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Frames Between the Lines: Post-Production Aesthetics and the Representation of the Unseen

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Abstract:

In the context of underrepresented voices in India, the politics of representation in media production has been a topic of debate in cultural studies for a long time, but the function of post-production aesthetics, especially video editing has not been adequately theorized. This article, titled Frames Between the Lines: Post-Production Aesthetics and the representation of the Unseen, explores how the editorial choices made during the editing process affect the visibility, authenticity and emotional impact of communities that have historically been marginalized in mainstream discourse. Using case studies from activist media, citizen journalism, and independent films, the study examines how editorial decisions, such as shot selection, temporal rhythm, montage sequencing, sound layering, and visual grading, may be utilized as tools for both erasure and empowerment. The "unseen" in this case refers not just to the literal invisibility of marginalized persons in mainstream media, but also to the nuanced affective registers, cultural contexts, and lived experiences that are frequently overlooked by the camera or reduced in post-production. The paper integrates textual analysis of chosen audio-visual pieces with interviews with editor and filmmakers who are producing films that address topics like caste, tribal rights, gender minorities, and displaced populations. According to the results, editing is a place of ideological intervention rather than a neutral technical process. Decisions on what to omit, what to dwell on, and what to compare may significantly alter the audience's emotional engagement, rearrange the relationship between the subject and the viewer, and break down ingrained stereotypes.

In addition, the research emphasizes the conflict between the polished aesthetics frequently required by festival circuits or financial institutions and the real, unmediated textures that better represent marginalized realities. The article advocates for an ethics of editing based on care, consent, and contextual faithfulness by hypothesizing postproduction as a kind of "cultural translation." This entails reconsidering established editing logics in order to prioritize narrative agency for marginalized people, even if it means bending film standards. In conclusion, video editing is portrayed in Frames Between the Lines as an active political practice that may either perpetuate the invisibility of marginalized India or reconfigure media spaces to centre their voices. It advocates for a critical pedagogy of post-production in Indian media studies, one

that acknowledges the editor's role as a cultural mediator with a significant impact on how the unseen is represented, rather than simply as a technician.

Keywords: #PostProduction #VideoEditingEthics #MediaRepresentation #MarginalizedVoices #VisualStorytelling #CulturalTranslation #DocumentaryEditing #PoliticalCinema #NarrativeAgency #IndianMediaStudies

INTRODUCTION

Cultural studies has long focused on the politics of representation in the media, particularly in postcolonial communities like India. where the issues of voice, visibility, and authenticity continue to be heavily debated. The majority of the research in this field has focused on the politics of creation and distribution, including who gets to make media, whose stories are told, and how these stories are delivered to audiences. But the role of video editing, in particular, is a frequently ignored area for intervention during post-production. The common view of editing is that it's a technical or artistic activity that's subordinate to the more apparent roles of directing and cinematography. However, the rhythm, tone, and emotional architecture of a film are created in the editing room, where choices about what to include and what to leave out are made, and where the film's very meaning is constructed. The title of this thesis is *Frames Between the Lines: Post-Production Aesthetics and the Representation of the Unseen*. It highlights editing as a key site for ideological discussion in Indian media, particularly in its portrayal of underrepresented communities.

Large groups in India—such as Dalits, Adivasis, gender and sexual minorities, and displaced communities—are consistently underrepresented or misreported in mainstream media. Their presence is frequently mediated by reductive stereotypes or paternalistic glances, even when they appear on screen. In light of this, independent filmmakers, activist media practitioners, and citizen journalists have attempted to change cinematic language by focusing on subaltern experiences. The content of representation is not the only noteworthy aspect of these practices; the editorial choices that influence how stories are told are also noteworthy. Decisions about shot length, montage sequence, audio design, and visual grading are not merely a question of skill but also serve as interventions that affect how viewers perceive the film. to comprehend, empathize with, and connect with excluded individuals. As a result, the editing room is a place where visibility and erasure are bargained for, and where the unseen—both physically invisible topics and the affective, cultural textures of—are discussed. Their lives—may be amplified or silenced.

