

**An exploration of the reception of political documentary
film among young Mumbaikars in India**

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Ethical Approval

Ethics Approval (10/263) from the AUT University Ethics Committee was gained prior to commencement of the study and written informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the commencement of data collection.

As the aims of the research changed during the course of my study, amendments to my original ethics application was made and three separate approvals were obtained.

Interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation: March 30, 2012

Follow-up interviews: June 17, 2012

Qualitative surveys: October 28, 2012

Abstract

There is scarce research examining young people's reception of political documentary film, especially in India. Literature has continually noted the influence of the documentary genre on the consciousness, knowledge and actions of its audiences, thus making it an important genre to be studied. Stemming from a cultural studies perspective, and drawing from the active audience paradigm, this study sought to understand the reception of political documentary film among young, urban people living in Mumbai, India. Data on audience reception to two films *War and Peace* and *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* were gathered using two focus groups with youth, two filmmaker interviews, participant observation and surveys of two documentary film audience segments (members of documentary film groups, and university students).

Analysis of data revealed that participants perceived documentary film as, boring but informative and useful. The domination of Bollywood and youth participants' general lack of faith in the media influenced their engagement with documentaries. However, they did become more knowledgeable and critically discussed issues highlighted by the film with their peers, while applying relevant themes to their personal experiences and current social contexts. These findings support the active audience paradigm. Filmmakers cited an unfavourable environment as the main constraint to the political documentary film movement in India. Nevertheless, their commitment to political activism and social change fuels their desire to continue working. Therefore, although valued, political documentary struggles to gain a strong following among young Mumbaikars. To cultivate an appreciation for this genre among young audiences and influence social change, political documentary filmmakers must improve film aesthetics as well as increase access through electronic and social media. Further research is necessary to find ways to increase young audience engagement and expand the reach of political documentary film in India.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Political documentaries in India are involved in questioning and critiquing dominant power, ideology and institutions in society that serve to marginalize and increase inequalities between certain social groups (Nariman, 2006). They have an investigation function, in order to make up for the inadequacies of mainstream media (Nariman, 2006). Due to its ties with realism, political and social documentaries are able to affect their audiences by allowing them to visualize images of distress and suffering (Kahana, 2008). According to Benson and Snee (2008), in countries where media filter the news and influence the construction of political understanding, such films become essential. This is especially true of India where commentators consistently criticize the mainstream news media for being highly sensationalized and politically biased (Kumar, 2010; Dhavan, 2008).

Political documentary allows for novel ideas, thoughts and attitudes to enter the public sphere through its representation of issues that are often dismissed by mainstream media (Chanan, 2007). Additionally, the aesthetics of representing reality can be a political effect in itself that increases influence on publics (Benson & Snee, 2008). By their ability to teach, delight and move, these films can effectively influence changes in the socio-cultural, political and historical landscapes. This genre's future rests on its ability to influence and move its audiences towards active citizenship (Benson & Snee, 2008). Therefore political documentaries are an important communication medium to be examined and evaluated. To assess the role and impact of political documentary film on societies, it is important to examine how audiences interpret, use and respond to it (Kitzinger, 2004), for which a reception study is warranted (Govaert, 2007).

Giroux (2011) states that this power to influence is a result of ideas, ideologies and images presented in ways that impact our imagination and consciousness. According to Professor Pendakur, currently in India where hegemonic discourses of fascism, fundamentalism and greed are increasingly prevalent, there is a necessity for political documentary films to be the voice of rationality and resistance (Fischer, 2009). Additionally, with the gradual disappearance of civic engagement, film offers the opportunity of intervention as interpretation – that is, stimulating discussions and debate that connect the political sphere with the social and personal ones; increasing

knowledge, challenging thinking and encouraging critical self-reflection (Giroux, 2010; Whiteman, 2009). Thus the reception of political documentary is an important area to examine.

Problem Identification

Previous documentary film research has focused on examining questions about genre, the works of noted documentary filmmakers, and debates about issues including truth, reality, and representation in film (Dover, 2009). In contrast, there has been scarcity in documentary analysis using qualitative or cultural studies research techniques to recognize the social contexts in which documentary films are produced, distributed and circulated, and the expectations and reception experiences of documentary audiences (Dover, 2009). This is especially true of India. Of the few studies that do use a cultural studies approach, Harindranath (2009) has focused on how perceptions of documentary film affected audience engagement with this genre while acknowledging the strong influence of cultural context on audience interpretations of these texts. Srinivas (2002) states that audiences were never an important factor in Indian media studies, especially the dynamic process of reception and an acknowledgement of the influence of socio-cultural contexts. Similarly Singhal and Rogers (2001) and Kumar (2010), both state that most audience research in India is focused on quantitative analysis.

Of the limited amounts of studies that do use a qualitative approach, Harindranath (2009) focused on how perceptions of documentary film affected audience interpretation acknowledging the strong influence of cultural context. One other doctoral thesis from India by Srivani Mulugundam in 2002 shares similarities with this study. Although her main focus was the prevalence and complexities of documentary film production in India, from the perceptions of filmmakers, an analysis of text and the readings of documentary film among various segments of audience were used to supplement her analysis. The main thrust of her study was a focus on the functions, agenda, perspectives and productions of documentary film and their filmmakers in India. She found that filmmakers were fuelled by passion and a conscience to address the issues plaguing the society they lived in, while facing obstacles such as the lack of

funding, domination of Bollywood and the continual marginalization of documentary film as alternative.

The context of Mumbai is important to assess as it is important to understand the possibilities of political documentary film in India in an environment that is dominated by mainstream Bollywood cinema. Furthermore, Mumbai is the largest, most populated and diverse city in India and it is possible to claim that it is also the hub of media and communications for the country. Additionally, the media and communications landscape of India is ever changing, with timeliness of research required. Previous studies precede this one by over a decade. Thus, considerable differences will exist between the outcomes of the two.

Indian literature recognizes the power that media has on influencing its audiences. Media is noted as having the capacity, and the responsibility, to educate, inform, be a watchdog, increase participation and be a vehicle of social change (Sharma, 2002; Chand & Singh, 2002). Yet, there is sparse literature focusing on the role of informative and educational media and their effects, especially among marginalized research groups like youth. Levy (2008) states that the media is a very powerful vehicle in the process of self-actualization and for political use, having most impact over young audience groups. The persuasive and influential characteristics of political documentaries, coupled with its ability to resonate with youth are an important area to be studied as accurate and positive reception of such films can lead to social change.

An exhaustive search of international scholarly articles published in English, indicated that there was paucity in research examining the reception of political documentary among young people. Nolan (2010) assessed and found positive reception of political documentary film by university students, while Stoddard (2009) found similar effects among high school students. However, there were no studies examining the reception of political documentary among youth in Mumbai, India. This claim is supported by Dwyer (2010), who states that in India there has not been much research conducted on young people and cinema activities. Mulugundam (2002) assessed the reception of documentary among various groups in which youth (17-25 years) from Hyderabad and Mumbai were included. Results showed that participants questioned the intentions of filmmakers, and accurate reading of text was dependent on the level of personal and cultural capital of each participant, such as the level of education attained.

The magnitude of diversity in India is challenging for any academic research to be conducted. Most media research conducted in India can be classified under 'market research'- quantitative statistical analysis commissioned by advertising agencies (Kumar, 2010). The limited qualitative research conducted, has focused on evaluation of content (Harindranath, 2009). There is a dearth of literature on documentary and political documentary film, possibly because of the limited research and training being conducted in the field of communications. Most of the information available is outdated and there is a significant emphasis placed only on journalism (Singhal & Rodgers, 2001). Likewise, Kumar (2010) notes that most audience research conducted in India is quantitative with little acknowledgement of audience experiences of media. Until recently, most Indian universities did not acknowledge the importance of film studies, with only two national universities offering film studies at a Masters level (Kumar, 2010).

Researcher reflexivity

Iacono, Brown and Holtham (2009) state that the entire research process is affected by researcher subjectivities, in terms of their background, past experiences, knowledge and attitudes. My own position in relation to this study was a rather complex one, as I am both an insider and outsider to Indian culture in Mumbai. I am an insider because I am Indian by origin, having lived in Mumbai for the first thirteen years of my life. Since migrating to New Zealand, I return annually to Mumbai for a period of two-three months. I still maintain strong connections with people from Mumbai (family and friends) and stay on top of the current issues relevant to this city and the country. My ethnicity and age also make me an insider in terms of the demographic profile of participants in this project. De Bruin (2008) noted that the chances of getting a more accurate picture of young people's perceptions when conducting reception research are increased when facilitators or researchers are similar to participants.

Being an insider possibly allowed me to reduce power imbalances between me and my focus group participants, also aiding them to feel more comfortable during focus group discussions. Moreover, it helped me to decode culturally specific language and behaviour. However, I also consider myself an outsider to the extent that I've spent a significant and influential part of my life in New Zealand, and the socio-cultural,

political and historical contexts of this country play a huge role in my individual identity. Being an outsider meant that I approached this research process without any previous assumptions, thus allowing me to contain any inherent biases which could influence the findings.

Research Purpose and Objectives

On speaking with documentary filmmakers, academics and students in India, despite the existence of lively communities of interest organised around the production and viewing of social documentaries, I found that none of these groups were able to direct me towards comprehensive Indian texts by Indian authors on political documentary film and audience research. Although there is some academic literature contextualizing media studies, and in particular documentary film in India, preliminary discussion indicates that the research in this area is limited. This study attempts to fill these gaps in international and Indian literature.

As noted before, there is sparse literature on audience perceptions and experiences with political documentary film both internationally and in India. Additionally, youth are rarely represented in media communications research. This research explored the reception of two political documentary films among young Indian audiences from Mumbai, India. Second, it examined how youth perceive documentary films, ways they engage with them and the possible effects that political documentary film may have on young viewers. Of the two documentaries selected for this study, *War and Peace* directed by Anand Patwardhan will be the focus of this thesis. The second documentary, *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* directed by Shriprakash will be used to compare and to highlight any important themes that emerge when engaging with *War and Peace*. Moreover, *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* will be discussed in detail to highlight relevant themes that emerge from this research study, thus making valuable contributions to the Indian literature.

Anand Patwardhan is one of India's well-known documentary filmmakers receiving national and international acclaim (Halberstadt, 2004). Fischer (2009) and Vohra (2011) both credit Patwardhan to be an important figure in the political documentary film movement in India. He is responsible for playing a key role in the initiation of

Mumbai based initiatives, such as Vikalp, which rose in response to the censorship by the State of political documentary films that rain against the grain of their premises. Rajagopal and Vohra (2012) note that Patwardhan has significantly influenced documentary film production in India. Successfully making documentary film for the last three decades, Patwardhan specializes in social and political films. The political documentary films of Patwardhan strongly critique the dominant ideologies of Indian society that result in injustices and inequalities for the most marginalized in India.

This particular study looks at the reception of Indian political documentary among young audiences in Mumbai only. Additionally, Anand Patwardhan, the filmmaker whose film is being used to investigate reception is also a Mumbai-based independent documentary filmmaker. Therefore the context of this study is pertinent to the city of Mumbai. However, it is important to acknowledge the work going on in other parts of India, in particular New Delhi, which is also a thriving hub of political documentary productions. For example, *Magic Lantern Foundation* in New Delhi is currently working on fostering audience engagement with documentary film by creating initiatives such as opening up a national distribution centre that stocks and disseminates such films (Magic Lantern Foundation, 2012). It takes a much more collaborative and participatory approach to the production of documentary film, in comparison to a more independent movement in Mumbai. Therefore, there is a necessity to acknowledge the specificity of this study in relation to the context of Mumbai. This is because, for example, when discussing implications and outcomes of this research they may not be applicable to young audiences in New Delhi.

Any audience media reception study must pay attention to the production of the text, as the production process (aesthetics, filmmaker subjectivity and position, content) to some extent affects the way the text is interpreted and received by audiences. Therefore, acknowledging the influential role of the filmmaker, this research study provides information on the motivations of filmmakers who make these films in an unsupportive environment. Filmmaker perspectives and the perceptions of young audiences participating in this study provide a rich, in-depth comprehensive account of a strand of political documentary film, its production and reception. In India, political documentary films suffer censorship and the lack of opportunity to distribute their films and generate revenue. Thus there is a curiosity to examine the continual growth in production of political documentaries in spite of such restrictive contexts. Filmmakers

are key to sharing their insights into the motivations that keep them going in the face of adversity.

This study used a cultural studies approach to reception research. It is an approach that enables the examination of the production of documentary texts, how audiences identify and interpret messages and the relationship between films and viewer within the context in which production and consumption occurs. In particular, this study drew from the active audience paradigm which recognizes the ability of audiences to actively construct meaning from media texts. Qualitative methodologies allow researchers to assess subjectivities, similarities and differences in interpretation while producing rich, in-depth data on the reception of political documentary film. The cultural studies perspective was chosen as it values subjectivity, encourages diversity and acknowledges the importance of context. This perspective is especially applicable to an Indian audience as the socio-cultural, historical and political contexts impact greatly on every facet of Indian society (Kumar, 2010; Harindranath, 2009). With an emphasis placed on subjectivity, participant views, meanings and interpretations generated throughout this study are valued as significant contributions to the research process.

Due to the limited amount of literature, this research is an exploratory study that provides insight into the reception of political documentary film among young, urban residents of Mumbai, India. This is supplemented by a recognition of the context in which the production and reception of Indian documentary film occurs. As filmmakers also have a huge influence on the reception of the film, this study will also examine the perspectives on political documentary film in India of two Indian filmmakers whose films are the focus of this research.

Thesis statement:

Anand Patwardhan is one of India's most well-known filmmakers. He is most recognized for his political documentaries that critique dominant ideologies, such as Hindutva¹ (religious fundamentalism), nationalism and paternalism. One of his many well-known films is *War and Peace* (2002), which was banned by the Central Board of Film Certification (India) but approved by the High Court of Mumbai as a film necessary to be viewed by all Indian citizens. Such documentaries are impacted by an unfavourable media context affecting both their production and reception. Reasons include: (1) the dominance and infiltration of Bollywood films throughout Indian society, thus making it harder for alternative forms of cinema to flourish; (2) the inability to access opportunities for civic engagement and political action, and (3) the struggle in the enhancement of self in the face of adversity (terrorism, corruption, competition) contributing to political apathy among young audiences. Thus young, urban, middle class Mumbaikars interested in the transformative potential of political documentary film are constrained by the socio-cultural context they inhabit in India's largest city, Mumbai.

This research study will answer the following research questions:

1. In what way(s) could *War and Peace* (Anand Patwardhan, 2002) be considered a political documentary?
2. What are the intentions and perspectives of political documentary filmmakers such as Patwardhan and Shriprakash when they make their documentaries within the context of documentary production in India?
3. How do young Mumbaikars perceive and engage with political documentary?
 - a. What are the various fora through which audiences engage with documentary films in Mumbai?
4. How do political documentary films affect the political consciousness of young Indian audiences?

¹ Hindutva is defined as a dominant religious ideology based on the premises of fundamentalism and communalism (Kazmi, 1999).

Thesis outline

This thesis has been divided into six chapters, beginning with this chapter – the introduction.

Chapter two, the literature review, will focus on providing an overview of and contextualizing political documentary film and their audiences, with an emphasis on India. The chapter will begin with a description of documentary film concentrating on political documentary. Next, it will provide an overview of the Indian media context in order to contextualize this study. The next section reviews literature about documentary film in India, the obstacles it faces, its audiences, and concludes with political documentary film and its filmmakers. Finally, it will describe the reception of documentary film and characteristics of these audiences.

Chapter three, methodology, discusses the research process of this study. It provides a detailed analysis of the philosophy underlying the use of the cultural studies approach, followed by a description of the qualitative methods used for acquiring data for this study.

Chapter four, results and discussion (part one), constructs a textual analysis of both films, and identifies the key characteristics that define them as political documentaries. It then proceeds onto describing outlets for accessing political documentary film for young Mumbaikars.

Chapter five, results and discussion (part two), evaluates the perceptions and expectations of political documentary film among young Mumbaikars. It also describes the intentions of Indian political documentary filmmakers, supplementing young participant discussions. The next section examines the reception of the two political documentary films among young Mumbaikars.

Chapter six, summary and conclusions, provides an overview of the significant findings of this study. It also describes the strengths and limitations of the study, contributions to current literature, implications for professional practice and recommendations for future research. Final comments on this research study are made.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study examines the reception of political documentary film among young audiences from Mumbai, India as well as locating the role of documentary filmmakers in the process of production. The chapter opens with an overview of documentary film, giving special focus to political documentary. Second, the impact of social context on audiences is important for reception research, therefore this study situates the general context of Indian media. Third, the chapter discusses documentary film in India and obstacles such as censorship that hinder its evolution. Next, it gives emphasis to political documentary film in India and the people who produce them. Finally, I conclude with a review of the literature on documentary film audiences. Through the course of the chapter, I thread through references to the production of Anand Patwardhan's *War and Peace* (2002), using the documentary as a case study to focus discussion.

Documentary Film and Political Documentary

Documentary films represent the world, making factual claims about the places we inhabit (Eitzen, 1995; Nichols, 2001). Bill Nichols has discussed documentary film in terms of “discourses of sobriety” – namely discourses of economics, politics, science and history (Nichols, 2001, p. 39). Initially, this genre of film privileged an expository and informative style that was linked with being truthful and objective, rather than using creative and imaginative content (Renov, 1993; Govaert, 2007). It was based on the premise of conveying truthful information over wanting to please or provide pleasure to its audience (Renov, 1993; Fox, 2010; Corner, 2008). The positive evaluations by audiences of recent aesthetic advances in fiction film have compelled documentary filmmakers to recognize the importance of producing films with high aesthetic value. Fischer (2009) notes, that to attract audiences, political documentaries must put effort into the aesthetics of their film, thus appealing to wider audience groups.

The production of documentary film, its content and aesthetics are strongly affected by social, cultural, historical and political forces that are in play during the films' conception, production, distribution and consumption (Renov, 1993; Morley, 1992). There are strands of documentary associated with an observational form that attempts to present an objective, unmediated truth (Govaert 2007). Other strands of documentary practice have abandoned attempts to remain neutral and objective, foregrounding aesthetic strategies to acknowledge the subjectivity of filmmaking (Landesman, 2008). In his contribution to the book *Rethinking Documentary: New perspective and practice*, Wayne (2008) makes the point that rather than being a purveyor of facts and knowledge, documentaries challenge the audience with questions and arguments about the construction of reality, testing out uncertainties.

In contrast, Bruzzi (2000) argues that documentary audiences do not need to be constantly alerted to the fact that documentaries are “a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other” (p. 4). This implies that questions of authenticity and trust continue to be of concern to the documentary genre. Documentary films engage with conventions that demonstrate a rhetoric of truth which has a certain level of value among audiences (Renov, 1993). However, not all audiences are able to accurately gauge the arguments and truth claims proposed by films engaging with these conventions. For instance, several fiction films embrace documentary film aesthetics to get a ‘realistic look’, such as grainy film scenes or the use of a shaky hand-held camera (Glynne, 2008; Landesman, 2008). Films like *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrcik and Eduardo Sanchez, 1999), make use of documentary aesthetics (shaky footage, loss of focus) to replicate a personal video diary (Landesman, 2008). Such blurring of fiction and documentary conventions present audiences with a conundrum – is it fact or fiction? According to Brian Winston (2008), the ‘truth’ claims of documentary films are better judged through audience interpretations, rather than the film/filmmaker staking such a claim (Cunningham, 2000). Therefore it is important to investigate the various ways in which audiences respond to the truth claims proposed by documentary film.

Social and political documentaries both share some commonalities, in that they are often involved in representing those whose voices have been muted by the powerful of society. A driving force of both these forms of documentary is a strong critique, be it of social groups or institutions (Kahana, 2008). Often these two strands of documentary

are referred to interchangeably. Yet, the social documentary is a much broader domain. Political documentary relates to, and is one aspect of the broader social documentary strand. More so than social documentary, political documentary film engages in an overt expression and strong critique of the political (Kahana, 2008), be it public figures or institutions. It seeks to represent the structures and activities of political parties by highlighting their references to broader political contexts (Corner, 2009). The political documentary is easily classified where undertones of the political resonate through each argument presented (Corner, 2009).

Documentary scholars have argued that the sub-genre of political documentary has a particular function to engage with the public by providing information for critical reflection rather than being distracted by fictional construction thus increasing an appeal to the viewer (Harindranath, 2009; Winston, 2008; Aufderheide, 2005; Landesman, 2008; Wayne, 2008). Vohra (2011) states that an 'original' cast and 'original' material/images allows content to be more significant and better interpreted by audiences. Additionally, the declining rate of efficient investigative journalism has increased the need for documentary films (Vladica & Davis, 2008). They are an outlet for political activity (Ba, 2007) and social activism while creating social change (Lipowski, Zeldes & Albers, 2011). For example, *The Dying Rooms* (Kate Blewett and Brian Woods, 1995) highlighted the negative effects of China's one-child policy and directed attention to the blatant breach of human rights in one of the most powerful industrial nations of the world. This film inspired various charities and human rights organisations to become involved in reforming this policy and improve conditions in these orphanages (Glynne, 2008).

Political documentary films stemmed from a cinema that was culturally and socially rooted. They often represent marginalized people, those who are usually excluded from mainstream media content, and whose voices are muted in political discussion and reform (de Jong, 2011). Most political documentaries engage with matters of local, national and global importance. Therefore, most content is always based on social issues, societal problems or other serious matters, such as representing injustices and inequalities between groups (Corner, 2008; Gaines, 1999; Smaill, 2007). Sandercock and Attili (2010) used documentary as a catalyst for initiating discussion about integration of Canadian immigrants into the Vancouver community. The film was later used as a model for public policy in several cities across Canada and training material

for future community development issues. Additionally, the film encouraged self-reflexivity and empowered community members (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Thus there is rhetoric of social consciousness embedded in social and political documentary film.

Such films seek to ignite a feeling of citizenship in individuals and thus bridge the gap between themselves and community engagement (Kahana, 2008). Political documentaries highlight the nature and activities of various parties in order that by making such environments more visible, it would open up more available spaces for audiences to engage in social and political action (Kahana, 2008). Indeed, Giroux (2011) believes that in a time where civic engagement is diminishing, films may be the answer to opening up a space for critical thinking and public engagement. Films are able to travel across various socio-cultural spaces and they carry “a kind of pedagogical weight that other mediums lack” (Giroux, 2011, p. 686). For filmmakers like Jean Renoir, rather than just being a source of profit and entertainment, movies were a tool to promote political and social justice, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of the civic responsibility of art (Bowles, 2006). In this respect, they addressed the gap left by commercial, Hollywood cinema that did not pay attention to culturally specific issues and history (Goldsmith, 1998).

In her informal survey of filmmakers and academics, Gaines (1999) found that this group was only able to identify films that caused some sort of influence, rather than irrefutable claims of social change. Nonetheless there is continued hope that independent documentary films will transform the social landscape and bring about political change. Gaines (1999) states that emphasis should be placed on documentary films ‘trying’ to change the world. By their commitment to social change, such films are able to avoid the problem of generating quantifiable social change. Certainly there are films that have created positive change. For example, *An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim, 2006) sought to increase understanding and motivate citizens to action in the area of global warming. Lipowski et al. (2011) cite that in the year after its release, several organizations, political leaders and governments took a stand against global warming by forming new rules and regulations, or changing legislation.

Belinda Smaill (2007) emphasizes the extent to which political documentary film is engaged in eliciting empathy from the audience by showing various social problems.

Insofar as empathy, as an emotion, is embodied, political documentary can be said to impact on both the body and mind. This is not dissimilar to Gaines' (2007) point that documentary visualization of political struggle will result in an engagement of both the body (actions) and mind (knowledge). The documentary rhetoric of realism underpins the ways in which the genre acts as historical evidence, a key reason why documentary films are powerful. Gaines (2007) also believes that political documentary films "use the world to transform the world" (p. 46). Thus, it is a useful pedagogical tool that incorporates image and sound to educate and open up alternative ways of seeing the world (Giroux, 2011).

Additionally, there is a strong sense of advocacy exhibited in political documentary. These films are tools to empower the socially or politically marginalized populations, while simultaneously trying to transform society (Wayne, 2008; Sandercock & Attili, 2010; Smaill, 2007). Social and political film can also be used to facilitate political dialogue. For example, in Canada, due to the decline in local economy and collapse of infrastructure, the government planned to relocate all the inhabitants of Fogo Island (Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Filmmaker Colin Low and academic Don Snowdon used documentary film to initiate discussions between residents and government officials. By the end of production, the government cancelled its plans for relocation and opened up a school for the people of Fogo Island (Sandercock & Attili, 2010).

Such forms of art and political activism are important to note as we live in a time where consumers are bombarded with various media texts. Currently, many political documentaries are preoccupied by issues of violence, political struggles, war, and the critique of dominant ideologies and political establishments (Lal, 2007; Wayne, 2008). *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004) brings to the forefront negligence of corporate responsibility, instead of the traditional focus on marginalized peoples (Smaill, 2007). Others portray a strong critique of private organisations and institutions. Films like *Supersize me* (Morgan Spurlock, 2004) and *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price* (Robert Greenwald, 2005) have been based around the critique, and persistent negative portrayal of the operations of two-well known corporate icons in the United States, McDonalds and Wal-Mart Stores (Pompper & Higgins, 2007).

By associating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), filmmakers can represent important issues. Collaborating in the initial phases of the project will result in a richer

production as filmmakers will be attuned with important details, and have in-depth research and knowledge about the issue (Frankham, 2004). Additionally, the collaborative effort results in both parties having a vested interest in the film thus ensuring more effort into its dissemination. Filmmakers could also have the opportunity to link up with international networks/organisations that are affiliated with the local NGO and thus open up wider channels of distribution. To those filmmakers worried about losing their vision in such a process, Frankham (2004) states that the collaborative nature of the process ensures that both parties are able to reach decisions where both views are represented in the film. Additionally, filmmakers also become film activists and have a significant role in movements for social change (Frankham, 2004).

There is some critique of social documentaries, in that the people and the issues they represent are victimized and simplified (Davidson, 1983). Yet social and political documentaries serve as a reminder of the exploitation and injustices that occur in communities across the globe (Smaill, 2007). The level of engagement with social and political matters is a marker of value of a documentary film. There are documentaries that stay away from social and political issues, however they receive less critical attention (Corner, 2008). Recently, although political documentaries have been flourishing in production and consumption around the world, they continue to receive limited attention (Vladica & Davis, 2008; Lal, 2007). Of these countries, India has been noted as one of the many developing countries in which there is a resurgence of political documentary. Political documentary films have been revitalized due to technological advances such as small digital video cameras and editing software. However, this relative ease of producing films has been met with growing challenges to accessing funding, avoiding censorship, and commercial release (Lal, 2007).

Media Contexts in India

Globally, India is the largest producer of films (Lorenzen & Täube, 2008), and is home to the second largest movie industry after Hollywood (Rajan, 1996; Khan, 2009). Movie theatres, also known as cinemas or multiplexes, are an integral part of the landscape of India, especially in urban areas. Bollywood cinema, based in Mumbai, is most famous in India and around the world (Dwyer, 2010). The impact of

commercial/mainstream Bollywood cinema is seen throughout – in fashion, on billboards, advertisements and language (Jacob, 1998). It plays an essential role in the formation of cultural, social and national processes; and is often used in promoting Hindu fundamentalist ideology (Hindutva) (Khan, 2009; Kazmi, 1999). Its focus on hegemonic meanings, such as paternalism, caste and gender differentials, and conservatism, results in a repetition of ideals and discourses, stifling discussion and debate. Thus Kazmi (1999) states that only serious cinema can be considered a vehicle for social change. Conversely, others note that Bollywood movies like *Fanaa* (Kunal Kohli, 2006), which focused on the volatile Kashmir situation, India-Pakistan relations and terrorist attacks in contemporary India, stimulates conversations about important socio-political issues in India, such as national identity, Muslim identity, Hindu-Muslim relations and the alternatives for Muslims in modern-day India (Khan, 2009).

Originating in the socialist era (1947-1964), initially public broadcast networks like Doordarshan² focused on providing educational information to improve development (Singhal & Rodgers, 2001). However, with the advent of globalization, and the rise of competing private networks, this focus shifted. This resulted in a decrease in quality and frequency of public service/educational programmes, and a push for more commercial content with a focus on meeting targets and increasing revenue (Singhal & Rodgers, 2001; Mehrotra, 2006). Currently Doordarshan dedicates only 10% of its broadcasts to educational programmes for youth, farmers, and other groups with programmes focusing on areas of agriculture, nutrition and health (Kumar, 2010).

Contrary to its main duty as a watchdog, the Indian media often functions as a lapdog (Kumar, 2010). The elite and powerful exert pressure to exploit the Indian media to propagate their own personal/political agenda (Kumar, 2010; Dhavan, 2008; Rajan, 1996; Singhal & Rodgers, 2001). This results in most media content being highly politicized in favour of one group or another, as seen during the elections where different broadcast channels screened material in favour of their preferred political party while criticizing the rest (Kumar, 2010). Additionally, most news and current affairs is bias and highly sensationalized. This equates to a lack of audience faith in media. Kumar (2010) notes that citizens often oppose or reject political media messages. This is possibly one of the main reasons why information conveyed via word of mouth takes

² Doordarshan is India's only free-to-air public service broadcaster.

precedence over information from the media. This is especially for rural audiences as most media content is focused towards satisfying the wishes of urban and elite audience segments (Kumar, 2010).

Documentary Film in India

Early Indian cinema, originating post-independence in the 1950s, viewed film as a serious art form allowing expression of issues plaguing Indian society post-independence thus giving rise to responsible filmmaking with a focus on realism (Bhowmik, 2009). This kind of cinema that focused on socio-political issues while trying to develop the political consciousness of its audiences was labelled parallel, art or new wave cinema (Vohra, 2011; Venkiteswaran, 2009). During the Nehru era, between 1947 and 1964, the state wanted to promote responsible citizenship. The first taste Indian audiences got of documentary films were patriotic short clips (similar to news clips) screened in cinema halls before the commencement of the commercial film (Bhowmik, 2009; Kesavan, 2006). During the '60s and early '70s documentary films comprised Olympic Games coverage and the visits of political leaders to foreign countries (Kesavan, 2006).

Since then, documentary film continues to be the alternative, operating outside mainstream Bollywood cinema (Vohra, 2011; Bose, 2005). Generalized into three broad categories (educational, social/political and political propaganda), they are attached with a purpose – to bear and fulfil civic responsibility, such as fuelling the nations' progress through social development (Kesavan, 2006; Vohra, 2011). As a result, such films were heavily tied to realism and being objective, using a rational and logical form of address (Kapur, 2006). However, contemporary documentary has recognized the value of human experience and draws more freely from symbolism and emotive forms of address (Kapur, 2006). Documentary films showcased on broadcast media are rarely shown during prime time or are one off screenings (Kesavan, 2006; Mehrotra, 2006). They are not showcased in cinemas, and film screenings have to be organized by filmmakers with the only publicity often being word of mouth (Kesavan, 2006).

The documentary film movement in India still struggles to get a firm foothold due to careful regulation and monopolization of all production, finance and distribution outlets for documentary film by the Indian government (Fischer, 2009). This is facilitated through two state governed bodies – The Films Division of India and The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). This is especially applicable to independent political documentaries, which are usually involved in critiquing the dominant economic and political systems (Fischer, 2009). The Films Division is the largest producer of documentaries globally and typically commissions and supports documentaries focusing on fostering national pride (Fischer, 2009). Content includes cultural heritage, biographies, Indian culture and traditions, which serve to overwhelm Indian cinemas with state endorsed propaganda (Fischer, 2009).

