CHAPTER 4

VISUAL EVIDENCE: A SOCIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Visual sociology is a methodological approach in which the researcher uses visual images as resource to substantiate his/her data. It has its roots in anthropology, in which scholars like Livingstone who wrote the book 'Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa', in 1857, \(1\) (Chaplin E, 1994) used (engraved) visual illustrations for the first time. Robert Flaherty in 1913 (Barnouw E), \(2\) as an anthropologist, used photographs of the tribes (Eskimos), made many documentary films to educate and share knowledge information that has enriched the disciplines of anthropology and social sciences. More recently, researchers used visual methods to capture, the meanings behind different phenomena such as the difference between dairy farms (H Beckerr, 1997), \(3\) or the relationship between midwives and their clients (Lomax and Casey 1998).

Visual Methods use photographs and moving images of films and videos. A researcher can use pre-existing images or can produce their own. Visual method, as a research method, carries some concerns with it. The first concern of a researcher is its ‘Evidential Validity’. The second concern is the ‘subjective choices’ of a film maker that affects while recording the images reality. Every film maker has to choose between what is to be included and excluded. Thus ‘selective reason’ of the film maker and editor affects the ‘objectivity of the Truth.’ It also brings into question the representation of the people in the image and especially in the case of historical photographs
or moving images; the authenticity of the image proves its evidential validity on scientific grounds.

Certainly, use of visual images adds richness to research understanding, however proper evaluatory precaution has to be taken to prove its applicability. In some instances, it can add to data and information base of the faculty of research as it provides the tangible proof of the existence of a certain phenomenon. Some researchers have used visual image to affect social change. Elizabeth Chaplin (‘Sociology and Visual representation’1994) cites the studies which accomplished positive changes in the working conditions of children in the early part of 20th century, or in the living conditions of people in the slums of New York and Chicago.

Thus it becomes apparent that the use of visual methods can have important implications for social research. The international Visual Sociology Association founded in 1981, promotes this method as a valid method of social research. The association sees this method as interdisciplinary, for use by anyone in any field to further social research. Very few people have attempted to analyze form of documentary film as ‘visual evidence’ in sociological sciences. Therefore, as a researcher, I feel it is important to examine the significance of moving images re-presented in documentary film, a prominent resource for social research.

4.1 ‘DOCUMENTARY FILM’ AS VISUAL EVIDENCE

The genesis of the word ‘Documentary’ reveals meaning having duel core function. a] to present the actual facts of a case, derived from Latin word
'documentum' meaning 'proof' and b] to educate – 'docere' meaning to 'to teach.' Thus from the concept of 'documentary' implies both legitimization of evidence and dissemination of knowledge. (Concise Oxford dictionary 8th edition 1990) Another version of Oxford English dictionary notes,

"Documentary: adj. before n. (1) Consisting of documents documentary evidence/source/material. (2) Giving factual record of or report on something especially by using pictures, recordings etc. of people involved” (Oxford English Dictionary,(for advance learner) 7th ed. 2007)

“ Documentary : Pertaining to, consisting of, or derived from documents, a film or programme portraying an actual event, life of a real person, period of history, or the like, in a factual way, esp. one containing sections photographed of actual incidents as they occurred.” (The Random House Dictionary, Bawkar Purush 2004)

Anita Roy, in her article 'documentary.doc', ('Raqs Media Collective', PSBT (2000), argues, the case of documentary film as visual evidence. According to her, like a courtroom, the refutation of 'falsehood,' and legitimization of 'actuality', while constructing an argument, has been an intrinsic element of the documentary film. The documentary film by presenting an eyewitness account of actuality and by faithful re-construction of fragments of reality seeks to persuade the 'Judge' (Viewer) the case it intends to represent. 4

The second element as pointed out by Anita Roy, i.e., 'docere' (in Latin) meaning - to teach. Filmmaker's responsibility is not just to 'refute the falsehood' but to go beyond that and enlighten, enrich the audience with
knowledge. (Roy Anita, PSBT, (2000) the need to communicate and ‘make aware’ of social phenomenon had been expressed by all the proponents of advocacy, as to ‘build the democratic relationship among citizen’. (Grierson on documentary, Forsyth Hardy, (1966) It is true, that the documentary film has implicit potential of being a ‘pedagogical tool’ as well act as evidence (eyewitness) to social struggles and turmoils.

