COMMUNITY DOCUMENTARY: A MOVE TOWARDS GENDER BRIDGING

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Abstract: The literature on community media and digital inclusion in the global context is critically reviewed. During the advocacy for alternative media by the marginalized classes including women - an attempt to make their voice audible, unequal or biased access to communication interfaces makes significant entry to the debate of gender bias. Here we observe the role played by the Community Video projects in the process of inclusion both digital as well social. We consider Community filming as *Cinéma Pur* and not based on aesthetic parameters rather from the basic idea of visual documentation, present a theoretical reference to such practice as *Community Documentary* and thus nullify the popular alternative expression *Community Video*. We further look at the potential of these documentaries, taken up for, of and by the community women, as a move towards gender bridging, encompassing every aspect of inclusion - social and digital, by ensuring better access and skill to use Information and Communication Technologies. Referring the three layered structure of digital divide: Economic, Usability and Empowerment, the model is scrutinized with three case studies taken up in the Indian state of Gujrat and Andhra Pradesh.

Introduction: With the coming of user friendly, light and less expensive equipments in the market during 1950-60s and with the intellectual influence from the Neo Realist and left Nouvelle Vaugue, some classic documentation efforts took place during the second half of last century those had changed the whole dynamics of film making with a noble purpose of 'Films for Change'. Though *Films for Change* incorporates feature film and documentaries, yet in due course it seems to advance more with the documentaries of social change. Digital revolution has today enhanced the total number of documentaries made globally. More number of people today can easily access this creative platform, now less expensive than before, to narrate the stories of their choice and the result can be seen in the viral web dispersal of such documentation. The whole working set up of community media also gets influenced by this digital up gradation. This article sees the existence of a working model within the sphere which upholds a What best can define documentaries and their creators has been well put in words by Filmmakers Pamela Yates and Paco de Onis in their article *Reflections on Getting Real: Debunking Five Myths That Divide Us,*

We give equal weight to being artists as well as human rights defenders. We know that as we get better and better as artists, we create wider audiences with far greater impact. (Yates and Onis, 2014)

Dennis De Nitto's classification of Gierson's documentaries, largely embraces all documentaries, upholds the view that a documentary shares any of these three sorts of relationship with society, i) Documentaries of Social Description, ii) Documentaries of Social Criticism, iii) documentaries of Social Protest. Documentaries not only ground on social reality; but also initiate change in social psyche as it instigate transform, affirmative or negative, in everyone associated with the film. Documentaries not only reflect the reality; but also instigate certain reform. McLemee Scotte's quote can be considered as universal for all the documentaries when he put his view on Paul Goodman in his article, *The Return of Paul Goodman,*

(his) approach much of the time, was to make a helpful suggestions towards the public good, in a spirit of responsible citizenship.(Scotte, 2011)

Despite going through some artistic makeovers what we today call as artistic stylization, every documentary, be it an ethnographic documentary or a political propaganda, not only reflect social reality; but also makes certain level of effort for attitudinal change.

When we discuss it from gender viewpoint keeping in mind the existing gender bias within the framework of ever changing dynamics of communication equilibrium with the developments of Information Communication Technologies, we can observe the potential role played by documentaries to balance the gender divide in the sphere of communication and thus in every aspects of society.

Information Communication interfaces are expected to be an empowering platform that lead women to engage in some good social agreements, administer and supervise commerce, and therefore control their finances and investments. Therefore the inequality in the participation in communication within the digital sphere has a larger socio-politico dynamic, addressing which will not only balance the equilibrium of communication; but will also ensure a fair balance to the existing gender structure.

On the contrary to above assumptions, in reality we get to see some alarming facts that ensure the existence of a gender divide within the digital divide,

in the use of ICT platforms. Wikipedia, though it has free editor participation system; 84-90% of its editor still records man. It has also been noticed that only 13% of women's voices have been recorded, listened or circulated in the social networking sites. It provides a strong support to the existing argument of gender bias within the communication space. Divides or inequalities associated to the access and use of ICT interfaces, one is completely related to the behavioural change in users mind.

Community Media initiatives taken up globally are often considered as a mean to overcome this divide. Community media initiatives are often considered as means for assuring women of their rights of equality, finance and having a sound political voice as well as stand. When Community Radio is more discussed and adopted widely, the potential of its visual counterpart are less cherished with this regard. Against the popular belief of the visuals speaks better than the audio and therefore accessed and adopted more has been discarded here probably due to the complexity and high expense of the medium. However the change in technology with digital revolution seems to have an impact here too that resulted in more and more community filming. Significantly a number of countable attempts have been taken up by women. Within such a framework it'll be interesting to observe whether visual community documentations can play a significant role as a community media to check the divide.

