# Documentary Acts: An Interview with Madhusree Dutta

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The following interview is based on a series of conversations we have had with Madhusree Dutta over the past few years. We condensed the breadth and depth of these stimulating exchanges into five questions which we posed to her via email. The text below is thus both a way of reflecting upon as well as a starting point for further engagements with Dutta's practice and thinking.

*Bhaskar Sarkar and Nicole Wolf*

The trajectory of your work, from your first documentary film *I Live in Behrampada* (1993), via films such as *Memories of Fear* (1995) or *Scribbles on Akka* (2000) to your current curatorial practice for the ongoing large scale research and archival project *Cinema City*, which developed out of *7 Islands and a Metro* (2007), shows a constant search for creative practices and formal languages to respond to your current social and political terrain and the questions of urgency this calls forth. Your relation to the Indian women's movement and your negotiation with the issues and theoretical concerns coming from feminist thought appear to play a significant role here. This relation was even institutionalized via your co-founding of Majlis in 1990, with the feminist lawyer Flavia Agnes, which brought you close to the realm of rights and maybe even law. Particularly when one thinks of the close relationship (consensual or adversarial) between political documentary and the Indian nation state, what were the provocations arising from feminist politics and how did they inform your filmmaking in terms of what you constituted as the subjects of your film and how you would approach them? And we were wondering whether this also operates the opposite way, i.e., does a filmic approach to the telling of a matter of concern inform political thought and practice? *Memories of Fear* seems to be a crucial case in point and you also talk of *7 Islands and a Metro* as a subject that taught you about citizenship.

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### Madhusree Dutta

*Memories of Fear*, in a way, was born out of frustration with the limitation of institutionalized rights discourse. Around that time I was more actively involved with the women's movement. It was also the early years of Majlis that was founded with the mission statement: *Culture is a Right, Right as Culture*. Allow me to narrate a story that singularly inspired this film. An elderly woman came to Majlis with her daughter who was looking for respite from her abusive marriage. The mother only spoke Konkani, which is not one of the main languages used in Bombay. Fortunately Flavia's mother tongue is Konkani and so she could attend to the woman. The summary of her submission was that she raised her daughter in an ambience of fear as her own marriage was very abusive and she thought any lapse on her daughter's part would aggravate the situation. When the daughter grew up and stepped outside this claustrophobic environment, she got involved with the first man who came her way. She lacked the ability to evaluate a person who could be her life partner and the marriage turned out to be disastrous. The woman actually said, "I gave her fear as inheritance and that is why she could not cope with her own life. Punish me but please help her." That became the synopsis of the film. What struck me was that the woman could not communicate in any of the languages generally spoken in Bombay even after living there for 40 years: she had remained an outsider, effectively invisible to the city. So that encounter was the beginning of my interest in the relationship between invisibility, violence, and city space. At that time, I too was a new migrant to the city.

There was also a separation between law and rights. The mother's testimony could not be part of the daughter's legal case as memoirs are not considered as evidence. Yet, in some sense, the case could have been avoided altogether if the mother's testimony was brought into the public domain earlier; or if the mother had access to some kind of public life, the story could have been something else. Formulated differently, the legal cases might never be necessary if rights were practised as norm. At that point Flavia thought we needed a film more than legal petitions. This also corresponds with her own exercise of writing an autobiography (*My story… our story of rebuilding broken lives*). She wrote it in 1980 at the most energetic period of the women's movement in the country. But by the time Majlis began functioning in the early 1990s she was far removed from the "first person character" in the book. I witnessed how her relationship with the book changed to a resource material for mobilizing the spirit of the women who came to Majlis for legal help. The point to remember is that Flavia, one of the premier women's rights lawyers in the country, herself could not obtain a legal divorce on the ground of domestic violence. So for her, fighting a legal case is more of an exercise in articulating and expanding certain notions of rights in practice and not really about winning a case. Witnessing this had helped me form a position where rights discourse need not be umbilically yoked to the polemic of the nation-state.