However, practically, contemporary genre of documentary film has shunned from its pedagogical and ethnographical function being hegemonic. The documentary, today as we have seen earlier has become an ‘instrument for social change’ (Patricio Guzman (1968) or sometimes it acts as ‘weapon for self defense’ by providing an eyewitness of state repression or social oppression. (Anand Patwardhan, ‘waves of revolution’)

Another argument of Anita Roy about ‘court-room capabilities of documentary film’ has its own limitation. This is firstly because of its disreputable relationship with fictional narrative. Secondly, the process and relationship between filmmaker and viewers including social researchers, is expected to be more interactive and democratic which is very vital for empirical feature of sociological research. The function of documentary film is double edged a) to be a self-eyewitness presenting an evidence of actuality and b) to be presenting an argument about the reality or the subject s/he is going to represent. Viewer, at the same time, while listening to an argument in a film, is also expected to use his/her critical reasoning power so that s/he can form his/her opinion or able to make own decision based on the text provided in the film.
The discourse on ‘Visual Evidence’ has been marginalized for many years in academic disciplines of sociology and anthropology for not achieving scientific evidential status. Sociology and Anthropology, both the disciplines are seemed to be trapped in dilemmas of ‘Seeing, Knowing, and believing.’ From every visual image whether moving or still, the fact is that we not only see the images, but we are also brought to know or being made aware of something. It is a question not of what we see but how it is put forward for our understanding (Elizabeth Cowie, ‘The Spectacle of Reality’, YIDFF, (1997). As I have discussed earlier in much depth, the extensive debate about element of ‘filmic illusion’ has marginalized the role of documentary as being scientific evidence.


Even those who do not stress upon the ‘primacy of vision’, would agree that there is a close inter-active relationship between what we see and how we represent the world. Elizabeth Chaplin (‘Sociology and Visual representation,’ (1994) discusses the contributions of early sociologist and anthropologists to the sphere of Visual representation. She mentions David Livingstone who traveled to South Africa on his anthropological explorations, contributed to Visual Sociology by giving engraved illustrations to support his research. She argues further “photography and sociology date almost from the same year in 1857 when David Livingstone’s ‘Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa’ was published before photography became widely available and is copiously illustrated with engravings.” Livingstone produced forty-six
drawings drawn by few artists who engraved the portraits of African people for the book. 6

Elizabeth Chaplin informs further that although “the combination of ‘antireductionism and positivism’ traditions (Chaplin E, (1994) within classical theory of sociology, has contributed to the marginalization of the visual in sociology. However, C.Stasz’s (Early History of Visual Sociology1979 p.134) analysis reveals that in the first thirty-one articles in the early volumes of ‘American Journal of Sociology’(1896-1916), used photographs as illustration and evidence – and these were associated with the approach which pressed for ‘social amelioration’, since photographs ‘force the confrontation with reality.’ 7 Therefore, ‘the sociology of visual representation’, attempts to regard photographs as sound objective evidence, there are several instances where many researchers have built their work around a reliance on the accuracy with which a camera records,

However, these early attempts to treat visual representations as ‘evidence’ were countered by ‘post-positivists’, (Chaplin, (1994) that photographic evidence cannot be objective, and that it is far from being a technically effective window to the world. Chaplin argues that ‘a photograph could be politically constructed like any other cultural representation. There is no reason why the social scientist should not take into account the fact that photographs can also provide detailed information about culture in which s/he may previously had his/her own roots. The photograph enables the social scientist to observe the anthropological evolution of life and culture. 8
The role of photography and Cinematography in modern society, which ultimately influences sociological understanding, has been recently incorporated into curriculum; because many social scientists started using ‘visual representations’ in their research methodologies. Ever since Livingstone incorporated the ‘visual illustrations’ in his anthropological explorations, there has been tremendous growth in the field of ‘Visual Sociology.’ The social researchers, and anthropologist’ considerations of all sorts of ‘Visual representation’ and their own contributions to huge reserve of ‘visual illustrations, qualitatively contributed to the field of epistemology. (Cowie E.,‘The Spectacle of Reality’ (1997)