Documentaries operating outside the Films Division do not enjoy box office success, as most commercial distributors are too anxious about being associated with film that critiques the establishment (Bose, 2005). The CBFC continues to censor most political documentary films. Additionally, Rajagopal and Vohra (2012) note that there is no established record of the evolution of documentary film and have found it hard to access documentary films made post-Independence. This is in contrast to the steady increase of political documentary film production in India over the last twenty years due to the relatively low cost of equipment, advances in technology and decreased cost of producing film (Rajagopal & Vohra, 2012; Fischer, 2009).

Kazmi (1999) states that the focus on individual problems, without situating them in a broader context is one of the biggest obstacles facing filmmakers of serious cinema. Documentary films in India focus on specificity of issue, context and people, so that they are able to provide an accurate representation of reality when investigating an important subject. In relation to this, the diversity in India hinders the ability of the film to engage wider audiences as the pertinence of the situation differs by region, caste, culture and religion. Therefore, what might be important to people from one state/city may be completely irrelevant for those living in another. Bollywood in comparison is able to draw large audiences, in particular those from lower classes, because of its ability to mix reality with illusion while focusing on broader aspects, such as community, culture, dialogue, experiences and beliefs (Kazmi, 1999).

New Delhi is the political hub of India, as it is surrounded by political institutions like the Parliament and other government organisations, such as the ministry of education and the military. Additionally, being the capital of India, most international organisations working for development are based here. Institutions such as the Public Service Broadcasting Trust, which works to create an independent, democratic and supportive space for documentary film are based in New Delhi (Public Service Broadcasting Trust, 2012). Such an atmosphere creates a positive space for political documentary film to flourish. Similar collectives fostering the growth, development and consumption of documentary film, such as Raqs Media Collective are also based in New Delhi.

The *Magic Lantern Foundation* is another initiative based in New Delhi, founded by a collective of social activists and media professionals (Magic Lantern Foundation, 2012). Their approach to producing documentary is a grassroots, bottom-up approach. It is increasingly participatory and collaborative. In conjunction with the people affected, other activists, and NGOs, filmmakers produce texts that serve to represent content often left out or misrepresented by mainstream media. The people of *Magic Lantern Foundation* made documentary films in an attempt to stimulate and expand debate on various issues, such as deforestation and the negative impacts of tourism. Their films are used to initiate campaigns and achieve social change. In an attempt to close the gap between documentary film and Indian audiences, they also established a magazine providing information about socially concerned cinema. Currently the people at *Magic Lantern Foundation* source and distribute documentary films, while working towards the formation of a national and international distribution centre improving access to documentary films for Indian audiences (Magic Lantern Foundation, 2012).

Documentary film production in Mumbai on the other hand, is much more independent. It operates within the same environment as India's largest and most popular cinema – Bollywood. This cinema has been called the opium of the masses, evident in the scores of people rushing to secure tickets for the first show of their favourite film or in their idolization of Bollywood celebrities. International and Indian research notes a strong relationship between Indian audiences and Bollywood film. As outlined in Indian literature, this domination of Bollywood is responsible for the lack of opportunities for production, dissemination and consumption of documentary film. As Mumbai is the

locus of Bollywood cinema, its domination in this context is much more prevalent and adverse to political documentary film.

Based in Mumbai, Anand Patwardhan is a well known Indian documentary filmmaker, successfully making documentaries for over three decades (Halberstadt, 2004). Specializing in political documentaries, Patwardhan singles out controversial issues and represents the marginalized while situating them within the Indian socio-cultural and political contexts (Singh & Bhargava, 2002). The content of his films makes them political. For example, in conservative India, Patwardhan was the first filmmaker to investigate the politics of sexuality in his film *Father, Son and Holy War* (1986) (Kapur, 2006). He critiqued that masculinity in India was a fundamentalist concept used to further authoritarian enterprises of the government, and even ordinary citizens.

Patwardhan's film *In the name of God* (1992) looks at the struggle between Hindus and Muslims over the use of land in Ayodhya and the bombing of the Babri Masjid by Hindu fundamentalists. Although this issue lay dormant for a while, the Indian High Court recently reopened this case to resolve the ongoing dispute (Mohan, 2010). As Patwardhan was able to capture a firsthand account of what happened in 1992, this film can be used as contextual evidence to help in political decisions, as historical and educational archives and for citizens interested in the history of this ongoing dilemma (Sharma, 2002). Most often, Patwardhan is involved in critiquing fundamentalist Hindu ideology – Hindutva – and has done so in several films such as *In Memory of Friends; In the name of God; Father, Son and Holy War; War and Peace*.

Patwardhan does not rely too much on aesthetic conventions, such as heavy editing and background music. His style is more journalistic and expository as he uses archival footage and situates his films within a historical context to support his argument and provide much needed background information. Patwardhan edits his films using juxtaposition, where stereotypical images of Indian society and culture are contrasted with candid interviews that suggest the opposite (Halberstadt, 2004). In *In the name of God*, Patwardhan foregrounds a Hindu politician publicly promising that the cross-country protest undertaken for the Babri mosque demolition will not result in deaths. This is followed by archival images of newspaper articles with headlines highlighting the number of deaths and the subsequent increases nationwide. Such an approach stems from the strand of documentary which emphasizes an accurate representation of reality,

over creative content with the premise that this will increase audience engagement and faith in what they see

Censorship of documentary film

The Constitution of India states that even though citizens have the right to freedom of speech and expression, in the interests, integrity and security of the nation or individual states, restrictions may be imposed by the government (Rajan, 1996). Dhavan (2008) suggests that the freedom of speech of political documentary filmmakers has been replaced with coercion into silence due to the ideologies and practices of the State. Through censorship, political officials and those of civil society use their authority to restrict filmmakers' right to freely express themselves through the creation and exhibition of films (Dhavan, 2008; Bhowmik, 2009).

The CBFC is the main obstacle for political documentaries in India (Fischer, 2009). According to Fischer (2009) it is simply an extension of the State that serves to promote the ideologies and interests of the State. Under the cloak of film certification, the CBFC continues to perform censorship rather than certification. Censorship restricts the ability of filmmakers to freely showcase their films to audiences, and the freedom of audiences to access such films is obstructed (Bhowmik, 2009). The CBFC issues a certification which is necessary for any film to be screened in India. Vohra (2011) points out that the documentary work of both Grierson and Vertov is evidence of the extent to which the genre was able to stimulate audiences by comprehensively and clearly laying out the possibilities of democracy, equality and development. The possibilities of such outcomes can disturb those in power and result in stringent forms of censorship for political documentary film (Vohra, 2011).

For Indian political documentary films, censorship is often conducted in the interests of maintaining communal harmony between the various religious and cultural groups in India, or to uphold a certain standard of morality (Bhowmik, 2009). In relation to this, there have been several Indian documentaries that have been banned nationwide. *Aakrosh* (Ramesh Pimple, 2003) and *Final Solution* (Rakesh Sharma, 2003) depicting communal violence between the Hindus and Muslims were banned due to the possibility that they may remind people of the earlier atrocities committed and fuel

more hatred between religious communities (Fischer, 2009; Bhowmik, 2009). These documentaries focusing on this issue, although made by Hindus, revealed a pro-Muslim angle much to the displeasure of the CBFC (Bose, 2005). The ultimate goal of the CBFC was to stifle political discussion and critical thought about this issue, ignoring them rather than informing audiences to prevent them from ever happening again.

The State and CBFC are easily swayed by intimidation from political societies and fundamentalist groups, responding to their requests to not incite an aggressive public reaction (Dhavan, 2008). Recently in India, such social pressures have escalated to severe forms of intimidation such as destruction of property, physical violence, vandalism, protests or threats to certain people (Dhavan, 2008; Liang, 2006). These are more often than not carried out by Hindu fundamentalist groups using violence to curb freedom of expression (Dhavan, 2008). Dhavan (2008) classifies this as forms of 'social censorship' and is a new form of censorship in India. The student right wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) party complained to the CBFC when a university in Mumbai attempted to screen films addressing the Gujarat communal riots (Fischer, 2009).

The CBFC is run by a single chairman, and between twelve to thirty five advisors, all appointed by the State. Therefore, they are more loyal to the State serving to its needs through the sanctioning of State approved discourses in film, rather than those of the citizen (Bhowmik, 2009; Fischer, 2009). The small numbers of politically affiliated authorities, often with no knowledge of Indian cinema, operate in stark contrast to the needs of 1.5 billion Indians. Patwardhan's experience with the censorship of *War and Peace* exemplifies the operations of the CBFC. The organisation's decision to request cuts to the documentary was determined by an advisory panel of four members, two of which were affiliated with the BJP (Fischer, 2009). This Hindu fundamentalist political party is the subject of Patwardhan's critique in *War and Peace*. Neither Patwardhan, nor any representatives for this film, were allowed to discuss the sanctions ordered by the CBFC in relation to *War and Peace* (Fischer, 2009). Moreover the CBFC even performed roles outside its jurisdiction, such as cancelling the documentary's screening at the Kolkata Film Festival (2003) under the excuse that the film was damaged, and a few weeks later closing its screening at a private Mumbai residence.

The battle between the CBFC and Patwardhan over the initial censorship of *War and Peace* is well known in Indian documentary circles. Moreover, as this research study is focused around the reception of *War and Peace*, it is useful to gain an insight into the processes of obtaining a pass certification from the CBFC for this film. It also provides an overview of the obstacles that most political documentary filmmakers in India need to overcome. The following is a list of deletions, as suggested by an examining committee affiliated with the CBFC:

1. Delete the scenes showing Pakistanis burning India's national flags. [But nothing was said regarding Indians burning Pakistan's national flag]
2. Delete the scene showing a Buddhist dalit leader objecting to India's nuclear tests being conducted on Buddha's birthday and to its codename as 'Buddha smile'
3. Delete the dalit song, which says that the killer of Gandhi was a Brahmin
4. Delete all references to exposition by telheka.com in the film
5. Delete part of an interview by an Indian scientist, especially where he says, 'China is India's next enemy'
6. Delete all speeches by politicians, including those by the central ministers and even the prime minister (Bhowmik, 2009, p. 21).

As seen above, the deletions initially suggested by the CBFC were not necessary as this content posed no real threat to national security. Patwardhan challenged the examining committee and upon appealing to the revising committee he was presented with an additional fifteen suggested deletions (Bhowmik, 2009). These were mostly in reference to the criticism of the BJP government that was in power at the time. Images and scenes in the film were referred to as "contemptuous of racial, religious or other groups...pointless or avoidable scenes of violence, cruelty or horror...endangering public order" (Bhowmik, 2009, p. 21).

In response, Patwardhan appealed to the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal who reduced the list to two cuts and an insertion (Bhowmik, 2009). Patwardhan did not give in and involved the courts. Appealing to the Bombay High Court, within a weeks time, *War and Peace* was finally granted a 'U'³ certification without any of the suggested

³ 'U' stands for Universal. This implies that the film is suitable for all ages. It is similar to the 'G' rating for general audiences in New Zealand.

deletions/insertion as they were not justified (Bhowmik, 2009). Additionally, the High Court was noted as saying that in the interest of democracy, speech should not be suppressed. By doing so, all of society is negatively impacted upon (Bhowmik, 2009). Rajan (1997) states that the Indian Courts have stood by the filmmakers in their right to freely express themselves, more so than any other system set up to do the same.

Political Documentary Films in India

At the end of the '70s there was a dramatic shift in the Indian social climate and a growing distress of citizens towards the political system (Venkiteswaran, 2009; Kesavan, 2006). The political documentary movement in India gained momentum in 1975, when the country was in the Emergency period as then President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, in conjunction with the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, revoked constitutional rights, civil liberties and killed/imprisoned innocent citizens (Fischer, 2009; Kumar, 2010). It was during this period that, a then student filmmaker, Anand Patwardhan produced *Waves of Revolution* (1974). This film is a documentation of an uprising of the people in Bihar who grew discontent with the widening inequalities between the rich and the poor (Patwardhan, 2004). The dangers of State response to the uprising meant that Patwardhan smuggled the footage overseas to have it edited and released in India (Fischer, 2009). It was an important film for the independent political documentary movement in India. As Vohra (2011) notes, many consider that the potential of documentary film was realized in the 1970s through the films of Patwardhan.

Vohra (2011) suggests that all documentary film in India, in a sense, is political because of the debates surrounding the political nature of any documentary in terms of its ability to reveal and raise questions about the dominant discourses and vested interests of political and powerful groups. Additionally, the style of Indian political documentary, use of juxtaposition or activist conventions, contributes to this political nature (Vohra, 2011). Political documentary filmmaking in India is akin to the activist style of filmmaking made famous in Latin America, with a commitment to the marginalized and a reformation of the public sphere (Vohra, 2011; Kapur, 2006). It is the people's cinema. According to Professor Manjunath Pendakur, in the current atmosphere of India where hegemonic discourses of fascism, fundamentalism and greed are

increasingly prevalent, there is a necessity of such political documentary films to be the voice of rationality and resistance (Fischer, 2009).

Political documentaries in India are distinct from the State-commissioned patriotic, nationalistic films. These documentaries questioned such jingoistic ideals instead, representing the voices of the marginalized (Fischer, 2009; Nariman, 2006). Despite the difficulties outlined thus far, political documentaries in India are not afraid to critique political systems, thus encouraging debate and enhancing public understanding (Nariman, 2006). This in turn results in such documentaries performing a sort of ‘watchdog’ function on behalf of citizens, while also improving the activities of such systems by exposing them. Political documentaries are independent productions that operate outside the realm of government funding and sponsorship, largely due to their content (Fischer, 2009). As the subjects they approach are highly politicized and often a critique of dominant political ideologies and institutions, such documentaries are produced using meagre resources and finances.

Political documentary filmmakers in India are faced with numerous challenges and obstacles – from getting past the CBFC to limited resources and funding. Most filmmakers do not have the strength or the resources to go to court numerous times as Patwardhan did for *War and Peace*. After a while, this takes a toll and most filmmakers give up (Bose, 2005; Fischer, 2009). However, there are those whose consciences never let them retire, and whose passion for the cause and idealism for a better India keeps them going. Despite all the obstacles, India continues to produce quality documentary films that are socially and politically relevant (Sen, 2006). For example, *Partners in Crime* (Paromita Vohra, 2011) addresses the complexity of the relationship between the internet and piracy, as fundamental to changing the meaning of the word copyright (Persistence Resistance, 2012). *The Immoral Daughters in the Land of Honour* (Nakul Singh Sawhney, 2011) explores how empowered women confront and challenge honour crimes, caste and gender discrimination, in the highly patriarchal society they live in (Persistence Resistance, 2012). However, the lack of a formal and effective distribution system constrains their ability to impact audiences.

Due to the inadequacies in support, funding and resources for political documentary filmmakers in India, they turn to international organisations and agencies for help in this area. However, Nishta Jain, a Mumbai based documentary filmmaker, notes that such

collaborations are not always beneficial. Jain expresses an immense pressure to conform to the wishes of her European funders which ultimately changed some of the premises of her film *Lakshmi and Me* (2008) (Matzner, 2012). In her film she addresses inequalities and power differentials between the domestic help and their owners. The film was only supported to be made in English which resulted in it not being able to engage lower class domestic help who were the intended target audiences to bring about positive change in this issue that affects them (Matzner, 2012).

Broadcast television has started allocating some time to documentary screenings. However, shows like *Documentary 24x7* on *NDTV* only provide a forty minute slot, inclusive of breaks for advertisements and a 'breaking news' banner scrolling on the bottom of the screen throughout (Matzner, 2012). Jain and other Mumbai-based documentary filmmakers are unwilling to subject their film to such regulations and distractions, rightly so, and thus have limited options using television as an outlet for distribution and audience engagement. In response, political documentary filmmakers organize mass screenings at public venues, such as sports fields, which opens up a space for engagement and dialogue (Matzner, 2012). Similarly for his latest film *Jai Bhim Comrade* (2011), Patwardhan uses the social networking website *Facebook* to provide information and promote free public screenings that he is conducting all over India. The successes of such films are revealed in the debate and discussion conducted through a question and answer session, often with the filmmaker and a selected panel, post-screening (Matzner, 2012; Sengupta, 2006).

Political documentary filmmakers

Films are forms of creative and political expression of the filmmaker. Filmmakers are strongly influenced by their own beliefs and experiences, as well as the social, political and cultural context they belong to (Branston & Stafford, 2006; Mellor, 2009). Garga (2005) considers that filmmakers in India are bound by fuzzy and irrelevant policies, pressure from censor boards and governments, and criticism from social/religious groups, thus resulting in the production of work that will please all factions. However, filmmakers like Satyajit Ray and Anand Patwardhan seem to go against this tide and produce compelling political accounts of various issues in India (Garga, 2005). Such filmmakers realize that, more than a career, documentary filmmaking in India is a

strong commitment to social change (Neogi, 2000). In India, such filmmakers are seen as rebels or trouble makers which results in the CBFC evaluating their work with suspicion and caution (Bose, 2005).

Indian political documentary filmmakers are perceived as liberal, committed and passionate about the issue they represent in their films (Vohra, 2011). Some also consider themselves to be activists. The production of the film itself is a form of activism (Ba, 2007). Such activist form of filmmaking has been associated with all of Patwardhan's films, highlighted by his commitment to open up a space for imagination, critical thought and debate while critiquing social and political injustices (Matzner, 2012). Similarly, Jain states that her main goal is to use film to open up a space for audiences to raise questions and disturb their consciousness (Matzner, 2012). There may also be instances when the presence of the filmmaker and his making of the film may intrude on the course of naturally occurring reality as they strive to advocate change, thus making changes in the world beyond the boundaries of film (Dorst, 1999).

Therefore, documentary films are a result of a mutually created product between the filmmaker and those represented in the text (Dorst, 1999). As documentary film seeks to reflect and describe certain groups, situations or issues in society, accuracy in representation is demanded, especially by those affected (Branston & Stafford, 2006). Additionally, filmmaker intentions and power imbalances between filmmaker and subject should also be addressed. When making her film *Far from Poland* (1984) about Polish workers, filmmaker Jill Godmilow questioned if it was her place to speak on behalf of these peoples, even though she was not Polish or a historian or political scientist (Godmilow & Shapiro, 1997).

The political documentary movement in India was concerned in representing the voice of the people (Vohra, 2011). In relation to this, there was a strong emphasis on using interviews by those affected and experts to deliver messages. Additionally, the film was seen as a product of collective identities – filmmakers and their subjects (Vohra, 2011). Similarly, as a director Patwardhan strongly believes that it is his duty to expose and represent marginalized images to the masses in order to stimulate critical reflection and generate political debate (Halberstadt, 2004; Sharma, 2002). Such marginalized images often include those that are excluded from mainstream India, representing those people of the fringe of society whose voices are generally muted. Singh and Bhargava (2002)

describe Patwardhan as “the voice of the underprivileged” (p. 623). Through interviews he engages with the people of his films, using their personal experiences to exemplify the injustices and inequalities subjected to them.

In a quest for an accurate representation of reality, attempts were made to produce films that were neutral and objective (Renov, 1993; Govaert, 2007; Ruby 1987). However, filmmakers are moving away from such a positivist paradigm as audiences have begun to understand that filmmakers are involved in constructing and ascribing meaning to the film. Subjectivity is now considered a necessity in documentary films, as the questions, thoughts and opinions put forward by the filmmaker through documentary film aesthetics and editing are valued (Fox, 2010). Documentaries are products of individual rather than absolute truth (Corner, 2008) as the filmmaker is in direct control of arranging the sequences, omitting material, forming arguments and presenting ideas thus making it important to assess filmmaker point of view (Sharma, 2006; Fox, 2010; Kak, 2000). Therefore, a film can never be neutral. The acknowledgement of subjectivity is important for documentary audiences too, as their ability to read and acknowledge filmmaker subjectivity will bring them closer to a more accurate interpretation of the film.

Political documentary filmmakers in India do not shy away from imparting a personal, subjective voice on their films (Vohra, 2011; Kapur 2006). However this serves to obscure the idea of being political as journalistic conventions of being objective and investigate reporting are abandoned (Vohra, 2011). Vohra (2011) notes that Patwardhan’s films are full of personality, as he remains outspoken and subjective while critiquing dominant ideologies and injustices in society. He does not attempt to stay neutral engaging with his participants as an interviewer, and with his films as a narrator (Halberstadt, 2004). Patwardhan often uses his own voiceover to narrate and guide audiences through his films, while simultaneously highlighting the subjectivity of the project. Both audiences and filmmakers in India have acknowledged that political documentary film is a personal, creative project, a constant experiment to increase audience engagement. The foregrounding of the director’s subjectivity to the audience often suggests that the audience is being lead on a journey with the filmmaker as a witness. Additionally, it may contribute to increasing audience intimacy with the issue and thus increasing the likelihood of political engagement (Vohra, 2011).

Along with dealing with the CBFC, another big hurdle documentary filmmakers face in India is the circulation and distribution of their movies. There is little opportunity outside of broadcast and cinema distribution, due to the monopolization of finance, funding and distribution outlets by the Films Division and the CBFC (Fischer, 2009; Sen, 2006; Matzner, 2012). The denial of a pass certificate by the CBFC severely restricts the distribution of documentary film. Their films are not accepted by broadcast television. Thus, documentary film in India is distributed from a narrowcast, rather than broadcast mechanism. Narrowcasting means screening films to certain groups (schools, organisations, non-governmental groups, film groups) according to their relevance (Sen, 2006). The main sources of revenue for Indian documentary filmmakers are overseas distribution, via DVD or on foreign television networks; seminars or conferences; and film society screenings – national and international (Bose, 2005). Patwardhan mentions that only recently has he started surviving from sales revenue but is still forced to make low budget documentaries (Fischer, 2009).

However the restrictive production atmosphere has been recognized and there are many initiatives involved in addressing this issue. Media cooperatives like *Janamadyam Cieds Collective* in Mumbai and *Media Storm* in Delhi are involved in funding independent documentaries that do not receive support from bodies like the Films Division (Fischer, 2009). Another organisation called *Steps India* partners up with international funding agencies to provide resources to Indian documentary filmmakers (Matzner, 2012). Increasingly many documentary filmmakers are turning to European and British sources for funding and sponsorship (Vohra, 2011; Matzner, 2012). Fischer comments that support from European organizations is due to the interesting stories, passionate filmmakers and tiny budgets of Indian documentaries (Fischer, 2009). The *Independent Documentary Film Association* is another collective which is focused on supporting, promoting and distributing documentary films (Kumar, 2010).

Some filmmakers in India are only concerned with producing issue-based films while withdrawing from the distribution process. According to them distribution is not a priority and should be a role taken on by somebody else (Sen, 2006). However, there are those filmmakers who are involved in every facet of their film – from production to distribution. Patwardhan stays involved in all parts of film production, from writing to shooting to editing and then distribution (Halberstadt, 2004). These filmmakers realize that the creation of film is not enough if they are unable to share their stories and

concerns with audiences to create a movement of social change (Sen, 2006). They understand that the true success of the film lies in its dissemination and encouraging audiences to broaden their perspectives, challenging their thinking. This goes beyond the role of a filmmaker, to a socially committed activist. Such filmmakers recognize that if their films make an impact on society, they will undoubtedly need to be part of the distribution process.

Documentary Film Audiences

By demonstrating close connections with the historical world (Nichols, 2001), documentary films increase their appeal to audiences as credible and authentic representation of the real world (Harindranath, 2009; Winston, 2008). Documentary film is able to intervene and affect audiences through their use of information and aesthetics which has implications for activating political consciousness (Gaines, 2007). Documentary audiences have certain expectations which condition reception of the genre. These expectations mostly relate to their belief, doubt or denial of the truth claims put forward by each documentary (Harindranath, 2009; Davin, 2003). According to Schrier (2004), fiction movies such as the *Blair Witch Project* contribute to audience confusion about fiction or reality, leading to confusion and skepticism about the premises of documentary film. Additionally, Davin (2003) states that the claims to objectivity and honesty by many documentary films subsequently increase viewer expectation and the propensity to criticise and look for flaws.

According to Smaill (2007), documentaries that highlight injustices in a world where the ideals of democracy prevail, cause pain to an audience. This pain is articulated as a kind of political discourse. This discourse of pain is often in response to witnessing the troubles of the marginalized. Audiences have the political consciousness that enables them to relate with their on-screen subjects. These on-screen politicised identities may not always elicit powerful emotions among viewers, but they do serve to increase recognition of political transgressions in society (Smaill, 2007). Conversely, there are times when activist documentary, infused with high levels of emotional content, can leave an audience feeling guilty and exhausted (Carpenter, 2009). This in turn results in

audiences feeling disempowered to become activists against what they have witnessed on screen.

Sometimes audiences are more trusting of documentary film, as they believe this medium closely represents the making of history as it happens, by filming actual events as they take place (Stoddard, 2009; Gaines, 1999). Although documentary films are valuable sources of historical evidence, the effect of filmmaker perspectives and audience interpretations complicates the basis for trust (Stoddard, 2009). That said, writers such as Greg Philo (1993) point out that viewers are aware that the content of documentary films are a reflection of the filmmakers views – it is commonly understood that the filmmaker decides emergent themes and what points are stressed when shaping documentary.

A complicated territory in documentary film studies is the relationship between filmmaker intentions and the meaning derived from it. There is a paucity of research examining filmmaker intent (Lewis, 2007). Audiences begin to question authorial intent and motives when they experience uneasiness or confusion when watching film (Lewis, 2007). This is especially true of the documentary film genre because of its claims to truth, reality and representation of the world. For audiences who are interested in delving deeper into the various layers of the film, it becomes important to explore filmmaker intentions, as documentary films are often shaped through the vision of the director (Lewis, 2007).

Documentary films have a legacy of transforming the world through moving image. There are limited amounts of in-depth research conducted on documentary audience segments, their perceptions and expectations of this genre and their experiences (Vladica & Davis, 2008; Perry, 2009). With continual debate of documentary film being a representation of the 'real', as well as its possibilities for social change, it is important to assess the reception of documentary film audiences to provide insight into the functions, benefits and impacts of documentary film.

Koopman et al. (2006) and Stroud (2007) assessed the effects on public opinion of the Bush administration post-watching *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004). Audiences had more negative attitudes towards ex-President Bush, were less likely to vote for him again (Stroud, 2007) and more likely to attribute the war on Iraq and a quest of oil domination on the Bush administration (Koopman et al., 2006). Positive reception of documentary

film increases awareness and contributes to positive attitudes. Laroie and Van der Linden (2009) and Owen (2007) found that after watching a documentary describing the lives of people diagnosed with schizophrenia, there was a positive shift in attitudes towards schizophrenic patients with an increased likelihood to socially engage with them, as well as improved knowledge through the correction of previously held inaccurate information.

In his study, Nolan (2010) assessed the impact of *An Inconvenient Truth* on university students with an average age of twenty-one, who would otherwise have not chosen to watch the film. Those who completed the survey after watching the movie had higher levels of knowledge about global warming and intentions to make positive changes in comparison to those who completed an identical survey before watching the film. An online survey one month later showed that this film continued to influence concern and audience beliefs. However, according to Fox (2010) these effects were correlational rather than causal as this movie was released at a time when most of the media was reporting on the global warming crisis. It is important that this film be acknowledged as a part of a larger project to change public attitudes and cause positive shifts in behaviour in relation to conserving environments (Fox, 2010). Thus subsequent actions from watching this film are impacted by context.

To stimulate change, documentary films should persuade their audiences and ignite a desire for action. Although audiences are unable to directly access the real world on screen, the representation of it combined with the faith audiences invest in the documentary genre result in audiences being transformed as political agents of society (Smaill, 2007; Glynn, 2008). In the film *Fix: The story of an Addicted City* (2002) filmmaker Nattie Wild successfully shifted viewer perceptions from seeing drug addiction as a crime to an addiction using aesthetic conventions to enhance rhetoric, persuasion and analysis. This film enabled its audiences to engage in critical thinking and the opening of a safe injection site, the first for North America, has been associated with this film (Smaill, 2007).

In her longitudinal study on rural and urban documentary audiences from the United Kingdom, Austria, Netherlands and Spain, Hardie (2007) found that audiences expected the experience of watching documentary film to be boring but informative. Audiences noted that upon hearing the word documentary, their first thought was that the film is

serious, political and informative, and Hardie (2007) noted this as an obstacle that prevents documentary from reaching audiences. Most audiences expected the aesthetics and quality of documentary films to be as high as their fiction counterparts. It was rare that the director, rather than subject drew in audiences (Hardie, 2007).

The two most common ways audiences sourced information about film were cinema newsletters and word-of-mouth (Hardie, 2007). Rural audiences stated that it took considerable effort to find information about documentary films and their screenings (Hardie, 2007). In contrast, urban audiences said that opportunities to source and access documentary film were freely available, but they would probably not engage with this genre during weekends because they seek out options for relaxation and entertainment. Audiences found it hard to find company to watch a documentary film in cinemas (Hardie, 2007). Therefore, membership to a documentary film society or attendance at film festivals would probably benefit such segments of the audience.

Documentary film audiences in India

Indians are noted for being very interested in watching films (Jacob, 1998), as reflected in the throngs of people queued up, often in the heat, to secure tickets for the first show of their favourite movies (Kazmi, 1999). However, watching documentary films is considered a labour intensive activity as the content is educational, rather than for pleasure or entertainment (Kesavan, 2006). Audiences are less likely to pay to watch documentary film due to such perceptions of this genre. They thrive on excitement and fantasy, premises of fiction film (Kesavan, 2006).

Most documentary film audiences have certain expectations of this genre. They expect the footage to be factual and unedited (Sharma, 2006; Kesavan, 2006). Fiction film is to entertain, while documentary film represents reality to inform and educate its audiences (Sharma, 2006). Such expectations not only limit the experiences documentary audiences have with this genre but also pose certain conventional (aesthetic) restrictions on filmmakers production. Therefore, it is essential that Indian audiences are exposed to a variety of documentary films that vary in conventions (expository, observational) and aesthetics (animation, re-enactments). Sometimes filmmakers explicitly challenge such expectations. For example, one film opened with

the filmmaker saying, “this is not a dry lesson in social and political history – this is the story of one woman, her love for her family, her community and her triumph over unspeakable evil” (Sharma, 2006, p. 136). Similar techniques are used by a number of filmmakers so that audiences see documentary film, like fiction film, as providing a good story (Sharma, 2006).

Bhargava (2006) considers that audiences are generally too lazy to critically think about the negative issues in society. In conversation with a casual traveller on the train, Jain (2000) revealed she was an editor of documentary films to which the traveller replies, “those terrible boring documentaries on Doordarshan...who watches them anyway...what is there to do in making those...anyone can do it” (p. 68). Such statements suggest the lack of value accorded to the documentary genre by ordinary Indian citizens.

However, documentary film is on the rise in India. Films Division, a unit of the Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, produces more documentaries annually than any other global organization (Fischer 2009). Audiences are becoming more aware of different types of media and various genres of film (Sen, 2006). Additionally, audiences are becoming increasingly underwhelmed with entertainment programmes and are turning their attention to opportunities that will inform and increase their awareness and comprehension of various issues (Sen, 2006). Yet, Matzner (2012) states that the diversity of culture, region and primarily language in India acts as a barrier towards audience engagement as documentary films in India are usually made in English or Hindi.

There are a number of documentary film festivals held throughout the country, often with limited support from sponsors (Sen, 2006). The large number of audiences that turn up to such festivals (Sen, 2006) is a testament to the increased interest for documentary film in India. These festivals allow documentary filmmakers to receive recognition and facilitate marketing of films (Fischer, 2009). Indian documentaries are highly valued in international festivals. Patwardhan’s films have won twenty two major awards from several international film festivals (Fischer, 2009). Although internationally recognized, his film *Father, Son and Holy War* was banned from being screened at the Mumbai International Film Festival (Fischer, 2009). In response to this ban, Patwardhan organized an initiative called *Vikalp*, meaning alternative, which has

now grown into a collective of filmmakers providing a venue for the screening of uncensored political films (Matzner, 2012).