Formally *Memories of Fear* needed a separation and an overlap between the woman's memory of her own life lived in fear and the legal case of domestic violence of her daughter. The scope of the project was similar to that of a conventional documentary: there was a burning issue, a need to create campaign material, testimonies from victims, debate over legal provisions, etc. But the aspect of "looking back" as reference to the testimony or even as a tool to access the legal case—which borders on a memoir and narrative text—seemed to need something else in terms of form. For the first time I attempted to place contrived narratives (stylized performances, embellished re-enactments) back to back with standard testimonies. What helped were the emergent intellectual formations challenging the homogeneity of the sources for research—Women's Studies, Subaltern Studies, and so on. Interestingly, these newer

disciplines too were not ready to problematize the centrality of testimony in a discourse, to develop its granularity. In other words, they were not ready to dilute the iconic status of testimonies as raw data. Criticality was to be developed *over* testimony but not *into* it. In theory the data was to be layered, analyzed, broken into fragments; but the contrived insertions into the testimonies themselves, that I tried in the film, were not taken kindly. They were criticized for mutilating the "protagonist's voice." The film flopped. Even in the limited circle of nonfiction film/political film/experimental film/critical art practice there is a concept of hit and flop, and this one flopped. After the mega success of *I Live in Behrampada* I was devastated by the poor showing of *Memories of Fear* and could not think of making another film for a long time. Still, in a way, one can trace back to this moment the beginning of my interest in citizenship issues beyond the realm of the nation-state, an interest that has evolved through the subsequent films until *7 Islands and a Metro* and the *Cinema City* project.

But after a decade my sense of despair around invisibility gets seriously challenged in *7 Islands and a Metro.* In the course of the film I have come across a whole lot of urban characters for whom invisibility is survival or even rewarding. The woman who plays body double for heroines in stunt films says, "We get ₹2000 to hide our faces and ₹1000 to show them." This is in reference to higher wages for appearing as a duplicate than playing an original side character. Invisibility is her livelihood (Image 1).



**Image 1.** Invisible labor of Bollywood stuntwoman Reshma: "What did the heroine have that I did not?"

**Source:** *7 Islands and a Metro*, directed by Madhusree Dutta.

## BS & NW

We have been particularly struck by the mutations of the entire "personal is political" ethos, invoked mainly in relation to home movies, diary, and essayistic films, and its recent intersections with what might once have been understood as "properly political" filmmaking with its larger social canvas. Contemporary documentary practices have clearly sought to complicate the underlying bourgeois public/private dichotomy. But this brings us to the question of register, of scale. Can we still speak of "big" films and "small"? In what sense: their budget, address and intended audience, circulation, popularity? Guggenheim and Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) or Patwardhan's *War and Peace* (2002) clearly conjure an epic canvas: each film deals with recognizably world-historical questions. Yet, *War and Peace* revels in profoundly intimate and poignant "small" moments. And one can think of films documenting personal odysseys and local experiences making it "big": *Born into Brothels* (Briski and Kauffman, 2004) or *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005), for instance. This question of scale and register, of form and intervention, is particularly relevant to your recent work. In *7 Islands and a Metro* you go looking for a megalopolis in terms of its lived reality: its textures, its rhythms, its energies. In many ways, its focus remains small-scale, local, its form is fragmentary, episodic. At the same time, its address is multi-scalar and multi-perspectival, its concerns (play between presence and absence, the visible and the invisible; futures of participatory politics and community life) are redoubtably epic.