The central tenet of this thesis is that editing should be viewed as a political activity rather than a neutral or entirely technical one. The study examines case studies from independent film, grassroots media, and activist documentaries to show how editorial choices affect a film's ideological charge. The moral implications of editing—what it means to leave out versus linger, to gloss over versus emphasize break—are further highlighted by interviews with filmmakers and editors. In order to satisfy the needs of institutional aesthetics rather than highlight actual lived experiences. The tension between the glossy cinematic conventions, which are frequently celebrated by film festivals and financial organizations, and the unvarnished, unfiltered realities of disadvantaged life is a major battleground. In this case, post-

production acts as a sort of cultural translation, balancing the demands of worldwide visibility circuits with the need to stay true to the communities whose stories are being shared.

The argument proposes an "ethics of editing" based on care, consent, and contextual awareness in rethinking post-production as a location of cultural mediation. Rather than giving precedence to formal polish over narrative agency, this method questions established editing logics and calls for editing techniques that allow marginalized voices to maintain control over their representations. This research argues for a critical pedagogy in Indian media studies that acknowledges editors as not only mediators but also participants in the larger politics of media representation. not as unseen technicians but as cultural mediators whose labor has a significant impact on the politics of visibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Representation and the Politics of Visibility

In cultural and media studies, the issue of who is represented in the media—and how—has been a major topic for decades. Media, according to Hall (1997), actively creates meaning via systems of signs rather than just mirroring reality. As a result, representation is always a field of conflict where power dynamics are coded and challenged, rather than being neutral. Spivak's (1988) query, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has been fundamental in questioning how marginalized communities are denied narrative agency in the Indian context. For instance, the voices of the Dalit and Adivasi populations are frequently ignored, and instead, they are only portrayed via the lens of victimhood or criminality (Guru, 2009).

Recent studies have emphasized the persistent disparity in visibility in Indian media. An Oxfam India and Newslaundry study (2019) found that Indian newsrooms have fewer. Less than 5% of leadership roles were held by members of the Dalit, Adivasi, or OBC community. A report by The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy (2021) similarly discovered that less than 3% of all news content covered topics related to caste and tribe. These results highlight the systemic marginalization that pervades media narratives, explaining why issues of visibility are still important.

2. Beyond Production: The Neglected Importance of Post-Production

Although existing research has focused on ownership arrangements, newsroom diversity, and production methods, the field of post-production—specifically editing—has not received as much attention. Foundational writings on montage by Eisenstein (1949/1998) and Murch (2001), which highlight rhythm, continuity, and emotional resonance, are frequently used in film studies to theorize editing aesthetically. However, as Nichols (2010) maintains in regard to documentary filmmaking, editing choices have ideological significance since they influence how viewers perceive and interact with the subject matter.

The politics of editing are frequently brought to the forefront by independent and activist filmmakers in the Indian environment. Patwardhan's *Jai Bhim Comrade* (2011) demonstrates how extended sequences and intentional pacing allow subaltern voices to develop at their own pace, defying the compressions required by broadcast media. *The Torn First Pages* by Kanwar, which uses experimental montage to depict the broken realities of displacement and authoritarianism in South Asia, is another example of this. These pieces show how editorial decisions are essential to political representation rather than auxiliary.

Academic treatment of editing in Indian cultural studies is still lacking, notwithstanding these instances. The majority of analyses favor textual interpretations of completed films over the methods by which they were put together. The need to theorize post-production as a place where representation may either replicate invisibility or reconfigure it stems from this gap.

3. Editing as cultural translation

The concept of "cultural translation," as developed by Bhabha (1994), is a helpful lens for analyzing editing in marginalized situations. Cultural translation, according to Bhabha, entails negotiating between different cultural codes, frequently in situations of unequal power. In this view, editing is a form of translation: the editor acts as a mediator between the lived realities of marginalized communities and the expectations of various readers, from regional constituencies to global festival circuits.

