

FILM

Real Reel

Abhijit Ghosh-Dastidar

Mumbai Film Festival (Oct/Nov,09) presented documentaries and real-life features, with loose narrative ties, which highlight topical immediacy and aesthetic nuance. Ermanno Olmi's "Terra Madre-Mother Earth" (Italy, 2009, 78 mins, colour) focuses on the Terra Madre World Cultural function in the industrial city of Turin, of Oct 08, where 1202 communities had assembled. The Slow Food association's third get together was a congregation of more than 6000 farmers, shepherds, fishermen and cooks, from over 130 countries, representing 1202 communities. There are quotations from Virgil of 29 BC, as children play with apples in a school garden. In the landscape there are towers, and a river along the fields. The stunning visuals capture the assembly in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Malnourished African children, nomads, local communities and indigenous people, Red Indian Incas and India's Vandana Shiva are the humble custodians and guardians of agro-bio-diversity. Speeches extol that children die at the doors of Europe at barricades, even though Earth is a generous giver to all. Speakers note that there has been an enormous increase in racism against blacks.

Visuals describe that Africa is poor because of corrupt politicians. Crop diversity in African fields feeds the increasing population and financial banks. From Turin's river and industrial chimneys, Fabio Olmi's camera pans over animal skulls and cobwebs. Worries are expressed over lack of water, increasing use of fertilizers, global warming and consumerism. Abundance and waste continue, even though the earth's resources were not infinite. The conference hall is full of speeches and big screams. The scenario shifts to Svalvard island in Norway. A global community has assumed global responsibility. The camera tracks from fields, grain cutters and tractors to fishing boats in the sea. Food and bread in India, are presented with quotations from the *Upanished*. The seeds were being patented, where 95% were genetically modified seeds. Privatization was created by the British rulers. Seeds are saved in Uttarakhand region, in northern India.

Italian ballads proclaim the crushing of seeds and terraced cultivation in north Italy. A carpenter displays agricultural tools and shoes. To live with less will be the new renaissance. Rain falls on tiled roofs. There are close-ups on seed planting and harvesting. Overhead shots of farming and the planting of garlic seeds, glide. Night, moon, river, the sounds of aircrafts and whizzing of insects are part of the fleeting tableaux. An Italian farmer is observed, as he plucks cauliflowers. A child with a cat plays around red chillies, brinjals, ripe tomatoes, and beans. Slow Food organization aims to produce tasty food, cultivated in a clean manner and traded fairly. Olmi's film documentary is a variation on agriculture insight, with perfectly shaped stunning visuals. The indigenous vignettes are linked by occurring events in lands still without telephone, light or gas.

"*Sound Track for a Revolution*" (USA/UK/France,2009, 82 mins, colour) by film makers, Bill Guttentag and Dan Sturman, begins with a Harry Belafonte

quotation : “You can cage the singer, but not the song”. The history of the American civil rights movement is traced through powerful freedom songs and music, resounding along picket lines, mass meetings, paddy wagons and jail cells. Music gave courage and drive to those locked in county jails. Freedom songs composed by John Legend, Joss Stone, Wycef Jean and the Roots play as backdrop to interviews with Congressman John Lewis, singer Harry Belafonte, Julian Bond and diplomat Andrew Young. The demonstrators convey that one could take away everything except the songs. A student leader recalls that in slavery, songs were one way of communicating. The civil rights movement started with the message of Mississippi, where in 1960, there was segregation for the coloured, who were 45% of the population. Restaurants, cinema halls, buses and grave yards were segregated. The Angie Stone song “Wade in the water” recalls bus segregation in Montgomery. Rose Montgomery, Martin Luther King and Dorothy Cotton showed that it was more respectable to walk in dignity than ride in indignity. The citizens council unite, and soon Martin Luther King's house is burnt. The negro citizens of Montgomery and Alabama continue the non-violent protests. The US Supreme Court decides that bus segregation is unconstitutional. The bus agitations spread to restaurants with the song, “Everybody sings freedom”. There were regular schedule mass meetings, in spite of growing violence in Memphis. Ignoring pouring of hot water, burning with cigars and beatings, non-violence was the winning approach. The camera zooms into black smoke, as the fuel tank of a bus blows up from incendiary devices. The Hank Thomas song asks : “Which side are you on?” The Joss Stone song “Keep your eyes on the prize, and hold your own”, and negro spiritual “Don’t hold me” became songs of protest. The oral tradition of song “Lord will see us through” sustained black life. TV brought news all over the country. Children join the movement for equal opportunities and dignity. The song “I am on my way to freedom land” associated with the message “You are going to jail, I went there last week”. The songs came from old black churches and Alabama choirs, ringing out “We shall overcome some day”.

Rockie Haven sings “I was standing by my window” at the funeral of a black boy killed in custody. College students observed “Freedom Summer” in 1964. Still photos focus those beaten, shot, lynched, drowned and killed. Posters plead ‘Turn towards’ peace, while protestors sing “Marching up to freedom land”. Martin Luther King is assassinated, and marchers sing as his body is drawn in a mule cart. John Legend sings “State of freedom–Hallelujah”, and ultimately peaceful non-violent means removed segregation. Dreams survive with the Roots song, “Keep on walking, talking, marching on a piece of land”. The film’s audio-visual space is filled with live footage documentary of music and shared humanity. Buddysquires and Jon Else's photography evocates the civil rights protests. □□□