

## **Sandhya Suri's *I for India*: Documenting Transnational Subjectivity**

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### **Abstract**

Documentary filmmaker Sandhya Suri's *I for India* (2005) is a compilation film that presents and interprets her father's experience of migrating from India to the UK in the 1960s and settling fully in Britain. It explores through her father's own amateur filmmaking the process and nature of transnational identity formation. Over a 40-year period her father, Dr. Yash Pal Suri, recorded home movies and audio letters, which he sent to his family in India in order to report about his new life. In 1982, after 16 years residence in the UK, Dr. Suri took his family back to India, only to discover that such a return – or *remigration* – was impossible. Unable to acculturate themselves back into Indian life, Dr. Suri and his family migrated for a second time to their British “home.” After her unexpected discovery of her father's audiotapes, in which he had poured out his feelings of alienation and despair, Sandhya created a documentary from this “found archive.” This paper examines how Sandhya's film documented and dissected the experience of transnational migration and added further interpretative layers to her father's filming project. I follow Stuart Hall (1990) in viewing diasporic or transnational identity as “a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (222). I discuss how Sandhya used a variety of filmic and audio discourses in *I for India* to document and comment with self-reflexivity upon this ever-shifting process of identity formation.

**Keywords:** *I for India*, Sandhya Suri, transnational, voice, home movie, documentary, migrant, hybridity, assimilation

A migrant is a person who has crossed a border. S/he seeks a place to make “a new beginning,” to start again, to make a better life. The newly arrived have to learn the new language and culture. They have to cope not only with the pain of separation but often with the resentments of a hostile population.

Madan Sarup, *Home and Identity*

We are Hindus who have crossed the black water; we are Muslims who eat pork. As a result we are now partly of the West. Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools.

Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands”

## Introduction

This paper discusses director Sandhya Suri’s 2005 award-winning documentary *I for India* in the light of transnational subjectivity and identity formation through film and audio media.<sup>1</sup> Sandhya made the film following her unexpected discovery of a trove of audiotapes in her parents’ home. The documentary, compiled from a variety of filmic, photographic, musical and audio media, spans four decades in the life of Sandhya’s physician father, Dr. Yash Pal Suri. It covers unevenly the period from his migration to Britain from the Punjab with his wife Susheel and young daughter Neeraj in 1966 up to the film’s completion in 2005. The documentary explores intimately the shifting nature of transnational subjectivity in response to the experiences of migration and repatriation, alienation and acculturation, and sheds light on how the identity of the exile is forged by the competing pressures of belonging and displacement, racism and assimilation, memory and disillusionment. The primary theme throughout is Dr. Suri’s shifting responses to “acculturative stress” (Berry), not only in Britain but also in India.

In this paper I look at how firstly Dr. Suri himself and then subsequently Sandhya documented and represented his life between two cultures and languages, particularly in terms of the key stages of acculturation recognized by cross-cultural psychologists, namely integration, assimilation, marginalization and separation (Ward & Rana-Deuba). I approach Sandhya’s multi-perspective documentary not only as a biographical record of the crucial middle decades of her father’s life but also as a self-reflexive exploration of (auto)biographical filmmaking itself and of how the acts of

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005, *I for India* garnered Best Documentary Awards at the Karachi International Film Festival and the Asian Festival of First Films and won the Silver Award at the Film South Asia Festival; in 2006, it won Best Documentary Awards at the Zagreb Film Festival and the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles and was part of the official selection at the Sundance Film Festival and Visions du Réel international documentary film festival.

filming a life and taping a voice do not merely record but actually construct and project subjectivity and identity, particularly in the context of the experience of transnational migration. My interest, in other words, is in how audio-visual media not only reflect but also generate and reify identity.

To begin with, it is necessary to consider Dr. Suri's migration to Britain and how this transformative experience drew him into amateur filmmaking in the first place. Dr. Suri, who had graduated from medical college in 1958, migrated at the age of 33 from India to the UK. As he describes it in retrospective voice-over in the documentary, "[Hindi]<sup>2</sup> At that time, many young doctors like me were leaving the country in droves for better opportunities overseas. They called it the brain drain of India."<sup>3</sup> Like many of these young ambitious doctors, he came to Britain in order to gain valuable professional experience and upgrade his qualifications by working in the National Health Service. Although he seems to have had no intention of staying long-term, he ended up settling permanently in Britain. The initial impetus behind his self-filming and self-recording project was the simple practical matter of staying in touch with his parents and siblings back in the Punjab during this sojourn in the UK. Finding international telecommunications too unreliable and letter-writing, as an overworked junior doctor, too time-consuming, his solution was to buy two Super 8 cameras, two projectors and two reel-to-reel tape recorders. One set of equipment he kept for himself and the other he sent to his relatives in India, enabling the separated families to exchange films and audiotapes. Dr. Suri's resourcefulness here in establishing a kind of "proto-webcam" link confirms Vertovec's observation that "migrants are often at the cutting edge of technology adoption" (2009: 60) in their need to maintain communication with far flung relatives. Indeed, Super 8 film, which of course is a silent medium, was launched by Eastman Kodak in 1965, the year prior to Dr. Suri's arrival in Britain. This shows that his chosen method of communicating with his Indian family employed the very latest technology and that he himself, like many other aspiring filmmakers in the 1960s, was open to innovative methods of filming.<sup>4</sup> As we shall see below, however, the lack of real-time connection, in contrast to webcam, would actually lead to misunderstandings and the creation of unreasonable expectations, principally in terms of what both families had hoped for with Dr. Suri's return to India.

Structurally and thematically, the film falls into three stages, or acts, which are uneven not only in terms of length but also in period covered and of media used. The first act, which takes up the bulk of the film, covers the Suri family's initial 16-year stay in Britain. This section mostly comprises excerpts from Super 8 home movies and audiotapes exchanged as "cine-letters" and "audio-letters" between Dr. Suri and his family in India. The second act covers the Suri family's unhappy nine-month return to India in 1982 and subsequent remigration to Britain. Dr. Suri's repatriation

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<sup>2</sup> In this text all references to Hindi speech in *I for India* quote the corresponding English subtitles.

