

**Visual Voice: Activism, Human Rights and
Adivasi (tribal) Rhetoric in a Village in South India**

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Synopsis

This dissertation draws on research undertaken with the Indian NGO Video Volunteers. The organisation's vision is 'a world in which all disadvantaged communities have their own locally relevant and locally produced media that celebrates their culture, voices grassroots concerns, and stimulates dialog to find solutions to endemic problems.' Initially the ideas and optimism of the founders of the organisation are considered. The focus then shifts to the implementation of the Video Volunteers programme in a rural adivasi village in south India. Here, a historiography of dissent and a reflection on shifts in the intimate lives and sartorial choices of the community producers working with Video Volunteers, give rise to a consideration of the nature of change. These two distinct sections are brought together by the final chapter in which the language of cinema and film becomes the focus. The main themes throughout the dissertation are technology, identity, activism and voice.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is substantially my own work. Where reference is made to the works of others the extent to which that work has been used is indicated and duly acknowledged in the text and bibliography.

Naomi Hatfield Allen 26/04/2010

The word count for this dissertation, excluding footnotes, bibliography and appendices, is 9,965 words.

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Introduction

The stark white screen contrasted with the ochre houses. The soft hum of the projector mingled with the purring of the generator. The producers called out through their PA system – ‘We have come to your village to show you a film about migration. We filmed part of the film in your village. Please come to see this film. We are Manyam Praja Video.’ In the dusk, men, women and children gathered in front of the temple. After some time, the film started; for forty-five minutes the screen was illuminated with interviews, short skits and music. The audience was, for the most part, attentive. The credits started to roll and, as quickly as they had arrived, the people dispersed¹.

At the centre of this dissertation is the question: can film change the way people think and act? Framing this is a consideration of technology, voice, activism and identity. Is participatory media, as promoted by Video Volunteers² (VV), an effective medium for communicating marginalised and diverse voices? What exactly is meant by this term ‘voice’? Is it a useful analytic for anthropologists and how do we account for divergent positionalities, ways of articulation and the efficacy of what is said? In other words, how do we define ‘voice’? Who shapes the activist agenda of ‘giving people “voice”’? How does this agenda, mediated through the medium of film in the case of VV, effect change with regard to identity?

The research for this dissertation was undertaken over two months in the summer of 2009. I spent ten days at the VV office in Goa,³ before travelling to a remote adivasi⁴ village in Andhra Pradesh for five weeks. I returned to the office for ten days at the end of my stay. VV was founded in 2003 by two people with a shared passion for media and human rights. Jessica Mayberry⁵ is an American videojournalist. Prior to founding VV she worked for CNN, and various US news channels before travelling to India in 2002. Stalin K is a human rights

¹ From fieldnotes.

² www.videovolunteers.org (last accessed – 24/04/2010).

³ A map of the research locations is given in the appendix.

⁴ Adivasi is the word used to refer to India’s indigenous population. In Hindi, *adi* means first; *vasi* means inhabitant, so it is also a claim to being autochthonous inhabitants of India. Adivasis exist outside the caste system and are thus seen by many to be *below* it.

⁵ ‘Jessica’ and ‘Stalin’ are their real names. I am aware that the anthropological convention is to anonymise the names of all informants. However, since they are public figures running an organisation that is principally about

activist and documentary filmmaker from Ahmedabad, India. Although VV was founded in 2003 it was not until 2006 that Jessica and Stalin conceived the Community Video Unit (CVU) model, the model at the centre of VV's work.

A CVU consists of approximately eight trained and salaried local residents who are employed as video producers. The producers work full time to create 'video magazines' – films focused on a specific topic. A community editorial board decides the content of the films. Topics range from education to land rights, malaria to electricity. Each film features a combination of interviews, role-plays, anchor pieces and 'success stories'.⁶ They end in a 'call to action', which, according to VV, consists of the concrete steps needed to effect change locally. Each video magazine takes approximately six weeks to produce. When it is completed it is screened in twenty-five local villages (or areas of the slum if the CVU is based in an urban environment). Screenings are, in theory, followed by producer-chaired community discussions on the issues raised.

VV currently co-ordinates nine CVUs in slums and villages across India. Each CVU is founded in partnership with an existing, local NGO. I spent time with a CVU called Manyam Praja Video⁷ (MPV) in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. It is co-ordinated in partnership with Laya, an NGO which acts as a resource centre for marginalised adivasi communities.

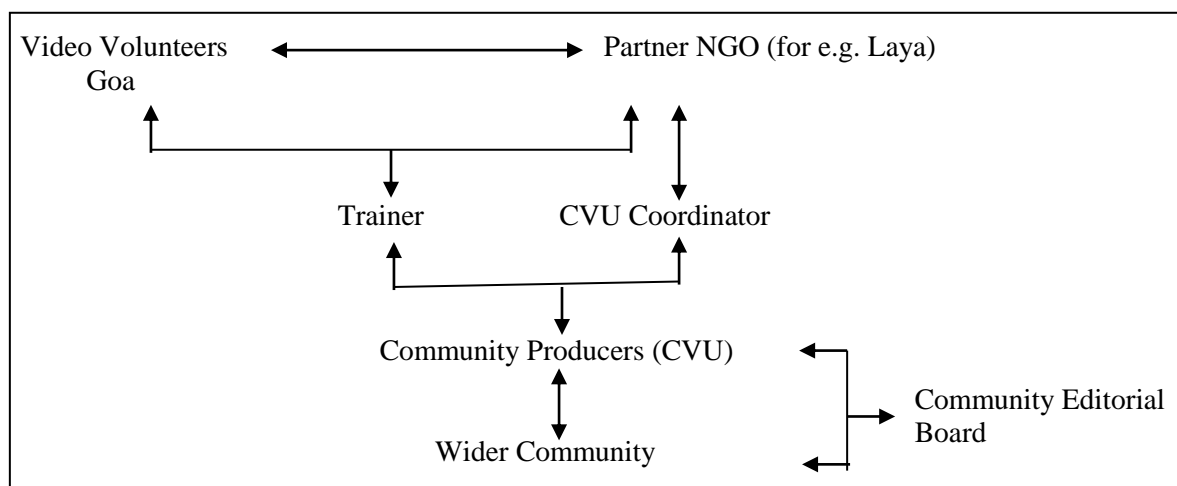


Figure 1

ideals and "voice" it feels strange to mute my informants with pseudonyms. Furthermore, all of what I discuss in the dissertation has been aired in discussions and long debates with them.

⁶ 'Success stories' document cases where local change has occurred as a result of information provided in a film, e.g. a local village was connected to the electric grid when residents took action after seeing a video magazine about electricity. The 'success stories' are used to inspire action and as 'proof' that change can and does occur.

⁷ Manyam Praja Video' is Telugu (the state language of Andhra Pradesh) for 'Forest People's Video'.

Figure 1 shows the structure of the organisation, and illustrates the spatial arrangement of VV. The distance between the headquarters in Goa and the locally based CVUs creates its own issues and tensions in terms of understanding and action.

