CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Documentaries studies are a fairly new province in academic research in India. Even the world over, the emergence of the documentary as a specific discipline of study is quite recent. It is in the past decade or so that some theoretical insights into the documentary have emerged more conspicuously, seeking to address critical questions about the practice of documentary filmmaking, documentary texts and audiences.

India has been one of the most prolific producers of the independent or social documentary, especially from the 1980s. The post-Emergency era was a watershed in the history of the Indian documentary. Breaking free from the shackles of state-sponsored institutions like the Films Division, independent filmmakers made documentaries that challenged the Nehruvian agenda of development through big dams and heavy industries. From being just the top-down voice of the state, the documentary in India found its niche as the voice of the marginalized sections in society, and envisioned development as participatory and sustainable.

Film festivals, screenings on and by university campuses, non-governmental organizations and new social movements speak of the increasingly articulate presence of these documentaries in our midst. However, a closer look provokes as many questions as the documentaries seek to address. What is the space that the alternative documentaries occupy in India? What agendas govern the making of these films? What are the dynamics at play during their making and watching?

The issues are far ranging, from the mundane questions of funding and production of these films, to those of philosophical import like ‘who speaks for whom and why?’, to
how the audiences engage with them. This study is an attempt to examine comprehensively some of the important concerns that arise while trying to explore the *raison d’etre* of these documentaries, within the framework of contemporary documentary theory and development theory.

**Objectives of the study**

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

a) To explore the various implications of the term ‘alternative’, with reference to the alternative documentary in India.

The study explores the various implications of the term ‘alternative’ with reference to the alternative documentary in India. It also investigates into the agendas that motivate the making of these films. The theory of development addresses questions of what is ‘real’ development and re-conceptualizes the role of the media to usher in a more equitable world. The emphasis is on the need for participatory, bottom-up initiatives from the grassroots and to bridge the ever-growing gap between the haves and the have-nots. The alternative documentaries in India are, broadly speaking, partners in this agenda. The concern is, to what extent and how do the films reflect this concern? The alternative documentary in India is also examined in the light of contemporary documentary theory, in an attempt to locate them along the historical continuum of world documentary and documentary in India.

b) To analyze ‘representation’ in the alternative documentaries chosen for the study.

The problematic of representation has emerged as a central concern in the post-colonial cultural and political criticism. The alternative documentaries chosen for the study are analysed *vis a vis* the various connotations of the term 'representation', and
the study examines the various representational strategies adopted in the films. The questions of power and knowledge as discursive practices by the state are being constantly thrown up by postmodern scholars. ‘Who speaks for whom?’ is one central concern of the study. Embedded in this question are notions of power - social, economic, political and technological. As the addressers and the addressees respectively, the filmmaker who makes the representation, and the audience who makes meaning out of the representation, are both vested with the power of knowledge and agency, without whom there is no text. The multi-layered politics of representation in the alternative Indian documentaries is explored. Issues of representing the ‘other’, self-representation, reflexivity and aesthetics in the alternative documentary are critiqued.

c) To examine the idea of documentary desire.

The idea of ‘documentary desire’ is a recent entrant into contemporary documentary discourse. How audiences engage with the documentary lies at the heart of this thinking. Patterns in meaning generation are mapped from the responses of the groups of audience chosen for the study, and are juxtaposed with the concerns of the filmmakers about their audiences. The concept of ‘epistephilia’ or pleasure of knowing, central to the notion of documentary desire, is examined with reference to the focus group discussions in the study.

The above-mentioned objectives are umbrella issues, within which several related issues emerge. The overall aim of the study is to offer some theoretical insights into the tradition of alternative documentaries in India, and reconcile this tradition within a larger global context.
Research methods

There is no text without an author, and there is no text without an audience. And the text is the medium through which the production and dissemination of meanings take place. So, the media text, the author and the audience are organically linked to each other. A study of these three constituents is vital to any comprehensive understanding of any of the media. Recent writing on media research provides a rationale for supposing this essential nexus between the text, the author and the audience, and the current study is located within that debate within.

