

REVIEWS

We make Films project, in association with Kirti Film Club, New Delhi & Mumbai

Kirti Film Club with Ritika: A Review of Two Documentaries

Those halls on Lodhi Road are amongst the many places where going alone as a blind person is not possible. However, as will become evident, the event to be reviewed below was fulfilling in many ways.

This event churned my thought over the question of why I want to film? What would I see and what would I show through the lens of that camera? Is that camera really mine? Would it do what I want it to do? I watched the two films as dialectic. Watching them together created a dialogue which has many aspects. But I shall just talk about ‘is that camera mine?’ for now.

Filming is an audiovisual medium to say a story. But what if a filmmaker is a Deaf or blind person? The first film that the club screened, ‘We Make Film’ is a documentary documenting the dream of filmmakers who due to their disabilities cannot have access either to the soundscape or to the visuals, but still would want to film, not just to capture their imaginations and experiences, but to capture much more as professionals.

It tries to capture the extent and the limitations of the technology available today. More importantly, it focuses on how ‘inclusion’ in the world of filmmaking is possible. As a blind person myself, it is slightly exciting to see that there are some professionals who wonder about film making and have tried working towards it in their own little ventures.

But while I was watching the film, especially the part where this blind filmmaker or YouTuber is adjusting and handling the camera on her phone with the help of the voice assistance where it could only give the directions of the object or the person as it fits in the screen, it made me think about ‘filming’ as an art or an activity. I started wondering what

capturing the visuals of a scene, or an object would mean to me? What if I click or capture something with a voice-over telling me the directions, but not knowing the visual nuances of the object that is being clicked or barely knowing it through my past visual memory or by how it was being described to me; what visual value would it have to my own self? And what artistic value would that picture have in general? Am I even evoking my imagination there? Well, my curiosity to know more about those who know the medium, and to interact with them, made me ask this question.

But only if 'inclusion' becomes less noisy and more inclusive!

Isn't this an ontological question of a picture or a video? Let's say I make a video of an agitated barking dog focusing on the sound of the barking. I move my camera to the right when I hear the sound coming from and change the focus when the direction of the sound changes. But because the sound of the barking cannot set the visual focus, it captures the trees and the bushes more than it captures the agitated dog. It may sound funny or even sarcastic, but the focal issue cannot be overlooked. Similarly, let me photograph the same agitated barking dog, with the same focus, on the loudness of the barking. I click it when the intensity of the sound is the highest. Now what you see, or I feel on the perforated paper, is a tree which was not on my mind while I was clicking the photo. I feel ditched and the referral problem cannot be overlooked.

Howsoever pessimistic it may sound, it is actually the most optimistic way of thinking about what would filming then mean to a blind person. What could they bring on board with their own epistemic tools? Recognising the limits and walking along the lengths that a disability extends is perhaps a more realistic and an apt way of bringing in the needed 'inclusion'. Filming is an action with an ulterior motive of 'to be seen' along with the obvious motive of 'to show'.

Moving ahead to the next movie in the line, 'I Didn't See You There' is an autobiographical work of making oneself being perceived through who, how and what he is through his own skills with the camera. Filming from the height of his wheelchair creating a new way of cinematography speaks a lot. The analogy that he draws between the title of the movie and the height of his camera is really intriguing. 'I Didn't See You There' is a two-way sort of

expressing ‘I choose not to see you there this time’ and ‘I did not see you there where I stand’. It’s a pun intending anger and attitude.

The filmmaker takes the audience along with him through the routine journey of the places he goes and the roads he travels – the family settings, the grocery-shops, the driveway, the corridors and so on, but all along moving his wheelchair at its level and pace. The plots are mundane yet engaging. It clearly shows that the wheelchair is in fact his camera! Before I end, I cannot do without mentioning the analogy of the tent. It grows bigger and bigger after certain intervals to perhaps show his zeal and urge to be recognised as an artist, to film professionally with others and for others.

It is interesting and important to see the contrast between the two films shown by the Kriti Film Club. The event made more sense as the two films go hand in hand with each other as the first film stimulates a thought which the second film in its own way, satisfies. The question of what an embodied aesthetics does and can bring in ran all through while Ritika was making me go through the visuals of the film.

The first film in a way questions, ‘you didn’t see me there’ and the second in a way exclaims, ‘I didn’t see you there!’

Sharmishtha Atreja