Elizabeth Cowie, a research scholar in film studies, observed, “we believe the evidence of our own eyes, including the visual evidence of photography and cinematography, even though we know that our eyes are easily deceived.’ Cowie argues that ‘an “attraction” in seeing for ourselves which sustains our belief over and above any knowledge of falsity of our seeing.” She explains that in the process of recording actuality, a documentary film maker seems to address two distinct and apparently contradictory desires. On the one hand, desire to witness actuality with own eyes and on the other hand, desire to scrutinize and review for analysis the acquired scientific and rational knowledge as a world og materiality. Thus any form of evidence is subject to confirmation through observation and logical interpretation. 9

There has been change in discourse of documentary film from being mere expository visual account and ‘mirror image’ theory to ‘epistemological relation to Visual representations.’ This paradigm shift in documentary approach has been acknowledged by Elizabeth Cowe, in her article (Cowe E.,
http://YIDFF.,10 (1997) that documentary film does contain ‘filmic illusion’ like fiction form. Yet, the new approach to sociology of visual representation has been shifted from earlier function of being ‘an actuality film’ (like travelogues and ethnographic films) viewed as ‘spectacle’ to its present prerogative of ‘epistemological resource’.10

4.2 THEORY OF REPRESENTATION

The theory of representation comprises of various aspects of ‘depiction’, referentiality, indexical bound established by images, specific play of time and space and last but not the least socio-political interpretation of the images by constructing an argument.

Depiction and Representation are not synonymous terms although most of the time we find similarity when film critics use it in their discourse. We can say that they are mutually inclusive terms because representation includes the method of depiction. Documentary represents the world, and it may be useful to recall some of the multiple meanings of the word ‘represent.’(Nichols Bill, Documentary representations, p111) It can be also described as per dictionary meaning that

“the action of placing a fact, before another by means of discourse; a statement or account, especially one intended to convey a particular view or impression of matter in order to influence opinion or action”11

Oxford English dictionary (2007 edition) says,

“Representation:- 1) the act of presenting something in a particular way; something that shows or describes SYN Portrayal. (2)(U) The fact of having representatives who will speak, have vote for you or on
your behalf. 3 (pl) formal statements made to somebody in authority especially in order to make your opinion known or to protest."

In short, documentary gives us photographic and aural representations or likeness of the world. It is obvious that documentary stands for or represents the views of individuals, groups, or agencies. Documentary also makes representation, constructs an argument about the world explicitly or implicitly. (Nichols, page 126) The world presented in documentary is a constructed image of real, nevertheless 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 image of the world may be rhetorical but it also persuades him/her to form or hold the opinion about the world around them.

The representation tends to hold proposition that is persuaded through the argument in documentary film. A filmmaker establishes the proposition through his/her perspective while constructing an argument by using selective sequences, narratives, verbal accounts of people and various gimmicks in portrayal of images. Thus the representation differs to be advocacy, observational, interactive or reflexive according to the approach taken by filmmaker to construct the argument in the documentary film. It is taken for granted that the factual visual documentation provides an evidential quality to any kind of representation. However, unless that evidence is indexically drawn from historical reality, the evidential validity cannot be guaranteed. Thus evidentiality of representation depends upon construction of an argument in film. The argument constitute the following
factors a] predetermined proposition b] filmmakers perspective and c] indexical referentiality to the historical world. [d] Play of time and space.