Drawing on this research and the work of Pfaffenberger (1992) and others, in the first chapter I will consider debates surrounding the use of technology in development and argue that the dazzling effect of new technologies has the propensity to create new hierarchies. Using the Subaltern Studies School I will critique VV's use of World Bank data to homogenise diverse voices into a unified narrative of dissent. In the second chapter I use the work of Tarlo (1996), Miller (1994; 2005) and Parry (1999; 2001) to deliberate the unintended changes brought about by the introduction of community media, namely in the sartorial choices and intimate lives of producers in rural south India. Next, using the work of O'Hanlon (2000), I argue that pursuit of deliberate and considered change is perhaps misguided. I use Miller (1994) to acknowledge the tension between a 'depth ontology' and a revealing surface, before critiquing his work and arguing that we should not laden an individuals interior *or exterior* with value judgements with regard to change, and the implications of change. In the final chapter I reflect on film as a medium of communication using two ethnographic examples to consider the affective nature of film (Deleuze 1989).

Chapter 1: Giving Access to Voice

Our carriage was crowded and hot. We took it in turns to stretch our legs, to stand hanging out of the train door, the cool breeze providing a welcome respite from the stifling heat. Soon novelty turned to boredom and we all grew restless. Ajay, suffering from fever, was deep asleep in the top bunk; Bala and Girish bickered over my iPod; Rani kept disappearing to make secretive phone calls to her boyfriend. The following morning, after a breakfast of chai and samosas, we settled into the last leg of the journey. The producers followed our route in my guidebook and asked numerous questions about images of backwaters in Kerala and temples in Rajasthan. It was then that I realised the magnitude of this journey: for many of the producers this was their first trip outside of Andhra Pradesh, their home state.

This chapter focuses on Goa, home to the headquarters of VV. Through detailed ethnography I hope to concentrate on the issues raised by the use of technology to affect social change, and the consequences of a preoccupation with the category 'voice'. I will argue that technology creates new hierarchies, and that diverse voices are problematically, and perhaps inevitably, shaped into a unified rhetoric by VV. This harsh critique will itself be subject to review in subsequent chapters.

The opening paragraph of this chapter gives an impression of a twenty-four-hour train journey I took across India with nine producers, a translator and their co-ordinator. Our destination was Goa, to attend a week-long training conference organised by VV. The conference took place in Candolim, a garish resort on a busy stretch of Goa's coastline. For one week, 130 participants lived and learned together. The conference was a chance for the producers to connect with other producers from VV's other CVUs, as well as students, media professionals and NGO workers. Daily workshops led by established Indian filmmakers, on creative camera skills, animation, music video, silent film, digi-activism and video-blogging formed the backbone of the week (*Figure 2*). Alongside these, there was a programme of film screenings, panel discussions and open mic nights. The VV conference was a pivotal week during my research as it brought a number of parallel discourses, that of VV in Goa, and those of the CVUs it co-ordinates, into the same physical and ideological space.



Figure 2. Producers shoot a short music video during a workshop at the conference in Goa.

In the next chapter, I will speak more about the changing lives of the producers themselves. For the remainder of this chapter, I will analyse the way in which, the founders and directors of the organisation formulate their understandings of the role played by technology in achieving the organisation's aims, and of their use of the category 'voice'.

Centre of Operations

VV's Goa office is situated at the end of Baga Beach, a popular tourist resort. The office is small – a mismatched selection of plastic tables and chairs, sophisticated computers resting precariously on uneven surfaces.

When in the office, one feels disconnected from the world; the atmosphere is one of contemplative calm. Staff, usually no more than eight at any one time, work quietly at their computers. Every so often, people turn away from their screens and engage in a conversation about work-related topics. At lunch everyone eats together in Jessica and Stalin's house

which sits above the office. It was at this time that we would really talk – about VV, human rights, Indian politics, religion and the caste system. It was during these discussions that I learnt most about the organisation and the people that worked for it.

In the following paragraph I attempt to synthesise some of the assertions that were expounded during these conversations. VV wants to ‘democratise the media’,⁸ and ‘invert the current media pyramid’ that places power in the hands of a small elite. It envisions an ‘alternative media landscape’ in which all communities have their own ‘locally relevant and locally produced media that celebrates their culture, voices grassroots concerns, and stimulates debate to find solutions to endemic problems’. VV seeks to ‘amplify marginalised voices’. It believes the global media movement is in the midst of a revolution, a revolution within which it wants to participate.

In conversation with Jessica she said, ‘We think of community video as a revolution akin to blogging and the internet but one that works for developing countries with high levels of illiteracy because we can teach people to make a film in a matter of weeks and it takes years to teach people to read and write.’ A similar faith in the capacity of film to inspire change is captured by Margaret Dickinson’s account of her ‘Jandarshan’s Bhilai training programme’⁹ in which she notes, ‘ideally, film should make the audience see the world differently and the most direct way to achieve this is to present the familiar so that it surprises, so the audience questions things they had always taken for granted.’¹⁰ Projects such as VV’s and Margaret Dickinson’s are able to harness the capacity of film to generate debate and, through rigorous training programmes, equip people at the margins of the media industry¹¹ with the skills necessary to pursue careers in film and television.

I will now seek to answer two pertinent questions raised by this idealism: firstly, why choose visual technology as a medium to ‘accelerate change’? Secondly, is ‘voice’ a suitable analytic category that ‘travels’ unproblematically from one CVU to another, or do we need to reconsider what we mean by it?

⁸ The words in quotation marks in this paragraph are direct quotes from members of VV staff. They are taken from contemporaneous field notes.

⁹ This project in Chhattisgarh, India, ‘aimed to improve networking between practitioners in community media and visual anthropology and to develop the use of digital video for exploring and communicating experiences of social change’ <http://www.marker.org.uk/Jandarshan.html> (last viewed on 23/04/2010).

¹⁰ Taken from - <http://www.fieldtofactory.lse.ac.uk/MSPersonalAccount.htm> (last viewed on 23/04/2010).

¹¹ In India this includes members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, members of ‘Other Backward Castes’ and women.

Technology and History

A focus on technology is required as it is the belief that ‘technology is a radical leveller’¹² that underpins much of VV’s work, an idea that I want to problematise. In this section I will place the use of new technologies in a historical context before considering the, perhaps unintended, effects brought about by technology, when used as a tool for social change.

The words ‘technology’ and ‘development’ have, for a long time, been placed in the same canon. As early as the 1830s, European colonial administrators and missionaries came to view Western technology, notably railways and steamships, as ‘key agents in their campaigns to revive “decadent” civilisations in Asia and uplift the “savage” peoples of Africa’ (Adas 1989: 224). A decade later, notes Adas, an editorial in *The Times* boasted that, the British would become ‘the greatest benefactors the Hindoo race had known’, and predicted that the ‘science and steadiness of the North’ would galvanise the ‘capabilities of the East’.

Lord William Bentinck, the reform-minded Governor General of India from 1828 to 1835, believed technology had the power to affect a ‘complete moral revolution’ in India (Adas 1989: 225), a sentiment repeated by the Marquis of Dalhousie¹³ two decades later; he was convinced that ‘only a large influx of Western technology could shake India from its lethargy and alleviate the poverty and backwardness of its masses’ (Hunter 1961 in Adas 1989: 225). Dalhousie and his contemporaries also envisioned numerous indirect improvements that would result from the introduction of Western technology into India. One such improvement was the hope that railways would accelerate the breakdown of caste barriers, ‘if high-caste Brahmins wished to travel by rail, they would have to rub elbows with low-caste farmers and labourers, thus making a shambles of notions about pollution’¹⁴ (Adas 1989: 225). Whilst VV sees itself as empowering the marginalised and the disenfranchised, it is striking how closely its entirely modern rhetoric resonates with the historical past.

