

Stages of Documentary film production: analysing the changes

Abstract: Documentary films have been a powerful means for representation. As narratives are changing, the ways of representing them are also changing. The process of making these representations are changing. Documentaries are no more about ‘reading’ of information in front of a camera, it has evolved with time. From being newsreel pattern to experimenting with various narrative styles, from shooting in reel to capturing in high definition digital formats, from a limited option of bulky film cameras to handheld cameras: changes are unavoidable along with a large number of options available. But the core production stages have been the same. Like human culture, the culture in the technological world has also evolved. The implementation of new approaches is the cause and effect of the advancement and evolution in technology. The process of production undergoes three essential production stages: pre-production, production, and post-production. However, these three essential stages have been elaborated with several ‘newness’ in terms of its implementation and execution. The technological experiments and acceptance of it by the audience have widened the creative aspect in documentary forms. However, universally the process of documentary production will vary, but more or less these stage of productions cannot be ignored. This paper shall attempt to explore the new aesthetic, expressive style, and technologies adopted in due course of time for producing documentaries, particularly focusing on the stages of production.

Keywords: Documentary film production, stages of documentary production, documentary film, pre-production, production of a documentary, post-production.

Introduction:

As a popular myth, the term “documentary” was coined by renowned Scottish documentary filmmaker John Grierson. Documentary films are the narratives recorded to narrate purely facts and represent reality. However, some believers believe that every film (including fiction), documents the reality of the events and moments of actor (acting fiction) is also a form of documentary film. As Bill Nichols rightly expressed “Every film is a documentary. Even the most whimsical of fictions gives evidence of the culture that produced it and reproduces the likenesses of the people who perform within it. We could say that there are two kinds of film: (1) documentaries of wish-fulfillment and (2) documentaries of social representation. Each type tells a story, but the stories, or narratives, are of different sorts” (Nichols 2001:1). Further, Marshall Curry considered that, “of course no documentary is completely ‘objective.’ Every decision you make - who to interview, how to edit, where to hold the camera - imposes a point of view on the film”. Documentary films deal with ethics, significance, and escapism recounting real stories (especially) of the unrepresented communities and individuals narrating the purest form of truth through this medium.

Albert Maysles expressed “making a film isn’t finding the answer to a question; it’s trying to capture life as it is”. Documentaries can be captured with simple elements like audio and video whereas they can be produced with advanced elements like graphics, visual effects and digital art. It can also be crafted with an amalgamation of various elements like photographs, texts, audio, video, graphics, etc. Not to forget, the implication of each element while crafting a documentary film bring challenges also: challenges of justification for its use, its appropriateness, maintaining the aesthetics and gravity of representation. Moreover, a question might arise that does the film needs technical ‘ornamentations’? Probably, the answer is, it is the decision of the filmmaker. But, some craftsmen are still attached to the traditional essence of documentaries. For this Sankhayan Ghosh expressed in *The Hindu*, “The world may get obsessed over technologically perfect images but it can’t make you feel or cry. The texture of the real footage, its imperfections is something I find very convincing and believable. The worse the quality of footage gets, the more emotional the audience is. That’s why I love film too, with its grains and scratches”. Another style to mention is Asif Kapadia’s observational style of documentary making by using archived footage in his films *Senna* (2010) and *Amy* (2015) which has inspired the contemporary documentary makers. In the year 2019, *The Financial Times* regarded Kapadia as “the director who reinvented the documentary”.

The simplest way of recording reality narratives can be traced in early films (pre-1900). “The earliest “moving pictures” were, by definition, documentaries. They were single-shot moments captured on film: a train entering a station, a boat docking, or a factory of people getting off work. Early film (pre-1900) was dominated by the novelty of showing an event. These short films were called “actuality” films”¹ (UKEssays, 2015). And of the early 20th century, *Pathe* is the renowned global manufacturer of such films. Whereas, the timeline of documentaries is enriched with lengthy productions like the 14 episodes documentary of Henry Hampton’s *Eyes*

¹ <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/film-studies/the-history-of-documentaries-film-studies-essay.php>

on the Prize (1987) and Ken Burns's *The Civil War* (1990) miniseries. Patricio Guzman's *The Battle of Chile* (1975-79) is a documentary project made in three parts: *The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie* (1975), *The Coup detat* (1976), and *Popular Power* (1979). In terms of the screen timing, it is the storyteller's expressive capacity in how much of duration they can distinctly portray the story. Many of the first films, such as those made by Auguste Marie Louis Nicolas Lumiere and Louis Jean Lumiere, were a minute or less in length, due to technological limitations. "Some of the techniques that Auguste and Louis set forth were of great use to Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov, who in 1929 made the revolutionary film *Man with the Movie Camera*, about life in Russia. While the Lumiere films were generally less than a minute long, Vertov's film took more time to establish a storyline through montage techniques" (Marof, 2007:3).

Technological advancement and alternate techniques have been rapidly taking over the former aesthetics and traditional styles of documentary filmmaking, especially in the hour where everyone has a story to tell or is surrounded by a story that is needed to be told. Improvement and growth in factors like education, gender equality, self-empowerment, and awareness of common men of their rights have made them felt their self-worth. This has called for a want to tell 'their narratives'. The expansion of new media platforms has also catered to the need for more screening platforms for this form. Furthermore, the dissemination of technology converged with new media in every age group in the current scenario has extended a screen for every story. Now the expensive stages of production can be completed in a smartphone. The documentary film is a medium to get 'inside' the life of a subject, a theme, a topic, or of an event, and affordable technology has become a boon for this genre of representation. These contemporary narratives of documentary projects are informative, engaging, and sometimes mixed with an element of humor as well. The 'heaviness' of documentary content has gradually been replaced by an artistic and experimental pattern of narration. This genre has build up space for all kinds of content and information: fundamentally it does not discriminate in portraying and representing the truth. The 'text' of representation has changed due to changes in technology.