## MD

True, the notion of big film/small film is challenged severely—by way of form, proclamation and out-reach. None of this actually has anything to do with the actual cost and shooting logistics. But histor-ically small people always made for big anthropological texts: tribes/natives are the case study subject and so are women. The current phase of reality shows and the celebration of surveillance is actually an iconization of the ordinary, the mundane. I would connect it with the recent interest among the European channels and film festivals in observational documentaries from India and similar countries. Suddenly it is all about seeing the protagonist in close quarters for the longest period of time—mostly aided by unob-trusive, small digital cameras. My discomfort is about this proclaimed "unobtrusiveness." Why do we have to be unobtrusive? Why does the protagonist need to become unmindful of the camera or at least become comfortable with the camera? Could we say that the protagonists must remain "small" in their screen appearances in order to be part of a larger world order/discourse/visual practice? Could this be a part of "codifying" native behavior in the classical anthropological term? I do not know for sure. Codification anyway remains a very serious issue in documentary practice. It is again connected with the issue of documentary being real. The quest for the real translates into a search for signifiers, and signi-fiers are essentially coded.

In this context, I want to share the shooting methodology of one sequence in *7 Islands and a Metro*. The two *chaiwallah*s on bicycles pedal through the deserted city in the night. We had placed one flycam on each of their bicycles and radio mikes on them. They were told of the value and the function of the camera and requested to take maximum care of the equipment. The image quality of those cameras was very distinct from the images of the camera that was with us while we were following them. There are a few points in the film where the same image is shown from both the cameras. My intention was to involve my audience in the curating practice of making a sequence out of two different camera images of the same scene. Simultaneously I facilitated my protagonists' performance for the camera—to their hearts' content—without my direct intervention. As they cycled around they knew they were actually facing a camera and so had the choice to create their own script of the self. In that sequence the younger vendor narrates a story of how his girlfriend back in the village committed suicide as the families were against their alliance because of caste incompatibility. It is not a revelation or some kind of investigative discovery. This tale has been told many times. It could very well be a popular script that he contributes to facilitate my task of making the film. I shall never know the truth and I am not interested in knowing it either. For me his decision to tell that story within the scope of our joint venture that night is important. I would like to recognize him as someone who collaborated in crafting the film. The *chaiwallah*s, for sure, were well aware all the time that they were being shot by a crew who fancy their lifestyle. In fact in the course of two nights that we worked together they changed their names thrice. I have never met them again. I am interested in the energy that comes out of a chance encounter: a little edginess, some mutual curiosity, little lies, a few revelations, a lot of discomfort, and so on. And not necessarily in the ease and comfort that he/she develops with me over time so as to reveal the "true self." This is a con-scious effort not to make films about small people but to facilitate their desires to appear tall, if they wish so and if they can pull it off. That is why I shot the bar dancers in their fineries and dancing paraphernalia even when they were out of work and most probably starving. This is how I would place the play between "small" and "tall" and would like to consider it as a discourse on citizenship: an intersection between the memory of the self and the fantasy of the self.

The other side of the coin is the practice of employing "small" people for "big" history. While shooting for my first film, *I Live in Behrampada*, I interviewed an 82-year-old woman. The film was on a controversial Muslim slum in the context of the anti-Muslim riots in 1992–1993. It turned out that she came to Bombay/Behrampada in 1948, in the middle of large-scale communal violence right after the India–Pakistan partition. My sense of textbook history prompted me to ask her all sorts of questions regarding partition, violence and homelessness as I was hoping to derive an overarching national narrative on communalism. But she insisted on only talking about making a home out of the deserted marshland, about carrying sand from faraway places to feed into the watery ground. My big history of the nation at civil war was clearly coming in the way of her small personal history of laying solid soil to make a home. It was truly a history lesson for me.

## BS & NW

Your work provides a very productive canvas to discuss the performance of the self within a documentary mode. As you say, it bypasses a critique of authenticity and goes straight to activating the space that a documentary screen can provide for multiple ways of imagining oneself. We would like to delve a bit deeper into your distinctive use of the theatrical. Working with actors and performance elements goes even further, cutting through the seduction of the real, the seduction of an aesthetic of the real—of violence, for example. A lot has been said about documentary realism and its strategies of authentication being very melodramatic, for instance in the foregrounding of a victim story, a narrative with chance events while delineating a clear dichotomy between good and bad or at least pointing toward a pre-decided destiny. And the idea that the spectator of a documentary film gains virtue from being told the truth: politics devolves into moralities. How would you locate the motivations for your deployment of theatrical and melodramatic tropes for a decisively different end? As you have used the friction of genres and disciplines since the mid-1990s with *Memories of Fear*, as recounted earlier, and you are now further experimenting and expanding it within *Cinema City*.