Theoretical Background: **Gender Inequality and Communication Imbalance**

Dictionary meaning of gender bias or gender inequality refers to the discrimination against a gender. In practice it refers to the discrimination against women or the belief of man are superior to women that led to the unequal participation or treatment of women in every sector of the society. Referring to the chairperson, Joan Holmes, of the Hunger Project, a global strategic organisation devoted to the sustainable end of world hunger; but with its highest priority given to women empowerment, as women are responsible for bearing the primary responsibility for family health, education and nutrition, Jovia Musubika stated in her documentation *Community media and the empowerment of rural women in Uganda: a study of Mama Fm Radio,*

"that when women are empowered, there is normally faster economic growth, reduced corruption in governance, lower malnutrition in children, reduced child mortality, and increased production in agriculture as well as more children at school, including girls."(Musubika, 2008)

On the contrary to such observational facts, Sherry B. Ortner in her scholarly discourse 'Is Female to Male is Nature to Culture' observed that 'The secondary status of women in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact.'(Ortner, 1972) The universality of women subordination exists within every kind of social-cultural and economic arrangements that indicates the existence of something very complex, profound and stubborn.

The social construction of male superiority, which is often even supported by some empirical constructs on physical strength of man over woman, led to state where voices of women are not only made unheard; but also suppressed. Thus their involvement in communication gets curtailed and eventually landed in a state of no communication, therefore no political, economic or social rights.

Exclusion of female from the most sacred right or highest political authority or economic functionaries in almost every traditional set up is strong evidence of suppression of women's voice in the sphere of communication that results in a strong unequal or biased participation. Religious rituals, one of those strong traditional communication platforms, most of the time do not allow women to be a part of the discourse and dialogues during their menstruations. Even on other days their participation in such dialogues is almost negligible. North East part of India, with its entire tribal lineage, many of which are still matrilineal, like the *Khasis* of Meghalaya, often considered as carrying far more liberal approach towards women as compared to Northern and Western parts of the country, also witnesses such exclusion of women from religious and sacred dialogues.

Women's participation in political communication was not that a common practice within the conventional, customary practices. Strong female figures picked from world history, those who'd taken weapons against enemy, used to do that not as a political communicator; but as the defender of the future official communicator, the King. Within the courtesan whenever had to communicate they did as an unofficial solicitor of the king- either was juvenile or provisionally not present. There were records of only handful instances, where women get the legal right to communicate as the political authority like Sultana Razia or Cleopatra. We get a very small, almost negligible account of women as political communicator even within the democratic set ups of modern nation states.

Gender bias has first been communicated during the 1st Wave of Feminist Movement, when the idea of Economic Rights for women has been first spoken and therefore uplifted, which is followed by the 2nd wave of Political Rights that ensures voters right for women in many European countries including Great Britain and thus granted certain right of political expression for women. Similar initiatives continued to flourish aftermath with direct and indirect help

from international socio-political authorities, including UN; but all seem to be went in vain when one notices incidents like unequal distribution of wages/remunerations in film industry based on gender or unequal participation of women in web. It is very significant to observe that, USA, often considered as the most democratic and liberal political structure of post world war era, still has to have its first political spokes person. When United Nations has been taking up various initiatives to balance the gender imbalance, all its secretary generals till date registered to be man. Such accounts provide strong evidence to the assumption that there exists globally a communication imbalance in every stratum of every socio-politico and therefore economic arrangements.

This imbalance in communication can be felt amidst the information revolution that is sweeping across the world with the new communication tools, leaving everyone in the midst of an information storm. Existence of gender gap can be felt even within the sphere of Wikipedia, though it has free editor participation system; 84-90% of its editor are still recorded man. It has been noticed that only 13% of women's voices have been recorded, listened or circulated in the social networking sites. When 42% of them have access to communication interfaces, other 58% are still lagging behind of these platforms. It provides a strong support to the existing argument of gender bias within the digital space that's been often raised and discussed as an agent to the larger phenomenon of digital divide.

Divide in the use of ICT and expansion of Gender Gap: What challenges to accomplish notions or projects like 'ICT for development', 'Rural market e-hub', 'E-Choupal' or other 'E-Government projects' in many developing countries across the globe is the lack of accessibility along with the usability and empowerment divides which alienate huge population groups from the sphere of communication, who miss out the Internet's potential. When it is the biggest challenge that the administrations of those Third World Countries of Asia, South America and Africa have to face which show their interest in the manifestation of Communication for the purpose of development; the developed, advanced economies of Europe and North America also have to combat with the Economic divide or Accessibility divide or Infrastructural divide within the digital communication ball. However far worse fact is that communication technologies remain so complicated that many people couldn't use them even if they get it for free. Internet, and all the allied new media or convergence platforms, technologies and tools associated with e-communication at large, changes so often that those who have physical accessibility to these tools could

not attain its full benefits because most of the available services are too difficult for them to understand.