In terms of the production of documentary films, it has traveled a long way. It has written some of the bright chapters in history with landmark productions as well as has overcome the lowest phase. But it has survived and documentary films have become experimental over time. This form of communication not only allows its audiences to learn and understand its subject's journey but occasionally also support finding a solution to their existing problems. It helps in unraveling the issues layer by layer and grows a deeper understanding of the subject that the film is dealing with. To express and represent narrations, different styles have been adopted and faded away with time. Diverse modes of documentary films have evolved, but Bill Nichols's six modes of documentary films are popular amongst scholars, academicians, critics, and documentary filmmakers. "In documentary film and video, we can identify six modes of representation that function something like sub-genres of the documentary film genre itself: *poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, performative*" (Nichols, 2001:99). In each style, the equipments are used in a particular manner, and narratives are drawn in their style of reference. These documentary narratives are identifiable by their styles and the way the narrative is woven. This genre demands apposite representation, appropriate encoding of narration, sensitivity towards its subject(s) and should be able to support the project till its dissemination to its targeted audiences.

Many aspects have changed in this genre but one aspect is still challenging for its maker, i.e. the financial assistance (funding). In the context of gaining fame along with a quotient of financial return in this genre cannot be compared with the big-screen releases. The numbers are thin on the ground who can, for a long, endure the rigorous process of arranging funds, directing, editing, producing, and distributing documentary films. Fortunately, few dedicated independent Indian documentary filmmakers consider documentary filmmaking to be a lifetime dedication and passion, to mention, Anand Patwardhan, Sohini Gosh, Saba Dewan, Rahul Roy, Sanjay Kak, Nishtha Jain, Stalin K, Pankaj Butalia, Mike Pandey, and more. All of them have witnessed and experienced the technical and non-technical changes and challenges that have enveloped this genre time again in India. Considering the growth of both documentary filmmakers and their audience, it won't be incorrect to state that as challenges are intensifying, film productions in these genres are also increasing. As documentary filmmaker Sanjay Kak rightly expressed, "there is a very vibrant documentary screening culture in India today, which distinguishes it from documentary practice in many parts of the world, and which sustains a large and growing community of filmmakers. Yes, it's not a commercially lucrative circuit, and it's not a threat to Bollywood, but I don't think that's where most of my fellow filmmakers have centered their ambitions either!".

Beginning with the core context, the stages of documentary production, the fundamental stages for both fiction and non-fiction films have been predetermined and to date, those fundamental stages have no alternatives. However, with due course of time, there have evolved various ways of implementing these stages. In fact, in contemporary times a documentary filmmaker has become as experimentalist as a fiction filmmaker can be. Audiences have amplified their perspective that reality can be represented with experimental narratives

without diluting the truth. In the context of stages of documentary film production, fundamentally, the process of creating film consists of steps, namely the process of pre-production, production, and post-production. "This process step is in accordance with the concept of MAVIB (Multimedia Audio Visual and Broadcasting) explained by Rahardja, et al. (in Ruhyana, 2016), that ... the steps of the MAVIB production concept begin with preproduction, then production, and finally postproduction" (Ranangsari and Fuquan, 2020:86). In the beginning, these three stages were moreover handled solely by the filmmaker. To refer, we can look at *Nanook of the North* where the task of the director, writer and producer was handled by Robert J. Flaherty. With due course of time, the production aspects got more systematic and each stage was handled by experts. In the context of implications, these three core stages are implemented in a chronological manner (as mentioned below in the chart).

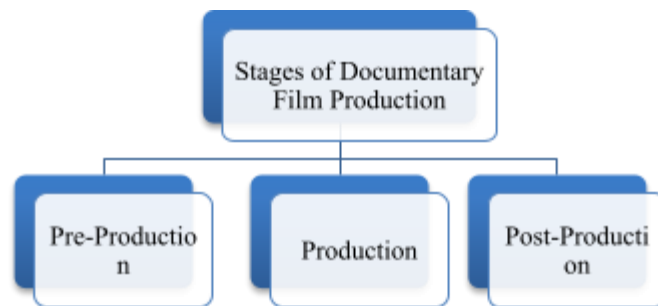


Chart 1. Stages of Documentary Film Production²

Two more stages bifurcated from within the three stages, i.e. research and marketing & distribution. These two extensions play a vital role in the professional dissemination of the final product. Productions like *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Robert J. Flaherty to *Roger and Me* (1989) by Michael Moore, from *Nightmail* (1936) by Basil Wright to *Tales of Night Fairies* (2002) by Sohini Ghosh can be referred to, to understand that each production (project) has its ways to imply these stages of production. However, any of these stages can be carried out simultaneously or can be taken into action in a non-linear manner. Nonetheless, certain factors like the sensitivity of the topic/subject, budget, filmmaker's decision and multiple external factors do influence as in, in which order each of these stages can be brought into action. Each stage is somehow interconnected with each other and has its influence and importance in building the representative text. In the world of video production, no other saying is more accurate than Benjamin Franklin, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!". These stages are independent and are conducted in different times and spaces. Nevertheless, at the same time, they are much interconnected with each other and an error in any of the stages does influence the entire production. As mentioned earlier, the contemporary scenario has given the flexibility to conduct these stages independently, parallelly, and or simultaneously. Let's have an insight into the various stages of production.

