

A woman with dark hair and a nose ring is shown in profile, looking towards the right. In the background, a hand is holding a camera up to the light. The image is split by a white curved line that separates the woman's face from the text on the right.

Social Impact of Audio-visual Media

International Online Symposium

August 13th-14th, 2021

The Challenges of Evidencing Impact

Village Tales

Participatory filmmaking in rural India

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A group of approximately 12 women are standing in a line, facing the camera. They are dressed in traditional Indian attire, including sarees in various colors like green, red, orange, and pink. Several of the women are holding up their mobile phones, suggesting they are participating in a video recording or training session. The background is a plain, light-colored wall, and the lighting is bright, possibly from the sun. The overall scene conveys a sense of community and active participation in a project.

Sneha Praja Video Project

Velugu Society for Rural Development

Training 12 'village women' to be video reporters

Video Volunteers (US charity)

Funding from the World Bank

First film about problems of child marriage

Screenings throughout Andhra Pradesh..... paid screenings

Research Question

How effective is the use of participatory filmmaking in creating new knowledge about women's everyday lives in rural India?

- The notion of 'the everyday' (Highmore, 2011)
- Locating 'the third voice' (Myerhoff, 1986)
Films 'blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work...films where outsider and insider visions coalesce' (Ruby, 1991:62).



Research Methods

- Video diaries became 'video diary interviews' – a hybrid of the video diary and interview.
- The women had control over their own cameras and would switch them on and off when they had nothing more they wanted to say.
- They chose where to place their cameras so location became an important part of their representation.
- They were always aware of the camera recording them.
- Soliloquies rather than the other half of a conversation.



Research Findings:

This practice research highlighted the different gendered experiences of space. The women always asked their husbands for permission to leave the home. This clip of Vinodha was shot by one of the other village women. When I was there, her husband kept far away from me so I would not have captured this.

Research Findings:

In contrast, their husbands were often disappearing from the home and not letting their wives know where they had gone. In this clip, Parvati, empowered by the camera, questions her husband about where he has been.

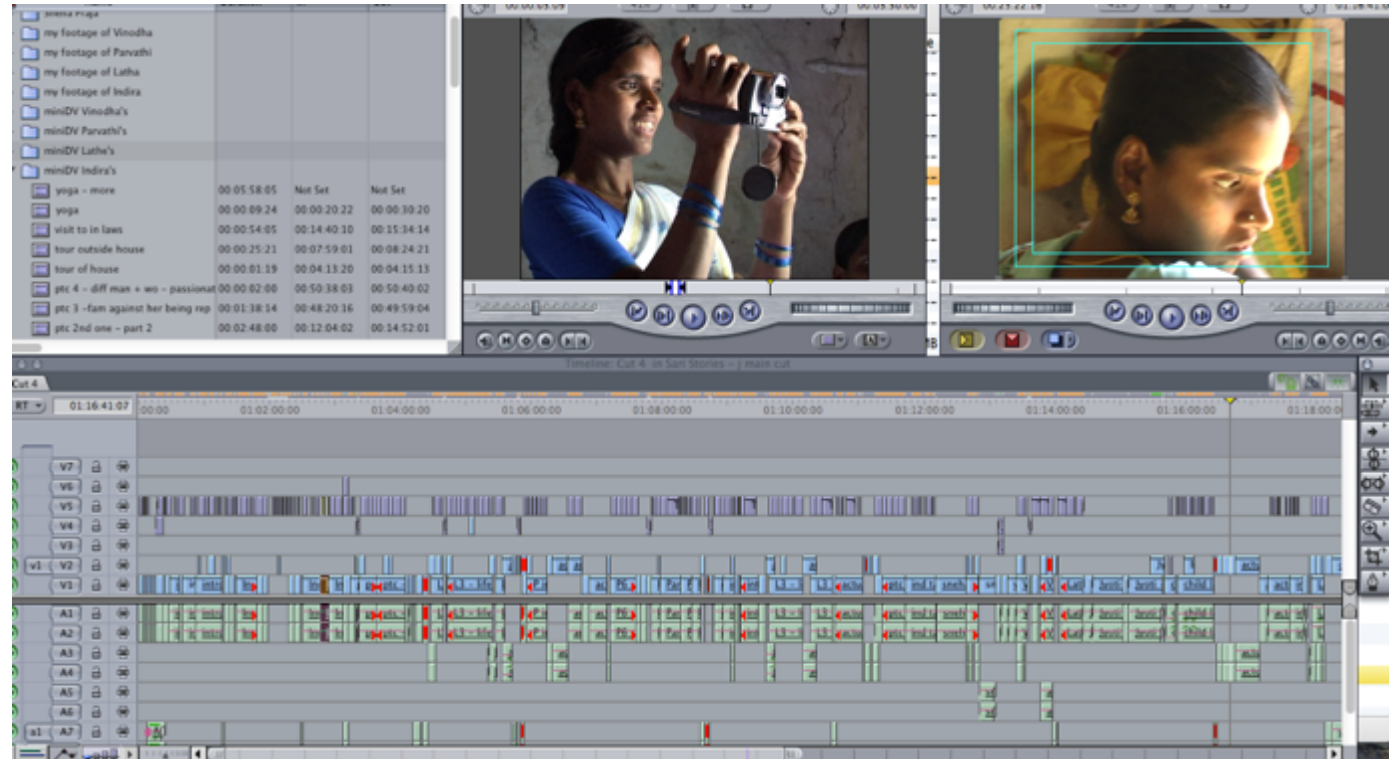
Research Findings:
When Parvati films her
son returning from
school and asks him
why he is late, he
challenges her
question. Gendered
attitudes and privilege
are established early.