4.3 DEPICTION, REPRESENTATION AND SOCIAL INTERPRETATION

The Depiction, Representations and Sociological Interpretations are interwoven concepts. It is not possible to explain them separately. Depictions themselves do not constitute the core of the discipline of science. It is empirical study therefore could be considered separately and integrated into the sociological study of research area under investigation. The scientific depictions are different from depictions in empirical science, as they are constructed in such a way so as to fit to the established doctrines in scientific knowledge. Depictions in field of visual and descriptive art are based on inductive logical reasoning. Documentary films depicting scientific issues such as applied and life sciences contain the data which could be interpreted and validated completely on different ground. Elizabeth Chaplin, (1994) separates the ‘scientific depictions’ from artistic representation. She adds that since our dominating form of communication is verbal, ‘pinning down’ is usually done with words in textual discourse. Depictions defined as ‘all representations, are thoughts that have been externalized.’ Depiction is predominantly considered as visualization that is part of subjective process of thinking, problem solving and theorizing. According to Chaplin there is plenty of evidence that scientist problem solving process also involves visualization of object.19
This research intends to study depiction of images that are coherent with sociological concerns. The sociological analysis emphasizes usually upon interpretation and contextualization of meaning and knowledge about the society. The social context of both images and depiction is interpreted with reference to time space and it social relations. The indexical accuracy in this temporal sociological analysis has been key concern of the sociological research method of visual representation. As I have mentioned earlier that every image is ‘multi-vocal’. (Marcus Banks, Visual Methods in Sociological Research, (2001) therefore multiple narratives are possible to interpret its depiction. While creating the verbal text of ‘depicted image’ or ‘Pinning down’ (Chaplin E, (1994) the sociological knowledge, one has to consider various other interfering factors like a] Metaphoric or aesthetic aspect b] Referentiality to social context c] Activity occurring within specific Time and space d] Indexical and historical knowledge. e] Gaze includes camera gaze that is mostly found to be male gaze. (Nichols Bill, (1991)

The depiction contains two important factors; on one hand, objective view of an image created by its maker and on the other hand, viewer’s subjective engagement with knowledge and its intellectual appraisal of the seen image. Cowie, (Cowie, (1997) YIDFF 10) quoted Lewis Hine, a pioneer of social and documentary photography who was committed to the use of photographs as evidence (‘Social Photography, How the Camera may help in Social Uplift,’ (1909), “Whether it is painting or a photograph, the picture is symbol that brings one immediately into close touch with reality. The picture continues to tell the story packed into the most condensed and vital form. The picture is language of all nationalities and ages.” Today, in this world of infotainment, we observe the rise in photographic illustrations displayed in
newspapers, books exhibits; prove the fact that ‘visual representation’ contains most powerful qualities to become anthropological evidence.

4.4 METAPHORIC AND AESTHETIC ASPECT OF DEPICTION

It is relatively easy to interpret straightforward images that depict material object in its natural state, compared to images depicting abstract concepts such as society, superstitions, unemployment and so on. Metaphor is commonly used to overcome these problems of abstractions. Most of the time, to connote the meaning of abstract concepts, filmmakers use group of various images by employing techniques of montage, juxtapositions, symbolism, direct or indirect commentary, and many other stylistic devices to what Bill Nichols refers as ‘Excess.’ (Nichols, ‘Sticking to reality’(1991)
Nichols explains that illusions denotations and objectivity have considerable power. Also the metaphorical representation that use many other stylistic devices such as ‘intellectual montage’ play important role in construction of argument.

Marcus Bank, who has done profound research on ‘Research methods of Visual Representations in India’, (‘Visual Methods in Social research’, Sage pub. 2001) narrates the example of ‘Metaphor’ in the Robert Gardner’s film ‘Forest Bliss (1985)’ shot on the bank of river Ganga namely Banaras (Varansi). It is also known as Kashi and described as ‘Anandvan’ (in Sanskrit) means ‘A Forest Bliss’. According to Marcus Bank, the film intends to rely upon metaphoric images and attempts to bypass the language with symbolic sound effects. The film offers universally comprehensible account of great but highly abstract theme life and death cycle in human
beings. The film is structured as a visual poem revolving around vivid images depicting symbols of life and death, acceptance of changes while they are being what they are. The film depicts aspects of death business for which Banaras is famous related to activities of cremation grounds at the bank of river Ganga. Marcus Bank believes that documentary films made on the subjects of non-European people, are usually shot in observational mode and they mostly rely on long-term fieldwork and research made by anthropologist to provide sociological insight. Bank, later, by citing Alexander Moore (1988) opined that when a film depicts metaphoric images, it will be meaningless unless it is contextualized. On the contrary, Metaphors may alienate viewers if they are shown without context.  

