

LENSING 'OUR' FOOD - ANALYZING COMMUNITY DYNAMICS THROUGH COLLECTIVE REFLEXIVITY IN DOCUMENTARY FILMS IN INDIA AND ITALY

Singh, Vishnupriya¹, D. Chakraborty, Gauri²

¹Research Scholar, Times School of Media Bennett University, India
Plot Nos 8, 11, TechZone 2, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201310
singh.vishnupriya3@gmail.com

²Professor, Times School of Media Bennett University, India
Plot Nos 8, 11, TechZone 2, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201310
gauri.chakraborty@bennett.edu.in
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8573-8861>

<p>Key words:</p> <p>Collective reflexivity, documentary, participatory documentary, food culture practices, sustainable agriculture.</p>	<p>Abstract:</p> <p>In an era of rapid technological advancements, environmental crises and shifting sociopolitical landscapes, the concept of self-documenting stories of communities is being used as an effective tool to critically examine values and beliefs around agriculture and food production. Documentary filmmaking has a closer affiliation to reality and ability to deconstruct process, place and people (Nichols, 1991). Collective reflexivity is based on the premise that communities have the capacity for critical self-reflection, allowing them to examine their own mode of existence. Collective reflexivity within participatory documentary is a double entanglement which accentuates a group's capacity for critical introspection coupled with documenting human experiences. This study examines collective reflexivity in the documentaries, "Keetnashak Ya Vinashak" (SPS Media, 2016, India) and "La Restenza" (Alessandra Coppola, 2021, Italy), two culturally distinct but profoundly related films which lens on the production of food and associated values in India and Italy. The research probes how the filmmaker engages as a participant within the larger scope of community reflection revealing multiple layers of climate change, digital technology, agro-tech and community resilience. This paper also seeks to identify how the filmmaker being situated in their own culture creates similarities and differences in the film's approaches to examining the stories, storytelling and the characters. Does the filmmaker's knowledge of cinematic devices contribute to its effectiveness? The paper contributes to the larger discourse of the documentary film's function as a reflective mirror for a developing society which is influenced by neoliberal and capitalist perspectives on agriculture.</p>
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Introduction

Reflexivity is a characteristic which defines both style and ideology in film (in both fiction or non fiction). In non-fiction cinema, including documentary and experimental films, reflexivity primarily focuses on these other aspects of filmmaking and viewing (Yacavone, 2021). (Yacavone, 2021) also states how reflexivity encompasses referential processes, it is logical to analyse its manifestations in cinema according to their referents. Reflexivity has the potential to allow expression of the filmmaker's idea of storytelling, meaning making and can instigate viewers' relationship to the story. Reflexivity emerges from the subjectivity of the filmmaker's choice to tell, retell and recall their own experiences, motivations, into the story structure while creating the concurrence of the events on/in the film. The viewers can be led to active

participation along with being critical or analytical. since reflexivity involves the personal involvement of the filmmaker with filming as a transparent act. Documentary as opposed to fiction basing itself on facts and real lived experiences. Reflexivity in documentary films presents spectators with the process involved on capturing the reality manning the constructed nature of 'what can be seen' on the screen encouraging viewers to continuously reflect on the reality portrayed as they participate in the film viewing. Reflexivity in cinema can foreground medial, formal, stylistic, or contextual elements that are independent of fictional reference and narrative construction. To facilitate this analysis, (Fredericksen, 1979) adopts a method of differentiating between the "cinematic fact" and the "filmic fact". Describing a film as reflexive suggests that it reflects either on the "cinematic fact" or the "filmic fact". The cinematic fact refers to factors influencing the film before its creation, such as production infrastructure, studios, financing, national regulations, decision-making dynamics and technological tools. On the other hand, the filmic fact involves aspects arising after the film's release, including its social, political, and ideological effects on audiences, as well as behavioral and attitudinal changes induced by film viewership. A film may engage with these reflections either through self-focused exploration or within a broader context (Fredericksen, 1979 p. 306-307). (Potash, 2011) discusses the significant impact of documentary films on attitudes, behaviours, and societal change. Therefore it is important to study how the idea of collective reflexivity in films can become a powerful lens through which communities can use to examine and assess their own social structures, values, and beliefs with regards to mediated communication. Within different formats of mediated communication commonly TV, fiction films, community radio and community films, the documentary represents one of the closest affinity to 'document' and capture reality. Moreover, documentary films serve as powerful tools for promoting social welfare interventions. For example, The Films Division of India (FD), founded in 1948, significantly influenced India's post-independence documentary film landscape (Deprez, 2013). Its mission was to contribute to nation-building and development through informational films (Jain, 2013). From 1948 to 1975, FD created numerous documentaries focusing on themes such as economic planning, industrialization, family planning, and the integration of tribal communities (Sutoris, 2016). By the 1980s, FD, along with the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, began embracing the emerging trend of independent documentary filmmaking, which emphasised activist-led projects using cinema as a medium for social change (Ks, 2023). Similarly, The Italian government has introduced various food environment policies aimed at enhancing public health, although certain areas, such as food pricing and retail, still require attention (Zaçe et al., 2020). In the area of food production, documentaries plays a vital role in ensuring food safety and adhering to audit culture standards. However, these documents often clash with economic sociability, underscoring the intricate dynamics of contemporary food production in northern Italy (Cavanaugh, 2016).

