

This Q&A with Sindhu Thirumalaisamy is being conducted via Google Docs and will begin at 8:30 pm ET; you can leave questions and responses for the filmmaker through May 1. If you have any technical questions, please send a text message to **(716) 427-4125** and a staff member will assist you.

Audiences are welcome to write in their questions and responses directly in the document below. Please do not delete other participants' comments or questions. You can identify Thirumalaisamy's responses in **brown**. Curator Ekrem Serdar's responses will be in **magenta**. We ask all participants to respect Squeaky Wheel's [community guidelines](#). Unless you are logged into a Google Account, your questions and responses are anonymous, but you are welcome to identify yourself if you'd like. Audiences are welcome to leave questions or comments through May 1, 2020 underneath the horizontal line.



Ekrem: Hello everyone! We decided to start the Q&A at 8:30 to give everyone a little time to login and watch the films. We'll be on and here at 8:30 ET, so feel free to make yourself comfortable in the meantime :), and we'll be back soon.

Meg: Just dropping in early to say I enjoyed both films and found them really beautiful. Thanks so much - unfortunately can't attend the 8:30 q & a live because of an appointment with a student but will look back and read with interest!

Sindhu: Meg, thanks for watching!

Ekrem: Ok, hi and welcome to the Q&A everyone! Thank you all for attending. Sindhu, are you here?

Squeaky Wheel would love to know about your experience of the event. Please take this brief, anonymous survey [here](#).

Sindhu: Hi Ekrem, hi everyone! I'm here! Here's a photo of me in my "studio" :) Thanks for watching the film, I'm excited to be doing Q&A this way.



Ekrem: hi Sindhu! Here's a smaller picture of me :). For all of you joining in: feel free to send us a pic of yourself! We'd love to see you! (Covered my eyes as I felt like they were too red and got embarrassed)



Hi, this is Judith -- both films are stunning, so beautiful. I wanted to ask, given the laser-sharp analysis of the first film, your choice to make the second film more elliptical...

Sindhu: That's a great pic Ekrem! Hi Judith, thanks for your comments. Well, the first film is sometimes shown as a silent film, without me reading. So it's not always so didactic. Sometimes it works as a mural-film and it's in the background to other things. I think that the second film

being a longer form, something that I imagined would be shown more in an immersive cinema environment made me want to work with a form that was more layered. I also think that there were things happening around the lake that needed to be “revealed” or “hidden” with some care.

Judith: Yes, you did that really beautifully, they are revealed and hidden at the same time, oblique. The sunset sequence is really amazing! My parents live on top of a mountain in the San Fernando Valley in the outskirts of Los Angeles, with a western exposure. They take a photo of the sunset almost every night -- completely electric, pyrotechnic with the smog. Hundreds of identical photos over 40 years.

Bryan: the sunset sequence was amazing. If I could see the sunset from home I would probably take a picture every day.

:) those views are very sought after.

Ekrem: Hi blue cursor! Some things are good :D. How are you?

I'm well. It's Tabia. I got nervous about asking my question and didn't wanna clog up the page.

Ekrem: No clog! This space is for everyone :). Ask away!

Tabia: Sindhu, I really like how you captured the multiplicities of the lake in your second film. Was your intent for it [the lake] to be both passive and active in how its conceptualized? Passive being shots of the lake and how its being used and active being the commentary (audio and text) of it.

Hi Tabia. That's an interesting way to think about it. I didn't use that distinction when I was filming. I think I was more trying to grasp the ways in which the lake as a space is both an environment for and an agent of commoning practices. In some ways, I was constantly reminded that it's very hard to “just look” at the lake when you are close to it, in a way that is kind of the norm when you are further away. When the foam flies at me or when the fumes make me lightheaded, when a dog comes up when I'm framing something, or when someone passing by throws in a question or comment. In these ways yes I think it is a very lively place.

Ishita: Hi Sindhu! Hi everyone! Really enjoyed both films.

I wanted to ask if you have documentation of all the varied voiceovers you've done for the Different Colourful Designs film?

Sindhu: Hi Ishita! Thank you! I have 3 lecture-screenings recorded so far and will try to continue recording them as I perform it. I imagine that maybe over time the things that the images will reveal will be a little different.

Hi Ekrem, Hi Sindhu, Michael here: (Ekrem I love this format!) Sindhu, I loved both films. I especially liked the sound design in the lake film. Could you talk about that a bit. The displacement of sound and image and the use of musical sounds and ambiances?