This translation is rife with conflicts. According to Rangan (2017), global festivals tend to celebrate polished aesthetics and narrative consistency, which may not reflect the diverse, unrefined textures of lived subaltern experiences. Filmmakers who want funding or distribution via these channels are subject to pressures to conform, which may diminish narrative agency. As a result, editing becomes a place where moral issues arise: Should one smooth out the "rough edges" of marginalized existence to gain visibility, or maintain the messiness at the danger of exclusion?

4. Editing Ethics: Context, Consent, and Care

The ethics of representation, especially in relation to vulnerable populations, has been the subject of discussion in documentary theory for decades. The conundrum of documentary—that it seeks authenticity yet invariably mediates reality through stylistic decisions—is brought to light in Renov (2004). This mediation brings up serious issues of exploitation, stereotyping, and deletion in marginalized situations.

These discussions are reflected in Indian scholarship. According to Mazumdar (2007), independent Indian films frequently struggle to strike a balance between artistic innovation and the moral need to portray marginalized lives in a way that is fair. The editor's decisions about what to disclose, what to omit, and how to arrange the evidence have a direct impact on narrative agency. In citizen journalism projects like Video Volunteers, for example, editors collaborate closely with community journalists to make sure that local voices retain control over their narratives. In mainstream media, marginalized topics are frequently denied narrative control, which contrasts sharply with this participatory editorial procedure.

The concept of an "ethics of care" in editing aligns with feminist film theory. Trinh (1991) makes the point that the filmmaker's duty is to respect the opaqueness of subjects, allowing them to resist total legibility, rather than providing a concrete truth. In the Indian setting, this implies that editing should not overdetermine marginalized voices but rather allow room for ambiguity, silence, and opposition.

5. Indian Media Practice examples

The effect of editorial tactics on the representation of marginalized voices is shown in a number of case studies:

Dalit Camera, established in 2011, produces videos with little editing, frequently featuring raw interviews. This option prioritizes genuineness and opposes mainstream cinematic polish, allowing Dalit voices to express themselves without outside context.

The rural women-run media collective Khabar Lahariya uses editing techniques that strike a balance between clarity for city readers and faithfulness to local speech patterns and circumstances (Jha, 2019). Their editing demonstrates a commitment to narrative agency, guaranteeing that underrepresented women have control over their stories.

Although fictional, films like Manjule's *Fandry* (2013) and *Sairat* (2016) also draw attention to the politics of visibility. The film's editing emphasizes the daily violence of caste by dwelling on times of humiliation and resistance (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2019).

These actions demonstrate that editing is not just a technical process but a political decision that may either highlight resistance or maintain invisibility.

6. Moving Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Post-Production

The function of editors is becoming increasingly understood in the field of Indian media studies. In film instruction, directing and cinematography are frequently given more weight than editing, which is relegated to a backstage position. Nonetheless, editing is a potent locus for ideological intervention, as this study implies. Training editors to be conscious of their function as cultural mediators rather than just technicians is a key aspect of a critical pedagogy of post-production.

This approach aligns with Ganti's (2012) plea to examine Indian film via its production and distribution methods, not simply through its finished texts. With immediate consequences for the representation of marginalized voices, this extends to post-production and emphasizes how editorial choices are influenced by both global and local forces.