<sup>3</sup> On the history and implications of the recruitment of Indian doctors to the UK see Robinson and Carey (2000) and Kangasniemi, Winters & Commander (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Kodak's "Super 8 mm Film History" page states: "In April of 1965, this revolutionary new format was introduced, and... many of today's great cinematographers and directors began their careers decades ago, at the counter of their local photo shop, buying a cartridge of Super 8 film." [motion.kodak.com/motion/Products/Production/Spotlight\\_on\\_Super\\_8/Super\\_8mm\\_History/index.htm](http://motion.kodak.com/motion/Products/Production/Spotlight_on_Super_8/Super_8mm_History/index.htm) Retrieved 2013/11/10.

obviated the need to continue the exchange of movies and tapes, and so none were made during this time. The footage depicting this period in *I for India* is therefore a reconstruction shot two decades later by Sandhya in 16 mm. The main point of this section was to document – or rather re-enact – how Dr. Suri’s much longed-for return to his home country resulted in failure. Dr. Suri himself is absent in this section; the troubled and disappointing experience of repatriation is recounted in on-camera interviews conducted in English by Sandhya with her mother and two elder sisters. Sandhya’s camera roves around various locations in Meerut such as her father’s deserted clinic and her grandfather’s house, where the Suri family stayed, in order to convey the background to the family’s attempt to resettle. The third act covers the period of the Suri family’s re-establishment of their lives back in Britain. The section begins with Super 8 footage, presumably filmed by Dr. Suri’s brother, of the Suri family’s departure from Meerut in 1983; the bulk of this final act, however, comprises footage, shot by Sandhya in Digi-beta, of interviews with her parents and sisters, interspersed with Super 8 flashbacks, in which they consider aspects of their oscillating transnational life between India and Britain. This section closes with indications of the future direction the family will take from the “now” of the documentary. Real-time footage of eldest daughter Neeraj’s interracial marriage and of middle daughter Vanita’s departure at an airport for a new life in Australia shows that the Suri family’s bicultural and multi-locational life will continue in the pattern set by Dr. Suri in 1966.

Although Dr. Suri’s archive of home movies and audio-letters convey a good deal of basic information about his life, it is Sandhya’s directorial strategies, particularly her selection and juxtaposition of media, that heighten or reinscribe the range of meanings that can be read from her father’s experience. Furthermore, Sandhya’s documentary project, whilst focusing on her father’s experiences, also becomes a process of *self-discovery* as she excavates her family’s past and provenance and seeks for answers surrounding her own cultural identity. In this sense, Erik Barnouw’s observation about documentary filmmakers is certainly applicable to Sandhya and her use of her father’s audiovisual archive:

True documentarists have a passion for what they find in images and sounds –which always seems to them more meaningful than anything they can invent ... *It is in selecting and arranging their findings that they express themselves; these choices are, in effect, their main comments* (348; emphasis added).

In this sense *I for India* can also be seen as an autobiographical quest on the part of Sandhya, an act of what Michael Renov (1999) has aptly termed “domestic ethnography.”

Dr. Suri’s experience of migrating from India to the UK made him a transnational, which is to say an “individual whose sense of identity crosses multiple national borders” (Ramji 2006a: 646). The transnational, Stuart Hall has argued, “must learn to inhabit two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to transcend and negotiate between them” (310). Hasmita Ramji, who has studied the return to India from the UK of first-generation Gujarati Hindus, writes that:

[T]ransnationalism as a concept and area of interest has grown out of

the recognition that migrants do not necessarily substitute old homes for new in a straightforward transfer, but often create active social fields between the two.” (Ramji 2006b: 705)

Following this idea we see that Dr. Suri’s transnational subjectivity, as *I for India* demonstrates, has not emerged from him relinquishing his “Indianness” and embracing a new “Britishness” (essentialist concepts that in any case have no substantiality), but has been created from an existence lived and imagined, struggled for and negotiated, between the two cultures and societies. A key aspect in the evolution of Dr. Suri’s transnational subjectivity, and one that Sandhya excavates in *I for India*, concerns her father’s use of *voice* – both in the sense of verbal enunciation and of agency – in the audio-letters.

Voice and agency differentiate the *transnational* from the *migrant*, two terms that it is important to define here. Indeed, although both share superficial similarities in their exiled and deracinated status, there is a crucial social and economic difference between the migrant and the transnational. In the context of South Asian migration, most people who came from the former colonies to work and live in Britain in the decades following the war were *migrants* in the sense that they lacked skills and education, belonged to the working class, spoke only their mother language, and migrated out of economic necessity. They took low-paying unskilled jobs and saw themselves as belonging to a diasporic community that furnished their needs and structured their lives. The *transnationals* who came to Britain, by contrast, constituted a social elite made up of multilingual, highly educated and skilled professionals such as doctors and engineers who migrated to Britain through choice rather than necessity. They were able to exercise considerable agency in negotiating their places of residence and even their nationalities, and gained the respect of the host society.<sup>5</sup> In this context, Bryceson and Vuorela make the point in their study “Transnational Families in the Twenty-first Century” that

[t]here are some transnational families who consciously try to avoid people of similar cultural background to themselves when settling in a new place. This is common amongst the elites who feel they have more in common with people of similar income levels... and may deliberately avoid networking with their fellow countrymen for fear of becoming ghettoized expatriates. (21)

Dr. Suri and his family, as we shall see, belong in this transnational category. In the sections that follow, I discuss different issues raised by the documentary – namely, racial hostility, assimilation, voice and agency, repatriation, and Sandhya’s directorial intervention – in order to analyse how the film has not only documented but also constructed the transnational subjectivity of its principal subject.

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<sup>5</sup> See Brah (1996), Cunningham & Sinclair (2000), Bryceson & Vuorela (2002), and Goulbourne et al. (2010).

## Racism and Assimilation

Sandhya devotes a considerable amount of film time to conveying, through the inclusion of excerpts from British TV current affairs programmes of the 1960s and 1970s, some idea of the uncertainty and hostility that greeted new arrivals from the Indian subcontinent. These excerpts, all betraying racist tendencies in varying degrees, effectively establish how “official” media – represented here by the BBC – positioned South Asian immigrants *en masse* as, at best, uneducated job-snatchers, and, at worst, unwanted aliens who were perceived as a threat to the culture of Britain. This compilation of clips enables Sandhya to construct a filmic patchwork tapestry of the “hegemonic cultural memory” (Berghahn 86) of the host society that serves as a backdrop to the sometimes assimilatory and sometimes separatist discourse of her father’s audiotapes. Although *I for India* is not an overtly political film, the inclusion of these clips constitutes Sandhya’s attempt to comment on the broader implications of mainstream British society’s wary response to South Asian immigration during those years and on how this may have affected the process of her father’s acculturation.

