

Lifestyle & ENTERTAINMENT

The Statesman

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TO HELL AND BACK

'Any representation is a misrepresentation'. The video camera is Shalini Kantayya's tool for communication with which she captures the essence of life, writes **Mathures Paul**

FOR a filmmaker life is filled with trials and tribulations. Shalini Kantayya uses film/video as a tool to educate, inspire, and empower audiences. She received a Fulbright Fellowship to make a documentary film about political street theatre in India and her recent documentary, *Manthan* (The Churning) received the first prize for best documentary at the Asian American Film Institute Festival.

"I am continually moved by art in India, by the diversity of its traditions, by the way ancient arts merge with current politics and pop culture. I am awed by vibrant political expression at the grassroots - and find this to be critical to any democracy. I am still in the process of making the film, and will return to India at the end of this year for a fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies that will enable me to complete the film."

While working on the documentary, she travelled across India but her focus was on Chennai, Kolkata and Delhi. "From my research it seems that street theatre thrived prior to the 1980s, but with the onslaught of cable television, people became less engaged with this public art form. I still believe that street theatre has immense power to



communicate information, to raise awareness, and to engage communities with community issues."

Like many filmmakers, she began her career working on documentaries but slowly turned towards fiction. "And I still have a great love for documentaries and will continue to make them. But I felt bound by the idea that I was conveying 'the truth'. I bring my own bias to any story, as any filmmaker does. It can never be purely objective. Any representation is a misrepresentation. With fiction, I can be more honest. I can create worlds without being bound by the facts or the premise that I am

telling 'the truth'. And fiction does have the capacity to be a clearer mirror of reality. I am not saying it always is, but it has the capacity for it. And a part of me just strives to make 'beautiful pictures' and you are more in control of making images in the fiction genre."

Films such as *Bombay Longing* were shot in India. But many of her projects have also been shot in the US. "The problems she had to deal with were not extremely different in either of the two countries. "Production is always hellish on independent films, whatever the

country may be. Every independent film is trying to accomplish so much with so little resources."

In the United States, there are six major media conglomerates that control almost everything we read, hear, and watch. Keeping this as the backdrop she formed 7th Empire/Amma Films. "In a country that declares itself a democracy, it is a major problem that people lack access to opinions of dissent. For instance, many Americans are outraged with the country's current leadership

launched 7th Empire Media with the mission of bringing a professional voice to people through media."

But what made her take up filmmaking in the first place? "Most days I wish I could do something else, anything else. But the truth is (at the risk of sounding trite) I fell in love with images. There was actually a moment, when I was in a Tibetan monastery in Bylakuppe (South India), and I was in a sea of hundreds of monks praying. I was acutely aware that they were reciting their culture in exile, and at that moment, I felt like there were things that I could not express in words. And before I knew anything about iris or aperture, I began to put imaginary picture frames over everything I saw. I actually began to rediscover my sense of sight, and see the world in a new way. That was 10 years ago. And while I often describe my relationship with film as rocky and sometimes abusive, I am still in love with the medium and its power to inspire, educate, and move people."

She is currently in the final stages of finishing a short science fiction, called *A Drop of Life*, a film about the future of water. It is a film about two women, one Indian and one American, and the convergence of their shared struggle for access to clean drinking water. It features Nandita Das.

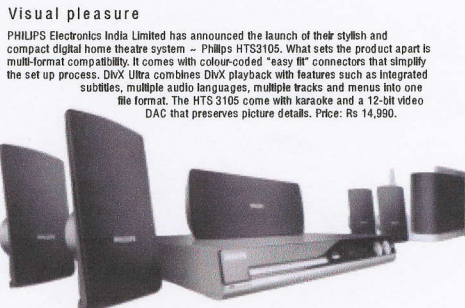
"I am a huge fan of Aparna Sen. She is a brilliant writer/director. I wish her films were more widely distributed in the West. I wish her films were more widely distributed in the West. I have been moved by brilliant actors like Konkona Sen, Nandita Das, Seema Biswas, as well as Meryl Streep, Uma Thurman, George Clooney," rounds off the filmmaker, who is making a place for herself in the most competitive industry in the world.

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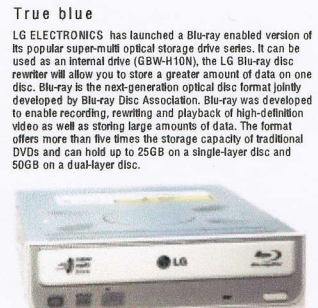
and foreign policy. I myself have participated in protests against the war on Iraq in which more than a million people marched - but it rarely makes news, so no one knows. No matter how you feel about these issues, I believe that we should all have access to both sides of the story. The Internet is changing some of this, but six media empires continue to control television, radio, and print media. I



Hands free
LOGITECH has announced the launch of a new wireless presentation controller with a built-in programmer timer. The Logitech Cordless 2.4 GHz Presenter will help business professionals manage their time while they wirelessly control their presentation. The gadget is designed for the growing number of professionals who frequently deliver presentations. Its features enable people to maximize eye contact. The timer, displayed on a one-by-half-inch LCD, is large enough to see at a quick glance. Price: Rs 5,995.



Visual pleasure
PHILIPS Electronics India Limited has announced the launch of their stylish and compact digital home theatre system - Philips HTS3105. What sets the product apart is multi-format compatibility. It comes with colour-coded "easy fit" connectors that simplify the set up process. DVI Ultra combines DVIx playback with features such as integrated subtitles, multiple audio languages, multiple tracks and menus into one file format. The HTS 3105 come with karaoke and a 12-bit video DAC that preserves picture details. Price: Rs 14,990.



True blue
LG ELECTRONICS has launched a Blu-ray enabled version of its popular super-multi optical storage drive series. It can be used as an internal drive (GBW-H10N), the LG Blu-ray disc burner will allow you to store a greater amount of data on one disc. Blu-ray is the next-generation optical disc format jointly developed by Blu-ray Disc Association. Blu-ray was developed to enable recording, rewriting and playback of high-definition video as well as storing large amounts of data. The format offers more than five times the storage capacity of traditional DVDs and can hold up to 25GB on a single-layer disc and 50GB on a dual-layer disc.