The situation of distributing documentary films in India operates in stark contrast to that of commercial Bollywood cinema. Commercial cinema has a variety of formally established distribution channels, and is taken very seriously due to the possibility of making huge profits (Sen, 2006). Additionally, politicians in India promote Hindu nationalist films by granting them tax exemptions or providing free screenings (Bose, 2009). Thus audiences have more opportunities to engage with Bollywood cinema.

Between 1997 and 2001 a newsletter called *Alternate Media Times* circulated with information about documentary films, like synopses, source, and price (Sen, 2006). This venture was extremely successful as each week hundreds requested for information about, or to purchase films, indicating the audience for documentaries. Additionally, universities and NGOs are constantly linking up with filmmakers to showcase films in their organisations to increase knowledge and stimulate critical thinking and discussion (Sen, 2006). However, currently there is no systematic way of getting out information about documentary films to the public. Kesavan (2006) points out that there are also a limited numbers of video libraries or retail outlets that stock documentary films.

In India, family, language, religion, caste, profession and community have a much greater influence on individuals than the media (Kumar, 2010). These categories, coupled with other sources of information that are of individual interest, are used as frames of reference for audience reading of media texts. Audience interest in an issue is affected by the relevance of that issue to them personally, and the groups (caste, social class, community, religion, profession) they belong to (Kumar, 2010). This in turn impacted on the success of a medium.

Documentary reception research in India

Harindranath (2009) conducted a study assessing cross-cultural differences between Indians and British audiences in their reception of documentary film. In India, these twenty participants included teachers, students and non-academic staff from an educational institution – The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad. Harindranath (2009) notes that the aesthetic function of documentary film

– logical arguments, rhetoric and form of address – resulted in decreasing cross-cultural differences in interpretation of film. Indian non-academic participants performed the most transparent, uncritical reading and were the group with the strongest in their claims about documentary representing reality. Their acceptance of the authority of documentary films in making truth claims directly resulted in them being more likely to accept the arguments put forth by the film (Harindranath, 2009).

Other groups varied in their critical analysis of filmmaker intent, objectivity and the extent to which the film was mediated. In general, they questioned the arguments put forth by the film, varied in acceptance of these arguments and showed scepticism of documentary truth claims (Harindranath, 2009). Among the Indian participants, non-academic university staff were the group that most differed in comparison to the students and academic staff groups, which were also more similar to each other. Harindranath (2009) found that the differences between these three groups were based on their levels of education attained. The study highlighted the extent to which knowledge of the conventions and aesthetics of genre is critical in the process of interpreting documentary. Documentary's association with truth claims demands expectations from the audience, which result in either an acceptance or a rejection of these claims. Moreover, the socio-cultural contexts individuals inhabit have an impact on how they interpret film (Harindranath, 2009). This study highlighted that contexts include more than geographic space, but rather political, cultural and social characteristics that constitute the development of multiple realities for each individual.

Sengupta (2006) observes that post-screening of documentary film, people leave immediately or they stay behind allowing what they have seen sink in, or discussing the content with others. These screenings provide an opportunity to quench audience thirst for information, absorb and encounter images, connect with on-screen participants and like-minded individuals, and use discussion to enhance growth and understanding, thus highlighting the presence on an active audience (Sengupta, 2006). For such audiences, documentary film is a link between their own lives and those that they see on screen. Sengupta (2006) notes that documentary films act as a catalyst for political discussion and are able to affect the political consciousness of audiences. It is hypothesized that the witnessing of real people and situations, coupled with the empathy, thoughts and reactions of another human (audience), will unquestionably result in stimulation of political consciousness.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to review Indian and international literature on the production and reception of political documentary film. As noted, political documentary films are powerful communication mediums, as they are able to contribute to social and political change. They are able to influence audiences by stimulating social discussion while increasing awareness and knowledge. This makes it an important medium to assess. However, there is a paucity of research assessing the processes and outcomes of reception among young people in India and internationally. This study aims to fill in some gaps.

In relation to India the cultural context plays a huge role in audiences accessing and engaging with political documentary film. As noted by numerous Indian commentators, the restrictive environment, facilitated by a lack of effective support and distribution networks for documentary film production, severely hinders the expansion of this genre. Additionally, documentary is in constant comparison with India's largest, and most successful mainstream cinema – Bollywood. Moreover, the politically powerful and elite have a significant role on most media content and institutions thus reducing their ability to serve citizens. On the contrary, they propagate for those in power. All these factors serve to constrict access to and engagement with political documentary film for Indian audiences. It is important to investigate the possibilities for enhancing the relationship between young audiences and political documentary film in spite of these adversities.

Therefore, in order to accurately comment on the reception of political documentary among young Mumbaikars, participant perspectives and the context in which reception occurs will be acknowledged. Literature suggests that personal capital plays a role on audience perceptions and the likelihood to engage with this genre. Furthermore, there is a need to analyse the possible fora through which audiences and filmmakers are able to overcome such adversities and allow for positive reception of political cinema. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the relationship between text-author-audience, within the surrounding context. This study recognizes the impact of the filmmaker in affecting audience reception of text. Filmmaker intentions are key to understanding the production of the text, such as the perspectives their messages stem from.

Film is a viable medium of choice for education, communication and research (Albertson & Lawrence, 2009). It has a huge impact on being able to communicate with people and motivate social change therefore making it an important communication medium to evaluate to be able to use it in the best possible way (Whiteman, 2009). However, it is important to assess the extent to which this takes place and evaluate the outcomes. The literature review informed this research, setting its scope and direction.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter begins by outlining the active audience paradigm, stemming from a cultural studies framework which underpins this study. I am particularly interested in gaining an understanding of the reception of political documentary film among young audiences residing in urban Mumbai, India. This will be done by examining the participants perspectives and expectations of documentary film, using two political documentaries to investigate reception. Audience characteristics were also identified, in order to increase the specificity of findings. This is especially necessary in a vast, diverse country like India, as findings are not always generalizable. Additionally, interviews with filmmakers contextualize this study and deepen the understanding of the reception of political documentary film for my audience group.

This research used qualitative tools such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observation, follow-up interviews and qualitative surveys in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the research topic. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse interview, focus group and follow-up interview data; content analysis was used to analyse survey data; and both films used in this study were explored through textual analysis. This chapter also provides a detailed account of the parameters within which these qualitative methodological tools were used to collect data, as well as an outline of the frameworks for analysis.

This chapter includes four major components:

1. Information on the study design
2. Methodological tools (overview of method, study sample, data collection procedure)
 - a) Interviews
 - b) Participant profile form
 - c) Focus groups
 - d) Follow-up interviews
 - e) Participant observation
 - f) Qualitative survey

3. Description of the analysis and interpretation process
4. Ethical Considerations

Study Design

Philosophy underlying the use of a cultural studies approach

Within the cultural studies paradigm that this study draws from, the analysis of experience is paramount to investigating audience reception of a text (Hall, 1980). Cultural studies researchers aim to understand experience in terms of how people define and respond to various situations (Hall, 1980). This is appropriate to the goals of this study which seeks to identify and examine the experiences of young Mumbaikars viewing political documentary film located within the context of a three-way relationship between filmmaker, text and audience (Goldsmith, 1998). A key focus of the active audience paradigm is to recognize and identify the possibility of diverse readings of media texts by audiences (Livingstone, 1998), which is facilitated through methods such as focus groups and surveys (Lozano & Frankenberg, 2009).

Cultural studies is a field of enquiry that is pluralistic in theoretical foundation, research and methodological approaches. Cultural studies perspectives draw from convergence between scholarly disciplines such as the arts, sciences, communications and humanities (Barker, 2006; Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram & Tincknell, 2004; McQuail, 1997; Livingstone, 1998; Storey, 1996; Kellner, 1995; Budd, Entman & Steinman, 1990; Ott & Mack, 2009; Dahlgren, 1997; Lindolf, 1991; Fenton, 2007; Milner, 2002).

The strand of cultural studies I am most interested in examines ways in which connections between culture, power and politics can be used for social transformation. This stemmed from an interest in growing social and political movements of the 1960s as complex associations between representation and power began being explored (Johnson et al., 2004). Critical cultural studies of this kind have been involved in interrogating and critiquing dominant institutions and ideologies that negatively impact on certain social and cultural groups, such as women or gay men and other marginalized peoples (Johnson et al., 2004; Kellner, 1995). Thus with the focus on identifying and

mobilizing political identity by highlighting political characteristics such as power and hegemony, this strand of cultural studies seeks to contribute towards effectively changing the political climate and informing policy (Barker, 2006).

Cultural studies approaches to audience research provide an understanding into the ways in which people make sense of the world they live in by placing prominence on the subjectivity and specificity of spoken and observed discussions and activities, while situating them within the socio-cultural context in which they operate (Pickering, 2008; Barker, 2006; Dahlgren, 1997). The acknowledgement of socio-cultural context is important as it is a contributing factor to the differences in experience between individuals. Cultural studies also seeks to understand the ways in which meanings are etched into cultural products. Documentary films are cultural products or texts as they are heavily influenced by the socio-cultural, political and historical landscape in which they are produced.

Reception research

In contrast to previous audience reception research which focused on a linear process of media imparting effects on passive audiences, a cultural studies approach proposes a more open relationship whereby audiences are viewed as active, making decisions on how to interpret media content within specific contexts. This active audience paradigm examines the production of documentary texts, how audiences identify and interpret messages and the relationship between films, filmmaker and viewer within the context in which production and consumption occurs (Barker, 2006; Johnson et al., 2004; Philippe, 2001; Copley, 1994; Ang, 1996; McQuail, 1997; Brooker & Jermyn, 2003).

Interpretation is not a simple process of accepting/rejecting media texts. Rather, audiences interpret in accordance with their past experiences, individual characteristics, cultural practices and socio-cultural context (Fenton, 2007; Hoijer, 1998; Brooker & Jermyn, 2003; Ott & Mack, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Storey, 1996; Ang, 1996; Lozano & Frankenberg, 2009; McQuail, 1997). The customs, practices, beliefs, languages, values and attitudes of a particular society strongly influence reception research (Hiebert & Gibbons, 2000). Mumbai city was chosen as the location of this research as it is currently the epicentre of India's main cinema, Bollywood. I was

curious to find out if within such a Bollywood dominant context, there lay possibilities for production and consumption of alternative cinemas, such as documentary film. Additionally, Mumbai is India's largest, most populated and culturally diverse city.

Hiebert and Gibbons (2000) state that personal factors such as a young age make it easier for media to influence and impact on such people, especially if there are minimal influences from other sources, such as parents. This makes them an important group to be studied. Young people between the ages of 16 and 25 were chosen for this study. Levy (2008) states that the media is a very powerful vehicle in the process of self-actualization and for political use, having most impact over young audience groups. Youth often use the media to express themselves and as a tool for information (Levy, 2008). Moreover Kim and Sherman (2006) cite, that contrary to often being considered as distanced from or apathetic to civic engagement, with proper support and organization youth can be positive in producing social change. The persuasive and influential characteristics of political documentaries coupled with their apparent abilities to resonate with youth are an important area to be studied, as accurate and positive reception of such films can lead to some kind of social change – a key aim of political documentary.

Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model was particularly pertinent to the area of understanding of active audience research. Hall stated that media texts were polysemic, that is, they were open to a number of possible interpretations (Barker, 2006; Morley, 1996; McQuail, 1997). This also causes differences between the messages encoded in, and decoded from texts. Audiences can perform three types of interpretations – dominant (in agreement with the messages or main arguments of the text), negotiated and oppositional (disagreeing with the main arguments or messages of the text) (Barker, 2006). Using ethnographic methods, David Morley expanded this model. Morley investigated the ways in which different groups of audiences, on the basis of their social standing, differed in their readings and interpretations of the British television show *Nationwide*. Morley's research stemmed from a curiosity of context – the ideological processes that are activated as audiences watched television (Ang, 1996; Morley, 1996; Barker, 2006). This ethnographic turn renewed a focus on contexts and recognized that contexts had a strong influence on audience reading of text (Wood, 2007). This is one of the pioneering and most influential research studies conducted within a cultural studies framework. The recognition that differences in personal and cultural capital

together with the influence of context, is one of the main reasons why texts are interpreted in different ways by different types of audience, enhances the analysis of audience reception.

Hall's theory was significant for the development of an active audience paradigm in the cultural studies tradition as it demystified the premise that media texts had strong effects on passive audiences. Audiences were actively involved in reading texts and producing meaning (Barker, 2006). However, this paradigm was criticized for placing too much emphasis on audience processes and interpretation of texts, while not drawing attention to the meanings that are already inscribed within texts during production (Wood, 2007). In response, cultural studies progressed to acknowledge that texts, audiences and contexts are interacting elements. Media texts influenced reception and needed to be understood within the context in which they are produced (Turner, 1999; Fenton, 2007). This includes an understanding of production processes (Johnson et al., 2004); meanings embedded in the texts, as well as the relationship between media texts and audiences (Davis, 2008; Barker, 2006; Seaman, 1992).

In addition to the broader context, cultural studies reception research also stresses that in order to understand the audience reception, it is important to situate them within the immediate surroundings in which the reading of text occurs (Philippe, 2001; Barker, 2006; Morley, 1996). The act of watching is inextricably linked with the environment it takes place in. For example when audiences go to the cinema to watch a movie or the theatre to watch a play, the space that they collectively share with other individuals plays an important part on the experience of the event (Sauter, 2010). Focusing on different contexts gives a broader picture of the environments available and accessed by audiences (Philippe, 2001). With this in mind, this study chose to examine documentary film accessed and viewed in two environments: as part of a documentary film group voluntarily attended by participants, and as part of prescribed academic coursework.

Reception analysis for this study

The active audience

An active audience approach recognises that the meanings and interpretations of texts are controlled by audiences and shaped by frames of reference, personal capital and contexts belonging to each viewer (Harindranath, 2009). Audience activity is an important area in audience research, however 'activity' is hard to define and is dependent on research aims and interests. Some scholars define 'active' as audiences producing meaning, interpreting and decoding what they view in media texts (Cobley, 1994; Kubey, 1996). Audience activity can also be defined as involvement via emotional arousal, for example discomfort or strain during viewing (Condit, 1991); and increases in consciousness; and parasocial interaction, such as, talking to the television (Biocca, 1988). Audiences are activated when they are encouraged to critically think, question, evaluate and engage in further action based on the content they have just witnessed on-screen (Winston, 2008; Biocca, 1988).

This study defines audience activity in three ways: speaking about film (shared discussion increasing knowledge and awareness); meaning production and interpretation of text (critically reflecting on the messages of the film, being able to relate information to personal contexts; empathy with on-screen subjects); and political action.

Speaking about film

Speaking about viewing film naturally turns the process of reading media texts into an active one in the sense that the ways in which audiences talk about their experiences of film are important for understanding the production of social meanings (Turner, 1999). Such discussion allows people to develop new understandings, share common meanings and compare and reconstruct previous understandings (Fiske, 1987; Hall, 1980). Researchers are able to examine the level of priority given to certain issues, the cultural values embedded in these discussions, and how the social and physical world is viewed (Turner, 1999). Several researchers also claim that there is a strong relationship between political discussion and political disposition or activity in the future (de Zuniga, Pui-i-abril & Rojas, 2009; Rojas, 2008; Ball-Rokeach, Kim & Matei, 2001; Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak, 2005).

Meaning production/audience interpretations

A cultural studies approach emphasizes that audience interpretation of media texts be the locus of reception research (Ott & Mack, 2009). Audience interpretation of a film may differ from one person to the next person as a consequence of unique subjectivities, social histories, and cultural backgrounds (Fiske, 1987; Ott & Mack, 2009; Lacey, 2009; Murdock, 1989). Audiences derive and construct meanings from media texts through a variety of sources and meaning construction is impacted upon by a range of determinants. Audiences use their personal and cultural capital to ascribe meaning to the text as it is read (Burgess, 2006; Storey, 1996; Morley, 1996; Barker, 2006; McQuail et al., 1996). Cultural capital includes previous social experiences, and cultural knowledge and practices. Personal capital includes factors like educational level, age, social standing, gender, race/ethnicity and past experiences (Hiebert & Gibbons, 2000; McQuail, 1997; Lacey, 2009; Davis & Davenport, 1997; Pickering, 2008; Liebes, 1996; Seaman, 1992; Fiske, 1987; Fetveit, 2001; Livingstone, 1998; Copley, 1994). Audience reading of text is also influenced by textual factors, such as the genre, aesthetic conventions and kinds of discourse used (Livingstone, 1998; Romao, 2006).

Meanings are an inevitable outcome of spectatorship (Goldsmith, 1998) and are created as audience read media texts (Fetveit, 2001; Lozano & Frankenberg, 2009; Schroder & Phillips, 2007). Production of meaning does not occur if the audience does not engage in the interpretive process (Fetveit, 2001). The process of making meaning gives audiences the opportunity to accept, resist or alter these meanings (Condit, 1991). In recognizing audience capacity to produce and ascribe meaning to text, it is important to acknowledge that these meanings are finite (Fetveit, 2001). Such limits on multiple interpretations are a result of the limited number of interpretive frameworks that audiences are able to refer to. For example, an audience may not have been previously exposed to frameworks such as feminism, and thus will not use feminism as a point of reference for their interpretation of text (Ott & Mack, 2009; Fetveit, 2001; Condit, 1991).

Polysemic texts are those which consist of a wide range of meanings, and thus open to the possibility of being interpreted in different ways by audiences from different contexts (Condit, 1991; Ott & Mack, 2009; Budd et al., 1990). The level of polysemy differs between text, as media audiences are heterogeneous, and some filmmakers

maximise the extent to which their work remains open to interpretation in order that they engage diverse audiences (Hiebert & Gibbons, 2000; Liebes, 1996). This can also correspond to more commercial attempts to attract global audiences (Ott & Mack, 2009). In the latter instance, here is a paradoxical tension between acknowledging variation and recognizing a degree of homogeneity to interpretations, especially when audiences come from the same or similar socio-cultural backgrounds. Culture is not singular, but made up of collective groups of individuals and thus researchers need to acknowledge the importance of shared knowledge and understanding of groups stemming from similar socio-cultural contexts (Barker, 2006; McQuail, 1997).

Justification for a cultural studies approach

Srinivas (2002) notes that Indian media research was focused on measuring the effects of media texts on audiences, investigating directors and celebrities, and examining the ideological messages contained in films. Similarly, a tendency to favour quantitative market research approaches to media is noted by Kumar (2010) and Singhal and Rogers (2001). The reception of film by diverse audiences has been neglected (Srinivas, 2002; Nandy, 2003). Most studies have not stemmed from a participatory framework that allows audiences to play a major role in the research, and construct a dialogue with the texts they consume. In addition, attention has not been paid to the cultural and social contexts in which film viewing and reception takes place (Srinivas, 2002).

In the light of Hindu philosophical perspectives, a cultural studies approach is most appropriate and relevant to conducting research in India. A number of Indian academics approach communication studies from a Hindu philosophical perspective. Such a perspective allows researchers to go beyond surface level characteristics, such as language, gestures and expressions by locating each participant within their socio-cultural context, as well as acknowledging the existence and complexities of various relationships. These may include participant relations with each other, their environment and social institutions. Such an approach is especially pertinent to communication research being conducted in India as Hinduism is the main religion and Hindu ideology is most dominant in Indian society (Kumar, 2010). This Hindu philosophical perspective, proposed by T. B. Saral, takes into the account the position of the individual in relation to other individuals and objects in its environment (Kumar,

2010). It is a more holistic approach, deeply rooted in the cultural context that encourages differences, contradictions and complexities. Moreover, outcomes of this perspective do not seek to fit into logic, categories or pre-defined assumptions (Kumar, 2010).

Cultural studies fits within this paradigm as it embraces complexity. Such an approach integrates the analysis of text and audience reception rather than treating them as separate entities, because of their symbiotic relationship. The text comes to life as audiences read it, and it is possible to see the impact of text on audience experience and activities (Johnson et al., 2004). Audience subjectivity is given prominence, while similarities and differences between individuals/groups are encouraged. A major strength of a cultural studies approach lies in its ability to acknowledge the importance of contexts and implications by providing evidence of the relationship between media texts and social systems (Ott & Mack, 2009; Fenton, 2007). Moreover as society evolves, cultural studies is able to evolve with it producing timely and relevant research (Ott & Mack, 2009).

Therefore in relation to this study, the cultural studies approach will enable me to explore how young Mumbaikars reception of political documentary film is affected by the socio-cultural contexts these audiences inhabit. Using qualitative methods, the cultural studies approach highlights the similarities and differences in thoughts, opinions, beliefs, experiences, and activities of these participants. By situating reception within the context it takes place, this study will be able to examine and isolate the various factors influencing reception manifested through the relationships participants have with them. Furthermore, although the main focus of this study is audience reception, cultural studies allows for the acknowledgement of the triadic relationship between the text, author and audience. This will result in the production of information that is rich, varied and valid to the context in which it is generated and disseminated. The cultural studies approach, coupled with qualitative methods empowers audiences to have a substantial role in research by allowing them to share their experiences with the researcher.

Srinivas (2002) used the active audience theory to examine the relationship between films and cinema audiences. Results showed that audience constructions of meaning from the films they viewed was an integral part of their cinema-going experience.

People interpreted drawing from their past experiences and through interactions with each other as they consumed film. Thus for Indian audiences it is important to assess this interactive and participatory experience they have with films. With regards to this, this research uses the active audience paradigm to explore the reception of documentary film among young audiences. The participatory nature of such viewing is acknowledged through the use of focus groups for researching reception of political documentary film. This is outlined further in this chapter.

Limitations of a cultural studies approach

Hermes states that one difficulty with a cultural studies approach to reception is that it runs the risk of placing too much emphasis on the meaningfulness and significance of media texts to audiences (Ridell, 1996). For example, a Norwegian study showed that the routine activity of watching the evening news is linked with another activity – drinking coffee (Ridell, 1996). In this instance, the content of news was considered less important than the act of watching the news itself together with associated everyday rituals. However, Hermes has been critiqued for not recognizing the wider contexts, such as the social and cultural forces operating in societies where texts are produced, consumed and their content is replicated in social and cultural practices (Ridell, 1996).

Cultural studies has come under some criticism for not being definitive in its concepts. There is continuing debate on what classifies oppositional or negotiated readings of media texts. Critics of cultural studies are undecided if it is necessary to identify oppositional readings as political shifts in attitude or activities, such as, starting/joining a protest (Morley, 2006). Although cultural studies research provides rich, varied data of how particular audiences respond to particular texts in particular contexts it is sometimes difficult to translate to generalized observations (Barker, 2005; McQuail, 1997). Conversely, Johnson and colleagues (2004) would argue that specificity makes more explicit the important characteristics of cultural analysis.

Qualitative methods

Qualitative methodologies were developed in social science contexts, and are based on the premise that perceptions of reality are subjective. Consequently, in qualitative studies, participants are encouraged to give their point of view (Iacono et al., 2009; Burnard, 1994). These methodologies explore individual subjectivities to reveal interpretations, experiences, attitudes and opinions that are person-specific (Hewitt, 2007). In comparison to quantitative methods, qualitative methodologies are considered much more effective when examining cultural and social phenomena within the social contexts in which they occur (Iacono et al., 2009; Atkinson & Pugsley, 2005).

Qualitative methods were chosen for reception research as they allow researchers to examine subjectively created social worlds and focus on how meaning is derived from social interaction (Lindlof, 1991). They allow researchers to identify new phenomena, analyse characteristics and provide descriptions within the social and cultural context the phenomena reside in. Methods such as focus groups allow researchers to observe dynamics between participants, cultural similarity and diversity, and use narratives to analyse individual opinions, experiences and activities (Meyer, 2009). Additionally, using methodological frameworks drawn from qualitative research methods such as ethnography and discourse analysis, cultural studies stresses the importance of lived experience and context. McQuail (1997) qualifies this point with the caveat that because qualitative audience research is often more critical of media institutions it must pay close attention to the context in which reception analysis occurs to ensure that the meanings derived are adequately contextualised.

Methodological Tools

This section describes the various methodological tools, or methods, used to collect information for this study. The study sample and data collection procedures are also identified.

Interviews

Interviews are a common qualitative data technique, most useful when trying to examine unique phenomena described in the ways in which people experience and give meaning to the phenomena (Gruber, Szmigin, Reppel & Voss, 2008; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2008). This study wanted to explore the perspectives of Indian political documentary filmmakers on political documentary film in India. Due to the limited amounts of previously published literature in this area, interviews were chosen as they allowed for rich, in-depth information to be collected. In comparison to surveys, interviews allow the collection of detailed data with the flexibility of re-structuring questions in order to achieve the outcomes of the research.

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Ribbens, 1989; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2008). This study conducted semi-structured interviews, and the method was chosen because of its flexibility and the utilization of open-ended questions which left enough room for new questions to arise as the interview proceeded (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2008). Semi-structured interviews remove constraints on the boundaries of exploration by allowing researchers to touch on new topics that arise during the course of the interview (Ribbens, 1989). Therefore, as filmmakers mentioned pertinent issues that were not in the list of topics to be discussed, I was able to utilize this new information and form new questions in order to gather more information. This is especially beneficial to this research given the dearth of literature on Indian political documentary, film practices and reception.

Study sample

Two filmmakers: Anand Patwardhan and Shriprakash, whose documentary films were the textual focus of this study.

One student, St. Xaviers College, Mumbai: A student who attended screenings of documentary films hosted by this university in order to provide a descriptive account of the atmosphere and activities at the screening. This was because outsiders were not permitted to these screenings.

Data collection procedures

For the filmmakers:

Although there were a set of pre-determined questions before the start of the interview, the sequence, style and use of the question varied depending on how discussions with the interviewee unfolded. These pre-determined questions were finalised after a review of previously published literature (Appendix A).

Anand Patwardhan resides in Mumbai, India where the rest of the study (focus groups, follow-up interviews, observation and surveys) was taking place. Therefore a face-to-face interview was conducted. Shriprakash was overseas while this study was underway in India and a Skype (audio) interview was scheduled at his convenience.

Within qualitative research the use of telephone interviews are usually not preferred. They are often considered disadvantageous as the interviewer is unable to establish rapport, effectively probe, make note of non-verbal cues and accurately interpret responses (Opdenakker, 2006; Novick, 2008). However, telephone interviews are also beneficial, in that they put their participants at ease while still producing rich, in-depth data similar to face-to-face interviews (Novick, 2008; Opdenakker, 2006). There is yet to be any concrete evidence that telephone interviews produce data of lower quality than face-to-face interviews.

Drawbacks to telephone interviews include participants conducting other activities in their respective environments and thus being distracted (Novick, 2008). Telephone coverage and connectivity is another shortcoming (Novick, 2008). Indeed during my discussion with Shriprakash the conversation was disconnected three times due to bad internet connectivity in India. Yet, despite these limitations the interview was successfully conducted as I was able to ask all the questions I had prepared and gather productive data.

Both filmmakers were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts. Only Patwardhan reviewed and made minor changes. The participant information sheet also advised that they may be contacted for a follow-up interview, if required, to which they both consented. Only Patwardhan was contacted for a follow-up interview as his initial interview was conducted before the commencement of the focus group discussions and follow-up interview with the young Mumbaikars. The follow-up questions were drawn

in light of these interactions. Due to Patwardhan being busy with his latest project, he requested that the follow-up questions be emailed to him as this method of communication would be most convenient. As Shriprakash's initial interview was conducted after the focus group discussions and follow-up interviews with the young Mumbaikars had all commenced, a follow-up interview was not considered necessary.

For the student:

A set of pre-determined questions was formulated to investigate the environment and activities that went on during the screening of political documentaries at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. This interview was also conducted over Skype. As this was a very brief interview, there were minimal occurrences of other activities or distractions in the participant's environment. Moreover, there were no problems with connectivity. A copy of the interview schedule is listed in Appendix B.

Films used to investigate reception

War and Peace (2002) by Anand Patwardhan

Buddha weeps in Jadugoda (1999) by Shriprakash

The political documentary films of Mumbai-based, national and internationally acclaimed, independent documentary filmmaker Anand Patwardhan was chosen to examine audience reception among young Mumbaikars. The film *War and Peace* was chosen as, until late 2011, it was Patwardhan's most recent film. *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* was chosen because the content of the film was similar to that of *War and Peace* – they both focused on issues surrounding nuclear development in India. However, the films differed in their approach to the issue thus making *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* an appropriate film to use for comparative purposes. Moreover, it was the only other Indian documentary found focusing on this issue.

(see Appendix C for a brief synopsis of both films)

Participant profile form

When undertaking reception research from a cultural studies perspective, participants first need to be profiled and identified (Lacey, 2009). This is because their personal characteristics can influence not only participant data elicited but also impact on the behaviour and dynamics of focus groups (Vicsek, 2007). Participant demographics that are generally assessed are age, sex, education, occupation and current level of knowledge on themes important to the research (Vicsek, 2007). This study made use of a participant profile form in order to obtain a snapshot of participant demographics and comprehend audience interactions with political documentary outside the context of this study. Ridell (1996) states that it is important to ascertain the place of media texts outside the artificial environment of research. Philippe (2001) states that focusing on the reception of a single genre limits the ability to highlight which media and which film genres were most relevant to the audience. In order to mitigate this, participants were also asked to list their favourite genre of film and the kinds of media texts they most often engaged with.

Study sample

Focus group participants: The participant profile form was given to all members participating in the focus group discussions. A detailed description of this study sample is listed in the following focus group section.

Data collection procedures

The Participant Profile Form was given to participants prior to the film screening and before any focus group data was collected (see Appendix D).

Focus groups

Audiences use language to organize what they have seen in media texts. It is used to reflect and communicate their perspectives to others, while comparing and

reconstructing previous, and new meanings (Schroder & Phillips, 2007; Hall, 1980). Speaking about film naturally turns the process of reading media texts into an active one as the audience is transformed from viewer to producer of meanings (Fiske, 1987). Focus groups have often been used in television and film reception research, initially designed to test out audience reception of radio (Kitzinger, 1994). They are an organized discussion initiated in order to explore a certain topic (Kitzinger, 1994; Lewis, 1992; Lunt, 1996; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009; Vicsek, 2007; Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Sim, 1998).

In his *Nationwide* study, Morley chose to use focus groups rather than one-on-one interviews so that he could investigate ways in which individual interpretations are shaped by socio-cultural contexts. In particular, a group setting was considered important for reflecting ways in which most media communication takes place (Morley, 1996). With these factors in mind, the focus group method was chosen to investigate the reception of political documentary among young Mumbaikars. For my purposes, focus groups provided a constructed and concentrated simulation of how audiences communicated about film to each other in everyday contexts. Focus groups enable participants to speak about film in a way that they would ordinarily do with their own peers. In India, the experience of watching a movie is a group activity, often shared by family and friends. This is especially true of teenagers for whom movie-going is a very collective experience (Srinivas, 2002).

In turn, the group context allowed me to observe the dynamics and language of socially constructed discussion in ways not encountered with interviews. By using a semi-structured question guide, the discussion ensued without placing too much emphasis on how the conversations were structured. Participants were encouraged to explore topics that were pertinent to them and may have not been previously thought of, thus illuminating new aspects of research. Similarly, Wilkinson (1998) states that the influence researchers have on the topics being discussed is minimized in focus groups. This in turn gives more importance to the frameworks, concepts, experiences, perceptions and language of the participants, as well as group norms (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 1998; Lewis, 1992; Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Lunt, 1996). Stemming from a cultural studies approach this study is increasingly concerned with allowing participants to express their perspectives, formulate meaning and share their experiences through their language in their context about Indian political documentaries.