Research: "The aspiration to capture, revisit and review reality has always been a driving force for both science and art. ... The search for visible evidence and attempts to document the world also underpin the origins of the documentary tradition. Documentary has a direct, multi-sensory impact" (Cassell. et .all, 2017). Research and fact-checking have become more essential, especially in the time where many are under the influence of infodemic. Documentary films are research-driven projects which are mostly dependent on the content, facts, and information found at the stage of research. The filmmaker has to earn in-depth knowledge about the subject, where research plays a crucial role. Once the filmmaker finalise his/her topic for the film, from here begins the filmmaking process, that is the research. It depends on the filmmaker, either to first conduct the research independently before the pre-production or to carry the research simultaneously along with the pre-production. Not to forget that many documentary filmmakers and critics do consider the stage of research to be a part of the pre-production stage. Documentary filmmakers like Errol Morris, Barbara Kopple, Steve James, Werner Herzog, and Nick Broomfield's process and filmmaking techniques are worth looking at.

Chiwetel Ejiofor stated, "You do as much research as you can for any project". Research can be of various types and can be conducted in an extended time frame until and unless the filmmaker is constrained to adhere to any given deadline. An independent project has the flexibility of stretching the research duration. However, it is not the same with a project, especially which is supported by any grants or has any broadcasting deadlines. In the context of the source of research, it can be either a primary source like the subject itself, direct interviews, original documents, or secondary source like books, journals, etc. On the contrary, there are certain topics where the scope of research is less. Certain topics are such which are captured in real-time, as the events

² Chart: Author's creation

take place, the filmmaker shoots chronologically as the narration progresses. The process of research can be conducted by the filmmaker himself/herself or can appoint a researcher who is familiar with the subject or refer to a subject expert. The familiarity of the researcher with the topic facilitates the project to determine its map for research: basically to identify its source of research without being directionless. For projects which has deadlines to meet, the researcher should know at least where to start the research from, in which direction to look for the answers. In short, a good documentary project has to have good research.

Importance of research:

- 🔗 Research functions as a reality-check: it acts as a filter to distinguish between reality and myth.
- 🔗 The foundation and credibility of the film is achieved by good research.
- 🔗 Research functions like the backbone of the documentary project
- 🔗 In-depth research does justice to the text of the narration and representation of the truth

Pre-production: As the name denotes, pre-production is the stage where arrangements are done before the shoot: this is where the project is planned to weave the narrative. Pre-production is all about preparing and working on the requirement for the shoot and it ends when the production stage begins. Development can take months or even years to get the project green-lit³ by a studio or any funding agency. There are several pre-production steps in the MAVIB production concept: it is the stage for brainstorming and conception, research (primary-secondary), drafting proposal, storyboard & shot listing, production-crew schedule, location scouting-risk assessment, drafting of budget, looking for funds, contingency plan-back up plan, shooting schedule, call sheets, key creatives are chosen, and scripts are drafted (word-to-word script⁴, outline⁵, format⁶). In the context of scripting, it can be influenced by the duration of the project, subject, budget, and few other core elements. All the groundworks are prepared, which is required to get the project started. The members or crew associated and involved in this stage are limited as compared to the other stages. It is a small group of creatives and executives who are associated with laying the foundation work for crafting the narration. Dealing with real affairs, a documentary project can only be a 'plan', one cannot be rigid as things can demand changes according to the events taking place and narration progresses. The more time dedicated to this phase, the clearer and communicative the project shall be towards its target audience.

Another essential decision taken in this stage is to finalize the types and formats of programs and productions: panel discussion, interview, PSA (Public Service Announcement), etc. This shall provide a clear idea about the shooting and editing style. To elaborately mention, to set the style of production like film tone, mood, narrative style, sound design, use of music, shooting location (outdoor/studio), graphics and special effects, camera angles, audio recording (mono/stereo and sync/non-sync), making a production calendar, editing style, and planning for dissemination of the finished project (marketing and distribution). To be precise, every minute to major aspects related to technical and non-technical arrangements is needed to be looked out for as there are no retakes while recording reality. In terms of the technical aspect, arranging number of cameras to use, recording and storing formats, types of mics, type of lighting, etc. need to be pre-arranged. Essentially, complete visualization of the project needs to be done at this stage but keeping an approach of acceptance of changes in the narrative. Reality cannot be scripted, controlled nor predicted: the filmmaker has to be ready for accepting the unexpected. Moreover, paper-works like official permission, gate-pass, transportation, shooting permit etc. are all needed to be worked upon. A roadmap from beginning till the end of the project is sketched

³ Green-lighting a film means the studio has approved the idea and will finance the project and next it can move into the production stage.

⁴ Word-for-Word: In a word-for-word script, every word spoken by the talent is written out. This type of script is used in dramas, music videos, lectures, and documentaries. When writing a word-for-word script, write the right hand column material first (audio and stage direction for performers). While writing the audio, visualize how the program will look. When you imagine a camera angle switch, move to the left column of the next line in the script and note "switch" in the video box. A change in camera angle can even occur in the middle of a sentence.

⁵ Outline: The Outline script usually has a word-for-word introduction and conclusion, but an outline for the body of the script. For example, the question for an interview is all scripted. For the initial draft, the scriptwriter does not know how the interviewee may respond and the answers cannot be scripted. The interviewee's response is noted in the audio column of the script as "the talent answers," "talent response," or a similar phrase.

