Metaphors': 'I am not making a perfect film; I am making an imperfect film.'



Step 7

Accept builder's offer to demolish house and build flats. Take money, buy plot in suburbs, and start again from Step 1.