



Sue Sudbury

I am a researcher working in the field of participatory film and visual ethnography, producing both theoretical and practice-based research.

In particular, I am interested in capturing seldom heard voices and unique perspectives enabled by participatory film practice. I explore this from both a visual ethnographic and participatory film approach through the analysis of the work of other film researchers and through a practice-based perspective, exploring ideas and concepts revealed and verified through the creation of my own filmmaking work.

Research Question



This feature-length documentary is an ethnographic practice-research project about representation, place and identity. The geographical context for this practice was the southern-most tip of Mumbai where, at a space research centre, astrophysicists were designing and building instruments for India's first astronomical satellite. In the West, the dominant discourse questions whether space research can be justified in a developing country with high levels of poverty. So when one of the space scientists invited me to film his science class with the children in the slum next door to the Space Research Centre, this presented an opportunity to explore this juxtaposition and contrast. The film intercuts these two worlds, separated by a wall, to question notions of outer space above and spaces here on earth.

Research Aims

The project had three research aims:

1. to carry out this unique research which, for the first time, films behind-the-scenes of an Indian space mission.
2. to disseminate it worldwide via television broadcasts, festival screenings and academic conferences while at the same time measuring the social and political impact of the film.
3. to advance rigorous, research-led practice methodologies for filmmakers to research and investigate social inequalities directly aiming for public outreach and social impact.

Key to these research aims is the strategic use of narrative and aesthetic means to align a Western mainstream audience to the lived experiences of people from another continent and culture. These experiences are multi-layered in that the astrophysicists and children inhabit different yet adjacent spaces in Mumbai with the former pre-occupied with outer space while the latter with spaces here on earth.

Publicly, these new insights have been disseminated through broadcast screenings to 86 different countries in Asia, the Middle East and Africa via the National Geographic Channel, NHK in Japan, cinema screenings in London and other parts of the UK, Europe and India. Several screenings have been attended by the film's main protagonists, Vinita Navalkar attended the London screening and Sandhya the one in India, which has led to genuine dialogue and research dissemination.

Research Methods



Anthropologist Redfield carried out a text-based study in Guiana at the site of a French space station, “where French aerospace engineers live close to stone-age forest-dwellers.” Redfield called this study a ‘bricolage’, a term first used by Claude Levi-Strauss to mean that an author is ‘pottering about’ amid different kinds of sources and methodologies.

I adopted this bricolage approach and spent a period of eight years data gathering (2010-2018) using narrative, imagery and documentary and visual ethnographic techniques to engage a potentially wide and general audience with the lived experiences of people from another culture.

Redfield, P. (2000) *Space in the Tropics: from Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Research Findings

Sandhya and Krishna dream of one day visiting modern Mumbai, across the water from where they live. That journey is their goal while next door the scientists are thinking of outer space. This juxtaposition forces us to question our modern world. The clip below shows this sequence.

<https://vimeo.com/395555689> pw: 20space20

Research Findings

When the children get the opportunity to visit the Space Centre, Sandhya tells her Mum that she will 'handle Dad'. I am looking for, and using, these universal moments to engage a wide audience in this research. The clip below shows this sequence.

<https://vimeo.com/395555190> pw: 20space20

Research Findings

When the children get the chance to look into outer space, this challenges the way they think about their environment. The next day when recounting the trip to her friend, Sandhya compares the different spaces allocated to the Space Centre next door compared to their school. The clip below shows this sequence.

<https://vimeo.com/395555309> pw: 20space20

Research Findings

Like any young child, Sandhya has dreams of pursuing a variety of different career paths. Her mother experiences this moment with great affection. This is another universal moment when Sandhya, aged 12, is beginning to find her mother's affection embarrassing. The clip below shows this sequence.

<https://vimeo.com/395555067> pw: 20space20

Output



Indian Space Dreams. 77'. Producer/Director: Sue Sudbury, UK/India.

The link to the film is available from Sue Sudbury

smsudbury@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Dissemination



In terms of scholarship, the film and its methodologies have been presented at a variety of conferences:

12-15.02.20. Sudbury, S. LeaDMe: Learning, Digitalization and Media Conference, KC College, Mumbai. (Keynote)

2014. Sudbury, S. Non-fiction and Outer and Inner Spaces, Cosmologies Conference, Falmouth University.

Todd Avery, Professor of English, University of Massachusetts Lowell
“A stunning observation of the myriad details, domestic and professional, that define these staggeringly different everyday lives...this film has certainly made me ‘see’.”

Dissemination and Awards



Bertha DocHouse, Curzon cinema, Bloomsbury, London. 02.12.19

<https://www.curzoncinemas.com/film-info/dochouse-indian-space-dreams>

River to River Indian Film Festival, Florence, 08.12.19

Lighthouse Centre for the Arts, Poole, 04.02.20

TV Broadcasts to date:

08.02.20 National Geographic Channel – 86 countries across Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

25.01.20 National Geographic Channel India.

20.12.19 NHK Television, Japan.

06.03.20 Nomination for the Royal Television Society Award for Best Single Doc.

23.12.19 Winner of Gold Award in Spotlight Film Awards.

Italian journal article about the film in Micron, Ecologia, Scienza, Conoscenza. January 2020

<https://www.rivistamicron.it/lettura/i-sogni-dellindia/>.