<u>Partial Exposure: Autobiographical Films and Documentary Evidence.</u>

(Paper given at Kent University as part of a series of seminars 'Visual Postures and Impostures: Presentations of Self and of Representative Culture in Visual Anthropology')

Compared to it's literary counterpart, filmed autobiography is an underdeveloped genre. Documentaries often include fragments of autobiography, for instance by presenting a subject through the experience of filming it but the autobiography is usually subsidiary to the ostensible purpose of telling a story about something or someone else. This is different from the much more unusual case in which a documentary takes as its main subject the life, or an aspect of the life, of the person making the film. This overt, self declared autobiographical approach is the one which I shall be considering in the following discussion.

My perspective is that of a practising film-maker and film historian which makes me something of an interloper in the field of visual anthropology. My background, no doubt, gives me a vested interest in my general objective which will be to suggest that anthropologists and sociologists need to broaden their ideas about how film may relate to their discipline and thus of the kinds of film and film-making which could be relevant to them.   I shall be suggesting that a fruitful direction of development would be to pay more attention to films made from within a culture by film-makers who are, in a loose sense, insiders to it. I shall then concentrate on a subcategory of such films – self declared autobiographical documentary - and look at some questions about using and reading them. I will do this with reference to extracts from two films made by students of an experimental video course in Central India. The films are autobiographical but also relate to a mainstream tradition of ethnographic film in that an anthropologist was involved, if indirectly, in the production process. The circumstances need a short explanation.

<u>The Background to the Bhilai autobiography project.</u>

The video training in India was part of a project which I initiated and subsequently co-ordinated, known in English as Images in Social Change, or more elegantly in Hindi, as Jandarshan which can be roughly translated as 'people's vision.'

The initial idea for Jandarshan – and this is where the connection with anthropology begins – came out of a conversation with my husband, Jonathan Parry, in 1997 the day he arrived back from a visit to Bhilai, the Indian steel town where he had begun a major field study four years earlier. Bhilai is home to the largest steel plant in Asia, built with aid and expertise from the Soviet Union as part of the Nehruvian programme of modernisation. The site in Chhattisgarh, then part of Madhya Pradesh State, was a poorly developed rural area and the aim was as much to promote human development as to produce steel. A model town was laid out for the plant workers, and this is now, forty years later, surrounded with numerous private factories and speculative residential developments. Jonathan's research has focussed on issues like work culture in the private and public sectors, caste, corruption and family. [1]

Jonathan's news on this occasion included an update on his former field assistant, Ajay, who had shown an instinctive talent for observational photography while working with Jonathan but had subsequently found that his lack of good formal educational qualifications was a barrier to gaining professional training in the visual me dia. My news included the fact that a colleague had drawn my attention to a call for proposals put out by the European Commission under a programme called the EU-India Economic Cross Cultural Programme which aimed to encourage interaction between Indians and Europeans. One of its dimensions was the media and one of the activities permitted was training. Naturally, we couldn't help noting that there was some possibility that my bit of news might have some relevance to Jonathan's. This started a process which led to a proposal to the European Commission for a project aiming to bring together people and organisations interested in using video to explore social change and which would include among its activities a video course in Bhilai accessible to students without high academic qualifications and linked to the video documentation of social change in the region.

The Indian partner in the project was *The Daily Deshbandhu*, a Hindi daily based in Chhattisgarh and with a good track record in rural journalism and in promoting communal peace. The European partners were SHIFT (Sheffield Independent Film and Television), a small organisation in Sheffield specialising in access training, and the IWF Knowledge and Media, Germany's central provider of audio visual services for higher education. Within IWF we were linked with the working unit 'Culture and Society - Globalisation and Regionalisation' whose main interest is visual anthropology.

There was therefore a strong connection with anthropologists but their influence on the training should not be exaggerated. The course covered general documentary production methods, touched on fiction but included no formal teaching in anthropology. My own motivation for setting up the course came less from my association with anthropology than with a particular strand of film politics which among other things was concerned with issues of representation and the promotion of equal opportunities. I was primarily interested in the possibility of networking with Indian colleagues around a course designed to bring non elite young people into the media. This was also the reason SHIFT became involved. The SHIFT representative, Stephen Jinks, had specialised in providing training for people suffering from various kinds of disadvantage. I had no comparable expertise but had been active in campaigns and some ten years previously had made a video[2] for the film technicians' trade union's Equal Opportunities Committee which had had the affect of giving me a crash course in issues to do with discrimination. In 1997 I was also writing a book on aspects of film and politics relating to these campaigns.[3]

My attention had been drawn to similar issues in an Indian context in 1990 when I made a programme[4] in India about a newspaper using an all Indian film crew. The experience impressed on me the extent to which the Indian media is a preserve of an elite by both caste and class. On the paper there was a startling preponderance of Brahmins and Kayasths among the editorial staff; while in my crew, camera person, sound recordist and researcher were all high caste and from educated, fairly well off families. The camera assistant, who was apparently less educated seemed to be doing the job as an

end in itself rather than as a step towards becoming a cameraperson. The crew turned out to be quite sympathetic towards the Hindutva politics of the BJP, which affected our work as I experienced some subtle resistance to trying to interview Moslems and Dalits.

Even though Vocational training does not play a very important role in determining entry to the Indian media it seemed to me to be a possible key for broadening access. In this respect the record of Indian institutions is mixed. At that time the most respected courses in film were run at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) at Pune and I have been told by former students that a combination of competitive entry and low fees did enable poor but able students to join. However the first stage of a highly competitive selection process was an essay in English, a test which would discriminate heavily in favour of a tiny anglophone elite. This was something we specifically wanted to avoid in our entry requirements.