The first excerpt is taken from *Make Yourself at Home*, a BBC series presented in Hindustani and English that was first broadcast in 1965 with the purpose, evident in the title, of helping newly arrived immigrants to adapt to British life and culture. Yet this benign intention is problematized by the headmasterly tone and manner of the presenter – “toe-curlingly condescending,” in the words of one commentator (Bradshaw) – as he portentously lectures his audience on the correct method of manipulating a light switch (see Figure 1). His patronizing approach exemplifies what Bhatia and Ram refer to in their study of South Asian diasporic experience in Britain as the “omniscient English eye” constructing the colonial other as “primitive and savage” (142). Sandhya’s artful editing, however, inverts this master-subaltern relationship and suggests that the real ignorance lies with the host society. “If I press the switch on the wall,” the presenter announces, “the light will come on.” Amusingly, the opposite happens: the screen immediately turns black and the title of the film appears, thereby proclaiming one of the implied meanings of the words “I for India,” namely that “I,” as a British Asian filmmaker, am using my film to subvert the former colonial power’s othering of my family’s Indian identity and heritage.



Figure 1. “This is a switch”: helping South Asian immigrants to understand challenging technology in *Make Yourself at Home* (BBC, 1969).

The next clip, from *The Dark Million* (BBC, 1966), signals a shift away from paternal “helpfulness” towards suspicion, and reflects the growing hostility towards the new arrivals as immigration steadily increased to a peak in 1968, the year in which Parliament enacted the restrictive Commonwealth Immigrants Act (Hansen) and in which the Conservative MP Enoch Powell delivered his notorious “Rivers of Blood”

speech that warned of the perils of open-door immigration. In less dramatic language than that employed by the Cambridge-educated classicist Powell, the narrator of *The Dark Million* seeks to pin down the “non-Britishness” of these exotic newcomers. He reports drily that:

[t]oday there are about a million coloured people living in Britain. That’s about one in fifty of the population. The immigrants have often established little islands of their own culture. In Smethwick the Sikhs have their own shops with their own special foodstuffs. They have their own cinema where they can go to see Indian films. They speak to each other in their own language. They create an atmosphere of foreignness. Very different from the sort of atmosphere that British people are used to.

The racialising language employed here – “coloured people,” “little islands of their own culture,” “atmosphere of foreignness,” and so on – unmistakably positions South Asian immigrants as non-assimilated and *other*. Sandhya is suggesting here that the Suri family, which started out in 1966 by living not far from Smethwick in the Midlands, would have been positioned in a similar fashion. This seems unlikely, however, since Dr. Suri, as a highly skilled and elite transnational, did not really see himself as belonging to any South Asian diasporic community. Unlike the working-class migrants who formed distinct and separate communities (“little islands of their own culture”), Dr. Suri, as I will show in the next section, took great pains to assimilate and integrate himself and his family into mainstream British society.



Figure 2. South Asian immigration represented as a dark invasion on *Immigration – The End of the Line* (BBC, 1979).

The racist tone of *The Dark Million* becomes more explicit in a 1978 World in Action report, featuring an interview with Margaret Thatcher in which she makes her infamous assertion, echoing Powell and his “Rivers,” that people in Britain – obviously the indigenous majority – are afraid that this country might be rather “swamped by people with a different culture.” She goes on with ominous certainty to state that “[p]eople are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.” The implication here is that hostility

to immigrants is not only understandable and to be expected but also, since she was elected Prime Minister soon after this, almost *officially sanctioned*. The scaremongering continues in another clip from a programme entitled *Immigration – The End of the Line*. (BBC, 1979). Footage of a National Front march is followed by presenter David Jessel announcing that the Government is making immigration control a priority in order to persuade the country that “a clear end is in sight to the line of people, *most of them coloured* [my emphasis], who can claim the right to come

and settle here.” Jessel delivers these words in front of a graphic display that depicts the black migrants as an arrowhead-shaped invasion force threatening Britain (see Figure 2).<sup>6</sup>

These broadcasts approached the issue of immigration in general terms, treating the South Asian immigrant minority as a monolithic entity and making no distinction as to religion, nationality or employment. Sandhya included a clip from another current affairs programme entitled *The Immigrant Doctors* (BBC, 1974) to shed more focused light on the her father’s experience as a participant in the medical brain drain. In this excerpt the presenter explains that:

[A]lready there are 9,000 immigrant doctors working in our health service. That means a third of all our hospital doctors qualified overseas. And in the present crisis, with many British-trained doctors now threatening to leave the health service, their number could increase still more. Some will settle in this country. Most will return home, but often after a longer stay than originally intended.

The implication here seems to be that it was considered acceptable for “immigrant doctors” to come to Britain to assist the NHS as long as they did not outstay their welcome by remaining in the country long-term. The clip continues with a British Medical Association spokesman adding patronizingly, “They [the immigrant doctors] come in the first place to get *a proper training*, but I’m not at all sure that that is what they get. They do provide for the NHS *a ready supply of cheap labour*” [my emphasis]. Once again, as in the case of the *Dark Million* report, the effect of the language used here on a BBC programme is to position the South Asian doctors as an unwelcome, under-qualified but regrettably necessary alien presence. With her inclusion of these jarring excerpts, Sandhya is evidently stressing the point that her father, who as a locum was dispatched to hospitals all over the Midlands, would have been positioned in general as one of the “dark million” and in particular as an under-trained and low-cost stand-in for a “properly” qualified White doctor. Thus we can see that even a highly educated and professional transnational like Dr. Suri was not entirely exempt in a general sense from the racist and othering attitudes of British society.

The unwelcoming racist climate indicated by the TV clips determined a great deal about the direction of Dr. Suri’s evolving transnational subjectivity. It led him towards integration and assimilation and, as a natural consequence, away from involvement and identification with the wider South Asian diaspora. Put simply, he wanted to convince himself and those around him that he had joined mainstream British society. Thus, far from associating with compatriots in a ghettoized South Asian community, like the Sikh migrants of Smethwick, the transnational Dr. Suri made extraordinary efforts to integrate himself into White Britain. In an interview I conducted with Sandhya, she informed me that the South Asians in her parents’ social network were primarily other doctors and their spouses and that the language they

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<sup>6</sup> It is amusing to speculate in passing whether the producers of *End of the Line* took the opening animated sequence of the popular BBC comedy series *Dad’s Army* (broadcast between 1968 and 1975), in which swastika-headed arrows threaten the British Isles with imminent invasion by the Nazis, as their model for this disturbing and simplistic image.



used at their social gatherings was English. These doctors came from diverse regions of the Indian subcontinent, so it was only natural that English should have been used as a *lingua franca* among them; nevertheless, the effect of using English even with fellow Indians would have been to further Anglicize these assimilating transnationals. Dr. Suri's home movie filming project was both the expression of and driving force behind his assimilation process. The home movies proclaimed that Dr. Suri's belief or wish was that he belonged to British society. His recording of his and his family's efforts towards integration reinforced and reified that acculturative process. Dr. Suri's efforts at assimilation included fully adopting Westernized dress; using English, even with his children at home (the young Neeraj speaks with an unmistakable Middlesbrough accent); sending his daughters to local schools; and immersing himself in such typical native leisure activities as visiting the seaside (see Figure 3), cultivating roses, and chatting with neighbours about the weather over the garden fence.