Research Findings:
Throughout her filming,
Indira uses her camera
to question her husband
about his attitude to her
being part of the local
government project. She
stops after she manages
to get him to finally
admit to his reticence
and that she first needs
to take care of the
house.

Research Findings:

The women often chose to film their children doing homework thus reinforcing their voiced opinions on the importance of education. This clip ends with Parvati talking about the death of one of her children. She chose to reveal this when, in a 'video diary interview', I asked her whether there is anything that makes her sad. Parvathi was in charge of turning the camera on and off and conscious of its presence throughout.

Village Tales aimed to give a 'snapshot' of the everyday, inevitably partial and subjective and embracing the subjectivities of all the different camera operators, including myself, who chose to point the camera in a particular direction at a particular time.



Outputs

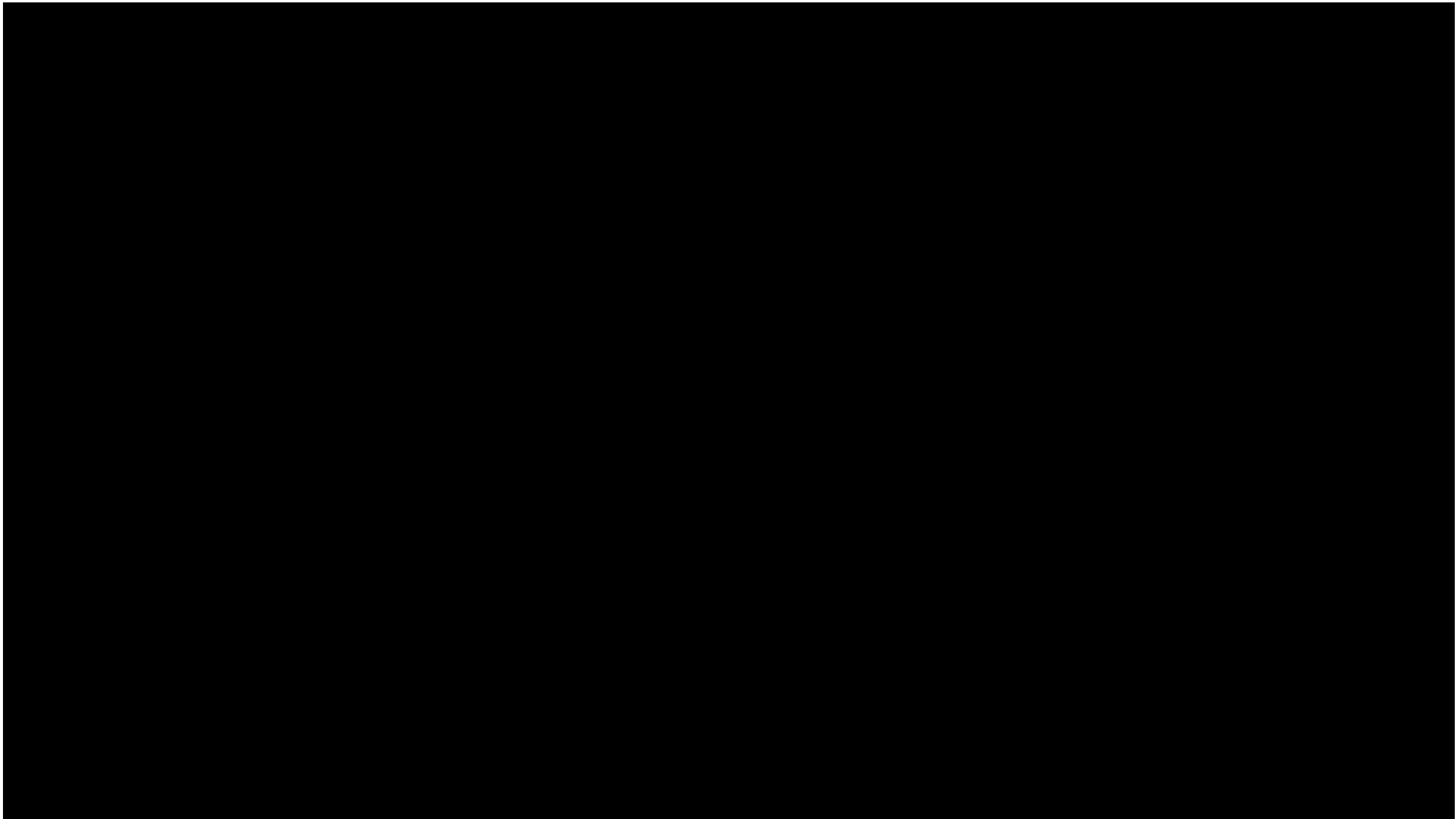
- Film - *Village Tales* 23'. UK/India.
- An exploration of the potential of participatory documentary filmmaking in rural India.
- <https://vimeo.com/173036861>
- The research methodology and findings are published in two journal articles:
 - Sudbury, S. 2016. 'Locating a third voice: participatory filmmaking and the everyday in rural India' In *The Journal of Media Practice*, 17 (2-3), pp. 213-231.
 - Sudbury, S. 2018. 'Visualising the everyday: participatory filmmaking in rural India' In *Visual Ethnography*, Vol 7, No.2, pp. 6-23.



Contribution to the field

- This video diary interview technique is “a radically new aesthetic form, driven by a profoundly ethical practice.” (Highmore, 2015).
- ‘Village Tales’ gives “priority to the voice of the protagonists, using their footage and emphasizing the issues that are important for them.” Cubero, C.A. *The Journal of Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia*, pp. 198-199.
- “No emotive soundtrack or slow motion, simply the dust, sunlight and birdsong with a palpable evocation of traditions shifting. This project is a brilliant example of the edifying power of research through film”, AHRC Awards jury, Winner of the AHRC Research in Film Award for Innovation 2016.