## MD

This reminds me of a story: Georges Méliès commented after he had attended one of the Lumière shows in the last years of the nineteenth century that the audience was mesmerized by the movement of the objects—dust, train, ship, waves—but was not interested in the moving people on screen. My reading of this is that the people in silent films appeared less real than they did in, say, operas and plays. But the mute objects moving provided the novelty in performance and the proof of the "real" as against the staged in theater. Since then we are suffering from this "dust flying" syndrome that has come to be the high classicism of documentary practice and over the years it became heavily codified. This practice of coded norms responds directly to the agenda of eventually arriving at a point of destiny—the purpose or rationale behind a documentary. Like melodrama, documentary has got burdened with the task of pedagogy, morale, evidence, revelations, and destiny. In both, there is a passion to harness a "fault factor" whereby meaning can be constructed out of the malfunctioning of human behavior.

My need to use theatricality in documentary stems from this—it is a device to de-iconize the "dust flying" by intercutting another, older iconic practice. In a way, it is an attempt to achieve iconoclastic transformation of the "real material" through the classical iconicity of contrived performances with the hope that they will counter each other. In *7 Islands and a Metro*, it is a series of soliloquies and in *Scribbles on Akka*, it is a series of impersonations. Both these are part of the repertoire of melodrama, the very basic characteristics of epic narratives, instances of frontal performance. As expected, these inter-ruptions have worked against the smooth viewing of the films. Some described it as overtly formalist, some accused it of excess and yet others considered it to signal a lack of disciplinary rigor. Interestingly, they are often read as an act of disrespect toward the historicity that the "real people" are expected to provide in a documentary. This means that a belief in the autonomy of the real people appearing in front of the camera and in the permanence of their testimonies is built into the system. This argument of autonomy on behalf of the interviewee for the sake of etching out a past in order to navigate the present, again, comes very close to the manual of melodrama where the interviewee is to be replaced by the pro-tagonist. This, clearly then, is a case of conflict between two practices of melodrama.

An audience once quipped: why put plastic flowers in an outdoor garden? My reply should have been: because the plastic flowers are not expected to fly as the dust would. On a serious note though, I would defend it as a strategic plac-ing of two tropes of classicism; and the sparks, read discomfort, that the joints between the two create should, at its best, dislodge the path to the destiny that is inherent in both practices and rather open into a maze of speculative journey, into memory and desire (Image 2).

To make a documentary/to direct a melodrama you need to know where you are to arrive at the end. Generally I work with a script based on field research and try not to research a subject while shooting *cinéma vérité*. But sometimes all these preparations go for a toss without warning. In *7 Islands and a Metro*, there is a sequence on the



**Image 2.** Actress Vibha Chibbar as "Ismat Chugtai," performing with projected layers of city images and an old map of Bombay.

**Source:** *7 Islands and a Metro*, directed by Madhusree Dutta.

territorial battle between the Koli women (the local fisher women) and the Bhaiyyas (the migrant male vendors). The background of the filming was that the migrant vendors were persecuted by the Shiv Sena, the xenophobic party in the state. I entered the arena on behalf of the male vendors on the premise of migrant rights. But as I began filming, it turned out to be a classic conflict between the organized sector (the Koli women who have got permits, infrastructure, and inheritance) and the unorganized sector (the migrant males who are unauthorized, footloose and can sell for cheaper prices). To make it more diffi-cult, the Koli women were gorgeous, militant, and cinematic, whereas the migrants were cunning, slip-pery, and uncinematic. The issues of gender, livelihood, and migration got unhinged and messed up. I had to painstakingly learn to leave the narrative unresolved and somehow create a space within the film to communicate that I do not know whose side to take. I had to undo the definitive structure of the

melodrama, and the insertion of fictional characters into the documentary material helped, to a great extent, to bring down the temperature generated by the "real" footage (Image 3).