An additional aspect of Dr. Suri's integration was that he interested himself warmly in the new culture around him. He turned the gaze of his Super 8 camera on Britain and created short films in which he enthusiastically showed aspects of British life and explained the odd ways of British people to his family back in India. He documented his new life, showing train journeys, the interior of the family's new home, Neeraj playing in the snow, and so on. He faithfully recorded family events as "a concatenation of ritual highlights" (van Dijck 27), and Sandhya weaves numerous Super 8 clips of family outings, birthday parties, and hospital social functions into the first act of the documentary. Dr. Suri invested some considerable time and effort in making the silent Super 8 movies more interesting by adding musical soundtracks, voice-overs and jokey title cards, all of which strongly suggests that, during the first decade at least, life in Britain was an enjoyable and positive experience for him.



Figure 3. Signs of assimilation: Dr. Suri and Neeraj in Western dress by the seaside.

A graver aspect of the filmmaking project also indicates that Dr. Suri countered the racist tendencies lurking in some corners of British mainstream society by presenting his family life as *normal*, as no different from the model families that were filling the TV screens at that time. José van Dijck writes that:

[C]apturing one's own family in the 1950s and 1960s meant to imitate the idealized family as shown on TV. The possession of the 8 mm [as in the case of Dr. Suri] in itself signalled the newly acquired material wealth that was prominently shown off both in television shown off both in television series and the home movies of these decades. (27)

The process of assimilation was certainly helped by Dr. Suri's position as a physician. Although they are not heard in the documentary, it is relevant to consider the words of Enoch Powell, who haunted the debate about immigration in the late-1960s, and whose inflammatory opinions would have been very familiar to Dr. Suri. In his "Rivers" speech, Powell declared that his primary concern was with those immigrants who planned to *settle* in Britain:

I stress the words "for settlement." This has nothing to do with the entry of Commonwealth citizens, any more than of aliens, into this country, for the purposes of study or of improving their qualifications, like (for instance) the Commonwealth doctors who, to the advantage of their own countries, have enabled our hospital service to be expanded faster than would otherwise have been possible. *They are not, and never have been, immigrants* [my emphasis].<sup>7</sup>

Thus Powell accorded doctors coming from the former colonies special status and respect, which undoubtedly encouraged someone in Dr. Suri's position to feel more welcome in Britain than the proletarian migrants in the wider South Asian diaspora. This distinction, I suggest, encouraged him to distance himself from his "immigrant" compatriots and redouble his own efforts at assimilation into middle-class British life.

Professionally, Dr. Suri's good work in the NHS enabled him to climb up from locum to specialist and achieve a position of high status and respectability. This success resulted in his decision to stay on longer than planned in Britain. In one audio-letter to his father, his discomfort at sharing this unwelcome news is clear in his stiff alternation between Hindi and English, as he declares that:

[*Hindi*] It's been a long time since I've been amongst you all. A very long time since I left my home. You have considered the matter, so have we. [*English*] Now what is the future for us? [*Hindi*] I'm being offered a senior position as consultant physician here. [*English*] Should I accept it or not? You know, I didn't qualify yesterday. I'm not that young. If I do not succeed as a specialist back at home [in India], then probably I'll be much more unhappy, so it was after quite careful consideration that we decided that we'll stay on a bit longer.

At this point in the early 1970s, it is evident that Dr. Suri had progressed quite some distance along the path of integration into British society, and that his transnational identity was becoming increasingly shaped by the culture of the host country. As a consequence, "India" recedes somewhat from the family life. A poignant moment that captures this development is when we hear Vanita, as an infant probably aged around four or five, saying with a broad northern English accent, "Dear Grandmother, I do not remember you but I know that your complexion is fair and that you have rosy cheeks. I hope you are all well in India."

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<sup>7</sup> For the full text of Powell's speech see [www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html). Retrieved on 15 Feb 2014.

It is safe to conclude that the great effort that Dr. Suri had invested in assimilating himself had built up expectations on his part that he and his family would be fully and equitably accepted into mainstream British society. Judging from what is shown in *I for India*, his integration proceeded more or less smoothly until around 1980, when his attitude towards Britain and its indigenous population appeared to reach a turning point. This change is revealed in an April 1980 audio-letter in which he ventilates his growing frustration:

[*Hindi*] I'm fed up . . . [*English*] sick and tired . . . of people not addressing me by my family name. [*Hindi*] They can't manage to pronounce "Suri." Some idiot will call me Fury, some Dury. [*English*] Even they don't ask for the spelling. . . . [*Hindi*] And if we mispronounce their names, [*English*] then we'll be immediately corrected. [*Hindi*] Tell me, what can I do about this? Sometimes I think, what's the use of bothering with these people.

It is significant here that Dr. Suri separates himself from the White British with his use of "we," "they," and "these people." His frustration is to some degree understandable. As a senior doctor, he had certainly become accustomed to being accorded respect and perhaps even deference. The mispronunciation of his name could have been taken as a sign of disrespect, but this would presumably have depended upon the intent of the speaker. Aside from this, any racism that Dr. Suri suffered during these years seems to have taken a rather mild form, since there is no indication in Sandhya's film that he suffered from any act or threat of physical abuse or violence. The only example of verbal abuse he mentions is occasionally being addressed as a "Paki." Undoubtedly, his position in society as a respected medical practitioner served to protect and insulate him from the kind of racist violence that was and still is a regular part of daily life in the migrant communities of Tower Hamlets, Bradford or Leeds. The key point here is, I believe, that his considerable success both in terms of his professional advancement and of his integration into British middle-class society had created within him *expectations* of complete acceptance. Thus the mispronunciation of his name, trivial enough in itself, was a sobering reminder of his continuing status as an outsider – a slap in the face. Consequently, Dr. Suri entered a phase of separation in the process of his acculturation that would point him back towards India or at least towards the "India" he imagined. The audio-letters that he sent back to his family in Meerut during this period attest to his sense of frustration and alienation.