The principle behind what we were planning has, of course good precedents in an Indian context. India has what is probably the world's most developed system of positive discrimination based on reserving quotas of university places, government jobs and political constituencies for people from tribal communities and Harijan or Dalit castes, referred to administratively as scheduled tribes and castes (STs and SCs) This system of quotas is predictably controversial and has become more so since quotas were added for a category referred to as OBCs or other backward classes. [5] The legislation, however, only applies to the public sector which explains the apparently odd anomaly that the media, with all its assumed political and psychological influence, remains so very largely a preserve of the forward castes. The film industry, newspapers, publishing and advertising are all in the private sector. Radio for a long time and television for a shorter period were state monopolies and during this period the overall representation of backward castes within the media was probably better than it is now. In the last decade the rapid expansion of television and development of multi-media have been led by the private sector, and the affect will have tended to dilute the influence of quotas' in the public sector. Media training in public institutions, of course, is subject to reservations but even reserved students have to reach a minimum standard and if the entry exams are

designed to test only the skills taught in good English Medium schools and big city tutorial colleges then it would be quite likely that there would insufficient quota applicants able to reach the required score. I was, for instance, told by a lecturer in video at Makhanlal Chaturvedi National University of Journalism, Bhopal, that his department was regularly unable to fill all the reserved places.

At the time of planning Jandarshan, although my personal experience of filming in India had served to underline the problem of discrimination, I knew, anecdotally, that many of India's independent film-makers have strong progressive leanings. I therefore felt reasonably confident that the proposed course would be able to slot into local networks with compatible aims and ideas. This was indeed the case and the success of the training was due very much to the Indian film-makers who took part.

The course lasted from August 1999 to December 2001 during which time a single batch of twelve students was trained. The minimum educational requirement was twelfth class pass and beyond that selection was by interview and practical test. We imposed a low quota (3 out of 12) for women but no other quotas. The advertisement made it clear that fees would not be required and mentioned a small stipend. Nevertheless, in terms of caste and gender the applications were disappointing. We had to re-advertise to fill the small women's quota; there were no applications from scheduled tribes and only one or two from scheduled castes. The group eventually selected consisted of 9 men and 3 women, three to four from forward castes, two from scheduled castes (SCs) and the rest from other backward classes (OBCs). In terms of social class, two or three were from families which could have afforded to pay fees but at least four, including all the women, would not have been able to join had there been no stipend. Fathers ranged from a tea seller to technically qualified employees of the Bhilai steel plant, from a farmer with 5 acres to one with 30 acres.

I should mention here that after the end of this EU project in December 2001 Jandarshan in Chhattisgarh was reconstituted as an Indian society and is now employing most of the former trainees making sponsored films. It is running a new training course

supported partly by scholarships provided by the State Government and reserved, three for STs and three for SCs. The existence of these scholarships was stated in the advertisement and it is interesting to note that this time, although no stipend was offered, there were many more applications than before from reserved categories. It is also interesting that without favouring reserved applicants, among fourteen selected, there were three ST and four SCs candidates.

<u>Local culture, the training. and the Family History Project</u>

This account of the project has explained the institutional background but it remains to say something about influences on the process of image-making. First of all there is local culture, principally folk theatre and the modern media, cinema and television. Chhattisgarh is proud of its traditional performing arts and official events usually include a programme of 'cultural activities' - dance, drama and music - neatly packaged for the urban stage. One of the most celebrated forms is pandvani, where a single performer, backed by musicians, gives a dramatised rendition of an epic story. I do not know how popular the village version of these performances remain. I often heard the complaint that theatre is giving way to CD players and Bollywood. However, this appears not to be entirely a matter of preference as one of the reasons given is that it is cheaper to hire a CD player than a troop of actors who all have to be fed and transported even if only minimally paid. Whatever the pressures may be, live performance is far from dead yet and those of our trainees who came from villages all claimed to have taken part in village drama. In cities amateur theatre of a more international kind is popular. Bhilai has a lively branch of the Communist inspired Indian Peoples' Theatre Association and one of our trainees had been and remains an active member.

Cinema remains cheap and popular in Chhattisgarh. The halls show Bollywood Hindi films or 'English films' which may mean mainstream Hollywood or soft porn. A new development is a proliferation of cinema films in the local language. Just as Chhattisgarh became a state an enterprising team of Chhattisgarhis with Bombay connections made a 16mm film in Chhattisgarhi, *Mor Chhainha Bhuinya* (2000 d.

Sateesh Jain) on a minimal budget which was an instant sell out, and reaped them a handsome profit.[6] This led to a sudden boom such that within months several other Chhattisgarhi films had been released, some successful, others reputed to be abysmal failures. This activity did not instantly add up to a Chhattisgarhi film industry because most of the equipment and skilled personnel were imported temporarily and the producers and directors were mostly from Bombay, some of them not even with Chhattisgarhi roots. However, there are plans for a local film studio and if films in Chhattisgarhi continue to make profits, a local production base of some sort will probably develop whether or not the studio is built.[7] It will be interesting to see whether that will lead to the evolution of local content which differs from Bollywood in any major respect other than cost.

