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Locating a 'third voice': participatory filmmaking and the everyday in rural India[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on practice-led research involving a community video project in southern India. The filmmaker also asked four of the women in this project if they would use their cameras to film their everyday lives. In the early 1980s, Barbara Myerhoff mentioned in a conference panel session the concept of a 'third voice' created through participatory research, when the ethnographer's and the subjects' contributions are edited together in such a way to form a new perspective [Kaminsky, M. 1992. "Myerhoff's 'Third Voice': Ideology and Genre in Ethnographic Narrative." *Social Text* 33: 124–144 (127)]. In this article, the filmmaker discusses how she used participatory and observational documentary techniques and 'video diary interviews', to produce five different sources of footage 'blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work … films where outsider and insider visions coalesce' [Ruby, J. 1991. "Speaking for, Speaking About, Speaking With, or Speaking Alongside: an Anthropological and Documentary Dilemma." *Visual Anthropology Review* 7 (2): 50–67 (62)]. This article examines the challenges of working in this way and considers whether this technique of filmmaking can reveal new knowledge about the everyday lives of four particular women living in rural Andhra Pradesh.

Introduction

I was aiming with this research to build on current practice by combining participatory filmmaking with traditional observational documentary techniques and video diary interviews to locate a third voice (Kaminsky 1992) in order to generate new knowledge about the everyday lives of women living in another culture.

I had found out about a pioneering community video project in southern India through a promotional email from the American charity, Video Volunteers. They had partnered with the Indian based NGO, Velugu Society for Rural Development, to set up the Sneha Praja Video initiative in Andhra Pradesh. Over a 6-week training programme, 11 local village women were trained in video production and reporting skills and produced a film about child marriage (Untitled, India, 2008, 33 minutes), which was subsequently screened in villages throughout the region. The women had been selected on the basis of their proven skills as community newspaper reporters, a

project similarly set up to empower village women by giving them a voice. Through this video initiative the women were gaining confidence and challenging long-held domestic roles in their communities. I was intrigued by the still photographs on the website of the women filming, using new technology to empower themselves and report on issues that concerned them.

I wanted to find out more about the Sneha Praja Video project and if it was indeed empowering these women and how they combined their filmmaking with their identities as rural women (Figure 1). I also wanted to give them the opportunity to tell us in the West about their lives by asking four of them to use their project cameras for this purpose. Each woman used their camera in very different ways while I used my camera to contextualise some of their shooting (though most of it was shot when I was not there) and film video diary interviews. My research resulted in a film (Village Tales, 2015) and accompanying thesis (Sudbury 2015).

Initial research

Once I had arrived in India, Meera Shenoy, the co-ordinator of the Sneha Praja Video project, arranged for me to meet with all the women in the group at the training centre in Chilkoor, just outside Hyderabad. Through the translator, I was able to explain my motivation for this research film, its parameters and answer any of their questions. I made sure that I gained informed consent by fully explaining the project in their native language, Telegu.

However, it soon became clear that this research presented many challenges. The 11 women in the group lived in remote villages up to 5 hours apart from each other and although their villages had names, they did not appear on any maps. Jayasree had been assigned as translator; she knew the women well and was herself 'a village woman'. Fortuitously, she had some idea of the whereabouts of the different villages; despite this, we still had to ask many times for directions to the particular houses.

Meera had proposed Jayasree as translator thinking she would put the women at ease however her English was not very good and sometimes it was impossible to understand

Figure 1. Shot from the Sneha Praja Video project film.

what she was saying. However, in hindsight, Meera was right to prioritise the feelings of the women above my need to understand fully what was being said; the women were very relaxed and open throughout the filming process.

Casting

All the women wanted to be involved in some way, so it was decided that the four women featured in the research film would work in teams with the other women in the group, who would take turns to film them. Lathe was one of the main women featured in Village Tales (2015). She had escaped her violent husband and was now living with her parents. She was very open about this experience, having told the other project workers, and was keen to tell a wider audience. She was understandably proud of surviving this situation and making a new life for herself (Figure 2).

I also chose Vinodha because she was the only Christian in the group and from the Dalit caste and Indira and Parvati because they engaged with me at the meeting, establishing eye contact and asking me questions through the translator. I intuitively felt they all had something they wanted to say as they were very keen to be in front of camera.

When discussing casting his own films, McElwee says, 'some people have whatever that quality is that makes them interesting on film – a kind of self-confidence, self-assuredness, mixed, perhaps, with a degree of vulnerability … you know it, as a filmmaker, when you see it' (interview with Ross McElwee, Lucia 1994, 35). I agree with McElwee's observation; as a filmmaker, you are looking for someone who is confident enough to want to take part in a film but, at the same time, someone who is prepared to be open with their feelings and show vulnerability and so connect with the audience. Some documentary practitioners refer to 'characters with unfinished business' (Rabiger 2009, 479).