### **Audio-letters and Voice**

In *The Myth of Return*, his study of Pakistani immigrants in Britain, Muhammad Anwar poses a simple question that goes to the heart of grasping the processes and travails of acculturation: "Even if a migrant is objectively assimilated," he asks, "what about his subjective identity?" (Anwar 9). Objectively, as we have seen, Dr. Suri had gone a long way towards successfully integrating himself into mainstream British life. Subjectively, however, after a decade in the UK, he began to see himself more and more as a *sojourner* rather than a settler. In a 1976 audio-letter, six years before repatriating to India, he tells his father:

[*English*] Respected Father, an important change is taking place in my life. An establishment of what I'd like to call a house, rather than a home, because I haven't still accepted that I can settle anywhere else in the world except my own country. I love my country [*Hindi*] although we have spent a major part of our lives here [in Britain] and by doing so, to a certain extent, made ourselves into misfits for own home.

Clearly, Dr. Suri's great effort at integration – his “*over-integration*,” as Sandhya expressed it in an interview with me<sup>8</sup> – had taken its toll over the years, making him in his own eyes an in-between “misfit.” Having made strenuous efforts to assimilate himself into mainstream British life, he had distanced himself from his native Indian language and background. This is evident from the fact that he frequently used English in his audio-letters to his family in India. Clearly, he was inhabiting a cultural and linguistic limbo, caught between living unhappily in the “house” of Britain whilst yearning for the “home” of India. He was, to use James Clifford's formulation of the diasporic dilemma, experiencing “the separation and entanglement of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (255).

This transnational dilemma felt by Dr. Suri – and in varying and differing degrees, as we shall see, by his wife and daughters as well – is what fascinated Sandhya and induced her to create the documentary. “The identity crises of first-generation settlers interest me more than those of the second generation,” Sandhya stated in one interview (Sandhu, 2007). “What happens when you lose your language? How does 40 years on foreign soil actually change a man?” She did not find answers to these questions in her father's Super 8 films but rather in the audio-letters, which provide a darker and more despairing counterpoint to the untroubled brightness of the home movies. The bifocality of the silent yet breezy Super 8 home movies and the darker and introspective audiotapes points not merely to a technological but also to a psychological dichotomy. As Sandhya recounts in her director's statement on the official homepage of the film:

Like so many families, lacing up our ancient projector and replaying our favourite Super 8 home movies was something we used to do with routine nostalgia. Only years later, as an adult, when I came across a box of audio reels, did I realize that the films were part of a much bigger story. Over weeks I sat down and listened to over 100 reels of audio letters, which my father had recorded and exchanged with his family back home in India – the most intimate thoughts and observations of our lives in England over a period of forty years.<sup>9</sup> At the same time as he was recording Super 8 films of birthday parties,

<sup>8</sup> This interview was conducted on Skype between Japan and the UK on 13 June 2013.

<sup>9</sup> In answer to my question about how the tapes came to be in her father's home, given that he had sent them to his family in India, Sandhya told me the following: “I knew of the existence of one or two cassettes of my grandfather's audio letters as I had found them earlier at our home. It was my father who mentioned that he had rescued the earlier audio reels from the dust and heat of our home in India [during the return in 1982-83] and that they were probably somewhere in the house. I consequently found them and couldn't believe what I had. Some of the super 8 reels I found in India were quite damaged and a few audiotapes I found too had simply melted in the heat so some stuff was lost but luckily my father had guarded a lot of it.” (Email from Sandhya Suri to author, 14 February 2014)

new houses and our successful lives abroad, the audio tapes were telling a more complex story. The familiar home movies took on a whole new meaning for me. (Suri)

The important point here – perhaps the most significant point about *I for India* overall – is that Sandhya had by chance rediscovered in both a physical and a figurative sense, her father’s private voice and was now allowing it to be heard in the documentary.

Voice is inextricably bound together with the language employed by the speaker. Dr. Suri’s growing command of English over the sixteen years of his family’s initial stay in Britain resulted in his feeling linguistically deracinated as he began to lose his native facility with Hindi. In the audiotapes, as we have observed, he switches between his mother tongue and English, often awkwardly so. In a clip from June 1980, not long before the return to India, he apologises to his father in stumbling, half-whispered speech for having grown more accustomed to English and thereby losing fluency in his own language:

[*English*] This is very confidential. Please don’t play it back for anybody else. [*Hindi*] It’s for you and Mamaji. Don’t think that your son has gone mad because he’s been speaking to you in *a foreign tongue*. But this is the language which gets the job done over here. I am really trying to find the Hindi “equivalent” of . . . Oh God, I mean, what is the word for “equivalent” in Hindi? I mean, I will try to find the comparable word in Hindi and not use *the foreigner’s language* anymore [my emphasis].

As was noted above about his divisive use of the pronouns “we” and “they,” Dr. Suri’s reference here to English as the “foreigner’s tongue” – the language that had previously been his passport to successful integration – is a clear sign of his resignation, for all his outward professional advancement, at finding himself still, after a decade of making every effort to assimilate, a marginalized outsider in Britain. The dark introspection is artfully emphasized here by Sandhya’s juxtaposition of the recording with a bright and happy sequence of Super 8 footage depicting a family outing to a seaside funfair.

It is in the audiotapes that Dr. Suri wrestles with and works through his memories and feelings of nostalgia and desire, and where he finds his voice and expresses what I would like to term a “post-assimilation trauma” that urges him on towards asserting agency in deciding to repatriate to India. In their 2011 study *Migration and New Media: Transnational Families and Polymedia*, Madianou and Miller make the key observation about the use of audiocassettes – a point equally applicable to Dr. Suri’s reel-to-reel tapes – that what

the machine-produced cassette tape lacked compared to the personal crafting of handwriting, it made up for in the significantly more emotional immediacy of voice and its stronger sense of a co-presence between sender and receiver. This emotional quality... comes from the presence of voice. (60)

This is the *orality* of a confessional performance of self. According to oral history theorist Lynn Abrams, “Orality comprises the rhythms and cadences, repetitions and intonations, the use of particular speech forms such as anecdote or reported speech, the use of dialect, as well as the volume, tone and speed” (20). As Sandhya notes in her director’s statement, these elements and qualities were present in her father’s recordings:

Listening to my father's audio letters, to the mike clicking on and off, us as children playing in the background, his breath as he struggles to find the right words, or the barely concealed anger or puzzlement in his voice, you can really picture him sitting in front of his tape recorder, documenting his life. (Suri, undated)

It is in these audio-letters that Dr. Suri, who had become linguistically liminal and hesitant, recovered and used his voice, and it is in listening to these recordings that we become privileged witnesses to the intimate “inside story” of his experience of displacement and loss and his negotiation of a new and constantly evolving identity.