¹² An assertion made by Jessica when explaining the motivation for using technology as a medium.

¹³ A British statesman and colonial administrator in India from 1848 – 1857.

¹⁴ It is a commonly held belief in India that contact with lower castes will somehow ‘pollute’ members of higher castes.

It has already been noted that visual technology can be used to circumvent the problems of illiteracy, but it is also a fact that the dazzling nature of technology can, and does, create new divides; we must consider the use of technology holistically. I use the word ‘dazzling’ to refer to the reaction provoked by the advent of video technology in communities that hitherto had no such resource. For example, in Addateegala, the sight of producers deftly manipulating sleek metal tripods and high-definition video cameras provokes intrigue, an intrigue that quickly turns to reverence (*Figure 3*). These producers have the means to represent, and communicate with, their communities through their expanded skill set. As such, their status within the community is elevated. On the one hand, this elevation is encouraged by VV who wants its producers to be community leaders; on the other hand, VV is all too aware of the possible risks associated with their producers being put on a pedestal. When this happens, the producers become detached from the very communities they have grown up in, the very communities they are paid to represent, whose concerns they are meant to ‘voice’.



Figure 3. MPV producers interview a schoolteacher, an older man who treated these young producers with great reverence.

In a conversation with Jessica she told me about an exchange she had had with a group of producers. In a training session the producers kept referring to the residents in their community as ‘them’. Jessica picked up on this distancing vernacular. ‘Who is them?’ she asked. The producers blushed, ‘We mean us’, they corrected. This exchange demonstrates the way in which the producers perceive themselves, as somehow separate from their fellow residents. Jessica clearly wants the producers to be experts rooted in their communities, able

to be adept at appropriating advanced technology and able to relate to their fellow residents as equals. Nevertheless, the ideals being expressed by Jessica and Stalin do not necessarily get transposed into the daily realities of the producers; there is a disjuncture between beliefs and practice.

It seems that the introduction of video technology has had impacts more profound than those originally anticipated by VV. I will now consider two varying approaches to the relationship between technology and society, and consider the positioning of VV within these approaches. This relationship has been widely explored in academic writing discussing theories of voice in the context of postmodernity (Fischer 2003: 40). As the philosopher Jonas (1984) puts it,

Our technological prostheses are taking us into models of ethics with which our older moral traditions have little experience or guidance to offer;...we are again thrown, as Wittgenstein noted, beyond 'grounds giving' to ungrounded ways of acting, to new forms of social life (in Fischer 2003: 51).

This assertion, that technology is capable of affecting such profound moral change, is guilty of technological determinism: 'the doctrine that because there is only one way to make or use a material artefact, every culture that adopts it will be forced to develop the same social and labour relations' (Pfaffenberger 1992: 510). Both Pfaffenberger (1992) and Schaniel (1988) refute technological determinism, arguing that the adoption of artefacts does not necessarily imply the adoption of the system of logic that produced the technology.

Whilst VV would not want to be accused of technological determinism, the organisation does not fit comfortably into the culturalist approach propounded by Pfaffenberger and Schaniel either. This is evidenced by the way in which VV trains its producers in both technical skills, and critical thinking. This will be explored in greater detail in later chapters. For now, it is sufficient to highlight the way in which 'new forms of social life' (Bentinck in Fischer 2003: 51) do indeed creep in with the introduction of video cameras. This truth is made evident by the activist agenda driven by VV, an agenda that, by its very nature, moulds diverse voices into a unified narrative – a problematic move, however virtuous that rhetoric may appear.

A Common Narrative of Diverse Voices

The sentiment propounded by VV with regard to democratising the media, as outlined earlier in this chapter, is emphasised by the presence of a World Bank statistic on the VV homepage:

The World Bank¹⁵ asked 60,000 people living on less than a dollar a day to identify the single greatest hurdle to their advancement. Above even food, shelter or education, the number one need identified was access to a voice. Hear that voice on Channel 19.¹⁶

In 1999, research commissioned by the World Bank was published in a report, 'Voices of the Poor'. The report claims to gather the voices of 60,000 poor men and women from 60 countries using a 'participatory methodology'.¹⁷ The study consists of two parts: 'a review of participatory poverty studies conducted in the 1990s covering 40,000 poor people in 50 countries around the world; and a series of new studies undertaken in 1999 in 23 countries engaging over 20,000 poor men and women'.¹⁸

The World Bank gives a paragraph to the importance of understanding poverty 'in each location, for each social group, for each region, for each country in a particular institutional context at a particular time in history' (World Bank 1999: 7). However, more important for the Bank, is articulating the 'common threads' found across countries to 'ensure that the broad human story does not get lost' (World Bank 1999: 7). This assertion results in the report continually referring to 'the poor'. Even in the section of the report in which localities are described methodically¹⁹, fieldwork experiences and local accounts are condensed into a thirty-page conclusion titled 'An Empowering Approach to Poverty Reduction'.

The universalising nature of the report is jarring to someone studying social anthropology, a discipline that encourages long-term fieldwork and a focus on the local and the specific. The phrase 'access to a voice'²⁰ infers a universal and self-conscious understanding of the category voice – a problematic presumption because of its assumption of generality. I suggest

¹⁵ In their 'Voices of the Poor' report.

¹⁶ Channel19.org is a website screening the videos produced by the VV community producers.

¹⁷ The newly commissioned studies were undertaken by development 'experts', working co-operatively with local people to run focus groups on subjects dictated by the World Bank.

¹⁸ Information is taken from the PovertyNet section of the World Bank website: www.worldbank.org/poverty (last accessed 18/04/2010).

¹⁹ This refers to the last of three sections in which the World Bank research was published – a section titled, in fairytale fashion, 'From Many Lands'.

²⁰ Taken from the World Bank quote above.

that the VV propensity to shape voices is an inevitable consequence of its CVU model and that in order to capture what is truly authentic in terms of voice, we need to consider what subjects the CVUs choose *not* to cover.

When one looks at the catalogue of films made by the CVUs from across India the topics covered are surprisingly similar: water, electricity, housing and health are all recurrent themes. Whilst these issues are undoubtedly of concern in all communities, the seeming ‘blueprint’, as far as content is concerned, is startling, especially when framed by Jessica’s assertion that, ‘Voice and people’s right to expression is the central theme and it doesn’t matter what they are talking about, the fact that they are speaking is them exercising a right that we wanted to be involved in securing.’

A conversation with Jessica that occurred towards the end of my stay focused on the issue of voice:

Naomi: The ‘voice’ created by producers is quite uniform, why is this the case?

Jessica: It’s not necessarily about voice; it is more about articulation, teaching people to articulate better. What I wanted to get into was how do you spread this technology further and do it in a way where you are giving deep critical thinking skills to communities so that they are not just capturing stuff that is happening in front of a camera but they are really expressing themselves.

Naomi: So, other than technical skills, what is included in the VV training?

Jessica: We focus a lot on our producer’s critical thinking skills and we educate our producers about issues such as gender, health and education.²¹

From this conversation, and as mentioned above, we can see the way in which content is directed by VV’s activist agenda and ‘voices’ are shaped accordingly. With this in mind, it could be argued that whilst VV suggest that we can hear ‘the voices of the poor’ on Channel 19, in reality, the voices we hear are ones fashioned by VV.

