

P1

Makaan

A documentary film based on construction worker

Salik Ansari - 156250001
MDes, Visual Communication
2015 - 2017

Internship at TISS, Mumbai
Guide: Prof. Anjali Monteiro (TISS)

Table of content

Acknowledgement.....	1
About guide.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Origin of the Idea.....	4
A poem from Bertolt Brecht 1935.....	5
Before visiting the field.....Phase 1.....	6
After Visiting the field.....Phase 2.....	7
Main Documentation Site.....	8
Profile/ Story.....	9
Labor, Art, Value?.....Phase 3.,.....	14
Michelangelo, poem.....Labor pains.....	15
Final Structre - Film.....Phase 4.....	17
Film/Literature (reading).....	18

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my tremendous and heartfelt gratitude to all those who have been a part of my journey in this project.

Prof. Anjali Monteiro, for giving me an opportunity to work with her and guiding me in this challenging project.

Prof. Sudesh Balan, for recommending my name to alumni association for getting loan for camera equipment's.

Sreesh Venuturumili , for being consistence on the brain storming.

Neha Chaturvedi, for constantly debugging my thoughts with intense discussion.

Prof. Raja Mohanty for asking difficult question in the starting and taunts that filled me with energy to go ahead instead of all the odds.

Prof. Alka Hingorani, for being a constant inspiration and moral support in this journey.

Shreya Gupta, for suggesting the name of the film from 'Ghar' to 'Makaan'.

Allumni Association, IIT Bombay.

TISS Archive.

Guide

For this project I approached Prof. Anjali Monteiro in TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences) Mumbai for her guidance. She accepted my request and helped me exploring the project, her critical views and suggestions have played a vital role in the development of film.



A brief introduction about Prof. Anjali Monteiro.

Anjali Monteiro is a Professor at the School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

She is involved in documentary production, media teaching and research. Jointly with Prof. K.P. Jayasankar, she has won thirty-two national and international awards at documentary film festivals. Prof. Monteiro has been a visiting professor at several Universities, including University of Technology Sydney, University of Western Sydney, Lund University, Sweden and University of California, Berkeley and has lectured at several

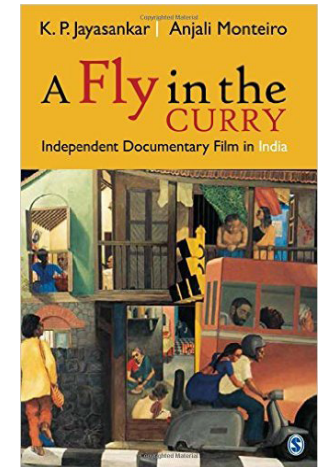
universities in Australia, USA, UK, Asia and Europe. She is also active in campaigns against censorship and for freedom of expression.

From “A Fly in The Curry” Book.

Our task is further complicated by the lack of a ‘sense of documentary history- almost a refusal of it’ (Vohra in Rajagopal and Vohra 2012:16) in various sites of its production and reception in India, such as film schools and film criticism.

This relative failure to engage with the documentary ‘as an aesthetic or arts practice’ (Vohra in Rajagopal and Vohra 2012:16), and instead consigning it to the realm of the political, as if it were purely an evidentiary enterprise of producing knowledge of the real, can perhaps be located in its Griersonian legacy.

Documentary film in India has a complex and chequered history. It has often been regarded as a discourse of the ‘real’, with an agenda, indeed a responsibility, to educate ‘the masses’ and to initiate awareness and change.



Abstract

'Makaan' is about bringing a story of construction worker community through one's family struggle. Their ups and downs as they navigate their daily lives puddled with economic and social hurdles. The narrative of the film juxtaposes similar situations. It expresses differences in the way of response through the perspectives of children and the elderly, where the children transform the hard reality. In their games, leaves are turned into money and a ten rupee note becomes a butterfly.

The film also tries to capture the essence of 'worker' and their struggle in today's modern time.

Origin of the Idea

I was about to reach Thane from Bhiwandi, on the national highway I saw a huge construction site was getting built. As my eyes rolls down to see the details of the place there I saw a bunch of homes made in tin metal sheets connected to one another was appearing like the base on which the gigantic structure (construction site) is getting built on.

I wondered for a while about those temporary homes and sooner realized it belongs to the workers who were working in the very same construction site. And it was not very far that I started thinking about the ephemerality of 'temporary space' and the lives that revolves around and inside.

I was finding it difficult to imagine a picture about these people (construction workers) as I was not having any clue or knowledge about their lives. Being born and bought up in 'City' and I didn't know who built it from their very own hands.

Till now my experience with this one incident was on emotional level, when I started observing minutely my own interest and inclination towards this subject I realized it was the commonality of life- the uncertainty of living, the anxiety of space and the displacement which was common among us, but in them (workers) it was on the surface 'visible'.