### **Return and Broken Dreams**

After a decade in Britain, Dr. Suri faced increasing pressure – emotional blackmail almost – from his family in the Punjab to repatriate. This pressure, which toyed with his deepening feelings of guilt and nostalgia, was exerted by almost every member of his family in what seems to have been a concerted effort in the Super 8 movies and audio-letters they sent from India to force him to return. His father appears to have been the driving force behind this effort. We hear him telling his son:

[*Hindi*] Yash, my son, I have many expectations of you. And when you open your clinic here, I’ll take care of everything for you. I’ll look after it all. May God let you come and be successful here. There’s so much work for doctors here, I can’t begin to tell you.

His mother expresses similar sentiments: “[*Hindi*] Just as God has blessed many doctors here with fine mansions, so I pray for the day when my Yash returns home to have such a mansion. And when I set foot in that mansion my heart will be filled with joy.” His siblings are more aggressive in approach. His sister, for example, upbraids him for missing her wedding and fans the embers of guilt: “[*Hindi*] You think I am angry with you. Yes, I would have loved for you to be at my wedding because every sister wishes for her brother to be at her wedding.” Emotional pressure was exerted upon Dr. Suri more subtly through his daughters. “Hello Neeraj, Vanita,” their grandfather says in English,

Do you not like to come to India? You come here, stay over here, and you carry on your education here in India. Anyhow, it is a good country now. I think it’d be better if you all come forever to India and don’t stay in England now. What’s your opinion? What’s your papa’s opinion? Does he like to come to India or not?

The heaviest emotional pressure comes from his mother: “Yash, you know that of all my children I love you the most. The rest we’ll talk when we meet.” Unfortunately,

they would not be reunited. A shot depicting a devotional photo of Dr. Suri's mother draped with prayer beads, filmed by Sandhya, makes clear the fact that she had died before he could return. His failure to see his mother again fuelled his yearning to return. Finally in 1982, one month after his mother's death and after an absence of sixteen years, Dr. Suri and his family headed back to India with the intention of establishing his own clinic and settling for good.

The second act, which covers the return to India, begins with a montage sequence shot by Sandhya of modern Indian city life with its noise, crowds and congested traffic. These shots of local colour, accompanied by the driving rhythms of a Bollywood film song, convey not only the excitement of modern India but also the notion that the country has changed a good deal from the one that Dr. Suri left in 1966. In place of the Super 8 home movies and audiotapes that recounted life in Britain during the first act, Sandhya now uses her own footage and interviews with her mother and sisters to recreate the family's experience of trying to readapt to life in India.

The homecoming, it seems, got off to a good start. "The day I arrived," Dr. Suri recalls, "was a very memorable day. You see, certain things you can never forget. It was like Tom Jones's 'Green, green grass of home.' It can't be described. A great feeling."<sup>10</sup> This joyful mood is confirmed by Mrs. Suri's recollection:

Your father's mood was very good. He was quite happy and... he started getting ready for his clinic, buying furniture, buying equipment and whatever he needed. So he was quite happy, he was looking forward. He was full of enthusiasm at that time.

Sandhya's filmed reconstruction of this period includes a sequence in which we see a reenactment of a sign painter creating a billboard that announces Dr. Suri as a "Leading U.K. Specialist" (see Figure 4). Significantly, the transnational doctor had brought "Britain" back with him as an integral part of his identity and as a professional seal of excellence. This strategy failed to attract patients to his clinic, however. Neeraj recalls visiting her father there:

He'd always dreamt of coming back and being the great doctor, and doing charitable works as well as having a flourishing clinic. Quite often when I came it was empty. Having seen Dad in the big hospital in Darlington, you know, where he was a man of standing, just seeing him sitting alone in his little hut, it was quite sad.

Mrs. Suri speaks of the difficulty that her husband had establishing himself in Meerut, "Your father was new in that town, so to establish himself as a physician was difficult. Your father used to get irritable sometimes in [*sic*] the psyche of those people and their mentality. It was difficult." She recalls that one person in the locality

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. Suri's tongue-in-cheek reference to this 1966 hit song about the emotional return home of a man released from a long spell of imprisonment, apart from signaling his familiarity with British popular culture, suggests that he experienced his return to India with great relief as the end of a long period of "incarceration" in Britain. Unlike the protagonist of the ballad, however, Dr. Suri did not find everything as he had left it.

was heard to say, “Doctor Suri knows how to practice in England, but here, how does he know how to treat patients here?” Thus in his homeland Dr. Suri ironically found himself positioned negatively as a *British* outsider, paradoxically othered in the land of his birth by his compatriots. Mrs. Suri’s use of the phrases “those people” and “their mentality,” however, suggests strongly that Dr. Suri had “co-produced” the alienation and distance that arose between himself and his patients. In some sense, then, he had brought this upon himself.

The key shift in perspective between the first and second acts of *I for India* derives from the fact that Sandhya’s reconstruction allows the voices of her mother and sisters not only to be heard but also to express frank opinions about this period with the full benefit of hindsight. Mrs. Suri and first daughter Neeraj were unhappy in India from the outset. Many things, ranging from having to live cheek by jowl with two other families under one roof to the lack of a washing machine, greatly frustrated Mrs. Suri. She comments in an interview with Sandhya that “[i]t was a different way of life and I didn’t like it very much.” Neeraj, who was an 18-year-old college student at that time, also hated being there. She recalls that she was bored, since “there was nothing to do, nowhere to go, especially if you were a girl.” College life, she recounts, was “mundane compared to life in England.” Only second daughter Vanita seems to have enjoyed being in India since she “no longer felt like a misfit” as she had in England. In India, she recalls, she felt “really at home.” The Suri family stuck it out for nine months before deciding to return – to *remigrate* – to Britain in October 1982 in order, as Mrs. Suri expressed it, to “get on with our life.”



Figure 4. Sandhya’s reconstruction of the “Leading U.K. Specialist” sign advertising Dr. Suri’s clinic in Meerut.

For Dr. Suri, his yearned-for India had turned out to be a mirage. His unhappy experience of returning to the land of his birth recalls the words of Salman Rushdie in his essay “Imaginary Homelands”:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)



This sense of loss and displacement is underscored in the film by Sandhya's inclusion of a song from the classic Hindi film *Kaagaz Ke Phool* (*Paper Flowers*). The English subtitles of the lyrics read, "What a cruel joke time has played on us. You have not remained the same, nor have I." Ironically, popular Hindi cinema has long served to bind NRIs in the diaspora to Indian culture.<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of references to Bollywood here, however, serves only to highlight how removed Dr. Suri had become from his homeland. Nevertheless, even after the failed repatriation and his second migration to Britain, India continued to be the foundation upon which he constructed his subjectivity and identity. In an audiotape he made soon after returning to Britain, he proclaims:

Finally, I want to say one more thing: please do not underestimate Y.P. Suri with regard to his patriotism and his loyalty. No matter that he did not succeed in his own country, to resettle. The love for my soil hasn't diminished. I'm a true Indian.

