

Future of Jharkhand Documentary Film Industry

Neel Kusum Kullu

Faculty Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communication, St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, Jharkhand, India
nkullu[at]gmail.com

Abstract: *This article is an attempt to situate the engagement of Jharkhand's independent documentarians with the focus on the state's documentary film industry. The collection of interviews with different documentary filmmakers highlights how they are focused on developing filmmaking skills, and have been creating an ideal space for documentary films in Jharkhand and India. As viewers continue to watch documentary storytelling across various platforms, and as new filmmakers brush up their filmmaking skills, tracking industry professionals' perspectives is a vital pursuit in creating a market for this genre in Jharkhand.*

Keywords: Documentary, filmmakers, film industry, documentary production, documentary culture, and Jharkhand

1. Introduction

After attaining statehood, Jharkhand has been firmly put in limelight for both the filmmaking and tourism industry. Since the release of Jharkhand Film Policy in 2015, the state has been progressively moving in filmmaking destination. According to the policy any film which is shot 50% in Jharkhand is eligible to get Rs 1 crore from the state government. The production house is entitled to get up to Rs 2 crore if more than two - thirds of a film's shooting is done in the state. In addition, the scenic surroundings of Patratu Valley in Ramgarh district have been chosen for proposed Film City. Apart from providing unlimited opportunities in filmmaking, the policy attracts investment through film industry. Fetscherin (2010) suggests that the film industry accounts for nearly 20% of all revenues in the Indian media and entertainment industries. A number of films have been shot in the state under big banners of Bollywood which has given employment opportunities to local artists to work in these films.

To encourage Jharkhand's potential in promoting and showcasing good cinema, Jharkhand International Film Festival Awards (JIFFA) started in 2018, which is organized annually by NGO - Navbharat Nirman Sangh, supported by Directorate of Film Festivals and Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Bollywood artist and other personalities from entertainment industry have been a part of it. Such efforts attract the local budding filmmakers and film enthusiasts to learn the art of filmmaking. Also, film festivals bring together local and national filmmakers to show case their work. Ruling and Pedersen (2010), argues that film festivals are interesting repositories of knowledge for gaining a better understanding of industry related issues. It also offers unique opportunities to engage in interaction with different media professionals.

Through these focussed plans, the state is witnessing a rush of filmmakers from all over India, especially regional languages. However, a number of regional and documentary filmmakers within the state haven't had a fair chance so far. They have criticized the sluggish paperwork done in granting the subsidy. Neither there are proper platforms or entertainment channels to release films and documentaries. Sparked by this curiosity, a survey was conducted to understand the present trends and experiences of filmmaking

especially, documentary culture in the state. The article provides a cohesive study of contemporary situation of documentary film production and promotion. Most importantly, it views these changes from the perspectives of three selected documentarians themselves. Documentary professionals believe there are more opportunities for new filmmakers now, as compared to the last few decades.

2. Literature Review

India's most eminent film scholars and a founder member of the National Film Archive, Pune, B. D. Garga (2007) in his book recollects the historical journey of non - fiction cinema in India, starting from colonial times to the production of Films Division of India. Later, K. P. Jayasankar and Anjali Monteiro's 'A Fly in the Curry' (2016), describes the journey of independent documentary film in India, based on close textual analysis and conversation with filmmakers.

Recently, Shoma A. Chatterji (2015) and Shweta Kishore (2018) have also published book on the practice of independent documentary filmmaking. The sheer range and depth of documentary films that the authors describe and analyse, challenge the framing of reality. Kasturi Basu and Dwaipayana Banerjee (2018), in their exclusive collection of essays and interviews, aims to chronicle how cinema can be democratized as people's medium for social transformation. Today, politically conscious films are re - shaping the notion of filmmaking for broader socio - political engagement and action.

Apart from these books, there are a few papers and articles, however these writings are inadequate to address the challenges faced by the genre of documentary production. Interestingly, the work and experience of Jharkhandi documentarians have been mentioned in almost every publication.