Attendant ethical issues

As previously mentioned, I made sure that the women themselves were fully informed, in their native language of Telegu, about the aims and scope of my research. The Economic

Figure 2. Lathe filming for the Sneha Praja Video project.

and Social Research Council (ESRC) *Research Methods Review Paper* (Wiles et al. 2008) also states that the researcher needs to 'brief the participants about seeking permission (from others) and explain the purpose prior to taking images of others'. So I made sure that the women explained to their families what they were doing and how their footage would be used in my research. This Paper also cites both Pink (2003) and Banks (2001) who both argue for collaboration as a means to empower participants to represent themselves in the images that are produced and disseminated in ways that meet their own objectives. Such practice will involve showing participants and allowing them to comment on images prior to wider publication or presentation (Pink 2006). I followed this principle in my own research by sending cuts of the film before completion for their comments and feedback.

Pink (2004, 29) cites Miller who emphasises that ethnography in the home is inevitably intrusive but goes on to say that the researcher has to decide what is revealed or not. This is one of the benefits of participatory research as by operating their own cameras, the women themselves decided what to reveal about their lives.

Another important ethical issue to be addressed was whether, and how, to compensate the women for sharing their lives on camera. It is customary in television documentary to pay contributors a small amount of money, sometimes significantly more if they have lost wages through having to take time off for the film. However, there is a concern that financial reward could make subjects 'act' or say things they would not normally do or say. Therefore, financial contributions are seen as an adjunct to the filmmaking process; contributors need to, and usually do, have other reasons for agreeing to be filmed.

Remuneration has always been an issue for anthropologists, too. Lansing suggests that 'this process is seldom mentioned because we tend to be a little ashamed of it, preferring to let it be thought that we are much loved by the people we study' (1990, 16). Barbash and Taylor identify another concern that anthropologists have with remuneration:

> They (the subjects) are providing a service for you, rather than continuing to live their lives as they otherwise might; they begin to wonder what services you want, what they should be doing for you, how they should act, what kinds of images or scenes you may be after. Therefore you may want to compensate people only after the fact. (1997, 63)

So there is a concern that financial contribution, at least 'upfront', can affect the veracity of the film or data observed on location or 'in the field'. However, there are problems around the notion of 'authenticity' and it needs to be remembered that 'what people say about themselves is data to be interpreted, not the truth' (Ruby 1991, 54).

Financial compensation, itself, can also bring issues in developing countries. Asch considers 'the effect that money can have on people who live in small, subsistence-based communities' (1988, 19). A single person's relationship between them and their neighbour can be altered. So before starting this research project, I sought advice from Meera Shenoy, the Sneha Praja Video project co-ordinator, and she suggested I paid the women the same amount they were given for working on that project so that is what I did. Each woman in the group was paid the same, regardless of whether their lives were featured in the final film; each woman 'worked' for 3 days on the film and was paid 250 rupees a day, which at the time of filming was approximately £3.20 a day. There is no perfect solution to this conundrum but I felt that it was important to financially reward their 'work'; I did not feel that these payments impacted on my research and the payments were made after the filming had finished.

Pink identifies problems with the notion itself of 'giving something back' as she feels this neglects the inter-linkages between the researcher's personal autobiographical narrative and the research narrative:

> Fieldwork, everyday life and writing-up may not necessarily be separated either spatially or temporally in the ethnographer's life and experience. Ethnographic research may not entail the researcher going somewhere, taking something away and being morally obliged to 'give something back'. Instead, the ethnography may be part of a researcher's everyday interactions. There may be a continuous flow of information and objects between the ethnographer and informants. This might include the exchange of images, of ideas, emotional and practical exchanges and support, each of which are valued in different ways. (2001, 45)

I did in fact take pictures of my children and partner with me because I thought it important to share something from my own personal life with the women. After all, I was expecting them to allow me into their personal lives and was meeting their husbands and children. Indira was very interested to hear that I was divorced and wanted to know how I had managed to leave my husband; it was clear that she was in an unhappy marriage and her questions confirmed this. I think Pink's position, outlined above, particularly applies to research done in one's own country with participants of the same class, gender and ethnic group. The old adage, that a film is only as good as the relationship between the subject and the filmmaker usually holds true but it is also important to keep professional boundaries. I think it important to remember that the researcher and researched are in a working relationship.

Kulick observes that 'in anthropology other people's secrets are valuable commodities. Ethnographic success is often measured, and anthropological careers often made, by the extent to which the anthropologist gets others to "open up"' (1995, 11). Interestingly, the same is true for some forms of documentary production and this research project could be similarly assessed. In fact, Banks disparagingly refers to what he observes as documentary filmmakers' 'great belief in so-called "magic moments" when a character being filmed drops his or her carefully constructed persona and bares his or her innermost soul; this is often connected with tears, memories, moments of personal crisis etcetera' (1992, 123). This particular measure of 'success' does raise many ethical questions; how aware are participants of what they are revealing if they are at that moment crying or emotionally moved? Documentary makers are often trying to get contributors to forget the presence of the camera but, in so doing, does that mean the participants are in a position to consent to their 'contribution'? That is why signed release forms after filming are crucial, as are screenings of the finished film to contributors, when in the 'cold light of day' they can decide if they are happy with their representation, or as some people might say 'performance'.