It is most likely that these words were offered as a reassurance to his family in India and as a way of smoothing over what must have been an unpleasant second departure from Meerut. These patriotic sentiments notwithstanding, it would appear that "India" fell away from the family's life following the resettlement in Britain. As far as it is possible to judge from what is shown in *I for India*, Dr. Suri and his wife resumed the process of assimilating into mainstream British society. In sequences shot by Sandhya in 2003 depicting Dr. and Mrs. Suri participating in meetings of respectively the Darlington Camcorder Club and the Darlington Women's Club, both retirees have clearly been fully accepted by other members and seem to be happily assimilated into British life.

There is sad irony in the failure of the home movies and audio-letters to fulfil their role of binding the two families together. Nowadays with the exponential growth of cheap and efficient international telephony, as Vertovec argues, the "real-time communications allowed by cheap telephone calls now serve as a kind of social glue connecting families and other small-scale formations across the globe" (56). Of course, real-time communication by webcam is an even more effective social glue, since it is possible to see one's interlocutor and gauge meaning and nuance from facial expressions and gestures. Two fundamental problems with the home movie exchange between Dr. Suri and his family in India – firstly the time-lapse between creation and reception of the films, and secondly the usually upbeat selection of material included – skewed communication in a way that was ultimately unrealistic and unhelpful. On both sides of this filmic correspondence Dr. Suri and his brother shot footage that showed their lives to the greatest advantage and purveyed the most joy. This naturally fostered ideal images of the other side. In the case of Dr. Suri, who in any case was feeling nostalgic for his "India," the movies coming from Meerut with their images of Punjabi life and familiar scenes would have constructed an ideal image of India in his mind. The time lapse between movies arriving would have meant that the same movie from India, for example, would be viewed repeatedly, thereby reinforcing and reifying this ideal image. The time lapse also made immediate response, as with telephones and webcams, impossible, leaving this ideal picture

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<sup>11</sup> On this point see Bandyopadhyay (2008) and Alessandrini (2001).

unchallenged. The use of this technology, which in 1966 had seemed so state-of-the-art, actually nurtured false impressions and expectations between the two families and made the failure of the return an inevitability.

### Directorial Interventions

Whilst Sandhya's film *I for India* has won awards as a documentary, it is open to question whether it can be described as a straightforward documentary in the commonly accepted sense of an objective filming of reality. Both the structure and narrative of the film have been heavily shaped by Sandhya's directorial interventions, ranging from her selection of material and her imaginative creation of certain sequences to her creative juxtapositions of sharply contrasted media and moods, all of which draw out nuanced meanings and readings and heighten aspects of her father's subjectivity and acculturation. In this context, Daniela Berghahn has shrewdly identified the significance of Sandhya's central role in generating meanings in the film with her apt description of *I for India* as "a complex postmemory film with a palimpsest structure" (100). Berghahn here borrows the term "postmemory" from Marianne Hirsch, who has worked with the children of Holocaust survivors in their attempts to reconstruct their parents' lives. Hirsch writes in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* that "[p]ostmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation" (22).

The act of searching through parents' memories and archives of photographs and home movies to create documentary films, Michael Renov has argued, is actually "a kind of identity sleuthing in which family-bound figures – progenitors and progeny – are mined for clues" (142) to the filmmaker's own migration-fractured identity. In making *I for India*, one can say with some certainty that Sandhya was investigating her own second-generation transnational subjectivity and "writing" her own life as well as that of her mother and sisters on the palimpsest of her father's self-recordings.

Sandhya's interventions as director seek to lay bare the inner life of her father. We have seen how her juxtapositions of the upbeat Super 8 clips with the dark introspective audio recordings expressed the troubled state of her father's mind in the years prior to the family's repatriation. Sandhya also used her own creative footage to convey Dr. Suri's nostalgic memories of his homeland. Early in the film we see the elderly doctor standing at his kitchen window and looking out at his garden. With Hindi film music playing the garden dissolves into a yellow vista of mustard fields in the Punjab (see Figure 5), which then serves as a bridge to archival footage of rural Indian life designed to conjure the life Dr. Suri had left behind.



Figure 5. Conjuring memories: Sandhya makes her father's back garden in Darlington merge into the mustard fields of the Punjab.

An even more striking example of Sandhya's creative attempt to convey her father's guilt-stricken mind leading up to the return is the extended "dream sequence" in which the line between documentary and fiction certainly becomes blurred. This sequence begins with a shot of the elderly Dr. Suri napping rather fitfully. There follows a night-time montage with unsettling shots of street life in India featuring silhouetted figures and rickshaws moving slowly in and out of smoke or mist and the sounds of sepulchral voices and eerie slowed-down bells and cymbals (see Figure 6). The result is a mildly nightmarish atmosphere in which recordings of the distorted voices of his relatives in India, extracted from the audio-letters, pressure him relentlessly in Hindi to return. His sister informs him, "Mother remembers you all the time and whenever she talks about you, she starts to cry." His brother-in-law tells him, "The longer you stay away from home, the unhappier you'll be. Satisfaction will come only from home. You won't find it outside." His brother employs the more direct leverage of guilt:



Figure 6. Conjuring dreams: Sandhya's conveying her father's troubled dreams about his family in India.

Do you remember when you were in India? How much love there was between us? Maybe, having moved to European life, you've forgotten how we used to be here. You left and went abroad and the responsibility you should have dealt with, you being the eldest son, that now is all on my shoulders. And as far as I can I will manage because I have no choice.

Then we hear the father, again, crying and lamenting in Hindi, "Yash, son . . . hello. God bless you and Sheel. My heart is breaking. I'm very distressed. Come home and I'll be better again. What else is there left in my life? My son is far away. I feel like dying. What shall I do? My life is unbearable without you."

A final example of the way in which Sandhya intervenes as director is her repeated insertion of filmmaking motifs. The passage of time, particularly in the first act, is marked by shots of film cans with place and date written on them (see Figure 7). There are also linking shots of her elderly father lacing up his old projector or sorting through a box of tapes. Filmmaking itself becomes a leitmotif. In the sequence mentioned above that shows the meeting of the Darlington Camcorder Club, we see Dr. Suri presenting a home video he had recently made while on holiday in Egypt.

