CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the present days world of Infotainment (Information and Entertainment), Mass Media is playing a vital role in building up social and cultural mindsets. Many social researchers in Western countries had acknowledged the power of mass media and carried out profound study on its mesmerizing effect on the social conscience. A well-known philosopher, Prof. Noam Chomsky described this process by coining the new term ‘Manufacturing Consent’. In South-East Asia, it is only recently that the social scientists have begun analyzing the significant role of Mass Media in structuring the National, Communal, Sectarian and Ethnic personality which is reflected in the outburst of conflicts and violence. (Report South East Asia). These diverse social interactions and upheavals have been recorded on various visual forms of mass media such as print and television news, fiction films, street or proscenium theatre, posters, paintings, sculptures and photographs. Unlike other media, the documentary film has unique power that persuades the audience to become aware and take notice of social upheavals, poverty, inequality, and unnerving situation around them. The documentary form was initially used by state to promote dominant paradigm of so called ‘development’. However the new generation independent filmmakers born after independence challenged such propaganda. This disturbing presence of the independent issue based documentary films tended to be inconvenient to politicians, unprofitable to capitalist and uncomfortable to hedonist community, hence it was constantly kept on the bay.
The documentary film, although shares few similarities of production process with fiction cinema, yet it is completely different in its form and content. The modern day documentary film has transcended its basic purpose to ‘Inform and Educate’ by giving “creative treatment to actuality,” it has acquired the new dimension, which is “To represent and Politicize”. The documentary film essentially being form of visual representation with explicitly stated social content, gives us photographic and aural representations or likeness of the world. It is obvious that documentary stands for something, or represents the views of individuals, groups, or agencies, however, at the same time constructs an argument about the world depicted in it. In other words it could be stated that the documentary film depicts ‘the politics of existing social reality’.

The world presented in documentary is constructed through images of actuality, gives the viewer the fresh vision and new approach to look at the world they are associated with. The apparent naturalness and referentiality of given images of the world and surroundings may sometimes appear to be rhetorical or propagandist, nevertheless; they hold tremendous information and persuade the viewer to form the opinion about the world or take proactive approach to change the world around them.

Documentary film appeals to the reason and motivates its audience to confront problematic situations. Being an eye witness to various social situations, documentary film acts as an ‘historical visual evidence’ to validate the information gathered by social or anthropological researchers to create epistemological data base. Therefore, very recently, documentary
films have been taken into account, as an important methodological tool in social and anthropological research by Western scholars.

At International level, tradition of documentary film study has been greatly enriched with sociological point of view. In U.K., pioneers like John Grierson, Paul Rotha, (1930) laid the foundation of Documentary Study; in former USSR D’Ziga Vertov, (1920) seriously explored and established the evidential validity of ‘Film Truth.’ Anthropologist Jean Rouch (1956) elevated documentary film to the status of scientific evidence of complex social process of human relations. Eric Barnaouw, (1978) made tireless efforts to analyze and contextualize documentary films with historical process. Bill Nichols, American critic contributed (1991) a lot through his significant research work while exploring ‘documentary representation of reality’. Most importantly, feminist scholars Diane Waldman and Janet Walker added new dimension of feminist perspective in documentary film studies for the first time in the history.

However, in spite of the international acclaim, documentary film has been always considered as 'Poor Cousin' in India. Despite having glorious tradition of documentary film making, no Indian scholar has ever attempted to analyze Indian documentary films from sociological point of view. The Films Division is being held responsible to push documentary to such status. The Films Division produced peculiar type of ‘Information’, ‘News reel’ and ‘Heritage, Ethnographic’ films that aimed only at advocacy. Similarly, the Indian critics and research scholars of documentary study infringed their work to the writing of historical account and largely glorified the state controlled process of documentary film production. They prominently
concentrated their work within the area of history of ethnographic diversity, aesthetics of information films that mainly glorified greatness of cultural heritage of India. Therefore I felt the urgent need to take note of the vital record of sociological history in Indian documentary studies.

It is not true that people hate to watch documentary films and enjoy only entertainment films. People are always eager to get the information which resembles their own reality. In fact, they curiously watch those documentaries where they can identify closely with the people and their issues represented in the films with ‘Alternative Political Perspective’. The issue based documentary films bring the viewers closer to their real life experience. However, such type of documentary films reflecting vivid socio-political sensibility are hardly been allowed through the front door by Indian government and conglomerates of entertainment world who deceitfully propagate false surveys and halt the screenings for their commercial gain, as a result, Indian viewers are deprived of its precious treasure. The absence of exhibition avenues for good documentary films concerning people’s issues has also prevented academicians to acknowledge its due importance as a significant sociological resource. I am attempting to draw their attention through the present research to this valuable reserve.