A text contains within it signifying mechanisms, which promote certain meanings and deliberately suppress others. The agenda-setting theory of the media suggests that the media do not tell us what to think, but what to think about (Cohen, 1963). The relevance of the authorial agenda is a much-debated issue, with Roland Barthes’s assertion in 1968 about ‘the death of the author’ (Barry, 1995). However, endowed with the agency to represent, the author of a media text is the one who decides what the signifying mechanisms in the text will be. So the author is a site of power, whose role needs to be looked at critically. The new audience research assumes an active role for the audience, which generates meaning from a text. The hitherto held notion of the passive audience upon which an omnipotent media wield their power is no longer tenable. The idea of the ‘effects’ of the text ‘on’ the audience has been re-conceptualized as ‘negotiation by’ the audience with the text. The new thinking underlines the hegemony perpetuated on audiences by several ideological apparatuses, including the media. Also, the view that an audience created its own meaning from a given text and uses that meaning to empower itself, gained currency (Morley, 1992).
In a particular reference to the documentary, Bill Nichols (1991) points out that the practice of documentary is constituted by three major players

a) a community of practitioners;

b) a corpus of texts; and,

c) a constituency of viewers,

A community of practitioners

In a reference to the filmmakers who make and disseminate documentaries, Bill Nichols writes of the documentary as an almost institutionalized practice with registered members, who choose to represent the historical world rather than an imaginary one. This mandate is self-imposed and involves encountering similar concerns professionally, and adhering to a common language and purpose in their work. Nichols opines that while filmmakers do experiment or deviate from established traditions, the changes are part of an ongoing dialogue within the documentary tradition and with the other members who make documentaries. So, this group is self-defining in one sense. Engaged in the practice of representing the historical world, these filmmakers adopt similar organizational procedures, distribution networks, and places of exhibition. Without any enforced rigidity, they seem to adhere to a specific discourse, especially with regard to their representational practices.

A corpus of texts

An informing logic is central to making documentaries. In their attempt to represent a concern in the historical world, the documentaries build an argument with an appropriate representation of a given problem. The narrative, more often than not, establishes the issue, provides the relevant background, examines the current status of the
issue, and builds a case to support the argument. Finally, the text arrives at a solution or a direction towards a solution. Typical documentaries establish the time and place, and continue the narrative in a chronological manner. The narratives assume the status of an observer and informer. The logic of the argument assumes great importance, and all the characters and what they say help to make the logic more convincing. The documentary depends a lot on the spoken word. Commentary (written and voice-over), interviews and reports heavily prop up the central argument. The documentary also invites the viewer to accept its footage as real by using visual techniques characteristic of the practice.

A constituency of viewers

The documentary viewer employs procedures of rhetorical engagement rather than procedures of fictive engagement that guide the viewing of classical narrative film (Nichols, 1991:26).

Generally speaking, the expectations that an audience carries along while getting ready to watch a documentary is very different from that of watching a fiction film. The text provides them enough clues for them to draw upon their past experiences, and then sets out to confirm, change, or negotiate their already existing thoughts, on some issue in the historical world. The audience would expect this information from the text. Nichols is of the opinion that for the viewer, the documentary image and its historical referent are congruent with each other. What is seen in the text is what the viewer would have witnessed in that situation, if present there. Realism is a hallmark of the documentary, whereas while watching a fiction film, it is assumed that the narrative was constructed to tell a story on the screen.

The study uses this three-pronged approach suggested by Bill Nichols to address the key concerns delineated in the research objectives. However, this study does more
than just examining his suppositions in the context of alternative documentaries in India. The data and analysis gathered from the films, the filmmakers, and the audiences will be used to see what the data throws up in relation to these important observations by Bill Nichols.

Corresponding to the three constituents being studied, three relevant qualitative research methods are used to gather data for the study. Textual analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions are undertaken to provide the data from the text, author, and audiences respectively. As opposed to empirical or quantitative methods, these qualitative methods are, by definition, subjective and interpretative. Philosophically speaking, they attempt not to provide 'real' meanings or numerical results, which can be replicated under controlled conditions. Instead they seek to explore complex questions about the production and generation of meanings. Qualitative methods emphasise not one 'meaning', but meanings. Not one audience, but audiences. Difference is celebrated, while homogeneity is critiqued. Subjective understandings are the key to unraveling the broader patterns that may emerge from the analyses.

The three methods adopted in this study and how the data was collected is elaborated below:

a) a detailed textual analysis of 10 alternative documentaries in India

This analytical procedure seeks to identify those ‘directive closures’ embedded in the text, which further the promotion of certain meanings and agendas (Morley, 1992).
The signifying practices in the text are examined closely, to provide insights into the preferred meanings\(^2\) that the text may seek to highlight.