The ‘perspective’ of filmmaker in metaphoric depiction during the process of cross cultural communication system, as depicted in Robert Gardner’s ‘A Forest Bliss’, has been subject to criticism by other foreigners who were more familiar to Indian situation specifically related to Hindu customary traditions. Bank quotes Jonathan Parry, who had initiated the autobiographical ethnographic visual representation project of ‘Janadarshan’ in Chhatisgarh, (Parry Jonathan, cited by Marcus Bank, p.20) along with his wife Margarate,22 point out limitations of Gardner’s perspective. Parry states that although he has an unusually intimate knowledge of things and persons seen in the film, it provides no clue for him of Gardner’s intentions in depicting them, except that he finds “Gardner’s vision ‘bleak’ and has an ‘uneasy suspicion’ that ‘Western viewers’ will conclude that India is ‘an ineffable world apart’, in effect enforcing a kind of cultural apartheid. What he does do, however, is mention in passing that the content of the film allowed him to ‘re-live’ something of what I experienced
during my first few weeks of fieldwork... (racial apartheid) above all the film evokes the intense frustration of initial incomprehension.” Parry’s remark about “initial incomprehension” clearly counters “foreigner’s superficial understanding of and emotional response towards activity of death ritual on Ghats of Banaras. The detailed fieldwork would have served to correct the filmmaker’s impression. Parry draws very important conclusion and notes that the images of action, without explanation of possible meanings, are unintelligible and go against the grain of any social research methodology’.23

A metaphorical comprehension arising out of textual construction of the film could be interpreted through ‘time and space’ and relationship between picture, sound and their linkages with scenes. The documentary film being explorations into the reality, tells the story through aural and visual metaphor. The strength and value of metaphor depends upon viewer’s ability to comprehend and how it relates the meaning with his/her own experiences. Therefore it is important to examine the ‘Time and Space factor in the film.

4.5 Constructing Argument in Issue Based Documentary

The documentary film has no longer remained a ‘mirror to the reality’ but it has become an act of presenting an argument about it. Documentary film is an act of construction of an argument taking raw material from real life. “The viewers may see the film in the way it has been constructed for them, but they also read their own meanings from images and sound provided in the film.” Says Sanjay Kak, in article ‘constructing an argument’. (PSBT 2000),13 Thus, filmmaker’s argument forms integral part of documentary representation.
Hans Richter looks at it as an opposition between “the beautiful village and the true village.” According to H. Richter, who wrote the book ‘Struggle for the film: Towards a socially responsible cinema’. (‘Towards socially responsible cinema.’ London, ScholarPress, (1976) p.47) documentary is not just about the spectacular, scenic view but also argument about knowledge and social & economic articulation of community inhabiting the village. He notes further, that “The task of the documentary film is on the contrary to make such a village (difference between beautiful and true village) understandable in its functions, too i.e., socially, not just as a beautiful landscape.”

Documentary film emerges as a particular form of narration about actuality and as a result it comes to be associated with the serious thought. Once we embark upon the presentation of an argument, we also step beyond evidence and the factuality while constructing the meaning. Bill Nichols observes (1991) “Documentary film has kinship with those nonfiction systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of ‘sobriety’. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare; these systems assume instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself.” Thus, we prepare ourselves not just to comprehend a story, but we can also grasp an argument. And we do so in relation to sounds and on screen images.