This shaping of voices has a long history, a history documented by the Subaltern Studies School. O’Hanlon provides a concise and informative overview of the Subaltern School, a project which aims to ‘recover the experience, the distinctive cultures, traditions, identities and active historical practice of subaltern groups in a wide variety of settings – traditions, cultures or practices which have been lost or hidden by the action of elite historiography’

²¹ This was transcribed in India from a recording of a long conversation that I had with Jessica towards the end of my stay.

(O'Hanlon 2000: 78). Subalternists are concerned with writing a history of 'the masses' and as such their task can be seen as 'one of "filling up": of making an absence into presences, of peopling a vacant space with figures' (O'Hanlon 2000: 79). The similarities between the objectives of the Subaltern School and those of VV are striking. The latter could be seen as peopling the current mediascape with diverse subaltern voices, albeit voices that are styled by VV. Both attempt to centre marginalised people in the frame.

Nevertheless, the Subaltern School has been the subject of intense critique – O'Hanlon notes the problematic rendering of the 'subject' in Subalternist accounts. She observes that, in asserting that subordinate groups have a history separate from elites, a history of their own, the subaltern project is guilty of slipping into an essentialist humanism²² (O'Hanlon 2000: 81). In other words, in Guha's²³ assertion that the subaltern is 'the maker of his own history and the architect of his own destiny' (1983: vii), the reader is presented with a subject no different to the one found in more elite historiographies. Furthermore, Guha's statement is misguided, as surely the subaltern 'cannot be the maker of his own history since he is part of a context which is not of his own making' (Masselos 1992: 122). O'Hanlon (1988), together with Spivak (1988), make a further criticism of the Subaltern School – this time noting the absence of issues of gender.

The Subaltern School and its critique provide an interesting lens through which to analyse VV. Masselos's critique is of particular interest as it could be argued that VV is trying to right history's wrongs. By encouraging marginalised communities to narrate their own stories, they will eventually become part of a context which *is* of their own making. The critique concerning gender is useful as it highlights the fact that gender, for VV, is a vital consideration in all that it does. At least fifty per cent of the producers in each CVU have to be female and one of Jessica's primary aims is the creation of a space where women are free to articulate and exchange ideas.

It seems then, that although during the conference in Goa, VV claimed to encourage its producers to centre themselves in the frame, use creativity and comedy, and articulate their diverse voices, the reality is quite different. A common narrative is woven, modelled on a certain perception of needs and 'rights'. However, VV is not solely responsible for this state

²² The notion that there is an unchangeable and eternal human nature.

²³ The founder of the Subaltern School.

of affairs. The organisation has found that producers have a tendency to stick stoically to the ideas imparted in training sessions, even when actively encouraged to diverge. This will be exemplified in the following chapter, which will focus on a close analysis of one particular CVU, Manyam Praja Video.

Chapter 2: Manyam Praja Video – Interpreting Activism

In this chapter I shift my attention from Goa to the local practices of a CVU in Andhra Pradesh. With this move comes a change in perspective as the narratives woven by VV in Goa are interpreted and appropriated by its producers in a diverse range of settings. For the purposes of this dissertation I am going to focus on what it means to be an adivasi producer in rural south India and consider the ways in which this impacts understandings of identity and activism. I will question the apparent changes brought about by the VV model. Furthermore, I will investigate the unintended and less visible consequences of working in such an organisation, focusing upon changes in the subjective relations between producers as a direct outcome of their ‘work’.

Addateegala

Before embarking on a discussion of the topics raised in the above paragraph it is necessary to describe the village in which I did my research. Addateegala is a village of about 5,700 people²⁴ in the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. The village is a *mandal*²⁵ headquarters and as such, the biggest population centre in a wide radius. It is situated in the forested foothills of the Eastern Ghats.²⁶ Addateegala is a sprawling village; an array of houses lines the winding dust roads that cut through its centre. In the middle are whitewashed concrete, mainly single-storey, dwellings – a stark contrast to the mud and palm-thatch houses that are located on its periphery. This spatial arrangement mirrors the town’s social make-up – non-adivasis in the interior, adivasis on the outer edges. Addateegala bustles with activity, especially on market day when traders from nearby villages come to do business; fruit and vegetables, fish, spices, jaggery²⁷ and meat are weighed and packed (*Figure 4*). People jostle and haggle over prices.

²⁴ Census of India website: <http://www.censusindia.net> (last accessed 02/03/2010).

²⁵ An administrative level below state or district, also sometimes referred to as a ‘block.’

²⁶ A mountain range running down the eastern coast of India from the state of West Bengal in the north to Tamil Nadu in the south.

²⁷ A dark, sweet substance made from unrefined sugar cane.



Figure 4. Market day in Addateegala.

A Historiography of Dissent

Before describing Manyam Praja Video more specifically, the historical trajectory of activism in the Eastern Ghats is both relevant and revealing, especially when contrasted with some of the received wisdom written about rural Indian village life. Voices of dissent have a long history in the hills surrounding Addateegala, a fact that is widely known and celebrated to this day. It was with some pride that Dominic D'Souza, the director of Laya, presented me with a photocopy from *Subaltern Studies I* (1982), an account by David Arnold of the Gudum-Rampa uprisings that happened in the Eastern Ghats between 1839 and 1924. Here one can see the peculiar circularity of such narratives of dissent. It seems ironic that activists reinforce their historical sense of injustice through the writings of historians whose aim is to restore the place of the marginal in mainstream histories of anti-colonial rule.

The Gudum-Rampa uprisings, referred to as *fituris*, passed through three stages. The first was constituted of elite conflicts between external powers trying to extend their control from the

plains into the hills and the *muttadars*,²⁸ seeking to preserve their independence and privileges (Arnold 1982: 140). From the middle of the nineteenth century a shift in the pattern of the *fituris* or risings occurred – backed by law and facilitated by the creation of an infrastructure, outsiders managed to penetrate the hill tracts, seeing in them a valuable economic resource. This change affected *muttadars* and subalterns alike, and though the risings were still led by the elite, pressure often came from below. The result – the *fituris* took on a more popular character than formally, and ‘social banditry’ ensued (1982: 141). The third and final stage saw ‘the attempt by outside idealists, opportunists and dissidents to convert the expanded *fituri* tradition of the second phase into a popular movement that could be extended into the plains’ (1982: 141). The thought was that rebellions started in the hills could become the base for a national war of liberation against the British. Whilst this never came to much, the pattern was echoed in the 1960s by the Naxalite communists, a Maoist insurgency group, very active in the Eastern Ghats even today. The Naxalites, who have been described by the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as the biggest threat to Indian national security,²⁹ believe that mobilising India’s adivasi population is the first step in rural insurrection and revolution in India.

I give this historical contextualisation for two reasons. Firstly, to demonstrate the long temporal trajectory of activism and resistance that characterises the adivasi population of the Eastern Ghats. Secondly, this historical account highlights the fact that the dominant discourse which narrates this adivasi history is one of activism and rebellion (Unnithan-Kumar 1997: 12). It is worth noting that there are, of course, many diverse adivasi histories, but the one that has been most appealing to recent historians is the one of the weak (adivasis) setting themselves against the strong (the state). Following on from this, it is poignant that, of the numerous possible subaltern voices, the one being captured is a voice of political dissent. This same framing occurs in media accounts, as is evidenced by Arundhati Roy’s article in a recent issue of Outlook, an Indian weekly news magazine. In ‘Walking with the Comrades’ (March 2010), Roy shadows a group of Maoist Naxalite rebels in Chhattisgarh,³⁰ constructing them as adivasi activists, or, as she puts it, ‘Gandhians with a gun’. It seems adivasis only make mainstream headlines when framed in such radical terms.