The documentary uses celluloid film or digital video format in modern times, to document a social situation in reality. To that extent documentary filmmakers could be described as investigative journalists who essentially take up penetrating approach to explore and investigate all the factual dimensions, share information and negotiate the argument. But they are quite different from the propaganda-journalist and reporters in electronic
news-media, who are constantly engaged in sensationalizing or extrapolating the factual information for its commercial gain. Documentary film has walked away from most hated genre of lackluster “News reel” form of propaganda established by Films Division. In fact, it has rather evolved into a ‘Reflexive tool’ to express Socio-political perspective and acts as a powerful ‘Protest-Weapon’ against establishment. The visual representation in documentary film served as ‘visible evidence’ of social upheavals and successfully served as a catalyst to enhance the effectiveness of social struggles.

The Reflexivity of a Socio-Political Environment is distinctive feature of every Issue Based Documentary film. Along with the factual details it presents filmmaker’s argument about the social reality. Therefore, documentary film is considered to be reflection of socio-political reality through the perspective of a filmmaker. Precisely, this strength of documentary film has persuaded those, who are concerned and care for the people, to make powerful statement through documentary. They go beyond the developmental paradigm to ‘inform and educate,’ and express their concern on various contemporary social issues. These are the ‘Issue Based Documentary films’ to which, I am trying to make a special reference point for the present research. The documentary films that are aimed to make a difference in the lives of the people, produced in this particular ‘genre’, have ability to force the change in society. Therefore, I think, there is an urgent necessity to analyze the content of this particular form of mass media from sociological point of view.
The Indian Issue Based Documentary Films are basically 'Political' in nature, therefore the ideologies on gender, class, nation or sexuality are woven together in very complex structure of society. The cinematic expression of this complex fabric is inscribed in visual symbols difficult to isolate. Nevertheless, many feminist scholars have constantly worked to 'decode' these signifiers of ideologies existing in complex structures of cinematic representation of society. They have used the parameters drawn from various theories of psychoanalysis, sociology, aesthetics and many other faculties of empirical science. The parameters used by feminist theories are useful to analyze cinematic representation of Gender. The present research explores to establish the inherent link between those feminist parameters and documentary theories. I have discussed it in detail in the chapters namely 'Documentary Form, 'Visual Evidence: A Sociological Discourse,' 'Feminist and Historical Perspective' in the context of 'Issue Based Documentary films.'

There are several instances of social and anthropological researchers where they have incorporated visual method in their work; because they consider the form of audio-visual information resource as most authentic. It is true that camera eye objectively witnesses social reality and eliminates possibility of human error in perception. However, few attempts were made to question its 'accuracy' and possibility of 'mediated distortion' or 'mediated interpretation' of real life visual images. But these apprehensions were successfully countered by Visual Sociologist; (Howard Becker, 1963), they claimed that there are several physical limitations to human observation compared to mechanical representations of social reality. On the contrary, it has proved that the greater degree of accuracy could be obtained through
camera recording (Thesis, 1998, Lomax H and Casey N), using various devices like micro and macro telephoto lenses. The fact that most of the academic science education documentary films use microfilming technology and various types of lenses to illustrate vivid details of scientific knowledge proves the need of visual resources for development of knowledge in all spheres of life.

Documentary film being visual form of social reflection, it has been constantly dragged into countless debates associated to ‘Aesthetic Criticism of Film Studies’. There has been several conflicting point of views that consistently evaluated documentary films in comparison with fiction films. Therefore, it is imperative to take informed note of few significant contributions and debates on ‘Documentary Form’. It is not possible to establish sociological knowledge of ‘Gender Perspective’ without acknowledging various debates on ‘Documentary form as visible evidence’. Many proponents of documentary film who consider the documentary to be a ‘tool for social change’, have attempted to define documentary films by breaking away with fictional narrative films.

In 1936, eminent British film maker and theoretician Paul Rotha, clearly distinguished the documentary method of visual representation and pointed out its difference in purpose from the entertainment motives of fiction films. He felt that documentary film has largely materialized as the result of sociological, political and educational requirements. It creates interpretation of life, social feeling and significantly express the philosophic thought. Another British filmmaker and founder of documentary theory and criticism,
John Grierson therefore wrote, "The documentary is creative treatment to actuality." "It is a special kind of picture with clear social purpose."

The World Union of Documentary Film-makers issued a definition in 1948 that appears to be quite pervasive. They emphasized upon different purpose of documentary form (from those of fiction films) by stimulating the desire to widen human knowledge and understanding and its obvious motive to truthfully pose the problems and solutions encompassing all the spheres of life. They have also accepted the unavoidable factor to 'reconstruct the actuality' for the convenience of shooting and recording reality on celluloid medium.

The BBC producer Richard Cawston extends the scope of documentary films and hits upon its 'propaganda' feature. He points out that "documentary film's job is to reflect the society and not to influence it; (G Roy, 1971), but in reflecting societies accurately, one tries to reflect as it were, the spearheads of society." The spearheads are the people who are slightly ahead in their thinking and communicate their thoughts to the masses. This process of dissemination of information empowers the people who are little lagging behind to catch up with ones in front, as a result it helps them to change the society.