I was curious and wanted to explore and know about the lives of these people, the basic idea that they keep on migrating after every project and watch the city growing have played a triggering role in pursuing this subject forward.

In the starting I was having very faint idea that 'film' as a media will be good to document the whole exploratory process and which can turn into a documentary film. But before starting on that I had to ask several questions to myself and getting answer to that turned out to be the most difficult part of the entire project.

“In any case I believe that the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space”

– Michel Foucault 1967.

'Questions from a worker who reads'

by Bertolt Brecht- 1935.

Who built Thebes of the 7 gates?
In the books you will read the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
And Babylon, many times demolished,
who raised it up so many times?

In what houses of gold glittering Lima did its builders live?
Where, the evening that the Great Wall of China was finished,
did the masons go?

Great Rome is full of triumphal arches.
Who erected them?

Over whom did the Caesars triumph?
Had Byzantium, much praised in song, only palaces for its
inhabitants?
Even in fabled Atlantis, the night that the ocean engulfed it,
the drowning still cried out for their slaves.
The young Alexander conquered India.
Was he alone?

Caesar defeated the Gauls.
Did he not even have a cook with him?
Philip of Spain wept when his armada went down.
Was he the only one to weep?
Frederick the 2nd won the 7 Years War.
Who else won it?

Every page a victory.
Who cooked the feast for the victors?

Every 10 years a great man.
Who paid the bill?

So many reports.
So many questions.

Before visiting the field.

Phase 1

The very starting ideas and assumptions:

The film will be based on a family of construction laborers who live in temporary houses built by themselves near the permanent construction sites they work in.

The film will also explore the way of living of migrating construction laborers inside their temporary house, their basic desires and small aspects of life, songs they listen to, stories they tell, food they cook, Games, love.

Also how these laborers identify themselves in urban metropolitan society as they keep on migrating after every project and watch the city growing.

The film will juxtapose activities of laborers 'on-site' (construction) and inside of their houses.

The climax of the film will capture the essence of their departure, and the feeling of not knowing where the next stay will be.

Assumption 1: Documenting construction workers, African Immigrant and an old Parsi.

Their correlation in this complex society.

Earlier I thought of three samples from different class, race and community. A worker keep on migrating faces certain problems and an African immigrant have

their own issues and an old Parsi how he identified himself as a part of the adapted society.

I wanted to understand and document the overlapping of their lives, the common and distinctive things. This idea appeared to me too fictionalized and complex even for myself to handle and process.

Assumption 2: Juxtaposing with 'Three little pig and a bad wolf' story- Pigs construct the home in different materials. Why this?

Then the first initial idea I thought of juxtaposing the whole narrative of the structure with the story of three little pigs and a bad wolf, which draws attention on the permanent housing and its long lasting nature.

In the story the houses are built by the pig themselves, the last pig's appearance is of mason and I was interested in showing that pig as a worker of today because of whom our houses are safe today. But this idea was having pot holes which is that in our time the labor is divided into many parts- Structures are designed by Architects, Civil Engineers, Contractors, Sub-contractors and then mason. In the story the mason pig constructs the entire structure by himself even the design, which is not the case of today so the overlapping these things was not working out.

During Visit in the field.

Phase 2

In-field observation

Visiting sites have made many significant changes in my thinking process towards the subject, I encountered a lot of barriers in myself and overcame many hurdles of assumptions made during earlier process. The 'theoretical reality' was very different from the 'practical reality'. The assumption of problem in my mind was not a prominent one in the field, certainly it's the time of connectivity, smart phones and information exchange have been affected the lives of worker as well. Most of them were having smart phones cheap ones made in China and used to act as scavengers for Wi-Fi internet, after their work they go nearby sites to get signal.

In the evening once the work is done one can hear all the regional songs from every houses. They were using 'chulhas' to cook food, wood and plastic was the main fuel for fire.

I have visited 3 construction sites inside IIT Bombay, the site near lake side was very special in terms of demographic location.

One can see the lake view, City skyline, Hill, trees, basically a good natural drama of scenes can be captured from there. Another thing, just below the 13th storey under construction building was the place for whole worker community to stay with one 'Tapri' (snacks and tea stall).

There the worker spend their leisure time having tea and chit chatting. As a whole this place was offering more dynamics in terms of content as compared to the other two sites.

The very first day I went with the camera but didn't documented anything I was talking with the workers and the camera played a good role in establishing my positive identity for them.

I started documenting the very basics of the location from the next day and a day after too, this helped me in getting familiar with the space and also in front of the workers as well. Soon I found myself no longer an outsider to this place but a fellow worker myself, from morning 9 till evening 6 with those people have shown a very close experience in the hardship of such manual work in so low wages.

