

Grant Number: **2009-0-008**

Grantee : Paromita Vohra, Mumbai

Grant amount : Rs 3,00,000

Grant period : One year from February 1, 2010

Précis

This grant supports research on the evolution of the Indian documentary film from the 1920s to the present by surveying the key figures and crucial phases of its development. The outcome of the project will be a manuscript and two paper presentations at seminars. Grant funds will pay for honorarium, research assistance, travel and living costs, reference materials, archival fees, equipment hire, local transport, communications, supplies and an accountant's fee.

Arts Research and Documentation

Grant Description

This grant supports Paromita Vohra to research the evolution of the Indian documentary film from the 1920s to the present. Paromita, an acclaimed documentary filmmaker and writer, will look at how different forms of documentary filmmaking have taken root and become dominant at particular moments in history and survey the central figures and crucial phases in its development.

A common approach to chronicling Indian documentary film history is to divide it into two phases—pre-Emergency (before June 1975), when documentaries were produced under the umbrella of Films Division and related government programmes, and post-Emergency, when they were produced as part of activist and NGO initiatives. *Telling Truths*, the working title of Paromita's book, will not adopt this approach but instead look at the types of documentary forms that came to be practiced from the 1920s, and trace their development up to the present. Paromita says, "It will not be a simple chronology of significant stylistic achievements but rather parallel timelines of formal journeys through the history of Indian documentary."

Paromita will look at how diverse idioms of documentary filmmaking emerged simultaneously. For instance, while Anand Patwardhan was making activist films in the 1970s, Nina Shivdasani made *Chattrabhang* (1974), an experimental stylised docu-drama, about caste violence. Also in the 1970s 'art' filmmakers like Mani Kaul were making films for Films Division. Paromita will map the beginnings and progress of these parallel practices. She will also trace formal connections between filmmakers at different points in time. For example, the style of a director like Pramod Pati, making documentaries for Films Division in the 1960s, connects with a filmmaker like Ruchir Joshi working with Channel 4 funding in the 1990s and Vipin Vijay, an ex-grantee of IFA, whose films are produced by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) in present times, as they all pursue an experimental, personal voice.

Some of the other aspects that Paromita will explore are a) the impact of technology on the documentary filmmaking process and the filmmaker's response to it; b) the relationship between politics, political theories and documentary film; c) the significance of documentaries in creating communities and enabling dialogues between them; d) the correlation between funding, censorship, audience and the formation of an independent documentary film circuit; e) the filmmaker's construction of the 'real' and the viewer's perception of 'reality' in documentary films; and f) the role of documentary films in creating parallel historical narratives of democracy.

Paromita will interview a range of people involved in documentary filmmaking. Some of these interviews will take place as conversations between two filmmakers and Paromita will be an observer. Since she aims to delineate connections in practice between contemporary filmmakers, and those working in different periods and locations, this method of witnessing a dialogue between two practitioners will be revealing. The record of these exchanges is important for two reasons: a) it provides an opportunity for filmmakers to offer insights into their own work and give voice to the otherwise tacit responses filmmakers have to each other's work, and b) there is scant primary material with respect to Indian documentaries, especially those produced privately. According to Paromita, "it is almost an oral history, which has to be taken down and then sorted."

In the case of deceased filmmakers, she will reference and collate existing materials or interview their associates or crew members. Paromita's list of interviewees will also include editors, cinematographers and sound recordists who have consistently worked in documentary films. Paromita will undertake archival research to locate older accounts and descriptions of documentary film in the mainstream newspapers and special interest journals, especially those from the 1960s and 1970s. In order to map the decision-making process of state funded documentaries, she will access the internal documents and correspondence at Films Division. To analyse the predominant themes and narrative structures, Paromita will view films by directors with a significant body of work.

The proposed outcome of the project is a publishable manuscript. The manuscript will have an introduction, and it will be divided into three sections. The first section will outline the developments in the early years of documentary filmmaking in India. The second section of the book will examine the role of the State and its agencies like Films Division and National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) in shaping the course of Indian documentaries. The third section will largely comprise conversations with and amongst contemporary filmmakers. In addition, Paromita will write two supplementary essays that will be presented at various seminars during the course of her research.

Budget

Reference materials	Rs 79,000
Honorarium	72,000
Research assistance	72,000
Archival research fees	28,000
Travel and living costs	24,000
Communications, local transport and supplies	12,000
Equipment hire	10,000
Accountant's fee	<u>3,000</u>
Total	<u>Rs 3,00,000</u>