**Image 3.** Actor Harish Khanna as "Sadat Hasan Manto".

**Source:** *7 Islands and a Metro*, directed by Madhusree Dutta.

## BS & NW

It has become something of a commonplace to say that filmmaking is inherently collaborative, and the best documentary films embody a deep, empathetic mutuality between filmmakers and their subjects. The trajectory of your work reveals a rather deliberate movement toward more explicitly collaborative projects; indeed, there seems to be a performative dimension to your evolution from a documentary "auteur" to an archivist, and now to a curator. How would you characterize this transformation? To what extent can this be related to your own background? In what ways is this shift a conscious response to new technologies of documentation, archiving, and dissemination? To emerging paradigms of materialist engagement, and of intervention in information networks and knowledge forms? Could this shift be read

as an index of your own evolving thinking about a media commons or a knowledge commons in the face of multiple forms of encroachment and enclosure—about the very potentialities of working, sharing, living *in common*?

## *MD*

This is a bit difficult to answer and may involve a certain amount of interim reading. Authorship is a complicated issue as it engages as much with the market as with human emotions. Of late, digital technology is often cited as the death knell on authorship. There is also a tendency to equate the erosion of authorship with the notion of public access. As if an orphan work or even industrial production will automatically become a "folk" artefact and come to exist in the public domain facilitated by digitality. Let me make one thing clear: I am not against authorship. Non-authorship is more like claiming a neutral position, which is ridiculous. But access is a contested issue and that makes the private–public dichotomy even more complicated in the present era. Does availability automatically make for access? This reminds me of an experience while curating the cultural component of the World Social Forum in 2004. The job entailed creating multiple and plural spaces within the forum to host myriad cultural practices. Though it was a logistical nightmare to host 3,000 artists of varied forms and registers from all over the world and yet maintain the autonomy of each work, it was conceptually not very difficult. But in the end, for the closing ceremony, we had to curate a single international show for the entire forum. The more we tried to be multicultural, multilayered and multilingual, the more we lost out on the primary participants in the forum—the working class of the city. It actually required many levels of negotiations, many layers of translations and also many points of refractions for an interface between the international and the local to take place. Our effort was only adequate for availability and not for access.

Earlier, we too tried to run a platform on the line of Creative Commons by uploading hundreds of hours of unedited video footage on the site pad.ma—public access digital media archive. This project was also initiated to facilitate the campaign for found footage filmmaking/research. A large part of the Majlis video archive on Bombay and Kashmir is still available to access and download on that site. But that exercise, though very rewarding in some sense, still left certain things unresolved. Although we had uploaded dense text annotations for each video, in the public domain they appeared orphaned, flattened, and incidental. Perhaps access does not necessarily translate into knowledge or even into communal property. We felt it needed more negotiations, more intermediaries. *Cinema City*, in a way, is the second phase of this exercise.

Here we were clear that in order to take account of the multiple locations, channels, economies, creative practices and imaginaries through which Bombay/Mumbai and the city's cinema negotiate and constantly re/produce each other, we needed multidisciplinary forms of research and similarly, diverse approaches to documenting, archiving, and ultimately disseminating. Hence, the project includes individual artists, filmmakers, theorists, designers, and architects working side by side and along with various institutional outfits: producing short films directed by debutant filmmakers with the national television channel Doordarshan and PSBT (Public Service Broadcast Trust); mapping the spaces of cinema production, post production and consumption with KRVIA (Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture); turning the maps into multimedia installations by collectives of visual artists and architects; mounting video installations with varied sources of inputs from researchers, designers, and