Television ownership has risen rapidly in the last decade. National figures indicate that around 60% Of urban and 18% of rural households have television.[8] My own impressionistic observation of the situation in Chhattisgarh suggests that in towns almost anyone in regular employment and with a permanent place to live is likely to have at least a small black and white set. In villages penetration, or at least use, depends more on the availability of power but in any village where there is at least an intermittent supply there will be a house or a few houses with television. As everywhere, tv is important as another way of distributing cinema but has also brought new forms of visual media to the public: advertising, celebrity game shows, drama serials, fashion shows - watched, everyone assumes, for the exposed bodies of the models - but also news and the kind of documentaries screened on National Geographic and Discovery.

Against this background the project introduced a set of new influences - parallel cinema or 'art' cinema, both fiction and documentary plus a critical approach to the image. The teaching had two principle objectives: firstly to provide a practical training which would qualify the trainees for paid work on the kind of video production for which we thought there would be a market in Chhattisgarh – mainly sponsored documentary and low budget drama; secondly, to inspire an ambition to be film-makers, to develop original ideas and seek to use the medium for their own creative ends. We considered

the second objective important although we were aware that even well connected ex film students from the metros struggle to find space for personal work and that creative ambitions are likely to breed dissatisfaction with the goal of mere survival.

 The practical work the students were set reflected the two objectives.   Some exercises were to make short productions with a relatively free choice of subject matter, while others obliged the students to work to an outside brief with a person or organisation playing the role of sponsor. Making ethnographic films was touched on in both contexts. One of the exercises in working to a brief was to make a film for a Phd student, Alpa Shah, who was doing field work in a Jharkand village. Also when developing their own subjects, the student were encouraged to think of teachers and students of the social sciences among potential audiences, there was some discussion about what such an audience might want and ethnographic films were screened from time to time. During visits Jonathan Parry made himself available to any of the students who wanted to discuss a film project or research. So, the course included ethnographic film but very much as one use of documentary among many.

 The student films which I am going to discuss here are from a series which emerged out of a project on family history for which all the trainees were required to prepare treatments on an aspect of their own family. Later, some of the films proposed were developed and put into production but the exercise was set initially more to raise issues in documentary method than for the sake of end product. The purpose was partly to encourage the students to experiment with a subjective voice, something which they found quite difficult, given that much of the early teaching was about how to reproduce the largely objective style of news, current affairs and Discovery style documentary.   A second aim was to encourage future professionals who might be making a living invading other people's privacy, to think about the problems of disclosure in the context of their own life.

 First person cinema, ethnographic film and indigenous media.

We did not consider at the time what relationship, if any, these family history films would have to the existing tradition of ethnographic film but I realised subsequently that the project raises   rather neatly some issues to do with the relationship between ethnographic and autobiographical film.

Towards the end of <u>Transcultural Cinema</u> David MacDougall makes a comment which I initially found rather surprising. He says
'The use of a camera by the subject of an ethnographic film occurs briefly in a few films (*My family and Me* 1986 *A wife among wives* 1981) but largely as an emblem of a personal exchange with the filmmakers.' [9] It seemed surprising because at once counter examples jumped to mind: for instance two films shown at this year's Göttingen Festival of ethnographic film: Sandya Suri's *Safar* in which the subject is the filmmaker's family, shot partly by herself and seen partly in her father's super 8 footage; Sophie Bredier's *Separated* in which   the film-maker investigates the background to her adoption and, although she does not hold the camera, she 'uses' it in the sense that she apparently controls whoever operates it. These films, of course, were made since MacDougall wrote the passage but there were examples available then which could have been cited. A colleague, Berit Madsen, was able instantly to name for me two films which I have not personally seen but which from her description seem to fulfil the requirement *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (Dennis O'Rourke 90 mins 1991) and *Osaka Story* (Toichi Nakata 1994).

Identifying a few exeptions, however, may not be entirely to the point as the thrust of MacDougall's comment is merely that the personal camera used by the subject is uncharacteristic of ethnographic films. I do not think he intends to assert that it never occurs or even less that it would in any way be incompatible with the goals of ethnographic film-making.   But unless there is some inherent incompatibility we should ask why it is, or seems to be, so uncharacteristic. This I think re lates to a particular history which has largely defined the territory of ethnographic film and which now may need to be revised. Much of the work which has come to typify ethnographic film – the MacDougall films on the Jie, Timothy Ash's Yanomami films - dealt with non literate

societies and   much of the debate around ethnographic film also relates to the anthropology of non literate societies. It is notable that, except for the chapter on Jean Rouch, Peter Loizos's book, *Innovation in Ethnographic Film,* focuses heavily on this context even though Loizos's own field of research is Europe and his own film work has been mainly on European topics.[10] Similarly, in Brian Winston's long critique of ethnographic film in *Claiming the Reel,* Rouch again is the exception in a discussion focussed on the MacDougalls, Gardiner, Ash.[11] Much of Winston's argument is deliberately historical, looking back to ground-breaking work of a previous generation but I think it is fair to comment that even in the 1970s anthropologists were by no means exclusively concerned with non-literate society. So, the film practice can not be explained as simply reflecting the discipline of anthropology.

The fact that Rouch appears as an exception in both discussions highlights a possible factor in terms of national professional traditions. Most of the work discussed by Loizos belongs to an American/British context and it has been characteristic of the British media establishment - which has borrowed extensively from the USA - to classify film and television into rigid genres and also to dismiss non commercial or less commercial genres as non professional. In such a climate people making films as part of academic research will operate within a specialised academic economy, financing their work from grants and showing it at seminars and conferences. In the absence encouragement or opportunity to interact with other kinds of film-makers, a tempting response is to emphasis the academic credentials, thereby reinforcing from inside the barriers erected by the media industry.