⁶ Format: The format script is very brief and is used for the evening news panel discussions, talk shows, game shows, and other programs whose format does not change from episode to episode. The on-screen talent and lines may change, but the shots are predictable from a production point of view. The order of events in programs of this type is predetermined and the sequence of every episode is consistent.

down in this phase. The stage of pre-production will benefit the quality of the production. It is about the efficient use of the filmmaker time and channelising the crewmember's creativity and energy. Furthermore, if a filmmaker wishes to adopt any particular narrative style then one has to decide at this stage. Many aspects of filming the narration have to be directed in the pre-production stage to apply the style of city symphony⁷.

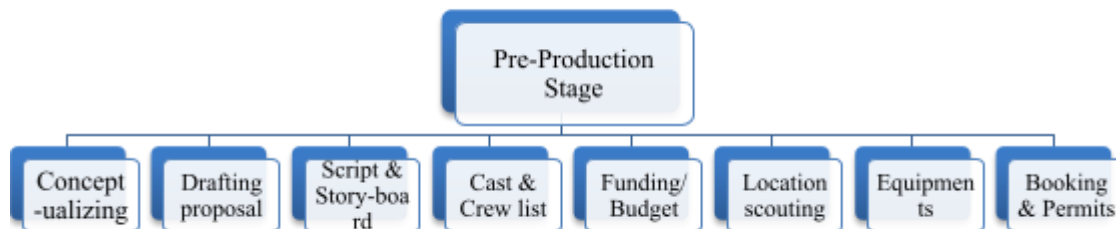


Chart 2. The stage of pre-production⁸

In terms of analyzing the technical changes in the production aspect, most of the above-mentioned elements have been converged with digitalization or have adapted the digital version. Handwritten scripts have alternative professional software like *StudioBinder*, *Celtx*, *WriterDuet*, *Highland*, *Final Draft*, *Fade In*, *Movie Magic Screenwriter*. Storyboarding is more prominently done on software like *Moviestorm*, *Frameforge*, *ShotPro(iSO)*, *Storyboard Pro*, *Storyboard Fountain*, *Storyboard Composer*, *Make Storyboard*, *Clip Studio Paint*, *TV Paint*, *Paper*. Softwares like *Shot Designer* and *Camera Storyboard* are used for planning visuals and the use of cameras. *PreProCloud* and *Movie Magic Budgeting* and *Movie Magic Scheduling* are considered the industry standard for managing the budget. *KitSplit*, *ShareGrid*, *LensRentals*, *Parachut* are options for getting equipment on rent. *LACasting*, *Backstage*, *Breakdown Services* are known for databases for crews and talents along with location details. Shooting schedules, crew lists, equipment lists, checklists, etc. are done on digital diaries and digital planners. Booking of location, permission, etc. can be done formally on e-application online instead of offline application on different venues and offices. Booking of studios, checking of outdoor locations, etc. are done online. Recce of locations can be replaced with a virtual tour. Moreover, the feedback contents (i.e. pictures, videos, reviews, ratings, etc.) shared on digital platforms like *Facebook* and *Instagram* are of real help as those are on 'self-experienced'. Bloggers and reviews of equipment have eased out to choose the pertinent equipment in terms of budget, quality, user experience, drawbacks, shelf-life, etc. Jack Picone rightly expressed, "The production and subsequent post-production processes of a movie can be shorter, longer, or about the same, but neither can exist without pre-production—the work that goes into a film before any images are recorded."

Importance of pre-production

- 🔗 This stage is the backbone of documentary film.
- 🔗 Feasibility of the project can be predetermined at this stage
- 🔗 Arrangements of every essential (technical & non-technical staff) are done
- 🔗 This is the only trial and error stage before going for the production stage

Production: The production stage is where the rubber hits the road, in short, it is the stage of collaboration of all ideas and equipment. Production is conducted according to the shooting schedule under the guidance of the director. The writer, director, producer, and other creative minds gradually see their expectations taking visual shapes on the 'reel'. The production of Indian documentary films is dated back to the pre-independence era. "In 1888 a short film of wrestlers, Pundalik Dada and Krishna Navi at Bombay's Hanging Gardens was filmed by Harish chandra Sakharam Bhatwadekar. This was the first recorded documentary film in India. In the 1930s, filmmakers D.G. Tendulkar, who had studied motion pictures in Moscow and Germany, and K.S. Hirelekar, who had studied culture films in Germany, brought the latest concepts of documentary film and laid the foundation of the documentary movement in India"⁹ (Bhuvan Lall, 2004). But the methods of producing

⁷ City-symphony: a city-symphony film is a form of cinepoetry being shot and edited in the style of a "symphony".

⁸ Chart: Author's creation

⁹ <https://www.documentary.org/feature/bollywood-long-rich-history-documentary-india>

documentaries have evolved a long way. “The nature of documentary films has expanded in the past 20 years from the cinema verite style introduced in the 1960s in which the use of portable camera and sound equipment allowed an intimate relationship between filmmaker and subject. The line blurs between documentary and narrative and some works are very personal, such as Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied* (1989) and *Black Is...Black Ain't* (1995), which mix expressive, poetic, and rhetorical elements and stresses subjectivities rather than historical materials”¹⁰ Wikipedia.