(Nichols, 2010) states that there are six types of documentary which are poetic, expository, reflexive, observational, performative, and participatory. (Nichols, 2010) the taxonomy of documentary modes is the key element which allows us to understand the complex interaction between filmmakers, subjects and audiences in the research of collective reflexivity in the areas of cinematic narratives. The collaboration between activist networks, communication campaigns, and mass media amplifies the reach and influence of documentary films. Reflexivity within the documentary is a self-acknowledgment of the filmmaking process which has the potency to sharpen the storytelling with the message. Documentary making, which already depends on providing more transparency and depth to the analysis of common topics/ themes is enriched through this self acknowledgement. Reflexivity, which draws attention to both the nature of the message and the context in which it was created, is a powerful form of self-reflection that further encourages viewers to explore their own interpretations and evaluate in light of broader thematic contexts highlighted in documentaries. As (Ruby, 1977) states "to be reflexive is to structure a product in such a way that the audience assumes that the producer, the process of making, and the product are a coherent whole. Not only is the audience made aware of these relationships, but they are also made to understand the importance of that knowledge". This research focuses on interconnection of documentary laden with reflexivity and its relationship with the lensed community and topic. How does a documentary which focuses on the elementary human task of food production integrated with dynamics of a community reveal collective

reflection through the storytelling of the filmmaker into distinct spaces and time namely India and Italy. In the contemporary times when sustainability is being foregrounded as prime most for human existence how can two culturally distinct and profoundly related films within Indian and Italian context reflect the power of mediated but reflective filmed content. The research uses the case study of Keetnashak Ya Vinashak (Lakshminarayan Devda, SPS Media, 2016, India) and La Restenza (Alessandra Coppola, 2021, Italy) both the documentaries focus on food production practices within small communities in India and Italy respectively. Lakshminarayan Devda and Alessandra Coppola use reflexivity within their storytelling while also depicting the collective consciousness of the food growers and the food production ecosystem. The research employs the interview approach in the background of auteurship and social movement theory.

Collective reflexivity and participatory documentary

The researchers denote 'Collective reflexivity' with the practice in films where filmmakers, often in collaboration with the communities that they represent, critically examine and reflect on the social, cultural, and political realities depicted in filmmaker's work. This is a collaborative process in which the viewpoints, voices, and living experiences of community members are integrated into the filmmaking, thereby fostering a shared understanding of the issues involved. Though participatory process, collective reflexivity in documentary enhances participation of not just the filmmaker but also the community and the process it lenses on. Therefore such films like Keetnashak Ya Vinashak and La Restanza become not only a medium for telling stories but also an instrument for collective introspection through which one can explore intricate societal dynamics and co-create meaning with filmmakers and their subjects.

In an era of rapid technological advancements, environmental crises, and shifting sociopolitical landscapes, the concept of collective reflexivity can be used as an effective tool for communities to critically examine their own social structures, values, and beliefs. Food production continues to be a focal point of discussion therefore documentary filmmaking, with its unique ability to capture and depict reality, can emerge as an effective medium for facilitating collective introspection on food production. The concept of collective reflexivity is based on the idea that communities have the capacity for critical self-reflection, allowing them to examine their own mode of existence. This process is especially important in the context of today's mediated world where television, films, community radio, community films, social media and video streaming platforms exercise the power to shape and influence societal narratives. Self-representation is fast becoming an important attribute for storytelling and communicating messages in such a mediated world continuously realigning social and cultural reflections.

Participatory documentary, which includes the subjects in filmmaking process has emerged as an effective tool for promoting collective reflexivity. Communities involved in the production of their own stories get a chance to share their experiences, and viewpoints with a stance of their community identity. To get a gist of the inclusive nature of collective reflexivity in cinematic storytelling, this research focuses on the ways in which participatory documentaries put forward co-creation and conversation within and outside the communities. Since the audience is an essential participant in any kind of documentary, especially the participatory one, the participatory documentary with its inclusion of voices of the community can function and form a compelling narrative on a subject like food production. It also has the possibility to justify any collective action or movement which may have influenced food production in that specific geography. Keetnashak Ya Vinashak and La Restanza are films that empower communities involved in the process of producing food and inform the public about essential matters concerning the food business. Through the examples of preserving and being environmentally friendly in the cultivation of foods, these documentaries not only raise critical questions on sustainability but also encourage people to follow food movements.