The above mentioned attempts to define the scope of documentary films have underlined the following prominent features of documentary film.
(a) The documentary films essentially deal with 'Social aspects' and prevailing 'Social Reality.'
(b) This celluloid representation of social reality is mediated by a film-maker with his/her creative and purposeful perception. In other words a film-maker reflects or rather interprets his/her understanding about the social reality.
(c) Its basic axiom is to widen the knowledge of the viewers by dissemination of information and motivate them for social action through the celluloid medium.

Thus, it is evident from above discussion that documentary film is a significant form of information resource in Social Research; therefore I have mainly adapted the new 'Visual Evidence Method' to proceed for critical sociological analysis. The 'Visual Resource Method' has been widely used and accepted in Social research, is called as 'Visual Sociology' or 'Sociology of Visual Representation'. There are prominent scholars namely John Grierson, Jean Rouch, Eric Baraouw, C. Staz, Bill Nichols, Marcus Bank, Elizabeth Chaplin, Elizabeth Cowie, Diane Waldman, and Janet Walker who had extensively argued and justified their stand on using documentary films as 'Visual Evidence' for the sociological analysis.

Although many western scholars have extensively contributed to the discipline of 'Sociology of Visual Representation', very few or almost none, in India, has attempted to analyze such an important visual information resource. It remained most neglected form because of its propagandist nature for more than four decades of Indian Independence. Despite having very old tradition of documentary filmmaking, for almost over a century, it remained to be a monopoly of state, which predominantly controlled its content. The documentary films made by government and governmental agencies aimed only to 'Inform and Educate' as a result, remained mostly unpopular and
hated form. The adopted paradigm of ‘Developmental communication’ excluded people’s needs that enforced ‘the state’s point of view about the people. The compulsory exhibition (Act 1952) of documentary films made by Government of India’s institution, namely Films Division by clubbing documentary films with entertainment fiction films, had created aversion rather than enlightenment in the minds of common people to such an extent that people used to enter into the cinema theatre only after ‘the Indian News parade’.

People disliked Films Division’s documentaries not just because they contained the ‘message’; but rather because of the way they were presented. The insipid projection of informative data in extremely detached authoritative voice was presented in a didactic manner. The producers of documentary films distanced themselves from the lively humane legacy of ‘Story Telling Skills’ embedded in Indian culture and landed up in something rigid insipid ‘objective’ expression. Similarly, the negative approach of treating documentary films as poor cousin, had indirect impact on academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and history, as a result very little work had been done in this direction.

When I came across the films made by Sukhdev who depicted impact of drought on rural India and heart shattering pictures of Indian poverty, (1973) or a film made by Loksen Lalwani, titled ‘they call me Chamar’, (1976) that depicted the caste discrimination in feudal system in India and films made by Sukhdev and Tapan Bose, titled ‘The Indian Story’ on Bhagalpur prisoner’s blinding case that exposed oppressive government machinery, had shocked me and provoked me to take serious note of several historical
accounts of bitter reality of post 60s Indian society. The connivance of Indian documentary films as powerful medium Representing Social Issues in Visual Form has been significant starting point of present research.

SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF THE SUBJECT

In a diverse society like India many sensitive individuals have reacted to jeopardized social situations and state repressions through different perceptions based on their experiences. Their documentaries presented intimacy of their concern and immediacy of bitter realities in society. Many of these films represented political issues like communal violence, caste and ethnic atrocities, electoral manipulations, the influx of rural people into the slums of metro cities, child labor, environmental degradations. They have used ‘medium of films’ as powerful tool to register their protest and apprehensions. These were called ‘Issue Based documentary’ or ‘Committed films’ that challenged the established patriarchal value systems, developmental paradigms of state, repressive capitalist system under disguise of ‘free market economy’. They aimed to change the world; because they believed that “another world is possible”. They have also changed the established notions of documentary filmmaking as ‘objective, realistic report of exhaustive information data base’ which was originated in colonial legacy of British India.

In India after 1977, during the ‘post-emergency’ period, various socio-political movements emerged on the canvass of Indian social history. The Post emergency Indian Society was passing through tremendous turmoil, which gave rise to various socio-political movements like civil liberties,
women's rights groups, labor and environmental organizations. The activists of these social movements came on the streets to fight for their rights. They started using the 'Public Sphere' to promote their ideologies. They have used various visual forms of arts to communicate their message. These social movements creatively used various graphical publicity Posters, Placards, Cartoons, Flash cards, handy Information Booklets with Pictures and Photographs, Slogans, Songs, and most prominently Street Theatre and Documentary films. The availability and easy accessibility of video camera during the decade of 90 has prompted many people to record their historical struggles in documentary form. Thus, 'Issue based documentary films' became significant part of every day human life. Therefore, as a social researcher I find it important to investigate this significant phenomenon of 'Issue Based Documentary films'.