The most self-reflexive filmmaking moment in the documentary, however, comes almost at the end of the film during the sequence in which the recently emigrated Vanita speaks with her parents by webcam. The split image on the computer screen shows Vanita talking from Australia and Sandhya herself filming the conversation (see Figure 8). This is the only time in the whole film that we see Sandhya, and fittingly she is hidden behind a camera recording this momentous event in the family's migratory history. In this moment one gains a sense of the centrality of filmmaking in

the Suri family and how it has served to help them not only to document but also make sense of their transnational lives.

## Conclusion

Over the last thirty years or more, a number of British-Asian fiction films have thematised, not only the troubled experiences of migrants, transnationals and their progeny, but also the pleasures of hybridity (Malik, 2010).<sup>12</sup> Writer Hanif Kureishi and director Stephen Frears are often seen as the initiators of this tendency with their highly successful film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), which as Sarita Malik (1996) has observed, celebrates the pleasures of hybridity. The mixed race protagonist Omar, born of a Pakistani father and an English mother, is the very embodiment of what Salman Rushdie terms this “plural and partial” in-between-ness. This film is notable for its pattern-setting exploitation of the possibilities of what I would like to term the *interstitial humour* arising from migratory and hybrid lives lived between two languages and cultures. The tendency to employ comedy both to defuse the potentially divisive drama of racial interaction (and, by the way, court mainstream audiences) is evident also in such fiction films as *Bhaji on the Beach* (Chadha, 1993), *East is East* (O’Donnell, 1999), *Anita and Me* (Hüseyin, 2002), *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002), and *West is West* (De Emmony, 2010).

Comedy has also been used in popular television programmes such as *Goodness Gracious Me* (BBC, 1996), *The Kumars at No. 42* (BBC, 2001), and *The Indian Doctor* (BBC, 2010) (Gillespie). In other words, we can see that comedy has offered a protective glove with which to touch the prickly issue of race in multicultural Britain. The terrorist outrages of 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London, however, changed this situation and made comedy an inappropriate response (Malik 2010). Fiction films such as *Ae Fond Kiss...* (Loach, 2004), *Yasmin* (Gleannan, 2004) and *Brick Lane* (Gavron, 2007) and television dramas such as *Bradford Riots* (2006) and *Britz* (2007) have addressed divisive interracial issues, particularly with regard to the suspicion with which the Muslim community has been viewed in some quarters, with depth and gravity. The serious (i.e. non-comic) cinematic treatment of race issues has come of age.



Figure 7. Dated Super 8 film cans used to mark the passage of time in *I for India*.

<sup>12</sup> I use the term ‘British Asian film’ here to refer, not to a film that has been written or directed by someone of South Asian descent, but to a film with a British Asian theme. Thus I take both Ken Loach’s *Ae Fond Kiss...* and Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend It Like Beckham* to be British Asian films.

When we turn to documentaries that deal with the real-life migration experiences of British Asians, we discover a great lack. Sandhya's *I for India* is one of the first and best films to attempt to fill this void. In this paper I have discussed how the film documents the development of her father's transnational subjectivity from a number of angles, namely the racism of official media in the 1960s and 1970s as evidenced by



Figure 8. Self-reflexive filmmaking: the webcam captures Sandhya (right) capturing her sister Vanita as she speaks from Australia.

the BBC clips inserted in the film; Dr. Suri's efforts to integrate and assimilate into mainstream British society; the juxtaposition between the Super 8 home movies and the private audio-letters and Sandhya's "discovery" of his voice; the Suri family's repatriation to India and subsequent resettlement in Britain; and Sandhya's interventionist strategies as director. All these factors, I have argued, have contributed to how *I for India* has both represented and constructed Dr. Suri's transnational identity.

In conclusion, I would emphasise two elements in Sandhya's film that make it a unique and valuable document worthy of attention. Firstly, we hear Dr. Suri's *voice* as he reflects on and wrestles with the implications of his transnationality. His confessional outpourings place us in the privileged position of "listening in" as he gives verbal expression to his authentic and deeply held thoughts about his experiences over many years in Britain. Secondly, we witness an actual return to India. In Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* and in the film adapted from it, the husband Chanu, like Dr. Suri, succumbs to "Going Home Syndrome" and returns to Dhaka. The crucial difference between real-life Dr. Suri and the fictional Chanu, however, is that one never learns what happens to the latter after he repatriated. Did he return to a "Bangladesh of the mind" and then come back to Britain or could he successfully reintegrate himself into Bangladeshi life? In *I for India* we are invited to follow the whole process of returning home, before, during and after, and from multiple perspectives. As we have seen, there is even a Super 8 clip recording the moment when Dr. Suri and his wife and daughters take their final leave of the family in India. Sandhya's film uncovers the complexities of repatriation.

These two elements differentiate *I for India* from another documentary that enquires into British Asian identity entitled *I'm British But...* (1990). This film marked Gurinder Chadha's debut as a film director and foreshadowed the themes of her fiction films. In Chadha's documentary various young second-generation British Asians with Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origins talk in conventional on-camera interviews about their hybrid lives and identities. They speak of South Asia abstractly as a cultural presence that they can either embrace or deny. In contrast to *I for India*, there is no filmed return to South Asia. Furthermore, whilst offering interesting insights into hybrid identity, the interviews conducted in *I'm British But...* lack the spontaneous orality of Dr. Suri's confessional tapes: the subjects answer questions

directed at them, whereas Dr. Suri unburdens himself in a more private and spontaneous way to his parents. Sandhya's *I for India* has broken new ground not merely for being one of the first films to fill the British Asian documentary void but also for offering deep insights into the transnational experience in Britain as well as in India, and for opening up the complex processes involved in acculturation and identity formation. As Dr. Suri says at the end of the film, "[Hindi] This sketch I have given of my life... I think our youngsters [English] they will gain a lot of insight from it, about the early struggles."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The recent three-part BBC Radio documentary *Three Pounds in My Pocket* (Kavita Puri, March 2014), which allows the experiences of South Asians who came to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s to be heard directly from the individuals themselves, points in a similar direction to *I for India*. *Three Pounds* provides an interesting comparison to *I for India*, however, in that it deals mostly with the hard "ground-level" experiences of working-class migrants rather than elite or middle-class transnationals such as Dr. Suri. See [www.historyextra.com/feature/£3-my-pocket-pioneering-migrants-who-came-britain-india-1950s](http://www.historyextra.com/feature/£3-my-pocket-pioneering-migrants-who-came-britain-india-1950s). Retrieved on 20 Apr 2014.

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