Organic movements such as the Slow Food Movement in Italy (1986) and Eat Right India (2018) are critical for the interaction of ecosystems, people and agriculture, and the regulation of food systems within the respective countries. The movements create arguments to resist the industrial food matrix, calling for action on the relocalisation of important food sources, a focus on organic food and heritage foods, leading to more just and healthy societies and environments. Considering documentary films constantly probe into people,

places and processes, this entanglement of active voices, movements and participatory filmmaking make for a complex mix of meaning making.

In Italy, the slow food movement developed in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, because of establishment of McDonald's first ever restaurant in Rome, Italy's capital. To combat globalisation and the negative impact of fast food on modern life. In reaction to the proliferation of fast-food establishments and concerns regarding the homogenisation of global culture and the decline in quality of life, the slow food movement expanded beyond its initial roots to encompass various regions, including urban areas, territories, and the realm of travel and tourism (Clancy, 2018). Slow food movement promotes the preservation of culinary traditions, local food systems, and environmental sustainability. (Petrini, 2013) stated how "along with the process of industrialisation, in little more than a century a kind of technocratic dictatorship has been established, where profit prevails over politics and economics over culture, and where quantity is the main, if not the sole, criterion for judging human activities." Slow Food and eco-gastronomic organisation founded by Carlos Petrini in 1986 asserts that food holds significant importance across various dimensions of daily life, encompassing cultural, political, environmental, and encourages sustainable agricultural practices.

On the other hand, in India, the preamble to the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, outlines the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) mandate to ensure the availability of safe and nutritious food for the people of India. To fulfill this mission, FSSAI has launched the 'Eat Right India' movement, aimed at transforming the country's food system to deliver safe, healthy, and sustainable food for all. The movement's tagline, 'Sahi Bhojan. Behtar Jeevan', serves as its guiding principle. Eat Right India employs a balanced approach, combining regulation, capacity building, collaboration, and empowerment to ensure food is beneficial for both people and the planet. It leverages the collective efforts of various stakeholders, including the government, food businesses, civil society, experts, development agencies, and citizens, to achieve its objectives. (Eat Right India, n.d.)

Agriculture remains a crucial sector in India, employing around 58-60% of the workforce while contributing about 25% to the national income (Chand, 2008; Sinha, 2007). Despite its importance, the sector faces challenges such as widespread poverty and declining employment opportunities (Mahapatra, 2007). Rural India, comprising 85% of the population in some states, heavily depends on agriculture for livelihood, with 60% of rural households being marginal or small farmers (Mahapatra, 2007). The agricultural sector's share in national output has decreased from over 50% post-independence to less than 25% in recent years (Chand, 2008). Post independence, government has introduced multiple schemes related to agriculture and simultaneously activists like Vandana Shiva's non-governmental organisation Navdanya, and Pinki brahma's Samaj Pragati Sahayog Community Media, have endeavored to create important interventions on native food verity and quality of food production. Vandana Shiva is a leading proponent of traditional agriculture and environmental sustainability. She opposes modern agricultural practices such as high-yielding crop varieties, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and GMOs, asserting that they contribute to biodiversity loss, environmental pollution, and social tensions (Erdős, 2019). Advocating for traditional farming techniques tailored to local ecosystems, Shiva established the Navdanya movement in 1991 to safeguard indigenous plant varieties through seed banks (Erdős, 2019). Pinki brahma's Samaj Pragati Sahayog Community Media, commonly known as SPS Media, is promoting No-Pesticide Management (NPM) agriculture as a sustainable farming approach. The use of synthetic chemical fertilizers and pesticides has significantly increased since the Green Revolution of the 1960s. Today, more than 7,600 farmers practice NPM agriculture over an area of 6,700 hectares. SPS emphasizes that water conservation and harvesting efforts are futile without addressing how water is utilized. In a typical watershed, agriculture consumes approximately 80% of the available water (Sps, 2021).

The importance of telling farmer stories through documentary film format in both these chosen countries is underscored by the complexity of the issue and the filmmaker's 'distance' from the process of producing food. (Rao et al., 2022) demonstrates the central role of community participation in promoting sustainable food system practices and explores how various aspects of food consumption and agriculture in India, including the role of indigenous knowledge, dietary transitions, and their cinematic representations. The

research highlights how A participatory filmmaking process in the context of community nutrition can enable participants to question unequal power relations by enabling the most marginalized to voice their own perspectives with the support of cameras and filmmaking skills (Rao et al., 2022). (Dorin & Landy, 2009) explores how participatory filmmaking has been used to document and transmit indigenous knowledge about local foods, improving dietary diversity among marginalized communities. Despite becoming a leading food producer, India still faces challenges of poverty, under-nutrition, and environmental degradation. The country has undergone various agricultural revolutions, including the green revolution and others focused on dairy, oilseeds, and horticulture, while also grappling with market liberalisation and its impacts on the agricultural sector (Dorin & Landy, 2009).