The situation is notably different in France where many fiction directors began their careers by making documentaries and, as in the case of Agnes Varda , may return to documentary without losing critical respect or status. Generally, in continental Europe I think the concept 'film-maker' is recognised as someone creates meanings with images as a writer does with words and can be expected, as many writers do, to work across genres according to a personal trajectory. So, Rouch could make cinema documentary,

ethnographic documentary and improvised fiction and yet retain the interest and respect of anthropologists, film critics and even film producers.

Integration or lack of it within a wider film culture is relevant to the emphasis on non literate societies since this focus helped to define a discreet area of documentary as 'ethnographic'. Since non literate communities often live in remote places and may have little communication with outsiders it is also an area where the anthropologist or grant aided film-maker has important practical advantages over the mainstream professional. There is also an attractive argument to be made to potential grant giving bodies that the anthropologist may be making the only filmed record that will ever be made of that particular community. So, there are a series of pragmatic reasons why in the British and American context particularly ethnographic film remains so strongly associated with non literate, non Western cultures. [12]

If the frame of reference is seen as primarily that of non-literate societies it is easy to see why first person camera by a subject will be rare. Non literate societies are also, on the whole, non film-making societies. Films about them will therefore be made by outsiders, or at the very least, facilitated by outsiders. That means that, if there is a first person address in a film the 'I' will not be a person from the culture which forms the ostensible subject but will be the outsider observer/film-maker.

MacDougall extends the discussion beyond the context of the classic outsider's ethnographic film saying:
' Some indigenous media production has specific ethnographic intentions, but this rarely extends to the conscious use of the first person camera.' [13]

The comment raises for me the question as to what is meant by 'indigenous media production.' Our German partner often used this term when term explaining the Bhilai project but I was never sure that it was quite appropriate. In a literal sense it is unexceptionable as it could mean almost anything. A considerable part of the BBC output is 'indigenous' in the sense of being made in England by largely English

technicians primarily for English audiences. But I think that our German partners had in mind those situations in which video equipment has been provided or small television stations set up by or for defined cultural minorities, often groups which had previously had minimal exposure to film or video. The best known examples are probably the much discussed Kayapo Video Project [14] and Aboriginal Television in Australia. [15] I think these would also be the kind of enterprises MacDougall is referring to. They have something in common with Jandarshan as all could be described in a very general way as 'community media' in so far as they were established to provide media services distinct from the national mainstream, answering certain regional or local needs and on a not for profit basis. But Jandarshan's 'region' is the large and heterogeneous State of Chhattisgarh; the aim was to be as inclusive as possible rather than to serve a single minority; the services funded were only training and advice, not making or transmitting of programmes on a large scale; and the organisation was certainly not introducing a completely new medium. Most of the population would have had some exposure to films and television and there was already some local production. Two of the trainees even had some relevant experience. The one referred to previously as a member of Indian Peoples' Theatre Association had played the leading role in a feature film partly shot in Chhattisgarh, *The Servants Shirt,* by the celebrated Independent film-maker Mani Kaul. One of the others had some experience of still photography as his father has a photographic shop in a small town near Bhilai. Among the new batch of trainees one is a small town cable operator, one a vhs camera operator and two had done small jobs on locally shot feature films.

I outline these differences between Jandarshan and other projects described as 'indigenous media' only for the sake of clarity. They are not necessarily relevant to the question of first person camera since I cannot see any intrinsic reason why this would not occur in the latter case and assume that, if there really are almost no examples, this must be due to the particular circumstances of each production context.

At this point it may be helpful to consider different kinds of first person address or self representation. MacDougall talks about the 'use of camera by a subject' under a

heading 'subjective camera' in the context of a chapter on 'subjective voices' in which he discusses strategies for representing subjective experience attributed to someone else, not the film-maker. A point to raise here is that the camera person and film-maker/author may or may not be the same person, and there may be more than one camera operator. So, talking about the use of a camera by a subject is not necessarily the same as discussing the subject as film-maker. The latter is further complicated by the possibility of shared responsibility. Documentary directors sometimes devolve to their participants a good deal of the power to control the film's content and it can be argued that there comes a point at which the participant effectively becomes the film-maker and the director only serves as technical facilitator.

Another question is how far any of these variants in the subject's control over the film necessarily means that the film will be subjective in any stronger sense than that all films are subjective. Certainly, if the cameraperson is also the main protagonist in the scene he is shooting the camera in that scene will be subjective unless it is left to turn untended. In any other situation I think a subjective approach is a matter of choice. A participant/ camera person can achieve an objective look as long as someone else is available to film the scenes in which he or she appears. A subject who is directing but not shooting can certainly opt for an objective style. Common examples from the mainstream would be presenter-led documentaries directed by the presenter and constructed to appear as a balanced, factual account.

In the context of autobiography, however, we are not just talking about films in which the film-maker appears or has a presence but films about some aspect of the filmmaker's own life or about people, places or events very close to him or her. But even in this case the subject/film-maker will not necessarily adopt a subjective style. Another term which I think is useful is 'first person cinema' referring to the quality by which a film may present a distinct and consistent metaphorical view.[16] In principle this need not be the film-maker's own, but if the film is also autobiographical it usually will be. (It is also an option to tell an autobiographical story from someone else's perspective but that is a highly sophisticated strategy not adopted in any of the films I shall be referring

to) As in the case of subjectivity a film will not necessarily have this 'first person' quality just because it is autobiographical.