While studying this particular form of communication, it was interesting to observe that how the members of people’s movements reflect their Value System based on prevailing social, political conventions. We can see that there is a selective reinforcement of values, attitudes about gender expressed through these means of mass communication. Thus, the perpetual absence or passive presence of women, or stereotypical representation of women, in various situations of moving audio visual images, sometimes portray devaluing gender relations. It indirectly indicates subordinate status of women and directly defends the superiority of male in the society. The 'Representation of Women' in mass media has been thoroughly discussed and interpreted by many feminist critics in film studies. In this connection I have discussed prominent 'Gender Discourses' in the area of film studies that are contributing to sociological understanding.
A documentary form basically attempts to fuse two incompatible concerns, that is, to hold together ‘medium and message.’ The committed filmmakers make it possible because they use ‘real people’ talking to the viewers, telling them the truths about realities around them. These are ‘Visible Evidences’ of historical and social process. The filmmaker ‘Re-presents’ the visual evidence of actuality which is largely substantiated by personal testimonies, interviews to get expert opinions the newspaper and television channel clippings, statistics from official reports, archival history, dictionaries and many more devices. All these incredible resources from the real world provide irrefutable evidential validity to argument presented in the documentary.

This effort appeals to human belief that ‘what we see, we believe’, the knowledge acquired by our own vision cannot be false. Therefore, during the process of recording actuality, a photographer or a documentary film maker seems to address two distinct and apparently contradictory desires. First is the desire to witness the actuality with our own eyes and second, the acquired scientific knowledge and rational argument about it should be subject to the scrutiny. Thus any form of ‘visual evidence’ is subject to confirmation through observation and logical interpretation of every individual.

In modern sociological research, the knowledge is prominently drawn from the New Visual Communication Technologies. This approach, which is often called as ‘Visual sociology’ or ‘Sociology of Visual Representation’, has been considered as an important methodological tool in the hands of
social researcher. A social researcher or an anthropologist uses visual images to ‘represent’ the research findings or to substantiate his/her data to share the sociological knowledge. The social scientist’s reliance upon ‘Visual Representation’ seemed to be gradually increasing because we believe in ‘evidence’ by our own eyes, including the visual evidence of mechanically reproduced resources such as photography and cinematography.

There is no doubt that the study of documentary films, forms essential part of Sociology and as an investigator one has to adopt method of ‘Visual Sociology’ for its critical analysis. As a researcher the purpose of my study is to investigate the ‘Social dimension i.e., ‘Gender’, reflected in relation to various social issues and problems represented by film-makers in their ‘celluloid re-creations.’ of social reality. While studying the process of ‘Visual Representation’ of people’s issues and struggles fought by both, people and the filmmaker, I wish to narrow down the focus of my present research, to the ‘subjective perception of gender’ of the film subjects as well as the filmmaker.

Thus it could be summarized as follows.
1) Documentary film is historical visual evidence which helps the social researcher to construct the knowledge of sociological importance
2) It has unique power of persuasions which motivates the people to become alert and take note of the issues faced by the society.
3) Documentary film acts as an eye-witness to state repression and later serves as significant evidence in legal as well as social research.
4) Issue based documentary film is used as powerful weapon to protest against established system
5) Analysis of Gender perspective informs the Social researchers and Social Activist whose socio-political perspectives are instrumental to Social Change.

6) This study is first of its kind taking into account the sociological knowledge produced by this visual resource for Sociological discipline.

HYPOTHESIS

The Indian Documentary films are ‘Representation’ of prevailing Social Conditions, Issues, Perspectives and Socio-cultural Ethos. Then they must be reflecting ‘gender perspective’ of film maker as well as the subjects. The era of digital revolution that is 1985-2000 has facilitated the filmmakers to choose the medium of documentary to reflect their own perspectives on social issues to produce sociological knowledge. The present research is carried out to verify the same and document the observations.

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

In India more than 200 documentary films are produced every year. Out of them, almost 50% documentary films deal with socio-political issues. The documentary films depicting socio-political issues implicitly reflect collective mind-set as well as prevailing value system of the society. It is very interesting task to explore this implicit personality of Indian society. I believe that if this kind of unexpressed dimension of gender perception in personality of Indian society is analyzed, it will certainly contribute to sociological knowledge of Indian society. For this reason I intend to study the ‘Gender perspective’ of those who are ‘Depicted’ that is ‘the Subjects of
documentary films as well as of those who are ‘Representing’ them i.e., Filmmakers. The gender perception can be observed with visible criteria and can be noted from conscious or sub-conscious effort of a film maker to interpret gender dimension in relation to socio-political issues. Thus, Objectives of the present research could be defined as follows.

1] Documentary form is intended to reflect Social Reality therefore present research explores ‘Issue Based Documentary film’ as ‘Visual Evidence’ for Social Research.