3. Background of the Research Problem

According to a popular belief, the word 'documentary' was coined by a Scottish documentarian John Grierson in 1926. He described documentary as 'creative treatment of actuality.' By the very act of documenting actuality, the filmmaker often purports to reveal truths. Documentary practice is the complex process of capturing reality to

educate people, inform and address conceptual problems. Documentaries have grown in length and scope over time, including educational, historical, and other genres. Digital platforms such as Netflix, Sony Liv, YouTube, etc. offer new possibilities for production and distribution of documentaries. Documentary storytelling approaches continue to improve, but they remain focused on emphasizing the realism aspect. By the 21st century the genre of documentary filmmaking evolved to become the part of popular cinema. Jharkhand too has joined in this creative marketing of reality.

In order to set the context of the research, the article first focuses on the evolution of Jharkhand documentary films. It was in the late 80s and the beginning of 90s, when the filmmakers of Jharkhand started to make documentary films, for empowering the marginalized people of the state. Reflecting on the initial years of documentary making in Jharkhand, documentary films and filmmakers constituted a coalition with socio - political movement across the state. There are traces of social movement in documentary films of Jharkhand such as Neterhat field firing range, uranium mining at Jadugoda, Koel Karo project, bauxite mining, development - displacement, Kutku - Mandal dam, etc. It was filmmaker Shriprakash who first came up with his documentary *Kiski Raksha* (1994), a film on protest against Neterhat firing range. Later in 1996, filmmaker Biju Toppo and Meghnath directed *Shahid Jo Anjaan Rahe*, a film on brutal massacre of local people of Banjhi. However, today there is a change in the form of a subtle movement towards a more explicit use of political discourse. Akhra's '*Gaon Chodab Nahi*', seeks to layer political agenda with poetic expression.

The key to understand the gradual development of film culture in Jharkhand can be witnessed in the variations portrayed in different documentary films. For instance, Shriprakash's '*Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda*'; Meghnath's and Biju Toppo's '*Naachi se Baanchi*', each film unfolds an account of social cause in the face of brutal state oppression and formation. Biju Toppo, Meghnath and Shriprakash are prominent figures who have laid the foundation of documentary film production in Jharkhand. Their films have been screened in almost every college and organizations, both national and international level. Their films have received commendable response from the audience.

In their pursuit of understanding filmmaking, none of them have attended any formal education in films but the trio have undergone film training programmes and film festivals. They have brushed up their talent in filmmaking skill through hard - work and dedication. Filmmaking is a passionate art for them, not commerce. Each of them has bagged national and international award in documentary filmmaking. In addition, the films produced are credited as leading the accomplishment of documentary as a genre across the state.

Rather than presenting arguments and conclusions about narratives and developments of film techniques, this research will find out how the state is gearing itself for establishing a documentary culture. The focus is how the documentary filmmakers are honing their skills, what kind

of support they are receiving from government and ministry and the reach of audience.

In terms of documentary production culture, Jharkhand's documentary acts as a mirror through which the state's history, lifestyle, people etc. can be analysed. The purpose of this article is to understand Jharkhand's documentary film industry perspectives based on the lived experiences of the selected national awardee documentarians - Biju Toppo, Meghnath and Shriprakash. In turn, this focus can illuminate some of the major challenges faced in documentary production in the state itself.

4. Research Objective

The research explores as well as expands our knowledge on documentary films production. Take any major social, political or environmental related issues, documentary filmmakers have always come forward in documenting the real events, and in the process, created a historical journey towards the development of the state. The focus is to note the historical and thematic dimensions of documentary films in Jharkhand in terms of major filmmakers and their landmark films.

The study aims towards-

- 1) The history of documentary films in Jharkhand.
- 2) Present situation of documentary industry in Jharkhand.
- 3) The opportunities and challenges faced by filmmakers.

Finally, the overall outcome of the research will help filmmakers and research scholars to understand the future aspects of documentary filmmaking in the state.

5. Research Methodology

This research is an exploratory study, carried out to increase as well as explore our knowledge on documentary film industry of Jharkhand. It is based on a qualitative analysis, especially focused on the works and opinions of national awardee filmmakers of the state. More specifically, it applies an integrative analytical framework for investigating filmmaker's agenda and film policies towards the development of documentary production. The study is designed to contextualize the factors that dictate and effect the rise of documentary production in Jharkhand.