Social movement theory

Social movement theory gives a basic structure for the research of film-making that is about showing the voices of the marginalised groups and is a force to bring social action. According to the theory of social movements, social action is a product of the perception of injustice, hence, documentary films are proposed to be the most effective tools for advocacy and mobilisation. Public documentaries, in general, are the essence of social movement theory by involving the community in the filmmaking process, thus, they create a feeling of being the owner of their stories. (Potash, 2011) states how documentary films have successfully played a significant role in increasing awareness of health problems, encouraging behavioural changes and even forcing changes in the public health policy. (Potash, 2011) points out that documentary films may act as 'multiple catalyst agents' for different stages of change in audience groups. These goals, therefore, are about raising 'awareness' on the socio-economic problems that directly influence health issues, such as obesity and food justice, as well as encouraging the adoption of healthy issues, such as obesity and food justice, as well as encouraging the adoption of healthy eating habits and motivating active social participation to solve community health problems and ultimately, documentary films can have a broad impact, extending to the shaping of food and farm policies (Potash, 2011).

(Hedemann, 2019) study examines the political roles played by both critical and 'constructive environmental documentaries'. The study analyses how audio-visual depictions of an 'ecological citizenship' play a crucial role in activist's struggle, being a tool for environmentalist filmmakers. Thus, activists and filmmakers can collaborate to involve more participants in environmental issues. The films analysed in the research, "Leben ausser Kontrolle" (Bertram Verhaag, 2004) and "Voices of Transition," (Nils Aguilar, 2012) share a common theme, addressing economic, political, and cultural structures contributing to ecological and social challenges. Bertram and Nils express varying degrees of opposition to the agricultural industry and disillusionment with existing policies. While citizens portrayed in both films are deeply involved and passionate, the primary motivations driving their activism, as well as the emotional responses intended to be elicited from the audience, differ significantly. Furthermore, the analysis of documentary films illustrates how ecological citizens utilising filmmaking as a tool spread their movements and perspectives globally through environmental documentaries, furthermore (Hedemann, 2019) denotes in his research that film and media studies underscore the diverse ways in which viewers interpret films and construct their own meanings, influenced by factors such as personal interests, prior knowledge, and the context of reception (Hall, 1993; Hattendorf, 1999; Binter, 2009).

Methodology

The aim of the research is to deconstruct the documentary practice which focusses on community dynamics and food production. The research explores documentary films that involve the filmmaker as 'participant and community member' in the process of food production. The research adopts a qualitative research methodology. Narrative analysis, visual style and usage of digital media production are critical to studying the contemporary documentary. For the study, case study method has been used for analysis. While selecting the case study, researchers have employed two key parameters:

1. Food production practice - this parameter been chosen in line with zero hunger (SDG2) of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015¹. The specific attributes of SDG 2 which resonate with the research objectives are (a) Every food system is sustainable (b)100% increase in smallholder productivity and income (c) Zero food loss or waste (United Nation, n.d.).

2. Community – this parameter focusses on the filmmaker’s stance at the filming food production as a member of the community itself. Knowledge of a specific agrarian group of food producers, its day to day challenges, socio-cultural nuances allows, as we argue a more justified representation of people, place and process.

This research paper seeks to explore collective reflexivity by analysing two documentary films that are culturally distinct yet deeply interconnected, Keetnashak Ya Vinashak and La Restenza (Alessandra Coppola, 2021, Italy). In both these documentaries, the filmmakers as a ‘participant and community member’ lenses process of food production in two different agrarian communities and discusses the issues of the farming practices and agro-technology. Since both films centre on a tight-knit community setting, promoting social cohesion as individuals and suggesting collective action by the food producers while navigating challenges. The study aims to discern the narrative techniques and technical methodologies utilized by filmmakers to portray the diverse dimensions of community existence. Collective Reflexivity as a concept is analysed through interviews of the filmmakers.

Rationale for the case study

Participatory documentary which include the community are the window to the study of the link between collective reflection, development, and mediated communication. Building on the theoretical background of social movement theory this study aims to clarify how the filmmakers take part as a member of the community on which they reflect. Through a narrative approach, the research analyses the representation of the sociopolitical and geographical communities, showing the topics of climate change, digital technology, agro-tech and community resilience and the role of cinematic devices in increasing the collective reflection. The main aim of this research is to add to the bigger discussion of the function of documentary films as mirrors for the development of societies. This research aims to study collective reflexivity in order to highlight its role in community resilience, development, protection of cultural identities in this changing world.

The primary data sources consist of two carefully chosen documentary films: Keetnashak Ya Vinashak and La Restenza. These films serve as focal points for the study's investigation into the portrayal of collective reflexivity within community dynamics. Through a combination of narrative analysis and interviews with key stakeholders, the study seeks to identify the narrative strategies and technical approaches employed by filmmakers to depict various facets of community life. The thematic areas under examination include community issues, development initiatives, social welfare initiatives, agricultural practices, technological innovations in agriculture, water conservation efforts, participatory decision-making processes, testimonials from local community members, and mediated communication channels, as depicted in the documentaries.