'Subjective' is sometimes used in a literal sense of shots in which the camera seems to stand in for a person's eye but more often it is used of films or sequences which seem to represent a particular person's wider perceptions. First person cinema, as I use it, has a slightly different meaning, referring to a quality, derived from the overall strategy of a film, of being one person's story or representation. Such films are not necessarily overtly subjective but can adopt other view points as long as these are all subtly framed by that of the person generating the representation.

The preceding looks at some of the variations to consider when discussing a subject's involvement in filming him or herself. We have seen that the subject may shoot or direct or do both and that the results may or may not have a subjective or a first person quality.   Another variable is the situation, the production context in which someone makes a film about themselves. A rough distinction can be made between the film professional, that is someone who has made other films and then engages in autobiography, and the non-professional. The latter would include, on the one hand, the many amateurs who casually record family events with their own camcorder and on the other, people with no previous experience of filming who start to film their life because they are encouraged and facilitated by someone else. The Navajo who filmed for the anthropologists Worth and Adair[17] are one example; another would be the people who took part in the BBC's Video Nation, for which the BBC's Community Programme Unit supplied relatively simple-to-operate camcorders to a variety of people with no film-making background, gave them minimal training and asked them to record their life and thoughts.[18]

These categories are necessarily flexible since a professional may take casual home movies and an amateur may develop a professional approach. The difference I would argue is to do with the degree of deliberate control exercised. The amateur may work instinctively but unless he or she has been completely isolated from moving image

media there will also be untheorised imitation. The professional's work will never be innocent of influences but in theory the professional should have enough aesthetic understanding and technical skill to make deliberate choices as to how far and in what way to imitate possible models. The rough distinction is useful for looking at the relationship with visual anthropology. There is a history of anthropologists working with the less professional end of autobiographical film, including the Navajo pr oject and similar experiments and also the study of home movies.[19] It may not be surprising, given the traditional concentration on non literate and non cine-literate cultures that biographical work by professionals is not normally considered part of visual anthropology. Indeed professional films generally receive little attention and this is one of the respects in which I would suggest the terrain of visual anthropology needs to change. Anthropologists increasingly work in developed, film-producing cultures but with a few important exeptions[20] visual anthropologists have not tried to engage with the films produced within those cultures. This will require not only looking at what is normally termed 'popular culture' but also at independent work which us ually represents a more conscious and deliberate cultural intervention.

The Jandarshan Bhilai films

I would present the Bhilai films primarily in the above context as Indian Independent documentaries which I believe are also of interest to social scientists. However their status in relation to the forgoing discussion is a little more complicated. They are the work of students undergoing professional training and as such can be regarded as autobiographical work by professionals but the production context also has something in common with experiments in amateur autobiography, set up by anthropologists. For the project was initiated by outsiders including anthropologists, it was imposed in that only two or three of the students previously knew enough about film-making to have seriously wanted to do it; the family films were started about half way through the course when the students' grasp of style and structure was limited; the broad topic was set by teachers and it was set, not primarily but partly with the idea that the results could relate interestingly to Jonathan Parry's written ethnography.

I am going to discuss here extracts from two of the series, *Everyday Tales* (32 mins) and *Living Memory*. (40 mins). *Everyday Tales*, by Kamlesh Kumar Sahu, is about the film-maker's grandfather, a farmer and retired steelworker, a respected man in his village, a member of the Pani Panchayat, an elected body which controls water for irrigation. Kamlesh opts for a relatively objective style. The film is structured round informal conversations between grandson and grandfather which are loosely linked with scenes shot in the observational style showing daily life in the joint family home and in the village. Kamlesh appears only to prompt his grandfather to talk and in these scenes it is the grandfather who is featured. The conversations and scenes of daily life blend harmoniously. There are two sequences, however, which stand out as different and jar a little visually. One included in the extract is a general discussion between the male members of the family, the grandfather, Kamlesh's father and uncle and Kamlesh and his younger brother. There are three sections of this discussion and the extract I am going to show ends with the middle one. Before this there is a scene of farming and of the grandfather paying his labour.

SCREEN THE CLIP FROM EVERYDAY TALES

The early part of the sequence shows that this is not an incompetent film-maker but someone who knows how to shoot and edit in the observational style with a reasonable level of professionalism. But the discussion scene is notably less satisfactory. Is this just bad luck or is there more to be said about it? I hope to show that such faults or defects can provide helpful clues about concerns which were present during the production process but do not show overtly in the film text. Outside information like interviews with the film-maker may bring the point to the surface but I will show that even without such context a careful reading can lead to fruitful speculation. So first I will discuss what we can see. Then I will bring in some background information.

One of the obvious problems with the discussion in the film is that the people look uncomfortable which suggests the scene is set up. It is noticeable that this is the only

scene where people are sitting on upright chairs. We see elsewhere that the family eat, drink tea, play cards sitting on the ground. This strengthens the suspicion that the scene was not merely a reconstruction of a situation which Kamlesh had participated in previously, nor was it a minor manipulation of something which was happening anyway but that it was totally constructed from scratch for the film. It is then a reasonable assumption that Kamlesh organised the scene because there was something he wanted out of it that he could not get from the other techniques he was using, observational filming and one to one conversation. So, what is in the scene? A conversation about lying, about modern conditions encouraging people to lie. This is moderately interesting but it doesn't go anywhere and nothing else in the film establishes truth telling or lying as is an important theme. It therefore again seems a reasonable guess that this was not the conversation the scene was set up to produce.