[2] Social movements in India have used the Documentary form as Tool for Expression of their Issues and Concerns. The Issue Based Documentary has emerged as dominant force during the period of digitalization that is 1985 to 2000

[3] Being mediated form of expression Documentary films Reflect Subjective Perception of Social Reality that is based on Gender, Class, and Caste Religion and Demographic specificity. Therefore, the present research has attempted to explore the ‘Gender perspective’ expressed by filmmaker as well as the subjects of Issue based documentary film

[4] To prove the Hypothesis that “Documentary films are ‘Re-presentation’ of prevailing social conditions, issues, perspectives and socio-cultural ethos that enriches the sociological knowledge.”
SELECTION OF PERIOD

The chosen period 1985 to 2000 represents the period of digital revolution, the technology that made the process of filmmaking more accessible to lay persons. In this age of ‘Digital Technology’, Information Web is bringing every aspect of human life under its purview. The digitalization has revolutionized all the means of communication such as camera, sound, recording of moving audio-visual images and broadcasting infra-structure. The revolution in communication technology has changed the scenario to such an extent, that the whole world could be brought in captivity of tiny button size digital apparatus.

The people in social movements, fighting for their issues, wanted to reciprocate their concern on various issues. They could easily use video camera and digital editing system to make documentary films on their social issues. SEWA, of Ahmadabad, an voluntary organization working among women in unorganized sector and vending vegetables, formed by Elaben Bhat. These women took up the video camera on their shoulders to reciprocate their issues to other urban audience. Women from small village like ‘Pastapur’ from Medhak district of Andhra Pradesh took up the video camera to expose government’s agricultural policy that safeguarded multinationals. Landless labor women from Katchh district of Gujarat started the Community Radio and documentary films production to exchange information on their small trades. All these initiatives were made possible due to change in United Nations approach and policy (UNDP funded) to empower poor people from underdeveloped countries to participate in democratizing the process of mass media. Thus, it is evident
that the digital revolution and easy accessibility of equipments has brought the overall change in mass communication arena and as a result, offbeat documentary film movement geared up the exchange of sociological information and knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

In view of above, the visual social research could be carried out by two methods,
[a] ‘Content’ analysis of documentary films through which prevailing social conditions and socio-political perspective could be studied
[b] Analysis of ‘Impact’ on the audience or the Society as a whole.

I have used the first method of ‘Content Analysis’ for the present research which has very wide scope. The foremost task of ‘content analysis’ method is, to distinguish between ‘Information based’ and ‘Issue based documentary films’. Prominent Indian Issue based documentary films made during 1985-2000 are selected for detail study.

COLLECTION OF DATA

- The chronological data of Films Division documentary films has been collected from Films Division’s office in Mumbai.
- Data on Private Sector Indian documentary films made until 1985 was collected from Media Journals, available in XIC (Xavier Institute of Communication) Mumbai Library collection.
• Data on Indian Issue based documentary films made during 1985 to 2000 was collected from various sources namely National Film Archives, Pune, Media Unit TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai), Abhivyakti Media for Development, Nasik, AVEHI (Audio Visual Centre, Mumbai), and Majlis Cultural Centre, Mumbai. The Data collected from all these governmental and non-governmental organizations helped me to categorize and prepare my own Catalogue of Post Independence and Issue based documentary films for the present study.

• D.V.Ds, C.Ds and VHS copies of selected documentaries were obtained from personal collection of Mr. Anand Patwardhan, Mumbai, Magic Lantern Foundation, New Delhi, Abhyvyakti Media for development, Nasik, Avehi, Mumbai, CED, Mumbai,

FILM SELECTION CRITERIA

1) First and Foremost a criterion of selecting film is the ‘Social Issue’, which is Focus of the present research.

2) Visibility of Gender perspective of filmmaker and the subjects expressed directly or indirectly in the film.

3) Period of documentary. The documentary should have been made During 1985-2000

4) The film should have been made by Indian filmmaker

5) Accessibility and availability of film to the Indian viewers and researchers.
6) Popularity of the film. Popularity is determined by the discussions and debates carried out through articles, workshops and various viewer ships groups.

After application of above-mentioned criteria more than twenty films found suitable for the examination of the present research. However, it was important to determine priority of selection. The priority was ‘Gender Perspective’, which was sought in equal numbers between male and female filmmakers to avoid ‘Gender Bias’. The emphasis on only ‘Women Oriented’ topics was avoided to critically review and compare between Gender perspectives of male and female filmmakers. On the basis of above mentioned criteria Ten Number of Issue based documentary films were selected for the detailed Textual Analysis. 1)‘Something Like a War’ by Deepa Dhanraj 2)‘Father Son and Holy War’ by Anand Patwardhan 3)‘Tu Zinda Hai’ by Shabnam Viramani 4)‘Lesser Human’ by K Stalin 5)‘Narmada Diary’ by Simantini Dhuru & Anand Patwardhan 6) Hamare Gaon Mein Hamara Raj’, Bijju Toppo 7)‘I Live in Behrampada’, Madushri Dutta 8) ‘Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda’ by Shripakash 9) ‘Skin Deep’ by Reena Mohan 10) ‘Moksha’ by Punkaj Butalia

In view of above-mentioned objectives, I have divided the discussion of my work within seven chapters as per following order