Table 1-Rationale

¹ The UN Secretary-General's Zero Hunger Challenge, launched at Rio+20, called on governments, civil society, faith communities, the private sector, and research institutions to work together to end hunger and eliminate the most severe forms of malnutrition (United Nation, n.d.).

S. No	Title of the film	Duration	Issue addressed	Depictions of Sub-themes in documentaries	Awards and Festivals
1	Keetnashak Ya Vinashak (Pesticides or destroyer)	33:41 minutes	Marginalised farmers resort to toxic chemical pesticides in farming, harming both crops and soil.	technological innovations in agriculture, water conservation efforts, participatory decision-making processes, testimonials from local community members, mediated communication channels,	Nominated- 9th CMS Vatavaran Delhi 2017
2	La Restenza (The resistance)	92 minutes	A community resists migration due to economic struggles, striving to improve their home by staying put.	community issues, development initiatives, social welfare initiatives, agricultural practices, testimonials from local community members	Screening -TFF- Torino Film Festival 2021

Interview

The researchers aim to present the insights gleaned from interviews with the director of Keetnashak ya Vinashak, (Laxminarayan Devda, SPS Media, 2016), (researchers translated his interview from Hindi language to English), and the director of La Restenza, (Alessandra Coppola, 2021, Italy). Keetnashak Ya Vinashak (pesticides or destroyers) narrates the story of a farmer, shedding light on the challenges of agriculture entangled in the harmful effects of toxic chemicals. These challenges include soaring input costs, unpredictable returns, environmental degradation, and health issues in a small village located in Madhya Pradesh, India. La Restanza delves into the intricate dynamics of community life and agricultural sustainability in Castiglione d'Otranto, as explored through the lens of a local farmer-turned-filmmaker.

Interview of Laxminarayan Devda, director of Keetnashak ya Vinashak

1. How did the film's development process shape the portrayal of diverse perspectives and motivations within the community, and how does it encourage collective reflection?

I come from a family with deep roots in farming and we have always prioritised sustainable and organic agriculture over commercial farming practices. In our efforts to avoid chemical pesticides, we noticed significant changes in crops like cotton, soy, and maize, especially as the market became flooded with heavily commercialized pesticides. However, these pesticides proved ineffective in addressing the pest issues on our farms. With my family background in farming and my educational background is in Media, I joined SPS Media with the vision of making films for social change. Agricultural challenges that I witnessed firsthand led me and the SPS Team to collaborate closely with other farmers and the local community to research and develop alternative solutions. Simultaneously, I thought about making a film on this issue. Through this process, we began fostering collective reflection and problem-solving, which not only helped

us improve our farming practices but also strengthened community bonds and promoted sustainable agricultural methods.

2. Can you discuss some of the real-life experiences or inspirations behind how the film's narrative were shaped and interpreted?

Farming has always been deeply personal to me, as it's a way of life for my entire family. This connection inspired me to explore alternatives to harmful practices in agriculture. I decided to make this film because I witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of chemical pesticides on the environment. Local bird populations were declining, and when farm runoff containing these chemicals reached the pond designated for fish farming, the fish started dying as well. These fish were vital, both for local livelihoods through pisciculture and as a food source. Through the film, I wanted to shed light on many such issues and advocate for more sustainable farming practices.

3. How did you employ collective reflexivity in the film to support agricultural practices and community improvement?

At SPS Media, we work closely with farmers to promote sustainable agricultural practices. Currently, 7,600 farmers are engaged in No-Pesticide Management (NPM) agriculture, spanning 6,700 hectares across the farmlands of Dewas in Madhya Pradesh. The NPM movement aims to empower farmers to grow crops without chemical pesticides, create a distinct identity for their produce, and connect these small-scale producers to larger markets. NPM agriculture focuses on enhancing soil fertility through sustainable practices such as composting, recycling agricultural residues, using farmyard manure, cattle urine, green manure crops like *Gliricidia*, and applying tank silt. This approach also includes gradually reducing dependency on chemical fertilizers, ensuring long-term soil health and environmental sustainability.

4. How did you negotiate the balance between portraying the harsh realities of life Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, and upholding the collective ideals of hope and resilience? How did collective decision-making influence narrative choices in this regard?

For this, I am deeply grateful to Pinki Brahma (Co-founder of SPS Media) for shaping my perspective. While I had formal training in media, it was under her guidance that I learned the importance of maintaining balance in storytelling. When addressing real-life issues in films, it is essential to uphold dignity and decorum—or 'Mariyada.' For instance, the questions asked in interviews should be thoughtful and sensitive, not harsh or intrusive. We don't just work with the community; we are part of it, and we must operate with that understanding. My entire family also contributed in the film including my wife, my brothers and my brother's children. Our goal is not to sensationalise or create unnecessary controversies but to responsibly shed light on important issues. Filmmaking, to me, is a significant responsibility. Collective decision-making is vital when we aim to create something for social good. Incorporating input from team members ensures our work is more refined, balanced, and democratic. This collaborative process ultimately helps us produce films that are impactful and resonate with the values of the community.