Kulick goes on to ask what would happen to the way 'we understand and practice our discipline (of anthropology), if success was also seen to be related to the extent to which we revealed secrets of our own, to the people with whom we work?' (1995, 11). As a documentary maker, one is always conscious of this imbalance and tries to correct this by revealing something of oneself 'off camera'. However, there are other professionals, such as psychotherapists, who encourage people to reveal 'their secrets' without revealing their own. A significant difference in documentary production is that these 'secrets' once revealed will then most likely pass into the public domain. Television documentary is also made in a commercial context and has a remit to 'engage' and usually 'entertain' though a discussion around this will not form part of this article.

The aim of a documentary is often to break down the 'otherness' of others, and allow them to communicate to a wider audience concerns that are at the core of humanity; to emotionally 'move' other people, in settings often remote and removed from the subjects of a film. So it is inevitable that 'contributors' will be encouraged to express their inner most thoughts and feelings and so ethical concerns are at the heart of all documentary making.

Participatory filmmaking

One of the earliest recorded uses of participatory filmmaking was by the American documentarian, Robert J. Flaherty, who, while making Nanook of the North (1922), would solicit Nanook's criticism of the rushes and ask for his suggestions as to what he should shoot next (Flaherty 1960, 15). In the 1960s, anthropologists Worth and Adair (1972) at the University of Philadelphia gave 16 mm cameras to the Navajo Indians; they produced Navajo Film Themselves (1966) by teaching the Navajo the mechanics of camera operation. This example of participatory cinema was motivated, exclusively, by academic research interests; however, at the same time, other participatory work had a more political motive, such as helping indigenous people express their demands.

Other degrees and forms of participation can be found in Jean Rouch's work such as Chronique d'un ete (1960) and in MacDougall's 'participatory cinema' Kenya Boran (1974). 'Without the participation of our subjects, certain aspects of their situation would have remained unexpressed' claims MacDougall (1998, 135) when referring to the making of Kenya Boran in which he intervened when filming a group of men having tea, by asking one of the men in the film to raise the subject of the government's advocacy of birth control. 'The result was an explosion of disagreement from … the most conservative old man present … which he was unlikely to have delivered without such strong provocation' (1998, 135). However, there is a clear distinction between participatory filmmaking, which hands the actual means of production – camera and sometimes editing – to the protagonists and MacDougall's 'participatory cinema' in which the filmmaker/anthropologist intervenes in 'real' situations and asks people to 'participate' by suggesting questions they ask.

Village Tales (2015) is partly participatory but as sole editor of the footage I was ultimately the author of the final film. I discuss the reasons for this later in the article.

Video diaries and video diary interviews

I have used video diaries before in Britain when making a charity-funded video about families experiencing domestic violence (Moving On, 2007). I felt this 'direct address' could be an effective and powerful way of connecting a Western audience with the 'other'.

Richard Chalfen collaborated with Michael Rich, using a method called Video Intervention Assessment (VIA)

> a research method in which children and adolescents with a chronic medical condition are given the opportunity to create video diaries of their everyday lives with illness. They are asked to 'teach your clinicians what it means to live with your condition'. (Chalfen and Rich in Pink 2006, 86)

However, there are far fewer examples of this methodology being used in other cultures. Through using a combination of still photography and taped narration, the visual anthropologist, Andrew Irving asked women in Africa to consider how they would tell their experiences to someone living in England (2011, 29). Irving noted, one of the main characters in his project 'actively selected certain events, dilemmas and experiences that she judged would communicate … to imagined, unknown others she had never met, living in a far-away country she had never visited' (2011, 29).

For this research project, I was keen to see if I could use this collaborative way of working with women in another culture, to explore their daily lives and allow them to reveal their inner thoughts and perhaps even emotions. For me, it was important that the women were in control of image production; individually they decided what to film and how to film it. However, when I asked the women if they would record video diaries it soon became clear that they were unfamiliar with this convention of using the camera like a personal diary. So I decided to ask them to talk straight to camera while I was still there and able to ask them questions about certain subjects. I filmed them while they did this to pick up the necessary cut-aways. I have called these 'video diary interviews' because they are a hybrid of these two methods (the video diary and interview). Though the subjects the women talked about were in response to my questions, they had control over the main camera and would switch it off when they had nothing more they wanted to say. The technique meant that though they were always aware they were being recorded, they often appeared to forget my presence; their answers became soliloquys rather than the other half of a conversation (Figure 3).