Along with the lack of e-literacy or e-compatibility, lower literacy also add to more complexity, as most of the sites even the government's websites targeting the rural, illiterate citizens are also not written in an easy to comprehend way. Indeed most of the sites universally follow a language; i.e. English, which the target audience is not at home with.

When these two inequalities are addressed or being planned to addressed, participation inequality pops out. Even if physical access or infrastructures are provided to e-literate users, inequality in participation among the users can be felt, that results in empowerment divide. Throughout the years of Internet growth, about 90% of users don't contribute, 9% contribute once in a while, and a tiny minority of 1% we can see contributing most. These empowerment divide can be seen as an outcome of the larger stratum of accessibility divide where the users could not understand the guidelines to make use of these technologies and hence they remain at the mercy of other people's decisions.

Information Communication interfaces an empowering platform that lead people to some good social agreements, administer and supervise commerce, and therefore control their finances and investments. But they can be an alienating environment for those who lack the usability of these platforms. When the governments of many developing countries urge for the deployment of ICT in development activities and concepts like C4D get emerged in the process, which demands accessibility of ICT for all, one can feel the contradictory existence of a virtual elite among the members of the Internet and users of other sophisticated communication tools. These elites fail to realize the extent to which, the less-skilled users or the non-users are left out of the communication interfaces and their benefits that they taken for granted.

When we are talking of communication divide or inequality in the use of ICT, referred as digital divide, it has a larger socio-politico dynamic, where one can feel the existence of gender bias within the notion of divide. Not only the traditional patriarchal set up of underdeveloped Asian, African and South American countries; even the economically developed and liberal countries of west have lack the gender balance in the proper use of ITC interfaces. Accepting the existence of a bias in the use of ITC and referring the Ugandian attempt to check it in the year 2002, with the conference "A Safari into the Cross-Cultural World of Women's Knowledge Exchange", JoviaMusubika said *"The women wanted to confront a climate in which communication for development had*

been reduced to technological advancement in sectors dominated by elite men." (Musubika, 2008)

Jensine Larsenin her research work *Digital Divide Looms Large for Women and Girls in Developing Countries* examines

"For women globally, the Internet has become a lifeline to information, opportunities, and new-found power. New data in a report called 'Women and the Web,' reveals how we can bridge the digital divide for women and unlock a massive wave of human potential." *(Larsenin, 2013)*

On the contrary to such potential, new data in a report commissioned by Intel with consultation from the the U.S. State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues, UN Women, and World Pulse reminds us the existence of a gender divide within the sphere of digital divide. Globally, women have nearly 25% less access to the Internet than men. This figure soars to 40% in sub-Saharan Africa. The power of connectivity is undeniable, and the UN even agrees to the argument of making the use of ICT a basic human right, yet the existence of gender biased empowerment divide can be felt even within the urban elites when Nielsen's global survey accepts,

"Globally more men gravitate toward tech-savvy mobile phone attributes like operating system (48% men vs. 41% women), battery life (48% vs. 44%), screen size (38% vs. 34%) and processor speed (41% vs. 31%) when shopping for a new device." *(Nielsen, 2014)*

Coming to our country India, Over 90% of Indian Mobile Internet users are men, leaving a meagre 9% of women accessing internet via mobile as it is quoted by Neina Khedekar, from a new report published and conducted by Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) and Vserv.mobi. Data shows that men dominated internet usage with 61% over 39% of women in the country. Statistical analysis supported by academia.edu, on the Patterns of Use of Cell Phone and Internet on Cell Phone, percentage of male users is almost double 71.80% as compared to female user of 28.21% providing evidence for the existence of a huge number of excluded both from accessibility and usability perspective. In a recent project upheld for Empowering Women through Mobile done under Digital Empowerment Foundation in association with the Vodafone Foundation, from 2009 to 2011-12, there has been a steady rise in the number of mobile phones owned by both men and women, yet the number of women using mobile phones is less than the number of men using. Against 349 male users, record shows only 225 female mobile users in the country.

Economic divide or Divide of physical accessibility of the device can be challenged by rapid industrialization and economic growth; but usability and empowerment divide will take longer to cease. In a report on girls taking part in the use of technology

of a project taken in the Oakland city of America, by *Techbridge* it is noticed that *"unfortunately, the tech workforce here does not reflect this richness of talent"* *(Techbridge report, 2015)* of the city especially from gender perspective.

Address the Inequality: Considering the techno-socio paradigm of digital divide especially from gender perspective, Governmental and Non-Governmental efforts have always been put forward in national and inter-national forums to confront such challenges. All these efforts can be collectively counted as moves towards digital inclusion, with concern to address digital inequality or inequality of communication within digital sphere. Jane Seale, in his research brief '*Digital Inclusion*' sums up the definitions of the term provided by different scholars as, "digital inclusion happens when all members of society are able to access the affordances offered by technology use." Digital inclusion implies to every move to counter digital divide. In addition to equality, broader definition of digital inclusion encompasses a number of inter-related concepts:

- Access to ICT interfaces by confronting economic or accessibility divides.
- To make every potential users to Use such interfaces to attain full benefits of this neo public sphere.
- Empower every user to make full use of ICT.
- Elimination of Empowerment divide will definitely address Participation inequality.