The 10 alternative documentaries chosen for analysis are *A Narmada Diary*, *Kahankar:Ahankar* (Storymaker: Storytaker), *Something Like a War*, *Lesser Humans*, *When Women Unite: The Story of an Uprising*, *Addo Miyad Ulgulan* (Another Revolt), *Live in Behrampada*, *Chaliyar*, *Tu Zinda Hai* (You are Alive) and *Kis Ki Raksha?* (In whose Defence?).

The films were chosen from various film festivals and film festival catalogues, workshops, and private screenings. All 10 films re-conceptualize development and are attempts to articulate the voices of the marginalized sections of Indian society. The fruits of development as envisioned by the rest of society have clearly by-passed the people who are the subjects of these films. And the films critique this inequitable development. The films included here have all been produced in the 1990s, and self-consciously interrogate the dominant paradigm of development. Some of the makers of these films are considered pioneers in alternative filmmaking, while others are products of new social movements asserting the rights of women and adivasis. I make no claims to representativeness, but I suggest that these films be seen as telling examples of the relatively new ferment in independent documentary filmmaking in India.

Brief summaries of the 10 films are provided here.

a) *A Narmada Diary* (1995) is a film that chronicles a grassroots struggle by the adivasis in the Narmada Valley against the mammoth Sardar Sarovar Dam. A sporadic video record maintained for four years (from 1990) by directors

\(^2\) Three kinds of readings by audiences of any media text are possible- preferred, negotiated and oppositional, as proposed by Stuart Hall (1993).
Simantini Dhuru and Anand Patwardhan constructs the history of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), and captures some major moments in their struggle against the dam. The NBA spearheads the fight of the adivasis against the displacement of 2,00,000 people and the submergence of 37,000 hectares of land by the dam's reservoir. The film questions that model of development, which has led to the adivasis being denied their basic human rights and amenities in independent India. Further, it tries to counter the state rhetoric of development by showing state propaganda throughout the film, and juxtaposing it with images of things are in the valley. The history of the NBA, police atrocities on non-violent activists, environmental degradation caused by the dam, the callousness of the politicians, and the apathy of the public are some of the issues highlighted by the film.

b) Kahankar: Ahankar (1995), which translates as “Storymaker: Storytaker”, is a film about alternative histories. The stories and paintings of the Warlis in Maharashtra are oral histories of their oppression, their society, culture, and worldviews. Their version of the systemic subjugation they were subjected to is radically different from the ‘official’ version documented in archival records. The film, directed by Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasankar, juxtaposes the Warli and official versions to problematize the notion of history. Self-avowedly, the video brings together ‘a selection of stories and writings of the Warlis and some of the writings about “them”’. By examining the hierarchies present even within the Warli society, the film constructs oppression as a dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon with multiple centers of power. The humour and local wisdoms of
the Warlis are evident in the stories and reveal an indigenous knowledge system replete with 'experiential learning and intuitive insights', as opposed to the homogenizing modern knowledge, which is often undemocratic and exclusive (Wignaraja, 1989).

c) **Something Like a War** (1991) by Deepa Dhanraj deals with the family planning drive of the Government of India, whose ‘target’ approach unleashes state-sponsored violence on poor women. A misguided population policy, coupled with a disregard for basic human rights of the marginalized women, is responsible for the corruption and brutality of this programme. The film is structured around multiple, complex narratives - a group of rural women talking about their bodies, their aspirations and their fertility; the inhuman family planning camps being conducted by a Dr. Mehta on hapless, poor women; the sinister agendas of international agencies funding contraceptive research, which use unsuspecting Third World women as guinea pigs; the ‘target’ approach which puts pressure on government servants to ensure numbers, and the propaganda of the state through mass media to ensure population control, all these threads are interwoven in the film.

d) **Lesser Humans** (1997) is a film about the Bhangis in Gujarat, human scavengers who are among the most oppressed people in India. Engaged in the inhuman work of cleaning dry latrines and other sanitation jobs, the Bhangis remain politically, economically and socially exploited for generations now. The film, directed by K. Stalin, exposes the evils of caste, which denies them even the most basic dignity. The apathy of the state towards providing the Bhangis basic
education and health facilities and rehabilitating them in better jobs, even after 50 years of independence, are highlighted in the film. The film is a powerful expose into the cruel profession of human scavenging and the oppressive nexus of caste, class, and gender, which perpetuates evils like untouchability. The visuals of the Bhangis actually cleaning the latrines are in tight close-up, and shock the viewer into recognizing their inhuman profession for what it is.