There are some key limitations of focus groups that were relevant to designing this study. For instance, the group context may sway the discussion to either consensus or extreme views (Lunt, 1996). For example, some participants may feel pressure to conform to the perspectives of more dominant group members (Vicsek, 2007). However, such effects were diminished through the use of follow-up interviews which provided participants with the opportunity to reflect, elaborate and clarify what they have said.

Study sample

Focus group participants: Participants targeted were urban, middle-class residents of Mumbai city between the ages of 16-25. To recruit participants, flyers were put up on notice boards of three major colleges – Bhavan’s College, St. Xaviers College, and R. D. National’s College⁴ in Mumbai, India. Emails were also sent to Faculty of the Communications Department at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and the College of Social Work to notify and disseminate information about participating in this study.

Once volunteers emailed an expression of interest to participate they were emailed back with more information about what the study entailed, their role and a brief synopsis of the films being used to investigate reception. They were asked to confirm their intention to participate by providing their cell phone details and specifying their availability to attending group screening of films and focus group sessions. Research has shown that working with a group of friends or acquaintances is a beneficial criterion for richer and a more productive focus group discussion (Lewis, 1992). Accordingly, the volunteers were asked to invite their friends, who went through the same procedures as those who expressed interest. Thus two groups, with naturally occurring groups of friends and acquaintances were formed.

The benefits of being able to host groups of people who know each other, through associations of ‘loose communities’, such as work or a university class, is considered to facilitate freer or more natural conversation (Sauter, 2010; 244; Kitzinger, 1994; Lewis, 1992; Wilkinson, 1998). Such groups potentially represent a naturally occurring social situation (Kitzinger, 1994). Participants may also be more at ease in challenging each

⁴ College is equivalent to University in New Zealand. However, colleges in India include Form 6/Year 12 and Form 7/Year 13.

others' opinions when they are already friends outside the focus group (Wilkinson, 1998). In this study, the involvement of groups of friends was beneficial as participants exhibited a sense of ease during focus group discussions. Moreover, this dynamic was particularly helpful as this was the first time any of the volunteers had participated in a focus group research study.

Two sets of focus groups were formed. Participants ranged between 19 and 25 years, with the average age being 21.5 years. The initial aim was to construct groups of eight participants, with two on standby. Literature suggests that a mix of both genders stimulates the talkativeness of the group (Sauter, 2010). Consequently, four young men and four young women were selected for each group. Each focus group was invited to watch and discuss the two documentaries. For ease of reference, I have named these focus groups Focus Group 1 and Focus Group 2. Focus group researchers are encouraged to take account of group composition and dynamics in order to identify the effect these elements have on the discussion (Kitzinger, 1994; Sim, 1998). On the day of each session, the composition of the focus groups were:

Focus Group 1: Discussion about *War and Peace* – 7 participants (4 young men: 3 young women)

Focus Group 1: Discussion about *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* – 6 participants (4 young men: 2 young women)

Focus Group 2: Discussion about *War and Peace* – 6 participants (2 young men: 4 young women)

Focus Group 2: Discussion about *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* – 5 participants (2 young men: 3 young women)

In Focus Group 2, there was a participant who could not make the discussion of *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* due to serious family circumstances. However, as she was still very keen to participate in the study a one-on-one interview was conducted at a later stage. This interview followed the same type and sequence of questions as administered in the focus group discussion.

There needs to be at least a minimum of two groups to examine similarities and differences, or until data reaches the point of saturation (Lunt, 1996). This is dependent on time and financial restraints, among other factors affecting research (Hughes &

DuMont, 1993). There were sufficient respondents to allow for two focus groups to be conducted, which sufficed for the nature of this exploratory study.

Data collection procedures

Participants were asked to first attend a group screening of each of the films. This was conducted one to two days in advance of the discussion session. Kubley (1996) advises that it is necessary to take into the account the delay between viewing of media text to discussions as audience interpretations, opinions and understandings may change between this period to become more elaborate, exaggerated or muted. Consequently, there was a maximum of one day's gap between film screenings and focus group discussions.

This study was conducted during the time of the monsoons. There were several times when focus groups were scheduled, and contrary to the weather predictions, there was a huge downpour flooding most of the city. This limited access to public transport and participants were unable to make it to screenings. Furthermore, it was hard to find a suitable time when all participants were able to be present for the films screenings and focus group discussions. Consequently, if a participant was not able to make it to the group screening they were given the option to watch the movie at their own convenience prior to the focus group session.

Engaging in some sort of activity, such as writing essays or keeping a diary can stimulate focus group discussions as it gives participants time to prepare and focus their attention to the topic under investigation (Colucci, 2007). Accordingly, for this study participants were emailed a set of questions to think about prior to watching the film and the commencement of the focus group discussion. These questions related to the topics that were to be investigated in the focus group discussion, such as arguments and messages of the film, pertinent themes, and likes and dislikes of the film. This allowed the ensuing discussion to be richer and more in-depth (Colucci, 2007). For similar reasons, participants were also encouraged to make notes while watching the film. However, only one participant did so.

On the day of the scheduled discussion each focus group watched short extracts from the two films being used in this study. De Bruin (2008a) states that this enhances

discussion while allowing researchers to understand how participants engage with specified depictions. Separate discussions were needed for each film, which is why two sessions for each focus group took place. Each focus group session occurred a week apart from each other. It is recommended that the setting for focus group discussion be as relaxed and casual as possible in order to motivate dialogue (Lunt, 1996; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). For this study one of the participants offered her home as a setting for the focus group discussions. Most members from both focus groups had previously visited this participant's home on several social occasions which contributed to an informal/relaxed atmosphere. See Appendix E for a copy of the focus group schedule.

The viewing environment also has an impact on attention. Mumbai is a chaotic city. It was hard to find a location where external factors such as traffic, loud chatter and weather conditions were able to be controlled. The time of day and length of the discussion may also affect the focus group data (Vicsek, 2007). The focus group sessions were conducted in the afternoon, and early evenings, when noise in Mumbai was at its most minimum. The length of the focus group was expected to be around one hour and all four discussions concluded within the hour or just after.

Follow-up interviews

One disadvantage to group discussions is the possibility that participants might lack the confidence to share certain details, which they may be more comfortable sharing through a questionnaire or in an interview (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 1998). This does not invalidate focus group data and can be overcome by using a combination of methods (Kitzinger, 1994). Thus, one-on-one follow-up interviews were scheduled with focus group participants. By the time of the follow-up interviews, I had already established familiarity and rapport with the participants. This level of comfort achieved may have resulted in a more open sharing of thoughts and experiences. Consequently, during the one-on-one interviews, participants were more at ease in elaborating on ideas or opinions, and sharing residual thoughts about focus group discussions. This may also

have been due to the fact that they felt less constrained by group pressures, such as wanting to appear in a good light in front of other participants (Vicsek, 2007).

In contrast to the semi-structured interview process which was used to explore topics, the follow-up interview was used to reflect and expand on pertinent themes that emerged in the focus group discussions (Morgan & Spanish, 1984). Lunt (1996) also observes that follow-up feedback from focus group participants about discussion data are a key part of critical research, enabling participants to play a more active role in the research process.

Research states that such one-on-one interviews may cause discrepancies in power between the researcher and participant as the researcher is in control of what topics are explored and may project onto and influence their cultural systems on participants (Wilkinson, 1998). This is overcome to some extent in this study as focus groups were conducted prior to these interviews, allowing the researcher to get to know the participants in a situation where participants had more control over the discussion than the researcher. Additionally, the topics discussed in the follow-up interviews were those highlighted by participants themselves during focus group discussions.

Given my position as both an insider and an outsider, it was important to ensure that my own assumptions, positions and biases were put aside. Follow-up interviews enabled clarification and expansion of ideas, opinions and discussions from the participants themselves, and also limited any tendency to form my own conclusions based on unclear data (Lunt, 1996). The follow-up interviews also provided the opportunity to personally thank each participant for the time given to this research. Moreover, these interviews solved the issue of having a small sample group by expanding on and enriching focus group data. It was also used to mitigate any 'group think' that might occur, as groups of friends were used for focus group participants.

Study sample

Eleven focus group participants: Follow-up interviews were conducted with all of the focus group participants with the exception of one young woman who dropped out from focus group one after the first discussion, and one young man from focus group one who was unable to be contacted.

Data collection procedures

Follow-up interviews (see Appendix F) were conducted two to three weeks after focus group discussions. These interviews were audio recorded. They were conducted at a time and location convenient to the participants, such as a coffee shop or the participant's home.

Participant Observation

Non-verbal communication is an important aspect of focus group discussions and can be captured through the use of video technologies (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Travers (2009) makes the point that gestures made by participants are important and aid understanding of speech. When working with young people, Rojas, Susinos and Calvo (2011) found that for some of them facial expressions and gestures were elements that impacted on their interaction with others and their dissemination of information. Some characteristics of non-verbal communication paid attention to in research include the use of space, body posture, movements, moments of silence, and facial expression (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Often participants use gestures such as the nodding of the head, as signs of verbal agreement of the content being conveyed by the person speaking.

For focus group discussions participant observation is beneficial as the researcher is unable to pay attention to the complexity and dynamics of the entire group during the whole session. When the researcher's attention is focused on the person speaking, there may be several interactions or non-verbal cues among other participants that the researcher might fail to notice. The researcher is able to go back and review the video footage and make note of important interactions and non-verbal cues that will enhance the verbal data collected (Lewis, 1992). For this study, videotaping of the focus group discussions enabled efficient transcription of data, allowing accurate identification of participant comments.

Similarly, when observing the documentary film society, participant observation enabled me to get a feel for the atmosphere in which screenings and discussion took place and the non-verbal response of audiences to the documentaries.

Study sample

Focus group participants: Focus group participants were made aware that they would be videotaped for participant observation in the participation sheet and gave their permission when they signed the consent form.

Vikalp@Prithvi: Around a hundred audience members at two documentary screenings held by this documentary film group.

Data collection procedures

Participant observation, assisted by the use of a Sony Handycam, was included in the data collection process for the four focus group discussions. The position of the video camera was at the front of the focus group in order to capture all members within a single frame thus making it easier to observe group dynamics and interaction throughout the discussion.

Vikalp@Prithvi was observed during two of their screenings on Monday, June 27th 2011 and Monday, July 25th 2011. I assumed the role of observer after advising the screening coordinator and the facilitator Mr. Anand Patwardhan of my presence and intentions. I assured them that none of the members of the group would be identifiable in the final report of my study. They were happy to assist me with this and I blended in with the rest of the group, observing and making notes. Participant observation enabled me to gather contextual information about the atmosphere, organisation, process and the eventual occurrence of the screening hosted by this film group. It also allowed me to examine audience reception to political documentary film through observation of the screening and the discussion that ensued after.

Participant observation notes

The participant observation notes are a cumulative account of field notes, scribbling and other information obtained during the time the researcher is an observer in the field (Jordan, 2001). Participant notes were used to provide description of the overall atmosphere of the Vikalp@Prithvi screening in order to provide information about the processes and on-goings of such activities. Researcher influence/bias was limited as the

film screening is a free, public screening containing diverse demographics. Note-taking was done discretely so those present probably assumed that I was part of the audience. When researchers are embedded into the group being researched it enables the production of richer data as participants are not aware and thus their actions and reactions are not impacted upon by researcher presence (Pickering, 2008). In the notes, no person present at the screening is easily identifiable, thus protecting subjects. However, simple observation is inadequate as the researcher will fail to ascertain the reasons behind certain actions (Pickering, 2008). Therefore participant observation was coupled with surveys in order to provide a richer description of documentary film groups and their audiences in Mumbai, India.

Surveys

Surveys are generally employed by quantitative researchers and have often been overlooked by researchers working with qualitative design frameworks because of their limited ability to account for social processes (Philippe, 2001). However, this can be overcome when combined with other qualitative approaches such as participant observation, providing useful descriptive data and improving the overall density of the research study (Philippe, 2001).

Online surveys were used because of convenience and its ability to generate large amounts of data within a short period of time. As I was distanced from Mumbai geographically, this method was most suited to gathering information about audience perspectives and the reception to political documentary film. These surveys were designed to be qualitative, facilitated by the use of open-ended questions in an attempt to collect rich, varied data, while allowing participants more flexibility in exploring and revealing issues.

Gruber et al. (2008) have identified a number of benefits to using online surveys. Their convenience enables participants to complete interviews at times that are suitable to them and from convenient locations where internet facilities are available. Online surveys have the added advantage of enabling researchers to access participants they would not otherwise be able to contact (Gruber et al., 2008). Additionally, when the

identity of the participant remains undisclosed they might be more at ease with participating in the study and disposed towards providing more detailed information (Gruber et al., 2008).

Study sample

Thirty Members of Vikalp@Prithvi: An advertisement was posted on Vikalp@Prithvi's Facebook page inviting potential participants between the ages of 16-25 to read an overview of this study and a participant information sheet.

Twenty-five Political Science Students of St. Xaviers College: An advertisement was posted on 'Political Science Students of Xavier's Batch 2011-2012' Facebook page inviting potential participants from the University to read an overview of this study and a participant information sheet.

Data collection procedures

If volunteers from either group were willing to participate, they were asked to click a web link listed on the advertisement which would then direct them to the online survey. In-person surveys were unable to be conducted with Vikalp@Prithvi members as the screening venue did not allow the administration of surveys. Online surveys were a viable alternative as most people belonging to the Vikalp@Prithvi group were notified about group events and important details either via email or the group's public Facebook page. Online surveys were uploaded using the free service option by Survey Monkey – www.surveymonkey.com (see Appendix G and H).

As these surveys were filled online the researcher had no control over participant responses. All attempts were made to elicit detailed information from participants, such as the use of terms like 'please elaborate', 'answer in detail', 'please give examples'.

Analysis and Interpretation processes

Data analysis is the crucial stage where researchers begin to understand their findings in light of their research aims (Basit, 2003).

Thematic data analysis

Thematic analysis is commonly used to code and analyse qualitative data collected from interviews, focus groups and follow-up interviews (Vicsek, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are many different thematic analysis approaches that have both emerged from key qualitative methodological frameworks such as Grounded Theory and independently as analytical methods. The coding method is designed to identify themes emerging from the data, while interpretation and analysis organize and describe these themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Fereday, 2006). Themes are defined as statements or ideas that recur throughout the data, enabling the coherence of a study (Bradley, Curry & Devers, 2007).

In order for thematic analysis to be conducted it is essential that all data is transcribed and a transcript of the discussion is formed (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The transcript is analysed in light of the notes taken by the focus group moderator, any recollections the researcher may have and video footage, to elicit more information (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Researchers are also encouraged to bear in mind the social-cultural context in which the research was conducted (Wilkinson, 1998; Lunt, 1996; Attride-Stirling, 2001). With regards to this study, qualitative data was analysed in reference to the context in which interviews and discussions were conducted, researcher notes, the participant profile form and the participant observation videos.

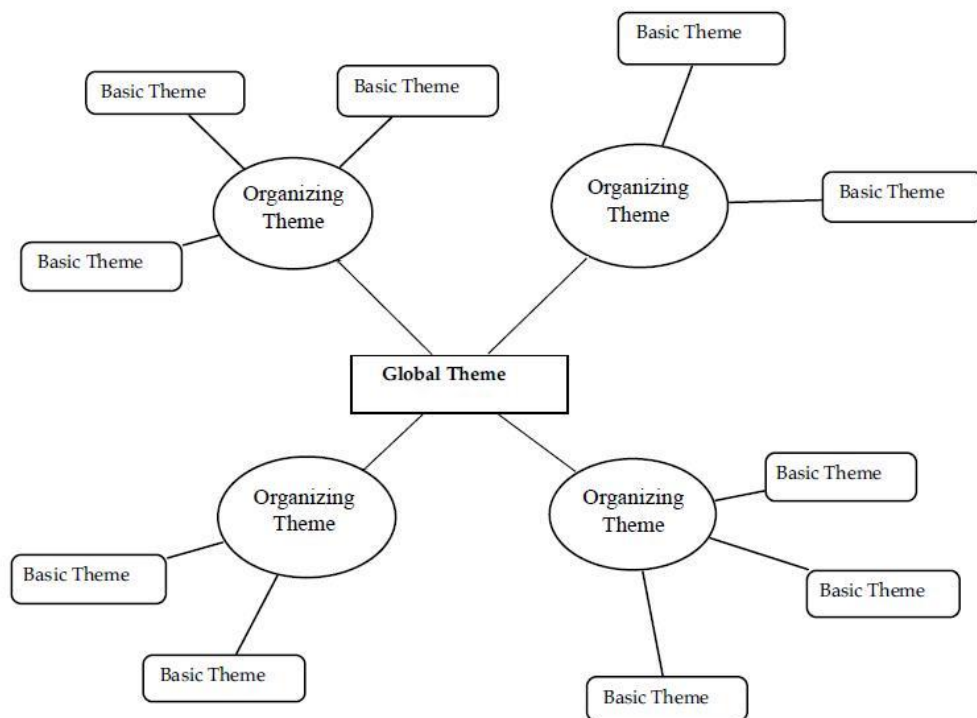
The first, and most essential step is coding of data (Kendall, 1999; Bradley et al., 2007; Basit, 2003; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Burnard, 1991; Braun & Clarke, 2006). A code accurately captures and describes the richness of the data (Fereday, 2006). Researchers ascribe codes to describe paragraphs, sentences, phrases or words of interest in the data (Basit, 2003; Attride-Stirling, 2001). These codes are used to find similarities and differences while researchers accumulate examples to highlight each code (Basit, 2003; Attride-Stirling, 2001). Coding and the formation of

themes can be classified as (Kendall, 1999; Burnard, 1991; Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Bradley et al., 2007; Attride-Stirling, 2001; 388):

1. *Basic themes* (codes) are of the lowest order and a simple descriptive premise of the data. They highlight patterns and are simple concepts and ideas that are illuminated frequently in the data. This process is described as open coding.
2. *Organizing themes* (taxonomies; descriptive themes) are categories into which basic themes are grouped under. Connections are made between the basic themes. They essentially tell a story and provide a picture of the main findings of the data. This process is described as axial coding.
3. *Global themes* (taxonomies; analytical themes) are those which encompass the bigger picture taking into account the data as a whole within the context that the research has been conducted in. These themes are generated through the funnelling down of organizing themes. These themes are establishing and conclusive. This process is described as selective coding.

Attride-Stirling (2001) devised a framework for thematic analysis, highlighting the interrelationships between the three levels of themes:

Figure 2: Thematic Network (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388)



Once these three stages are completed, researchers begin analysis of data by establishing patterns and interpreting findings (Attride-Stirling, 2001). A summary is then provided about the themes and the patterns, while making inferences to previous literature and answering research questions (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study combines the results and discussion section allowing readers to see how the themes relate to each other, and their implication in relation to previous literature.

Additionally for this study a pragmatic adaptation of grounded theory was used to support Attride-Stirling's (2009) framework for thematic analysis. Barbour (2007) says that the analytical part of a research study can be influenced by other frameworks of analyses, in order to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of data in a manner that is most appropriate. Grounded theory is most appropriate for circumstances where there is a paucity of pre-existing theories or literature (Goulding, 1999). As seen in Chapter One, these are the conditions from which this research study emerges. This study legitimizes inductive data analysis in order to generate themes from participants, rather than relying on pre-existing information. The inductive approach to thematic analysis allows themes to emerge from the qualitative data transcripts rather than deductive identification in accordance with a template of codes drawn from the literature review prior to analysis (Fereday, 2006).

Content Analysis

Content analysis is widely used in communication research and provides a brief description of important aspects of text or data collected (Wilkinson, Joffe & Yardley, 2004). It is similar to thematic analysis but not as detailed. This method establishes categories and then assesses their frequency. Content analysis is always linked back to the context in which the data collection has taken place (Wilkinson et al., 2004; Westbrook, 1994; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Content analysis was used to describe data collected from the surveys administered to the documentary film group, Vikalp@Prithvi and the students of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai.

Analysis of Film

Both *War and Peace* and *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* are culturally specific films that are historically analytic and speak through a certain kind of media discourse. In-depth analysis of documentary film reveals the political forces at play and develops a political understanding of the issue being addressed (Renov, 1993). When performing critical research into audience reception, textual analysis is central as it highlights the multi-dimensionality of the text (Murdock, 1989). Cultural studies researchers are encouraged to observe the various conventions used to construct the text while also situating them in wider systems involved in its production (Kellner, 1995; Willeman, 2005). This calls for a shift from a sole focus on textual analysis to an inclusion of the recognition of context that impacts on the creation of the text and thus on how the text is interpreted.

The analysis of the documentaries will be conducted in order to highlight the conventions that fit Patwardhan's film into the category of political documentary. Shriprakash's film will be used in a complementary manner to draw out similar and contrasting characteristics. The film analysis will also aid an understanding of audience reception of film. Although I would not consider myself an expert, I have the philosophical and interpretive knowledge of a documentary film student to which audiences may have not been exposed. Thus there will be a difference in the reading of the text by myself, as the researcher, and the audience. It is important to bear in mind that there is no right or wrong reading, and that for the purposes of this study, my reading of media text has the same value as other accounts of the text encountered in the research (Fetveit, 2001).

Ethical Considerations

It is important to ensure that research is conducted in an ethical manner, especially when it is social in nature, involving people (Esterberg, 2002). All research was undertaken under the guidelines of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK). As this study progressed, ethics approval was duly obtained for the use of online surveys to assess the reception of audiences who were part of a documentary film society and students who watched documentary as part of their

university curriculum. Participant observation of the documentary film group Vikalp@Prithvi was held in a public place and as participants remained anonymous and there was no problematic activity, AUTEK approval was not required.

The confidentiality of participants is an important consideration in social research (Esterberg, 2002). Apart from interviews with the two filmmakers, all other participants were given pseudonyms in order to protect their identity, and therefore their original identity remains undisclosed in this study. This was clearly indicated to participants in the participant information sheet, and verbally before the commencement of focus groups and follow-up interviews. Additionally, it was made clear the participation in research is voluntary, and participants could choose to leave the study at any time. However, because of the nature of focus group research, participants who chose to leave these discussions were advised that their input would be used as its absence would unduly affect the nature and outcomes of these group discussions. No participants objected to this. Upon agreeing to participate in this research participants were emailed with a participant information sheet and a consent form. A signed copy of the consent form was handed to the researcher when participants presented themselves for the focus group discussions. Participants were once again verbally informed of their rights, research procedures, and given necessary information of the nature of the research with the appropriate contacts, before the commencement of interviews, focus groups and follow-up interviews. Their consent to be audio (interviews, focus groups and follow-up interviews) and video (focus groups) recorded was also sought. No participants had any issues with data handling and storage, as made explicit in the participant information sheet. Additionally, the two filmmakers were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts.

For survey participants, once again, participation was stated as being voluntary with anonymity protected. These participants had no contact with the researcher, as confirmation to participate was made via a link on *Facebook*. A separate link containing the participant information sheet was made available stating the nature of the research, procedures and an opportunity for them to contact the researcher should they have any questions and wished to receive a copy of this study. In line with AUTEK guidelines, voluntary participation to undertake and complete the survey was considered as participant consent. Upon reflection, all participants were happy with the nature and procedures of the research.

Conclusion

Rather than focusing on a quest for knowledge this study uses methods that engage in processes of interpreting and understanding the world as it is located within historical and subjective contexts (Ang, 1996). In this chapter, I have described in detail the research processes that were utilized in this study, engaging with areas such as study design, the uses of methodological tools and analytic processes. This study is exploratory in nature, drawing from a combination of descriptive and interpretive strategies to elicit valuable insights that will enable me to fulfil the aims of this study. Methods such as filmmaker interviews will provide an insight into the production of and context surrounding political documentary films, while focus groups will allow for the assessment of audience perceptions and reception of political documentary film, interpreted by using thematic analysis. Participant observation aids in providing a descriptive account of focus group interactions, as well as the atmosphere of political documentary screenings at documentary film groups. These aspects of research are supplemented with a textual analysis of both films, as it is important to ascertain the political nature of the films that have a potential impact on reception.

Generalizability

Qualitative research is highly contextual, and thus does not prioritize generalizability (de Bruin, 2008). Generalizability is defined as the fittingness of the findings of one study to other populations (Beck, 1993). This study examined the reception of documentary film among a very small segment of the Indian audience – young (16-25), urban, middle class Mumbaikars. Moreover, in light of the cultural studies approach, audience interpretations or readings of text are dependent on their cultural identities and contexts, and thus such findings cannot be generalized to include all other groups (Morley, 1996; Drotner, 2000). The participant profile form further indicates the specificity of the research. These findings give indication of the perspectives of a very small, but significant group within the vast, diverse Indian population. Such diversity limits generalizability as there are various religious factions, a multitude of languages and numerous social and cultural practices in India (Harindranath, 1998; Sharma, 2002; Kumar, 2010). Additionally, the landscape changes from one city to another and what may be applicable for Mumbai may not be relevant for Delhi. For example, the

environment of Delhi is often politically charged as the Parliament and the President of India reside there, along with other top governmental and political institutions. On the other hand Mumbai is the epicentre of the entertainment industry, and therefore there is a strong focus on celebrity and entertainment activities. There were limitations accessing large numbers of participants, thus limiting generalizability. However, as this is an exploratory study the findings are still relevant for those wishing to conduct future research in this area.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion (Part One)

Introduction

This chapter (supplemented by the textual analysis in Appendix I and J) begins by providing an overview of the key concerns of *War and Peace* (2002) by Anand Patwardhan in order to locate it as a political documentary. In line with a cultural studies approach, it will also situate political documentaries within the socio-cultural and historical context of film production in India. The second film *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* (1999) by Shriprakash serves as a tool for comparison, to highlight, describe and further aid the analysis of *War and Peace*.

Using information gathered from filmmaker conversations, focus groups and follow-up interviews this section then moves on to discuss the possible outlets for young Mumbaikars to engage with political documentaries. Using qualitative surveys, further information was gathered on the implications and outcomes of accessing documentary film through educational institutions and documentary film groups. The themes are italicized and listed in relation to their correspondence with the main aims of this study.

War and Peace as a political documentary

Political documentary films are often concerned to identify and critique dominant institutions and ideologies in society within the socio-political context in which they occur. For instance, films like *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) highlight the negligence of corporate responsibility (Smaill, 2007). *Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers* (2006) and *Enron: The smartest guys in the room* (2005) are similar in the sense that they investigate and critique institutions and dominant assumptions in society (Wayne, 2008).

Likewise, in *War and Peace* Patwardhan critiques influential institutions, the political nature of their actions and their subsequent impact, as well as dominant religious ideologies prevailing in Indian society. The documentary investigates issues that, during the time of production, were at the crux of social and political life in India. The

main topic of the film, nuclear nationalism, was an important political issue that needed to be addressed as India was on the verge of becoming a nuclear super power. Through interviews, images and documents Patwardhan highlighted the actions of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was in government at the time the movie was being produced. Patwardhan showed how dominant religious ideology, Hindutva, is used to harness support, brainwash, manipulate and foster aggression amongst civilians in order that the government could achieve its goal. Other political issues addressed in this film were political pride, increasing resistance against long-standing enemy Pakistan, and fostering political alliances with the West.

Throughout his film, Patwardhan clearly articulates his political position. Rather than preaching to his audiences, he uses cinematic techniques like juxtaposition to present his case and allow audiences to interpret and react themselves. Unlike Michael Moore who focused on critiquing the actions of President George W. Bush in *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Christensen, 2004), Patwardhan critiques the entire political system that was in power during 1998-2002 when the film was being produced. Audiences are taken on a journey as Patwardhan actively promotes and asks audiences to reflect on his message of peace by showing images that counter his position.

In Appendix I, three excerpts of this film are discussed in terms of being a politically relevant documentary film. These three excerpts were chosen as they are most representative of the key themes of the entire film. *War and Peace* plays an important part in the construction of historical and political knowledge about an important issue in Indian society. Key themes in this film include nuclear nationalism and the construction of identity, the influence of religious fundamentalism, and the detrimental effects on India's most marginalized, such as, women, religious or caste minorities, and rural citizens. The themes highlighted and the messages drawn from each of these excerpts are politically charged and used to persuade audiences and encourage them to reflect on what they are seeing.

Political documentaries focus on issues such as social injustices, politics and nationalism while stimulating critical debate and persuading their audiences to take action (Benson & Snee, 2008). They are increasingly centred on critiquing, rather than supporting, dominant social and political ideologies and institutions (Benson & Snee, 2008). Similarly, Patwardhan shows his audiences how political institutions (the

Government) are involved in increasing social injustices and promoting a false sense of nationalism that would subsequently lead to grave consequences for the nation as a whole. He encourages audiences to critically reflect on the situation and question social and political activities.

According to Benson and Snee (2008), overtly political documentary film is classified by its representation of political parties, political figures and political processes. Kahana (2008) suggests that *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) is an overtly political film as Al Gore uses several references to politics, through archives of his political campaigns and personal reflections. For example, in one scene Al Gore says, “I used to be the next President of the United States of America” (Kahana, 2008, p. 28). Similarly, through all of his films, Patwardhan critiques the beliefs and practices of dominant institutions such as the Government, highlighting the corrupt and manipulative practices of politicians or dominant religious ideologies such as Hindutva and cultural practices like Sati⁵.

Political documentaries encourage their audiences to develop a sense of participatory citizenship as they reflect on the problematic issues affecting their societies (Benson and Snee, 2008). Such films seek to ignite a feeling of citizenship in individuals and thus bridge the gap between themselves and community engagement (Kahana, 2008). In *War and Peace*, Patwardhan encourages his audience to critically think about India’s involvement in the nuclear arms race by providing an in-depth analysis of its impact in India, while highlighting the gravity of the issue by situating it within an international context.

Shriprakash also critiques social institutions and prevailing ideologies in *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*, but on a much smaller geo-political scale than *War and Peace*. In comparison to Patwardhan’s critique of several political institutions and political figures, Shriprakash focuses on the negative impact the Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) had on the land and people of Jadugoda (an area in close geographical proximity to the plant). Through the use of interviews and images Shriprakash draws attention to the ways in which the tribal indigenous people have been misled by the corporation. In Appendix J, an excerpt of this film is discussed, highlighting the key themes of the movie that contribute to this documentary’s political nature. *Buddha*

⁵ Sati is an act by which a women sacrifices herself atop her husbands funeral pyre (Hansen, 1988). According to Hindus this act is scared and post-Sati women are considered to be divine and referred to as goddesses henceforth (Hansen, 1988).

weeps in Jadugoda brings to light themes such as the negligence of large corporations by taking into consideration the negative effects these companies have on the tribal people of India.

Patwardhan explored numerous issues under the overarching theme of nuclear development, whereas Shriprakash specifically focused on an informative argument about the impact of uranium mining in Jadugoda. *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* is educational in scope and elicits empathy from its viewers as they see the adverse circumstances the people of Jadugoda live in. Its main premise is to increase awareness of the issue. In contrast, the main aim of *War and Peace* was to tap into the political consciousness of its audiences encouraging them to question the multiple ways in which the agendas of agencies and individuals operate to advance a push towards nuclear power under the cloak of the nation's progress.

Kazmi (1999) states that documentary filmmakers in India often approach social issues from an individualistic perspective. This includes describing and analysing the psyche of the marginalized individual, their experiences and grievances, rather than critiquing the system that has had an impact on these negative circumstances. Although both Patwardhan and Shriprakash have given attention to individual concerns and negative situations, importantly both filmmakers situate these concerns within the socio-political landscape, simultaneously critiquing dominant ideologies, political figures and/or institutions. According to Bose (2005), Patwardhan steers clear from an instructive approach, used by most Indian documentary filmmakers, relying on humanistic and liberal worldviews to highlight the injustices he sees in Indian society. Similarly, my textual analysis of *War and Peace* showed that Patwardhan put forth his perspectives and intentions in the form of an argument, that challenged audiences to critically question the images they saw on screen. Shriprakash's narration is simply a description of the images without his critical narration of the events or personal opinion. More than Patwardhan, Shriprakash steers clear of an instructive approach relying more on interviews and expert opinions to get his point across.