The notion of Digital Inclusion is more often considered as a key player in empowering the marginalized communities including women. In the UNESCO publication on digital inclusion by Skuse A, Fildes J, Kirsty T. Jo, Martin, Baulch E, *Poverty and Digital Inclusion: Preliminary Findings of Finding a Voice Project,* techno-socio dynamics of empowerment have been highlighted. Conceptualizing digital inclusion as being about use and empowerment, prompts us to acknowledge that besides technical parameters, digital inclusion is also about equality of outcome as referred by Selwyn in his article *Reconsidering political and popular understandings of the digital divide, (2006)* where he observed that in a way, therefore, the socio-cultural cognition associated to Digital Inclusion is equally important to its technological dynamics. That is why Van Dijk (2005) sees successful engagement of ICTs with the socio-cultural aspects of resourcing, like social network positions and relationships, home or community and cultural assets along with temporal, material and mental resources. When these socio-cultural assets and aspects of inclusion would be taken care of then the gender divide within the working of digital divide will be addressed as well.

Referring to a Know-How Conference entitled "A Safari into the Cross-Cultural World of Women's

Knowledge Exchange", held in Kampala, Uganda, Musubika (2008) highlighted how African women were—carefully scrutinising patriarchal media institutions, challenging the widely-disseminated stereotypes that degrade women, and developing new strategies for circulating transformative and progressive knowledge. The women wanted to confront a climate in which communication for development had been reduced to technological advancement in sectors dominated by elite men. Analyzing a network of fifteen local community media and ICT initiatives across India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, researchers understand how creative engagement with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can contribute to the development of marginalized communities, carrying some positive social changes.

Eliminating the Divide of Empowerment: Community Media as a Method to Encounter :

As an alternative medium to public broadcasting and mainstream industrialized corporate media, community media engage in strengthening a social agenda, its supporting views and apprehend about context specific issues related solely to the specific community; and thus facilitate public forums for debate and discussion within the community. A note prepared by UNESCO, *'Community Media'* referred them as

Community media are characterized by their accountability to the communities they serve. They emerge as a result of popular movements that strive to attain an important space in citizen participation and demand the right to own and operate free from political or commercial interference. (UNESCO, 2014)

These media platforms create some public spheres which are independent, community owned and run. It is any form of media that is created and controlled by a community, either a geographic community or a community of identity or interest. Often referred as Grass root media, they focused particularly on generating content by and for the local community that it serves making the debates narrower and precise. These are small scale media projects with aim to bring different visions and perspectives; those are so easily embedded in the social psyche of the community.

"UNESCO recognizes that the presence of community media is a sign of media pluralism, diversity of content and the representation of a society's different groups and interests. Community media encourages open dialogue, local transparency and a voice to the voiceless." (UNESCO, 2014)

Community media, be it a radio forum, video endeavour or traditional medium like theatre, shares strong connection with the potency of civil society. In the publication *Community Media: A Good Practice Handbook* of UN, compiled by Buckley S, bilateral relation between community media and civil society is being analyzed as,

"The emergence of community media is often associated with wider political change particular the deepening of democracy and the strengthening of civil society." (Buckley S, UNESCO, 2011)

Buckley has analyzed the situation behind the emergence of Community radio forums in Africa crediting the economic decline caused with the end of the cold war, and increasing social mobilization came as a wave of democratization thereafter, carrying an atmosphere soothing to political freedom and the emergence of a more plural and democratic media landscape for the same. It has demolished the structural status quo of urban elites causing an urban monopoly in media. In the fore front of these developments were Mali and South Africa. After the revolution of 1991, broadcasting was opened up in Mali. Today Mali has over a hundred small rural community radios with considerable public and political support. South Africa, community radio has been seen as a tool to empower the indigenous rural majority, previously excluded from any kind of media wave. Providing a distinct status with state and commercial radio over 100 community radios have been licensed in South Africa.

Referring the Benin case, one of those success stories of Community intervention against media imbalance, Buckley observes

Benin has an independent regulator which is responsible for the licensing and regulation of community radio services and the management of a media support fund which includes grants for community radio. (Buckley, UNESCO, 2011)

Freedom of speech is recognized and guaranteed in Benin according to the 1990 constitution, and is protected by the Haute Autorite de l'Audiovisuel at de la Communication (HAAC), an independent regulatory body established in 1992. HAAC, responsible for the establishment of private radio stations and television services under the Law No 97-010 of 20 August 1997, not only distinguishes between commercial radio and non-commercial radio; but also publishes the list of available frequencies based on its frequency map and issues call for application from all sectors, public, private and commercial. Applications are examined publicly, in the presence of the HAAC representatives, the applicants and the general public. Thus ensures public cooperation not only in the broadcasting process; but throughout the process of application, allocation and broadcast.