Village Tales (2015) is, in part, autobiographical in the sense that the women themselves shot the footage dealing with their own experiences and life history. Citron quotes John and Judith Katz acknowledging the value of autobiographical films, 'the value of knowing, in more realistic fashion, about other people's interior lives is unquestionable' (1999, 271). Citron, too, claims the autobiographical film 'can break a silence and by doing so, lessen the isolation and despair that we often experience, both personally and culturally' and because honest autobiographical film can 'publicly speak about the socially hidden … gay sexuality … violence against women … .it poses an implicit threat to the status quo' (1999, 272). Citron also picks up on its historical significance for women who have traditionally lacked either a voice or a public forum in which to speak but recognises that it is often denigrated when labelled 'confessional'.

Figure 3. Lathe recording a video diary interview.

During the interview process, Myerhoff identifies the creation of a third person, an 'ethno-person', born by virtue of 'the collusion between the interlocutor and subject'; 'when one takes a very long, careful life history of another person, complex changes occur between subject and object. Inventions and distortions emerge; neither party remains the same. A new creation is constituted when two points of view are engaged in examining one life' (1986, 281). As Kaminsky goes on to explain,

> the notion of the third voice, then, is itself an instance of double-voiced discourse … the crucial move made by the notion of the third voice is that it grounds the collaborative author's interventions in the process of communication between teller and listener; this notion construes the author as listener who continues … a process that is initiated in face-to-face dialogue … so the listener-as-author, engaged in the act of editing … now hears and sees the 'meaning' of the utterance, and can intervene to help articulate this coproduced meaning more 'clearly'. (1992, 135–136)

The filmmaker is a key partner in this 'double-voiced discourse', so reflexivity is a core requirement of any ethnographic research.

Us and them: positioning the self

Pink acknowledges 'a reflexive approach recognizes the centrality of the subjectivity of the researcher to the production and representation of ethnographic knowledge … subjectivity should be engaged with as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation' (2001, 19). Pink cites the work of Fortier when she claims that 'it is not solely the subjectivity of the researcher that may "shade" his or her understanding of "reality" but the relationship between the subjectivities of researcher and informants that produces a negotiated version of reality' (Pink 2001, 20). Pink goes on to say that 'researchers … ought to consider how their identities are constructed and understood by the people with whom they work. These subjective understandings will have implications for the knowledge that is produced from the "ethnographic encounter" between researcher and informants' (2001, 20).

I intended, as Pink suggests, to engage with subjectivity 'as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge and interpretation' and, though to a lesser extent, 'representation' (2001, 19). My engagement with subjectivity was explicit in *Village Tales's* accompanying written thesis (Sudbury 2015) rather than throughout the film itself because I want to allow the film's participants to communicate and 'engage' directly with the audience. I made my presence known to the audience at the beginning of the film through the use of narration to set up the research and help the audience navigate the different filmic layers that my documentary consists of. This clear authorial voice contextualises the film, and then allows the women's stories to unfold, in their own time.

Like Probyn (1993), I am suspicious of some uses of reflexivity within films themselves. Probyn believes that there is a tendency in anthropology to think that problems of power, privilege and perspective can be diffused, simply by inserting the self into one's accounts and proclaiming that dialogue has occurred:

> To the extent that this move leaves unchallenged the epistemological basis of anthropological knowledge, all it does is subsume the other into the project of the self. It is like in Watson's (1991, 85) words 'playing chess with oneself, making the moves for both black and white pieces'. (1993, 80)

Barbash and Taylor (1997) go as far as to say that self-reflexivity is no more an assurance of authenticity or sincerity than any other style. 'If, as Ruby says, "we have the moral obligation to reveal the covert" it is quite possible to dream up a reflexive moment or scene in order to dramatize, quite duplicitously some such divulgence' (1997, 61). Ruby does, inadvertently I think, acknowledge the constructed nature of self-reflexivity when he states that 'knowing how much of the self it is necessary to reveal – is the most difficult aspect of being reflexive. When successfully mastered, it separates self-indulgence from revelation' (2000, 155). Likewise, Moore notes that sometimes 'microphones and cameras are as awkwardly inserted into films as they were once avoided' (1994, 126).

Kaminsky identifies an inseparable link between the third voice and reflexivity:

> The self-effacement of the anthropologist in tales told in the third voice, and the foregrounding of the positioned and positioning anthropologist in reflexive narratives, are not as different as they appear: both reproduce the same set of dialogic relationships, and both conceal the actual process of text production, the former in a text that effaces the activity of the anthropologist, the latter in a text that presents a self-portrait of her 'consciousness of her consciousness' that 'doubles the mirrors'. (1992, 141)

Kaminsky goes on to argue that both forms subordinate the informant's voice under the shaping intention of the interviewer-author. I agree with Kaminsky but it is naïve to believe that one can record an informant without shaping that discourse in some way – after all, it is a 'double-discourse'. However, I believe that adding reflexive sequences into a film subordinates the informant's voice even more. Some films are naturally reflexive but I do not believe that this creative project is; I am attempting to get close to other women's lives so including my own presence in the film would distract and get in the way of these women's own stories (Figure 4).