e) *When Women Unite: The Story of an Uprising* (1996) reconstructs a spontaneous uprising by poor, rural women from 22 villages in Nellore, against the liquor policy of the state. In the words of the director of the film, Shabnam Virmani, the docu-drama explores the unique ferment of feminism, politics and democracy. The spontaneous, leaderless, struggle was sustained for three years, and resulted in affecting a state policy on prohibition. The drama is a scripted story, recounting the various experiences of the women of Nellore, into one fictionalized narrative and is enacted by the activists who were part of the struggle. The drama is interspersed with documentary footage from the agitation and interviews with women activists, police, bureaucrats and liquor dons.

f) *Addo Miyad Ulgulan* (1995) translates as 'Another Revolt' and chronicles a 30-year struggle by the adivasis of the Chhotanagpur area against the construction of dams on the Koel and Karo rivers. The adivasis fight against their displacement, which the dams would cause and also against the disruption of their lives and livelihood. The identity of the adivasis are organically linked to their culture, and a destruction of their culture (which displacement would cause) would lead to the effacing of their identities. The interviews with the adivasis show that they are
aware of their exploitation, and also that their survival depends on their identity. Questions of appropriation of adivasi resources, notions of citizenship and rights are addressed in the film by director Shriprakash.

g) *I Live in Behrampada* (1993) is a film by Madhushree Dutta, which started off as an investigation into the communal riots in Bombay in 1993 (which followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya). However, as the filmmaker puts it, ‘more than the chronology of violence, people and their struggle to survive became our focus’. The film interviews the inhabitants of Behrampada, a minority-dominated slum in Bombay, with a dreaded reputation. What emerges from their stories is a story of survival and amicable living between Hindus and Muslims, now being threatened by outsiders keen to grab the prized land. The conflict between the slum dwellers and their middle-class neighbours are also explored. The film sets out to demolish the misconceptions about them and reveals the people of Behrampada to be law-abiding, respectable citizens of India,

h) *Chaliyar: the final struggle* (1999) by Sarat Chandran, is a film about the continuous pollution of the Chaliyar river in Kerala for the last 36 years. The Grasim Rayon Pulp factory, pollutes the river on a sustained basis, because of the toxic effluence channeled into the river. The incidence of disease and death from cancer and skin diseases is very high among the locals there, and the film investigates into the reasons for this. The history of the struggle of the people for the closure of the factory has been filmed, and also the hardships they face because of the pollution. The state-market nexus, which benefits from one section
of the locals who do not want the closure, is examined in the film. The film is part of an ongoing agenda to mobilize public opinion against the factory.

i) **Tu Zinda Hai** (1995) is about the women activists of the Ekta Parishad, a mass-based women’s organization working in 35 districts of Madhya Pradesh. The film, directed by Shabnam Virmani, profiles three women who challenge the traditional, patriarchal structures of domination, and survive in a hostile environment to achieve their goals. A tribute to the indomitable spirit of the women-activists, the film also narrates stories of the changing identities of these women, in their own words. The interviews also reveal the hardships faced by the women in trying to rebel against a coercive family and society, and their attempt to chart their own destinies. The film throws up issues of empowerment and the power of a collective, and critically looks at the conniving role of an ineffectual state, the exploitative landlord, the corrupt police, and other manifestations of patriarchy.

j) **Kis Ki Raksha?** (1994), a film by Shriprakash, captures on video the agitation against the government takeover of adivasi land in Netrahat, South Bihar, for use as an army firing range. The adivasis, forced to choose between displacement or death from the stray bullets, fight against this state-sponsored tyranny. The spirit of the adivasis, who resist this forced eviction and also their concern to retain their identity and livelihood, are reflected in the film. The interviews in the film reveal that the adivasis are fully aware of the oppressive practices to which the state systematically subjects them.
The textual analyses of the films try to unravel the roles of the state, the market, the people, new social movements and often the filmmaker too, as envisioned by these alternative films. Notions of citizenship, identity and development, as constructed by the films, are critically examined in the light of the alternative thinking in development. The overt and covert agendas of the films are examined, by looking closely at specific representations in the films. As David Morley (1992) points out, textual analysis is necessarily interpretative and will produce a reading dominant in the text. The audio-visual techniques in the ten alternative documentaries are closely examined, including the various shots, the audio-track, the written word, and the camera movement.

b) in-depth interviews with 10 filmmakers

The in-depth interview is a useful method to elicit extensive responses from the interviewee on particular issues. While an open-ended questionnaire has a fixed and finite number of questions (which could limit the responses), the in-depth interview allows for an extended discussion of the topic being studied, and also for answers to any sub-questions that might arise from the main issue.

