

## The lament of the documentary maker

They've won laurels across the globe and creativity is booming in their field in India too. Yet, the documentary filmmaker is still just a second-class citizen of cinema.

This blunt point of view, reflecting the reality, is made clear in a new journal called Documentary Today. Not only do documentary filmmakers lack awards, they are starved of funding and deprived of reviews.

'You are not at the head of the queue when it comes to political clout or ministerial access. If you're reviewed, it is an after-thought, an act of kindness, or condescension,' comments Phillip Adams, himself a documentary filmmaker, writing in the journal.

Adams argues the gap between a documentary maker and a feature filmmaker is similar to the gulf between a journalist and a fiction writer. 'Both of us deal in words, but our words are deemed inferior,' says he.

This is ironic considering that the documentary filmmaker looks at the entire human population, not just a few megastars.

'Perhaps because our documentary industry has to fight for the crumbs that docu-production has become competitive to the point of being acrimonious,' comments Adams, an international producer himself.

'The general apathy that most people exhibit towards documentary films stems from the step-motherly treatment accorded to this genre of cinema vis-a-vis entertainment films,' commented Kuldip Sinha, in an editorial in the recently-launched journal.

Currently just in its second issue of its first volume, the 64-page journal is published by the Films Division.

The journal looks at the 'rediscovery' of a long-lost documentary on Mahatma Gandhi, and covers an interview with Gaurav Jani, the maker of the much-awarded 'Riding Solo To The Top Of The World'.

This story is about Jani's solo motorcycle journey from [Mumbai](#) to one of the remotest places in the world, the Changthang Plateau in Ladakh, bordering China. Jani's was a one-man film unit.

Documentary Today also looks at this genre of films from the neighbouring country of Bangladesh.

It notes that after partition in 1947, Dhaka - 'then a de-glamorised ancient capital turned into provincial town and capital of the East Pakistan province' - saw Bengali Muslims realising that they had lost everything to Bengal's cultural capital of [Kolkata](#) and had to start everything from scratch.

'Unfortunately, the government-produced documentaries are hardly truthful in Bangladesh,' says the analysis.

Director of Film Festivals Neelam Kapur, when asked about the lack of sufficient high-quality independent documentary films at the IFFI 2007 though many were being made, conceded that

more needed to be perhaps done to attract the best in the field.

In October 2007, NDTV's Ayesha Kagal announced plans to screen 'quality' 22 or 23-minute independent documentary films. 'Documentary' will go beyond the headlines and hype of instant news to focus on issues and individuals whose stories have a universal resonance, said NDTV in a note circulated among documentary filmmakers.

Kagal told IANS that the mainstream TV channel was showing documentary films each Thursday at 9.30 p.m., followed by a repeat show.

'It's been on for two months now. The critical response has been good. TRPs will probably never be high for this kind of (serious but meaningful) films,' she said.

Incidentally, the growing number of independent filmmakers in India have their own online networks, like Vikalp, Docuwallahs2, and CAC-Delhi, the last born out of a campaign against 'censorship' on documentary film.

Meanwhile, the government of India's Films Division - which long had a monopoly over the production of documentary films in India - recently held a sale of its documentary films here in Goa.

During the just concluded IFFI, the Films Division - based at G. Deshmukh Marg in Mumbai - put out on sale a select list of its documentary films. Its film available here dealt with themes of Indian dance, cinema, writers, art, music, biographies, the Indian independence movement, and Indian theatre.

'We have 8,200 titles on sale, and each is priced at Rs.90 (plus VAT). But we brought only a few for sale here,' said Films Division senior branch manager Anil Kumar N.

Meanwhile, the Tenth Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) for documentary, short and animation films gets underway from Feb 3-9, 2008, at the National Centre for the Performing Arts at Nariman Point.

*Frederick Noronha* ( © IANS / India eNews)