filmmakers; devising dissemination strategies through new software for an interactive archive and through pedagogical courses in collaboration with SNDT (Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey) Women's University and Max Mueller Bhavan, and so on. The practitioners write and the theorists produce art works; the students of the courses on City Narratives archive their respective neighbourhood as part of their dissertation; senior artists such as Pushpamala N., Atul Dodiya, Kausik Mukhopadhyay, Archana Hande work in reciprocation with younger artists; the art works build the archive and the archive, in turn, produces more art works and texts; the final publications get edited by a film historian (Kaushik Bhaumik), an architect (Rohan Shivkumar), and myself as a filmmaker (Image 4).



**Image 4.** "Cinema City" installation in Pune.
**Source:** Majlis.

Many more people, organizations and places are involved that I cannot name here due to lack of space. The foundational idea for this large scale project is really about blurring the binaries of disciplines by producing art works that are simultaneously research work, collated work, creative work, pedagogical work, critical work, and then also a process of archiving. So the authors are many but they are distinct and not faceless. We are attempting a methodology where each one's work exists independently and yet comes into existence only in relation to the works of many others. Let me cite an example: a project on producing date calendars on Cinema-City-Modernity for the twentieth century. For this, we first compiled a timeline from various sources—anecdotes, urban lore, documents, literature, development

records, architectural plans, import–export records, studio inventories, gallery history, political hand-outs, field research, etc. The text is then shared with a large number of visual artists, filmmakers, graphic designers, and architects: both practitioners and students. They speculate on the popular culture and sociology of a certain time and accordingly design a date calendar for a particular year—complete with images, copy text, and a market product attached to it. It involves around 50 artists and each of them works independently according to her own discipline, lineage, and tendency. Yet the works come alive only when collated together. As individual work they may not survive at all. Since each work is firmly anchored to a year that belonged to the previous century, it becomes a speculative exercise as well as an intervention into the notion of the original. It could be termed an act of impersonation in visual art practice or an experiment in "copy without original." There is a bit of a performative aspect in the endeavor though technically it is a pure visual art project. Such an ambition can be initiated only in collaboration with a large number of people who also remain distinct.

Yet this novelty of creating together or in relation to each other does not automatically translate into a knowledge commons, as that would also demand a "common" memory evolving out of a domain that appears to be an insinuation from the lived world. An exhibition space, however non-institutional, participatory, and radical, is unlikely to contribute to a common memory bank. We plan to print the calendars in tens of thousands with some rudimentary printing technology and insert them into the circuit of second hand artifacts (popularly known in Bombay as *Chor Bazaar*—market of thieves). This is our private little guerrilla strategy to destabilize the privatization and commodification of street art by confusing the authenticity of the works.

In terms of my personal development I would like to place the *Cinema City* project as a very logical expansion of my interest in documentary and its relationship with the performative—as discussed earlier. All the artists involved are protagonists and authors at the same time. They collate a memory of a time and space as much as they speculate and perform that. It is also a search for a space for materiality/tactility at the time of digitality without conforming to either slavery or antagonism toward technology (Image 5). Here again, we can refer back to the tropes of melodrama while engaging with the imputed death of materiality in cinema. Another story/urban lore: Sharmaji works out of a shack next to the mighty Western Express Highway in Bombay. He is a dealer of discarded filmprints. The 70-year-old salvages filmprints and celluloid wastes from the labs, archives, editing rooms and distributors' offices. He has been extracting pinches of silver out of the Black and White (B/W) prints; but that job has dried up due to paucity of B/W prints. Then he turns to processing the acetate based color prints into an ingredient for making bangles. But with the advent of polyester-based prints even that work gets extinct. The only thing the polyester prints are good for is to cut them into strips to make shirt collar stiffener. And he does that. Death is not final, there are always ghosts.