Filming decisions

I gave each of the four teams three 60′ tapes to record on and they used the four existing Sneha Praja Video project mini-DV cameras to film with. It felt appropriate to ask the women to collaborate by self-shooting, as they then had total control over what to show and when to record. I was also keen to reveal 'hidden' biographical experiences,

Figure 4. Vinodha filming herself outside her house.

which rely on memory and self-representation; it would have been difficult to uncover these through purely observational documentary filming methods.

Jennifer Fox similarly dismisses observational techniques as a method for capturing intimacy when talking about the making of Flying, Confessions of a Free Woman (2006):

> I knew if I had a cameraperson observing women talking that they/we would become self-conscious and the very intimacy I wanted to capture would disappear. So I had to find a way to bring the camera into a conversation in a way that would be part of the intimacy, so I came up with this technique which I call 'passing the camera'. It's very simple: the camera is just passed back and forth in the conversation. There is no filmmaker and subject, we are both equal … the camera becomes a tool of intimacy, rather than a tool to record. (Fox 2007, July 2)

I decided to start filming straight away, partly for the reasons that MacDougall outlines below and partly because of budget restraints which gave me only three weeks on location:

> One advantage in beginning to film immediately is that your initial response to a place and to a whole society can be quite important, but after a while you may begin to take things for granted. If you do begin to shoot right away, there may be a certain freshness to your shooting that will be useful to the film. It may capture some of the heightened awareness that you'll lose later on. (David MacDougall interviewed by Barbash and Taylor 1997, 70)

Similarly, documentary filmmaker Molly Dineen always starts filming as soon as she has been given the permission to do so and her developing relationships with the key protagonists are a major part of her films' narratives; 'if you know someone too well, you don't have the freshness on film and the questions I want to ask them on film, I will have already asked them' (Masterclass with Phil Agland and Molly Dineen at Sheffield International Documentary Festival, 1999).

However, according to Barbash and Taylor, Flaherty's wife Frances said her husband's secret was 'non-preconception, a method of discovery as a process of filmmaking' (1997, 24). Flaherty lived among the Hudson Bay Inuits for more than a decade before he began to film Nanook and was there for a year during the making of the film itself. 'He was convinced that he had to live among his subjects for a long time before he would know them well enough to make a documentary faithful to their lives' (1997, 24).

Documentary filmmaker Phil Agland also liked to research for up to a year before he introduced the presence of a camera:

> With Baka we spent a year without filming but then shot most of the film in eight weeks … I really felt we had to have something that took (the participants') attention away from us, so they were really focused on something that really was changing their lives … we were dealing with a radically different culture and I don't want the audience to observe, I want them to participate in an emotional story that will involve them so much that they won't question whether these people are Chinese, British or Baka. (Masterclass, Philip Agland and Molly Dineen, Sheffield International Documentary Festival, 1999; Agland 1987)

This approach, obviously, necessitates a significant budget and Phil Agland was not a 'self-shooter'. This might have meant that he was mindful of the need to first develop and ascertain his relationships with the contributors before introducing other people onto 'the location' or into 'the field'.

Like Rouch, who considered it a must to use the 'one take/one sequence' method (1974, 89), I never asked the women to enact an action; it was important to me that the filming

process was as relaxed and unselfconscious as possible. I was attempting to preserve the notion of capturing 'reality' so I would rather move the camera to accommodate what they were 'naturally' doing rather than directing them to do so. I was not using a tripod, which makes this approach far easier.

However, the one exception to this was when I asked each woman to 'walk through' their house with their camera to introduce their home and family (Figure 5). I subsequently discovered that this methodology was used by the visual anthropologist, David MacDougall, in Lorang's Way (1979) and is similar to Sarah Pink's video tour method. Pink asked her subjects to film video tours of their house in an attempt to identify 'a sense of the (gendered) identity, everyday life, priorities and morality of my informants (and) representations of their actual everyday practice' (2006, 95). Video was important to Pink in this process for two reasons; firstly 'it facilitated my informants' self-representation, they could "show" on video … what is important to them' and secondly 'it gave me a visual record of our encounter, which documented not only what MacDougall (1998) has called "deep reflexivity" of the process of knowledge production, but also the material context where we interacted' (2006, 95).

This was the first time I had made a film in a foreign language but I began to learn to pick up on many non-verbal clues. Through observing the intensity and intonation of the women's speech, their body language and the atmosphere in the room, I knew when to keep filming. This intuitive way of working proved fruitful because when these particular sequences were translated I discovered they were significant moments of revelation and became key moments in the film.