Realizing the potential of Community media to upheld and adhere socio-economic equilibrium in the communities not only Benin and other African countries under Buckley's reference; but most of the developing countries of Asia, Africa and South America are now engaged in joint community media

initiatives by UN and their respective state governments supported by different NGOs. Jovia Musubika, in her documentation on Mama Radio and its role in the empowerment of Ugandian rural women, summarised it as,

Today, in most parts of the world, the need for the empowerment of women is increasingly taking priority and more and more organisations most of which are run by women are coming up with projects i.e. community radios3 to reverse the problem of women marginalization. This phenomenon is a not new one as women's radio stations and programming within community radio have existed since 1969 when WBAI4 in New York introduced feminist programming (Steiner, 1992). Other forms of early programs and stations include RadiOrakel (99.3 FM) in Norway, Radio Tierra (95.1 FM) in Chile and Radio Pirate Woman (102 MHz FM) in Ireland (Mitchell, 1998).(Musubika 2008,)

With special reference to gender issue UN Women has been encompassing enormous Community media initiatives as means for the fulfillment of their goal of assuring women their rights of equality, finance and having a sound political voice as well as stand. It is expected that The power of media makes the voices of women audible in the patriarchal set up where otherwise their voices not only made unattended; but also got suppressed.

A Know-How Conference entitled "A Safari into the Cross-Cultural World of Women's Knowledge Exchange", held in Kampala, Uganda from the 23rd-27th of July 2002 highlighted pioneering initiatives for African women's empowerment in male- dominated fields of mass communications (Lewis and Boswell, 2002). Quoting IBID, in *Community media and the empowerment of rural women in Uganda: a study of Mama Fm Radio* Jovia Musubika said,

"A number of papers presented during that conference revealed how African women were - carefully scrutinising patriarchal media institutions, challenging the widely-disseminated stereotypes that degrade women, and developing new strategies for circulating transformative and progressive knowledge." (Musubika, 2008)

In the UN report of Community radio projects running in Asian developing countries of Bangladesh, Nepal and India, it is being observed that how such community oriented media endeavours not only confront the digital divide by assuring accessibility to the technological interfaces and by facilitating the other two dynamics of usability and empowerment; but also ensure eradication of gender bias as most of the community radio stations are run by and for the women of the community. When Nepal has their Community radio station 'Radio Nari Awaj', India has worked for the strengthening of marginal voices and good governance through such forums of Community media. The Country has went to the extent of ensuring at least 50 per cent of participants will be women for strengthening of gender equity and outreach to marginalized sections of society, such as Dalits and tribals. Many of the pioneering initiatives in the country are taken up for and by women. Addressing the technical divide, with technical trainings they are provided with, from some outer bodies and government, they have challenged both usability and empowerment divide and therefore the gender issue related to social inclusion have also been taken up. Kutch MahilaVikas Sangathan, in the Indian state of Gujarat and Deccan Development Society, Andhra Pradesh initiated some pioneering attempts in the field community media. They began radio broadcasts on All India Radio initially and then gradually have their community radio set ups. Women make their programmes and focus on education where literacy levels are low. Operated by Dalit (socially backward, untouchables) women, the programmes focus on caste and empowerment. Through the process of arrangement of program, recording, editing and broadcasting, these women not only equipped with technical knowhow; but also have learnt to make their own choices. Like India, its neighbour Bangladesh also has encountered similar experience with this regard. *Our Voice Our Power,*compiled byFahmidaAkhtar and Protiva Banerjeeaccount 12 such cases, where community media has empowered some women with digital usability and thus ensures elimination of technological divide (from all the dimensions of accessibility, usability and empowerment) for them explicitly and in another way enlightens other women from their communities by bringing them to the attention of authorities and communities. Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) has provided fellowship and three month journalistic training for 12 rural women from different community and later these women started working at community radio stations. As women this set of radio workers have experienced the divide of empowerment and the gender bias beneath it, hence they work become sympathetically towards women and other suppressed classes. In the process they not only get themselves technically empowered; but also enhance social empowerment for other women by making them aware of literacy and their rights as human beings. Jannat, station manager in Community radio Satkhira in Bangladesh, commented on the dynamics of community media working to face the socio-technico divide from women and other suppressed classes context, when she mentioned,

"My values and ideology has been changed completely while working on field under the fellowship for deprived and neglected populace, the

condition of women and children and their rights, problems and prospects. While working with sex workers and transsexuals, I realized how much our society has advanced."