On an average daily wages of the workers were 350-450 Rs. Per day (inside IIT-B) they won't even get paid for Sunday holiday therefore they work on Sundays as well. Delay in in getting money was the serious issue as the workers didn't have any control or say over the issue.

During the whole exploration (documentation) of around one and half months I ended up having more than 45 hours of footages. The tricky part of the data was 'Where should I start now'?

Main Documentation Site



Some views of the main site, Lake side IIT Bombay, Powai, Mumbai.

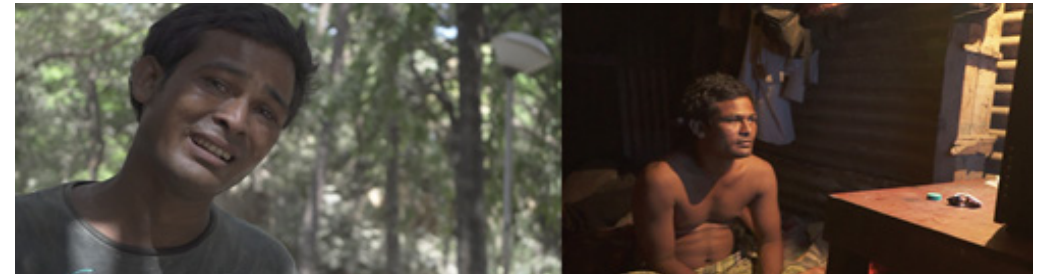
Profile/ Story of the People



Raaju and His Wife Muskaan.



Muskaan with her 3 daughters, left Laadli, center Chandani and right Roshini.



Raaju crying because he was asked to leave his house and he was feeling what did he do?

Raaju watching “Coolie” at night – with the dialogue Billa no 786, “Mazdoor ka pasina sookhne se pehle use uski mazdoor mil jaani chahiye, magar use milti bas maar hai”



Raaju in the next morning.



Laadli- Raaju's Daughter.



Argument over 10 rupee,
between an old and a young man.



Laadli making snake origami out
of original 10 Rs note.



Laadli saying that he kicked her father so hard that he fell on the round, she kicked him because he was drunk and was fighting at home.



Laadli and Chaandni playing game and acting like vegetable vendors and negotiating the value of their creation. The leaves became money, small stones become 'Rasgulla' and dry mud became 'GaramMasal' (Hot Spices), brokel construction helmet became container to store money (leaves) in their game.



Sailendra Kumar age 24, from Gorakhpur is going to complete his MSC in Mathematics. Doing construction work because want to collect money for his sister's marriage and dowry. He has a girlfriend in IIT but the girl didn't know that he is a construction worker, he didn't told her because he thought that she will not like it finding him a worker.



Salinder dancing with his friends.



Salinder working.



Shabbir age 26, from Bengal.



Gulzaar age 58, from Gorakhpur.



Gulzaar and his friend

Labor, Work, Art, Value?

Phase 3

Characters were narrowed down in this phase- Raaju's family-Children, Salinder, Gulzar.

The question how to show and express the value of their work interested me in this phase, after interacting with more and more workers I wrote few dialogues which I thought can convey the value of their work.

I was trying to stage the literal narration of the situation in the 'real' which failed and the evidence of it can be seen in the final film where Raaju says while crying.

1st Dialogue- "These people they know what dialogue you have written! That they get money for Sunday also but we don't even get anything, why"?

2nd Dialogue- "Saahab! Look at your city and imagine if we the workers take back the work we have done, your city will turn into a village. It is a village indeed, which becomes city by us the people from villages. This dialogue special tries to redefine the value of these laborers by the process of undoing. *Written for Gulzar.*

3rd Dialogue- "If you look closely at these walls with a microscope you will only find impressions of our hands" because we are illiterate! *Written for Raaju.*

4th Dialogue- "We are temporary people and we live in temporary houses but things we built is permanent" *Written for Raaju.*

All 4 dialogues failed! conceptually they sounded appropriate with the context but working with real people things are very different they are not actors! When they are on their own, they were not conscious to the camera at all but if something I tell them to do they hesitate. So I decided to not to stage anything, rather discarded all the dialogues from the final version of the film without compromising with the actual essence I wanted to convey.

Further in the process of making I tried to redefine the value of their work by showing them through artistic views or 'them' as an artist or the maker of the cities. Going on with this idea I borrowed references from the Michelangelo's sonnet- the poem he wrote to his boyfriend Giovanni when he was painting the majestic Sistine chapel and expresses his 'Labor Pain'.

Michelangelo: To Giovanni da Pistoia

“When the Artist Was Painting the Vault of the Sistine Chapel”—1509

I’ve already grown a goiter from this torture,
hunched up here like a cat in Lombardy
(or anywhere else where the stagnant water’s poison).