Sindhu: Hi Michael. I'm glad the sound worked for you! I love working with sound and try to move sonically. I think the film moves between moments where we are very much "in sync" with what we are seeing, and other moments where we drift a little, sometimes quite a bit (like that foam sequence). Some of this is in response to the way that I experienced sounds floating across the water from different parts on the banks of the lake. You can hear gunshots from the army facility on one end, songs from the temples that dot it, from the mosques, all kind of echoed across the water and reaching me as I was recording. Ambient sounds have this way of "placing" you somewhere without a clear explanation of all that is around. I tried to work with that in this film. The text is also sometimes tied to the sound, other times not. I am working to translate between 4 languages spoken in this film and wanted to convey to the audience that a simple translation is not possible. Also, some of the things in the text are thoughts, some are conversations that were not recorded, some are things that I did not have the courage to say in the moment but wanted to bring up later. So all of this.. I think is in the text and sound together.

Yes!

Thanks!

I loved that ambiguity between thought and speech!

Hi Ya'll! This is Neil, Ekrem, Squeaky gang and of course Sindhu, for the beautiful and thought provoking films...

For the first film - is every performance of the text improvised? Are you working from a strict script or is there improvisation/riffing?

Sindhu: Neil! Sorry I missed this question. I have a written text for this one but some parts are improvised.

Also... i'm digging how mellow this format is... i really can never formulate good thoughts after screenings and appreciate watching everyone's textual unfoldings! Ahem.

ALSO: WHat is the FOAM? I joked with my viewing partner that "it's a foam party rave" (at beginning) and then there actually was one!!

Sindhu: Hi Neil! Yeah it is a very striking form.. It's a soup of a lot of things, probably a number of things I could never fully list. The city is not able to keep up with the amount of waste it produces. A lot of untreated sewage and illegal effluents are released into its lakes. The foam is all of these chemicals+sewage.. Phosphates from soaps and detergents cause the frothing and I think there are other things in the water, heavy metals and living matter that kind of "fix" it in this bubbly state.

Hi, This is Andrea: I really appreciate this screening and format. Thank you to everyone involved. I was wondering about the audio that ends the first film. What is happening there. I hear voices of protest but I don't know what they are saying.

Hi. Jason here. Thanks, Sindhu. Both films are remarkable. Loved the "sound up" at the end of DCD. Also this is my first time participating in this kind of format for a post screening discussion. Mind blown. This is fantastic.

Sindhu: Andrea and Jason, thanks for watching and for your comments! That audio is from protests I attended in Bangalore in Dec 2019, against the new Citizenship Amendment Act and NAtional Registry of Citizens that the govt had just passed at the time. People are shouting "freedom" and "go back" (both slogans have been around since the struggle for Indian Independence).

Bryan: I wanted to ask you about the more "ethnographic" side of *The Lake and the Lake*. I suspect there are many more encounters that did not make it into the film. How did you start interacting with the people around the lake, and what was that like?

Sindhu: Hi Bryan, yes sure there is quite a bit of footage that isn't in this film. I spent a couple of months in total filming around the lake over 2 years. I initially spoke to passersby, people who worked in the temples around the lake, and the people who gather the grass. In the course of the year there were many eviction drives to destroy the settlements around the lake. I was initially reluctant to film in these areas because there was already a fraught relationship to "documentation" in these spaces. But over time it felt important to engage and address these evictions and so I ended up filming in the sites where construction waste is dumped around the huge tech parks and SEZs. Most of the people I talk to in the film were people who passed me by or were curious to know why I was filming the lake. The shores of the lake have many people coming and going through the day and I built some friendships with some people over time.

Bryan: Thank you. I was particularly struck by the kid asking where they could see the film...

Yeah, Sharmeen. That question struck me at the time and as I edited as something I needed to answer. When I filmed the last round in Bangalore, I told them that I would contact them when I came back next. But the next time I went back to Bangalore, which given my own fraught visa situation, was 2 years later, the settlement had been demolished again and I couldn't get in touch with her.

Hi, Katherine here: loved these films, thank you for the opportunity to watch them in this way. What camera/s was/were used to film these?

Hi Katherine, the two films used very different cameras. The first film I used an SD tape camcorder. This was what I had access to through my school when I started the filming, and over the years. The second was on Sony A7s, also via school, but a very different one :)

Thanks!

Ekrem: Just want to encourage everyone too to feel free to type your question or response in a color (or typeface!) of your liking :). Additionally, while we love seeing who you may be, you can also remain safely anonymous if you wanted to ask any questions - on our end, we only see anonymous animals (Neil you are an anonymous cheetah on my end) :)

This format is fun! Also if people want to have a longer chat with me about specific things, feel free to write me!