²⁸ Translated as ‘local chiefs’.

²⁹ <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/naxalism-gravest-internal-security-threat-pm/517294/2> (last viewed 20/04/2010)

³⁰ A state in central India.

This long history of politicisation can be contrasted with depictions of ‘backward’, sedentary village life. Srinivas (1996) argues that from the first influential account of the Indian village in 1812 (in the ‘Fifth report from the select committee on the affairs of the East India Company’) to the work of Marx and Maine, and many anthropologists since, the Indian village has been cast as a social fact *resistant* to change. They have been romanticised as ‘little republics’ (Munro 1812 in Srinivas 1996: 3) having ‘nearly everything they want within themselves’ (Metcalf 1832 in Srinivas 1996: 3). It is in this way that Srinivas sees the Indian village as being cast into the framework of universal history as economically autarkic, politically autonomous and opposed to change (1996: 7–8).

The two polarities that are represented in the discourse – radical rebellion versus sedentary village life – are also the two with which VV appear to engage. With regard to the former, it seems VV is aware of a history of dissent, and thus seek to capitalise on such adivasi sensibilities; using new technologies, they hope to widen the reach and accessibility of adivasi struggle. The organisation engages with the latter discourse by way of a critique; the Indian village *can* change.

Manyam Praja Video

A short walk from Addateegala is Vanantharam, a large, NGO-run, purpose-built, herbal healthcare centre. This building is also the office and edit suite of MPV, an all-adivasi CVU. Nine community producers run MPV: four men and five women. The team of producers is accountable to a local co-ordinator, a community editorial board and VV. Day-to-day administration is fairly co-operative and for the most part producers are left to their own devices. The producers’ time is divided fairly equally between time spent in the office, time filming in the community and time screening the films they produce (*Figure 5*). For now, I am going to concentrate more specifically on the lives of the MPV producers. Such a focus is important if one is to understand the way in which these producers receive and internalise the rhetorics constructed by VV in Goa.

Gendered Production

The women producers live together at Vanantharam. This is because the producers come from far-flung villages and it is believed to be unsafe for the female producers to travel on a daily basis. Consequently, the women sleep in the MPV office. Each evening the production paraphernalia is pushed to one side and reed mats are rolled out. Sleep is often accompanied by the whirl of video cameras that are left “capturing”³¹ late into the night. Aside from the edit suite the women also have a small room in which they keep their belongings and do their ablutions. Their personal effects are kept in locked metal trunks, which line the walls. Their lives, though very different from the ones they would lead at home, are not defined by wealth.



Figure 5. In the early morning light a producer edits in the MPV office.

The MPV team is divided in two; each comprises a mix of male and female, and junior and senior producers.³² These two teams work independently of each other, producing films on a rolling cycle and providing support to one another only when necessary. Although there were

³¹ A stage in the editing process whereby footage from the digital video (DV) tape in the camera is transferred to the computer to be edited.

³² The junior and senior labelling referred to the length of time the producers had been producers – seniors had been there for three years, juniors sometimes only for a few months.

numerous theoretical divides between the producers, the most tangible divide was along gender lines. The men and women, whilst obviously close, lived very separate ‘working’ lives. This is most likely due to the domestic arrangement outlined above. The women, perhaps inevitably, became my closest informants.

It is here that it is necessary to break for a moment and consider language: firstly, because it is central to any discussion about voice and communication; and secondly, because it impacted greatly on my experience of fieldwork. The language spoken by the producers, and the communities in which they work, is Telugu, the state language of Andhra Pradesh. English, rather than Hindi, is the second language of the region, but in rural areas is spoken by only a very small minority. My fieldwork was too short for me to learn anything more than a meagre Telugu vocabulary and the English language skills amongst the producers ranged from non-existent to basic. Consequently communication was always a struggle. During the working day a translator (an administrative Laya staff member with a reasonable grasp of English) accompanied me. The mornings and evenings, however, gave way to an ascending cacophony of sound as my stay went on. The female producers’ English gradually improved and the little Telugu I managed to grasp caused endless amusement.

With this in mind, in the following paragraphs I am going to recount my impressions of two producers, Rani and Aditi. Their stories are telling and raise issues rarely, if ever, discussed on camera; identity and intimacy are the themes I choose to focus on here. Whilst the producers spend their work days talking about equality, health, education and housing (all topics that are part of the wider development discourse that they self-consciously engage with), their nights are spent embroiled in conversations about men, sex and fashion. The disjuncture between the women’s public and private voices is stark and worthy of consideration. Is such a divide inevitable? In what ways do their public voices influence their private voices and vice versa? Does it even matter that two (sometimes contradictory) spheres of articulation exist?

Aditi is twenty-seven³³ and the daughter of agricultural labourers. Before becoming a producer three years ago, she too worked on the land. She is beautiful and gregarious, the joker of the group. Aditi is always immaculately turned out in a skilfully tailored salwar

³³ This is the age Aditi said she was although Jessica disagreed, believing her to be older.

kameez,³⁴ very different from the half-sari³⁵ traditionally worn by unmarried adivasi women. She is the oldest female producer and considers her single status a burden. The other women joke that she is ‘married to MPV.’

Rani is twenty-one and is also the daughter of agricultural labourers. She is one of four children; her two sisters are both married housewives with children. Her ten-year-old brother is an agricultural labourer and thus does not attend school. Rani herself was educated to tenth standard³⁶ and is an articulate young woman. She too, is unmarried although she has been engaged in a secret relationship with a young man from Hyderabad³⁷. The two are constantly in telephone contact and every few weekends Rani will leave Addateegala and travel to see him. She was always highly secretive about her meetings with him and so any information I did garner about their relationship was through the other women³⁸.

Clothing and Identity

With these two women in mind I want to first discuss the issue of clothing as a symbol for the presentation of multiple identities. Framing this section is a consideration of the work of Daniel Miller (1994). Miller argues that at the heart of Western philosophy is a misguided, yet pervasive ideology, which he refers to as a ‘depth ontology’, whereby ‘we tend to assume that everything that is important for our sense of being lies in some deep interior and must be long lasting and solid, as against the dangers of things we regard as ephemeral, shallow or lacking in content’ (Miller in Freidman ed. 1994: 71). He critiques such a belief, and the notion that there is a link between surface and lack of importance; instead he asserts that identity can in fact be constructed on the surface and that such an identity is as ‘deep’ and meaningful as any other; changes in style or fashion are far from trivial.

This rhetoric is found in the work of Emma Tarlo (1996) when she suggests that through changes in clothing individuals are able to build up and discard successive identities. This notion is also found in Srinivas’ ‘Social Change in Modern India’ (1966) where he quotes a

³⁴ Salwar kameez is the traditional dress in much of India for unmarried women (and is increasingly being worn by married women too). It consists of loose fitting trousers and a long, matching top.

³⁵ A garment that consists of a long skirt, a cropped top and a swathe of material wrapped in a particular way around the upper body.

³⁶ The equivalent of year 11.

³⁷ Hyderabad is the state capital of Andhra Pradesh.

³⁸ And thus may not be entirely reliable.