As I already mentioned, there are two other bits of discussion in the film and perhaps one of these contains the key speech. The first section is about the influence the Steel Plant has had on attitudes to education, that plant workers educate their children further than non plant workers. In the last section the participants are blaming industry for the decline of the joint family. Again, the topics are interesting but the views expressed are predictable and the film does nothing to endorse or question them. . Kamlesh might have pointed to a possible contradiction in that the speakers are all themselves industry employees or ex employees and yet are living apparently contentedly in a joint family. But he does not. Given the content of the conversation and use made of it, a reasonable question is whether the added interest really justifies inclusion at the cost of visual harmony. Kamlesh could simply have decided to eliminate the discussion from the final edit. The fact that he kept it suggests he, or perhaps someone else, had a strong vested interest in it for reasons which do not come out in the film. This is probably about as far as the viewer can go working only from the film text and I will now turn to information the film-maker supplies in an interview about six months after the film was finished. [21]

Of the discussion scene he says:

'It was not as successful as I had imagined. The things came in a very general perspective. ……Since it was the first occasion to sit like that for discussion in my family and to ask specific questions, to fix questions on various aspects of life I feel that I hesitated to ask those specific questions.'

A little later I remind him that his original script had anticipated a discussion about caste and I ask whether he was anticipating this because he had experienced such a discussion. He answers obliquely but the implication is negative:

'I know the different perspectives on castism and intercaste marriages in society. I know my grandfather never accepts such things because he was always against intercaste marriage…. And I talked many times with my younger brother. He always said that it should happen, that intercaste marriages should happen and that there is no problem about them. But when I made them sit together my grandfather didn't express as much as he likes and my brother changed his mind – maybe because elder family members, two senior generations were there….'

We can see now that the purposes of this debate was to reveal differences between the generations and it fails because neither of the young men, when it comes to it, are willing to state their disagreement. In the rushes there is a scene in which caste is discussed, but as Kamlesh says, his younger brother simply agrees with his elders which makes the scene uninteresting and from Kamlesh's perspective, 'untrue'. It was therefore dropped but because of the emotional investment in the issue Kamlesh was reluctant to entirely abandon the context of cross generational discussion.

The interview adds more perspective. Kamlesh puts a lot of stress on his love and respect for his grandfather which he refers to both in the opening and closing sentences of the interview. He complains that he did not have the space or the skill to do justice to the subject and one of the points he regrets having omitted is his grandfather's work as a member of the caste panchayat. This is a committee of senior members of a caste – in this case Sahus – who look after caste interests and also police the caste rules. This is significant as it means that the grandfather's views are of practical importance – If a

Sahu marries a non Sahu, for instance, he would personally be involved in imposing a punishment – usually by extracting a substantial fine from the offender's parents.

A further point which seems relevant is that the filmmaker was in his early twenties and unmarried when making the film. It is therefore surely unsurprising that the scene which never took place seemed important, relating as sit does to a set of tensions which have a potential personal, practical significance. So, while the film seems to be telling us that everything in this joint family is harmonious, it hints in its very construction to the possibility of disharmony.

The second clip I am going to show comes from a film which is much more directly about the film-maker and has a much stronger first person feel. The film is *Living Memory* by Shobha Ajay. As she tells us in the film, Shobha comes from a Telegu Christian family from a part of the world where people normally marry cross cousins. But Shobha married one of her fellow students, a marriage which was thoroughly unorthodox, cutting across religion, caste and regional identity. The main theme of the film is the extent to which cross cousin marriage is breaking down and to which unorthodox marriages like Shobha's are being increasingly accepted. The film is roughly chronological, starting with Shobbha's marriage in 2000 and finishing as the film is being finished two years later. A major element in the story is that just after her marriage, Shobha's father was diagnosed with terminal cancer. The main departure from a strict chronology is that the first scenes with Shobha's in-laws are placed after the father's death, nearly a year after she actually moved in with her husband's family.

The passage I am going to show includes this section. It starts just after the father's funeral when for the first time we are introduced to Ajay's family. The passage continues with a sequence showing a second visit to Shobha's relatives in Andra Pradesh. A previous visit, included earlier in the film, had taken place just after the marriage.

SCREEN THE CLIP FROM LIVING MEMORY

As before, I will discuss what is visible and only later bring in my own and the film-maker's comments. One of the first things that probably strikes you is the range of film styles. The first scenes in the clip are extreme examples of subjective camera, where the film-maker is using the camera like an extension of her body to relate to other people. After we cut to Andra Pradesh we switch to an objective, observational style where, clearly, another person is filming since Shobha appears interacting with her relatives in scenes where everyone is politely behaving as if the camera were not there. Just as we have got used to this style, a third shift occurs as Shobha stops ignoring the camera and addresses it, or addresses us through it, in the style of a newsreader or presenter.

The important question to ask is whether these switches in style are deliberate or are due to some accidental factor like filming over a long period without adequate planning. One way to answer this is to consider what affect the different techniques have. The subjective camera naturally encourages us to identify with Shobha. This is the first time in the film that such a literal subjective camera is used but it is not the first or only use of a subjective style. The confidential first person Voice Over runs throughout the film. Then, when we first hear about the father's illness, there is a sequence which I read as strongly subjective although it does not involve Shobha holding the camera. It consists of a long tracking shot from a bullock cart of the Andra village over which Shobha describes her feelings about her father and her family. Briefly, an image of each family member referred to is mixed in and out again as if conjured by Shobha's thoughts. The affect is to present Shobha as agent but not as pointedly as the   hand held camera in the in-law's house. Readings, of course, are themselves subjective but I find that scene of entering the in-law's house quite disturbing. The single viewpoint emphasises individuality and therefore the solitary situation of the film –maker/bride.   I experience a sense of suspense as we approach the house and enter it, a lone individual penetrating someone else's space and then a sense of relief when the people encountered joke and tease and do not seem threateneing. So, I see this is a very strong evocation of the

daughter in law's situation.. We are given a happy ending but the implication is that this is a dangerous moment and the story might have been different.

