

## SOCIETY

# A delicately woven documentary

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**Anjali Monteiro's and K.P. Jayasankar's film 'A Delicate Weave', explores the fast disappearing musical traditions of the Kutch region**

As the film opens to the wispy melody of a rustic flute, the rough hands of a woman delicately moves over a newly woven durrie, snipping off the odd ends with a small pair of scissors while the man's voice fills in, talking of Kabir, who was a weaver. Another Anjali Monteiro- K.P. Jayasankar film, it unveils the mystic musical landscape of the Kutch grasslands and hamlets.

**A sequel**

*A Delicate Weave* (Jhini Bini Chadariya), the third documentary in the Kutch trilogy of Monteiro's and Jayasankar's exploration of the vanishing musical traditions of the Kutch region, is a sequel to their earlier works, *Do Din Ka Mela*, (A Two Day Fair / 2009) and *So Heddan So Hoddan* (Like Here Like There / 2011). The film, produced by School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, was completed in August, 2017 and screened in Kochi in September.

A scene from the documentary A Delicate Weave | Photo Credit: **Special arrangement**

“We had been working with the people of Kutch and their oral tradition since 2008,” say Monteiro and Jayasankar. “They have an extremely syncretic tradition that draws on the works of Kabir and the Sufi saints. These precarious traditions are on the verge of disappearing on account of different reasons, some of which have got to do with the spread of certain kinds of modernity and the market, the educational system and the kind of intolerance that is gripping the country at present. These are not mere traditions, but certain ways of seeing and being.”

As they felt the need for documenting and preserving these traditions, Monteiro and Jayasankar began the work with the support of Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghathan (KMVS), an NGO that works among rural women of the region. The KMVS had started the community radio, Radio Ujjhal, in 1998. “The community radio energised these people, and,

interestingly, technology has stepped in to help them preserve their traditions and pass it on. Mobile phone has come in handy for them,” points out Monteiro.

### **Transcribing music**

Now they use mobile phones to record music and it helps youngsters to learn, like the group of young men in Bhujodi village who meet every night to sing Kabir bhajans. Or, like Naranbhai, a carpet weaver and community activist from Bhujodi, who records all the bhajans, transcribing and documenting the songs using the facilities at Soorvani, an informal organisation of around 400 musicians representing 40 different musical forms.

Soorvani was created by a media cell of KMVS in 2008 for helping to preserve and promote the rich folk tradition.

The film meanders lazily through the sleepy arid terrain of Kutch soil where a multitude of Kutch tribes lead their lives in tune with the rhythm of nature even in the midst of trucks roaring down the highways connecting the industrial hubs of Gujarat. Even as the landscape is being revealed in magnificent sweeps, the camera deftly picks up minute details of everyday life – the shining metal pots, the basket of cow dung cakes, the roti puffing up on the tava, the dal boiling away on the kerosene stove. The landscape teeming with life is there before your eyes. All the details are delicately woven together to form the subtle tapestry of this film.

And there is no ‘ordering’ the atmosphere. As Jiant Khan speaks of the philosophy of Shah Bhitai and the nuances of the ethereal Waee singing, the child in his lap gurgles and babbles away happily. Music flows freely through their lives, accompanying everyday work, weaving, tending cattle, cooking and making cow dung cakes. In Lakhpat, an abandoned border port town which is sparsely populated now, a group of feisty village women ooze confidence as they dream of presenting programmes in far off places. Music has given them wings. They are illiterate, the women declare. Yet, they have been elevated to the status of professional singers thanks to the efforts of Soorvani and that of musicians like Ramazan bhai who trained the women to sing before the mike, to the accompaniment of instruments.

“We always associate literacy with empowerment, but that is not necessarily the case,” says Jayasankar. “The unlettered people are extremely wise, by the way they can philosophise. There is a lot of power in the oral tradition, which we do not take seriously, as they are not written down. In many ways, the spread of education sometimes ends up being detrimental to these traditions. Like the education in an alien language. For these people, who speak Kutch or Sindhi, Gujarati, which is the medium in schools, is an alien language. There is a severe disconnect and they lose their grip over their own oral heritage.”

The frames of Monteiro and Jayasankar capture the rustic villagers in all their pride and self-esteem. Even in the bare surroundings of their gruelling living conditions, these people keep their heads high. And the one single message that all the singers assert is the same, though the words may be different – “Kutch has no Hindus or Muslims, only brothers!” declares Jiant Khan.

*A Delicate Weave*, is being screened by the Cochin Film Society on October 28 at Children’s Park Theatre, Ernakulam, at 6 pm.

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