Nayar³⁹ informant saying, ‘When I put on my shirt to go to the office, I take off my caste, and when I come home and take off my shirt, I put on my caste’ (1966: 123). One can see here the way in which ‘clothes are not merely defining but they are also self-consciously used to define, to present, to deceive, to enjoy, to communicate, to reveal and conceal’ (Tarlo 1996: 8). This self-conscious manipulating of identity through choice of garment was seemingly present amongst the female producers.

All the female producers chose to dress in salwar kameez⁴⁰; synthetic fabric and bright patterns adorned their frames. This was a stark contrast to the half-sari worn by their peers. However, when the women returned home, which they did at least once a month, they reverted to wearing the half-sari. The parallels with Srinivas’ Nayar informant are stark. This leaves one asking *why* Aditi, Rani and their fellow producers chose to change their attire. Rani asserted that the salwar kameez was the most functional clothing to wear whilst shooting. But, as is highlighted in the work of Banerjee and Miller (2003), the case of functionality is made in equal measure for both the sari and the salwar kameez; thus such assertions may be no more than ‘post-hoc rationalisations’ (Banerjee and Miller 2003: 243). Neha, another female producer, took longer to answer my query; ‘It is more professional’ she eventually replied (*Figure 6*).

This mention of professionalism raises a number of issues, most notably modernity and modesty. It is commonly asserted that the salwar kameez is worn by India’s urban middle class and is thus emblematic of modernity. The relationship between professionalism and modernity has burgeoned in India’s urban metropolises and it is thus no surprise that the MPV producers choose to self-consciously emulate it. The news anchors they see on television often wear stylish salwar kameez and, as will become more apparent in the next chapter, emulating professional film and television is a concern of all the producers.

³⁹ Hindu caste from the state of Kerala; traditionally an aristocratic lineage of land managers

⁴⁰ *Salwar* means trousers and *kameez* refers to a long tunic-style shirt worn over the trousers.



Figure 6. A producer, in her neatly pressed salwar kameez, interviews a local agricultural labourer about housing issues.

Modesty is perhaps another reason for the women's choice of dress. The half-sari, usually worn by adivasi adolescent girls before they move to a full-sari after marriage, reveals the midriff, a celebration of her increasingly sexualised body. The salwar kameez ensures the midriff remains covered; 'it sort of covers from head to toe, it covers your body. It makes you look good, presentable, it does not over do it, nor under do it' (an informant in Banerjee and Miller 2003: 245). The increasing propensity to wear such concealing attire is made more interesting when read alongside Parry's article 'Ankalu's Errant Wife: Sex, Marriage and Industry in Contemporary Chhattisgarh' (2001), in which he considers the conjugal and sexual relationships of Satnami⁴¹ workers in a labour colony located on the outskirts of a township built by the Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) in Chhattisgarh. These relationships are marked by an engagement in new forms of domesticity and the curtailment of female sexuality to make a break with what the young people perceive as a more permissive past.⁴² In other words, despite the seeming liberation of new forms of intimacy, they also bring with

⁴¹ The largest untouchable caste of the area.

⁴² Older BSP workers had a succession of monogamous relationships. This way of life has been rejected by their white-collar children.

them new forms of gendered curtailment. Although the lives of the adivasi female producers cannot provide a direct parallel with the lives of those studied by Parry, one can see correlations in as much as their choice of modest dress, with its concealment of the reality of intimate lives, suggests that they are considering themselves free to make a choice and to determine their future based on something beyond their intrinsic female sexuality.

Contrasting with this notion of concealed identities, Miller notes that in Trinidad ‘what they regard as real, the real person, is considered to be on the surface’ (2005: 3). By contrast, ‘that which is held deep inside them is seen as false, being hidden from public scrutiny’ (2005: 3). In the case of the MPV producers it seems the salwar kameez is indeed more about proclamation of identity than it is about concealment of ‘the real person’. When wearing the salwar kameez they are self-consciously asserting their status as professionals; a result of their elevated status. This rise in status is perhaps inevitable given the reverence afforded to technological expertise.

Intimate Lives

Continuing on this theme of change and identity, and still with Rani and Aditi in mind, I wish to turn briefly to the matter of love. The two women provide an interesting dichotomy. For Aditi, the domestic set up at MPV has led to her resisting the opportunity of a relationship:

There is no point getting married because I want to carry on working at MPV and if I get married then I will probably have to stop. I am waiting for a man who does not mind me working here but it is hard because he would have to live near here. I need to marry soon though because my mother wants me to and I want children⁴³

This can be contrasted with the relationship Rani is sustaining with her boyfriend in Hyderabad. For Rani, living at Vanantharam is an opportunity not to be missed – it provides unbridled prospects and freedom from the gaze of her family and neighbours. Parry makes a similar observation when he suggests that contract labourers prefer work away from home as it creates the opportunity for illicit sexual affairs and secondary

⁴³ This was said to me one evening whilst I sat alone with Aditi. It was a private moment and so no interpreter was present. It was towards the end of my stay and so she had become more confident at speaking in English, albeit a little broken. I have reconstructed her words from my field notes.

unions (Parry 2001: 25; 1999a; see also Shah 2006). It is clear that for both women, working for MPV has effected significant change in their intimate lives. For Aditi it has rendered her single whilst for Rani it has opened the door to a world of experiences she may otherwise have missed. Whilst these stories may not seem to be of immediate relevance, they are important to highlight the profound, unintended changes brought about by VV.

Whisper of Change

Up to now, the changes that have been highlighted have been indirect and unintended. Nevertheless, VV is an NGO with an activist agenda and effecting change is at the centre of its work. This is evidenced, as mentioned in the previous chapter, by the inclusion of ‘critical thinking’ in the VV training programme. VV believe that by asserting voices of dissent as a unified sound, real and lasting change will be effected.

This view is jeopardised when those voices are in conflict with the beliefs and attitudes held by producers. Returning to the questions raised in the section on ‘Gendered Production’, it seems the parallel spheres of articulation that exist within the minds of the producers are absolutely to be expected. The rhetoric that the producers put into words when recording anchor pieces or speaking with community members is their work canon, in the same way a banker speaks in the language of stocks and shares and a physician converses about diagnoses and treatments. The difference, as far as VV is concerned, is that the language the producers are taught to use is there to be internalised. It is there to effect ‘real change’, which is understood by VV to be ‘deep’ and internal. Jessica once said, ‘You want to create that shift in people’s thinking over the long term.’

Here, a return to Miller’s ‘depth ontology’ is necessary. Whilst the producer’s use of language is not, in this instance, to do with consumption⁴⁴, there exists a similar tension here with the one that Miller contemplates. VV’s critique of ‘surface’ (here, in the realm of the efficacy of ideas) is premised on the idea of what constitutes a ‘depth ontology’; Jessica equates real change with an internal remodelling. As previously outlined, Miller critiques such a view, arguing instead that the ‘surface’ can indeed be the site of reality

⁴⁴ Consumption is the focus of Daniel Miller’s research.

and truth and as such, the site of ‘real change’. However, in this instance, I am inclined to agree with Jessica. The women producers have undoubtedly learnt to articulate the rhetoric of VV and it would be reasonable to assume that some of this rhetoric has been internalised. However, they also have counter interior voices born of their history which appear, at times, to be at odds with their ‘surface’ presentation as activists. Given this, it is important to not be presumptuous about the nature of change; Margaret Dickinson’s assertion that ‘change is usually a slow business’⁴⁵ certainly rings true in this instance.