The images become more disturbing in the next sequence dealing with the church – the wide angle produces that characteristic distortion which works as symbol of social or personal disturbance. The priest, standing in for the church, is being represented to us as bad, to put is crudely, and this jerky, distorted representation ensures we internalise the point which is being made at the level of logic in the dialogues and Voice Over.

When we cut to Andra the Voice Over tells us that Shobha was glad to escape and the change of style seems to mirror just that sense of relief. The world portrayed now appears calm and orderly. Shobha herself is seen as part of a group, not singled out as the 'I' of the scene, no longer an individual but part of a harmonious group.

So, it seems very plausible to read these shifts in style as a deliberate attempt to reproduce the emotional connotations of the *sasural* and *mayka* – the house of one's in-laws and the house of one's own birth - the former, a problematic zone where your identity is challenged; the latter, a place where you simply fit unquestioningly.

The face to camera sequence initially does not seem to have any similar aesthetic justification. But perhaps its very oddness suggests some clues. It occupies a pivotal position in the film roughly in the middle. Before this we hear Shobha's own story of how she married, was excommunicated and lost her father; in the second half we look at a series of other marriages in the family. One of the oddest things about the shot is that it does not seem terribly relevant to anything. Shobha is telling us about a ritual, Pushparvati, which is being performed for a girl who is not established as being terribly close to Shobha and which seems to have no direct connection either to Shobha's marriage or her father's death or her problem with the church. But the very fact that the scene is not only retained in the edit but retained in this central position, suggests to me that the ritual does have some special significance which is not fully explained.

In this case, as context, I am going to refer both to my knowledge of the film's history and to an interview with the film-maker. The evidence is somewhat contradictory as the former made me sceptical as to whether the affects I've described were deliberate, while the latter seemed to confirm that they were.

I knew this was a film shot over two years and during a time when the film-maker and her collaborators were learning and changing their ideas about how to make films. The subjective sequence was almost the last thing shot, in June 2002, and it was shot during a visit by a film-maker and teacher, Tarun Bharatiya, who I knew was encouraging the staff (this was after the end of the training project) to explore more subjective and personally expressive styles of work. So, I tended to assume that the sequence was shot as it was only because of Tarun's intervention.

The scene in Andra was shot nearly a year before in spring 2001 by Ajay, Shobha's husband. On this occasion the crew was accompanied by my husband, Jonathan, and I felt that he might have been encouraging the objective style and an element of explanation to camera since, as someone who works largely with the written word, he tends to value speech over image. However, when I came to ask Shobha about the details of what had happened I found that my guesses were an oversimplification. The style of the Andra shooting was partly to do with that stage of the training and partly conscious choice and Tarun did encourage the later subjective filming but Shobha also says she was experimenting and that she wanted that scene to be different:

'I think if I do this style it will make a change. This is the in-law's house. First I show my house, my parents, my brother in law. … But then when I see this (the in laws sequence) I don't think that the camera did it. Shobha saw that house and Shobha was taking to her in-laws. So it gives quite a different impression compared to the other.' [22]

About Pushparvati she says firmly that the scene is relevant because it is centrally related to marriage. She also makes a point that apart from marriage it is the only remaining important function that brings families together. It may also be significant that it is a pre-catholic tradition and so represents a cultural identity irrespective of the history of conversion. That this should seem important is entirely in keeping with an

underlying emphasis throughout the film on tradition and orthodoxy. It is striking that although the events in the film show Shobha as breaking with tradition, the Voice Over constantly seems to be asserting that really she has followed the true tradition. She is dutiful daughter, a good daughter-in-law who chose to live with her in-laws and she is a true catholic. What she seems to be saying is that tradition is very important and that innovation is ok as long as it does not really disrupt the key relations between fathers and children, husband and wife and the family and the church. So, if Pushparvati symbolises the true traditions of the *Mayka* as well as being the starting point for all marriage plans then it is not surprising that it is given its pivotal position. Her treatment and placing of it has an instinctive logic. In the same way there are accidental explanations for the contrast between the scenes in Andra and the in-law's house but these re not as important as elements of internal logic to do with how the author wishes to represent herself and her situation.

The analysis I have offered of both these clips is primarily concerned with the film-maker's state of mind,   the film-maker's objectives in terms of a desired affect on the viewer, the film-maker's technical and aesthetic understanding of the film medium and how to use it to influence the relevant audience.   My main point is that the potential ethnographic interest of a film may not lie primarily in the quality of its portrayal of pro filmic events but in the film itself as cultural expression, in the details of content, style and construction and what they tell us about the beliefs and desires of the maker. In this respect the more partisan a film is the more interesting it may be.

In saying this, however, I am not suggesting that films must be partisan to be interesting nor that they cannot, in some circumstances, be useful as records of pro-filmic events.   It has perhaps been unfortunate that some of the strongest critics of the notion of documentary as a record, have approached the question in a rather literalistic way. For example, much of Brian Winston's thoughtful argument in *Claiming the Real* is devoted to debunking different claims about how documentary, ethnographic or otherwise, can show the world as it is.[23]   But I am not sure how seriously such an idea has ever been held by practitioners. It is true that some of the American pioneers of

observational documentary like Pennebaker or Leacock made some strong statements[24] in the 1960s. But it is important to remember that documentary is part of cinema, cinema is part of show business and that these were film-makers establishing themselves in a world which is known to thrive on hyperbole: this comedy will have you rolling in the isles, that horror film will send you shrieking from the cinema; and our new fly on the wall documentaries will at last reveal to you The Truth.'

