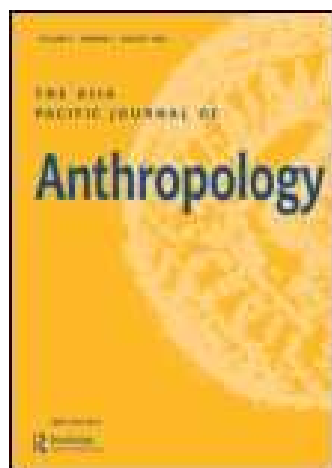


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Publisher: Routledge

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The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtap20>

So Heddan So Hoddan (Like Here Like There)

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Published online: 19 Sep 2014.



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To cite this article: Nicola Hearn (2014) So Heddan So Hoddan (Like Here Like There), The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology, 15:5, 505-507, DOI: [10.1080/ 14442213.2014.925791](https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2014.925791)

To link to this article: [http:// dx.doi.org/ 10.1080/ 14442213.2014.925791](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2014.925791)

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of Dan's, originally drawn from a term used on a pearling lugger when they have to turn the sail back into the wind when the seas are rough, so they just sit there 'steady steady'. Dan has become well known for his use of this saying and this book is certainly a tribute to the value of a life lived in this way.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2014.887412>

So Heddan So Hoddan (Like Here Like There)

ANJALI MONTEIRO & K. P. JAYASANKAR (Directors), PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING TRUST (Producer)

Sindhi, Kachchhi and Hindustani with English subtitles, 2011

Duration 52 minutes

Opening with a wide shot of an expansive blue sky and low horizon line of pastoral landscape, the shuddering sound of a mechanical 'clunk' is juxtaposed with the title of the film, *So Heddan So Hoddan*, appearing over the frame. This jolting between the natural landscape (which, as we come to learn, is considered by our protagonists to go hand in hand with traditional forms of living) and the mechanical reality of contemporary life foreshadows the primary thematic element of this film: the tension between tradition and change. Filmmakers Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar are academics from the School of Media and Cultural Studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in India. *So Heddan So Hoddan* is the second film in a three-part documentary series on the communities that live in the Kutch district of Gujarat.

As the opening shot continues, the sound of an oncoming vehicle grows louder as two trucks enter the frame from either end, driving headlong towards each other along the horizon. Mirage-like, they disappear as they meet in the middle—it was a mirrored shot, created in editing. This stylistic convention of mirroring continues as a thematic element of the film: the film ends as it began, with a long shot of the same landscape, but this time with a single figure walking across the frame. Man and machine, tradition and change, are reflected back at each other. As the sound of the engine fades into the distance, the melody of a string instrument (a surando) begins to play.

Immediately, we cut to a close-up of a body of water. Shot from an elevated perspective, it fills the frame. Droplets of rain beat out a percussive accompaniment to the music, and this shot holds fast on the water for a deliberate pause. Long shots of expansive landscape become a recurring motif of the film, creating a meditative atmosphere reflective of the poetry of medieval Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai. This is a film about three cousins who share a passion for the poet; about their families and the communities in which they live; but most of all about tradition, identity and change.

The music cuts and we are left with the sounds of the landscape: rain, wind through grass, leaves rustling, a faint birdcall. A panning shot takes us across the landscape, with foliage in the foreground and a wind farm in the background, tall white windmills dotting the horizon. Like the truck, they are a visual cue of a modern world. The first dialogue we hear is a voice-over quoting Bhitai, from which the title of the film comes: 'Like here, like there. So it's in one's heart. With his grace, know thy soul.' In the next shot we are introduced to the voice, Umar Suleiman, a farmer and self-taught Bhitai scholar. He begins to explain passionately the significance of Bhitai, and as the film moves to another wide shot of Kutch landscape, a series of explanatory subtitles appear over the frame. They read as follows:

The Fakirani Jats of Kachchh in Gujarat, India sing the verses of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689–1752)./ This pastoral community moved across Kachchh and Sindh, carrying with them stories, poetry and music./ Today their lands are divided: Kachchh is in India and Sindh, in Pakistan./ Umar, Mustafa and Usman are cousins from this crucible of the ancient Harappan civilisation.

The inclusion of this text over the shot helps the viewer to understand this landscape and its significance to the characters of the film. Monteiro and Jayasankar effectively aid our interpretation of place and community. By engaging with these three men and their relationship with the work of Bhitai, the filmmakers are able to explore the significant political, geographical and cultural shifts that have occurred in this region since Partition in 1947.

We are introduced to the community through a series of establishing shots: the sunrise over a silhouetted village, women milking cattle (shot at the eye-height of the animals), and for a moment one woman catching the eye of the camera. These shots introduce the audience to elements of the everyday: where this community lives; their relationship to their animals; the work they do. It is also made clear that this community is being observed, that there are filmmakers present. And as the woman fleetingly engages with us through the lens of the camera, we too become part of this observer/observed dynamic. As becomes clear later in the film, this dynamic is in many ways an equal dialogue.

The film goes on to introduce the other cousins, Mustafa and Usman, a singer and a surando player respectively. As they perform, subtitles translate the lyrics of the Bhitai verse being sung. Inclusion of performances is a deliberate stylistic choice of the filmmakers. They reflect the communal and performative aspects of Bhitai's verse, but also draw attention to the 'performative' nature of the interviews in this documentary-style film.

In later interviews, each man explains the personal significance of his craft. They speak to the importance of tradition, and these traditions are tightly wound up with their own concept of identity. They will teach their sons these skills, and Mustafa explains 'every generation needs to keep this art form alive'. The documenting of these traditions is their motivation for participating in the film. Umar explains to his wife Aasiya: 'They're [the filmmakers] recording this in order to preserve our ways.' In a later scene, Aasiya says to the camera: 'Even if people die, through this they live

on.' Initially it seems that she is talking about the verses of Bhitai she had been singing, but in fact she is talking about film itself. 'I feel good that my recording is there [motions to camera].' This dialogue simultaneously draws attention to the observer/observed dynamic inherent to the genre of documentary, and shows the active role these three men, their wives and their communities have in making this film. These interviews are the most captivating and illuminating scenes of the film, prompting the audience to participate in the conversation that the filmmakers are facilitating.

The poetry of Bhitai is meditative, dealing with themes of great love and loss and personal turmoil, but also transcendence and redemption. This artistic and philosophical approach to the choice of subject matter can be seen in other films by Monteiro and Jayasankar, for example, *SheWrite* (2005), a film about four Tamil women poets. The filmmakers use these themes as a springboard for exploring broader issues of politics, gender, ethnicity and religion. In *So Heddan So Hoddan*, the politics are not overt. It is the philosophy of the poet that is reflected upon, and the ways in which his philosophy informs the everyday lives of the film's protagonists.

Anjali Monteiro and K. P. Jayasankar's intention is to make films that give a voice to marginalised communities. The implications of such an objective could be problematic, as they have the potential to create a situation in which the filmmakers are speaking *for* the community, patronising and further disempowering them. But *So Heddan So Hoddan* avoids this problem by employing a truly reflexive style. The presence of the camera, and the effect that it has on the people being filmed, is openly acknowledged. And through interview, it becomes clear that the subjects of this film are *active* participants in the filmmaking process.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2014.925791>