While constructing an argument, filmmaker organizes tangible visual evidences in such a way that it forms a backbone of film which comprises of knowledge and motivation. For example film historian Eric Barnouw
(Barnouw E, 1993) categorizes the documentary forms according to the argument placed before our eyes. He titles them according argumentative approaches as explorer, reporter, painter, prosecutor, catalysts, guerilla and so on.

Argument can take two forms to present perspective of the world or to comment upon established systems. The direction of argument determines its form. Approach of presentation of argument may follow the observational or interactive method in order to provide different contesting perspectives of the world. The commentary approach to present an argument provides orientation, evaluation, judgment, reflection, reconsideration persuasion of the world. (Nichols, 1991) Sometimes commentary gives didactic orientation to the argument.

However, there are always more than one-way to see the world and sometimes these ‘ways of seeing’ may carry ideological, moral, aesthetic implications with it. Whether it may be perspective or commentary based forms of presentations such representations do not offer neutral fingerprint of the world although they may aspire to a certain culturally determined standard for objective reportage. Third strategy of ‘Objectivist’ apparently offer non-judgmental, impartial, disinterested and rigorous attempt to be factually accurate, view of the world. Nonetheless their sense of self-effacement testifies to significance of the world.

4.6 Ideology in Construction of an Argument

When it is said that a film is made with a particular ideological angle, we mean that the conceptual infrastructure of the film is based on particular
ideology. Every individual carries a specific ideology. To put it in simple words, no individual exists without ideology. The individual’s ideological stance influences the form of presentation of argument. Thus ideology is integral part of filmmaker’s perspective that constructs an argument. Ideologies are manifested in the form of images, concepts, cognitive maps, worldview etc. The emergence of ‘Cinema Verite’ genre during 60s in documentary representation was indication of ideological revolt against established rhetoric and hegemonic representation in early documentary tradition.

Documentary retains the responsibility to describe and interpret collective experience of the world through its argument. Ideology plays important role in construction of collective conscience. Russian documentary filmmaker Dziga Vertov (Chapter 3.2) advocated in his writing and his films an active process of social construction, including the construction of the viewer’s historical-materialist consciousness. (Nichols p.10) Documentary film may not provide direct scenic route to this collective conscience, but through various other discursive formations like language, advertisements, games, ideologies, pleasures and other imagery world, it provides tangible representation of ideology. In the world of the present day, we see reality shows on television, photographs in news papers, movies, theatre political campaigns press conferences and choreographed debates, paid advertisements, spectacle of space shuttles, Olympic games, contests and living room wars etc. We can notice many dimensions of documentary; however, “the goal of documenting reality, the hope of arriving at final resting point where ‘reason and order, truth and justice prevail, recedes’.(Nichols p.10)
A. R Ghosh a research scholar in film studies explains, in very interesting manner; Althuserian concept of 'Ideological State Apparatus', with its application to Indian fiction and nonfiction films. He notes that ideology imposes itself not simply through consciousness nor through disembodied ideas; but through systems and structures. Ideology is inscribed in the representations (the signs) and the practices (the rituals) of everyday life. we can say that films are series of representative signs of ideology and the impact film or television cast upon our society is the 'practice' (rituals) of ideology in our everyday life Ghosh summarizes Louis Althusers concept of 'Ideological State Apparatus' \textsuperscript{17} (Althuser on 'ISA')

Thus ideological manifestation through subjugation of subjects and inscription through the symbolic actions create third reality (termed as allusion by Althusser\textsuperscript{18}) that helps to forcefully construct the argument in documentary film. Documentary filmmakers mostly use intellectual montage to construct the ideological argument in film. Intellectual montage consists of strange juxtaposition, signification of symbols, and metaphoric organization of images and the faithfulness of visual representations and its relationship with 'realism.' The 'allusion' of reality constructs the argument and ultimately it helps the documentary to represent the society.

\textbf{4.7 TIME AND SPACE}

Spatial dimension of documentary representation is very important factor in the discussion of 'Depiction and Representation' in documentary form. A simple and very beautiful example is given in article by Raqs Media collective, (PSBT 2000) on 'Researching documentary.' It says-
"The sound of a musical instrument being played in an empty subway at night is markedly different from the sound of countless commuters’ feet as they traverse the same space at rush hour. In a film, as in life, a space can mean very different things at different times."