I shot the film on a Sony PD150 and recorded the sound using radio microphones and the on-board camera microphone. I did not use a tripod or lights for practical rather than aesthetic reasons. I learnt that being a self-shooter does offer advantages and disadvantages. One advantage was that I obviously knew exactly what I was getting and while keeping my left eye open could respond to action happening outside of frame. However, sometimes it is hard to draw back and view the overall development of the shoot while at the same time considering technical issues such as focus, framing and lighting. On the other hand, the level of intimacy one can achieve with a minimal crew is one of the main advantages and it was particularly appropriate in this situation and with what I was trying to achieve.

Figure 5. Parvathi's 'walk through' her house.

The women used their cameras to interview their husbands and family members when I was not there and these interviews, I believe, give us a view never seen before (Figure 6). They also filmed each other and I would never have got the actuality of Vinodha asking her husband if she could go to a meeting without that. When I was filming with Vinodha, her husband kept well away from me. Even then, one can see his reticence as he is aware of being filmed; he looks at camera before he says 'Go' but because the person behind the camera is a village woman, like his wife, he is behaving relatively 'normally' (Figure 7).

Some decisions, as to how to frame a shot and when to keep filming, are taken at the time of shooting, though in the context of methodological decisions taken before the start of filming. Barbash and Taylor acknowledge that a documentary filmmaker, while shooting, is making decisions that ineradicably embody his/her theory while on the contrary, textual anthropologists can do the bulk of their thinking and theorising once they have returned from 'the field' (1997, 70). Now that recording mechanisms are cheap, it is tempting to shoot 'everything that moves' but too much footage can lead to time-consuming edits. However, though crucial to stick to established parameters it is important to respond to the unexpected. This tension, I believe, is at the very heart of good documentary filmmaking.

Figure 6. Lathe interviewing her father.

Figure 7. Vinodha asking her husband's permission to leave the house.

The edit

In the second part of this article, I discuss the editing process, and my attempts to locate a third voice by editing the footage in such a way that it blends together to create a new voice, a new 'vision'; neither perspective dominates and neither could exist without the other. According to Kaminsky, Myerhoff never actually wrote about her concept of the third voice but mentioned it at a panel session when she wondered aloud how she would edit the personal stories she had amassed from people in Los Angeles; '(they) are to be written in the third voice, which is neither the voice of the informer nor the voice of the interviewer, but the voice of their collaboration' (Kaminsky 1992, 127):

> She wished to find a way of editing the personal narratives that she had collected, so that everything she knew about them would be invisibly embedded in the tale, through the editing: the tale would be presented without the overt discourse of the interpreting anthropologist. (Kaminsky 1992, 128)

It is in the process of editing that I also considered the significance of the footage when making decisions about ordering and juxtaposition and tried to do justice to the reflexivity of the women's own stories. The tensions between established documentary professional practices and editorial integrity can be fraught but fundamental to the making of any artefact, which attempts to represent other people's lives.

Even though Mermin acknowledges that 'film as experience is never completely controlled by filmmaker, subject or viewer' (1997, 49), it is in the edit where the filmmaker can exert a great measure of control. It is here where the narrative is created and it is the means by which filmmakers begin to supervise and direct their viewers' experiences of reading and creating meaning from their films; it is also here where I was attempting to locate a third voice.

Participatory filmmaking has a long and established tradition of frequently involving the subjects in the process of assembling the film. As Barbash and Taylor note, Flaherty screened at least some of his rushes (the developed footage) for his subjects, eliciting their feedback and suggestions for future scenes that they could film; 'although, he may have transformed his subjects into actors in the process, he also actively collaborated with them to a degree that is still rare today' (1997, 24). This kind of 'acting out' was an inspiration to Rouch, who coined the concept of *anthropologie partagee* (shared anthropology) (1974, 43–44).

A Delhi-based documentary maker, though known for his participatory methods, justified editing his footage himself because he needed to do justice to the people he was portraying, 'if I can create a visually interesting production, then their involvement can successfully affect many other people who may view it' (Booker 2003, 329).

In this research, there were logistical and resource implications of involving the women in the edit. There was so much footage generated by this way of working (23 hours of it) and most of it was in Telegu so the edit was a time-consuming process. However, I did send DVDs of cuts to Jayasree, the translator, who screened them to the women before I finalised the film to make sure they were happy with the way their lives were represented and for them to be able to feed back any concerns and comments.

There were five different sources of footage; the different components of the video research material are listed in Table 1.

I wanted to interweave these different sources to make a comprehensible and engaging narrative and create a third voice. I was attempting to blend together these 'insider' (the women's own footage) and 'outsider' (my footage) 'visions' to create a flowing narrative (Figure 8).