## BS & NW

Could you speak a bit about the institutional context—local, national, transnational—of your work? We are wondering about support, distribution, circulation, collaboration beyond Majlis: financing agencies, film festivals, documentary forums, individual filmmakers, and curators, etc.

**Image 5.** Sweatshop installation, part of Cinema City project. Against projections of iconic images of the Bombay citiscape, the small video inserts document forms of hidden labor that sustain the media industry.

**Source:** Majlis.

## MD

That is a vast subject. But for lack of space let us limit it to two broad issues.

The phenomenal cinema-mindedness of India poses a strange problem for critical practices in film-making. The problem is that in India the notion of cinema is infested with the notion of popular culture and the market. Though criticality is practised in other disciplines including film studies and cultural studies, its role in cinema production is shrinking by the day. The recent success of Bollywood in the global market and also in Western academia has made the situation worse. Hence, transnational spaces and alliances have become absolutely essential for the survival of critical practices in Indian cinema. Notwithstanding the big international film festivals getting euphoric about the novelty of Bollywood, there are still sites that showcase critical works from across the globe. But I often felt that on many occasions an imagination of India precedes the works from India. Perhaps India, with its sheer size, population, mythology, scandals, democracy, plurality, violence, poverty, and opulence, has become a victim of its own image. While the works of a Western avant-garde filmmaker would be evaluated in terms of a

nuanced knowledge about the artist's personal language, complex lineage, and tendencies, an Indian filmmaker would be expected to be an Indian filmmaker. However radical the framework might be, it is impossible to represent a country in a film. Though I can, to some extent, understand the programing difficulty that might have resulted in this situation. There is a lack of volume of work from India that can be categorized as avant-garde, in the way it is understood in the Western context. In India, the dichotomies of national/international and tradition/modernity, open out in a different pattern that is laced with issues of being indigenous, colonial, federal, and hybrid. But this may not be the space to discuss that.

However, there is an unsaid expectation from practitioners like us to be as distinct as, in another sense, Bollywood is. I am afraid Bollywood has become the new nation-state for us to conform to/ oppose/live off. I must mention here that the Berlinale—within its Forum Expanded section—was the first institution to host a show of the *Cinema City* project even when it was at its infancy. The day Shahrukh Khan was holding the world premier of his *My Name is Khan* (Johar, 2010), we too were inaugurating our show in Berlin. I wish such co-incidence were a norm rather than the exception.

Another curious development is the funding profile. With European television channels warming up to the international market that documentaries from India can help consolidate, the funding situation has eased up a bit. It has also effectively checked the hegemony of the NGOs and the development agencies in funding documentaries. But these commissioned works are mostly based on character profiles. This phenomenon corresponds well with the emergence of India as an economic giant as well as with the conception of India as one of the largest markets in the world. The imagination of "Incredible India" or "Shining India" needs to be laced with evidence and testimonies and so a certain kind of Indian documentaries (observational/character profile/community profile, etc.) becomes coveted. The brief from these European television channels is surprisingly similar to that of the Films Division, the government documentary wing that was founded in 1948 to assist the nation-making agenda.