Space is not a place that provides backdrop of wilderness to the characters in the film to stand against. Authors of the article (‘Researching Documentary’, Raqs Media, PSBT 2000) substantiate the research on space by circulating a questionnaire to the filmmakers during the discussion, about their perception on ‘The Space’ in documentary film. They asked interesting questions for example

- What happens to a space when it becomes active, bustling with people, and what happens when it becomes empty?
- What happens to the nature of sound and to the shifts in the patterns of light in a given space at different times of the day and in different seasons?
- What are the personal and emotional association that people in the film have with particular spaces and landmarks? How does damp, cold and heat change the way people relate to the same space?
- What are the social, environmental economic and political patterns that configure a particular space?
- Who are the different kinds of people that inhabit the space? What are the relationships between them?
- What are the myths, legends, folklore, histories related to particular place? How can its ritual geography be delineated?
The exact ‘value’ (qualitative as well as quantitative) of the space could be figured out when we attempt to provide the answers to the above-mentioned questions. The details of space suggest other associated referential elements for example identity of the people its indexical bond with historical context etc. Sanjay Kak, in his article ‘Playing with flux : Constructing argument for documentary’ (Raqs Media collective, PSBT, (2001) narrates his experience in other context of intentional/unintentional or accidental presence or absence of any image or sequence in documentary nonetheless, also demonstrate the ‘Spatial Configuration’ and its ‘Referentiality’ in documentary argument. He narrates his experience -

“In 1997, we were headed to a Dalit rally in southern Tamil Nadu, working on short film about democracy in India, a territory at once both were invisible and contentious. The sight of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar’s statue at every village square leads to a factory which mass-produces these concrete statues; then to a reflection of the construction of identity amongst Dalits and a way of looking at majorities and minorities. An image leads a whimsical path to an insight, but it is an idea that works with audiences...”

4.8 REFERENTIALITY ASPECT IN DOCUMENTARY FILM

A documentary film does not occupy spatial dimension alone, it also inhabits and describes ‘The Time,’ sometime more than one time. The visuals establishing time as ‘present’ may at the same time point towards the past. In such cases the comparison between two periods provides us speculation and imaginative space within which filmmaker and viewer can
interpret the argument in documentary. The referentiality of visual representation of 'what happens before and behind our eyes' contribute to the larger understanding and also to the 'repositories of public memory. (Raqs Media collective PSBT 2001)

The factors such as 'Referentiality' and 'Indexical binding' also constitute crucial concern in sociological interpretations of text in documentary film. There is minute difference between 'Referentiality' of images appearing in the documentary film and its historical ('indexical', as Bill Nichols refers to it (Nichols, 1991) binding with sequences depicted. The documentary film cannot be seen and interpreted into fragmented form. The analysis is always bound to be in totality. It is impossible to separate its constituent parts for the purpose of analysis in social research; because they inevitably form a link with specific ideological argument and a historical context. Its referentiality with 'Time and Space' and historical indexical bond is indispensable part of documentary.

**4.9 INDEXICAL BINDING WITH HISTORICAL WORLD**

Bill Nichols gives elaborated understanding of 'Indexical Bind' and 'Authenticity attached to representation. According to him 'representation involves one thing standing for another. An image or recorded sound stands for that from which it was "taken." This peculiar use of words show the close physical or existential bond that exists between referent and representation.' (Nichols p.149) The indexical bond usually seen manifested in photographic or electronic images they represent. In the process of mechanical reproduction, various optical lenses [zoom, wide angle,
anamorphic etc.] approximate the properties of human eye and provide endless fascination that guarantee the authenticity.

