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Project 1

Learning to Make a Documentary Film

With,

**CAMERA
AND SHORTS**



Abstract

The aim of the project was to handle the pre production for a documentary film on the theme of "Autowallahs in Mumbai".

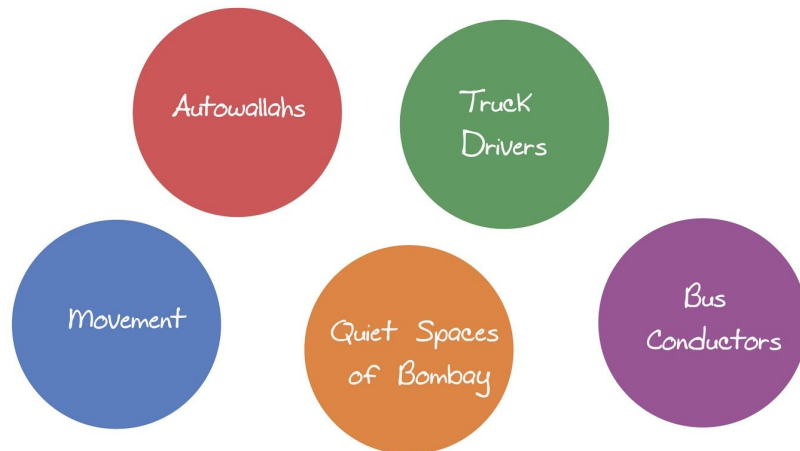
My task was to hunt for interesting characters that capture the essence of issues and problems faced by this demographic, and extract interesting stories from the people selected.

The aim of the project was to tell the untold story of a group of immigrants in Mumbai who are visible to everyone and are an essential part of the transportation sector, but are rarely acknowledged for their efforts and sacrifices.

Choosing a Theme

Theme Selection

The first week was spent in choosing the theme across various interests of the team at Camera n Shorts. Some of them were:



Autowallahs of Mumbai

Zeroing on the theme of exploring auto drivers on Mumbai, we came up with the following themes:



Selecting and Eliminating topics:

Ola & Uber:

- Extensive Quantitative research required.
- The dataset was really small: 42/400000(approx)
- Even if you get it what exactly would you want to show?
- Would have turned journalistic

Decorating Autos:

- Most are really bland since decoration is expensive.
- Half are on rent, so the driver is not really the owner.

Mapping Mumbai through Auto:

- Too less time.
- Too ambitious.

Building a Narrative

Essentials of a Story

- An Interesting Character
- A Conflict
- The Incidents that are Reasons for that Conflict
- Deconstruction of the Character through the Narrative

Finding an Interesting Character

- A fancy looking auto might have an interesting owner.
- Auto drivers in position of power in Auto Unions.
- A talented/eccentric auto driver.
- A female auto driver.

A Few Characters

Ramesh, 32 years, Allahabad

- He got his auto decorated by this kickstarter funded venture called TAXI Fabric.
- They decorate taxis and autos for free in order to improve the “mobile aesthetics” of Mumbai.
- The graphic designs are quirky, chic, and often beyond the understanding of the cab or auto drivers.



Deepak, 28 years, Haryana

- Spent 5 Lakhs on his auto including the decoration.
- Got original metallic labels of vintage cars to stick across the auto.
- Had a transparent hood.



Bal Singh, 52 years, Banaras

- Is a senior member of the auto union.
- Been driving since over two decades.
- Is supremely pissed with Ola and Uber.
- Been holding meetings to get around around the menace.



Nisha Shinde, 29 years, Mumbai

- Been driving since 8 years, and is perhaps the longest driving female auto driver.
- Is very passionate about her profession.
- Doesn't feel intimidated by a male dominated profession.
- Is a single mother ,but is not legally separated from her husband.



Vijaya, 42 years, Mumbai

- Been driving since two years.
- Finds housekeeping kind of jobs against her self respect.
- Been a cab driver for a private travel company.
- Driving an auto gives her flexibility.



So many of them..

The city has over 1.2 lakh autos, with nearly two lakh auto drivers, working across two shifts. This is a lot in comparison to Delhi, that has 80,000 autos, and bangalore, that has some 70,000 autos.



Finding a Character

Among the 20+ auto drivers i met, i was fascinated by the two female auto drivers the most. I decided to enquire more about them.

The method i adopted was essentially like this:



Nisha's Interview



Why ride an auto? – Because she likes to ride an auto. She learnt how to ride a bike when she was 19, and wanted to earn a living riding something on the roads.

Did she face any restrictions from her family? - No, she had a very supportive family. She was the youngest of her four siblings and was never stopped from doing anything.

Who taught her how to drive an auto? - Her cousin, she learnt to drive it in a day. She already knew how to ride a bike by then.

Did she face any discrimination when she started? - Yeah, for a couple of years, but she filed complaints against the men who harassed her couple of times. No problems followed after that.

Who were the ones who harassed her? – Oh they were the fellow auto drivers essentially. No passenger ever harassed her.

Is she part of any unions? - She used to be, but then there are no real benefits of being part of unions so she withdrew.

Does she ever face any troubles finding passengers? - No, never. In fact it is often “ladies first” when it comes to sitting in an auto. She actually gets preferential treatment.

Did she ever teach any other women how to ride an auto? - Yeah numerous times she tried. But to no avail. Women just don't want to step out.

Did her husband ever have problems with her driving an auto? - No, she was already driving an auto for years before they got married. So why would he object later.

How does she manage home and kids? - She has a maid who cooks for her. She leaves her 18 months old daughter at the day care.

Vijaya's Interview



She begins with complaining about how there are no toilets and that she is down. She also complains about how there are no ladies queue while filling up CNG at the gas stations. She has a plethora of complaints and an equal number of stories to discuss.