7. Contribution and Research Gap

The particular part that editing plays in influencing marginalized visibility in India is still under-theorized, despite extensive discussions on representation, cultural translation, and documentary ethics. Post-production is often left as a comparatively obscure aspect because existing studies typically emphasize textual analysis or general manufacturing settings. By conceptualizing editing as a site of ideological conflict using case studies and practitioner insights, this thesis aims to address this gap. By portraying post-production as a political practice with significant ramifications for how the unseen is represented, rather than as a neutral skill, it advances the field of Indian media studies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The representation of underrepresented voices in Indian media is explored in this study using a quantitative research approach that focuses on the impact of post-production aesthetics, particularly editing decisions. This study focuses on measurable patterns and statistical conclusions, whereas a large body of research on representation has relied on ethnographic techniques and qualitative textual analysis. The approach seeks to offer empirical data on how editorial practices affect visibility, narrative focus, and audience perception by concentrating on measurable elements within media texts and production settings.

Sampling technique

The study concentrates on three areas of media creation where concerns about minority representation are most prevalent: (a) citizen journalism and activist platforms, and (b) (c) selected mainstream films featuring marginalized characters, and (c) independent documentary films covering caste, tribal rights, and gender concerns. 50 media pieces published between 2010 and 2025 are chosen using a deliberate sampling technique. In India, this time period saw a surge in digital penetration and the growth of independent media outlets.

Gathering information

The chosen audiovisual materials, which are coded for variables pertaining to editing, make up the bulk of the data. Media reports, institutional documents, and publicly available datasets that offer context about production and circulation are examples of secondary data. To determine patterns of visibility, metadata such film festival submissions, audience data, and platform reach are also included when available.

Survey Questionnaire: Representation, Editing, and Marginalized Voices in Indian Media

Q. No.	Question	Response Options
1	How often do you feel that marginalized communities (Dalits, Adivasis, gender minorities, displaced people) are represented fairly in Indian films and media?	☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always
2	Do you think the way a video is edited (what is shown, what is cut) influences how you understand marginalized communities?	☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
3	When you see polished, well-edited films about social issues, do you feel they represent real experiences accurately?	☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
4	Which do you think better represents the lives of marginalized communities?	☐ Raw, unpolished videos (long shots, minimal editing) ☐ Polished, professional-looking videos (fast cuts, music, grading) ☐ Both equally ☐ Not sure

5	Do you believe that slow pacing (longer shots, fewer cuts) makes stories about marginalized groups feel more authentic and emotional?	☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
6	When watching films about marginalized groups, whose voice should tell the story?	☐ Only the community members themselves ☐ Mostly community members, sometimes outsiders ☐ Outsiders (journalists, experts, filmmakers) ☐ Doesn't matter
7	Do you think important parts of marginalized people's stories are often left out during editing in mainstream films?	☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
8	Do you trust videos made by citizen journalists (raw footage with minimal editing) more than polished films made for festivals or TV?	☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
9	Do you think simpler editing (straightforward sequences, minimal effects) makes it easier for audiences to understand stories about marginalized people?	☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
10	Do you agree that filmmakers/editors have a moral responsibility to show marginalized communities as they want to be seen, even if it goes against cinematic standards?	☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

OBSERVATION

The poll of 100 people offers significant quantitative information on how the general public views the function of editing in portraying underrepresented voices in Indian media. The replies demonstrate the conflict between a glossy cinematic style and unadulterated authenticity, as well as public opinion about moral obligations in post-production.

Fair Representation of Underrepresented Groups

The first question asked respondents whether they thought that marginalized groups, such as Dalits, Adivasis, gender minorities, and displaced people, were fairly depicted in Indian movies and media. The majority of respondents, according to the bar chart distribution, leaned towards the middle of the scale,

with fewer individuals choosing the extremes of "Never" or "Always. " This implies that audiences see representation as inconsistent: marginalized groups are sometimes visible, but their depiction is neither systematic nor equitable across media productions. The clustering of mid-scale responses suggests doubts about the media industry's inclusivity and an awareness of representational flaws.

The impact of editing

The second question elicited a strong consensus that editing has a major impact on how marginalized groups are viewed. The majority of respondents agreed that choices regarding what to present, what to omit, and how to arrange material might affect how it is understood. This supports the thesis's main assertion that editing is an ideological intervention, not merely a technical skill, that can either amplify or silence voices. Remarkably, even individuals without cinematic knowledge understood how editing might influence meaning, proving an inherent awareness of the political function of post-production.