In this chapter I have considered change with regard to both clothing and language. On the one hand I have advocated the work of Miller, emphasising the importance of the ‘surface’ (with regard to clothing). On the other, I have critiqued his assertion and highlighted the significance of the interior (with regard to language). Far from being contradictory, this shows the unpredictable nature of change and emphasises the importance of not privileging the interior over the exterior or vice versa; one must avoid loading either with moral judgement and a priori significance.

Writing about the methodological problems faced by anthropologists studying ‘change’, O’Hanlon asserts, ‘it is a genuine difficulty as to how we may discern, in the consciousness and practice of those we study, processes of unilinear change, real learning experiences gained in the course of struggle and resistance, and how far we should assign all change to the realm of the reversible and contingent’ (O’Hanlon 2000: 77). With this in mind, the changes I have focused on in this chapter, namely in fashion and in love, may be nothing more than circumstantial and momentary. Pursuit of calculated, permanent change, like that desired by VV, is perhaps misguided. Nevertheless, I think it is worth emphasising that changes, however fleeting and unintended, can have lasting and very real consequences. And, it is these; an unexpected friendship, a new boyfriend, a brightly sequined salwar kameez that may bring the whisper of change which, at some point, will become the louder voice that VV seeks to broadcast.

⁴⁵ <http://www.fieldtofactory.lse.ac.uk/MSPersonalAccount.htm> (last accessed on 23/04/2010).

Chapter 3: The Language of Film

Linking the discourses of Goa with the narratives of Addateegala is a common language, that of film. The current chapter will therefore explore this medium; specifically, looking at the materiality of film and the affective nature of the viewing experience. In order to do so, I present two ethnographic accounts.

Small-town Cinematics

It was a Sunday and the MPV producers' holiday. A trip to the cinema had been arranged, a favourite pastime for these women, as for many Indians. We set out early and boarded the bus for the small town of Yelaswaram, two-and-a-half hours south of Addateegala. After a little confusion, tickets were bought and we crept into the back of one of the theatres. *Magadheera* ('Great Warrior'), a big-budget Tollywood⁴⁶ action film, was mid-flow but this did not seem to concern the women (*Figure 7*).

For the next two hours we sat through a tale of love, gallantry and heroism – our eyes bombarded with special effects, our ears ringing with Tollywood hits. Men wolf-whistled whenever the heroine appeared on screen; her skimpy costume concealed little. Women and children cried out with excitement as Ram Charan Teja, the lead actor, battled his way to victory. Everyone stamped their feet and shouted for the last 15 minutes of the film – a frenetic fight scene; the racket made by the audience almost drowned out *Magadheera's* pulsating sound track. The energy in the cinema was palpable; the heat was intense. Humidity dripped down from the corrugated iron roof and my back ached from sitting on the concrete benches. Nothing though, could detract from this sensory overload. The materiality of the experience was overwhelming and I left, emerging into the mid-afternoon sun, exhausted and exhilarated.

⁴⁶ In Andhra Pradesh the regional Telugu (state language) cinema is dubbed 'Tollywood'.



Figure 7. A film poster for *Magadheera* featuring its hero, Ram Charan Teja.⁴⁷

The affective dimension of cinema viewing was a sharp contrast to the more mundane experience of producing and viewing community video magazines. In Yelaswaram people clamoured to be let into the video hall, once inside they experienced the film with bodily fervour and on leaving they were hungry for more. In recent years film theory has drawn increasingly on theories of affect. In Deleuze's famous work, *Cinema 2* (1989) he seeks to move away from the reductive tendency that views film as 'a series of signifiers and signifieds' (Gormley 9: 2005). Instead, the theory that cinema is primarily sensory and visceral is advanced; its propensity to signify is a secondary process. It is widely understood that 'there are certain moments in certain sequences in films which have a specific intensity and an effect on the viewer that is almost inexplicable, indeed, to explain it is to take something from it' (Kennedy 2000: 99-100). It is this 'nonactualizable part of the event' (Flaxman 2000: 294) that Deleuze refers to as its 'affect'. And, understood in Deleuzian terms, it seems it is this affective quality that is largely missing from MPV's films.

⁴⁷ Taken from <http://wallpapers.oneindia.in/d/197476-2/magadheera-10.jpg> - last viewed 21/04/2010

Returning to Yelaswaram, I was exhausted following the *Magadheera* screening and thus dismayed when I realised that the plan for the day was not one, but two films. We left the first cinema and made our way to the second for three more hours of Tollywood viewing. On the way home, talk turned to the disjuncture between the special effects seen on screen and the limited production capabilities of the producers. The frustration in the women's voices was palpable. We returned to Addateegala after dark where the women immediately switched on the television: the third film of the day – their appetite for film seemed insatiable.

Supermen of Malegaon

The joy experienced in the cinema in Yelaswaram was felt again at the end of the VV conference in Goa (see Chapter 1). The atmosphere at the conference was one of hope, of inspiration, of new horizons; a positive mood that reached its peak on the penultimate evening at a screening of a documentary made by first-time Indian director Faiza Ahmed Khan.

Khan's documentary film provides a telling commentary on the determination of a small group of people in pursuit of their dreams whilst simultaneously creating role models for the community of producers. *Supermen of Malegaon* tells the true story of a town⁴⁸ and its inhabitants' insatiable love affair with cinema. Shakeel Bharati, a resident of Malegaon and an actor in *Malegaon's Superman*,⁴⁹ explains,

Malegaon has many identities. Among them is an obsession for films. Theatres are packed on Fridays because the power looms are closed. A worker is exhausted after a week of hard work at the looms. His mind is numb, so he watches a film on Friday, surrenders his consciousness and imagines himself on the screen. Trades his reality for a fantasy.⁵⁰

Malegaon's mania for Bollywood led one resident, Nasir Shaikh, to make his own films. Nasir grew up surrounded by cinema – his uncle ran a video parlour screening both Bollywood and Hollywood classics. Nasir took over the running of the film parlour before being forced, for financial reasons, to convert the space into a clothes showroom although his passion for cinema remained.

⁴⁸ Malegaon is a predominantly Muslim town in Maharashtra, a state in southwest India.

⁴⁹ To be clear: *Supermen of Malegaon* is the title of the documentary about the making of the spoof film *Malegaon's Superman*.

⁵⁰ Transcribed from the documentary *Supermen of Malegaon* which is in Hindi and subtitled in English.

Nasir's first foray into directing resulted in a spoof remake of the Bollywood classic *Sholay*. Its unprecedented success led him to make a string of similar spoof films before improvements in technology and the increased accessibility of chroma keying⁵¹ enabled him to take on one of Hollywood's iconic heroes; 'I'm making *Malegaon's Superman*, because, so far, no one has messed with Superman' he asserts in the opening sequence of Faiza's documentary which is a film about the making of a film.

Supermen of Malegaon follows Nasir and his eclectic cast and crew through the weeks of filming their film, *Malegaon's Superman*. The title of the documentary is telling: Nasir and his team truly are 'supermen' even to conceive of such an ambitious project. On a budget of less than \$500 for a feature-length film, Nasir's production requires creativity and tenacity as he works tirelessly to create believable special effects. Shafique, the skinny young man cast to play Superman is dressed in a replica of Superman's trademark red and blue outfit only this time the 'S' is replaced with an 'M'. The casting is wonderfully ironic; Shafique is physically the antithesis of superman (*Figure 8*).