My stomachs squashed under my chin, my beard’s
pointing at heaven, my brains crushed in a casket,
and my breast twists like a harpy’s.

My brush, above me all the time, dribbles paint
so my face makes a fine floor for droppings!

My haunches are grinding into my guts,
my poor ass strains to work as a counterweight,
every gesture I make is blind and aimless.

My skin hangs loose below me, my spine’s
all knotted from folding over itself.
I’m bent taut as a Syrian bow.

Because I’m stuck like this,
my thoughts are crazy, perfidious tripe:
anyone shoots badly through a crooked blowpipe.

My painting is dead.
Defend it for me, Giovanni,
protect my honor.
I am not in the right place,
I am not a painter.

In 1509, an increasingly uncomfortable Michelangelo described the physical strain of the Sistine Chapel project to his friend Giovanni da Pistoia.

“I’ve already grown a goiter from this torture,” he wrote in a poem that was surely somewhat tongue-in-cheek. He went on to complain that his “stomach’s squashed under my chin,” that his “face makes a fine floor for droppings,” that his “skin hangs loose below me” and that his “spine’s all knotted from folding myself over.”

He ended with an affirmation that he shouldn’t have changed his day job: “I am not in the right place—I am not a painter.”

The poem is a fine example of the achieved potential of a person, labor or an artist.
The basic idea which I was trying to connect in between these labor and Michelangelo is the forced labor or the choice of preference to work, and still be able to work with precision.

Why this narrative didn’t used in the final film?

Overlapping with Michelangelo was appearing forced again. I didn’t have the clear way to show how to put the worker and Michelangelo on the same page as the Renaissance artist have the ownership of the work but these worker don’t and how to establish that was a problem.

Prof. Anjali Monteiro suggested me to take references from their very own surroundings and to reduce the number of prominent characters as it was having too much of information. The suggestion was very important as I went back to all the ideas I found her suggestion very useful.



Renaissance hotel, Powai.



David by Michelangelo



My brush, above me all the time, dribbles paint, so my face makes a fine floor for droppings!
(Line from the poem)

मकान

Final Structure / Film

Duration: 38 mins.

Phase 4

After going back to back on the footages I decided to focus only on Raaju and his family because there was interesting events which had happened. Various footages of Laadli dancing, singing, drawing, fighting, playing in garden, Salman imitating work of his dad (Raaju), chaandni slapping Laadli over 10rs (vada pav) argument.

The contrast between children and elderly establishes the important transformation in the nature of responses to a common situation. Which expresses how a similar situation can look differently from another perspective with ought having any conflicts.

A conflicts happens for 10 Rs. between Shabbir and an old man and Laadli plays with money making origami 'Naagin' (snake) out of a real 10 rupee note. Laadli screaming on his father Raaju, Laadli and Chandani negotiating and generating value out of discarded construction scraps.

The final structure and narrative of the film juxtaposes similar situations but expresses difference in the way of response through the perspectives of children and elderly.

Experience of making a documentary film

I wanted to explore and observe the lives of laborers and wanted to document the very same experiences.

'The Real' ? what ever I have captured in the film was only a part of reality. The whole process of documentary for me was not the discourse for 'real' but a pure 'fiction' which tries to talk about 'reality'.

While working in the field I became a 'worker' myself, an observer then a camera man then to a story teller.

Screening

Idea phase 1:

The screening of the film will be shown from inside the 'Makaan' of construction workeres and will be hosted by them only.

In this process the documentary behaves as an experimental 'space' which can cater a new possibility of dialogues and interactions among two different 'classes'. (between host and the viewer).

Idea phase 2:

Fabricating the 'Makaan' (house) of construction worker to show screening of the film from inside it. The 'Makaan' will then be migrating in different parts of the city conceptually following the migrating life of these worker.

Films and Literature (Reading)

Films:

Baraka- Ron Fricke

Prisoners of Conscience- Anand Patwardhan (Emergency time, India)

Naked Spaces- Jean-Paul Bourdier

My Migrant Soul- Yasmine Kabir

Statues also Die- Chris Marker

Song- Ain't got no life by Nina Simone

IN

Association

with Insight - IIT Bombay, IIT Bombay,
Sreesh Venuturumili.

Literature:

A fly in the curry (Independent documentary film in India)- Anjali Monteiro and K.P.

Jayashankar

Of Other Spaces (Utopia and Heterotopia)-

Michel Foucault

Michelangelo Sonnet- Poem on his 'Labor Pains'

IDC

School Of Design
IIT Bombay.

Project-1

Documentary Film.
Duration 38 mins.

Guide:

Prof. Anjali Monteiro
Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Salik Ansari

M. Des. 2015-2017
Visual Communication