In the assessment of technical elements, “the arrival of sync sound did not instantly revolutionize documentaries, as it did fiction films, because early sound-recording equipment was extremely difficult to bring on location and because filmmakers were slow to make significant use of it in the studio. Instead, the first great revolution in documentaries came only in 1960, after lightweight sync-sound equipment was developed, to go with lightweight cameras. The result was cinema verite, or direct cinema, as exemplified by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer* and Robert Drew's *Primary*. Yet this revolution quickly led to a paradox. ... On the other hand, the power of lightweight sync-sound equipment and the relative ease of its use fostered a countervailing type of cinema, one that, in ostensibly observing and recording events objectively, rendered filmmakers even less visible and audible than before—the so-called fly-on-the-wall approach to documentary filmmaking”¹¹ (Brody, 2020). Earlier, the 16 mm spring-wound Bolex “H16” Reflex camera was a popular choice among professional productions. With the coming of financially affordable and technologically superior film apparatus, the old and outdated ‘look’ of the documentary started to get redefined in the 2000s. HD video and affordable digital single-lens reflex cameras (DSLRs) have not only made filmmaking easier and accessible but have also radically changed the materiality of the documentary form. Then some of the contemporary industry favorites came up, like *Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera 6K*, *Nikon Z6 II*, *Sony a7S III*, *Panasonic Lumix S1H*, *Canon EOS R5*, *Sony Alpha 1*, *Blackmagic URSA Mini Pro 12k*, *7 Canon C300 Mark III*, and *ARRI ALEXA Mini LF*. Tools like *Helios Sun and Moon Position Calculator*, *AJA DataCalc*, *Sun Seeker*, *pCam Film + Digital Pro* guides the cinematographers in learning about the current lighting situation, storage capacity, cinematographic corrections, etc. The affordable digital cameras and editing apps have encouraged contemporary documentary filmmakers.

The first documentary to take full advantage of this technical revolution was Martin Kunert and Eric Manes's *Voices of Iraq*¹² (2004), where 150 DV cameras were sent to Iraq during the war and passed out to Iraqis to record their activities. “Developments in technology like smaller and lighter cameras that used 16mm film stock (as opposed to its 35mm predecessor), and portable sync sound allowed for a much less obtrusive way of filming events on-site as they happened. The major film crews could be significantly downsized, editing became much more unnecessary and the hand-held cameras could ensure a closer, more authentic look at the subjects in question”¹³ (Nam, 2015). “The first great period of documentary filmmaking ran from 1960 to about 1980, when, relying on new equipment, filmmakers responded to—and advanced—social progress by fusing the personal and the political in their art (as in “Sympsiopsychotaxiplasm” and “Joyce at 34”). New video technology helped: it enabled filmmakers to record for longer periods without interruption and with even smaller crews”¹⁴ (Brody, 2020). “When lightweight digital video—on cameras and cell phones—became available, it sparked the recent and ongoing second revolution in documentary filmmaking, making the camera a virtual extension of the filmmaker's body and integrating filmmaking with daily and private life. The outpouring of astoundingly creative and personal documentaries in recent years is the result of those technological advances and of a renewed and deepened sense of the inseparability of the political and the personal, the breaking down of the barriers between the public and private realms. Documentary filmmakers are creating new forms that pursue political progress through (and even despite) the morass of new media”¹⁵ (Brody, 2020).

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_film

¹¹ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/sixty-two-films-that-shaped-the-art-of-documentary-filmmaking>

¹² *The Voices of Iraq*, gave birth to a new genre of film-making termed as “documentary swarm”. In this genre, the technique of creating audiovisual content for documentary films combines the work of the documentary filmmaker and the work of citizen journalism. The *Voices of Iraq* used this technique where 150 DV cameras were sent to Iraq during the war and used by Iraqis to film themselves.

¹³ <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/cinema-verite-vs-direct-cinema-an-introduction/>

¹⁴ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/sixty-two-films-that-shaped-the-art-of-documentary-filmmaking>

¹⁵ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/sixty-two-films-that-shaped-the-art-of-documentary-filmmaking>

Along with this affordable data and connectivity (network) has also made a huge contribution in the genre. Lucy Walker on this well expressed that “with portable cameras and affordable data and non-linear digital editing, I think this is a golden age of documentary filmmaking. These new technologies mean we can make complicated, beautifully crafted and cinematic films about real-life stories”. Also to remember that documentary films cannot be exactly scripted. Consequently, a documentary filmmaker should be prepared to accept a new narrative: basically, the content directs the filmmaker. Probabilities are there that the narrative might not meet up the expectation and sometimes the filmmaker might record the never expected angel of a narrative. In this regard, Hirokazu Kore-Eda said well that “When you make a documentary, you have to adapt to what reality imposes upon you”. To be at the right time with the right equipment crafts the right documentary narrative. In such a genre, the best is that the filmmaker should be active with core equipment, as the narration can progress at any moment. But, there are documentary projects based on certain topics where the subject is ‘silent’. In such topics, the filmmaker can be ‘rigid and loyal’ with the script. Documentary films on topics like tourism, monuments, architecture, art and craft, etc. can be have scripted narration. Also in certain projects, the narration is enacted, staged, or in another language, one can say it is recreated (recreation of the truth). In such cases, the filmmaker can adhere to the script which has been made to depict the exact incident which has happened, for instance, Errol Morris’s *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). But, despite winning several awards, this documentary has received criticism also as the critics felt that the re-enactment of truth has no place in the documentary format.