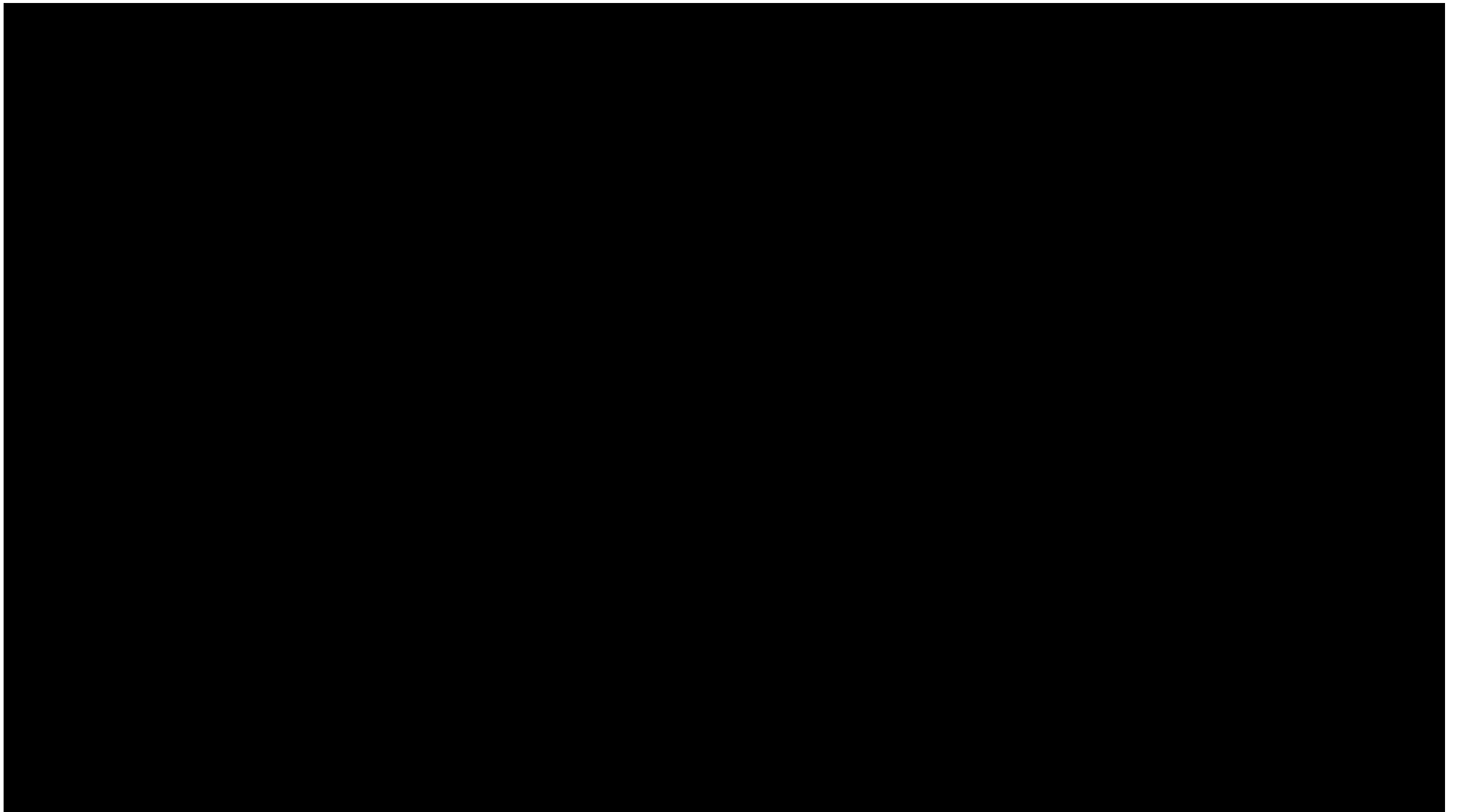
Societal impact across India

Self-help groups and charities across India are using the film to help empower and develop women in other village communities. Screenings of *Village Tales* have impacted both women and men in these villages.

“The women (in this film) speak out about the same problems that I struggle with and this makes me feel stronger. I can now go forward with more confidence.”

Screening at Thirunandikarai village, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, 10.05.18






The creative role of research

Understanding research impact in the creative
and cultural sector



What were the limitations of the evaluation methods and evidence used to describe impact in REF 2014?

- The narrative approach to describing reach prevented an analysis of the data gathered on anything but a thematic basis due to the inconsistency of the quantitative measures used.
- Information about reach offers little indication of the demographics represented by quantitative measures; this is essential if we are to fully grasp the public benefit of research.
- The case studies also offer limited evidence of how researcher engagement has contributed to wider economic activity within the sector: researchers seemed reluctant to use financial indicators if there was not a clear and causal link between the research and income generation, even in cases where wider economic activity was likely to have occurred.
- The evaluation of significance was predominantly anchored in the immediate period after exposure, typically communicating an endorsement or a change in opinion for the short term.
- The most effective examples of change confirm that, even within the constraints of the REF's reporting guidelines, evaluation is not something that occurs at a set point at the end of a project, but is a reflexive process that is more usefully set in motion at the beginning of a project, and extends long beyond its end.

A close-up photograph of a woman's face in profile, looking towards the right. She has a nose ring and is looking at a camera held up by a hand. The camera is a small, black, handheld device. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with other people.

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