Potential of community media in challenging the digital as well as the social, especially the gender divide, by virtue of its contextual and local character , is put in words by Arpita Sarrmah in her research work *Role of Information Communication Technology for Empowering Rural Women*, "*With the help of community radio, we can provide information and education among the rural women.*"

The power of media makes their voices audible in the patriarchal set up where otherwise their voices not only made unattended; but also got suppressed. Their newly possessed technical strength and identity of a social organizer, thus earned them an esteemed identity in their society.

Community Documentary: New Approach to the Pedagogy: Though in practice, Community radio projects are referred as synonymous to Community media practices as a whole, yet potentials of other comparable practices like community video, print or theatre practices can't be mistreated as well. Legacy of Community media in the state of Canada indeed traced its glory in the community video projects of 1960s when National Film Board of Canada set up the 'Challenge for Change' project with a series of documentary films addressing socio-economic issues. The initial motion picture experiments of Lumiere brothers were nothing other than some visual documentation attempts. Fictions entered the scene quite late. Even after the introduction of box-office patterned fictions dominated by Hollywood and its imitators, experimental practices of documentary continue to exist. With Sony's relatively small and easy to carry *Porta-Pak* cameras, revolutionary changes in outdoor shooting had been caused that resulted in many documentaries deploying 'Fly in the Soup' and 'Fly in the Wall' filming techniques. When Frederick Wiseman's famed documentary 'High School' peeped inside the Philadelphia's North East High School with this Direct cinema technique in the year 1968 in Canada, filmmakers Bonny Klein and Dorothy He`nautrely did the same on *Challenge for Change* to deal with local community issues. Later in the same year, they have trained some members of the St. Jacques Citizens' Committee in video production. This team went into the Montreal slums and captured interview footage with inhabitants and then presented the video in public meetings for discussion. With this participatory video production initiative Canada, to be precise Montreal's St. Jacques Citizen Committee laid a foundation stone for Participatory or Community video practices which seems to have a rapid growth with development of digitalized filming technologies in last few decades.

Derived from the concept of "video for change", "Community video" or "Participatory video" engage directly with visuals as a form of advocacy and activism, human rights, and more broadly, for emerging tool kits for the creative liberation of citizens and the planet. However though the two terms are used identically; yet in practice, there lays a difference. When we call it a Participatory practice, it is initiated by an outer body, though sympathetic towards the community yet without the sense of belongingness, with participation from the members of the community. It may be community oriented; but may not be owned and done by the community. On the other hand when we call it a 'Community video', the whole process is initiated, taken up and supervised by and for the community. It is an outcome of the second level of empowerment, which is technological, subsequent to the first- sociological empowerment through the change in societal psyche. Such processes though initiate debates and discussion even in the global platforms in the run of internet and social networking sites; however they are yet to get the status of a pure film. The equal status of collaborators in such works land in jeopardy. Collective decision can become inflexible and lead to ineffective compromises, which may harm the artistic aspects. Problem may arise in following continuity in editing and other visual grammars including filming the events. Most of the time collective action leads to lack of direction and absence of an aesthetic coherence. Probably all these can be held responsible for not considering such not so technically correct video endeavors as 'Documentaries' or 'Cinema Pur'. (While analyzing the theoretical grounds to consider such works as Cinema Pur, one should not confuse it with the concept of Community Film, which emerged in the '70s to challenge the global, big budget industry of 'cinema'.)

As we have discussed in the first section, a documentary film is basically any kind of visual documentation of certain aspects of reality, often scripted post filming. It has been considered as a filmmaking procedure and the journey of cinema starts with some non-fiction documentaries. John Grierson, considered to be the one coined the term in popular myth defines documentary as "Creative treatment of actuality." Soviet famed documentarian Dziga Vertov opted for presenting "Life as it is" or "Life caught unaware". When Pare Lorentz defines the term he comes with "a factual film which is dramatic." None of these definitions contradict from institutionalizing any kind of community visual documentation as documentary. Like French Dadaist School of cinema- *Cinema Pur*, many of such works can be considered as "return the medium to its elemental origins." However unlike *Cinema Pur* of Dadaism, such practices may lack deep aesthetic

senses; but pure visual elements against a thoroughly structured story line has been followed in both, that may provide a justification to our attempt of taking these community videos into account of the large domain of documentaries, especially of those *Cinema Pur* and to be considered as Community Documentary. When skill set and visual grammar aspects of these community documentations have been taken into account, definitely many of them will not reach the bench mark set by the decades long practices by professionals or may not be technically right; but many of the early film endeavors, which we now consider as earliest documentary experiments even lack the involvement of basic editing practices. Beside while talking of community radio projects, even these practices are not that sound from technical angle; but are considered as radio units.

If we refer to the classification of documentary by Nitto, i) Documentaries of Social Description, ii) Documentaries of Social Criticism, and iii) documentaries of Social Protest, it is evident that most of the community documentation processes fall within one of those classifications. They document stories of social upraise or urge for the initiation of one by filming their pathetic reality through the lens. Keeping the theoretical references of documentary and tradition of practice of other community media in account contextualization of the term Community Documentary against the more used Community Video is proposed and hereafter in this writing all visual documentation by and with participation from the community will be referred as Community documentaries.