Her reason for a separate queue for CNG is that the males get their breakfasts fixed and housework done by their wives. Whereas, she has to handle all that in her house and then come to get her refill done. Thus a special queue for women (in her case there is just one woman at the gas station at any point of time) is a reasonable demand.

She begins by telling me about how she used to drive a 4-wheeler, starting from 2009. She switched to riding an auto just two years ago, as autos do not require her to go out of station, unlike her career as a 4-wheeler driver in a private cab service company.

She told about how there is so much discrimination among male autowallahs. She has faced a questioning attitude even from her passengers a lot of times. She told how she has had auto races with other auto drivers, and how she sometimes ignore, while other times teaches them a lesson by beating them at it. She was a person with a well defined self image.

On being asked, why auto and not some other work, she says that she does not want to wash utensils of others and is very much against the idea of housekeeping as a career option for herself. Riding an auto boosts her self-respect. She gave a rather lengthy explanation on it that how outsiders take away the natives' jobs and how the natives are left with very options.

She talks about how she is crusading against the idea of orange hoods for lady auto drivers. Her logic is that she does not want to stand out because it might affect the number of passengers approaching her. Her other reason is that if she ever wants to give the auto on rent, she won't be able to rent it out to a male driver. Her reasons seem legit, though the first reason reveals a deep sense of insecurity she feels as a female auto driver.

How I find her?

Family
Oriented

Fighter

Crusader

Demanding

I finalised Nisha as my character for the film. The project then became about telling her story as effective as possible. Given, the kind of eccentricity she had as a professional woman, the story was potentially loaded with feminism and breaking stereotypes.

The approach:

- Research about Storytelling
- Learn the Essentials of a Good Narrative (at least theoretically)
- Write your opinions
- Discuss and Dismiss Misconceptions
- Repeat

The process involved me to get my own understanding of the issue. Women in unconventional professions undergo a lot of hardships and are also examples of shattering stereotypes. More often, they can shed some light on inventive ways to go past their limitations and sometimes, beat the men at the profession.

I too, learnt a lot from them and penned my thoughts on the same for a clear and coherent vision on feminism and femininity.

My Write-ups

The Art of Playing a Victim and a Survivor

It is pretty evident that the auto rickshaw community is male dominated and predominantly sexist. They aren't used to watching females driving. Driving has a sense of control about it. How many men are ready to witness women taking control?

Coming to the scenario at home, a working woman is not any less of a housewife.

I find it amusing how Nisha, despite the constant bullying and gossiping by her neighbours, gives zero regard to not being able to do housework. She has got a maid to do all that and a babysitter for her daughter.

I find it more amusing how Vijaya is ready to fight sexism at work but has conveniently surrendered to sexism at her home. She fixes meals for her family and has a complete charge and responsibility of her household.

The fact that the former is so unapologetic about her life, and is so gender neutral in her opinions about her work, is a testimony to improving gender representation in male dominated professions.

The fact that the latter is so demanding of "equal" rights at the workplace represents the current feminist wave, no storm, which breaks the internet every two weeks.

This fortifies the age old argument that women are often their worst enemies. They would seek validation from women and that is why they are victims. A working and empowered woman is actually NOT seeking validation from men. If she were, she would be at home. Right? Maybe women give way too much importance to the opinions of women. They know the psyche of their gender, they know where they would be judged, they even know how to appease, and eventually in the process become victims of their own social setups.

How casually we define suitable professions for women. It is okay for women to be working in offices and behind desks where their colleagues and the people they deal with are consistent. But a profession like driving a cab or a rickshaw, or waiting tables in restaurants is a man's profession. Women aren't expected to be dealing with all sorts of people the whole day. We expect women to be safe, and their professions must have a sense of predictability. We would always want to define a suitable profession for our women.

The mentality is reflected across all social strata. The timings, the number of hours, the sufficient amount of money, and the time they should be spending with their families.

The questions are:

Who is being more reasonable here?

Are there any differences between the two kinds of working women? What are the parallels?

Is playing a victim a reasonable way of dealing with sexism at work?

Is ignoring the nonsense offered to you at work a healthy way of evading sexism at work?

Is the urge to become an all-rounder making women dissatisfied at work? They never seem to complain at home. At least in this social strata.

And after all, where does one start waging a war against sexism?

Final step before beginning production

The process of pre production required for the final preparation for the production. The steps included:

- Learn how to frame relevant questions
- Discuss what questions are vital, and how to extract the most
- Frame questions that ask how and why rather than just what (avoid objectivity basically)
- Go back to the interviewee and start your work

Intentions

A Comparison Between the Two Women

Different Versions of Feminism

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Learning to frame relevant questions

- Map your character's life.
- Flag all the major events in their life.
- Point out the cause and effect of each event.
- Build questions on the basis of those events.
Make sure they are subjective in nature.

Building the Character's Timeline

The questions that are intended to be answered through her timeline, that is, her life's journey are:

- Why driving an auto?
- How supportive was her family?
- Did she ever face sexism?
- What about her husband?
- What about her neighbors and sister?
- Does she feel she is missing out on her daughter?
- Her favorite memory of her passengers?
- Her tryst with the police?



Building the Narrative

Nisha

Did she make those choices?

Or was she left with her conditions and chose to be happy?

Somehow, her life does not seem to be a war, unlike other working women.

Or at least, that is how she projects her life to be. Is she smiling on the face of adversity?

Or did she totally dodge adversity?

Or was she lucky enough to not face an adversity at all?

What is really her equation with her husband?

What is to follow

The Shooting

Post Production Scripting

The editing

Thank You.