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SUBJECT

This chapter introduces the Significance and scope of the present research. It also elaborates the Objectives, Methodology, Data Collection, Film Selection Criteria etc.
CHAPTER 2:- REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It was extremely disappointing to know that very little was written on Indian Political-Issue Based Documentary. During the research, I found that lot of literature is available on ‘Indian Fiction Cinema’, that has thoroughly discussed and analyzed it’s various aspects, such as, cinematic language, songs, editing pattern, stories, social environment, it’s treatments as well as ideologies reflected by them. But very little has been written on modern Indian documentary films which have thrown off all the shackles of government control and censorship and have leaped into the open sky of plurality, transcending across the barriers of time, space and languages. Only authentic material I found on documentary films were early attempts to chronicle the history of the documentary during pre and post independence era by few people like Jag Mohan who worked with Films Division for long time and another book jointly written by S. Krishnaswamy with Eric Barnaouw. There are few books and articles contributed to the various publications and catalogues of Films Division by people like Jag Mohan (1960), Mohan Bhavnani (1960), Dr. Gopal Datt (1968), Dr. P. V. Pathy (1972), S. Krishnaswamy- Eric Barnaouw (1963), Sanjit Narvekar (1995), and most recently Captain Purush Bawkar (2005).

The Review of Literature is done as per the four important sections of the research. Lot of literature was available that has discussed all the theoretical concepts and debates through Aesthetic as well as Sociological perspective. The books and articles that have emphasized the uniqueness of Documentary Form as Visual Evidence in Sociological of Anthropological knowledge
were thoroughly discussed. There was considerable amount of literature available on discussion of 'Visual Sociology'. The Feminist Perspective was needed to analyze the Gender Perspective. The literature of feminist theoreticians helped me to form the parameters to analyze the content of documentary films.

CHAPTER 3:- DOCUMENTARY FORM

In the third Chapter, I have discussed the main theoretical framework and various theoretical concepts, debates associated with 'Documentary Form'. The discussion on nature of documentary, the attempts to define and critically examine few contentious concepts that determine and enhance meaning of documentary form. Many academicians have always questioned and debated over the truth and degree of distortion in depiction of 'Social Reality' in the documentary films due to filmmakers mediations while representing it. There are some contentions of scholars whether documentary could be considered as 'Visual Evidence' which does not have scientific veracity and method of objectively observable data for anthropological or social research. 'Truthfulness', 'Objectivity', 'Artistic Neutrality' and 'Propaganda versus Art', are kind of ethical expectations from the documentary form. The 'John Greirsonian' school of thought has always defended documentary for its being bias with 'social purpose.'

In this chapter, I am discussing Sociological Approaches to structure the form of documentary film. The four major approaches discussed are Expository approach, Observational approach, Interactive approach and Reflexive approach. One of the subsections of this chapter is 'The moral
dimension.’ It consists of ethical responsibilities of filmmaker, the ‘Hegemony’ and ‘Imbalance of Power’. It is obvious and inevitable that filmmaker holds complete control over the process of ‘representation’ of social reality. In this context, I have discussed few concepts often used to describe the genre of documentary approaches to form. These concepts include ‘The Film Truth: Cinema Verite’, ‘Direct Cinema’, Films for ‘Advocacy’, the concept of ‘The Other’ ‘Cinema of Protest’ in connection with debate on ‘Propaganda versus Art’.

CHAPTER4: VISUAL EVIDENCE:

A SOCIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

This chapter is vital aspect of my research work as it examines the possibility of documentary form to become ‘visible evidence’ in light of various discourses on ‘Visual Sociology’. It consists of ‘Theory of Representation’ and ‘Depiction’ by using various stylistic devices such as metaphoric, symbolic depiction, ironic and poetic depiction etc. The ‘theory of representation’ and depiction consists of analysis of factors that determine and hold its evidential validity. The factors such as ‘referentiality’ and ‘Indexical Binding’ within the text of film contain specific historical context of ‘time and space’. It also involves important factor of ‘Ideology’ and ‘Construction of Argument’ for the topic of representation.

The method of visual representation has its roots in anthropology, in which scholars such as David Livingstone, who wrote the book, ‘Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa’, in 1857, (Chaplin E, 1994) used engraved visual illustrations for the first time to describe the various tribes he had seen in
South Africa. Similarly, Robert Flaherty, (1913) known as father of documentary films, (Barnouw E, 1993 S.E.), went on an anthropological excursion, used documentary film as an ‘Visual Evidence’ for the first time in history to substantiate his research findings and information on the life of tribal people (called Eskimo). Subsequently, in recent years, Howard Becker, John Berger, Elizabeth Chaplin, Marcus Bank, H Lomax and N Casy, D. Harper, have contributed alternative theoretical paradigms in the field of Visual Sociology. C. Stasz, who initiated ‘the sociology of visual representation’ also defended her stand by citing thirty-one articles which were included in the early volumes of ‘American Journal of Sociology’ (1896-1916), used photographs as illustration and evidence. (Stasz, C, 1979)