Ten directors of alternative documentaries in India were interviewed in depth about their views on the alternative documentary in general, and their films in particular. Their responses to various issues were recorded and analysed. A whole spectrum of issues was explored, ranging from their philosophical preoccupations to the practicalities of film production and funding. The filmmakers were chosen from across the country, and were selected because they were directors of one or more alternative documentaries. The selection was also influenced by my knowledge of their work and my access to the
filmmakers. The various film festivals, workshops, and seminars I attended also facilitated my selection.

The interviews were conducted in Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Mumbai, depending on where the filmmaker was available to be interviewed. An interview guide was used to direct the interview (see appendix A). The interview guide helped to systematically elicit the opinions of the filmmakers on various issues. However, the interviews often extended beyond the guide, and extra questions prompted by particular responses were included. Many of the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed later. Due to the malfunctioning of the dictaphone or too much external noise, four of the interviews could not be taped. Those interviews were written down as they took place. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to three hours, and was influenced by factors like unexpected interruptions or a paucity of time for the filmmaker. The interviews were conducted in English, except for one filmmaker who responded in Hindi, and whose responses were translated.

The 10 filmmakers interviewed for the study are Anand Patwardhan, Anjali Monteiro, K.P.Jayasankar, Deepa Dhanraj, Madhushree Dutta, Omji John, Sarat Chandran, Shabnam Virmani, Shriprakash, and K.Stalin.

c) focus group discussions with nine groups of audiences

Focus groups discussions are group interviews in which a discussion is held to get the desired information from the group. Wimmer and Dominick (1983) write that the focus group technique involves a 'relatively free discussion' by a group, facilitated by a moderator. The aim of the discussion is ‘not to build a consensus' but to understand the

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3 The more acclaimed films of some of these filmmakers are mentioned in chapter 2.
that focus group discussions are like collective in-depth interviews, ‘probes that are meant to find out how people think and act’.

Focus group discussions were undertaken to elicit the responses of various kinds of audiences to the alternative documentaries. The focus groups were chosen based on the potential ideological differences between them and were defined on the basis of their class, gender, profession, or ideological affiliations as evident from their membership in a particular organization. Logistic factors like the regional language in which the alternative documentary was available, the feasibility of getting together a focus group, and whether the members of the focus group did turn up at the chosen venue and time influenced the selection of the focus groups.

I wanted to choose different kinds of audiences, one difference being the exposure of the audience to the discourse of alternative development, and another, the difference in socio-economic status and also the level of education. Since it is a commonly held notion that the audiences for the alternative documentary are always those who go to film festivals, I conceived of audiences who were thought of as ‘converted’, and some audiences who had very little chance of being exposed to the ideas of alternative development. Audiences for whom many of the filmmakers profess to make their films, the disadvantaged people themselves, constituted another kind of audience for me. Since one focus of the study was examining the representational practices in the films, it

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4 my efforts to have as a focus group an audience comprising of IPS probationers, who are the visible sites of power for the state, and a group of doctors to respond to the critique of population policies of the state. However, at the last minute, these two focus group discussions could not take place, because of the difficulty of putting together the groups.
seemed imperative that I include one group of marginalized women empowered to represent themselves.

One of the alternative documentaries chosen for the study was screened for each of the focus groups, and the choice of the film was partially determined by the availability of the film at that particular time, and the language of the film. Before the screening commenced, the group was briefed about the study. In all the discussions, I was the moderator who guided the discussion, based on an interview guide (see appendix B). The respondents introduced themselves before the discussion began.

The responses of the group were then videotaped, with the exception of one focus group, when the video recording equipment mal-functioned. The discussion of that group was audiotaped, and later transcribed in full. The language of the discussion differed from group to group. Where required, translation was done by me, along with some outside help in some cases. The duration of the focus group discussions lasted for an average of one and a half hours, with the exception of one group (the poor, agricultural women of Pastapur). The respondents of this group walked out of the discussion abruptly, due to paucity of time, despite being briefed about the study.

