

***Tellavision Mumbai*** is a documentation of one delicately poised edge of global conflict.

South Asia is a patchwork of 20th century histories- once colonial, once divided, once socialist, once "non-aligned". Now, we stand abreast the rest of the world: nuclearised, liberalised, terrorised; suffused with right-wing politics, bigoted and belligerent.

For young minds in this part of the world, the nineties were both heady and numbing. Our nations opened their doors to global capital, and "reform" of all kinds swiftly followed. But we were running blind, into this flood of new goods and ideologies. The implications of this change, on both public policy and the popular psyche, were rarely questioned or understood. How many of us remember a globalisation debate in Indian popular media of the 90's?

Now, after a violent year worldwide, our picture of the world is hazier than ever, floating in newspeak and dangerous definitions. What is good, what's evil, what is a fight for freedom, who is a terrorist, and why is justice for some injustice for plenty of others? These are fundamental questions. Even for those of us who did not believe the promises of the last decade- of an infinitely connected, smoothly synchronous globe- these are shaky times.

In the days that followed September 11, 2001, a group of us here in Mumbai, India, shared a sad *déjà vu*, a sense that our own roots were entangled here. At the local level, many floating ideologies were quickly precipitated. We saw a city and its people being forced towards "us and them" politics. We felt a public consciousness mutate and realign, mostly along old scars. The air was heavy with hate-revenge-justice- as a TV war lit up our homes.

## **Television!**

In a few years India has moved from 2 state-owned channels to over 90. Yet, after a decade of privatization, the country's huge middle class (more than the population of the USA) does not have access to a single truly independent channel. We cannot choose perspectives that are not sanctified by global media monopolies. There are alternative worldviews emanating out of our own neighborhoods, and public schools of thought, but often TV remains the only window into the world, a fishbowl space of refracted information.

If our city really had an independent channel, we wondered, what would make news? Who would shape our views? Where, in the open city, could the camera go and what alternatives, fresh or forgotten, would we find?

*Tellavision Mumbai*, the video documentary, was born here; an outward projection, a view from within an Indian city that needed to be shared. It was an opportunity to cast our vote, to be counted in the reckoning for a common geo-political future. But it also became, importantly, a mirror looking inwards into Mumbai; a record of the

patterns of public grief, anger and belief; an excavation of our own many layers for the symptoms and cures of a global malaise.

Workers and young student activists organized one of the first protest marches in the city against the bombings in Afghanistan. Women's groups came together to distribute pamphlets in local trains. We systematically followed these anti-war demonstrations and discussions. We sought out other pockets of public opinion and debate. The voices that emerged- the people who cared, were a diverse and sometimes surprising mix: religious clerics-turned moderates, retired military generals, academics, shopkeepers, feminists, teachers, journalists, lawyers, environmental activists, human rights watchers, young radical students, the Gandhians and Khilafats of swadeshi and non-violence, and the resilient left. They were all there, committed and impassioned; yet the truth was hard to ignore. There was a huge distance between the peoples' movements and the people.

This lack of a critical public culture was evident in the scale of events we saw. We are forced into small rooms to discuss large issues. Public spaces are gentrified, and college campuses are politically insipid. Most meetings ended with urgent appeals to come together, rethink and regroup and find new ways to network and reach out to more people.

This film is thus more than just a documentation of public action; it is designed as an action tool. It presents the many faces of a public dialogue that needs to enter our social, political and importantly, educational institutions.

**The film's treatment** exploits and counters TV's visual language. A contrapuntal structure that is supported by energetic editing. We cut between the Ambient TV of our daily lives- packaged, overloaded, truncated by restless surfers- to the verite of Direct DV - immediate, unpredictable, immersive, an almost participatory experience. **DV (digital video) technology** allowed this project to be fully autonomous. ChitraKarkhana is an independent production unit, based in Mumbai working with experimental video and documentaries, apart from other not-for-profit productions. Filming and preliminary editing of this film was entirely self-funded. We realised the rough-cut with funds from local city sources.

Forty hours of documentation has now been edited into a 90-min feature length documentary. This project has this site, **[www.chitrakarkhana.net](http://www.chitrakarkhana.net)** as its online chapter: At the moment we are seeking completion funds (sound studio costs, language dub, subtitling, etc) and costs for our screening campaign (spaces, projectors, public discussions, etc).

A screening campaign, "Ensuring Freedom" scheduled over two months has been planned. This includes most city and suburban colleges, and will be supported by discussions initiated by the director and protagonists from the film. We would like to organise additional public screenings as part of an awareness campaign aimed at urban youth. We welcome any further suggestions or possible collaborations. Please write to [tellavision@chitrakarkhana.net](mailto:tellavision@chitrakarkhana.net).

We cannot claim that what we saw in Mumbai was prescient. But there was foreboding of what was to follow; we were on the brink of violent communal rupture. India and Pakistan have been on war alert for several months now. We have come dangerously close to "The Day After", and felt firsthand the lunacy of nuclearising this subcontinent.

On February 27, the Sabarmati Express was torched in Godhra. The horrifying genocide that followed has cost over 1000 lives and displaced 150,000 people, 60,000 in the city of Ahmedabad alone. If 9-11 was the end of "America's holiday from history", these events are our alarm call. Wake up. The reverberations are loud and clear. India cannot afford to be polarised, communalised or homogenized. There is no "us and them". We live too close; too much is inextricable, unresolvable into opposites. Mumbai is a microcosm of this problem, a great density of this humanity.

Tellavision Mumbai is a plea for humane, secular thought. It will encourage its audience to participate in a renewal of active democracy. Tell people that their Constitution gives them the tools to question, protest and puncture oppression and totalizing rhetoric. To tell a vision that seeks justice and freedom.

In this, the film is universal. The issues are ubiquitous, across time and geography. And the perspectives are fair, just and human. The message is for the global citizen. Learn to see. Act. One person can make a difference. Let us have a revolution in the mind.

**Shaina Anand**- Director. She has been working independently in film/video and other media since 1997. After completing a Film & Video production course while still in college, she worked with film director Saeed Mirza on screenplays and was first asst. director on a docu-series that involved a 5-month travel across India. She has been writing on her travels and the issues of media ethics and representing reality. She was an active member of the Indian Peoples Media Collective and organized an Anti-nuclear campaign in city colleges by screening films, coordinating talks, and forming networks of students that lead to a 12-hour Concert for Peace. In 1999, she went to Temple University, USA to pursue her MFA in Film & Media Arts on the Inlaks scholarship, but returned home a year later as the streets of Bombay beckoned. She shoots and edits her own video films, believes in copyleft and free media.

**Ashok Sukumaran** - Executive Producer. Was trained as an architect at the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi, he has been involved with exhibitions and cultural productions internationally, notably the Basic Needs Pavilion at the World Expo 2000 and the *Earth Center* sustainable development project in the UK. He is currently pursuing an MFA in Media Arts at UCLA.

**Nikhil Anand**- Associate Producer. He has worked on issues of economic justice and ecological sustainability over the last three years. A 1998 graduate of Reed College, Portland, Nikhil's early assignments were with Earth Island Institute, San Francisco and at India Centre for Human Rights and Law, Mumbai, where he worked with community organizations that were grappling with the rapid processes of economic globalisation. Since then, he has been working as Coordinator for *Seeds of Hope*, an effort to document alternative development practices that further the goals of social justice and ecological sustainability. He is an associate of PUKAR. (Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research.)

**Sameer Khedekar**- Assistant Editor. Provided invaluable hardware support. An active member of the Indian Peoples Media Collective, he has been instrumental in organising film screenings and discussion events in Mumbai over the last few years.

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