In the context of time consumed during the production stage, in case the film has any deadline to meet then the production has to adhere to the prescribed and scheduled time. On the other hand, without a deadline to meet, the filmmaker can stretch the production stage to years. To mention, Nikita Mikhalkov’s *Anna:6-18* (1993) was shot for a period of thirteen years, from 1980 to 1993. Steve James’s *Hoop Dreams* (1994) was originally planned for 30 minutes production, but eventually, it took five years of shooting and 250 hours of footage. Tony Kaye’s *Lake of Fire* (2006) shooting duration was for 16 years and the release was in black and white. Jeff Malmberg’s *Marwencol (Village of the Dolls)* (2010) production time was from 2006 to 2010 using a combination of DVCAM video and Super-8 film format. The synchronization of technical and non-technical aspects is a must for a successful project, as certain emotions, events, and reactions cannot be re-acted and re-recorded. This stage is crucial as any technical glitch, damage of content, or loss of data happens then it cannot be retrieved, as documentary films deal with truth and cannot be redirected. During this stage, capturing the subjects (A-roll) as well as the supporting visuals (B-roll), are essential. This stage requires constant vigilance on the use of equipment, management of time and crew, content recorded, and expenditure.

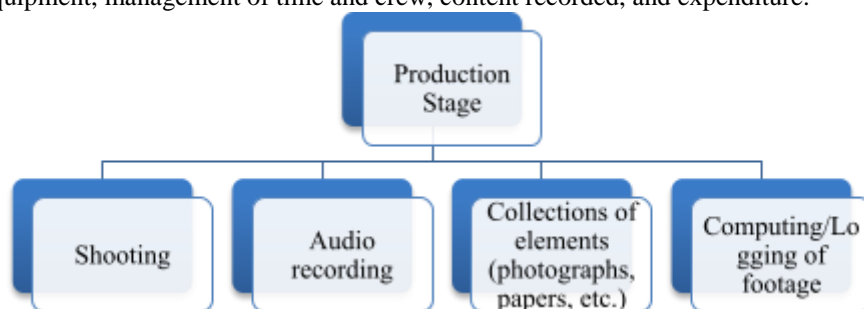


Chart 3. The stage of production¹⁶

Importance of production for making a documentary film

- 🔗 In this stage, the script comes to reality: reality meets the lens
- 🔗 Synchronization of all the technical and non-technical elements brings the finest output in this stage.
- 🔗 The production stage determines the quality of the narration as the content recorded at this stage shall make the film.
- 🔗 Recording adequate audio and visuals at this stage help the editor to draft out a fruitful narration.

Post-production: After the shooting is completed, the next stage is post-production, where raw footage is edited to build a concrete narration. This stage is commonly known as editing. “The first type of editing in the film was simple cutting: physically cutting the still images before planting them into the *Kinetograph*¹⁷. Physical cutting editing was first introduced into the editing world in 1895-1917, this type of editing was known as

¹⁶ Chart: Author’s creation

¹⁷ Kinetograph

"cutting and sticking" and was the first type of editing within the film industry"¹⁸ (Molyneux). *The Corbett-Fitzsimmons Fight* (1897) and *Nanook of the North* (1922) were the productions where the traditional means of editing were used. By 1970, "CMX systems were a huge boost within the editing industry as it gave editors much more freedom in what and how editors can edit. For the first time in editing history, editors could now locate a frame within seconds and go back and change something or create another edit using CMX systems. ... By the year 1975, the *ECS-1* was very much cherished by editors as it was a way of making editors working lives a lot more easier. The *ECS-1* increases the effect of films as there is less of a chance of mistakes happening, this is because the *ECS-1* uses dual joystick remotes resulting in the editing process becoming more accurate and easier to use. ... Editing Platforms such as *Adobe*, released in 1991 and created by Randy Ubillios, allowed students and other people to edit their own footage at home and even create their own short films. Since the release of home editing software such as *Adobe* in 1991, higher quality software has been introduced into the market industry such as *Final Cut Pro*, purchased by Apple in 1999, with Apple going on and improving this software in 2011 creating *Final Cut Pro X* and *FCPX*"¹⁹ (Molyneux).

Between the stage of production and post-production, logging²⁰ of the footage is done and tools like *Adobe Prelude* make the process of logging very straightforward. Also, it includes 'in and out' points and comments on each clip. It shall not be wrong to state that the actual arc of the film is given at this stage: the content drives the storyline. The content recorded has its rhythm and synchronical to be placed in a sequel to narrate a representation. It is said that the final narrative takes place in the post-production stage and not in the script. The script is around but possibilities are always there that the narration might completely reverse or a completely new representation might develop. This is the beauty of documentary film: it takes its own shape. But yes, there is a certain narration like historical documentary projects where the filmmaker has the scope to be loyal to the script and the editor has to follow the script, and edit the content: basically, here the script shapes the narration. In what manner the stage of post-production draws the graph of a film is well articulated by Martin Campbell when he said "I like pre-production and post the best. I don't like shooting at all. I find it grueling and tough, but I love post and the whole process of seeing the film finally come together. You start ironing out all the rough spots, and the really bad bits you just throw away. So from day one of post to the last day, you see nothing but improvements".