6. Data Analysis and Discussion

The documentary filmmakers were selected on the basis of their dedication towards cinema for a cause. Biju Toppo and Meghnath both are a part of Akhra, a film production group formed in 1996 in Ranchi. Akhra group has been working towards making films on social issues and development in Jharkhand as well as India. Both Biju and Meghnath have won 58th National Film Awards twice in 2010 and 65th National Film Awards in 2018. Shriprakash may be considered as father of Jharkhand documentary films. He has directed and produced many documentary films during the last 20 years. He had won the Rajat Kamal award for '*Buru Gara*' in 2008.

The interviews, which aims also to probe, in the context of Jharkhand documentary production, whether and to what extent documentary film will develop for a progressive transformation of the society. Based on an unstructured questionnaire asked to the filmmakers, an insight on documentary state of Jharkhand was gathered. The information provided by the filmmakers are entirely based on their work experience and their encounter with different challenges.

6.1 Interview with Biju Toppo

Filmmaker Biju Toppo is one of the first Adivasi documentarian. For the past two decades he has been using movie camera effectively to counter the misrepresentation of his community by the mainstream media. Apart from making films for NGOs, he has done two films - *The Hunt & Jharia*, for Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) and *'Naachi se Baanchi'* for Films Division.

In conversation with him, he was quite optimistic about the fact that documentaries can create a change in the society, especially for the weaker section. His films mainly focus on Adivasi culture, livelihood, development, upliftment, displacement etc. which ultimately questions development of Jharkhand. Documentary may not be able to provide a suitable source of living for your family but it is a source of inspiration for everyone.

Films are not always for entertainment only but are informational and educative too. Following the Bollywood and Hollywood style will cause damage to the Jollywood (Jharkhand film industry). It is because every region has a unique culture and geographical boundaries and therefore it is the responsibility of the filmmaker for finding out about the cultures they are representing. Even though Maharashtra is home to Bollywood, still it gives equal priority to Marathi films. Filmmakers need to collect ideas from different films and recreate regional films on the basis of local talents.

The main need of a documentary filmmaker is to reach the target audience. Audience is responsive to inspiring documentaries worldwide. Finance is the major challenge faced in documentary production. People are always ready to sponsor commercial films but documentarians have few sponsors. Documentary requires the right kind of market to attract the interest of target audience worldwide.

He said that the future of documentary production lies in the hand of the state government. In addition to the Jharkhand film policy, he stated that there should be some provisions made for the students of Mass Communication. They can assist the film directors in their projects, such an initiative will help upcoming filmmakers. He believes, in consideration to the film festivals, the Jharkhand government should understand how to promote regional film festivals and then look forward in organizing international film festivals. Today, Goa, Kerela and Mumbai have become the centre of excellence for International Film Festivals. They are providing platform for enhancing documentary culture in India. Documentary production requires proper funding and support from both public and government.

6.2 Interview with Meghnath

Meghnath is a film activist working in Jharkhand for more than 30 years. During his college days he had a passion for photography, after which he started to learn making documentary films. In his early age he was a social activist, but when he witnessed there was no Adivasi voice in the mainstream media, he took up cinema as a medium to represent the people's voice. Since then, he has been working with the people's struggle against destructive development. In conversation with him, he said that Shriprakash should be regarded as the 'Father of Jharkhand Documentary' as he was the first filmmaker to shoot documentary film in Jharkhand.

Looking towards the positive side, he said technology driven society will attract common people and politicians if a suitable documentary culture is built here. He wants to create an environment where people would enjoy to watch documentary just like commercial films. Quoting his lines 'a healthy cinema for a healthy society'. Since ages cinema has been the driven force to bring change in society and will do so in the future. Every audience connects themselves with films.

Talking about forming a film society in Jharkhand, he said it is difficult to form due to lack of access to film resources. The local films should be given priority in the film festivals of Jharkhand. There is very little appreciation and support from government towards documentary films and filmmakers. People of Jharkhand want to see documentaries but they do not have access to it. Documentary can do well in the market and society, they just need a proper platform, which is yet to be organized in the state. He also stated that big cities should have community halls where people can screen documentaries and films to reach maximum number of audiences.