Like any other form of community media, we observed, these community documentaries also have the equal amount of potential to instigate a move towards digital inclusion including the socio-cultural aspects associated to the idea. Making of a film demands a basic technical knowhow and close insight to the occurrences in society. While doing so, the former ensures access and use of ICT interfaces and the later demands the socio-cultural cognition related to the notion of digital inclusion. The whole process of making a community film ensures the access of the community to camera, audio recorder, computer and internet. At the ground it overtly accounts the technical segregation, beneath it ensures other aspects of inclusion, primarily social, which comes from the newly offered social recognition to the community in the global sphere, construction of a social identity of the maker within the community itself and self satisfaction of encountering the technical divide which otherwise they considered to never be accounted.

When we see it from the gender equity perspective to attain communication equilibrium we can see that these documentaries not only offer them a medium to communicate their views, which otherwise remain unattended; but their newly possessed technical strength and identity of a social organizer, thus earned them an esteemed position and status in their community. Besides, it ensures a valued recognition for issues related to woman in the community as such documentation provides a scope for community interaction, where related issues can not only be taken up; but also can be clarified through interactive discourses.

Examining the idea taken up by UN Women, in their ongoing project 'Making Women's Voice and Vote Count: An ICT Based Intervention', taken up in the Indian states of Gujrat and Karnataka, to empower women digitally for more effective social and political empowerment by means of participatory media forums like Community radio, we feel and observe that Community Documentary initiatives will serve more to the purpose as it encompasses not only filming or editing; but also makes sure that the world can get to notice these initiatives on internet. The same happened with the three cases we'd taken under our observation.

Their Documentary: Let Their Voices Count

In the year 2013, *Making Women's Voices and Votes Count: An ICT Based Intervention in India* has been started in three districts of Indian states of Gujrat and Karnataka. The project was supported by UN women's Fund for Gender equity with participation from *Area Network and Development Initiative (ANANDI)* and *Kutch Mahila Bikash Samiti* in Gujrat and *ITC for Change* in Karnataka. When the project itself uses ICT to catalyze a critical mass of women in local governance by virtue of community radio, voice messages, GPS and small video units arranging visual trainings for the rural women and make them tell their stories on their own; ANANDI had proposed for a documentary to be made by their beneficiaries with certain amount of technical help from *Drishti*, Ahmedabad, one of India's pioneering participatory media organization. We had accompanied ANANDI's workers in the interior villages of Bhavnagar district of Gujrat and witnessed the impact of the project "to strengthen a network among women in local *panchayats* (primary unit of Local Self Governance in rural India) to create a support group focusing on a peer to peer pedagogy that offers a completely new point of departure for capacity building of women in local governance" (Project profile, MWVVC, 2014). When it was evident that the project itself could be cited as a success story of ICT intervention to confront the Divide of Communication, it was also noticed that the rural women took no time to be at home with the technical aspects of visual recording and were able to arrange the narrative for their film. Though with editing of the film they need certain amount of guidance; but while operating camera and

audio recorder, usability and empowerment divide were surmounted easily. In the whole process of filming and post production village women, irrespective of age bar, were found enthusiast to gather technical knowhow of visual documentation and thus they could challenge the usability divide. Accessibility divide was already confronted by ANANDI and Drishti and to a great extent motivation from ANANDI made it easy for the women to challenge the empowerment divide and to participate in the process actively. Beneficiaries of the program took the camera as a window to the world and literally had converted their success and grievance stories into a complete film so that it can reach so many like them. At the end of the whole documenting process when we approached the women, they not only got empowered technically and socially; but also could articulate the whole process as, "News paper or television (mainstream media) hardly reaches our places. So our stories hardly reach authority; but now we can raise our voices to reach the government. We had a fear for camera and computers (which they use for editing); but now we can operate them. Our voices not only reach leaders; but also thousand others like us who still get afraid of technology and are not allowed by their family heads, usually male, to not use these interfaces", said Jashuben, one of the beneficiaries, a Dalit women, from Okharla village.

When Bhavnagar documented and articulated their stories as it revealed in front of them, two other instances were also encountered by the researcher, where community documentary projects though not totally taken up by rural women and more of a recreation of realty; but had not only made technical inclusion and empowerment possible; but also political and economic empowerment followed the former.