Ekrem: Sindhu, I'll chime in too :). Before the show, I was re-reading the absolutely lovely interview between [you and Fabiola Carranza](#) in *Public Parking*. Certainly one of the things that's striking, to me at least, is the politics behind both the toxicity and the efforts to "beautify" them, hide them from view. I know, in Turkey at least, sort of seeing that kind of pollution is also an indicator of how, at least in the eyes of a certain Westernized group, still "not-modern". In your interview, you talk about newer efforts to fence people off from the lake, not recognizing the many ways its being used. I love how you describe *The Lake and the Lake* as a way to "provide a durational, vibrational space within which some of these entanglements could be perceived." Now, as you've been living with the film, screening it, for a year after that interview, how do you feel about the entanglements, and how they're perceived by audiences?

Ekrem that's a really good question. One that I might have to think a bit about before I respond. Will come to this over the week!

Coming back to your question, Ekrem, on a sunny Tuesday evening.

You're right that this is a film that is made in a context where there is a strong desire to see certain aspects of modernity and disregard other parts of it. But when nature refuses to "play its part" in the fictions of development, we are forced to look... And instead of meeting the foam with a look of horror and utter alienation, I hope the film moves audiences to see how integral waste is to development, to think about urban life and living in relation to waste and toxicity. I wonder how many people notice that a lot of muddy shores around the lake consist of construction waste and dug up earth from the SEZs and giant apartment complexes around it. And that it is this very waste that is being managed and dealt with by the migrant workers who are at a risk of being evicted as part of the "pollution problem." The dogs we see throughout the film have been rounded up and released here, one could say "dumped."

What I consistently get as feedback so far is that the film is engaging and has room to think about these things without being tied to a central character or plotline. So in that sense I think it works at some level to help people to think about the lake not just as a polluted environment or a problem to be fixed by technocratic means but also as a resource and an agent in the life of the city, a living thing.

Ekrem: Absolutely. Its striking too to see the GIF that you selected from *The Lake and the Lake* at the beginning of this document. Thinking around ownership, stewardship of land. Would you like to talk about that (now or later :) more?

I was going through the doc to see if I'd missed some questions! I think this question or confusion around stewardship is crucial for common spaces in a city like Bangalore where the administrative bodies just keep playing passing the parcel (of land) between each other and ultimately no one is responsible or answerable, until the land becomes enclosed and developed, usually as private property. These "lakes", keres, were built initially to dam rain water for irrigation and consumption. There were systems in place that ensured that they were cared for (though these systems were also entrenched in caste logics...). As the city began to become urbanised, and particularly as water started to become a commodity, the keres' role changed. Now they seem to exist mostly as things to look at, views. This historical awareness is rarely there in relation to discourses around cleaning up the lakes, it often feels like a missed opportunity to reassess how we relate to land, waste, and our neighbours, rather than being stuck with reactionary responses to environmental degradation.

Ekrem: Thank you! I think considering, re-considering our relationship to land, waste, is certainly something that is grounding me in this moment. It's now 9:30 pm; how you feeling Sindhu?

Feeling energized by this chat, and ready to take a break and maybe have a drink and dinner with whomever would like to join! Also, over the week if people want to leave comments and questions here I'd be happy to respond at a less intense pace. Thanks for all of these questions and comments to everyone, and to Squeaky Wheel and Ekrem for making this happen!

Ekrem: Thank you Sindhu, and thank you everyone! If you wanted to join the post-screening drink / food / hangout session over video, here's a link so you can jump in:

<https://meet.google.com/fue-tj-sm-knb> . We'd love to see you! I'll smoke a cigarette and come right over :)

To join the video meeting, click this link: <https://meet.google.com/fue-tj-sm-knb>

Otherwise, to join by phone, dial +1 530-882-2226 and enter this PIN: 614 111 411#

To view more phone numbers, click this link: <https://tel.meet/fue-tj-sm-knb?hl=en&hs=5>

Thanks Sindhu and thanks Ekrem for hosting!

Sarah: Thank you so much for this screening and Q&A! I missed the live Q &A but really love this format as well and enjoyed reading it today (Sat). Wonderful screening last night and what a beautiful and thoughtful introduction. Ekram, I found it so moving and it put me in the right state of

mind for the screening! Lastly, Sindhu< beautiful work!! I absolutely love how you film things, the attention to the mass of an “entire” context but then there is something minoot (minute?) happening in the shot...the ants on the tree, the foam disappearing, just so lovely to see that breadth through the film...speaks to how loud or I guess maybe even graphic things can appear but then still meaningful, textured things are occurring within. Haha I’m editing this like a paper, hope no one is watching :)

Thanks again!! Will definitely look out for more Squeaky Wheel screenings.

Sindhu: Hi Sarah, thank you for watching! I’m so glad you were able to catch those details. When screenings started to move online I wondered how the texture and details in this film would translate in streamed formats. I remember when I showed a version of the film to my MFA advisors they told me that I had made my life that much more difficult because they also thought that the film needed a certain scale to have an impact on the audience. I hope there will be opportunities to share it in a larger format sometime in the future!