6.3 Interview with Shriprakash

Shriprakash is Jharkhand's first national award - winning filmmaker, he received national and international recognition for his films. Shriprakash has directed and produced many documentary films during the last 15 years. In his early twenties, Shriprakash started off by learning VCR repair work and gradually ended up in filmmaking. "In my early twenties when I realized that the struggles in the hinterlands of Jharkhand needed a medium to be seen, a medium to reach out to the larger masses. And that is exactly how I embarked on my journey of documentation of the struggles and trials of the people of Jharkhand," recalls Shri, as fondly addressed by people. He wants to change the world through cinema, raise global awareness about threatened cultures and people through the films.

Shriprakash passion for filmmaking put him in touch with Biju Toppo and Meghnath, each one of them making cinema of resistance. Upset about the fact that filmmaking is simply pro - profit, and so the struggles of Jharkhand aren't selling in the film industry. According to Shriprakash, documentary films are not doing well because they do not cater to the need of masses. He said that a responsible filmmaker is

always worried how to portray the social cause to its desired audience. Reach of the film is not dependent on money; it depends on the storyline of the film.

Financial issues are the major hindrance in documentary production. People are ready to invest in commercial cinema but funding is less in documentary as this genre has a small market arena. Since there are no proper screening platforms in the state, only a few selected audiences are exposed to this film genre.

If government provides support and outline policies then automatically documentary culture will flourish in Jharkhand. Besides providing screening platforms, the basic technical facilities like equipment, studios and post - production labs should be built here. This will lessen the burden of the local as well as other filmmakers.

7. Conclusion

Subsequently, the interviews with the trio filmmakers, it is now clear that documentary film production, both on regional and national level is growing immensely on transnational connectivity. In the last two decades, a number of fiction and non - fiction film has been shot (Table 7.1), a network of film festivals has been organized, and distributors and financiers are growing slowly.

Table 7.1: Few Bollywood Films Shot in Jharkhand (2010 - 2017)

Film Name	Year	Director
Udaan	2010	Vikramaditya Motwane
Gangs of Wasseypur	2012	Anurag Kashyap
A Death in Gunj	2016	Konkana Sen Sharma
M. S. Dhoni: An Untold Story	2016	Neeraj Pandey
Begum Jaan	2017	Srijit Mukherji

The research concluded that the state needs a market where regional films could be promoted, particularly, old theatres should be opened to screen local films. The problem of marketing their films is also a barrier in reachability. The government should take care of the interest of the local artists and promote the new artists. Basic infrastructure, standard studios & labs, impart training to artists and technicians, financial assistance to films made in Jharkhand should be provided.

Even after the formation of Jharkhand Film Policy, funding documentaries still remains a challenge, particularly for films addressing urgent social and economic problems. Only big budget films are able to avail the subsidy, while the regional films have to struggle with loads of paper - work. Film societies and clubs are to be formed, where media persons, filmmakers, social activists and expertise would gather to discuss about matters related to film and society. Then only, the market of documentary production will grow in a professional environment.

Today mainstream audiences are somewhat tentative towards non - fiction storytelling, filmmaker Meghnath says, "If we start screening more interesting documentary films their tastes will surely change." Besides a lot of young

enthusiastic filmmakers who get a chance to learn from these documentarians, are now into filming career such as filmmakers Anuj Kumar, Rupesh Sahu, Seral Murmu and others to name a few. Films of these young filmmakers too reflect the social and political turbulence of the state. It can therefore be argued that Jharkhand documentary films are socio - political style.

Digital platforms have opened up new avenues for promoting documentaries worldwide. Camera technicalities have been improving and new film professionals are emerging every day. Despite an expansive landscape for documentary filmmakers and audiences, challenges are persistent here. Clearly, it's going to be a struggle for Jharkhand filmmakers as they try to move ahead and move away from Bollywood's fantasy fare in the next few years, but the end result could be an on - screen richness that's better than anything India has produced before.