Thus authenticity stems from the image forming process itself. The digital sampling proved the fact that 'the indexical image also can be fabricated, yet, impression of authenticity can remain just as powerful.' (Nichols, 'Representing Reality,' 1991) According to Nichols, external information that accompanies visual image in the form of commentary or indexical references is sometimes necessary to radically re-align our perception of a film. He further notes that "facts make sense only within systems of meaning. Such systems are multiple and sometimes conflicting with one another. The link between 'evidence' and 'system' is tenuous. Facts and the concepts we employ to grasp them can be described as "labels for points of view voluntarily adopted by the investigator..." "Court trials often hinge upon precisely this fact and involve not only matter of 'Circumstantial evidence' but the meaning of documentary evidence itself."

4.10 PERSONAL TESTIMONIES, INTERVIEWS EXPERT COMMENTS AS VISUAL EVIDENCE

The idea of the documentary as an argument about the historical world is borne out by the use of testimony to argue its case. Testimony has been used here as evidence to advance a particular argument presented in issue based documentary. The personal interview is probably most common strategy used to put forward convincing arguments in this documentary. Expert testimony is also extensively used, where credible sources from the real world are presented as irrefutable evidence to argue the case. The newspaper
and television channel clippings, statistics from official reports, archival history, dictionaries etc. are some of the expert resources. Interviews with experts are also used where opinions of 'scholarship' are presented as evidence for the arguments, like interviews with social scientists and academics. And of course as discussed above documentary realism is used effectively as visual evidence to provide the authentic picture. The voiceover is the most unambiguous of all strategies to put forward the arguments of the filmmaker.

Personal testimonies of real people act as bricks while building an argument in issue based documentaries. As documentaries intend to give voice to the marginalized sections of society, filmmakers largely use the personal testimonies and interviews of their subjects. In issue based documentaries mostly people speak for themselves. Filmmakers, usually avoid dominant hegemonic strategies, like 'voice over commentaries.' The personal interview format has been indispensable part of issue based films because it offers first hand evidence of the subjects who are struggling against established system. Interviews include personal stories, and experiences articulated powerfully by the disadvantaged people. These personal testimonies connect very well with the viewers because proletariat people immediately relate with those images because they feel that they are in similar situations like people seen on screen. It also gives them sense of sharing the sorrows and strengths to fight their own. The talking-heads are the real heroes of the issue based documentary films.

Oral testimony by way of on-camera interviews is heavily used in many issue based documentary films. Unlike in the west the filmmakers are
always able to isolate the speaker to present his or her own views. When a camera is focused on one person in the outdoor shooting, immediately the crowd gathers around, as though to keep check on the process. Everyone has something to say, to add to or challenge something that is being said. Anand Patwardhan in his film *Bombay our City*, which depicts devastated life of slum dwellers, zooms out to include the whole community gathered around that gives the sense of chaotic ambience caused due to slum evictions. They all testify to the tyranny of police who take away their meager belongings and destroy their homes.

Anand Patwardhan in *'Father Son and Holy war'*; Madhushri Dutta in *'I live in Behrampada,' Shabnam Viramani in 'Tu Zinda hai'*, extensively use the personal interviews to tell the viewer about the issue being dealt with. Madhushri uses powerful testimonies of women from the Mumbai slum 'Behrampada', displaced by communal riots in 1993 and evicted by MMC. Shabnam Viramani also makes strong statement about patriarchal family system through the personal testimonies of women activists of 'Ekata Parishad' These personal testimonies form main narratives of the many issue based documentaries. Anand Patwardhan adds different sarcastic dimension to the argument on communalism and patriarchy by juxtaposing the interviews to contrast the realities. Similarly K Stalin also uses the interviews in *'Lesser Humans' to enhance the horrific reality. He juxtaposes the pigs and other animals roaming in dirty gutters with superimposed voice of the interviewee narrating their horrific condition. Thus the personal testimonies and interviews provide in-depth insights into social realities and social struggles. The personal testimonies in Issue based documentary films unveil bitter truth of the real life which is usually suppressed by the
oppressive system thus they build straightforward argument of documentary films.

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Chapter 4 - Visual Evidence a Sociological discourse


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