At the other end of this is the emerging Indian corporate sector. With the weakening of the welfare state model and the increasing dominance of the market, the portfolios of higher education and culture are shifting to the domain of the latter. But the Indian bourgeoisie in the era of globalization is not strictly fashioned in the modernist modes of benevolence and nationalism. Even as a term like CSR (corporate social responsibility) is gaining currency, the funding inputs are broadly concentrated in the area of primary education, child welfare, civic amenities, etc. The concept of outreach is denominated similarly to the average Bollywood film: lowest intensity, largest number. While in the last couple of years many Indian multinational companies have donated generously to the coffers of high profile universities, museums and cultural centers in the UK and US, in India their contribution is largely limited to the sphere of basics. So the critical art practices remain a stray phenomenon—maybe even a kind of cult activity (Image 6).
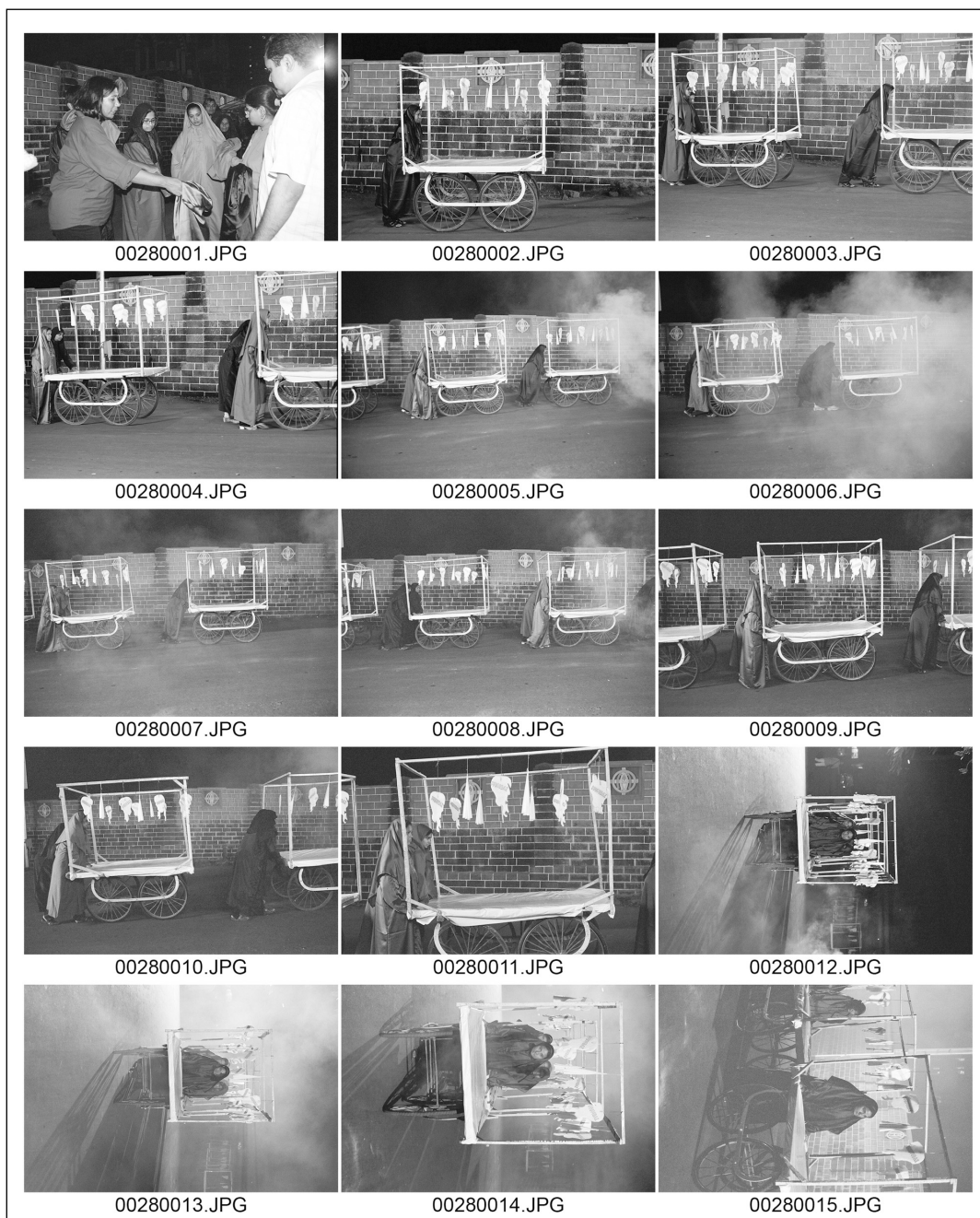
**Image 6.** Production stills for *7 Islands and a Metro.*

Courtesy Madhusree Dutta.

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