

CINEMA

Documenting concerns

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Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar make documentaries that complement their social concern, academics, and passion for filmmaking.



Introducing Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar as documentary filmmakers with a long innings is really not saying everything that this pair has accomplished in their other areas of interest – media research, cultural studies and as faculty at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

In Thiruvananthapuram with their latest documentary 'So Heddan, So Hoddan' on the Fakirani Jat community of Kutch, Monteiro and Jayasankar take you through their body of work and share their experiences as filmmakers and keen observers of the “terrain that is constantly changing.”

Digital technology

“Digital technology has changed things considerably. There is a blurring of the divide between production and consumption vis-à-vis filmmaking because it is no longer a space solely for the filmmaker, but has been embraced by communities, individual identities, students, and activists. But, now more than ever, the documentary maker faces the censorship of the state as well as a censorship of the market,” is how Anjali describes the present scene.

Adds Jayasankar: “Every documentary presents a struggle. In fact, what we experience now is a strange paradox: production has gone up but venues have not seen an exponential increase. There is a reduction of space in mainstream media where the documentary viewing culture is not cultivated and the international scene does not give a revenue model.”

An interesting element in most of their documentaries is that they locate the marginalised herdsman ('Do Din Ka Mela' and 'So Heddan, So Hoddan'), the non-conformist woman celebrating womanhood through her poetry ('She Write'), tribal people such as the Warlis ('Kahankar: Ahankar'), transgender, the normal and deviant ('Our Family'), and creativity among prisoners in Yerawarda jail and their social isolation ('YCP'), and so on as the subjects.

There is a great degree of archiving which gets clubbed with their filmmaking, as in the case of 'So Heddan, So Heddon,' where the focus is on the Fakirani Jat community, which lives in the Rann of Kutch who use the Surando, a stringed instrument to accompany the verses that are recited. By way of documenting the community, Monteiro-Jayasankar have also recorded for posterity the music of the lone surviving Surando in the region.

They see documentaries as a collaborative experience with people, and there is a lot of protest in stories of the subaltern: the diverse voices of the marginalised, be it the Warlis, or Dharavi slums; it is a powerful expression rooted in traditional wisdom and normally ignored by mainstream media.

As self-taught filmmakers who strayed from academics to filmmaking, the pair see their areas of specialisation, media research, cultural studies, and filmmaking – as complementary.

As media researchers there is one question that cannot remain unasked of Monteiro-Jayasankar: Is the media really paying heed to the findings from studies on audience, content and reception analysis?

“With the coming of the Internet the audience is part producer and part consumer when you engage in uploading on the YouTube or blogging. Further, with emerging diasporic audiences, revenue models are changing. A fragmentation of audience is inevitable because even the 'self' is so fragmented now. Market researchers are open to redefine their approach,

the media is in a fix, audiences are playful with advertisements, and finally, even the non-literate has access and uses technology,” concludes Anjali.

For the duo who have won 22 national and international awards for their films, an integration of their academic and filmmaking energies translate into meaningful journeys as documentary filmmakers, researchers on media consumption, marketing and audience responses, as well.

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