In terms of the procedure of post-production, it can begin while the shooting is still going on. To mention the trends, the footage is transferred and is reviewed by the editor along with the filmmaker. The raw dialogues are stitched together and a significant narration is woven. Multiple shots are assembled in the editing timeline so that it comes alive into a story form following the three-arc structure: the beginning, middle, and the end. Initially, the meaning of editing was to remove the unwanted content and bring the raw footage to a meaningful narration. But technological advancement has facilitated much more. Shots are weaved together to narrate a scene, and gradually into sequences to evoke emotional punch and have an impact on the audience with multiple graphical 'ornamentation'. In the contemporary technically advanced phase, the meaning of the editing process has expanded from its original sense. It has a wide palette of functions for implication: from color correction to noise deduction, from adding graphics to application of various transition styles, from sound designing to animation. Softwares like *Final Cut*, *Wipster*, *DaVinci Resolve*, *Adobe Premiere*, etc. are commonly used for editing purposes around the globe. Once the rough cut is developed into the assembly cut than further it is trimmed to the fine cut, subsequently follows the addition of music, mixing of sound, visual effects, adding of transitions (audio and video), subtitles are added (if required), etc. and the project is ready to move towards the master cut. The mood and tone of the documentary film are designed in this phase.

To a certain extent, production glitches can be managed (like color correction, reduction of noise, etc.). But at the same time, one needs to understand the possibility and amount of rectification that can be done, cause documentary film deals with veracity. Not to forget, every error in the production stage is not rectifiable in post-production. Moreover, if good editing can build a narration then bad editing can destroy a narration also. It has been aptly believed that a good 'cut' is not seen, and if the edits are visible then it is not a good edit. In the context of editing, Kosalalita Anggiyumna Ranangsari and Qiu Fuquan have rightly communicated that "Film editing in terms of its activities can be divided into 3 aspects, namely technique, skills, and art" (Dancyger, 2011:86)". But as the palettes of editing options are increasing, another question is also on the rise: is using artificial effects diluting the truth? Is this technical ornamentation required? Probably one can consider that it is the 'choice' of the filmmaker. Another aspect that the filmmaker should keep in mind in this stage is the language of the film. It is very essential that the editor is familiar with the language of the content and if not

¹⁸ <https://www.sutori.com/story/history-of-editing--4GFACxgMyEMWxhKVquX2GpEV>

¹⁹ <https://www.sutori.com/story/history-of-editing--4GFACxgMyEMWxhKVquX2GpEV>

²⁰ Logging

then a translator must be a part of the post-production stage. Subtitles become mandatory, especially if the project is designed for a miscellaneous audience.

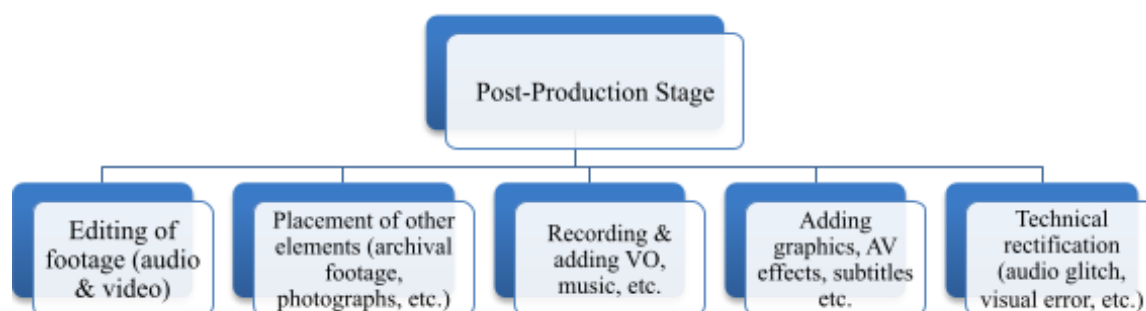


Chart 4. The stage of post-production²¹

Importance of post-production for making a documentary film

- ❧ The strength and meaning of the raw footage can be practically visualized (especially after placing it with other footage).
- ❧ It is in this stage that the shots are placed together in order to create expressive representation (either in a linear or non-linear manner).
- ❧ Technical errors/glitches (like color correction, etc.) can be rectified (to some extent) which ultimately helps in shaping and modifying the film.
- ❧ The final narration of the project takes shape in this stage when all the efforts of the three stages are combined together.

Marketing & Distribution

Hardly documentary projects are made with a profit motive. The narratives mostly deal with topics based on the need of the hour and/or on a subject that is appealing for the filmmaker. After the completion of the project, the priority is to make it available for its targeted audience and also to stretch the project's shelf-life. But, one cannot deny that the filmmaker deserved to get the basic return-on-investment. And for that, marketing & distribution is the final stage in a project for the producer/filmmaker. Without a rigorous and robust distribution strategy, the other stages of production shall be unrewarding. On the verge of analyzing change, this genre has undergone notable variation in this stage also. Tracing back to the 1980s, free from the compulsions of bureaucratic procedures and approvals, filmmakers could now distribute their films independently. "The VCR allowed mobility to VHS copies and helped in grassroots-level circulation. VHS copies could be easily distributed through informal and private networks by filmmakers who found no place in state-enabled production support and distribution systems"²² (Gulati, 2017). Over the time, hand-held home video cameras were welcomed, the 'rawness' of these videos represented actuality. Exploring and circulation of more self-stories began. Personalization of technology and expansion of screening platforms has increased the documentary narratives. And especially within India, during the early 1990s, the boom in satellite television led towards state broadcaster *Doordarshan's* two-nation terrestrial channels in India. These two channels were the only television networks where the screening of documentary films was happening. Subsequently, in August 1995 and 1998 launch of channels like the *Discovery Channel* and the *National Geographic* created further opportunities for documentary filmmakers in India, especially on wildlife and environment issues. With time, channels like *NDTV*, *DD National*, and *Lok Sabha TV* opened up broadcasting opportunities for commissioning as well as for several independent documentary projects. But still, the broadcasting of documentary projects was limited until the digital wave of the new media. It did bless the production as well as the marketing and distribution aspect of documentary production at a much larger scale.