8. Future Scope

There are just a handful of contributors that determine the complexity and diversity of the documentary scene in Jharkhand, and its worth of understanding how a small documentary culture operates here, despite difficult political terrain. This is just an initial investigation to explore what lies ahead for the enthusiast filmmakers and scholars. The information gathered here is applicable in the field of social science. Scholars can further examine the impact of Jharkhand film policy on the economy of the state, outside films or creating job opportunities. Understanding the context of past and present situation of documentary films can enable filmmakers to appreciate the environment where they can take decisions or carry out their professional skills. It will guide the filmmakers to fulfill their functions in the society.

Filmography

- 1994 - Kiski Raksha, Shriprakash
- 1996 - Shahid Jo Anjaan Rahe, Akhra Production
- 1997 - Ek Hadsa Aur Bhi, Akhra Production
- 1998 - Jaha Chiti Ladi Hati Se, Akhra Production
- 1999 - Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda, Shriprakash
- 2003 - Development Flows from the Barrel of Gun, Akhra Production
- 2005 - Kora Rajee, Biju Toppo
- 2006 - Gadi Lohardaga, Akhra Production
- 2006 - Buru Gara, Shriprakash - National Film Award
- 2007 - Jadugoda the Black Magic, Shriprakash
- 2008 - Ek Ropa Dhan, Akhra Production, National Film Award
- 2008 - Iron is Hot, Akhra Production, National Film Award
- 2011 - Eer, Shriprakash
- 2015 - The Hunt, Akhra Production
- 2017 - Naachi se Baanchi, Akhra Production, National Film Award

References

- [1] Banerjee & Basu (2018). Toward's a People Cinema: Independent Documentary and its Audience in India, Three Essays.
- [2] Battaglia, Giulia (2018), Documentary Film In India - An Anthropological History, Routledge
- [3] Bose, N. K.1971. Tribal Life in India, New Delhi: National Book Trust.
- [4] Chatterji, Shoma A. (2015). Filming Reality: The Independent Documentary Movement in India, Sage.
- [5] Corner, John.2008. "Documentary Studies: Dimensions of Transition and Continuity. " In Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices, 13–28. Maindehead: Oxford University Press.
- [6] Dutta, Uttaran, (2016), Adivasi Media in India: Relevance in Representing Marginalized Voices, Intercultural Communication Studies XXV: 3 (2016)
- [7] Fetscherin, M. (2010). The main determinants of Bollywood movie box office sales. Journal of Global Marketing, 23 (5), 461–476.
- [8] Girase, Swati (2016), International Journal of Development Research Vol.06, Issue, 05, pp.7924 - 7927,
- [9] Karlin & Johnson (2011), Measuring impact: The importance of evaluation for documentary film campaigns, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256545144>
- [10] Monteiro, A. and Jayasankar, K. P (2016), A Fly in the Curry, Sage Publication
- [11] Mulugundam, S. (2002). Narratives of Development: A critical analysis of alternative documentaries in India, University of Hyderabad.
- [12] Paterson, C., and A. Zoellner.2010. "The Efficacy of Professional Experience in the Ethnographic Investigation of Production. " Journal of Media Practice 11 (2): 97–109.
- [13] Ruling & Pedersen, 2010. Film Festival Research from an Organizational Studies Perspective, Creative Works.
- [14] Sharma, Aparna (. Documentary Films in India: Critical Aesthetics at Work,
- [15] Singh, K. S.1982. Tribal Movements in India, Vol. I &II, New Delhi: Manohar Prakashan.
- [16] Tascon, Sonia (2012). Considering Human Rights Films, Representation, and Ethics: Whose Face? Human Rights Quarterly, Vol.34, No.3, pp.864 - 883.

Author Profile



Neel Kusum Kullu is currently an Assistant Professor at Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, St. Xavier's College, Ranchi, Jharkhand. She is pursuing her Ph. D. in Journalism and Mass Communication from Berhampur University, Odisha. The author has attended national and international conferences and has written many research papers on independent documentary films. Her area of specialization is Documentary Films, Communication, New Media, Advertising, and Public Relations.