In 1993, Indian state of Andhra Pradesh had emerged with the biggest 'anti-arrack' (state supplied distilled liquor) movement that the country had witnessed till date which led to the eventual ban of arrack sales in Andhra Pradesh in 1995. The movement started when a group of women participating in a literacy program started questioning their oppressed status. It was a true grass-roots movement. The movie documents the incredible courage of these women, their political and social consciousness and their steady realization that, through struggle, they could control their own destiny. Documenting their story through an artistic recreation of reality, *Drishti* with its co-founder Shabnam Virmani went on to produce a performative documentary, one among those bests that India has ever documented. Getting influenced by the neo-realists, Virmani worked with non-professional rural women of Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh and other parts of the state. She succeeded to make them

to not fear the camera and other technical aspects associated with the making of a documentary. When the film got released, it not only had gathered critical acclaim in international forums; had also became a strong instance of support for inclusion of community documentations as pure cinema within the dominant sphere of structured documentaries. Those who associated with the film as crew or actors not only overcame the technical divide; but also got enlightened with political realization of rights that led many of them to take active participation in local self governance like it was actually happened with the real characters of the story and shown in the last few frames of the film. Thus these women affirm communication equity not only within the social and economic sphere; but also emerged as strong political communicators, that more often seen to be dominated by the man.

The third case we've taken was, *'Ek Poltun Beek Nu'* (Not A Little Bit of Fear), another recreation of non-specific reality by the community women of Narmadapura, Gujrat dealt with the issue of taking hold over the political rights entitled to women by the Constitution of India, especially the representation rights in local self governance. Like in the other two cases, the name of the film came true literally when the community women, engaged in the whole process of making this film went on taking their next documentary endeavours on their own. The whole production process includes not only the digital inclusion from accessibility and usability aspects; but the process of motivation to make these rural, illiterate community women to feel that technology is not a sole right for man and urban elites rather it is equally useful for them to speak of their rights and thus get hold over the political and economic entitlements that the constitution designed for them. Result could be felt in the narrative growth of their film under the guidance of ShabnamVirmani.

Technology, not only acts as a window to the world as it happens with other community media platforms; at the same time the overwhelming effect of Cinema in India, credited to Hindi film industry, affirms a certain level of dignity and respect to those associated with these documentaries, within their community, as filmmakers from neighbourhood. A small digital camera not only made these women speak universally; but to listen locally, which otherwise never happened when they communicated in the physical sphere. Thus Technology made their voice heard. Again the confidence of handling something with grace that is not handled or even comprehend by their male counterparts, those considered as more techsavy with traditional stereotypical belief, added another level of confidence to these rural community women that did effect their overall personality including communication skill.

This newly developed personality not only helped them to speak for their societal dignity; but ensures better existence in the business sphere. Rasila ben, Sarpanch (head of rural local self governance-Panchayat) of Navagram village of Gujrat, a participant of ANANDI's endeavour, put her experience in word as, *"before, though I was the Sarpanch and my family was supportive; but nobody in the community welcome my stands on local market led by village women and economic use of Babool forests. When I became a part of Community filming procedure of ANANDI and I made two Nanu cinemas (short length films), where I raised these issues, my opinion not only upheld by my community; but the TDO (Taluk Development Officer) also appreciated it."* This digital cognition not only reshaped their social identity; but also restructured their economic identities. When earlier they were some street traders; these film on one hand helped them to get a market, and on the other hand provided them the ability to sell their commodities against reasonable value as now they are more confident to communicate with the buyers.

By empowering selves for using camera, computer and also internet, as all these films are made available in World Wide Web, these community women have not only successfully encountered the communication divide that is explicitly technical; but also tackled the gender bias that implicitly exist in every level of societal communication. These three documentaries were not some individual inspirational accounts rather they dealt with some collective efforts to challenge the gender bias through media intervention. All three of them documented the change in social psyche that not only allow; but cherish the idea of women take hold over digital empowerment that earlier were not even literate. They also made the women communicate in political and business spheres, who otherwise could hardly speak and listen to even within their households.

The model therefore may serve not only enhance digital empowerment by virtue of digital inclusion, challenging all three divides exist within the digital sphere; but also ensures a check for the gender imbalance in communication equilibrium by ensuring better access and skill to use Information Communication interfaces and hence can work as a move towards gender bridging.

In a way the subjects of all the three films themselves could be interesting instances to understand the complex dynamics of inclusion: social as well as digital, from gender perspective.

Concluding Discussion: In this article we have taken three community documentaries into account; but the model is equally applicable to similar instances taken following the same grass root participation. The discussed documentaries not only documented a move from gender biased communication misbalance to communication equilibrium with all the empowerment attributes as consequence, following the change in social psyche; but also attributed to their acclaimed cinematic aesthetics. There is no doubt the radio is still most used community device in the field of participatory or community communication; but when it comes to aesthetic appeal visual documentation is more appealing and attract more number of audience. Besides the whole process of making these films and their global release not only ensure the use of all kinds of ICT interfaces from a camera to internet in the production and post-production procedure; but also ensures a connectivity among the groups with identical thoughts to come onto a platform propagated by the new media apparatus and thus work for a better move of media convergence that ensures equilibrium and bridging not only from gender perspective; but also holds the potential of expansion to all the marginalized groups in the society.

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