I started by archiving the 23 hours by logging each shot and separating it out into the different categories. I then went through what would be the underlying script of the film and backbone of the narrative – the video diary interview material. Shiva would translate what the women were saying directly and then if I intended to include that section in the cut, we would together, without changing its meaning, put it into more fluent English. Sometimes it was important to keep the Telegu expressions, such as when Vinodha says 'girls' lives should be 'paved with gold and flowers' and Indira's husband says that she should 'go and return with profit'.

It was important for me to clearly establish the identity of each woman; there was a danger that the viewer would be confused as to which woman's footage and 'point of view' they were looking at. At one point in the edit when I was too 'close' to the cut, I showed it to the documentary filmmaker, Paul Watson, who confirmed my suspicions that I was switching too quickly between the different characters; therefore, I decided to keep their narratives in self-contained blocks to make the film easier to comprehend.

Table 1. List of the different components of the video research material.

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Video diaries shot by the four women	Facilitated and interviews conducted by me
Self-shot actuality by the four women	Facilitated by me
Film of the four women shot by other women in the group or relatives	Facilitated by me
Film of the four women, actuality sequences and general views (gvs)	Filmed by me
Sneha Praja Video project film about child child marriage	Reflects the women's own concerns about child marriage. Initiated and managed by Video Volunteers. All these sequences in the film are shown in a Recording frame
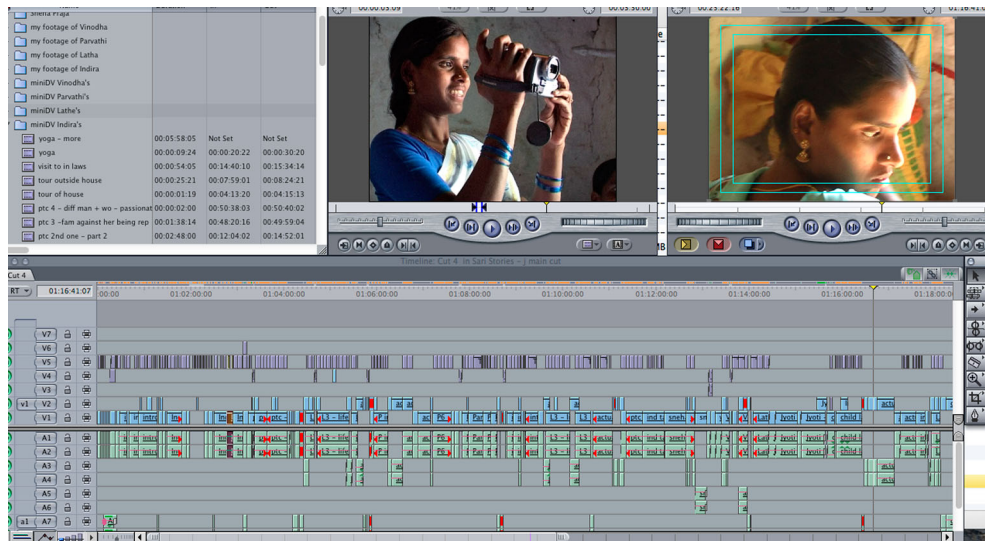
Figure 8. Screen shot of the Final Cut Pro time line.

Collier and Collier argue that the spatial and temporal order in which images are recorded must be maintained so that they can be analysed correctly as 'reconstructive ordering of photographs can inadvertently confuse the actual sequence of occurrence' (1986, 180); they believe that the chronological linear sequence by which images are produced forms the narrative that represents their meaning. It was for this reason that early ethnographic film theory and practice suggested film should represent 'whole' cultures and avoid close-ups and use minimal editing (Heider 1976). However, this is not customary practice in documentary production when frequently images are used in a different order from their capture, in order to create meaning and narrative. Despite this, documentary filmmakers take care that the perceived 'reality' of a situation is not distorted by this lack of adherence to chronology.

However, I did keep Indira's interviews with her husband in the order they were shot as she only stops questioning him when he eventually admits that her first priority must be her household chores, cooking and 'taking care of the house', before going out to film. There was a logic to this ordering, which when kept intact, said more than the individual sequences.

Moore noted that, in the Kayapo Indian video project, institutionalised Kayapo practices of violence against women were not caught on camera and these 'realities' were ignored and not articulated at all:

> If ethnographic film continues to maintain that what you see represents the significant rather than the selected, regardless of who has the camera, a less horrific, but still crude hierarchy emerges separating visible people and practices from those that defy visual representation. (1994, 135)

This example not only emphasises the importance of democratising access to the camera but at the same time, the need to acknowledge that films are partial 'truths'. As Gadihoke observes, 'we often simplify the "real" to mean the "visible". In doing so, we marginalise whatever cannot be seen or depicted through the camera' (2003, 278). This could be seen as an argument for not prioritising just the visual but setting out to obtain the spoken word, using subjects' testimonies, be they in the form of video diaries or conventional interviews, to access 'realities', such as the presence of domestic violence.