As discussed earlier, political documentary film aims to highlight civic responsibilities by providing a space that encourages critical thinking and motivates public engagement (Giroux, 2011; Bowles, 2006; Sandercock & Attili, 2010). Both Shriprakash and Patwardhan use a montage of interviews, coupled with personal narration to produce a

shared narrative. Shared narratives are formed through the voices of the filmmaker and those participating in the film. Throughout most of the film, both filmmakers use this shared narrative to draw attention to pertinent issues, enabling audiences to critically reflect on things they may have not thought about before. Another technique used by political documentaries is the visceral depiction of struggles of marginalized and politicized identities (Nariman, 2006; Wayne, 2008; Sandercock & Attili, 2010; Smail, 2007) that work to affect the mind and body of their viewers (Gaines, 2007). Both movies show vulnerable villagers who have been directly affected by the developing and testing of nuclear arms. Additionally, by highlighting the negative circumstances they face, in juxtaposition with the corruption, negligence and denial of these circumstances by those in power, the filmmakers are able to elicit empathy from viewers.

To the extent that socio-cultural context is reflected in the production of political documentary film, it is important to take into account the specificity of time and place, social and cultural institutions, and the political atmosphere contextualising the production of film (Goldsmith, 1998; Dorst, 1999; Tawil-Souri, 2011). This includes an acknowledgement of characteristics, such as the tools and institutions through which the text was made, as well as the relationships between these factors and the produced text (Dorst, 1999). Therefore it is important to pay attention to the context that surrounds *War and Peace* as this atmosphere is as political as the documentary itself.

The news media in India is highly sensationalized and often represents the interest of political groups or the elite (Kumar, 2010). Therefore political documentary in India can serve to perform a sort of ‘watchdog’ function to address the inadequacies of news media (Nariman, 2006). Counter to mainstream news media, both *War and Peace* and *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* represent vulnerable citizens of India – indigenous peoples and the rural population of India – while exposing the problematic activities of organizations such as the UCIL and the illegal, corrupt activities of the Government and various political figures.

Although in recent years there has been increased support for the freedom of the press, censorship and regulation are usually exerted in response to the moral panic fuelled by religious, social and political factions (Laughey, 2009). Indian political leaders have been known to punish those who critique them or their governments (Dhavan, 2008).

War and Peace was made during the time when the BJP Government was in power. The BJP is known to promote Hindutva ideology while imposing a number of secular laws against Muslims. In 1992 they took it to the next level in their involvement with the destruction of the Babri Masjid (Dhavan, 2008). This was based on the belief that the mosque was erected on the same spot as where the Hindu God Ram was born. From then on, every political and social issue under their regulation was embedded with Hindutva ideology as they propagated themselves to the top of the political hierarchy.

The BJP is known for intimidating people and unleashing moral panic (Dhavan, 2008). *War and Peace* was involved in critiquing this Hindutva ideology and the BJP. Patwardhan showed instances where the BJP was involved in corrupt practices and manipulation of vulnerable citizens, while ignoring the needs of India's most marginalized. Unsurprisingly, the BJP did not take kindly to this criticism and was thought to have played a key role in the censorship of the film. Fischer (2009) mentions that half the members of the four-member Advisory Panel of the CBFC, who proposed scene cuts for *War and Peace*, were functionaries of the BJP. Indeed, the literature suggests that there have been numerous instances where people were appointed into authority at the CBFC solely on the basis of their political affiliation (Bhowmik, 2009).

Political documentary films engage in addressing matters that may be of local, national or global relevance (Corner, 2008). Shriprakash's film addressed a local issue – uranium mining in the rural village of Jadugoda – while Patwardhan addressed the development of nuclear arms on a national and international scale. Patwardhan chose to focus on neighbouring Pakistan because he says,

India did nuclear tests and within two weeks Pakistan also did nuclear tests so they were parallel situations and there was also an arms race that had begun between India and Pakistan.

Both of these films were made during a time when the nuclear issue was a current event in India. Nuclear tests were conducted in 1998 which prompted Patwardhan to embark on a journey to counter these tests by highlighting their negative effects. Shriprakash's response on the other hand was to investigate and illuminate the unsafe practices and the negligence of government corporations providing resources for these tests. Thus, both films were reflective of important social and political issues relevant at the time of production.

A local approach is often targeted to those local/national audiences represented in the film. Audiences are better able to relate to the people they see on-screen as they share a common background with them, in terms of location, culture or nationality. Thus, this approach allows what is represented on screen to be relevant for audiences. However, this is not to say that the issues represented are not able to be transferred to international audiences who are also witnesses to such situations. A global approach on the other hand can be related to a variety of audiences, as such films generally approach issues on a much broader scale by making reference to many different countries/cultures/peoples. Therefore, audiences are better able to relate to the film. Second, a global approach is beneficial in terms of comparative purposes. Audiences are able to visualize and critically reflect on issues in relation to other countries thus allowing them to realize the gravity or potential of their own situation. Lastly, a more global approach heightens the severity of the situation by showing something that is affecting a large number of people around the world.

Issues of access

One key factor that impacts on reception is access to media texts. Consequently, it is important to take note of the fora available to young Mumbaikars for accessing political documentary film.

Internet as an outlet for documentary film engagement

In light of focus group participants' interests in documentary and the constraints of access, we brainstormed ways in which documentary film could be easily accessed by this group. Online outlets such as *YouTube* are participatory social spaces that increase the potential for democratization, and allow dispersed individuals to share information, while at the same time articulating their personal identity. Such internet portals open up a free space for individuals to upload videos that reflect issues that are important to them, or footage of themselves articulating their opinions. Most participants described the internet as an outlet for documentary film engagement as most young, urban,

educated, middle-class Mumbaikars were frequent consumers of this medium. In the participant profile form, the internet was also cited as the most common source accessed in order to keep participants informed.

Neha: Now at this age everybody is a net savvy person. I think here internet would be the best way - or maybe social networking - to promote these kind of things where young people are most active.

With more people becoming connected to the internet, filmmakers are promoting films online and assessing audience reactions to synthesize particular aspects of their film (Barker, 2006). Films like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) used the internet to prepare audiences for the arrival of the film and adjust segments of the film in response to audience reactions over the internet (Barker, 2006). With the ability to expose and generate interest long before the film is released for public circulation, audience interest will already be activated and this will have an impact on reception.

However, with most of India's population living in rural areas, and 84% of those people still unaware of the internet (Sinha, 2010), this method may not be feasible if filmmakers are trying to reach a broader audience range. A couple of participants stated that because they were unlikely to hear about new documentary film releases, and would thus not know how to search on the internet for those releases, the best way for documentary film to reach them would be through broadcast media. In particular, participants mentioned that more news channels should dedicate space for documentary programming. Currently participants only note one channel, *NDTV*, which dedicates some airtime to documentary films. However, there is not a lot of publicity about documentary programming, thus resulting in low levels of viewership. These channels are not free-to-air but are included in a package of paid television channels, of which most middle-class households subscribe to.

Sara: Only if it's [the documentary] on TV, because there's no other way. I wouldn't Google it, but probably if it was on TV or there were a lot of advertisements about it, only then.

Educational Institutions

Still, for most focus group participants, showing documentaries in educational institutions was one of the main ways in which they could be promoted and interest could be generated. As one participant mentions,

Divya: I think they should provide them to schools 'cause that's where I watched half my documentaries. I was forced to. Schools and colleges that's where it works best. Because you have to see it, you have to make presentations for it, so you develop interest.

Rajagopal and Vohra (2012) note that John Grierson was one of the first people who promoted film screenings in schools and universities, based on the premise that these are films people would not ordinarily choose to go see in cinemas therefore the films should be brought to them. This suggests that by including documentary film as part of the academic syllabus, young audiences could engage with and develop interest for the issues presented in the films, and possibly the genre itself. Most participants identified the higher school grades as potential audiences as they had the knowledge and capacity to understand content and would be more likely to articulate perspectives and opinions about the documentaries they watched. Similarly, commentary also suggests that sometimes if students have not developed literacy around the documentary genre, they might be uncritically swayed by the content, messages, arguments and truth claims of the documentary - unable to acknowledge filmmaker mediation (Stoddard, 2009).

In light of these discussions, I decided to explore the reception of documentary among university students attending a mini film festival. The Political Science Association at St. Xaviers College organizes an annual documentary film festival that showcases three films over three days. Held outside class time, for a fee of Rs. 30 (around NZD \$1), this event is open to all students of St. Xaviers. It is not a public event, but is compulsory for political science students. Its main premise is to create awareness about pertinent national and international issues, and stimulate critical thinking by hosting a discussion at the end of each film session. Patwardhan too has conducted organised screenings at the university, and was due to screen *War and Peace* two months after I conducted an interview with him.

Through an advertisement on the Political Science class of 2011-2012 *Facebook* page, twenty-five political science students were surveyed online about their perceptions of political documentary and experience of this event.

Table 1:
Age profile of Xaviers survey respondents

Age	Number of Respondents
18	3
19	13
20	10

Table 2:
Sex (male/female) distribution of Xaviers survey respondents

Sex	Number of Respondents
Male	12
Female	13

Table 3:
Educational level students currently enrolled in

Educational Level	Number of Respondents
Second Year Bachelors Degree	12
Third Year Bachelors Degree	13

Table 4:
Frequency of watching documentary film

Frequency	Number of Respondents
Often	6
Sometimes	3
Rarely	5
Never	4
Only at university	7

Table 5:
Appeal of documentary films

Level of Appeal	Number of Respondents	Respondant Comments
Appealing	9	They are very interesting. I'm very keen on knowing about world history.
Neutral	2	Sometimes, it depends on the story. Some of them, depends on the subject.
Not appealing	14	They are too long and boring. Not so much, I like entertainment movies.

Table 4 shows that a higher proportion of students were uninterested in seeking out and engaging with political documentary films. This is possibly because of their lack of appeal to this segment of audiences, as noted in Table 5.

A third, eight, of the respondents said this experience was good as the films were interesting and they learnt new information.

P8: My experience was good, very informative.

P16: It was good. The documentary on the riots was very grasping.

Another eight respondents said the experience was boring as the movies were too long and slow.

P3: They were boring and long.

P7: They were long and slow [pace].

The remaining nine respondents were neutral.

P22: it was fine, not too bad.

P20: It was okay, the one on the riots was a bit interesting.

However, when specifically asked if they learnt new information as a result of watching the films two thirds, seventeen respondents, said they did while the rest said not really or it was boring. More than half, fourteen, of the respondents stated that they would have attended the screening, even if it had not been a requirement for their political science course. Over half the respondents said they were motivated to use the information they gained from watching the films and would recommend the film to others, as well as discussing the information they learnt. The rest, six respondents, said that they were not motivated to positively use the information, while a few were somewhat motivated.

Documentary film groups

In Patwardhan's interview, he mentioned a film society called Vikalp@Prithvi which hosts free documentary film screenings monthly at Mumbai locations. This was the first time that I, or any of the participants had heard about any such activity in Mumbai.

Originating as a response to the difficulties of access to the work of documentary filmmakers (through censorship, lack of support and distribution) *Vikalp: Films for Freedom* began in February 2007. The founders of Vikalp believed that free documentary screenings afforded one way in which they could promote a more democratic India. More information about Vikalp@Prithvi can be found in Appendix K. It became evident, through interaction with this group and the filmmaker, that documentary film groups are prevalent in Mumbai. Similar groups include *Docuwallahs*, which is an online forum allowing for the networking of documentary practitioners (filmmakers, producers, writers, editors, technicians) interested in the production and dissemination of this genre. Another group called *Shamiana* specializing in short films also hosts documentary film screenings for young Mumbaikars. This group operates mainly via their *Facebook* page, giving out relevant information to its members.

At Patwardhan's invitation, I was able to conduct participant observation at two screenings and the discussion sessions that ensued. It was evident that these screenings are greatly appreciated by their audiences. On both days, attendance exceeded the capacity of the venue. There were approximately up to a hundred people on both days. Space was constrained as a consequence of difficulties obtaining sponsorship, however the audience had no qualms about standing at the back and around the perimeter of the room to watch the film. During the screening, the audience sat watching the documentary, mostly in absorbed silence. There were moments when content elicited sighs, empathetic comments or angry observations as audiences watched injustices and hardships affect the subjects on screen. After the screenings, Patwardhan - who is present at all screenings - invited the audience to stay for a discussion. About a third of the participants leave at this stage.

I was surprised by the zest in which the discussion ensued on both occasions. Audiences spoke with conviction as they discussed, argued and debated the content shown. Opinions were challenged and new consensuses were reached. Patwardhan acted as facilitator, moderating the discussion to ensure that every person's views were respected. These discussions indicated the way in which documentary can influence its audiences, opening up spaces for political discussion and the mobilization of citizens. Although there was a strong presence of young Mumbaikars, possibly around 20%, they were outnumbered by older adults. It was clear that people from different backgrounds

were present, such as students, documentary film enthusiasts, academics, budding filmmakers, non-governmental parties, among others. Clearly, Vikalp@Prithvi opens up a space for people from different facets of Mumbai society to meet, discuss and participate in shared knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, membership to this society is voluntary and its success is dependent on motivated audiences with strong interests.

I was interested to see the perceptions and reception of political documentary film among those who sought out engagement with this particular genre. Thirty respondents between the ages of 19-25 completed an online questionnaire, advertised through the Vikalp@Prithvi *Facebook* page.

Table 6:
Age profile of Vikalp@Prithvi survey respondents

Age	Number of Respondents
19	1
20	0
21	3
22	5
23	3
24	8
25	10

Table 7:
Sex (male/female) distribution of its Vikalp@Prithvi survey respondents

Sex	Number of Respondents
Male	13
Female	17

Table 8:
Frequency of watching documentary film

Frequency	Number of Respondents
Often/every month	7
Sometimes	6
Rarely	12

Table 9:
Frequency of attending Vikalp@Prithvi screenings

Frequency	Number of Respondents
Very often	11
Often	9
Occasionally	6
Rarely	4

Academic backgrounds ranged from arts, commerce, science, media communications, and engineering.

As neither myself, nor any of the focus group participants had heard of this group before, it was important to find out how members first came to interact with Vikalp. Most respondents had heard about Vikalp@Prithvi from their peers, five heard about it through the internet and a couple by advertisement. Over half the respondents stated that the Vikalp@Prithvi *Facebook* page was valuable in providing information about upcoming screenings. Vikalp members were also asked about their perceptions of documentary film. Most respondents valued documentary film because they considered the genre to accurately, truthfully and factually represent reality. Additionally, the coverage of important social issues through the screenings was highly appreciated for their informative purpose.

P1: Provide information and are a great starting point to subjects/issues one has not come across yet.

P5: Real people, real world, real situations.

Hardie (2007) states that audiences attraction to documentary film is due to its ability to cover stories about real people, provide insight and change perspectives, increase curiosity and the ability to shock and draw empathy from audiences. Respondents were also asked to share some of their experiences after engaging with documentary film. These films increased awareness of issues that participants previously had no contact with, stimulated critical thinking and inspired change, elicited empathy, and provided information through different perspectives. The documentaries also changed attitudes/beliefs, stimulated conversation about the content people viewed, increased knowledge and provided information that people could use in their daily lives. Unlike the findings of focus group discussions, only one person expressed a negative view about the biases of point of view documentaries.

P17: A lot of the documentaries I saw on consumerism and money have impacted on my ideologies. One called *Examine Life* has really changed how I view fashion and shopping. I have actually never shopped from a branded store nor shopped in general - unless there is a dire need - after watching that one.

Not surprisingly, a comparison of documentary viewing as an academic requirement (St. Xavier's university students) and voluntary attendance to documentary screenings (Vikalp attendees) indicated that respondents from the documentary film group were more receptive to documentary film. They realized the potential of documentary film to

influence and contribute positively to audiences, namely through ways of increasing knowledge and offering different perspectives. Although St. Xavier's students acknowledged these purposes of documentary film, a significant proportion of them shy away from subsequent engagement because documentary films are perceived to be long and boring. As noted by the focus group participants, the internet is a participatory tool for young Mumbaikars and there may rest a possibility that this age group may be more inclined to use online digital media for documentary film engagement. Online portals would give them the convenience to access the media at their convenience while allowing them to search for films they are most interested in. Thus the reception of documentary film is increased when participants voluntarily seek out engagement with the documentary genre.

Although these were qualitative surveys, sometimes the respondents answered in brief or one-word thus limiting the retrieval of in-depth information. The context in which the viewing takes place is important – educational institution versus public auditorium. This may have an effect on audience engagement, with students perceiving the experience as academic and boring versus a social activity and pleasurable for documentary film audiences. The differences in age group are also important to note. St. Xavier's students were younger (18-20) in comparison to Vikalp@Prithvi members (19-25). Although not investigated in detail in this study, age may be a contributing factor to engagement. Nolan (2010) found that mature audiences, with an average age of 40, were more receptive to documentary film in comparison to university students, averaging an age of 21 years.

In addition to these fora, organisations such as the *Magic Lantern Foundation* are consistently working towards bridging the gap between Indian audiences and documentary film. Their passion for using this genre to stimulate discussion and contribute towards social change has led them towards improving the access to engaging with political documentaries in order to harness the transformative potential of these films. In the past, they published a now discontinued magazine called *Alternate Media Times* which disseminated information about socially concerned cinema. They are currently working towards founding a national and international distribution centre as an outlet for documentary film engagement for interested audiences (Magic Lantern Foundation, 2012).

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion (Part Two)

Introduction

As mentioned before, the main objective of this research was to develop an understanding of the reception of political documentary film among young, urban, middle class audiences living in Mumbai, India. As a form of inductive, thematic analysis (coding with respect to themes that emerge from the data) was used, the results are indicative of the core themes and concepts that have *emerged from* the discussions. The themes have been grouped according to the research aims, noted in Chapter One, and each theme is listed using sub-headings in their relevant section. The themes and information elicited from the focus groups and follow-up interviews is contextualized by filmmaker interviews and arguments established in previously published literature. The themes are italicized and listed in relation to the main aims of this study.

Perceptions and expectations of political documentary film

The perceptions and expectations of audiences precede and have an impact on their reception of political documentary film. With that said, this makes it important to examine these factors. This is supplemented by information gathered from conversations with both filmmakers and references to previously published research.

Documentary film is boring

The focus group discussions indicated that although most participants remain underexposed to documentary film, they had a strong perception of what this genre entails. The main theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was that documentary film is boring. As a genre, documentary film is often popularly conceived as being a more serious way of approaching topics (Murdock, 1989). As Bill Nichols suggests, documentary film is understood to be embedded within “discourses of sobriety”, such as politics, history, science and economics (Nichols, 2001, p. 39). These commonly held beliefs may be shaping the perception of focus group participants.

Many political documentaries serve to highlight the inadequacies of society, problematic socio-political issues, inequalities and other social injustices (Corner, 2008; Gaines, 1999; Smaill, 2007). This informs the extent to which content is based on issues of social significance. Accordingly, most focus group participants noted that the current trend of documentary film was to explore serious, negative issues. It is plausible then, that the seriousness associated with political documentary film is linked to the perception of boring. In the participant profile form, out of thirteen participants, only one revealed an interest in watching documentary film. Moreover, during the screening of the movies before the commencement of the focus group discussions, participants were often seen chatting with each other about unrelated matters or texting on their cell phones which may indicate a distractedness connected to that sense of 'boring'.

Aryan: I'm not trying to generalize but almost all the documentaries are made out of people's misery so this one also almost follows the trend basically. I've noticed of late, it's the bad things that are always highlighted. The current trend that is developing now where documentaries are always negative...

Ishaan: Dude, documentaries are supposed to be about sad issues

Savio: Documentaries are generally boring.

Chris and David: *chuckle*

Neha: *Laughs*

Savio: If you tell a person to watch one he's not going to want to.

Divya: Yeah

In the individual follow-up interviews, participants expanded on these themes brought up in the focus groups discussions. Once again, they were firm in their perception that documentary is boring, it has no entertainment value and thus the activity in itself – the viewing of documentary film – is boring too. It is plausible that such associations were due to the limited opportunities to view political documentary film. In the participant profile form, participants were asked about documentary film exposure previous to this study. Seven participants had previously watched documentary films, with *Fahrenheit 9/11* being most popular, followed by *Zeitgeist* (Peter Joseph, 2007). Five participants stated none, and one could not remember. Therefore, participants generally did not engage with Indian political documentary. If they did, it was in educational institutions. The academic context in which these films were viewed might have an effect on associations of the genre as boring. Furthermore, literature suggests that aesthetics were

kept to a minimum in Indian documentary as critic's evaluations were aligned with realism, objectivity and truth. The obsession with producing and conveying a sense of realism at the expense of creative treatment thus resulting in information-heavy films may be one of the reasons documentary film is seen as boring (de Jong, 2011).

Aryan: Frankly speaking the masses come for entertainment as most of us have a very short attention span and sitting through such a long documentary can be tedious.

Priyanka: The second one (*Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*) was, I don't know, I mean it was what a documentary should look like. It was boring, it was informative, it was everything that I would assume a documentary should be.

Documentary film is purposeful

As pointed out by Priyanka, although boring, documentary film is informative. This view was unanimous among participants of this study. Despite the perceived unattractiveness of this genre, participants all agreed that documentary film is purposeful. According to participants, unlike fiction film, documentary film is created with specific intentions in mind, and to serve a particular purpose, mainly being informative. This was the most common perception and expectation of documentary films between both focus groups. With its focus on representing reality through the portrayal of issues of importance, documentary film has long been established as a medium which disseminates information (Wayne, 2008). Thus for participants, they expect to gain information from this genre of film thus making them more knowledgeable and aware of issues.

David: Yes one thing is good that they are creating awareness by making their documentary and sharing that information with others.

Another commonly perceived purpose of documentary film is the genre's ability to be educational. Research shows when used in schools as educational material, documentary film is able to increase awareness of social, cultural, political and historical contexts (Stoddard, 2009). It is useful when teaching about controversial issues, highlighting multiple perspectives and stimulating critical discussion (Marcus & Stoddard, 2009; Stoddard, 2009). For participants, this association may be a consequence of educational institutions being the primary place for interaction with this genre. Indian literature has established that there is a lack of opportunity for audiences

to engage with documentary films in cinemas and on television. This is primarily due to the preference of fiction cinema. Thus schools and universities are the main places where young Mumbaikars can engage with documentary film as these institutions screen such films as part of course curriculum or scheduled visits by filmmakers trying to promote their films. When asked about *War and Peace* being used as an educational film participants discussed,

Ishaan: Excellent. It should.

Aryan: Yeah it's very good yeah.

Ishaan: Because for somebody at 24, we keep doodling a lot and stuff like that, we know about it but people who are younger than us who don't really watch a lot of news and are not into newspapers but if you could make them sit down and watch this.

Sonia: And it also covers a lot of issues, not just one, it covers a lot.

These thoughts were similar for *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*.

Divya: I think it's a good educational piece cause it just starts from showing what it is, how it goes about, what are the ill effects, everything – so like it's just all the age groups you can show it to and I think it's a good film.

Aaron: Especially in schools.

Interestingly, research conducted by Kaya and Cengelci (2011) showed that teachers expressed positive views of documentary film as a teaching tool as the visualization of social and historical events enabled greater information retention, enhanced learning and increased knowledge. In a case study by Barbas, Paraskevopoulos and Stamou (2009) on the use of documentary film to educate sixth graders in Greece, results showed heightened sensitivity to the topic as well as a shift in attitudes, beliefs and increases in knowledge.

Participants stated *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* would have better success as an educational film as it was precise, coherent, had a logical sequence and explained the issue from its origin (what uranium mining is, how it is conducted, who is affected, why and how are they affected, who is to blame, what are the solutions). In comparison, they felt that *War and Peace* was too long and a lack of overarching context meant that it bounced back and forth from one issue to the next, leading to confusion rather than understanding. These claims are plausible as previously published literature states that most political documentary filmmakers in India do not seek to contextualize their films as their main audiences are Indian citizens and they expect them to have a

comprehensive understanding of the issue beforehand (Fischer, 2009). Perhaps then if their desire is to facilitate better reception among young educated, urban audiences, Indian political documentary filmmakers should contextualize and provide more background information to the issue, as participants state that most young people lack this information.

Films not only educate through the increase of knowledge, but ensuing discussions open up spaces for individuals to learn more about themselves as well as through the opinions of their peers (Fine, 1993; Stoddard, 2009; Kaya & Cengelci, 2011). Similarly, in research, focus groups allow participants to challenge ideas, learn from each other and clarify their own thoughts and beliefs (Lewis, 1992). When asked to evaluate the focus group discussion all participants highly valued the experience as it allowed them to become more aware of their own views, while benefitting from shared learning. The focus groups of this study are a simulation of a documentary screening, but much smaller in size as compared to a screening at an educational institution in Mumbai. However, it does serve to highlight the necessity of hosting a discussion post-screening to open up a space for people to converse and share thus fostering critical reflection. This is possibly the main way through which documentary films in India are able to affect political consciousness. This is a practice that Patwardhan considers valuable, as he is currently touring India with his new film *Jai Bhim Comrade* (2011), and post-screening discussions are a crucial part of the programme.

Divya: To know other peoples thoughts and opinions helped me think about the issue with a different viewpoint.

David: the group discussion was good. It helped, you know it did...made me aware of not only what I, but what other people around me think.

Rather than spoonfeeding its audience, critical documentary film proposes to be revelatory and stimulate thinking by encouraging audiences to ask questions and critically reflect on what they have seen (Cunningham, 2000; Fine, 1993). In the follow-up interviews all participants stated that they would be very interested in watching a sequel, that is, a film that discusses the issue in light of current socio-political contexts in India, thus making it more relevant for these participants. Furthermore, four participants specifically mentioned how *War and Peace* encouraged them to seek out more information about the issue, and heightened their awareness and

interest in the topic. Such residual interests and activities are indicative of positive reception, as audiences show interest in the issue long after the viewing and reading of film has commenced. In the follow-up interview, the following participant valued the ability of this experience in allowing her to self-reflect and critically evaluate important issues.

Riya: The role of a documentary movie should not be to spoon feed you. It should be for you to question things and to make you more aware and want to know more...leave you to think, leave you to want to find out more about it.

Political documentary film can work as a tool to legitimise the voices of vulnerable people (Renov, 1993; MacKenzie, 2010; Smail, 2007). Most of the people participating in Patwardhan's films come from the margins of society – people who are not usually given a voice to share their grievances or state their claims (Singh & Bhargava, 2002). Similarly, Shriprakash highlighted the plight of indigenous groups in India, people rarely publicly acknowledged in society. Additionally, political documentary film may sometimes aid the function of investigative journalism (Wayne, 2008). For participants of this study, documentary's status as a vehicle through which to investigate important issues that would otherwise not be encountered is highly valued. As foregrounded in Chapter Two, the mainstream Indian media cannot be relied upon to disseminate unbiased information and political documentary films may serve to address this issue.

Divya: The people were Adivasis and we ourselves have this mindset about them that we don't touch them, we don't speak to them. So you know I don't think so we would really bother about it. So I think he made this film to reach out to them, I think he understood them a lot and wanted to tell us about what they went through.

Aaron: I think he wanted support and a little bit of contribution for this cause because he really wanted to do something for the people who were affected. He wanted many more people to come and join this cause.

Neha: I think this was the only platform for those people to speak out against the wrong things that they have gone through. At the same time his motive was to let us know, because obviously the normal government wouldn't allow the news channels to come out and speak about this. We right now – the young generation - could do something about it.

Documentary films then, allow audiences to interact with other worlds that they might not necessarily have access to (Morley, 1992; Dorst, 1999; Hudson, 2008). Participants noted how they were informed about places that they had never heard of and commended filmmaker efforts to bring to light pressing issues in areas that they would

not ordinarily visit. Participants also considered that by providing a platform for marginalized people to voice their opinions, documentary is a useful vehicle through which to harness support from viewers. They clearly identify the two key traditions of documentary practice – mobilization of the people (audiences) and empowerment of the people (on-screen subjects) (Rajagopal & Vohra, 2012). Such accurate identifications are necessary as they are key to such films being able to achieve their goal of social change. If audiences are aware of the main premises of political documentary film, this in turn will influence their engagement with this genre as well as their activities post-viewing.

Like the participants, Patwardhan and Shriprakash agree that documentary film is purposeful. However these purposes differ in comparison to what audiences deem are the main purposes of this genre of film. Participants valued political documentary film for being informative and educational with the ability to stimulate critical thought and reflection. In contrast, filmmakers saw the main purposes of political documentary to be a tool to explore pertinent issues in society and an outlet for political activism. Apart from being an outlet of political activism for filmmakers, documentary film is also a channel for cultural activism for the subjects of the film. Cultural activism is defined in terms of marginalized peoples using cultural artefacts and practices to challenge dominant or repressive structures in society (Levine, 2007). Shriprakash uses music of the tribal people from Jadugoda as background music when filming in an observational style. The words of this song are extremely pertinent to the issue he explores. As Shriprakash highlights the negligence of the UCIL and the devastating effects this has had on the land and the people, the music in the background translates into: ‘since the days of our ancestors we never got any justice, not even from the upholders of justice. We were uprooted from everywhere’. This serves to further strengthen the arguments put forth by the film. Patwardhan draws from the people’s own cultural practices and artefacts in a similar way.

Patwardhan: Usually the music in my films is sung or played by people who have been in front of the camera at some point in the film, so you know the source of this music and it is an integral part of the film.

According to various commentators, documentary film can provide information (Harindranath, 2009), investigate important socio-cultural issues (Vladica & Davis, 2008), educate (Stoddard, 2009) and provide the opportunity for critical reflection and social action (Aufderheide, 2005). These functions resonate for Patwardhan and Shriprakash.

Patwardhan: Documentary allows you the potential of exploring more serious things.

Shriprakash: Film [is] a medium to tell stories... It's just a tool, kind of a catalyst to do things.

Political activism

Political documentary filmmakers sometimes make films as expressions of their own political activity (Ba, 2007). Both Patwardhan and Shriprakash use their films as an outlet for political activism by addressing social and political issues. They are engaged in promoting social and political justice (Bowles, 2006) and addressing inequalities in society (Corner, 2008; Gaines, 1999; Smaill, 2007). Patwardhan states that his films are responses to the injustices he sees, and for Shriprakash such injustices compel him to want to do something about the situation.

Patwardhan: I make human rights oriented films. Films about various injustices that I see around me and so they're my response to those events and acts...Human rights work and documentaries began slowly over a period of time. Trying to spread the knowledge about these groups and what they are fighting for – this was how I thought I could contribute to those movements.

Shriprakash: It was '89, '90, '91 here in the plateau where the army wanted to make an artillery firing range. The entire area is a very deep forest and our tribes are living there. And then the entire community was against the project... And I was there. I spent almost three months there with my scooter and my small team there and we documented and made the film. So this is the urgency - I emerge from that kind of situation.

Those political documentary makers who consider themselves activists use their films as tools for social change, representing the disadvantaged by empowering them, allowing them to voice their concerns and mobilizing themselves to change their destinies (MacKenzie, 2010). Kazmi (1999) considers that committed filmmakers use situations that anger and affect them as driving forces in making politically committed

film. For Shriprakash, being a witness to political inequalities is his catalyst to making documentary films. He explicitly refers to himself as a film activist.

Shriprakash: I'm not a filmmaker, I'm a film activist...I go and get involved with the movement. I become part of them.

