



Social change

# through films

THE AUTHOR IS A FILM-MAKER WHO HAS CHOSEN TO HELP OTHERS USE

THE MEDIUM FOR HIGHLIGHTING THEIR GOALS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

by **Madhusudan Agrawal**

**M**y personal journey began with my graduation from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, California. I had a major in motion pictures and television. While I was there, something was incomplete – there was emptiness, and I felt the desire to come back and find my stories.

With a backpack and a donated camera, I returned to India and started travelling. I stayed with Himalayan yogis and mod-

ern teachers, but the turning point came when I was making a film on one of the last active disciples of Mahatma Gandhi, Dwarko Sundaraniji.

He runs a school for the children of an ‘untouchable’ caste in rural Bihar. I stayed with him for two months and while leaving I touched his feet and asked his permission to go. That is when he asked me, “Ok Madhu, what are you going to do now?” I did not understand for a moment, and

then he said, "Find your truth through whatever you do. Filmmaking is just an instrument, realise your true goal." This blessing later gave birth to MAM, founded on the principle of Gandhiji's well-known saying, "Be the change you want to see in the world."

In 2006 *Time* magazine's person of the year was 'You'. Now our effort was to harness this energy and direct it towards creating engaging cinema and sensitive film-makers.

**Our mission:**

- Harness the power of technology, Internet, YouTube and individual potential.
- Engage youth, students, and corporates in creating inspiring media
- Social branding: invite corporates to participate in creating social cinema with commercial value, as part of their CSR programme. We rolled our sleeves and our social experiment began.

**Our mantra:** make a film; make a difference. Our first effort: Genesis film project, a film competition held in Mumbai where we invited 101 film-makers to make films for 101 NGOs in just 101 hours. It was an instant hit, with more than 300 film-makers participating. We got 90 films on time, which motivated us to do it every year.

Then we launched a project called 'She Creates', where we invited 25 girls from various backgrounds, from Dharavi slums, to children rescued from streets to some from public schools. We brought them together, gave them a film workshop and in just 21 days these children made some heartwarming films on women's issues, gender inequality and female foeticide. The best part, these girls were just 10-15 years old and most of them were without any formal education.

These girls have now become citizen journalists. They have formed a video community within their own organisation and make short videos about local stories and share it among the community. We hired one girl as a teacher who goes back and helps create various other video commu-

nities. One story which reflected the immediate impact of this was of Salma, who wasn't getting her ration card without a bribe, but when she went to the office with a video camera and questioned the officer in charge, within one week she had her card. These projects were an awakening for us, we truly realised the power of videos and power of One.

Our next step is to create a ripple effect, to engage students, corporates and individuals, to inspire them to create participatory media and video communities throughout India. The aim is to give organisations their own voice, and tell their stories through videos, which would then be shown globally through internet television.

I recently met the remarkable Prof Anil Gupta from IIM Ahmedabad, who asked me, "Madhu, what is your dream?" Before I could reply, he said, "What's your dream for the next 200 years, what's your dream for the next 2000 years? Dream so big that you look very small before your dreams."

Therefore, in this moment when we realise that we are all here for a reason and what we do today will not be meaningless, I take the opportunity and make a humble effort to share some of our dreams.

I dream of a group of people who will work together to use the medium of art and cinema for the upliftment of humanity.

I dream of a support system for such a group of people based on the principles of social entrepreneurship.

I dream of a new media industry with more citizen journalists who will empower themselves and their communities through videos.

I know these dreams may seem difficult but something within tells me: "We are never given a dream without the power to make it come true." ☺

Madhusudan is a film-maker who supports and nurtures independent film-makers who use media, the arts, and technology to inform, inspire, and empower others to create positive action in the world

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this article. Mail us at editor@lifepositive.net.



Madhusudan: enlightening media