CHAPTER 5:- FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter various feminist discourses on documentary film studies and media studies are discussed. There have been several media studies with regard to women in various countries. The uniform observation noted by them states that media representations of women has been gender biased and by and large held sexist attitudes and value systems. The popular commercial media distorts images of women and advocates gender stereotypes. The traditional roles of men and women are grossly glorified to maintain the status quo. The two predominant feminist Theoretical Perspectives such as Liberal feminist and Radical feminist that influence the sociological analysis of Media have been scrutinized for the present research.
This chapter, while exploring Gender Perspective of the filmmaker, as well as of the subjects primarily deals with ‘gender sensitive approach’ towards every thing. ‘Gender’ in the present research is being specified in its relation to totalitarian perspective, which refers to conventional social set up that discriminates the women. The ‘Gender Sensitive approach’ looks at the totality of social relations in the economy, the family and the society in order to understand, how gender operates between and within particular arenas of social life. Various Feminist discourses on sociology, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism are discussed in relation to various concepts such as male-female film gaze, reflexivity, and subjectivity, creating counter-cinema, sentimental contracts and politics of sexual difference.

CHAPTER 6:- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

PRE & POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

This chapter evidently reveals that British Rule laid the foundation of the Indian Documentary film movement, during colonial period. Therefore, Indian documentary films, produced during pre-independence and post independence era by government, were clearly based on given British paradigms. The British paradigms of documentary film making practice were based on the theory of John Grierson, a founder of world documentary filmmaking movement, an academics and a philosopher. John Grierson had played pivotal role in the developmental communication in Indian documentary film culture.

The historical review of Indian documentary films reveals that it is only from mid 70s, one can notice gradual rise of different kinds of documentary
films, which are independent of state patronage and that primarily defer in form and content. Many of these independent documentary films were poor in terms of budget, film craft, and modes of distribution, but they have extensively experimented in terms of ‘Forms & Content’. They have questioned and put forth the critique of dominant socio political hegemony.

CHAPTER 7: ISSUE BASED DOCUMENTARY FILMS
DURING 1985-2000

In India after 1977, during the ‘post-emergency’ period, various socio-political movements emerged on the canvass of Indian social history. The Post emergency Indian Society was passing through tremendous turmoil, which gave rise to various socio-political movements like civil liberties, women's rights groups, labor and environmental organizations. The activists of these social movements came on the streets to fight for their rights. They started using ‘The Public Sphere’ to promote their ideologies. They have used various Visual Forms of Arts to communicate their message. These social movements creatively used various graphical publicity Posters, Placards, Cartoons, Flash cards, handy Information Booklets with Pictures and Photographs, Slogans, Songs and most prominently Street Theatre and Documentary films.

For many organizations and individuals involved in spheres of social-political awareness and actions, video has served as an important function of recording their endeavors and achievements over the period, with its directness and intimacy. “It has provided the space and appropriated a medium for those whose voices -whether inspirationally collective or
painstakingly individual - let alone heard. It has functioned with swiftness and economy to empower filmmakers and their subject.” wrote Paromita Vohra, in her introduction to video section (MIF 1998). I am discussing the role of few NGOs such as CENDIT from Delhi, SEWA from Ahmedabad, JANA DARSHAN from Jharkhand, two other women’s collectives from Bangalore and Pastapur [AP], who specifically worked to empower ‘People in Mass Movements’, with visual techniques by arranging ‘Video’ trainings and workshop for them. The products of these actions have ‘Voiced the Voiceless’. Marginally literate activists have attempted to represent their burning human right issues of workers struggles against state and capitalist repression, water pollution due to developmental projects, land right issues, women’s self-identification while organizing themselves for micro-credit groups, etc.

The decade of 1990s, have witnessed dramatic changes in media scenario. Globalization has brought, in its wake a proliferation of trans-national satellite networks and a variety of program genres which were unknown in the country. On the one hand, news channels are churning out investigative reports that appropriate the form and content of the documentary as ‘authentic evidence’, on the other hand the sheer boom in small screen text further marginalized documentary filmmaker.

CHAPTER 8:- CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FILMS

A microscopic observation of few issue based documentary films during earlier period of video revolution, starkly reveals the hierarchy of power relations in mass social movements. For instance one can obviously note
that women's presence in Zarkhand movement against uranium mining as shown in the film 'Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda' made by Shreeprakash, is passive. Merely presence of 'woman factor' in the film does not make much difference in portrayal of socio-political issues, but the lack of gender sensitivity of film maker while recording the struggle, prevents him from inquiry into women's participation and their status in the decision making of the given social movement. On the other hand, a film 'Lesser Humans' made by another filmmaker, K.Statlin, who recorded the issue of caste discrimination of night soil sweepers [Bhangi community] in Gujarat, prominently points out women's participation and initiatives in decision making during their struggle against 'state' and the 'society'. The filmmaker's gender being male doesn't prevent him from portraying women's aggression in their fight against caste system and their comments against their passive men and drunken husbands. A film 'Father Son & holy war', made by Anand Patwardhan obliviously makes 'Gender Preference' to explore the power relations within gender and community, as cause for communal violence. The segment titled 'Hero Pharmacy' interestingly explores the construction of 'Gender Dominance' in today's culture and its use in raising communal hatred. It exposes the patriarchal social system and state machinery, which obviously biased against gender.