Political filmmakers can use the situations that disturb as impetus for producing their film. As Shriprakash's experiences suggest, it can be difficult for a filmmaker to be a silent observer, especially when passion for the issue is what fuels them in the first place. There may be times when filmmakers strive to advocate change by partaking in the protests they are filming. Patwardhan has also experienced what it is to be a participant-filmmaker.

Patwardhan: As for the peace march in the film, it was certainly not my creation but I knew the people who had organized it and I joined in it both as a marcher and as a camera person recording it.

The notion that there can be complete objectivity in documentary production has been thoroughly contested by filmmakers and commentators over the years since technology of the 1960s enabled the rise of the 'fly on the wall' observational style of documentary which relied on a notion of unmediated reality to persuade audiences of documentary truth (Winston 2008; Shdaimah, 2009). An antithesis of observational documentary has been the advocacy style of documentary where filmmakers make their presence known and collaborate with their subjects by simultaneously learning from and advocating for them (Stewart, 2010).

According to Shriprakash, each film is not merely a project where once completed the filmmaker can dispense with it and move on to the next production. If a filmmaker is truly committed to the cause when representing an issue of social/political concern, then he or she will maintain contact with the issue until there is a productive outcome. From some perspectives, it is of ethical importance that filmmakers do this because sometimes the issues they cover are of utmost importance to the people in the film.

Shriprakash: It all depends how much you want to do. How much you're concerned with the issue... and then after making the film you will not run to another project to make a living out of that issue. That [current] issue is really a life and death question for a few people.

As noted at the end of *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*, even though UCIL promised better outcomes for the tribal people living next to the uranium mines and plant, they failed to keep their word. Shriprakash remains highly involved in the issue and is still trying to achieve favourable outcomes for the tribes of Jadugoda. He says, “I made this film in 1999 and this is 2011. The last public hearing was May 26 and May 27 of this year.” Thus, such films serve a purpose, not only as a tool to stimulate political consciousness, but as a record of what has happened and what continues to happen to the process of social change.

Unfavourable environment

Participants were aware that an unfavourable environment is one of the main issues plaguing the expansion of the documentary film movement in India and its ability to act as a catalyst for social and political activism. In the participant profile form, three participants stated that documentary films would not thrive in Indian cinema as it is mainly an entertainment driven industry. The marketing, promotion, and distribution of documentary films are the main obstacles most filmmakers face (Sen, 2006; Bose, 2005). Participants are conscious that documentary films struggle to reach audiences as there are limited options for their marketing and distribution. This is considered to be one of the main barriers to access and engagement.

Aryan: The thing is no one promotes them. They're not commercially...people want to see their normally you know entertainment movie, Salman Khan stuff. You know, go in the weekend and just enjoy yourself.

Ishaan: *nods in agreement*

The dominance of a profit driven industry is further expanded in a follow-up interview,

Riya: It's not marketable. At the end of the day everybody is looking to make money out of this. Even multiplexes. In fact a lot of regional films like Marathi films, Gujarati films, they are not shown on the multiplexes or in any theatre - these multiplexes are not going to make money out of them.

Such views are congruent with the filmmakers interviewed in this study, who also note an unfavourable environment. Their work lacks the support of formal distribution networks and funding agencies. Both Indian and western commentators cite the struggle of political documentary to access productive distribution outlets. Indian commentators state that there are limited channels of distribution for independent

documentary filmmakers (Bose, 2005; Sen, 2006). Similarly in Canada, Winton and Garrison (2010) suggest that every independent filmmaker focusing on making political or activist film concerned with representing the stories of those most marginalized fails to find an audience due to the lack of support from commercial distribution networks. Without supportive distribution channels, their main premise to stimulate social change is severely hindered. Likewise, independent filmmakers such as Shriprakash and Patwardhan struggle to market and distribute their films, especially when piracy is rife throughout the country.

Shriprakash: This whole distribution, and promoting the films is a really big problematic area... I'm not in a position to sell my films and I failed to earn money from my films...we are not able to make money to sustain ourselves.

In general, independent documentary filmmakers in India have to rely on generating their own funds for projects because there is also a lack of formal funding networks (Sen, 2006; Fischer, 2009; Matzner, 2012). This in turn has an impact on the production of the film as filmmakers are constrained by the resources they have.

Patwardhan: I have to cut my coat according to my cloth so I keep my expenses down while making the film.

Patwardhan: It's very difficult. As I said there are no distribution outlets so there is nobody paying for what you're doing. You have to really do it as a labour of love. You have to try figure out how you can afford to do it and what strategies you have to use. I use this lecture-fee strategy, as one kind of strategy.

According to Frankham (2004), the potential for filmmakers to collaborate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and similar agencies can potentially produce a piece that is richer and more insightful. Moreover, when more parties have vested interest in the project, more effort can be put into the film's production and distribution. Focus group participants also suggested this. They thought that documentary filmmakers would be able to garner support for their cause through collaboration with NGOs who are committed in achieving social change. Indeed, in India, partnerships with NGOs have been one of the main ways through which documentary filmmakers disseminate their films (Liang, 2008; Sen, 2006). Participants also note that such connections allow an opportunity for Indian documentary filmmakers to market, promote and distribute their films.

Priyanka: There are social groups that protest against nuclear activities and if you take your documentary and put it out to them they [the films] will have a platform. They [social groups] will have the resources, the money that they've garnered from our government to actually promote and market that movie, to markets that are important. They can actually use that money and market it to different places.

However, this perspective is not shared by some filmmakers. Patwardhan expressed apprehension when collaborating with such groups as he considered that international funding agencies and sponsors are not sensitive to the needs of Indian audiences, rather they are more interested in achieving their own goals.

Patwardhan: They always want to tell you how to do it or what to do, what they're interested in. And when they're sitting outside the country, they don't really have the knowledge about what's happening here. They're thinking about their own audiences while I'm thinking about my own.

Similarly, another Mumbai-based documentary filmmaker Nishta Jain states that collaboration with international agencies was not an easy task (Matzner, 2012). Due to cultural differences the reading between both parties differentiated and she describes the process as a difficult experience. Additionally, such international collaborations sometimes result in a strong focus in ensuring the film is palatable to international viewers at the sacrifice of local intentions and understanding (Matzner, 2012). However, Shriprakash states that sometimes there is no choice but to collaborate, due to lack of funds and support. Though, he firmly believes that filmmakers need to express their commitment while negotiating an outcome that will represent their story as well as the viewpoint of the people he/she collaborates with.

Shriprakash: If [you] are strong enough, you can negotiate with the NGO. The funding agency will say 'look this is my point', but you will make your point [too].

In addition to the lack of supportive distribution channels, Indian commentary states that censorship in India also plays a huge role in the unfavourable nature of the environment for documentary film. As seen in the literature review, *War and Peace* had a long battle with the CBFC to gain a pass certificate so that it might be distributed and showcased to Indian audiences. Participants were not aware of the details of censorship that most political documentary film in India succumbs to. They do however realize that the government and other political institutions have the power to control distribution and access to films. In the following statement, Patwardhan acknowledges

the impact of dominant institutions on political documentary film in India, with particular reference to his film *War and Peace*.

Patwardhan: You are faced with a nuclear establishment that doesn't want people to know the truth, and that's not just this country, that's every nuclear country in the world.

However, in spite of the obstacles that political documentary filmmakers like Patwardhan and Shriprakash face, they continue to be motivated to produce films that are concerned with important political issues. This motivation stems from positive responses from audiences and their continued commitment to political activism.

Patwardhan: There are also terrific responses from the people that do get to see the film, and this makes it [documentary filmmaking] worthwhile...It's almost ten years since the film has been made and it's still being used.

In India, cinemas are considered to be an integral part of the mediascape, especially in urban areas. The influence of commercial cinema can be seen as billboards and posters of popular Bollywood films are displayed everywhere (Jacob, 1998). There is heavy emphasis placed on commercial film, while documentary film is marginalized (Venkiteswaran, 2009). In the follow-up interviews, participants were asked if they had ever heard about or seen a documentary film being showcased at their local cinemas. Out of eleven participants, ten said no and one said,

Harsh: Yes only Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11 came to the theatres.

They were also asked if they recalled viewing any advertisements for documentaries on local television channels, to which only two said yes. None of the participants had heard about the work of Shriprakash, with only two saying that they had heard about Anand Patwardhan's films. Out of these two, one had read an article about him in the newspaper and the other had received an email about his film screening. Shriprakash and Patwardhan also noted the marginalization of Indian documentary film in local cinemas.

Shriprakash: I don't know of any documentary film in India which has been released in a multiplex. It is really very difficult to even be broadcast on the main channel.

Patwardhan: There is no mechanism to do that [release documentary film in mainstream cinemas]. There are no distributors who are looking for documentary films.

This is contrary to Western contexts where documentary films have an increasing presence in cinemas (Chanan, 2007). In India, with multiplexes out of the question, filmmakers have tried to use broadcast media to disseminate their films and generate revenue. However, this has also proved unsuccessful for both filmmakers. According to Shriprakash, *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* was denied broadcast because the footage was of a lower aesthetic quality than the television accepted. Patwardhan managed to have his film broadcast on television, but the broadcaster controlled viewership by programming it in an off-peak time slot.

Patwardhan: They [national television] didn't want to telecast it. They announced that they would telecast it at ten at night because the court had ordered them to, and then they showed it at 10 o'clock in the morning. So they actually tried their best to reduce the audience that watched the movie.

These claims by both filmmakers are in line with the work of Indian academics. Indian broadcast media was initially concerned with providing education and enhancing democracy (Kumar, 2010), but over the years its content has been driven by profit rather than social responsibility (Singhal & Rodgers, 2001). Broadcast media rarely shows programmes that are public service or education oriented, and if so they are usually run at odd times (Mehrotra, 2006). This in turn serves to limit audience exposure to such programming.

As a consequence of this lack of marketing and distribution, young, urban audiences in India are significantly inhibited from engaging with documentary films. This aspect of documentary film production is crucial as Sen (2006) states, most documentary films being produced in India are based on content that is relevant to 70% of all Indian citizens. These levels of distribution are in complete opposition to the formal channels of marketing and distribution set up for commercial Bollywood cinema (Sen, 2006). From the participants' perspectives, the Bollywood industry is a contributing factor to the unfavourable production environment for documentary films.

Domination of Bollywood cinema

Therefore, the domination of Bollywood cinema is another theme that emerged in the focus group discussions. The high prevalence and consumption of Bollywood cinema in India has resulted in “the Bollywoodization of Indian cinema” (Dickey & Durah, 2010, p. 208). For the participants, commercial film is defined in terms of popular fiction, namely Hollywood and Bollywood movies, which are entertaining and easily accessible. Documentary does not fit into this category and is clearly an alternative kind of film for these young audiences. Throughout the focus group discussions, participants described documentary film as “not commercial”, constantly comparing the genre to Bollywood.

Pooja: I don't think there should be any humour in a documentary.

Savio: There should be, otherwise it is going to get boring.

Neha: mmmm (*nods head in agreement*)

Pooja: But then it'll just be a Bollywood movie with people dancing.

Chris: This isn't a commercial movie though.

Rhoads (2004) suggests that audiences do not go to cinemas to have their consciences questioned. This idea is supported by a study conducted by Dickey (1993) who found that South Indian audiences watched fiction film to escape from concerns and boredom, and to pass time. Although no similar study has been found on audiences in Mumbai, it is assumed that this could be a plausible rationale for the motivations and pleasures of movie-going audiences in Mumbai.

Priyanka: I think they [genres of fiction film and documentary] are made for two completely different reasons. One is made for entertainment and the other made for information. Entertainment is related to spending money – you're spending two hundred rupees to go watch a movie, but you know its going to be fun and you know it's going to take you to another world. It's not going to sadden you when you sit through it. This is not true for documentary.

These factors contribute to the situation where documentary cinema is perceived as being in crisis as a consequence of being considered alternative and marginal (Kazmi, 1999). Both Patwardhan and Shriprakash highlight that they operate in an industry dominated by Bollywood cinema. In light of this, both filmmakers realize that documentary film will continue to be an alternative medium in entertainment driven India.

Patwardhan: It won't ever take the place of mainstream cinema...it is a necessary supplement. The mainstream [Bollywood] by itself is mainly an entertainment driven industry.

Shriprakash: These people are not interested in looking at the ugly part of their own society. They just want to live in illusions and Bollywood provides a really good opium for them. People who are not moved by the genre after watching one documentary will say.... 'Dada bohot ho gaya ye sab film. Thoda Govinda aur Amitabh ka film dheekhao na!'⁶

Kazmi (1999) says that Bollywood enthusiasts may sometimes spend numerous hours in the hopes of securing tickets to the first cinema screening of popular films. This passion for Bollywood film does not look like it is going to weaken anytime soon. Indian commentary suggests that serious cinema can never compete with commercial Bollywood cinema because political documentary films ask their audiences to front up and accept responsibility for the social and political issues plaguing their societies (Kazmi, 1999).

That said, even though Bollywood films are mainly consumed for entertainment, researchers have found that they can be vehicles through which to address social issues and influence viewers. In her study of South Indian audiences, Dickey (1993) found that commercial films did prompt audience's desires to learn more about the social context. In the follow-up interviews for my study, participants were asked to compare the effectiveness of political documentary films with Bollywood movies. Almost all participants stated that Bollywood films had more capacity to positively address social issues. This corresponds to previous research which suggests that Bollywood, more so than its serious cinema counterpart, can truly challenge and change hegemonic ideals (Kazmi, 1999). Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of celebrity in drawing audiences to watch films from any genre.

David: What people do here is that they don't make a documentary, rather they make a movie out of important issues. And they make them entertaining for people. If they make a documentary I don't think even half the people would be interested in watching it. So instead they convert the documentary issue to a movie ... the general Indian audience would rather watch a movie because everyone here wants entertainment. It's funny, but somehow they get information or they get knowledge through that movie. They want information, they want to see their actors, they want to see jokes and they also get a message from it.

⁶ Translation: 'Brother enough of these kind of films. Show us a few Govinda and Amitabh films' (famous Bollywood film stars).

Kazmi (1999) states that Bollywood film in India is more effective in engaging large audiences because of its ability to mix reality with fantasy, while focusing on topics that are socially, politically and culturally relevant. When examining works of fiction, Dickey (1993) found that audiences identified with the everyday lives and issues concerning ordinary Indians in Bollywood film. The high levels of consumption of Bollywood film in India, along with the genre's potential to influence audiences, suggest that this is one of the main ways in which film could be used to promote social change in India. In the case of documentary, underexposure to the specifics of the genre might possibly be a contributing factor to decreased engagement and reception. Another possible reason why documentary film is less influential may be a consequence of the skepticism around the conventions and premises of the genre based on documentary's claims to truth, the accurate representation of others, and objectivity (Winston, 2008).

Skepticism about documentary film

This skepticism about documentary film was another theme highlighted in the focus group discussions. Literature suggests that when audiences interact with documentary texts they undertake a number of evaluations about the genre itself, such as objectivity, accurate representations and the level of truth (Winston, 2008). Participants from both focus groups undertook critical evaluation of these areas. Some audiences struggle with the notion that documentary genres represent the real, albeit filmmaker mediation (Wayne, 2008; Godmilow & Shapiro, 1997). The ability of audiences to accurately interpret this is dependent on their exposure to and familiarity with the genre. As findings from the participant profile forms and focus groups suggested, most participants did not have regular interaction with this genre thus affecting their familiarity with and evaluations of film. When asked to comment on the credibility of *War and Peace* participants stated,

Savio: I think it's 50-50

Neha: I think the whole picturization of the movie is based on realistic things so I think that whatever he represents in the movie is coming across in the right way and is not just made up

Pooja: He's not given us any sources of information. How do we know the people are who the films say they are?

Savio: Yeah, what he (*pointing to Chris*) had said was right. It's like the way that politicians use people - he could have basically paid these people to say whatever he wants to

Pooja: In fact, how do we know they are real people?

What stood out from this discussion was the issue of filmmaker intentions, highlighted by the statement, "what he (*pointing to Chris*) had said was right. It's like the way that politicians use people - he could have basically paid these people to say whatever he wants to." Lewis (2007) states that filmmaker intentions and motives are questioned when audiences feel uneasy with some content, or when films strongly suggest the personal voice of the filmmaker. This may be one of the reasons why Shriprakash's film was perceived to be more credible than *War and Peace* – because of the relatively limited attention to editing and aesthetics. Patwardhan's overt critique of the BJP may have been misinterpreted as propaganda or bias. To gain a deeper insight into the claim, that filmmakers like Indian politicians use people in order to make their film, this was drawn into the follow-up interviews and most participants disagreed with this premise. For them, it wasn't so much a case of filmmakers using people, but rather that peoples' cooperation, their experiences, and their stories were needed for the creation of the film.

David: What I feel is that their main motive is to use them in a good way in order to get information that can be shared with the world.

Buddha weeps in Jadugoda was considered much lower in aesthetic value than *War and Peace* by all participants, as the documentary had lower production values. However, participants believed that *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* was the more credible film as Shriprakash had no agenda and simply wanted to highlight the hardships faced by the people of Jadugoda as a result of the inhumane practices of the UCIL. Some literature suggests that the perceived integrity of documentary film is influenced by understandings of aesthetics. Smaill (2007) states that a persuasive argument, combined with the integrity associated with a low budget documentary, positively influences a documentary's opportunity to gather support and advocate for social change.

War and Peace was more overtly critical of people and institutions taking advantage of the vulnerable and marginalized. Patwardhan explicitly voiced his opinions and critiqued all those involved in development of nuclear arms. His arguments were given strength by influential officials that supported his cause. This criticism was made on a

much broader and intensive scale than in *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*. This may be why participants of both focus groups felt that the *War and Peace* was one-sided and biased, propagating an anti-BJP agenda. Whereas the former film did not explicitly critique UCIL, but addressed the issues more obliquely through a focus on the ill effects of uranium mining.

Neha: If they had shown some of the benefits of nuclear power to our country, then probably it would have been more informative.

Pooja: It would have been non-biased then, because right now, it's one sided right.

Aryan: I think that from the first it was really anti-BJP. It's like a recurring theme throughout the movie – anti-BJP. What is surprising is that this guy only considers the '98 tests haan (translation: 'yes') which were the tests connected with BJP.

Ishaan: hmmm.

Aryan: but if you go back to 1974, the issue was because of Congress.

Ishaan: Congress.

Aryan: so he does not even consider Congress.

Similarly, in her dissertation Mulugundam (2002) found that some audiences found the content of Patwardhan's earlier film, *A Narmada Diary*, was biased. In response, Patwardhan stated that his films can be considered propaganda – a form of propaganda that is anti-state and his own point of view. In light of this, filmmakers believe that it is important that audiences in India learn how to critically interpret the content of political/committed documentary films (Mulugundam, 2002). However, when this bias was brought up in the focus group discussions half of the participants explicitly stated that, on reflection, they believed *War and Peace* offered an accurate representation of what went on at the time.

Sara: I basically said it was one-sided because of the present day context, but when I did a little reading about what was happening with the political situation at that time when the BJP was in power, it made sense that he had to show a lot about it because at that time it was all happening.

The above statement supports the 'active audience' argument that audiences are not passive viewers, merely accepting what they see on screen. They are actively involved in performing oppositional and negotiated readings. However, along with questioning the content they see on screen, audiences supplement their material and answer questions or clarify doubts through additional research. Thus audiences can be motivated to use political documentary film to better inform themselves.

As John Dorst (1999) suggests, documentary films can be understood as being co-created by the filmmaker and those represented in the text. Participants were split as to whether they considered the primary purpose of documentary film was its function as a medium for people to have their story heard, or if it was a vehicle for the filmmaker's point of view. In terms of *War and Peace*, a few participants advocated for the value of expressing filmmaker subjectivity. Others considered the film a biased representation of the issue. Most participants agreed that *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* was a positive representation of the 'people's story'.

Neha: I think every documentary moviemaker at the end of it wants to have his point of view in it. That's the reason I think he [Shriprakash] went over there, it was his motive to show everybody and it became a platform for the people in the film to also open up their voices, so it became balanced.

Participants questioned filmmaker motivations in terms of decisions about content, their use of people, and their ability to provide an objective account of the issue. Although most participants realized that filmmakers did not use people for the purposes of making their film and sometimes content is biased due to the socio-political climate at the time the film was made, most participants still struggled with the idea that documentary film is a truthful representation of reality.

Positive representation of subjects

Documentary makers who have a participatory emphasis to their politics always attempt to ensure that their films are created through the discourses of the people participating in them to empower these people and strengthen their individual and cultural identities (MacKenzie, 2010). Because of the genre's close connection with representations of the historical world, it can be argued that filmmakers have an ethical responsibility to ensure a positive representation of subjects. These participants are the people who are depicted in the film and whose stories and experiences are shared with audiences to encourage change. Shriprakash acknowledges that documentary film is a collaboration between subject and filmmaker and actively tries to ensure that the films he makes are the people's films rather than his own. Both filmmakers also acknowledge that the film is an outlet for people to tell their story.

Shriprakash: I try to understand their point of view. I just want to go there, try to put as much as I can, tell the peoples point of view and tell what people are saying.

Documentary film is subjective

In contrast to audience expectations that documentary film should be neutral and objective, Patwardhan and Shriprakash both state that documentary film is subjective and contrary to the prevailing perspectives this need not remain hidden.

Patwardhan: The perspective of the filmmaker should not be hidden. Very often people have complained about the lack of objectivity in my films. I am very upfront about what I think because I think it is much less manipulative that you are clear that this is [your] point of view... I prefer the agenda not to be hidden.

Shriprakash: I'm just a person who is part [of it], and I witnessed some incidents so that I go there and document that and try to make a film with my knowledge and my understanding of the issue.

Filmmakers are moving away from such a positivist approach as audiences are beginning to understand that filmmakers are involved in the process of giving meaning to and constructing the reality they are about show on screen (Fox, 2010). Filmmakers use music and editing to convey their message or argument to audiences. Therefore, they make conscious decisions about what content is included in the film and what is left out. Although literature suggests that this subjectivity is now beginning to be recognized as documentaries are considered to be an account of mediated rather than absolute truth (Corner, 2008), it seems that participants of this study still struggle to acknowledge this. This is probably due to their expectations that documentary films should present factual accounts of information.

A way to increase audience acknowledgement of filmmaker subjectivity in the creation of documentary film is by filmmakers being reflexive in their films. A common way to depict reflexivity is the filming of the filmmaker and their equipment as part of the sequence of events that unfold before him/her (Dorst, 1999; Ruby, 1987). Filmmakers are reflexive because it is their way of notifying the audience that what they are about to witness on screen is a subjective film, and thus recognize the relationship between the filmmaker, the film and reality (Govaert, 2007; Ruby, 1987). Bruzzi (2000) states that unlike observational documentaries, these filmmakers do not attempt to conceal their presence and by acknowledging subjectivity they may increase credibility of their film.

She identifies a performative approach, similar to Nichols' (1991) interactive mode where filmmakers appear or perform in their film, as Michael Moore does in all his films, or do not appear but are heard when interviewing their subjects.

Conversely, filmmaker-commentators such as Ruby (1987) believe that it is not necessary for filmmakers to make their presence known in their films and those who deliberately do so run the risk of appearing narcissistic. Patwardhan shares similar views, stating that overt reflexivity is not necessary as audiences are very media literate these days and they hold the necessary information to identify subjective perspectives.

Patwardhan: They [filmmakers] do artificial things like getting themselves filmed so that people can know their film. I think that's treating people like idiots. People know how films are made.

However, although Patwardhan is optimistic about his audiences, it seems that in relation to the results found in this study, filmmakers would benefit from being more reflexive in or about their films. This in turn would also limit the opportunity for audiences to negatively perceive films as being biased, as they are presented with texts that show that the content is mediated by the filmmaker.

Lack of faith in the Indian media

This skepticism about documentary film among young people in Mumbai may be a consequence of participants' general lack of faith in the Indian media. Participants had no faith in the Indian news media because of the well-known existence of corrupt practices such as accepting bribes. Such instances have also been noted in Indian literature which, for example, described an official in the Bangalore branch of the CBFC accepting a bribe in return for granting a film a pass certificate (Bhowmik, 2009). Participants noted that broadcast media were biased in their selection of programming, giving more preference to entertainment than information-driven content. Mehrotra (2006) notes that because Indian broadcasters are profit-oriented, Indian broadcast media rarely shows content that is public service related or educational, although some such programming might occur during off-peak hours. This was commented on by both Patwardhan who referred to the content on television as "completely mindless!" and participants:

Priyanka: Honestly, I question even the news.

As noted from previous literature, corrupt practices are rife in Indian media institutions. Additionally, the Indian media is politically affiliated. Politicians and public personalities often use the media to promote their own agenda, and most media content is often aligned in favour of a political or public group to receive resources and support (Kumar, 2010; Singhal & Rodgers, 2001; Bose, 2009). Indian literature consistently shows how politics and the media are sometimes partners in crime. Therefore, it is a fair statement as one participant notes how the Indian media is strongly influenced by the government in power.

Savio: No media company is going to take over this kind of a film. The government is obviously going to put pressure on the media company and say 'don't programme this'.

Importance of aesthetics

Another theme elicited from the focus group discussions was the importance of aesthetics in engaging young audiences. According to participants, documentary films must be aesthetically pleasing, that is, good camera work, good editing of sequences, high quality footage and informative yet entertaining, to captivate them and keep their attention focused. Additionally, the length of the film should be short. Participants valued the ability of a film to go straight to the point. Moreover, the high levels of information loaded in these films, coupled with the gravity of the issues presented may cause audiences to get tired and lose focus after a certain period of time. There was one participant who likened documentary with how news used to be – the unobtrusive dissemination of facts.

Priyanka: It should be like news used to be at one point of time. News at one point did not allow music because they said that it spoilt the nature of the news that's being said. That you just need to show it the way it is and let people form their own judgements. That is how news was 20 years ago. That is how a documentary should be.

Fox (2010) and Corner (2008) both note that documentary was initially concerned with using limited aesthetics to convey information as truth, instead of experimenting with form to entertain audiences. This is in line with maintaining documentary premises of

representing reality. Rajagopal and Vohra (2012) note that Indian political documentary filmmakers prefer not to make films high in aesthetic value as they convey too much subjectivity. According to them, because they represent a serious issue, too much attention to form would take away from the significance of the film as a representation of reality. In India, realism is considered a political weapon to mobilize audiences, and aesthetics only weakens it (Rajagopal & Vohra, 2012). Similarly, Patwardhan does not like to rely on too many aesthetic conventions or heavy editing to get his point across.

All participants felt that *War and Peace* was too long which resulted in most of them getting bored and losing their connection with the various issues covered.

Aryan: It's too long.

Ishaan: Yeah it could be more...[makes gesture with hands as if to suggest compact]

Priyanka: it could be more concise.

To gain more insight, during follow-up interviews participants were asked to evaluate why audiences are more concerned with the length of a documentary film, but not so often for a Hollywood or Bollywood movie. Participants stated that Hollywood and Bollywood movies are created to entertain their audiences, while political documentary films confront them with the negative aspects of their society or the world they inhabit. As Shriprakash mentions, supported by a previous study by Dickey (1993), Indian audiences watch films to relax and transport them to another world for a little while and are not confronted by serious topics.

Chris: With regards to Hollywood and Bollywood movies the entertainment factor keeps the audience in their seats, whereas documentaries have a monotonous flow to them as well as drawing attention to topics which a lot of people are unwilling or uncomfortable about discussing.

However, somewhat paradoxically, when comparing *War and Peace* and *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* most participants were in agreement that the quality, aesthetics and storytelling of the former film were better. The importance of aesthetics for audience engagement with documentary film was highlighted in the following focus group discussions.

Priyanka: I mean if it's [*Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*] made like this then most people would be like 'screw it'. It was little drab. Yesterday's [*War and Peace*] had little more uh...

Ishaan: Masala⁷.

Riya and Aryan: *smile in relation to Ishaan's comment*

Priyanka: I don't know, scope. It had little more scope for those people to get their stories out because people would watch that documentary. With this one [*Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*], I would not have usually watched it.

Aryan: Yeah.

Priyanka: I mean no matter how bad [their plight] I would not have watched it.

There is an argument that the more artful a film, the more attention it commands and is thus more effective in the communication of ideas and concepts (Winston, 2008). This may sometimes result in "pleasurable learning" (Winston, 2008, p. 35). In the participant profile form, when asked to choose between watching an entertaining or informative film, nine out of the thirteen participants stated that they would like to watch an entertaining film while the other four said entertaining and informative. As one participant says,

Aaron: I personally feel that the filmmakers must invest a little more and use latest cameras as the images convey messages to the viewers. The filmmakers can also try to incorporate stunning visuals to keep the viewers attention.

The expansion of technology, the globalization and commercialization of film, and the development of creative practices has changed the context for contemporary documentary film production. It is important that documentary filmmakers acknowledge the importance of bettering the aesthetic and production values of their films to promote the reception of documentary films among Indian audiences. However as Shriprakash states, there should be a balance so that film audiences do not also feel that the value, integrity and credibility of such films are compromised.

Michael Renov (1993) notes, that within the history of documentary film some claimed that a fact lost its authenticity if presented in a way that is too beautiful, as beauty increases distance from absolute reality. In line with this school of thought, both Patwardhan and Shriprakash shy away from overly editing their film, relying mostly on the material they have captured. According to Shriprakash, until recent advances in film, editing and creativity aesthetics were never important. Rather he saw the

⁷ *Masala*, usually refers to a spice mixture used for food preparation. However, when used in everyday speak it refers to products that contain the right mix of ingredients that provide entertainment (Srinivas, 2002).

production of an aesthetically pleasing film as confounding the main premise of documentary film – an accurate representation of reality.

Shriprakash: If you had asked this question ten years ago then probably I would have said I don't bother with this aesthetics kind of things [because] aesthetics, technology, economics can be really problematic, so I started destroying all these parameters.

Additionally, there is a need for political documentary filmmakers to mobilize audiences and empower the people represented in the film. This goal is severely constrained when audiences are unable to accurately engage with the realism factor of documentary film as the lines between fiction and documentary film continue to blur (Rajagopal & Vohra, 2012). Furthermore, Indian critics remain conservative, choosing to evaluate film according to traditional documentary conventions (Rajagopal & Vohra, 2012). However, in a country where Bollywood is the mainstream, and is constantly evolving in its aesthetics, Indian documentary filmmakers have had to step up their game. Shriprakash realizes the importance of aesthetics in contemporary documentary filmmaking in India to engage audiences.

Shriprakash: I realized after some time that you cannot punish your audience. If there is a chance to make a really good visual experience rather than showing crude reality with a crude kind of artistic approach, there should be a balance. So for me aesthetics is really secondary, issue and content are most important. But if aesthetically it is good, people will watch it.

This corresponds with commentary that suggests that within documentary film production there is a tension between producing a piece of work that is aesthetically innovative or poetic and producing knowledge (Corner, 2008). Audiences are asked for their time, energy, attention and money, all of which are finite in supply, and filmmakers hold a certain responsibility to produce a piece of work that is easily understood (Godmilow & Shapiro, 1997).

Support for documentary film

Despite the dominance of Bollywood, scepticism of the documentary genre and lack of faith in the media, the focus group participants expressed inclinations to support documentary film. Participants from both focus groups stated that they would

recommend both films. However, this was later qualified when most participants agreed that there was paradoxically no point in recommending documentary films as people were not interested in engaging with this genre. Ultimately though, because the films were considered relevant to the socio-cultural context, participants thought that it was important that these films be recommended. When asked if they would recommend *War and Peace* to others, participants replied,

Neha, Aaron and Pooja: Yes.

Divya: Yes if people are interested.