All the women had voiced that there was a problem with domestic violence in their communities so it was important for me to include this. Latha's story was a good way to safely raise the subject as she is now living many miles away from her ex-husband and protected by her new location in her parent's home.

In Latha's interview she had said that 'when the women go to meetings, sometimes the husbands get drunk and when they return home, their husbands harass them' and I was able to place this voice-over over footage of the women's meeting without being too specific about a particular woman's relationship. It is interesting that when the women move out of the domestic sphere, that is the moment when there is a particular risk of domestic violence. At that point, the wife is directly challenging their husband's masculinity, a masculinity that has been observed by others as being built and maintained on a greater use of physical space (Wex 1979).

I decided to add the sequence when Parvati is interviewing her husband, asking him where he has been, with a shot of their cow and Parvati cleaning out the cowshed. This edit was certainly my choice but I felt it was making a valid point in that he says he is taking care of the

house and all of Parvati's worries but she also is taking care of everyday household chores by cleaning out the cow shed. I was also hoping to add some humour to the film.

Highmore suggests an approach to the everyday in which the 'project is precisely to go behind the scenes and reveal underlying structures and latent contents' (2002, 8). It is through acquiring not just the visual but also the spoken word and editing this footage together, that one can hint at these structures.

Conclusion

I believe that the use of the video diary interviews and participatory filmmaking in my research has encapsulated some of the women's feelings and subjectivities in a way that conventional observational documentary filmmaking could not have done and produced a nuanced picture of the interior lives of four rural women.

I have experimented with form to discover what story I can tell about the 'reality' of these four women's lives and shine a light into a particular part of rural India. Asking them to use their cameras to film whatever they wanted to of their everyday lives, and contextualising that with my own camera, has generated different perspectives. There is an intensity to the practice of looking directly down a camera lens and being asked questions about one's feelings and thoughts. To some considerable extent, this technique has allowed me to access and capture some of these women's interior feelings at a particular moment. This research has shown that it is possible to get close to the feelings of the 'other' and allow them to reveal universal emotions; from Indira's anger at a husband's disrespect, Parvati's grief at the death of her son, to Indira's amused irritation at her teenagers leaving the kitchen in a mess.

When the women 'walk through' and introduce us to their homes through the camera lens, they appear to respond intuitively to what they find, talking to us about their prayer corners and their families, in a way that manages to hint at the subtleties of, and hierarchies within, their relationships. This way of working highlights, in an innovative way, the women's relationships with their husbands and children and also how they feel about their homes; feelings and interiority that would have been very hard to illustrate without using participatory filmmaking and video diary interviews. However, I think it is important, in the first place, to select participants who clearly have something they want to say and to build mutual trust with them so that they want to share aspects of their interior lives.

Latha, Indira, Vinodha and Parvati, despite sharing similarities in their domestic situations, are all very different to each other as people and the film demonstrates that it is possible to portray nuanced gendered identities and articulate difference; that gendered identities are plural, by nature, rather than binary (Pink 2001). I hope, too, that Village Tales (2015) shows that it is possible to have a kind of humanistic knowledge that does not play a dominant role over the people it seeks to study (Chambers 1980, 512).

The film has been able to give us 'a snapshot' of the everyday, inevitably partial and subjective and embracing the subjectivities of all the different camera operators, including myself, who chose to point the camera in a particular direction at a particular time. To a certain extent, the film has been able to capture the 'movement of the daily' (Highmore 2002). In addition to the 'walk throughs' the film has other performative elements including movement within the domestic sphere when the women go to the village wells to

collect water and more significantly, and controversially, when they ask their husbands if they can leave it. For example, Vinodha and Indira asking to leave the house to go to meetings.

The Sneha Praja Video project evidently had a marked effect on these women's lives; Vinodha said that she was being treated with more respect from members of the village, of particular importance to her as she is from the Dalit caste, while Indira talks about gaining confidence to deal with 'family problems'. It is tempting to say they were 'empowered' but as Gadihoke says, 'in our efforts to present our characters as "empowered" we run the risk of representing them as one-dimensional and devoid of all conflict and contradiction. In trying to narrate "success stories" we often gloss over inadequacies, problems and weaknesses' (2003, 278). There is inevitably a danger in this but I think that Village Tales (2015) does not 'gloss over' the everyday challenges each woman faces.

Finally, I believe that I have located a third voice by blending together the footage to tell a story from a new perspective. At times, my camera looks in, observes the women as they make their films and attend meetings while, at other times, it is their perspective, as they switch on their cameras to speak directly down the lens or use their cameras to question their husbands. As Carlo A. Cubero, the film reviewer of *The Journal of Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia*, noted my film gives 'priority to the voice of the protagonists, using their footage and emphasizing the issues that are important for them. However, the film is still an authored piece' (2014, 198–199). Neither perspective dominates the other but would not 'work' without the existence of each other – these 'outsider' and 'insider' visions coalesce and through a third voice tell a unique story to a wider world.

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