*Figure 8. Nasir (left) directs Shafique as Superman.*⁵²

⁵¹ Chroma keying is a technology used in film production whereby one frame is laid over another in order to superimpose a background.

⁵² Taken from <http://media3.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/photo/2008/12/17/PH2008121703861.jpg> (last viewed 21/04/10).

It is important to explain why I have focused so closely on the story of *Malegaon's Superman*. It seems to be the case that Nasir and his crew play a role very similar to that played by VV's producers. However, the parallels are not just technological: both groups are also concerned with translating global worlds for local audiences. The focus of the two groups undoubtedly differs; the team in Malegaon are translating blockbuster classics for a local audience whilst VV's producers are interpreting a certain human rights rhetoric for their fellow community members. Nevertheless, both groups are concerned with 'glocalising' – thinking globally, acting locally. This 'glocalisation' is nowhere more evident than in the actions of Nasir and his crew as they work tirelessly to bring Malegaon's very own superman to the silver screen.

At times the making of Malegaon's Superman teeters in the balance but solutions to problems always emerge. Laughter and despair exist on set in equal measure. And, throughout all the highs and lows, Faiza's documentary weaves a haunting narrative that concludes with footage of the premiere of *Malegaon's Superman* in a video hall in Malegaon. With emotion in his voice, Nasir tries to articulate his motive,

Life is full of tears and sorrow anyway. But it is very difficult to find any laughter. Laughter is....precious. And very important. Where can you...I mean.... How do I.... How do you make a person happy? This is probably the only way. No give and take.⁵³

With those final words, the audience in Goa rose to their feet, clapping and cheering with tears rolling down their faces. Nasir, Akram and Faiza, stood on a small podium and smiled modestly as the applause continued. The affective energy in the room was palpable as producers splintered into groups to discuss what they had just seen.

Inspired by the special effects created by Nasir, the MPV team spoke animatedly about the possibilities of producing their own action film using Vanantharam⁵⁴ as the set.

Perhaps recreating *Magadheera* was not such an impossibility after all.

Aditi: We could make Tejas hang from the roof with a bit of rope!

Bala: Yes, and then Ajay could come and save him, come swinging across from the other side.

⁵³ Transcribed from the documentary *Supermen of Malegaon* which is in Hindi and subtitled in English.

⁵⁴ The large community healthcare building in which they are based in Addateegala.

Santosh: Film it from below so it looks like he is flying.

Aditi: And then he could fall in love with Enika [*hysterical laughter*]

Enika: No, not me, with Chitra!

Their conversation continued for some time – the scope of possibility seemed endless. And there, around a table in Goa, the producers began to articulate some of the rhetoric expressed by VV. The talk of creativity and comedy so often expounded by Jessica and Stalin was starting to come alive in the minds of their producers as the affective power of the film had its effect on its spectators.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I have sought to consider the nature of change focusing primarily on technology, identity and voice. In these concluding paragraphs I will focus on voice once more: first touching on linguistics and then drawing on Sen (2009) to consider the relationship between voice and human rights.

There have been a number of valuable contributions to the conception of ‘voice’ in anthropology, usually concerned with the way in which anthropologists construct the voices of their informants (Hymes 1996; Simpson 2007). In an attempt to move towards a more critical anthropology of voice, Giulianotti focuses more closely on linguistics and notes that ‘in the Bourdieusian imaginary, the individual’s pattern of linguistic expression represents the aural inscriptions of that person’s stratified identity’ (2005: 341). Bernstein (1971 in Giulianotti 2005: 341) also makes this link between language and social stratification, dividing speech into the ‘restricted’ or ‘public codes’ of the lower classes and the ‘elaborated’ or ‘formal’ codes of higher social strata. Bernstein suggests,

The lower social classes’ disadvantage is redoubled through language as their lack of familiarity with elaborated codes undermines their educational achievements and chances of rising social mobility (in Giulianotti 2005: 341).

I want to suggest a critique of both Bourdieu and Bernstein, as without falling into the homogenising trap laid by the World Bank, it seems that VV, using technology, equips producers with a new medium of articulation, one that allows producers to rise up the social strata and communicate across caste and gender boundaries. The polyvocality of individuals is realised by the video camera as the producers interpret global vernaculars for local audiences.

The interpretation of global vernaculars by producers is informed by the fact that VV defines itself as a ‘rights-based’ organisation; an NGO concerned with securing human rights. Using technology to amplify ‘marginalised voices’ they seek to rid the communities in which they work of ‘human rights violations’,⁵⁵ enabling those who cannot effectively assert their rights,

⁵⁵ ‘Human rights violations’ were continually referred to in the office in Goa. In conversation with Jessica she said, ‘Nearly every village in the world now has access to at least one mobile phone that takes photos or even video; and every village has human rights violations – its just a question of putting the two together and you potentially have something very powerful.’

particularly their basic human rights, to do just that. This fact requires the anthropological lens to zoom out somewhat and a broader consideration of human rights to take place.

The above paragraph assumes that people do in fact possess human rights.⁵⁶ I do not wish to dispute this assumption. However, what I will say is that I support, albeit cautiously, Amartya Sen's view that human rights can be understood as 'constitutively linked with the importance of certain basic *freedoms*' (emphasis added, 2009: 366).⁵⁷ The basic freedom that VV is concerned with is the freedom to be heard. Rights have correlate duties (Sen 2009: 382) that they impose on other people; in this instance, listening is the correlate duty of the right to voice and is thus necessary if voice is to be considered a human right. Accordingly, when the human right of a person to be heard is acknowledged, the importance of freedom to be heard is 'reaffirmed and acclaimed for everyone, and with this the confirmation of the need for others to consider what they can reasonably do to secure [the freedom to be heard] for all' (2009: 376).⁵⁸ In other words, the very act of amplifying voices confirms the need for others to respect what those voices are saying; 'affirmation of human rights is a call to action – a call for social change' (n. 2009: 304).

With this mention of change I want to return to the question posed at the beginning of this dissertation: can film change the way people think and act? O'Hanlon (2000) notes how hard it is to recognise processes of unilinear change and to know whether we should perceive all change to be conditional and circumstantial. Framed in these terms and returning to the lives of the MPV producers we see a process of change, brought about by an engagement with filmic technology, that is unplanned and often hard to locate. The shifts in sartorial choices and the impact on the intimate lives of the female producers may well be contingent and unpredictable; they are certainly not the ones planned by VV. Nevertheless for the most part, the spaces created by VV, however momentary, give the opportunity for creativity and open discussion from where change may emerge in whatever shape it assumes.

⁵⁶ This has been disputed by Sonu Bedi (2009) in his book *Rejecting Rights*.

⁵⁷ The focus on freedoms contrasts with Joseph Raz's (1986 in Sen 2009: 376) focus on interests as the basis for human rights. I favour the focus on freedoms; see Sen (2009: 378) for an argument against the focus on interests. Sen's work can also be read alongside anthropological engagements with human rights; most notably Englund's *Prisoners of Freedom* (2006) which provides a critique of Sen's preoccupation with 'freedoms'. Englund advises caution with Sen's admiration for freedom and notes the danger of 'isolating political freedoms as the essence of democracy' (2006: 12).

⁵⁸ Adapted from an example made by Sen (2009: 376).

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Appendix

Figure A1



http://www.nationsonline.org/bilder/map_of_india50.jpg (last viewed - 22/04/2010)