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Theorising 21st Century Indian Political Documentary Films: *AFSPA, 1958* as an Epistephilic Narrative

Vellikkeel Raghavan

Haobam Paban Kumar's AFSPA, 1958 chronicles political upheavals in Manipur and its violent implications. The docufilm registers a different idea of India in the 21st century, assertively demanding from the nation a reformulation of its strategies through political dialogues, not through repressive state apparatuses.



AFSPA, 1958

Documentary films are generally appreciated and critically approached as epistephilic narratives that foster the desire for and the pleasure in knowing, or "epistephilia", as described by Bill Nichols (Saunders 2010: 17), theoretically separating them from scopophilic, fictional cinematic narratives. In such an interpretative context, an academic exploration of political documentary films on contemporary India would definitely yield an idea of the 21st century political India. This is the basic conceptual premise of the present paper. From 2001 to 2013, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, an official organ of the Government of India, has conferred

the Best Non-Feature Film Awards on 13 films, most of them belonging to the various subgenres of non-fiction. These films could be tentatively classified under the following four categories with respect to their representation of the imagined community called India.

The first category of these films can be labelled as contemporary India through her People. The films belonging to this group are: *Sonal* (2001) by Prakash Jha; *Narayan Gangaram Surve* (2002) by Arun Khopkar; *The Postman* (2009) by B. Manohar, and *Rangbhoomi* (2013) by Kamal Swaroop. The second category represents contemporary India through her Places: *Journeyings and Conversations* (2004) by Arvind Sinha and *Riding Solo on the Top of the World* (2005) by Gaurav Jani. The third group depicts contemporary India through her Problems: *Bishar Blues* (2006) Amitabh Chakraborty; *Germ* (2010) Snehal R. Nair, and *We Play On* (2011) by Pramod Purswane. The last category is those non-fiction films which are making cinematic statements on contemporary India through her Politics: *Jung aur Aman* (2003) by Anand Patwardhan; *Hope Dies Last in War* (2007) by Supriyo Sen; *AFSPA 1958* (2008) by Haobam Paban Kumar, and *Shepherds of Paradise* (2012) by Raja Shabir Khan.