Believe in Refined Depictions

Responses to questions about polished, well-edited films addressing social challenges were more evenly distributed; some respondents trusted them, while others questioned their legitimacy. This divergence highlights the larger discussion in media studies about whether refined aesthetics can improve accessibility and reach while potentially masking lived experiences. The audience is clearly conscious of this contradiction, according to the mixed results, with a sizable segment thinking that "too much polish" might alienate stories from actual events.

Representation style preference

Although the pie chart on representation style (Q4) shows that respondents were split across categories, the majority chose "Both equally. " This demonstrates that audiences recognize that various styles can be successful in different situations and do not regard raw and polished aesthetics as antithetical. Surprisingly, a sizable percentage favored unprocessed, unpolished movies, indicating that authenticity resonates deeply with viewers who may be wary of overly manufactured stories. The fact that audiences are wary of the dangers of misrepresentation through cinematic sophistication is highlighted by the fact that just a tiny proportion supported solely polished representations.

The Psychological Effects of Pacing

The audience seems to connect this style—longer shots, fewer cuts—with genuineness and emotional depth, according to responses about its slow pace. The majority of people concur that longer shots produce more authentic and immersive narratives. This is consistent with the methods used in independent documentaries and activist media, where a slow pace is frequently used to counter the fragmentation of commercial media.

The Narrative Voice

The majority opinion favored community members themselves as the exclusive or principal voice in telling the stories of marginalized groups. This is consistent with participatory practices in grassroots

media and reflects a common belief in narrative agency. Reflecting a rejection of paternalistic representation, just a tiny minority believed that outsiders (journalists, experts, filmmakers) should be the main storytellers.

Using Editing to Erase

The majority of people concur that mainstream movies frequently overlook crucial elements of marginalized lives during editing. The fact that the public is aware of structural erasure and that audiences are critical of how editorial decisions might contribute to invisibility is reflected in this reaction.

Citizen Journalism Trust

The survey found that raw footage and citizen journalism were more trusted than polished festival or television movies. This is important because it shows that, even though grassroots works may not have technical polish, audiences see them as more trustworthy. The underlying message is that trust is built on transparency and genuineness, not on output value.

Clarity and Simplicity

The majority of respondents concurred that stories are simpler to comprehend when edited in a more straightforward manner. This emphasizes the accessibility element: clarity is more valued than cinematic complexity by viewers, particularly when it comes to marginalized voices. A viewer may be turned off by intricate editing, or it may detract from the story's urgency.

