

Knowledge, Hierarchy and Decision-Making: Analysis of Documentary Filmmaking Practices in India

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Abstract : In his critique of Lefebvre's view that 'technological capacities' are class-dependent, Francois Hetman argues that technology today is participatory, allowing the entry of individuals from different levels of social stratification. As a result, we are entering into an era of technology operators or 'clerks' who become the new decision-makers because of the knowledge they possess of the use of technologies. In response to Hetman's thesis, this paper argues that knowledge of technology, while indeed providing a momentary space for decision-making, does not necessarily restructure social hierarchies. Through case studies presented from the world of Indian documentary filmmaking, this paper puts forth the view that Hetman's clerks, despite being technologically advanced, do not break into the filmmaking hierarchical order. This remains true even for a situation where technical knowledge rests most with those in the lowest rungs of the filmmaking ladder. Instead, technological knowledge provides the space for other kinds of relationships to evolve, such as those of 'trusting the technician' or 'admiration for the technician's work'. Furthermore, what continues to define documentary filmmaking hierarchy is conceptualization capacities of the practitioners, which are influenced by a similarity in socio-cultural backgrounds and film school training accessible primarily to the filmmakers instead of the technicians. Accordingly, the paper concludes with the argument that more than 'technological-capacities', it is 'conceptualization capacities' which are class-dependent, especially when we study the field of documentary filmmaking.

Keywords : documentary filmmaking, India, technology, knowledge, hierarchy

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