

Five women and a camera

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THE girls at the Santacruz Municipal School have neither ever faced a camera nor ever told of their travails on the play-field amidst dominating boys. The women preparing mid-day meals for school children are certainly not a camera savvy bunch. Nor are the residents of the Chawl Nehru Nagar in Juhu. However, five women, who are wielding cameras and sound equipment for the first time, have decided to train their camera on these subjects.

"This is an outcome of an eight-week Script to Screen training programme in filmmaking for Vacha's community-based facilitators, held at the Comet Media Foundation," says Nishchint Hora of Vacha, a resource centre for women and girls. The films were screened on International Women's Day at SNTD recently. They can also be viewed on the Internet at commons.wikimedia.com

Script writer and film-maker Smriti Nevatia spent weeks with the young women, Medhavinee Namjoshi, Anikta Tambe, Sheetal Bhujbal, Bela Patel and Snehal Phadakale.

Nevatia showed the women films and work-shopped with them through script writing exercises. "In the second round, we discussed the importance of planning. My whole attempt was to distinguish between coverage and telling a story cinematically.

I asked them to look for human moments and characters. They understood this very well, even though we were doing documentary," says Nevatia. She was pleased that Dziga Vertov's documentary, *Man With A Movie Camera*, inspired Bhujbal to make *A Day With Sound*, an abstract about the sounds surrounding a woman who moves from her home to the noisy city outside.

Chandita Mukherjee, a media maker and teacher who is an FTII alumna, was overseeing the project and helped do the subtitling for the film. M Shanthi, a cinematographer and FTII alumna, worked with the women on handling the camera.

Khushboo Agarwal helped them on the edit, discerning the vast footage they



(Top) Vacha team being trained by cameraperson M Shanthi. (Right) A still from *Khel Khel Mein/It's All in the Game*, a film by Medhavinee Namjoshi.

had shot. One had to help them to see their footage objectively and cut their 'darling shots'. Ravi Dev Singh did the audiography.

"It was wonderful to finally get behind the camera and demystify the aura built around technology," says Namjoshi whose film *Khel Khel Mein* dealt with school girls in the playground. Initially the women, who are all teachers and social workers at Vacha, wanted to 'just learn the technicalities' of operating the camera.

"They said they were not interested in becoming filmmakers to begin with but at the end they were happy with the films they had made. This is a chance in a million and they all rose to

the challenge and made shorts on things that concerned them," says Mukherjee.

The women are now expected to train the young girls to operate a movie camera and document their own lives. "I hope they can transfer this enthusiasm on to the girls," adds Mukherjee.

Phadakale's film that captured the residents of Nehru Nagar reacting to living near Amitabh Bachchan, was one of the most nuanced films. One of the residents reacted to Phadakale's question "Where was Bachchan during the floods?" by saying: "In all his films he fights for the poor but in real life we do not even get to see him. One cannot expect such things from a movie star."



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