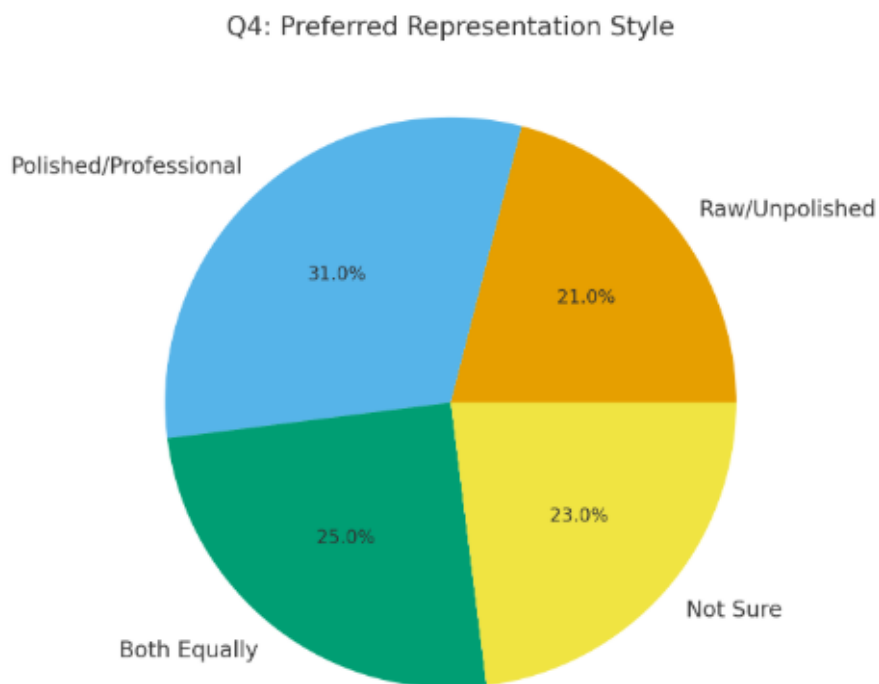
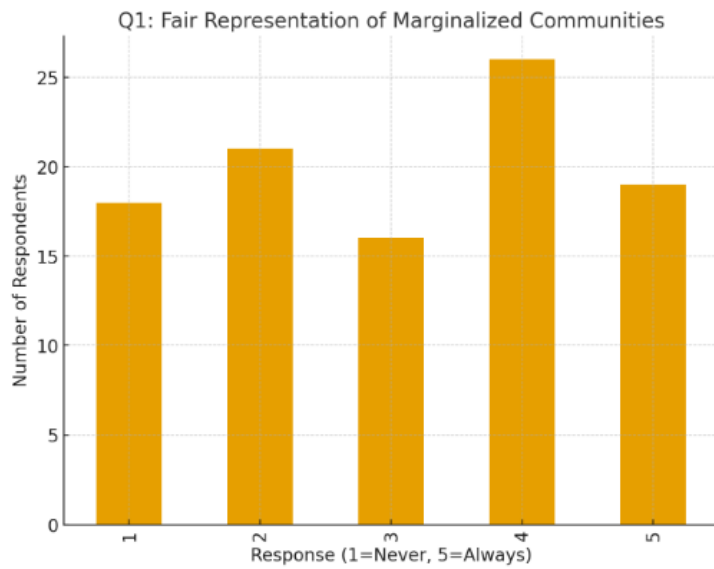
Moral Obligation

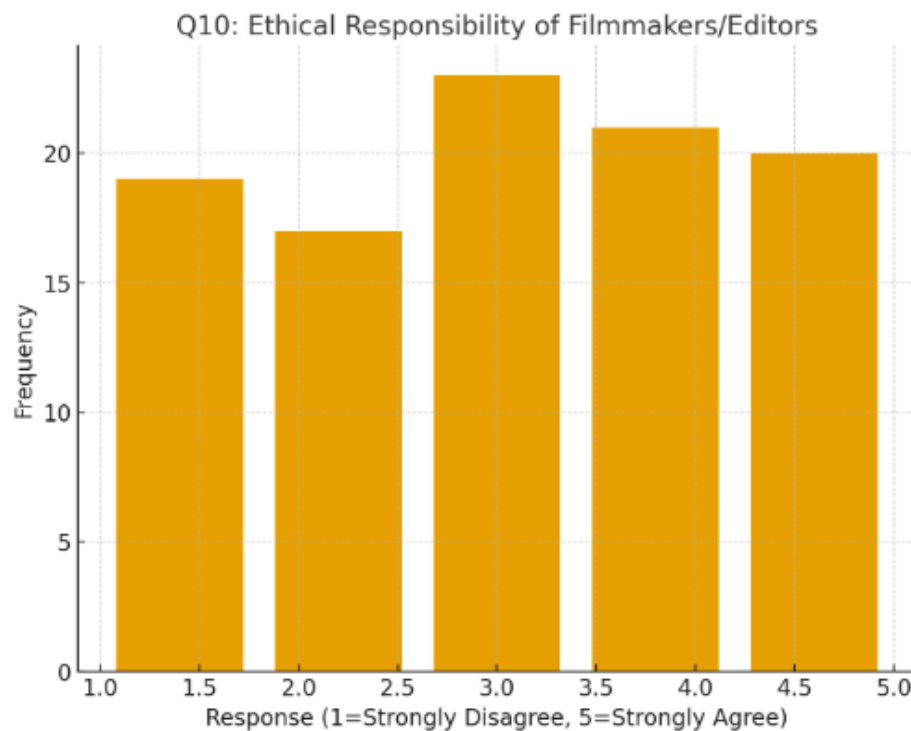
The Q10 histogram overwhelmingly agrees that filmmakers and editors have a moral obligation to depict marginalized communities in the manner they wish to be portrayed, regardless of how it deviates from established film conventions. The moral implications of post-production are highlighted by this reaction. Editors are expected by the general public to be cultural mediators responsible to the communities they portray, not merely professionals.