5. How do you anticipate the themes and messages of Keetnashak Ya Vinashak resonating with audiences, particularly in relation to collective experiences and perspectives?

We work closely with farmers to educate and inspire them about sustainable agricultural practices, including seasonal cropping. Our mission is to bring social change for the greater good. I recall a particular instance where 40 acres of cotton farming land in Khate Gaon, about 70 kilometers from the SPS Centre, was devastated because the farmers chose not to participate in our training programs. This incident reinforced the importance of our work and the impact of knowledge sharing. In our films, we don't use actors; instead, we feature real people and local characters who share their personal experiences with practices like organic farming, cow dung-based fertilisers, and water-saving techniques. These stories are

authentic and highlight the importance of sustainable farming methods, making the message more relatable for the community."

6. Can the collaboration between filmmakers and the community in this filmmaking process be considered part of a film collective?

Yes, of course. "Nirdeshak aur Samudaay ek sangam hai, aur film ek madhyam"(The director and community are a collaboration, and film is the medium). SPS with the collaboration with community make films for the people by the people.

7. How important is it to make films focused on food culture and agriculture?

We live in a country where agriculture forms the backbone of our economy, and yet, we are increasingly facing the challenges posed by climate change. As these issues affect our food systems, it becomes essential for us to understand the food we consume. Where does it come from? How is it sourced? What methods are being used to grow it? How does it reach our tables? These are critical questions we must ask ourselves. One of the most important aspects to consider is the use of pesticides. It is crucial that people are aware of what pesticides are and how they impact both our health and the environment. Awareness plays a key role in making informed choices, and it is through this awareness that we can begin to demand better practices in food production. Films that focus on food culture and agriculture can be powerful tools for educating the public, raising awareness, and inspiring change. By shedding light on these issues, we can contribute to a healthier, more sustainable future for both the environment and our communities.

8. Did you also organise a screening of this film for the community?

Yes, we did. We screen films regularly through our People's Mobile Cinema initiative. We have converted a van into a mobile cinema, which is well equipped. This set up provides an open-air screening experience to the audiences. The experience is deeply engaging for the audience, especially when they see themselves on the big screen. It creates a sense of pride and joy, making it a shared experience that goes beyond just watching a film. The communal aspect of this initiative adds to the richness of the experience, bringing people together while also enriching their lives with the joy of cinema.



Image 1 & 2- People's Mobile Cinema -Van, captured by the researchers.

Interview of Alessandra Coppola, director La Restenza

1. How did the film's development process shape the portrayal of diverse perspectives and motivations within the community, and how does it encourage collective reflection?

It was a long process that took 4 years. From the beginning I was part of the collective, putting my skills at the service of the project. This brought me to be closer to the people who were more active and that had a key role in “making things happen”.

I had to re-shape my wish several times because some people that I had chosen as characters of the film, were floating in terms of their commitment to the project and to the participation in the film.

What is the hardest part in working in collective is the “human factor”. To respect the individuals, their path, their choices, their inconsistency, can be very difficult when you have to build a story and deliver a “product”. It’s a real challenge, not to force things, to trust the process and also to work with the fact that you don’t have control on reality ;-)!

At the same time, it’s a big learning which I believe being very important for the building of new paradigm of relationship between humans but also between the humans and the living in general (the earth, the animals, the plants).

The philosophical approach of permaculture was a great teacher in this sense.

2. Can you discuss some of the real-life experiences or inspirations behind how the film's narrative were shaped and interpreted?

There are many... I was following the life in the fields, but also the collective meetings. We were eating together, spending time together. In such a small village, you are never alone.

So what was more difficult was to choose what to put in the film and what to exclude.

The choices were mostly made according to a dramaturgy that could serve the perception of the audience to follow a story that can be the most faithful to the reality of the life there.

But to do so, there is a re-construction of the reality that have to be made with the editing. For example, the Green Night (the big feast that you can see in the film), seemed very important to show how the life of the community get catalysed around a ritual to celebrate the activities, the work and the bonds inwaved during the whole year.

3. How did you employ collective reflexivity in the film to support agricultural practices and community improvement?

Mostly thought small videos realized during the important events of the agricultural calendar: the collective seeding, the harvest, the organization of the green night, the hosting of students.

Documenting those moments and showing those videos to the community, functioned as mirrors of what was happening and allowed the collective to become aware of the pieces of the puzzle that constituted the very specific “art of staying” in this territory.

4. How did you negotiate the balance between portraying the harsh realities of life in Castiglione d'Otranto and upholding the collective ideals of hope and resilience? How did collective decision-making influence narrative choices in this regard?