Savio: Especially if they are starting a nuclear plant in Maharashtra then yes definitely. Make people aware about this.

Participants were less likely to recommend *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*, unless people were interested in the topic, because of its comparatively low production values and perceived uncertain relevance.

Riya: If I were to recommend it to someone, I would only recommend it to people who really want to watch documentary films.

Priyanka: If people were interested. Sorry.

Aryan: I think I would definitely recommend it to most of my friends because it is very informative in terms of having a good underlying intent.

Sara: I would recommend yesterday's [*War and Peace*] movie. Not this [*Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*] one.

According to Srinivas (2002), in India the likelihood of watching a certain fiction film is strongly dependent on recommendation from peers. The desire to recommend the documentaries to others suggests that overall participants had a positive experience despite sometimes expressing ambivalence. Most participants noted that word-of-mouth recommendation of films by their peers would be one of the main ways to increase the likelihood of watching documentary film, and is therefore one of the main ways which increases young Indian audiences engagement with documentary film.

Indian literature suggests that the association of documentaries with an educational purpose results in Indian audiences being less inclined to want to pay for movie tickets to go see a documentary (Kesavan, 2006). On the contrary, Sen (2006) states that the numerous documentary film festivals hosted around the country are a testament to an increased interest for this genre. Patwardhan too believes that there are audiences who support the documentary initiative in India, but they are yet to be accessed because of difficulties with distribution.

Patwardhan: [Documentary] definitely has an audience, but that audience has to be tapped.

Although not highly visible yet Sen (2006) claims that documentary audiences are on the rise as a consequence of the decline in quality and narrow range of programming seen on television (Sen, 2006). Patwardhan also cites this as one of the main reasons for the increases in documentary audiences in India. He notes, “People are fed up with what they see on TV – it is completely mindless!” A week-long experiment of screening *War and Peace* in commercial multiplexes indicated that there was an audience for this kind of political documentary as the cinema was sold out on multiple days. This is supported by the regular occurrence of well-attended free documentary screenings in Mumbai, such as those conducted by Vikalp@Prithvi.

Patwardhan: We run a film society. Once a month we do documentary screenings, twice a month actually in two different locations in Bombay. Those are very well attended and a lot of good discussion follows. Judging from those kind of things, I know there’s quite a hunger for this.

However, Patwardhan points out that language constrains the accessibility of the film for certain audience groups. India has twenty official languages and over 5000 dialects, when coupled with a lack of funds results in filmmakers producing content primarily in English rather than another official language or local dialect (Sen, 2006; Sharma, 2002). Additionally, Shriprakash states that the audience groups most responsive to his films are people to whom the film content is especially pertinent. This includes stimulating critical thought among young audiences who are yet to take up committed political positions. For most of the focus group participants, the content of these films were not relevant to them personally, because the issues took place in areas they had never interacted with and the films were made almost over a decade ago.

Political documentaries and the political consciousness of audiences

Using information gathered from the focus groups and follow-up interviews, this section discusses the various processes that highlight audience reception and

engagement with political documentaries. These results are supplemented by interviews with both filmmakers.

Increased knowledge and awareness

Participants were unanimous in saying that both films increased knowledge and awareness. There is considerable literature assessing the impact of documentary film on audience knowledge and attitudes. Owen (2007) found, in her study into myths about schizophrenia among college students, that as a consequence of watching documentaries on the subject, participants corrected their previously held convictions about people suffering with this mental illness. Similarly, participants for this study admitted that before viewing such films, they did not know much about the issue of nuclear development in India. They felt that they were better informed about the ill effects and the role of the government in the nuclear issue. Additionally, discussion and the development of shared understandings about the film facilitated increases in knowledge. When asked if they had learned anything new from watching *War and Peace* the following discussion arose:

Pooja: *nods head*

Neha: Yeah.

David: I've not learnt anything about nuclear weapons but I've definitely learnt more about the nuclear issue. For example, I know what the side effects are of nuclear tests, what happens. I mean until now I was not even aware. I always thought that nuclear tests would happen somewhere in a deserted place where no one would be affected by them. But now we know that what actually happens.

Divya: Politicians using the nuclear issue to gain votes was something I just never came across. I didn't think that could happen. I was surprised.

Pooja: When all this happened we were really young - we must have been 10 or 12 or something, so we didn't know...We were just given a very rosy picture that our country's becoming really cool with nuclear weapons. But now we're mature enough to understand the ill effects.

Similarly Nolan (2010) assessed the impact of *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) on University students with an average age of 21, who would ordinarily have not chosen to watch the documentary. Participants were asked to complete a survey assessing their knowledge either before or after watching the movie. Those who completed the survey after watching the movie had higher levels of knowledge about global warming and intentions to make positive changes than their counterparts (Nolan, 2010). Both groups demonstrated an increased concern about the environment and global warming after

watching the film. However although there was increased willingness to take action immediately after watching the film, these intentions dissipated when investigated one month later.

Relevant to current socio-cultural contexts

Audience responses to certain texts will be affected by their initial reaction to the relevance or irrelevance of the text to them (Morley, 1986). Audiences are able to create a relationship with those seen on-screen as they read texts while relating the content back to their everyday lives (de Bruin, 2008). Increased knowledge and a heightened level of awareness about the issues presented in both films probably enabled audiences to use the content in the movie and make it relevant to current socio-cultural contexts. Participants felt that although the movies were made in 2002 and 1999, the themes and messages of the movies were still pertinent in Indian society. In reference to *War and Peace*, a participant notes,

Aryan: We're still obsessed with weapons, especially nuclear ones. We signed a deal last year with America for more fuel. So we're still obsessed with this, it'll continue forever.

When reflecting on the relevance of *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* participants said,

Aryan: when you see it, you realize how the Naxal⁸ situation developed.

Ishaan: That's exactly what I was gonna say.

Aryan: you see this and then you realize how...

Ishaan: [*interrupts Aryan*] then these people come up and fight.

According to Kahana (2008) the ability of individuals to use the content they seen on-screen to understand and interpret their socio-cultural contexts transforms them from being audiences to agents of change. Most political documentaries reflect events in society that are locally, nationally or globally relevant, making documentary film a useful tool when teaching history to students (Stoddard, 2009). However, apart from acknowledging the use of documentary film as historical evidence there is a lack of literature that assesses the continued relevance of film over time in relation to changing

⁸ "The Naxalites, also sometimes called the Naxals, is a loose term used to define groups waging a violent struggle on behalf of landless labourers and tribal people against landlords and others. The Naxalites say they are fighting oppression and exploitation to create a classless society. Their opponents say the Naxalites are terrorists oppressing people in the name of a class war" (Diwanji, 2003).

socio-cultural contexts. This study demonstrates that documentary films continue to remain important over time.

Both Patwardhan and Shriprakash state that even though their films were released in 2002 and 1999 respectively, the themes of these films are still relevant to current socio-cultural contexts. India currently is still developing nuclear power and shows no sign of stopping. This then increases the chances of a positive reception of these films by Indian audiences, highlighted by the participant discussion noted above. Shriprakash mentions that *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* is still being used to initiate and organize anti-nuclear movements, and Patwardhan notes how India is still obsessed with nuclear development.

Patwardhan: The Congress that came to power initiated a treaty with America which is a nuclear treaty and that nuclear treaty has made India aspire to have many nuclear power stations ... multinational corporations from America, France, all over the world are jumping into India to increase our nuclear capability, mainly in the sphere of energy, but energy is really as dangerous as nuclear weapons as we saw with what happened in Fukushima. India is now building a huge big nuclear power plant in Maharashtra on the coastline in Jaitapur. This is the biggest nuclear power plant in the world – a complex of power plants.

Polysemic interpretations

Audience increases in knowledge and awareness were a result of polysemic interpretations of both movies. A polysemic text is one that enables several interpretations, increasing its chances of a broad reach (Condit, 1991; Ott & Mack, 2009; Budd et al., 1990). Thus the sharing of multiple interpretations allows for audiences to engage with and reflect on thoughts and opinions they might not have necessarily thought of. This fosters better understanding and increases in knowledge. In comparison to *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*, *War and Peace* was more open to multiple interpretations. As seen in the previous chapter, this is because *War and Peace* explored several issues within the overarching theme of nuclear development. Moreover, using a global perspective, Patwardhan explored the issues within several different contexts. The following discussion highlights polysemic interpretations of *War and Peace*.

David: I think his message was to show others about things that were hidden - the after effects of the tests. People didn't know about them and the politicians would

not reveal anything although they knew about it. His basic purpose was to go there, video in real time, and spread the message. That was his basic goal.

Savio: I think his message was to basically show that we should stop developing nuclear weapons in the first place and move towards developing nuclear. Stick to your normal guns and go shoot him if you want to. Why develop a nuclear bomb? We are killing innocent people for that matter.

Neha: I think the basic message was to show how things have gone wrong because of these developments in India. To show to the right kind of audience so that people can do something about it.

In contrast, all participants said that they received one main message from *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda*, that the ill effects of uranium mining were a result of the negligence of the UCIL.

Priyanka: For me, compared to yesterday's documentary I think this documentary had just one theme. It did not have multiple themes. It concentrated particularly on one thing and I think he covered it well – the whole issue of how uranium radiation is affecting the villagers.

Polysemic texts allow for audiences to derive their own meanings from the text (Condit, 1991). The higher the level of polysemy, the more audiences the text is able to appeal to (Hiebert & Gibbons, 2000). As Kahana (2008) states, the political force of documentary film rests in its capacity to make its content relevant to a variety of audiences, such as governments and communities. It is important to keep in mind that polysemic texts do not allow for infinite interpretations. Rather these interpretations will be constrained by the socio-cultural context the text is read within, allowing audiences to have access to certain frameworks specific to their culture and not others (Ott & Mack, 2009; Condit, 1991; Fetveit, 2001).

For the filmmakers the openness to reception among various audience segments is the ability for polysemic messages and interpretations to be derived from the text. This in turn allows the text to have positive reception by audiences from different contexts. Shriprakash states that he does not seek to impart just one definitive meaning to his audiences. Rather he ensures that his film contains generalized meanings so that diverse audiences can connect with it.

Shriprakash: I'm just leaving this entirely to the audience. So you cannot say that look this is the only message of my film... I never want to preach or give one message and say 'look this is the only answer', because we are always learning and they [audiences] have their own mind. They can interpret. But I know this is a

naïve statement... If some message is there, I will try to make it more generalized so that people feel it is their duty to react to that message.

Critical thought and analysis

In addition, increased knowledge and awareness of the issue could be linked with the ability to engage in critical thought and analysis. Documentary film encourages its audiences to critically think about matters of social and political significance (Giroux, 2011; Aufderheide, 2005). The focus group data showed that participants critically analysed and discussed the content shown in both movies and reflected by raising questions and hypothesizing different outcomes resulting from the issues and events shown in the film.

Divya: See if they're doing it [building a nuclear plant] then they should take better precautions to not harm the locals.

Neha: Localites yeah.

David: Yeah if they wanted to, they could have taken enough precautions to make sure no one is affected by this. But I'm sure they would know that people would be affected by nuclear tests. People living in that area. If you have spent so much money to do these tests they could have very well put more money to make sure that people are safe after these tests.

Pooja: But what precautions would they take? India is so populated. You can't find empty land or empty places.

David: Yeah that's another problem.

Chris: No they did take precautions.

Pooja: You can't find such places.

Chris: Earlier on there were surface tests that were done. Later on they switched to underground testing, underground blasts. Those precautions were taken but they didn't realize that surface testing would have such effects. Why didn't they research the project before they actually went ahead with the testing? That's irresponsible of them. That irresponsibility is still there in today's world. Hasn't changed!

Critical thought and analysis is stimulated by viewers being able to listen to and witness the testimonies of those affected and represented in political documentaries (Shdaimah, 2009). This is especially true when documentary film is used to educate and teach in social work courses. Shdaimah (2009) states that when on-screen subjects speak to its viewers, in this case social science students, it forces the students to think about the subjects' stories, as such people are representative of those that these students might have to work with one day.

Connectedness with on-screen subjects

By allowing audiences to visualize the struggles of marginalized and vulnerable people, political documentary films can elicit empathy from their audiences (Gaines, 2007). Documentary filmmakers hope that these struggles, images of trauma and catastrophe, elicit compassion from audiences. All participants were able to establish a connectedness with on-screen subjects. Both films showed images of struggle, such as people with health problems, depiction of body deformities and accounts of death and distress, which lead to participants feeling upset.

Ishaan: Because they've shown us those extra fingers and limbs deformed, you can see that and you really feel bad because they're all gonna go through it again and again and again and you're just sitting there watching, okay. I was really angry in one of those scenes where they lost two kids.

Participants were compassionate and used the content of the documentaries to reflect upon their own lives. This is highlighted through comments such as:

Sara: I have such a comfortable life – go to college, come back, relax. I don't do anything to help society. But these people they have to live it, they have to worry about their generations because of the after effects. It makes you put your life in perspective and think 'what am I doing?'

To the extent that political documentaries can transform society, there is potential for a dialogue to be created between the subjects on screen and the audiences (Sandercock & Atili, 2010). Shdaimah (2009) states that in comparison to lectures and text books, documentary films develop empathy for the subjects among students, thus increasing understanding. The film *The Dying Rooms* (1995) which investigated the negative effects of China's one-child policy, such as children being left to die in orphanages, was so powerful in reaching out to its audience that several human rights groups mobilized to bring about a change to this reform and helped improve conditions of the orphanages (Glynne, 2008).

Gaines (2007) states that the ability to relate to subjects on screen, should translate into opening up a space for audiences to directly relate the content with their own world. Although participants were empathetic when watching images of struggle, these feelings were dispersed quickly. This may be due to the differences caused by geography, language and culture. Most of the people affected by nuclear development

are India's most marginalized and reside in rural villages. As one participant mentioned during the focus group discussion, there is a big disconnect between the urban and rural inhabitants of India.

Sonia: People in urban areas, everyone has his or her own thing to do - thinking about a rural area or this nuclear whole energy which they are not directly affected by - they barely care about it.

Limits to political action

In spite of feeling empathetic towards the people represented in the movies, most participants did not show any substantial instances of movement to action in the sense that Gaines (2007) identified in her article on political mimesis. All participants felt compelled and motivated enough to engage in some sort of social activity, but this did not translate into action during the period of the field study. However, they did become more interested in the subject and were motivated to find out more about the issue. Additionally, they mentioned that if this issue was at the forefront of Indian news, they would feel more confident in voicing their opinions. Finally, they stated that these limits to political action were a consequence of people being busy with their own lives and not knowing the right channels through which to engage in political action.

Limited time, amongst other constraints, is one of the main reasons why individuals do not participate in social action or political activities (Schroder & Phillips, 2007). Participants mentioned that people in India are more concerned with taking care of their own needs in a context where the general climate is one of apathy.

Aryan: These things are difficult to watch. I'm sure that even a normal person after watching this movie won't really be concerned. He'll be more concerned with daily living - so that's a problem.

The average citizen lacks power and influence to cause social change. This marginalized position disables individual ability to voice their opinions in the politics-media-citizen relationship and leads to a decrease in civic engagement (Schroder & Phillips, 2007). Participants of this study state that the political atmosphere in India constrains any move towards political action. This is supported by their previous experiences where they have sought to achieve change, but have never seen any positive outcomes. This restricts further participation in social and political activity.

Neha: Even if it would have happened in our own city - like if the terror attacks happened right in our city and we were all outside doing our own thing - what could we do? We went for rallies and protested for a week and nothing happened at all.

Chris: The government basically believes that we are going to say something for a little while and then we are going to shut up. Which is true.

Neha: Cause we know at the end of the day, nothing is going to happen. You know how the government is.

Pooja: We're just taken for granted.

In a follow-up interview, one participant elaborates,

Priyanka: I think primarily because we've all grown up with the idea that nothing can change. No matter what we do, it's not going to make a difference. Even the pot holes in the road, we can call the BMC, no matter how many times, we can take it to the press, we can embarrass them as much as we want, but they're not going to do anything. So that's why you sit back and watch and say 'fine that's the way it is'.

Gaines (2007) suggests that the constant portrayal of images, such as those of violence and terrorism might stimulate curiosity for a brief period. Then audiences may move through phases such as arousal, shame, and possibly indifference at the end. For participants in this study, it was not the constant portrayal of images of struggle in the film, but rather that they constantly faced such images of struggle in their lives. Additionally, Gaines (2007) notes that it is hard to determine exactly which images stimulate political consciousness and which cause indifference. Moreover, in order for political action to occur, willing audiences need to be provided with positive and desirable models of action that they could imitate (Benson & Snee, 2008). The participants from both focus groups were unable to identify such desirable models of action, even though they were mobilized through emotional arousal and the intellectual claims of the films. Rather, they felt helpless as they were unable to identify avenues through which they could participate in positive change.

Sara: After I've watched it, I don't know where to go from here or how to bring about a change. I don't know about any NGOs or organisations that are doing this kind of work. So I think probably awareness I guess. I don't know how they're going to do that, but it needs to be more out there and more like mainstream TV or something. We need some way that people would come to know about it and only then can you do something.

De Zuniga and colleagues (2009) state that online participation such as writing blogs, reading the news, and joining social networks all contribute to increasing political

participation. In the follow-up interviews, participants showed engagement in such activities such as joining *Facebook* pages and researching more information on the topic of nuclear development. Online interaction opens up a space for individuals to politically engage with various issues, enhances relations between people and consequently increases political participation (de Zuniga et al., 2009). Taveesin and Brown (2006), and Kwak, Poor and Skorik (2006) found that information-seeking from online sources has a positive association with political activity and community participation. For example, citizens of Thailand who accessed the internet to seek information or follow the national elections were more likely to participate in the 2001 national election (Taveesin & Brown, 2006).

In conclusion, participants in this study are more aligned with civic engagement than political action. Livingstone (2005) defines the 'civic' in terms of politically relevant activities that precede the political action. Influenced by the socio-cultural contexts, this concept of the civic includes the beliefs, opinions and practices that precede actual participation in public/political society (Livingstone, 2005). As seen in this section, participants felt better informed on the issue of nuclear development. They declared that both films had been revelatory and although they could not promise any engagement in political action, they did cite increases in motivation to engage with the issue. This is in line with Livingstone's (2005) observation that audiences can lie somewhere in between the critical interpretation of issues and the motivation to move towards public participation that is expected of them.

Neha: If somebody comes and tells me about the nuclear developments that are happening, I would know what's going on, I will take it in the right way. But to take a step forward and do something about it – we can say we'll do it, but nobody does.

Pooja: At least we're motivated. At least we'll think of doing something.

Neha: Yeah.

Pooja: Previously we didn't even think of doing something.

Chris: See now we know what to do - to a certain extent.

Pooja: *nods in agreement with Chris's comment*

Divya: Maybe if someone starts an initiative we might just help.

Literature suggests a firm association between political documentary film and a goal of mobilizing its subjects and audiences to strive for social change (Sharma, 2002; Chand & Singh, 2002; Gaines, 1999; Bowles, 2006). Similarly, Patwardhan maintains that change can occur, but is not immediate.

Patwardhan: You can't quantify that. It's not in our hands anymore [with] thousands of copies, DVDs, floating around, etcetera... I don't think people watch a film and suddenly take action but I think a film, like a book, has a residual response. People over time think about what they see ... you change and redefine ideas. It's through reading and through watching films - so it's adding to the package of information, motivation that's available to us.

Likewise, in conversation with Indian documentary filmmaker Sarat Chandran, Mulgundam (2002) found that she too believes that in comparison with commercial film and television programmes, the images of documentary film linger in peoples consciousness long after viewing has commenced. DVDs about the war in Iraq are distributed for sale with tag-lines such as, 'Share it and change the world' (Gaines, 2007, p. 40) yet, little is known about the effects on social change stimulated by such documentaries beyond the likely effect of consciousness raising. Although the filmmakers were unable to identify specific situations where their films were directly linked to consciousness-raising and actual political activities, they were able to provide examples of instances where their films were used internationally to positively impact on important circumstances. Patwardhan states that his film was used in Pakistan as a catalyst for public debate broadcast on television nationwide, while Shriprakash mentions that his film was used as information for people in Brazil facing similar circumstances.

Patwardhan: I went to Pakistan to participate in the debate with the retired chief of the ISI, the Pakistani Intelligence Agency, with a nuclear scientist who is also against nuclear weapons and with a pro-nuclear spokesperson. So we had a panel discussion that went along with the film. This was all telecast in Pakistan and was so popular there that they ran it three times.

Shriprakash: The first uranium film festival in Brazil was just concluded in July, so you can go and see their official website, you find that my film is there and the official statement is that this film is very important because Brazil and India are going to have a nuclear treaty. It's very important for us to see the situation and understand.

Despite these positive outcomes the reach of documentary film in India is limited because of the cultural context. As Johnson and colleagues (2004) suggest, hegemonic meanings, dominant discourses and socio-political contexts all have an influence on the production and reception of texts. Both Patwardhan and Shriprakash acknowledge the broader contexts that have impacted problematically on the access and reception of their

films. They cite a vast population, lack of distribution options, and citizen apathy as reasons for a low reception of political documentary film in India.

Patwardhan: Considering the population of India, the number of people that have seen the film is .0000001% and so I mean what impact can a film like that actually make, when so few people have seen it.

Patwardhan: The role documentaries played in Indian society is restricted thanks to the low level distribution of these films.

Shriprakash: These people [citizens] are not interested in looking at the ugly part of their society...They don't want to see their reality.

Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusions

This chapter provides an overview of the significant aspects of this study, addresses its strengths and limitations, comments on researcher reflexivity, discusses implications and provides recommendations for future research.

Overview of significant findings of this study

As mentioned in Chapter One the main thrust of this study is an examination of the reception of political documentary film among young, urban, Mumbaikars. Before this research process began, I hypothesized that the socio-cultural context is one of the main constraints to effective reception of political documentary film among young audiences. This context included the domination of commercial Bollywood cinema and the lack of distribution and dissemination options for political documentary film. As the literature review began to take shape, it became evident that Indian academics too believed that the main obstacle to the expansion and positive reception of documentary film was a unfavourable environment. Similar to my assumptions, Indian literature noted the overpowering of Bollywood cinema, resulting in marginalizing other forms, especially documentary film. Additionally, they also noted the lack of a formally established infrastructure for the support, production and distribution of political documentary films in India (Fischer, 2009; Sen, 2006; Matzner, 2012), as well as the stifling effect of having an immensely popular and well-established cinema (Sen, 2006).

For participants of this study, obstacles to reception included a lack of information and opportunities to access with political documentary film. Participants rarely hear about any information about film screenings, new releases or see advertisements for political documentary. However, a couple of participants did mention that recently news channels on local television have been showing advertisements promoting the screenings of documentary film. Although documentaries are being shown on some national television channels, most documentary filmmakers prefer not to use this option for dissemination of their films because of the commercial constraints they have to navigate. Matzner (2010) states that documentary filmmakers in Mumbai are

apprehensive commissioning their films to satellite television, as channels such as *NDTV* ask that films be edited to fit into a forty minute timeslot as well as commercializing the films by including advertisement breaks. This further contributes to the dearth of opportunity for broad audience engagement with documentary film.

This difficult environment also impacts the production of political documentary. Within the contexts cited in Chapter Two, both Patwardhan and Shriprakash are faced with the lack of opportunities to market and distribute their films, as there are no established distribution networks. They are often intimidated by the CBFC, the elite, and those in political power who work against filmmakers challenging the principles and beliefs of these powerful groups.

Participants and filmmakers all firmly assert that the domination of Bollywood cinema contributes to the marginalization of independent political documentary film. This was hypothesized at the beginning of this study and the information collected from focus groups and interviews supports this claim. Bollywood infiltrates all facets of life in Mumbai from billboards, posters and advertisements populating the urban landscape, to expressions of identity through language, fashion and so on. Audiences across India have a connection with Bollywood celebrities and are able to relate to the stories seen on screen, and there is a particularly strong relationship with Bollywood for audiences in Mumbai as this city is the epicentre of Bollywood productions. However, although disadvantageous to the expansion of political documentary film, Kazmi (1999) indicates that it is currently a more feasible option to use Bollywood film, rather than documentary, to attempt to positively influence mass audiences and cause social change due to the positive and popular reception of this genre.

In light of these constraints young, urban Mumbaikars stated that the internet would be the most viable medium through which to access documentary film. Additionally, to foster a culture of appreciating documentary film, participants emphasized that more efforts need to be made to ensure adolescent audience groups came in contact with this genre in school and colleges. However, upon further examination this recommendation might be problematic as the qualitative survey of college students indicates. Only a third of 25 college students positively responded to political documentary film viewing as part of their academic coursework, and this may also be the case for adolescent audience groups. The institutional contexts of school and college may have an impact

on reception, where viewing in an educational environment might be thought to correspond with a belief that watching documentary film is a form of study. In contrast, audiences who voluntarily watched documentary film as part of a monthly documentary film group appreciated documentary for its representation of reality, factual nature, and coverage of important issues. In turn this appreciation had positive outcomes, such as increasing knowledge, stimulating conversation and critical thought.

In addition to contexts, previously held perceptions and expectations of the documentary genre also impacted on reception of political documentary film for participants of this study. Of those participants who had watched documentary film in the past, most had engaged with the genre in educational institutions such as schools and colleges, consolidating the perception that documentary film is educational and informative. Of concern is the assumption that documentary films are boring, a unanimous perspective among all focus group participants and major barrier to positive receptions of political documentary film. Participants valued aesthetics highly – a production that had good camera work, strong edited sequences, and high levels of cinematography. Therefore, filmmakers need to produce work that is aesthetically pleasing to challenge and change such perceptions.

Focus group participants had difficulties with the notion that documentary film production is subjective, leading to skepticism about the genre. The general lack of trust in the Indian news media is a possible contributing factor to this perception. These perspectives connect with commentary that argues Indian media is largely profit driven and highly influenced by the elite and politically powerful. This compromises a civic responsibility to provide unbiased information to citizens (Mehrotra, 2006; Kumar, 2010; Dhavan, 2008). In relation to *War and Peace*, filmmaker subjectivity was misread as bias, which inhibited participant engagement with the issues. Conversely, *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* was seen as a more credible account, possibly because Shriprakash's critique was comparatively subdued and his point of view not as evident as Patwardhan's was.

Although participant experiences suggested that there were several personal and social benefits to viewing political documentary film such as increased knowledge and awareness, development of critical thought and analysis, and establishing a connectedness with on-screen subjects, these outcomes did not translate into obvious

action for social change. Precipitating social change is a key goal of political documentary film. Socio-cultural constraints (domination of Bollywood), negative experiences with civic engagement (previous activity resulting in no positive outcome), and audience perceptions (perceiving the documentary genre to be boring), constrained the transformative potential of documentary film for these participants. All people participating in the study are constantly faced with images of struggle. For example, seeing people living in poverty; being victims or witnesses of terrorist attacks; and numerous other injustices and inequalities based on caste/religion, which may possibly contribute to an aura of indifference and lack of social activity. The constant exposure to these images of struggle may desensitize participants thus making them less likely to actively do something to address these issues. Many participants were however motivated to find out more about the issues raised in the documentaries, as well as participate in future discussions about them, which increases the likelihood they would be willing to engage with this genre in the future. The active engagement of the audience was highlighted as participants reacted to what they saw on screen, debated issues, came up with solutions and were able to translate messages and themes from over a decade ago to their personal socio-cultural contexts.

In light of the focus group discussions, it seems that participants are more likely to join initiatives and campaigns for social change, rather than initiating such movements themselves or taking personal steps in these directions. Some expressed that it would be beneficial if filmmakers provided information about the ways in which audiences could take positive steps to making changes in society. Audience motivation for civic engagement is strongly influenced by the successes of initiatives or campaigns contributing to political action or social change.

At this stage, the expansion of documentary films is heavily dependent on audience engagement with this genre. Unfortunately, the restrictive environment the production of this genre operates in does nothing for this goal. Therefore currently, filmmakers need to actively promote their films by taking their films to the audience rather than waiting for audiences to make contact with their films. Findings in this study suggest that audiences are more likely to watch films if someone recommends or presents it to them in comparison with them seeking such films out on their own. In India, it is not so much the unavailability of documentary film but the lack of opportunity to access these texts because of this context. From personal experience, one initial point of contact

with a relevant source is needed for further extension in information. For example, through my involvement with Vikalp@Prithvi I was made aware of other documentary film networks, such as *Docuwallahs* and film clubs like *Shamiana*. Therefore, it is important that filmmakers also focus on disseminating information about documentary film groups, like Vikalp@Prithvi to increase the presence of political documentary film in Mumbai.

Anand Patwardhan is noted for his contribution to initiating the independent political documentary film movement in India. His most recent film at the time of the study, *War and Peace*, was chosen as a tool through which to investigate audience reception. Participants appreciated *War and Peace* for its global approach, coverage of numerous issues, multiple perspectives, style of storytelling, aesthetic value, and the ability to keep them engaged by stimulating their thinking. A third of the focus group participants preferred *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* because it was less confusing, had a good flow and was shorter in length. A marginally higher proportion of participants stated that they would recommend *War and Peace* instead of *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* because it was more entertaining and engaging. Both films were highly valued by participants. *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* was valued for being informative and easy to understand, while *War and Peace* was valued for its ability to be thought provoking and engaging through Patwardhan's cynicism and juxtaposition of events.

This study specifically examined the reception of one form of documentary – the political film. In comparison to other non-fiction films, political documentary film urges its audience to perform a critical analysis of what they see on-screen, in the hopes that such critical reflections will open up a space for debate. Such debate has transformative potential, as ideas and opinions are discussed and may often result in positive change. Additionally, by being a representation of reality, they affect the consciousness of its audiences more than fiction film as what audiences see must have occurred somewhere in the world they inhabit, at a certain time. Thus, when political documentary film presents arguments or concerns that are not in line with audiences personal beliefs and opinions, this medium becomes increasingly open to critique. Due to its ties with realism, more so than other forms of documentary, political and social documentaries are able to affect their audiences by allowing them to visualize images of distress and suffering (Kahana, 2008). As a result, audiences are empathetic to the situations of people they seen on-screen. Therefore, one must realize that audience

information gathered in this study is in response to a particular genre of documentary, the political documentary.

Limitations of the study

It is important for any study to assess the limitations of research that could significantly influence the data and research outcomes. According to Kumar (2010), the magnitude of diversity in India is challenging for any academic research project. There are several factors that need to be taken into consideration, such as religion, cultural activities, social class, language and community. This study tried to provide an overview of these aspects through the participation profile form, but did not delve into the demographic profile of participants in great detail in the analysis and interpretation of findings. This is because rather than making distinctions between various segments of the audience, this study simply sought to provide an overview of how youth in Mumbai engage with political documentary film. The participant profile form was used to contextualize participant information.

At the time this research was conducted (indeed, as always), Mumbai was bustling with activity and chaos. People, especially students, are always busy. There is a huge emphasis placed on academic achievement, which considerably restricts their opportunity to participate in other activities, a possible contributing factor for the relatively low levels of student participation in this research. I hoped to recruit at least three different focus groups, with 8-10 participants in each group, however that expectation had to be adjusted in the light of what was possible. The literature recommends the use of 6-8 participants in order that facilitators can moderate the group discussion, giving everyone an opportunity to contribute (Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Wilkinson, 1998; Lunt, 1996; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Sim, 1998). Furthermore, psychologists recommend that groups of seven people are ideal for 'group talk', as it ensures participation from all members (Sauter, 2010; Lewis, 1992). As this was an exploratory study, two focus groups sufficed and I was able to mitigate lower than expected focus group participation with the triangulation of data-types – focus groups, follow-up interviews, qualitative surveys and participant observation.