There are numerous documentary films made by women filmmakers, as their obvious choice of the women related subjects, express 'gender sensitive' approach while recording the social reality on the visual media. Documentary film made by Shabnam Virmani namely 'Tu Zinda Hai' explores the issue of asserting women's identity in mass movement. The filmmaker tries to reveal all contradictions and problems of power
relationships in the movement. Women taking initiative to prioritise their
gender issues in mass struggle had been the subjects of many documentary
films made by women. It will be very interesting to know why only women
prefer to do that. There are various forms used by filmmakers such as
autobiographical and biographical category point to the fact ‘personal is
becoming political. These films explore the individual relationships to the
society as a whole. Thus the proposed research study tries to microscopically
explore the ‘Gender’ factor as it affects attitudes of the filmmaker and
viewers. This research will hopefully enrich the sociological discipline with
its unique observations

CHAPTER 9:- CONCLUSION

Despite many hurdles of modern world, we can see the rise of strong and
powerful political content represented in ‘Reflexive’ style of documentary
filmmaking. This reflexive mode involves formal strategies that question the
traditional notion of ‘Objective portrayal of social reality’. The modern style
of documentary genre of camera, ‘fly over the wall’ or ‘Cinema verite’
where the camera records whatever appears in frame without much
mediation of filmmaker the subject itself narrates itself.

In this new form of socio-political documentary ‘Personal becomes Political’
in which filmmaker’s perception of self in relation to totality and society
becomes the subject of the narrative structure of the film which creates
intimate dialogue with the audience which they have never seen or
experienced. Thus it has reduced the gap between the audience and a
filmmaker. I am trying to trace this new genre in documentary film which
unfolds the creative yet potentially political documentary practice, while discussing few films such Anand Patwardhan’s ‘Father Son & holy War’, Tu Zinda Hai by Shabnam Viramani, Skin Deep’ by Reena Mohan and many other autobiographical narrations of women filmmakers.

Based on the theories and perspectives discussed in previous chapters, following Parameters were considered to analyze the content of documentary films.

1) Frame of Reference
2) The Ideological Perspective of Filmmaker
3) Nature of Argument in documentary film.
4) Gender mapping and Gender perspective
5) Time and Space inhabited by the subjects
6) Gaze, Visual Language and Vocabulary of dominance
7) Enhancement devices such as music, sound, symbols and metaphors.
8) Effect as a Spectator and Researcher.

All the above-mentioned parameters were applied while analyzing the issue based films. After detailed textual analysis the Hypothesis was effectively proved in the following way. The analysis pointed out that [1] Issue Base documentary films have reflected the reality images of adivasies whose fundamental human right to live being treded, dalits constantly pleaded their right to live with human dignity, mired poverty, hunger, gender discrimination, social and sexual exploitation of women and children, caste discrimination, communal violence, ethnic strife, nuclear mongering, eco-terrorism and politics of hate and so on. [2] Study also revealed that Issue Based films have empowered the marginalized sections of the society and
made the ‘space’ in the mainstream media to voice their burning issues. [3] The conscious effort was done by ‘few sensitive men’ to redefine the ‘Gender roles’ and to include women in public sphere as well as help them to challenge the patriarchal norms. [4] The films with priority to non-gender issue demonstrated certain ‘visual vocabulary of dominance’. [5] Digital revolution during 1985 to 2000 has largely empowered marginalized sections and illiterate farmer women were able to choose their visual language express powerfully through ‘Community Video. [6] All the selected documentaries acted as ‘Visual Evidence’ to establish the social reality and forced the oppressors to accept and act against the injustice. On the basis of powerful reality images filmmakers and victim people used the films as witness to bring the change in the policies. [9] Issue based films challenged the ‘Patriarchal Systems’ as well as State’s capitalist developmental paradigms. [10] This research has also noted some fallouts in Filmmaker’s perspectives that demonstrated ‘idealism’ and ‘utopian’ ideology about the life of indigenous people to be ‘unaffected’ by modern era and they blamed the capitalist set-ups for being responsible to damage ‘innocent and eco-friendly life styles of the tribal people and their women.

Thus it can be categorically said that ‘The Indian Documentary films are ‘Representation’ of prevailing Social Conditions, Issues, Perspectives and Socio-cultural Ethos. They also reflect ‘gender perspective’ of filmmaker as well as the subjects. The era of digital revolution that is 1985-2000 and especially the developmental communication programs implemented by UNDP have empowered downtrodden to choose the medium of documentary to reflect their own perspectives on social issues to produce
sociological knowledge’. The sociological insights generated by the present research will be instrumental to the development of ‘Visual Sociology.

******

References:

Chapter 1 - Introduction


4 Rotha Paul, ‘Documentary films’ (Father and Fabels Limited, London, 1936) p68


Note: All the resources on ‘Visual Sociology’ or Sociology of Visual Representation


Berger, John, 'Ways of seeing', BBC and Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972
Cited in and Visual Representation


'Indian Documentary films 94' published by Films Division, collection of various articles on the centenary of cinema. (1994)