

Short slices of real life stories

Short is not always sweet. At least not when you are trying to portray real life stories that don't come with sugarcoated pills to provide relief. The Centre for Civil Society's search for truth has taken everyday cases of harassment caused by legal and regulatory restrictions as well as bureaucratic process of approvals and licences and encapsulated these in the form of a film festival held in Delhi over the week-end. The first of its kind, "Jeevika 2003: A National livelihood documentary competition" - inaugurated by film actress Nandita Das on January 17 - saw nine films being screened as part of the attempt to showcase social, cultural and religious practices that prevent or constrain people from earning a honest living.

From documentary films that focused on the struggles and aspirations of sex workers to Punjab farmers lured by money power taking the dangerous and illegal road to a better life abroad, the winners here probably had more reasons to cheer, specially after their films faced rejection at the Mumbai International Film Festival.

Screened at the India Habitat Centre, Shohini Ghosh bagged the top prize for her documentary "Tales of the Night Cities" which follows the film- maker's journey with five sex workers and a man through their work and world. With Kolkata's red light area forming the backdrop of this documentary, the struggles and aspirations of the sex workers who constitute the Durbar Mahila Samanyay Committee form an integral part of this effort.

Rahul Roy's documentary may have lost out in the MIFF race, but his "The City Beautiful" won the second prize at this competition. The story of two families caught in different types of domestic struggles, this 78-minute documentary looks at the different ways in which the two come to terms with their problems.

Exploring the contradictions characterising Government policies towards conservation is "Turf War" which bagged the third place in the competition. Directed by Sanjay Barnela and Vasant Saberwal, the documentary revolves round the Great Himalayan National Park in the Kullu Valley which was brought under the regulations of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act in 1999. Also part of the festival were Reena Mohan's "A Group Portrait", Jyoti Patil's "Liquor vs Living", Shri Prakash's "The Fire Within", Sanjay Maharishi and Anuradha Maharishi's "Aruvacode Diary", Aarti Bhasin's "The Bamboo Children" and Meera Dewan's "Backstage Boys".

By Lakshmi Balakrishnan