

# Situating Women Filmmakers in Indian Film Festival Networks: Digital Access and the Politics of Emerging Alternative Narratives

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Women have been a significant part of the Cinematic Institution from its inception. In India, like in the other parts of the world, women had made their presence felt in the pro-filmic regime from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the category of Women Filmmakers in this country has been subject to historical, structural and systematic repression over the years. From within the handful of Women Filmmakers who can be found in the subcontinent's history, a minuscule section of their works has survived to this date.

Therefore, the emerging Women Filmmakers of the day have, next to no filmic material to look back on, for them to create a sense of historicity for their gender, specific to the advent and evolution of cinematic technology.

Film Festivals, on the other hand, have been - and continue to be - spaces that help women put forward their voices and give them a sense of security, value and historicity.

This research tries to delve deeper into this strikingly masculine endeavor of Filmmaking and situate Women Filmmakers within the enormous network of Film Festivals of various stature in the country. It would try to understand the phenomena of "gendering" the process of filmmaking and precisely the idea of women's access to digital technology, to unravel the kind of narratives that emerge in the works of women coming from various caste and class positions to these sites every year (Valck, 2007).



The work implements an "anthropological methodology (Valck, 2007)" to document the individual experiences of the filmmakers, audience, organizers, journalists, distributors and sales agents in festival sites from across the country and tries to analyze how women filmmakers navigate this complex network of actors who "meet and compete" (Valck, 2007). Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) will be particularly useful in this case as "it assumes relational interdependence and includes both human and non-human actors as objects of study" (Valck, 2007).



Henceforth, the idea that technology must be studied in conjunction with the category of the 'social' resonates with Latour's framework. This project, then, would like to understand how access to Digital Filmmaking Technology by women is a privileged position to take in this country. In order to study the physical manifestations of these technologies as well as its interface, the project heavily draws from the works of the French Philosopher Gilbert Simondon, who deals with the relationship between 'technical objects' and humans. His idea about Individuation as a process by which the subject (a human subject) continually comes into being in relation to other individuals or technical things is a concept that shall be used to think about/with, in the context of the project (Simondon, 1958, 2017).



For primary research, IAWRT Asian Women's Film Festival 2025 was chosen as a site for conducting interviews of a set of filmmakers who are going to be present there and produce observations on the space of the festival.

On interviewing a few, the researchers identified that most of the filmmakers have either taken the route of documenting their experiences as a woman in their films, or they have documented other people, cultures and practices from their own position (their gender position and sexual identity) in the form of documentaries.

With these preliminary observations, few pertinent questions arise. Why do women tend to make documentary films? Why don't they make fiction as often as men?

Do they really differentiate between documentary and fiction films owing to the trends of the market? The larger project would try to probe into these issues and more.

The outcome of this project will be a film that is premised upon the idea of what it means for a woman in this country to make a film.

It aims to delve into the personal experiences of women and queer filmmakers, for whom, film festivals play a crucial role for granting them the access to tell the stories that they want to.

The film documents these experiences within the film festival spaces to understand how these festivals act as networks of digital access and nodes for alternative narratives to emerge.

#### References:

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