The nine focus groups were:

1. Employees of an institute for environmental education in Bangalore (environmental scientists) – the seven members of this group were males and females, between 24 and 31 years of age. All of them had a post-graduate (MSc) degree in Environmental science, with a focus more on waste management than on the human rights aspects of sustainable development. By profession, they were involved in spreading environmental education to the people and sensitise them
about issues like bio-degradability, global warming etc. The group consisted of English-speaking, mostly urban-educated youth,

2. Women members of a Hyderabad-based women's research and activist group (feminists) – four feminist members of this organization, between the ages 25 to 35 were the respondents in this group. All the members had been variously involved with women’s causes and activism. Academically, all of them were in various stages of their doctoral research, mostly in literary theory.

3. Indian engineers working in the USA (computer engineers) – the six members of this focus group were all employed as computer engineers, who were from India and working in the United States of America. English-educated and mostly city-based, they were all male and aged between 25 and 32 years.

4. Students of social work in Mumbai (students of social work) - the seven members in this group were aged between 22 to 30 years, and were a mix of postgraduate students and research scholars of social work. They were both male and female, and were mostly English-educated and urban, except for one woman who was Hindi-educated.

5. Members of a marginalized women's group in Ahmedabad empowered to represent themselves through video (participatory video-makers) – the six members of this group were a vegetable vendor, a house wife, a tailor, a head-loader, a screen-printer and a beedi worker, who were mostly semi-literate or non-literate, belonging to a lower socio-economic status. Empowered to wield the video camera as a weapon, these women can represent themselves and their problems, and often wage daily struggles against domination by the police,
politicians, municipality, etc. aged between 25 and 40 years, they were an articulate, politicized group who could speak for themselves.

6. Graduate members of a right-wing students’ organization in Hyderabad (right-wing students) – seven male, graduate students constituted this group, and were activists of a right-wing, Hindu, national students' organization. While six of them were Hindus, there was one Muslim member in the group. All the students were aged between 17 and 23 years.

7. Women agricultural workers affiliated to a NGO working for empowerment of rural women in Pastapur village of Medak district in Andhra Pradesh (agricultural workers) - the five women in this group were rural, agricultural workers, who were illiterate and poor. They were between 25 and 45 years of age, and were members of an NGO working for their empowerment.

8. Post-graduate students of development communication in Hyderabad (students of development communication) – the six students of this group were both male and female, aged between 21 and 25 years, and were II year MA students of development communication.

9. Women employees of a state-sponsored welfare organization in Hyderabad, working as educators with marginalized groups (welfare workers) – the seven respondents of this group were employees of the state engaged in educating the children of marginalized sections like a leprosy colony, rickshaw pullers' colony, Muslim slum-dwellers, Lambada colonies, construction workers’ settlements etc. Aged between 27 and 50 years, they were all literate, empowered women trying to empower disadvantaged groups in and around Hyderabad.
The descriptors of the focus groups given in parenthesis above, are used throughout the thesis to refer to the focus groups.

**Scope of the study**

Documentaries have not been the focus of academic research in India. The paucity of books and theoretical writings on Indian documentaries reflect this lack. By focusing on alternative documentaries in India, the study hopes to provide a broad framework for students and teachers of communication in the country, which can facilitate further research on the documentary in India.

The study explores the space that alternative documentaries in India occupy as 'narratives' of an alternative development. Besides locating these films in a larger historical and philosophical context, the study attempts to evolve a trajectory for these films, in their quest to usher in a more equitable world. The issues that dominate documentary discourse, and the alternative documentary are examined in the study using qualitative methodologies. The observations made in the study, while not exhaustive, do reflect the dominant trends in the making and receiving of alternative documentaries in India. The study also attempts to provide new insights to the teachers and students of development communication into alternative uses of video to further new social and political agendas.

Interactions with filmmakers who make these films, and the NGOs who fund these films often reveal their need to try and understand what the audiences do with their films. As part of the invaluable feedback between the source and the receiver, the study hopes to provide a perspective on the generation of meanings by audiences. The endeavor is also to supplement the personal experiences of filmmakers about audiences with
systematic observations about how different kinds of audiences engage with the alternative documentary in India.

Non-governmental organizations and funding agencies are some of the key players involved in the financing, production and distribution of alternative documentaries in India. The agendas of these organizations are critiqued, through the opinions of the filmmakers. The study hopes that some of the analysis it offers in the critique can help clarify some issues of representation, funding and dissemination.

The thrust of the study is to explore the dominant agendas within and across the selected alternative documentaries. Also, the similarities and differences in the opinions of filmmakers on various issues, and the patterns of meaning generation within and across focus groups supplement this analysis.