Often, especially in the beginning, people in Castiglione were wondering why I was filming “bad moments”. For example, the scene of the film when the rain risk to make loose the harvest or some harsh discussions. I told them that it was important to show that the choice they made “to stay” is not so easy and granted, that implies to face difficulties and that for the public is important to see them as humans, with multiple faces and not just like heros. I explain that we wanted to transmit the reality of things, not just the “beautiful face”. In this respect, I know that often, they trusted me without really imagining what I was doing. This is a very import part of the process, trust. In a collective, each person has some competences, some skills, and knowledge, and not always one can understand the action of another. In those cases, we always had discussions to put proposals on the common table, but to be able to trust the other and let go on “my own understanding” of what he wants to do, it’s fundamental to develop a project in its “biodiversity” on all levels.

5. How do you anticipate the themes and messages of La Restanza resonating with audiences, particularly in relation to collective experiences and perspectives?

Actually, I didn’t expect such a big resonance as the film revealed. By accompanying the film around Europe, I realized it myself. For more and more people become evident that to transform old paradigms and

practices, the most effective is to start from close, from oneself, the community we belong to, the territory where we have our feet.

6. Can the collaboration between filmmakers and the community in this filmmaking process be considered part of a film collective?

Well, *la Restanza* is not really a case of film collective, but more a film of an individual author made within a collective which doesn't have as mission : making a film, but creating the social, political and economical condition to live a territory in the plane respect of the living.

7. Did you also organise a screening of this film for the community?

Yes, I screened *la Restanza* for the community of Castiglione d'Otranto.

Analysis

Keetnashak Ya Vinashak (pesticides or destroyers) filmed amidst natural landscapes in rural villages of Madhya Pradesh, adopts a small-scale or micro-production approach. The film is characterised by steady camera movements, predominantly mid and long shots, and natural lighting. The documentaries feature testimonials accompanied by light background music, with standard editing cuts predominating. *Keetnashak Ya Vinashak* is produced by SPS Community Media, a media outlet that is based in a remote tribal village in Madhya Pradesh and it encourages the stories of people who are living in the periphery and weaving those stories into films and audio stories in a way that is dynamic and interactive in process and in cooperation with the local community. The main team consists of local people who are from the area. The main motivation of SPS media comes from the voices of people and the real-life stories of the local region. More than 200 films have been produced by this organisation, including social documentaries, community videos and training films. SPS Media work on improvement of agricultural practices that adapts watershed management, which is accessible to farmers at a low-cost and low-risk rate. SPS Media has significantly contributed to field trials involving enhanced crop varieties and propagation techniques tailored to the local context. For example, the organisation educates farmers on the importance of efficient water usage, discouraging the cultivation of crops such as onions which demand substantial water resources. Given the hilly terrain of the local village, ensuring water availability for all crops remains a significant challenge. Despite this, some farmers persist in cultivating onions due to their lucrative nature as a cash crop. SPS has conducted field trials involving 120 enhanced varieties of 15 key crops prevalent in the region, including sorghum, maize, pigeon pea, soybean, cotton, groundnut, black gram, green gram, chickpea, pearl millet, sesame, foxtail millet, and wheat. These varieties demonstrate high yields even under conditions of limited resources. Among these, 60 vegetable varieties have been selected based on their suitability to the local climate and agricultural environment (SPS, 2021).

Simultaneously, *La Restanza* delves into the dynamics of community life and agricultural sustainability in Castiglione d'Otranto, as explored through the lens of a local farmer-turned-filmmaker, Allesandra. The director sheds light on the intertwining complexities of food production, social justice, and ecological health, steering clear of direct inspiration from the slow food movement but acknowledging its presence within their research journey. The film's development spanned four years, embedding the filmmaker within the collective fabric of the community and allowing for a nuanced portrayal of diverse perspectives and motivations. This intimate engagement facilitated the depiction of real-life experiences and inspirations, carefully shaped into a narrative that authentically reflects the rhythm of life in the village. The film strikes a delicate balance between portraying the harsh realities of life in Castiglione d'Otranto and upholding collective ideals of hope and resilience. By capturing both the challenges and triumphs faced by the community, the narrative highlights the human complexities inherent in the pursuit of a sustainable livelihood.

According to (Vito Teti, 2022), *La Restanza* is depicted as a form of resistance through staying put. The notions of leaving versus staying or migrating versus remaining are viewed as complementary rather than opposing forces. In this perspective, remaining becomes an unconventional choice rather than the expected norm. However, choosing to stay doesn't always result in a sense of belonging. *Restanza* entails feeling

both rooted and disoriented in a place, where there's a perceived need to protect the place while also feeling the urge for radical change and renewal (Oevelen, 2023).