Crowdfunding became more strong, the number of funding institutions and organizations grew. *An Insignificant Man* (2016) is a documentary project succeeded by crowdfunding. Strategies and platforms for marketing and distribution were on another level. Along with funding and producing, the marketing and distribution aspect of documentaries were also taken care of by prime organisations like *India Foundation for the Arts*, *Ford Foundations*, the Ministry of External Affairs, *Public Service Broadcasting Trust*, etc. The rapid growth of online platforms has built a turning point for these prime organizations also. The new media has

²¹ Chart: Author's creation

²² <https://www.sahapedia.org/the-radical-impulse-of-documentary-practice-india>

helped in introducing foreign funders and collaborators, especially with social media platforms like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, etc. and social media handles like *hashtag*, *tags* etc. Prevailing possibilities has grown much more strong, like avenues for international online distributions, online streaming and distribution, etc. Moreover, in terms of theatrical release, to mention documentary films like *Hubble* (2010), *Under the Sea* (2009), *Celluloid Man* (2012), *Gulabi Gang* (2014), *Katiyabaaz* (2013), *21 Years: Richard Linklater* (2014), *City of Gold* (2015), *The Vatican Museum* (2014), *He Named Me Malala* (2015), *CodeGirl* (2016), *Blue Planet II: One Ocean & the Deep* (2018) and more had managed for it.

Well-planned and strategic marketing (both online and offline) includes many approaches and elements like trailers/promos, posters, billboards, instagram accounts, facebook page, hashtag, social media handles, etc. Digital literacy has allowed people to use digital media to the fullest and connect at the fastest of time. Social media has been a boom in the context of promoting an idea, a concept, or a product. Distribution and marketing, both for fiction and non-fiction productions have been relying majorly on social media especially after the pandemic. Social media tools and facilities like the hashtag, Instagram stories, reels, highlights, tagging, etc. allow a major scope to multiple the reach of its targeted audience and also to trend within a very short time with very low financial investments. The sharable characteristic of one content in multiple platforms like Whatapp, YouTube etc. has encouraged producers to republish the same content in multiple platforms at the same time. This option of sharing or forwarding the content on different social media platforms like *Signal*, *Messenger*, etc. have made distribution and marketing much more effective. The availability of a smartphone along with the internet has made things much straightforward and hassle free especially for the digitally literate.

Focusing especially on the distribution aspect, distribution in big screens like *PVR*, broadcast in television networks like *BBC*, streaming in OTT platforms like *Netflix*, *Amazon Prime Video*, *Disney Hotstar* and collaboration with educational & research institutions like *TISS*, museums like *IGNCA*, or related organizations and NGOs like *CRY* has been successful for meeting the targeted audience. With the digital age and rapidly converging technologies, viewers are watching content in new and different ways on different 'screens'²³, denoting that the distribution phase is constantly evolving. Although distribution is the final stage of the project, the channel of distribution and marketing of the project is better to be planned in pre-production. "Companies such as *Quiver* and *Distribber* distributes film to digital platforms like *iTunes*, *Google Play*, *Netflix* and *Hulu* often for a flat rate. ... Platforms like *Vimeo On Demand* and *Bittorrent Now*, lets one sell their digital file directly to consumers"²⁴ (Studiobinder, 2018). In the current scenario, one of the flexibility that documentary projects have witnessed is the freedom for peaching for funds in various private and non-private organizations. Even there are platforms like *Docedge*, where they help from the scratch: conceptualization of theme, scripting, storyboard, technical assistance, the final output of the narrative till distribution. There are crowd-sourcing options that can be started at any phase of the production. The institutions and organizations are freely willing to pitch in at any stage of production: either in pre-production, production or post-production. Technology has facilitated marketing and distribution jobs to be done more effectively in the digital platforms as digital content works on the multiplier effect. Digital options have a much wider scope for marketing and distribution: online television, CDs & DVDs, digital streaming, etc. Distribution can also happen through exhibition, synergy, and convergence with production house and cooperates. In today's scenario, *Netflix* is one of the popular distributors. Projects like *Period. End of Sentence. 2018* has been successfully distributed on digital platforms.

Conclusion

Documentary filmmaking has traveled a long way and in this context, Richard Brody has well stated that "the idea of what a documentary is has shifted according to what has and hasn't – been possible during the past hundred years. But the artistic preoccupations of their creators have not changed radically in that time". Filmmakers have always been brave enough to keep their straightforward narration among their viewers woven with aesthetic sense and technological experimentation over time. As a form of communication, it has amused its limited viewers and has never stopped experimenting and giving up during the testing phase for its existence. Time again it has adapted to the various technological as well as non-technical changes that have come and have maintained its space of existence with embracing its limitations. Every area in the map has used this form to make its narrative reach the other parts of the world: some has used to express its agony and some to boost its

²³ Screens: Variation of screen size has evolved over time and in this context some of the aspects need to be kept in mind while releasing the master copy.

²⁴ <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/how-to-make-a-documentary/>

royal heritage, whereas some to record its struggle while some to make their poetic narrative immortal. But no part in the map have kept this form unadapted. With the 'miracle' growth of technology, the possibilities of easy and quick product dissemination have made this form more vital. This genre has grown as a form of art and also as a business as the availability of this genre has been at ease with e-platforms like online film festivals, websites, and other digital platforms. The air of rejection of injustice, the strength to voice up for the right, and the growing inquisitiveness to know more and see beyond what is just visible has given the lens many possibilities to capture numerous portraits, face, and their powerful emotions.

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