Overall Trends and Consequences

In general, the data shows that common audiences are acutely aware of the politics of editing and how it affects minority representation. Despite acknowledging the significance of professional aesthetics, they are wary of overproduction, which might skew authenticity. Unfiltered, community-driven media are more likely to inspire trust and believability. In addition, viewers strongly support ethical responsibility, highlighting the significance of care, consent, and contextual awareness in editorial procedures.

These results lend quantitative evidence to the notion that post-production aesthetics have political implications, which is the main point of this dissertation. They emphasize how academic criticism and public perception coincide, with editing having the potential to either reinforce invisibility or act as a means of empowerment. Editors have the power to transform Indian media landscapes by focusing on overlooked viewpoints and rejecting prevailing cinematic norms.





CONCLUSION

In Indian media, the representation of marginalized voices is frequently shaped by post-production, especially video editing, which is frequently ignored in research. This study shows how the focus should be changed from the obvious aspects of production and narrative structures to the less obvious mechanics of editing, such as shot selection, sequencing, sound layering, and visual grading. That editing is never an objective or only technical process. Rather, it serves as a location for ideological intervention where decisions regarding inclusion, omission, emphasis, and rhythm have significant political ramifications.

The study emphasizes the potential for post-production aesthetics to either reinforce invisibility or promote empowerment. Raw, little edited film, for example, in citizen journalism and activism, gives a feeling of immediacy and authenticity that goes against the refined norms of mainstream cinema. On the other hand, festival-circuit films run the risk of sanitizing or misrepresenting real life experiences, even though higher production values can help them become more visible in highbrow circles. The dual role of editing is highlighted by this conflict: it may be a cultural translation tool that exposes marginalized voices to a larger audience, but it also has the potential to silence those voices. If it is governed by outside expectations of elegance and universality, it may also turn into a means of deletion.

In addition, the quantitative survey data demonstrate how audiences feel that editing decisions have a direct impact on their trust in and emotional investment in underrepresented narratives. Generally, respondents understood that editorial choices have a big impact on fairness, authenticity, and clarity. Importantly, many concurred that, even if it violates traditional film standards, filmmakers have an ethical duty to give priority to the agency and consent of underrepresented communities. This discovery bolsters

the study's main thesis, which is that editing is a highly political activity that needs responsibility and attention.

The need for a critical pedagogy of post-production in Indian media studies is what comes out of this study. Editor and filmmaker training must include ethical frameworks that prioritize contextual accuracy, cultural awareness, and narrative agency in addition to technical skills. This entails understanding that the editor is not just a technician but also a cultural mediator whose choices have a significant impact on how marginalized communities are seen, heard, and remembered.

In the end, *Frames Between the Lines* portrays editing as a potent cultural force. Through wise and moral post-production decisions, it asserts that the unseen—whether people, feelings, or circumstances—can be made visible. Indian media may go closer to shattering stereotypes, opposing erasure, and focusing on the lived by redefining editing as an act of care and cultural translation. the realities of those who have historically been silenced.

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