Any film-maker who seriously believes their finished film, packaged for distribution, literally shows the events which took place during shooting is in a state of denial. As MacDougall perceptively puts it: 'for the filmmaker, the film is an extract from all the footage shot for it, and a reminder of all the events that produced it. It reduces the experience into a very small canvas.'[25] But this reduction should not distract us from the fact that in one sense all film is evidence – evidence at the simplest level that a pattern of light was fucussed onto a strip of film – or digital tape - at a particular moment. Beyond this, as with any other documents, interpretation is needed. Rather than concentrating on what different genres of documentary film fail to show, it could be more productive to consider what they do show or more accurately, how they can add to our understanding of a situation.

In this context autobiography has a special place. Interpretation will always be concerned partly with the ostensible subject and partly with what was happening behind the camera. The further the social distance between the film-maker(s) and the subject, the more split the inquiry becomes and the less will information about the film-maker(s) and information about the subject be relevant to each other beyond the narrow context of the film. Autobiography has the great convenience that the distance between film-maker and subject is reduced as much as it can be and so interpretation can be concentrated within one field. In this context, manipulation by the film-maker need not detract from a film's value for an anthropologist. Indeed, it can enhance it. Autobiography can become a powerful tool to settle scores, to present a 'line' and to try to seduce the audience to the film-maker's version of events. But as it does this, it potentially

reveals more about its subject than it ever could by attempting a studiously balanced story.

Notes

[1] See for example, Parry, J.P. (1999a; 1999b and 2001)

[2] *Cue for Change* (1987) ACT Films.
[3] Dickinson (1999)

[4] *Other News* (1991) Channel Four Television and Ikon.

[5] In 1980 a Commission chaired by B.P. Mandal recommended an extension of reservations. In 1990 the Prime Minister, V. P. Singh, took the decision to implement the recommendations and this provoked a series of demonstrations. One of the most thoughtful commentators on the Mandal controversy and the wider issue of reservations is André Beteille. See for example Beteille (2000 and 2003) There is a review of some of the arguments in Parry (1999b)

[6] The success of *Mor Chhainha Bhuinya* attracted several articles in the film press and related web sites including, *Chhattisga rhi film beats Mohabbatein* on rediff.com Movies, in the Mumbai Grapevine www.rediff.com/entertai/2001/feb/09chhat.htm and *Bollywood News* for 23 Feb, 2001 on news-editor@mumbai-central.com

[7] For a journalistic account of the situation see Vajpyi (2001).

[8] The figures come from the National Sample Survey Organisation quoted in a report by Ravi Kapoor on
http://www.financialexpress.com/fe/daily/20000707/fec07054.html Friday. July 7th 2000.

[9] MacDougall (1998) p. 120

[10] Peter Loizos's most extended field work has been in Cyprus. He also made two ethnographic films there: *Life Chances – Four Families in a Changing Cypriot Village*, a study of class, education, up and down mobility, and agricultural enterprise in changing markets, and *Sophia's People – Eventful Lives*. More recently , together with Tone Bringa he made a film on Bosnia, *Returning Home – Revival of a Bosnian Village*. Before becoming an anthropologist he had been a producer with the BBC where among other things he made a number of programmes for *Horizon.*

[11] See Winston (1995) p. 170 - 196)

[12] Before I seem to be singling out the English speaking world I should also note that the ethnographic film tradition within the IWF in Germany has also been isolationist to the extent that there seems to be little history of exchange between the Institute and the world of German independent cinema, even during the nineteen seventies and eighties when the film-makers clearly thought they had much to say about politics and society.

[13] MacDougal (1998) p 120

[14] This project in Brazil was facilitated and documented by the anthropologist Terence Turner. See, Turner (1990)

[15] See Michaels (1987) and Batty (1993)

[16] Bruce Katwin (1978) explored the concept of first person cinema in the context of fiction films and in particular Bergman and Godard. I think the concept is also helpful in studying documentary although relatively few documentaries fully achieve the quality, possibly because of the lack of opportunity in most countries for film-makers to make documentary as cinema with a free hand rather than for a branded TV slot or a sponsor.

[17] Worth (1972) and Adair,

[18] Video Nation was developed from 1993 by two project producers Mandy Rose and Chris Mohr. Mandy Rose describes it as a fusion of 'the production practices of Video diaries with the spirit of Mass Observation, using camcorders to hold a mirror up to Britain, mapping everyday life and attitudes in the 90s though tapes of people across the country.' Rose (1994)

[19] Richard Chalfen for example, has studied both the home movies kind of domestic media and the outcome of practical experiments in what he calls 'coerced image production' in which subject s are provided with a camera for the sake of a research project. Chalfen (1992)

[20] A good example is Felicia Hughes-Freeland's (1992) discussion of the realtionship between Balinese Television and Balinese dance drama.

[21] I recorded the interview with Kamlesh towards the end of 2002 for a hypermedia project linking some of the Jandarshan films with texts and stills published on the London School of Economic website 'Field to Factory: Film and ethnography of industrialisation in Chhattisgargh, Central India' (http://www.fieldtofactory.lse.ac.uk/)

[22] The interview with Shobha was done at the same time and in the same context as that with Kamlesh. See note 21.

[23] Winston (1995)

[24] Winston (1995) pp 149 –151

[25] MacDougall (1998) (19p 27

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