Other limitations were related to participant recruitment. I had limited success with advertisements placed on university notice boards, so I supplemented participant recruitment using the snowball technique (Noy, 2008). Specifically, when people expressed their interest to participate, they were encouraged to bring their friends. According to Kitzinger (1994), this is a potential disadvantage as these participants stem from a shared context and thus discussion centres around group norms, such as activities, habits and topics of interest that the group engages with together, thus limiting exploration of areas that fall outside these norms. Conversely, using groups of friends in focus group discussions can also be a strength as it is conducive to conversation flow and simulates a more naturally occurring social group (Sauter, 2010; Kitzinger, 1994; Vicsek, 2007).

The dropout rate from the study was another limitation. Six participants expressed interest, but did not turn up on the day of the scheduled focus group film screening. There were five participants who came for the screening of the films, but did not participate for the focus group discussions. Similarly, one participant decided to only participate in the first focus group session and not the second. One participant failed to respond to an invitation for a follow-up interview.

Research indicates that audiences participating in reception research may conduct a more critical reading of media texts than they are usually inclined to do (Kubey, 1996). This effect might have been exacerbated in this study as participants were given a set of prompts to think about before they watched the film to cue them up for the focus of this study. In the end, this technique proved beneficial as it allowed participants to gather their thoughts, and the discussions were more productive and time-efficient as a consequence (Colucci, 2007).

Several inaccuracies may occur when focus group and interview data are transcribed because of factors such as background noise which affect the researcher's ability to accurately hear what is being said (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2008). This is especially applicable to this study given the extent of environmental noise in Mumbai. During focus group discussions, outside conversations, traffic noise, birds and the rain were all present. To compensate for this, four audio recording devices and two video cameras were used for the focus groups, while two audio recording devices were used for the interviews with filmmakers. Other transcription problems included accidental

omissions, the inability to identify certain words, quotations and sentence structure (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2008; Hewitt, 2007). To increase accuracy it is recommended that researchers read their transcripts while simultaneously listening to audio data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2008). This was done a couple of times in this study to decrease any inaccuracies. Additionally, the filmmakers were allowed to review their transcripts. As well as mitigating inaccuracies, this was also an ethical approach aimed at empowering participants by giving them further control of and participation in the research process (Mero-Jaffe, 2001). For example, Anand Patwardhan made some edits, but did not change the overall content of the interview.

A possible limitation, given the interpretive nature of the research and my background, is that I may have inherent biases which could influence the findings. However, this has been acknowledged and considerable attempts were made not to let my pre-conceived notions and past experiences influence analysis. By using follow-up interviews with focus group participants, I made their opinions a priority. Additionally, I asked them to elaborate on some topics discussed during focus groups thus limiting the necessity for me to use my assumptions as reasons for why certain things were said. I also made it a point to clarify all details, major and minor, thus allowing me to reserve my personal opinions while allowing the participants of my study to be the focus. However, being an insider is also a strength. Coming from a similar background to my participants, it possibly aided in them feeling comfortable around me and decreasing power differentials. It also allowed me to interpret and understand the culturally specific nuances of language use. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009) being an insider gives the researcher a certain level of legitimacy when making claims and discussing findings.

Strengths of the study

This study contributes to the small body of literature assessing the reception of documentary film as well as to the field of Indian media and communication studies (Nolan, 2010; Harindranath, 2009; Mulugundam, 2002; Dover, 2009). An extensive literature search revealed that there has not been a similar study to date drawing from the experiences of urban audiences residing in Mumbai, India. Additionally, there have been no studies investigating the various fora through which young, urban audiences in India engage with and consume documentary film.

Second, there is scarce research examining the reception of documentary film among youth. A literature search revealed that the reception of social/political documentaries among school and university students has been studied to some extent, but these studies mostly employed quantitative survey methodologies to increase the volume and generalizability of data (Nolan, 2009; Owen, 2007). The lack of in-depth and detailed qualitative information limited their accounts of reception.

The triangulation of data is another strength of the study. The research design made use of a number of research methods to further research aims, elicit a range of information, enable a deeper analysis, and control deviations, thus increasing the validity and rigour of the study (Barbour, 2001; Sauter, 2010; Malterud, 2001; Mays & Pope, 2000). For my study, a combination of participant observation with focus groups and follow-up interviews resulted in obtaining richer information as participants were able to clarify points and expand on their comments during the follow-up interview and provide more detail. In addition, as two weeks had passed between focus groups and follow-up interviews, participants were able to mull over the discussion and thus offer insights into new areas not previously covered during focus group research. Similarly, when examining fora through which young people engage with documentary film, participant observation was combined with qualitative surveys to improve interpretation and analysis by being able to contextualise the information. As literature suggests, the triangulation of data improved the overall reach of interpretation as it increased the ability to provide a richer account of participant experiences (Mays & Pope, 2000).

An additional strength is the use of focus group discussions as a research method to empower and instil confidence in participants (Levine, 2007) providing them with the opportunity to share experiences and learn more about themselves (Peel et al., 2006). All participants stated that the focus group discussions were beneficial as they were able to not only learn more about themselves, but also from others sharing their perspectives and experiences. Also, as most discussions about media occur within groups, focus groups were an appropriate methodology to simulate these interactions (Morley, 1996).

This study emphasized the research design context throughout the research process. This is beneficial as it allows other researchers/readers to better relate the findings of this study to other settings with similar contexts (Mays & Pope, 2000). Additionally, to strengthen credibility, I have made explicit all of the methods and processes as well as

addressed researcher position in this investigation (Beck, 1993). Another strength of this study is exploring reception in relation to filmmaker perceptions, textual analysis and socio-cultural context thus providing a comprehensive account of factors affecting the reception of political documentaries in India among young, middle class, urban Mumbaikars.

Implications for documentary practice

As previously identified, India has a multitude of languages and bewildering levels of cultural diversity (Monteiro & Jayasankar, 1994; Kumar, 2010). Since 1994, Hindi was the primary spoken language for less than a quarter of the population (Monteiro & Jayasankar, 1994). As a result, the extent to which documentary films can be used to influence the masses is highly limited. In order that documentary films such as *War and Peace* and *Buddha weeps in Jadugoda* increase their reception and impact, it is desirable that these productions be translated and made available in a variety of popular regional languages. However, this can be expensive and financial resources are limited for documentary film production.

This study will also enable documentary filmmakers in India to gain insight into young people's perceptions of documentary film. This study identifies the main ways through which young people engage with documentary film (internet, educational institutions, documentary film groups). This finding may be useful for the future marketing and distribution efforts of filmmakers as well as informing them that young audiences want to see short, informative pieces that have high levels of cinematography (good editing, high quality, professional camera work). Finally, this study provides information for documentary production and distribution groups about where to target sales and distribution of documentary films.

Recommendations for future research

This is a small, exploratory study assessing the reception of political documentary film among one small segment of a vast Indian audience – middle class youth between the ages of 16-25 living in urban Mumbai, India. As such, it can be used as a pilot study to

inform future research examining reception among this segment of the audience, in India and internationally. There needs to be more research investigating the reception of political documentary film among young audiences because this genre is a very powerful vehicle for political action and social change. The persuasive and influential characteristics of political documentaries coupled with its ability to resonate with middle-class, educated youth (as a demographic favourably equipped to effect social change) are an important area to be studied.

Further research with youth in India would benefit from collaborating with educational institutions and documentary film groups as it is hard to access participants otherwise. A longitudinal study, where engagement and reception of political documentary is examined at set intervals, and the effect of such engagement is measured would be another productive way of extending this research. As Patwardhan mentions, political action and other such social effects of watching documentary are residual and happen over time. It would be very interesting to see if the outcomes of documentary effects over time are enhanced or diminished.

This study also provided a brief overview of the perceptions, engagement and reception of political documentary film among young people in two different contexts – as university students and as members of a documentary film group. There were significant differences between the engagement and reception of documentary film between both groups. As there has been no research conducted in this area, future research could focus on the differences between voluntary experiences of viewing documentary film versus as part of academic prescription. Additional research on the impact of political documentary film as an educational tool would also complement this work.

As most participants stated that the internet would be their main medium of choice to watch documentaries and get information, more research should be conducted in assessing how online interaction with documentaries could be used to stimulate political consciousness and action for change. Additionally it would be interesting to also investigate how the internet, online forums, blogs and social networks are viable avenues through which people can engage politically with social/political causes and activities.

Participants in this study stated that they were not directly affected by the nuclear issue – topics covered by both films used in this study to investigate reception. This could possibly impact on the reception of the film. It would be interesting to assess the reception of these films on populations that were directly being affected by nuclear development in India. Shriprakash mentioned that *Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda* is highly valued in communities that have suffered negligence from organisations such as the Uranium Corporation of India. Future research could assess differences in reception between such groups.

Morley (2006) states that the disengaged or indifferent audience is important to consider in contemporary audience research. The reasons behind people's refusal to engage with documentary film is an important area of study that relates to the overall field of documentary reception studies in India, as Indian literature has consistently shown how viewing Bollywood film is usually preferred over viewing documentary film. Future documentary film research in India could focus on assessing this disengaged or indifferent audience.

This kind of study could expand to global research on the reception of political documentary film. By comparing the reception of political documentary films cross-culturally, such research can provide insight about the levels of audience engagement across cultures. Additionally, given its main premise of achieving social change, more research internationally would reveal if current documentary practices are taking steps in the right direction. Moreover, because of the relative lack of national and international research examining the effects and reception of political documentary film, further research must be undertaken to address this gap. For further development of the social potential of this genre, it is important to assess if it is able to achieve these goals, and measure its success in relation to different kinds of audiences.

Concluding Comments

Documentary film reception in India is a complex process, and more so among young audiences. The complexity is because the context in which films are produced and consumed is ever changing, is politically charged and has a strong influence on how a film is produced, distributed and consumed. The overall lack of faith in media because

of its political affiliations and biases, domination of Bollywood and widespread corruption within the film industry are contributing factors that restrict engagement with political documentary film. For most young Mumbaikars, this genre is valuable in terms of being informative. However, when compared with the popular Bollywood cinema, political documentary films were considered boring as they lack the 'entertainment' factor. Therefore, documentary filmmakers must endeavour to make their films more evocative and aesthetically pleasing to draw in diverse audiences.

Political documentary films have the potential to influence and mobilize young audiences. Young, urban Mumbaikars are able to connect with people on-screen and be empathetic to their struggles while critically analyzing social and political problems. However, although motivated to act, the context which they live in limits political action. Because of previous unsuccessful attempts by citizens to create positive change, audience motivation can quickly turn to apathy. To succeed, filmmakers must collaborate with like-minded individuals to find pathways through which audiences can be mobilized.

From this study, I firmly believe that there is tremendous potential for Indian political documentary films to influence their audiences to bring about social change. Filmmakers must continue to produce political films that are timely and aesthetically captivating to stimulate audiences towards social change. The outlets for accessing documentary films in Mumbai serve as one of the primary barriers to engagement with political documentaries. For young people, the internet is the most viable option for accessing documentaries. Therefore, this portal should be explored as a means for enhancing engagement with documentary film among young Mumbaikars. Moreover, efforts into the marketing of documentary film groups, such as Vikalp@Prithvi, should also be increased.

To conclude, I leave you with a quote from Anand Patwardhan,

As for small audiences for films that have the potential to bring about change, it is not surprising that unjust systems do not encourage or pay for their own executioner. But every now and again some change makers do slip in through the cracks in the wall.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide (Filmmakers)

1. In reference to documentary films in India, do you think that they are the alternative to the mainstream? Do they have a valid place in Indian cinema?
 - a) Why do you choose to make documentary films in a film industry and a society/culture of people that are so Bollywood-driven?
2. How would you define your work? *your style of making documentaries*
 - a) Is there a specific agenda which motivates your work?
 - b) What was the purpose for making this film?
3. In relation to [film name]
 - a) What was the main driving force for making this film – where did this idea spark up from?
What inspired/motivated you to make a film about his issue?
 - b) Why did you choose to approach this film from a more global standpoint (inclusion of Pak, Japan and USA) rather than making a national/local film?
 - c) Do you think, with India and Indians playing a more important role in global environments it is essential that we are able to locate ourselves within a more global context?
 - d) What is the main message of this film? Is this still relevant to Indian society today?
4. What do you have to say about the politics of representation in political documentaries?
 - a) What measures do you take in order that you ensure your subjects are represented fairly?
5. How do you conceptualise objectivity?
 - a) 'truth' is a much contested term in documentary studies. What is your opinion on this?
6. How important is it that the filmmaker acknowledges his position, not only to himself but to his audiences?
7. What are your ideas about reflexivity in political documentary? *Are audiences able to sit back and critically reflect/evaluate the content being shown?*
 - a) In your opinion, how did [film name] provide a space for audiences to evaluate what they are being shown and feel empowered to make informed considerations?
8. Would you call yourself a film maker or a film-activist?
 - a) Do you hope that your films are catalyst for change? Motivating people to jump out of their seats and do something?
9. Are there any instances that you know of where your film has stimulated social action or social change?
 - b) What are your impressions about the audiences for political documentaries in India? Does India have an audience for political documentaries?
 - a) Who was your intended audience for this film and how did you target them?

10. What have been your experiences with various audience groups while promoting/screening your film?
 - a) What about international audiences?

11. How did you promote/market your film?
 - a) Do you feel there is a market for documentary films in India?
 - b) Did you intend [film name] for local or international release? Or both?
 - c) Did this film release in mainstream cinemas?

12. Some state that funding decides the agendas of films. What is your opinion on this statement?
 - a) Is it easy accessing funding for documentary films in such a Bollywood driven industry?
 - b) Can you share some of your experiences with funding agencies in India?

For Patwardhan:

- It is a great achievement to stand up to the censor board in India and pursue the release of your film without edits. Can you explain what this experience was like – standing up to the Censor board and then taking your claim to the High Court? What was it like when you won?

Appendix B: Interview Guide (St. Xaviers student)

1. What is the event called?
2. Why is it being held?
3. Who is organizing it?
4. Where is it being held?
5. Do you need to buy tickets for the event? How much does each student have to pay?
6. Who all have been invited to attend? (only political science students? All students? What class levels? Outsiders?)
7. Why have only these people been invited?
8. Is it compulsory? Is it part of the academic curriculum?
9. How many movies are being screened each day? Can you list all the movies?
10. Are the movies screened only once each or do they play many times?
11. How many times a year does this occur?
12. Is it held during class time or outside class hours?
13. Is there a discussion after the screening?
 - a) What is this like?
 - b) Do many students stay/participate?
14. Will students be tested on the information they have gained from watching these films? When will students be asked to use this information?
15. What was the atmosphere in the room like as the movie was screened?
 - a) Before screening?
 - b) After screening?
16. Do teachers/lectures attend the screening?
17. Is the screening monitored by anyone or is it just students that are there?

Appendix C: Synopsis of films

War and Peace/Jung Aur Aman (2002)

Synopsis:

Filmed over four years (1998-2002), this film takes a look at the nuclear tests that began in Pokaran, India on May 11th 1998. Patwardhan speaks to a number of Pakistan and Indian ex-officials involved with the development of the weapons and their tests, as well as army officials who have been involved in India-Pakistan wars. He also speaks to Indian and Pakistani civilians who are both a pro- or anti-nuclear war. Patwardhan does well to highlight the current and future detrimental effects of war and nuclear testing for both nations, and asks the audience to critically reflect on these issues should these two countries ever partake in the use of nuclear arms. Patwardhan also travels to United States of America (USA) and Japan establishing links between the atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the current nuclear landscape in India. Through interviews with USA historians and victims of Hiroshima/Nagasaki Patwardhan investigates reasons and effects between one of the biggest war crimes in history.

Buddha weeps in Jadugoda (1999)

Synopsis:

This film captures the struggles of the Adivasi tribal people of India, as they are manipulated and taken advantage of by the Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL). Upon discovering the presence of uranium in Jadugoda UCIL made no delay in setting up a uranium plant to mine and process uranium, with the help of labour from people living in Jadugoda and the surrounding area. However, their lack of concern for the people, their surroundings and the employees themselves has resulted in devastating effects that continue to affect future generations.

Appendix D: Participant Profile Form

Participant ID:

Name:

Age:

Sex (male/female):

Highest Educational Attainment:

Employment/Occupation:

Religion:

How often do you watch movies [either at a cinema or at home (DVD/Broadcast)] – circle one option:

- More than once a week
- Less than once a week
- Once every fortnight
- Once a month
- Once in 6 months

What are the sources of information you refer to when choosing to see a film: (example: newspapers, magazines, posters/billboards, word of mouth, reviews, cinema programmes, internet, special interest groups)

Favourite type of film genre:

(example: adventure, music, political, social issues, natural world, science, war, environmental, sports, biography, arts, travel, history, science-fiction, non-fiction, fiction, documentary, comedy, romance, action)

When choosing a film, would your choice be based on GENRE or CONTENT?:

When choosing a film, would your choice be based on INFORMATIVE or ENTERTAINING?

Please rate your general interest for the documentary film genre (circle one option):

1 (low) 2 3 4 5 (high)

Have you ever watched a documentary film? If yes, please give an example of a film:

What are some of your expectations when you watch a documentary film?

How often do you watch documentary films? Please circle one option:

- More than once a week
- Less than once a week
- Once every fortnight
- Once a month
- Once in 6 months

What are your expectations of the documentary film genre?:

Thinking about the film industry scene in India, what is the role or the place of documentary film in this industry?

How often do you see advertisements (posters, billboards, advertisements on television) about documentary film?

What sources of media do you use to keep yourself informed?:

What interest do you have with regards to the issue of nuclear development in India? (circle one option):

1 (low) 2 3 4 5 (high)

How concerned are you about nuclear development in India? (circle one option):

1 (low) 2 3 4 5 (high)

How likely are you to watch a documentary film about nuclear development in India? (circle one option):

1 (low) 2 3 4 5 (high)

Have you ever been involved in an advocacy/activist group? If yes, please give details about involvement in brief:

Have you ever been involved with a non-governmental organisation (NGO)? If yes please give details about involvement in brief:

Appendix E: Focus Group Guide

1. According to you what is the main message or argument of this scene?
 - a. Does it relate to the overall message of the entire film? (will get them to elaborate how the main message of the scene ties in with the overall message of the film)
 - b. Name one main point or message you would take away from this scene?
2. Tell me about some of the themes you have identified in this scene?
 - a. Do these themes recur throughout the movie? Please elaborate by providing examples. (*Does anybody else want to add in any other themes that have not been mentioned?*)
 - b. Do you think that even though this movie was made in 2002 these themes are still pertinent/important in the Indian society today?
3. What parts of the scene did you find most interesting and why?
 - a. What do you think about the film as a whole – a good balance of stories? Informativeness? Entertainment? Cinematography?
4. Are there any doubts at all about the content you have seen? Trustworthiness of the stories, experiences and information given in this film?
 - a. Are you able to identify with/relate to these people and their stories.
 - b. Do their stories have an impact on you personally? How so?
5. Do you think such films are an outlet for people to get their stories/voices heard?
 - a. Do you think the filmmaker is telling his story or providing a medium for the characters to tell their story?
6. What do you think the filmmaker wanted to achieve from making this film?
7. Do you think this film is a believable/credible account of nuclear development in India – YES/NO. *Then ask:* What makes this film a good/bad representation/portrayal of the issue of nuclear development in India?
8. Any thoughts or reflections about the themes/issues highlighted by this film?
 - a. How did the film make you feel? What did the film mean to you?
 - b. Did you learn anything new or become more informed as a result of this film?
 - c. Are you motivated to use the information seen in this film?/Will you use the information you have received in this film?
 - d. What are your views on this film being used as an educational piece?
9. Did you like this film? [*concluding*]
 - a. What did you like best about this film? What did you like least about this film?
 - b. Would you recommend this film to others and encourage others to watch it?

Appendix F: Follow-up Interview Schedule (focus groups)

1. Did you enjoy watching these films? What was your experience of the focus group discussions?
2. It was mentioned that these films were made in 1997 and 2002 and a lot would have changed since then. If a follow up or a sequel was made and released would you be interested in watching it? If yes, why? If no, why not?
3. It was mentioned that although viewers watch these documentaries and have the power they don't exercise it. They won't do anything about it. Why is this so?
4. Have you ever been active/had active involvement in standing up for a social/political issue that has been important to you?
5. A lot of participants expressed that the length of War and Peace was too long. It might be the case for a lot of general audiences as well. Yet people sit through Hollywood and Bollywood movies for the same amount of time or more.
 - a. Why do you think the length of a documentary film is an issue?
 - b. What about for you personally?
6. One general theme of the discussion was that Patwardhan's film War and Peace was too one sided. If you thought this was so, what made you say this?
7. One theme that came up was that filmmakers 'USE' people in order to make a film and get a story. What are your views on this?
8. A theme that came up was these films are important and need to be marketed and promoted correctly. Any ideas on how such films could reach you?
9. So in your opinion do you think documentary films have the capacity to impact on and influence Indian audiences or do you think Bollywood films like Taare Zameen Par and 3 Idiots serve this purpose better? Please explain your opinion?
10. It was mentioned that the film starts to make you think about the issue more and the role you could possibly play in making a difference. Since watching these films have you engaged in any social action related to this issue?
11. What is one message or argument that you have taken away from each film?
12. Before my research had you ever heard about either filmmaker or either film?
13. Have you ever heard or seen a documentary film in your local theatre?

14. Have you ever seen any type of advertisements for documentary films?
15. Why do YOU think documentary film is not so big in India?
16. Have your thoughts, opinions and knowledge been influenced as a result of watching the movies? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Appendix G: Survey (Vikalp@Prithvi)

Note: By completing this questionnaire you are indicating your consent to participate in this research. Thank you once again.

1. Age and Sex (Male/Female):
2. Highest educational qualification completed, and/or occupation
3. How did you hear about Vikalp@Prithvi?
4. How often do you attend screenings by Vikalp? What film was showed at the last screening you attended?
5. How have you benefitted from membership to Vikalp@Prithvi?
6. How often do you watch documentary films?
7. What is it about documentary films that appeals to you?/Why Do you enjoy watching documentary films? (Please answer in brief, give examples and elaborate as much as possible. Thank you.)
8. What are some of your experiences of watching documentary films? (Please answer in brief, give examples and elaborate as much as possible. Thank you.)
9. How have documentary films influenced you? (Please answer in brief, give examples and elaborate as much as possible. Thank you.)
10. Are you part of any non-governmental organisation, charitable organisation, activist group – or in the past hand any experiences with them? If yes, please list all activities.

Appendix H: Survey (St. Xaviers students)

Note: By completing this questionnaire you are indicating your consent to participate in this research. Once again, thank you very much for your participation.

1. Age
2. Sex (Male/Female):
3. What level of your degree are you currently in?
4. Are you attending this screening because it is compulsory (Yes/No)
5. Would you attend such screenings if they were not compulsory? If yes, why? If no, why not?
6. How often do you watch documentary films?
7. Do documentary films appeal to you? If yes, why? If no, why not?
8. What was your overall experience of watching these films? (Please elaborate and give examples)
9. Did you learn any new information from watching these films? If yes, please give examples. If no, please explain why not.
10. Are you motivated to use the information received from documentary films? If yes, how so? If no, why not? (Please elaborate and give examples)

Appendix I: Film Excerpts – *War and Peace*

Excerpt 1: (00:00 – 10:03)

Patwardhan opens by showing archival footage of Mahatma Gandhi, the most renowned and respected freedom fighter of India and firm believer of non-violence, his death, the effects of the atom bomb explosion in Hiroshima, and nuclear tests. Using this as evidence to support and assert his point of view, Patwardhan uses voice over narration to report on how the ideology of non-violence was fading and being replaced with a sense of nuclear nationalism. This was a result of events such as nuclear testing in America, the Hiroshima/Nagasaki incident and unstable political relationships with China. The use of archival footage provides a political and historical account that is necessary for the film. It conveys to audiences how the issue of nuclear development in India is undoubtedly tied up with political pride and national identity.

The film then begins with a display of the nuclear test during the celebrations of a religious festival in Mumbai, India. Automatically Patwardhan shows how religion is undoubtedly tied up with the political decisions of the country, as well as weapons of mass destruction. The statement (translated), “and Buddha smiled” is heard in the background. The Prime Minister of India (at the time), Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is shown delivering a speech commending the efforts of all those involved in the successful completion of India’s nuclear tests. This image of the Prime Minister, a political figure, automatically signals to audiences the political association of the issue. Then Patwardhan highlights nuclear nationalism as citizens celebrate the nuclear tests by bursting fire crackers and going as far as signing their name with blood on political drives gathering support for the political party in position – Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – while chanting religious and patriotic messages. Through interviews Patwardhan asks people about the possible effect these tests may have on the unstable India-Pakistan political situation, and a possible subsequent retaliation from Pakistan. Drunk on the success of nuclear development and a false sense of nationalism, people are seen as feeling secure that India is developed enough to protect itself from any nuclear attack from Pakistan.

Patwardhan then cuts to a scene showing how Pakistani nationalism is linked with the demise of India. Subtitles convey that in response to five nuclear tests conducted by India, Pakistan conducted six. This is reflective of the continuing, never changing, political tension between these two nations. By showing Pakistani’s praying in front of a missile, Patwardhan once again shows how religious ideology is inextricably tied to politics. Cutting back to India he concludes by showing staged eruption of a bomb in a dove, reflective how citizens of India believe that the bomb symbolizes good (peace) rather than evil. Once again Ganesh, a Hindu religious deity, presides over this enactment. This scene concludes with a patriotic music video showing India’s military advancements, created in order to instil a sense of pride in citizens while also reacting against the bad press against the nuclear tests.

Excerpt 2: (22:50 – 32:07)

This excerpt was shown to participants before the commencement of the focus group sessions, in order to aid recall and stimulate discussion about the film.

Patwardhan opens with the prime ministers' visit to the nuclear test site. Villagers are seen protesting against the tests, holding signs such as 'we want a permanent hospital'. The complete disregard for civilian protection and development is further highlighted by Patwardhan through interviews with people in the village closest to the test site – Khetoli. Patwardhan shows different opinions. A tailor is recorded saying the tests were not necessary as it is an instrument for death when the money could have been spent on helping develop the village. Another man, of a younger generation, states that the tests were good as India progresses and comes closer to becoming a super power.

Patwardhan then interviews a lawyer, who is affiliated with the ruling party (BJP), stating that there is nothing to prove that the negative health effects are a direct cause of the nuclear tests. Moreover, even if the tests could have such effects only a few would have occurred and these lives are sacrificed for the greater good – fame and progress of India. Patwardhan presents an argument by contrasting these claims with images of doctors and physicists educating villagers about the severity of the negative effects of the nuclear tests.

Next Patwardhan shows a political leader using tactics to rally support for the upcoming elections from an organized political event. He is shown saying that before the nuclear tests people did not know India even existed, much to the embarrassment of its citizens. However subsequent to testing, India is now on the world map, and the village of Pokran has achieved worldwide fame, even going as far as saying that Indians do not need to show their passport anymore. Through this footage Patwardhan describes the manipulative tactics of political parties on unassuming civilians from rural areas. Patwardhan concludes this segment with subtitles on a black screen comparing the costs of weapons development with public services. For example, "one nuclear submarine costs 30 times the annual national budget for primary education".

Excerpt 3: (02:02:04 – 02:07:53)

Patwardhan shows civilian obsession with weapons at the military expo in the capital Delhi and in Mumbai as citizens flock to see military ships, jets and submarines. Patwardhan asks these people, and inadvertently audiences, to think about the consequence of spending money on weapons instead of disasters such as earthquakes. To this he gets a reply that spending money on developing India's military defence is not wasteful as it puts India on the world map and makes it closer to becoming a super power. Thus once again Patwardhan highlights how the concept of national identity is tied up with nuclear nationalism.

Patwardhan then shows images of George Fernandes, current Minister of Defence of India who denounced the first nuclear tests in 1974 as a "betrayal of the poor". Now, after joining hands with Hindu nationalists he links nuclear development to patriotism. Failing to support such progress is associated with being a traitor to the country. In order to counter these claims Patwardhan then introduces the 'Tehelka Tapes', which uncovered large defence scams and corruption in the defence ministry of India. The prime minister of India is shown claiming these accusations as false. Using juxtaposition Patwardhan then shows archival footage from these tapes where investigators posing as middlemen in defence deals successfully bribe politicians. Thus Patwardhan openly critiques the major political institution in India.

The song in the background is used to complement the images seen in the film. The patriotic song sanctioned by the government to strengthen national identity is used in the background to mock the unpatriotic, corrupt and self-serving practices of some of the major political figures in the country. As the song plays, newspaper headlines about the corruption of the defence ministry are shown in the background. This serves an argumentative function and enhances Patwardhan's critique of the main political institution of the country – the Government of India.

Appendix J: Film Excerpt –

Buddha weeps in Jadugoda

Excerpt 1: (20:12 – 30:17)

This excerpt was shown to participants before the commencement of the focus group sessions, in order to aid recall and stimulate discussion about the film.

Shriprakash shows a heated discussion between the people of Jadugoda and a representative from UCIL. There is an argument over the negligence of the security guard in ensuring that nobody, especially children, go near the tailing pond which accumulates radioactive waste. By making excuses such as, “he is only human”, the UCIL representative dismisses the villagers grievances and shows lack of concern for the wellbeing of the villagers.

Using archival footage of safe mining practices, Shriprakash contrasts the unsafe practices of UCIL mining. As the camera scans over workers and their activities voice-over narration is used to notify audiences about the extent to which labourers of the UCIL are offered protective clothing to keep them safe from radioactivity. This is further supported by numerous interviews with current and former workers of the UCIL as they relay information about lack of protective gear, and lack of information and efficient health care. Next audiences are shown the negative outcomes of radiation as Shriprakash conducts interviews with professionals, such as doctors, and those affected. Shriprakash provides numerous examples of those infected, as well as the multitude of health adversities ranging from keloids to tumours and down syndrome. This build up of evidence serves to really affect audiences and tap into their political consciousness reminding them of those suffering at the hands of national corporations.

Appendix K: Vikalp@Prithvi

Vikalp: Films for Freedom began in February 2007. In collaboration with Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai Vikalp@Prithvi was formed. This documentary group hosts screenings of documentaries and short films on the last Monday of each month. These screenings are free and due to the limited capacity of the venue seating is on a first-come-first-served basis.

When I asked the coordinator for some information about Vikalp@Prithvi she wrote:

“Book burnings, destruction of canvases, attacks on artists and cinemas... India has been witness to a growing intolerance in recent decades. The state itself has institutionalised censorship by making censor certification mandatory for films.

Documentary filmmakers have specially borne the brunt of censorship, as was seen during the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) 2004. The then government knew that films on the Gujarat genocide and several others could embarrass it on an international stage, and censor certificates were suddenly made mandatory for Indian films. After filmmakers threatened to boycott MIFF, official censorship was withdrawn but a dubious selection procedure excluded some of the best new Indian films on communalism, caste, gender, sexuality and the environment. In response, Vikalp: Films for Freedom was born.

A collective of a large number of filmmakers was formed and the 'rejected' films were screened right across from the MIFF venue, while several filmmakers withdrew their films from MIFF and screened them at Vikalp, drawing packed houses everyday.

Vikalp believes that an assault on the freedom of expression is an assault on democracy itself. It has now transformed itself from a parallel festival into a movement. In Mumbai at the moment there are 3 venues that invoke the name: Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Deonar; Alliance Francaise in Marine Lines; and Prithvi Theatre in Juhu. In Delhi, Bangalore and Kolkata and elsewhere, regular screenings take place, some in the name of Vikalp, many with other names. Vikalp, in other words, is an uncopyrighted idea, an inspiration rather than an institution.

Come join this thriving community at Vikalp@Prithvi and strengthen those vibrant voices of dissent as a filmmaker, viewer, volunteer or friend.” (Vikalp@Prithvi, August 2011).