The film shows a lot of tough manual work like digging, planting seeds, harvesting, and even rushing to save the wheat from rain by spreading it out on the roof of a house. The main characters are lively and full of energy, but they're also practical. They find a way to borrow money to buy a stone mill by promising to pay back three pay-checks to a fair bank. This might seem strange, like living without rules, but it's another way of aiming for an ideal. Even after they buy the stone mill, which makes the best organic flour, these hardworking people still face challenges because of the beliefs of the free market. The film shows how the world today is often confusing, with different ideas about culture, politics, and money. People's values can't always fit into simple categories, especially with everyone having strong opinions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of collective reflexivity in 'Keetnashak Ya Vinashak' and 'La Restenza' demonstrates that participatory documentary filmmaking, where community members take on the role of filmmakers and engage deeply within the context of the issues and aim to portray the same in their film, serves as an important medium for fostering critical self as well as collective reflection. The approach employed in both the films, highlight filmmakers as active participants in their communities, effectively capturing the complex layers of climate change, digital technology, agro-tech, and community resilience.

In "Keetnashak Ya Vinashak," the filmmakers are the local resident of SPS Community Media Centres, which plays a very important role in the development of the local community in Madhya Pradesh, India. By the means of participatory documentary practices, the filmmaker works together with local residents to create a story together, thus making them the active part of the storytelling process. This strategy creates an atmosphere of common reflection in the community members, as they come across difficulties of farming which is connected to the damaging effects of pesticides. By amplifying the voices and experiences of those living in the community, the film encourages critical dialogue and collective action towards sustainable agricultural practices.



Image 3- film screening by SPS Media in the local village Bagli, Dewas district, Madhya Pradesh, captured and attended by the researchers.

The researchers undertook a site visit to the SPS Media Centre in Bagli, located in the Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh. During the visit, they engaged with the entire team of SPS Media and also conducted an

interaction with Mrs. Pinki Brahma Choudhuri, the co-founder of the organisation. The insights shared by Pinki Brahma Choudhuri, provides a compelling testament to the transformative power of collective reflexivity showcased in "Keetnashak Ya Vinashak" and all the other films produced by SPS Media. As Choudhuri aptly expresses, films have served as a catalyst for farmers to recognise the importance of connecting with their local communities and sharing their stories. Through community screenings, where local voices take centre stage, a deeper sense of connection and understanding is fostered.

‘ Vilakp dikhane main madad kiya hai films ne’

(these films have contributed to presenting an alternative) - Pinki Brahma Choudhuri

Furthermore, she briefed how SPS Media promote ‘experiential learning’, allowing for messages to be inferred and internalised by local communities. By engaging in participatory documentary practices, these films serve as a conduit for collective introspection and empowerment, inspiring dialogue and action towards sustainable agricultural practices and through the lens of "Keetnashak Ya Vinashak" and the insights of Pinki Brahma Choudhuri, collective reflexivity can be observed in amplifying marginalised voices and catalysing positive change within rural communities.

"La Restenza" shows that the filmmaker has spent a lot of time within the Castiglione d'Otranto community of Italy. In the span of four years, the filmmakers develops a deep understanding of the rhythms of village life, forging lasting relationships with the residents and getting to know their struggles and aspirations. The film uses a participatory approach to show the complexities of community dynamics and the interdependence between social justice, ecological health, and agricultural sustainability. Through the combined stories of the local people, the film acts as a mirror for the community, provoking conversation and group resilience in the face of hardship. Both "Keetnashak Ya Vinashak" and "La Restanza" are powerful combination of a compelling narrative of community collaboration and resilience that resonates with the audience and gives an insight into the transformative power of grassroots initiatives. Through the filmmaker's journey of observation, acceptance, and collaboration, the film convey a powerful lesson on the importance of intentionality, openness, and collective action in fostering sustainable communities.

Collective reflexivity served as a guiding principle, as documented moments of agricultural milestones became mirrors for the community's self-reflection and collective awareness. Through small videos capturing significant events in the agricultural calendar, the community engaged in a process of collective introspection, fostering a deeper understanding of their shared journey towards sustainability. Integration of collective values and ideologies, such as embracing local traditions and biodiversity, enriches the storytelling process, allowing the past to permeate through the present narrative. Challenges encountered during production were addressed through collective problem-solving and resource-sharing, further reinforcing the themes of resilience and adaptability woven throughout the film. In both films, collective reflexivity is demonstrated through the filmmaker's commitment to amplifying the voices and experiences of marginalised communities.

As (Ruby, 1977) stated “being reflexive means that the producer deliberately and intentionally reveals to his audience the underlying epistemological assumptions that caused him to formulate a set of questions in a particular way, to seek answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally to present his findings in a particular way”. The narratives presented in these films serve as reflective medium for a developing society, challenging dominant neo-liberal and capitalist ideologies. They underscore the importance of collective action and collaboration in addressing pressing social and environmental issues. Through the medium of film, these stories transcend geographical boundaries, sparking conversations and inspiring change on a global scale.

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