

Home and Away

Title	Home and Away
Subtitle	Not provided.
Lead-in / Abstract	I will explore the idea of crossing borders in the course of my work as a documentarist and connect that to the kinds of crossings made by the subjects in <i>Home and Away</i> as well as by the viewers of the work.
Participants and speakers	Mishra, Samina (IN)
Short biography of participants	Samina Mishra is a documentary filmmaker and media practitioner based in New Delhi. Her work includes <i>Stories of Girlhood</i> , a series of three films on the Girl Child in India and <i>Hina in the Old City</i> , a non-fiction book on the Walled City of Delhi for children. She was the location sound recordist for the documentary film <i>Words on Water</i> . <i>Home and Away</i> is her first new media work.

Full text

I live in a suburb of Delhi and believe that I cross borders everyday. I cross a river, I negotiate different urban landscapes, I weave through a tangled web of differences. Everyday, I am both at home and away.

My work here at ISEA 2004 is an audio and visual document about children from some British Asian communities growing up in London. The work has evolved from a six week research fellowship. At the time, I did not know exactly what I intended to do. I had six weeks to spend in London and a vague notion of doing a book for children about their counterparts in the UK – an attempt at disbanding stereotypes about growing up in the West, something that would bring to urban middle class Indian children the “harsher realities” of life in the West. So, I went about the tasks that I had set for myself. I asked the children questions that others had asked before, I wandered the streets that many before me had wandered and perhaps, I experienced the same amazement as others before me at the presence of typically Asian objects – from jhatka chicken tikkas to Fair and Lovely cream. I guess I didn't really stumble upon a new idea. It was all about ideas of belonging, communities and the lines drawn around them – the stuff of everyday life in India.

Borders - Here & There

I work as a documentarist in India. A lot of the time, I walk into villages and poor urban settlements and engage people in conversations – sometimes with a recorder, sometimes a camera and sometimes just paper and pen. It doesn't really matter what I carry or what I wear. Each time, I'm the outsider - English speaking and city bred, privileged by class and circumstance. And each time, I encounter differences. Class, language, religious and cultural practice.

Fourteen year old Navdeep Singh Alg who lives in Wimbledon, London told me,

“In my first school, I kept getting lots and lots of questions. They kept asking why do you wear a turban, why do you do this... Why, why, why... It got tiring after a while. But you might as well say it because that's the only way they'll understand...”

When I go into a village deep in Uttar Pradesh, India, they ask me if I travel around like this unescorted. Before I got married, they used to ask me how come I wasn't married even at 30 ! I have a mixed name – my first name is one you find only amongst muslims in India and my surname is a Hindu caste name. So, it's fairly common in India for people to ask me how come I have this name when they first meet me. It used to irritate me in my adolescence. Lots and lots of questions, as Navdeep says. It got tiring after a while – for me as well. But he's right, you know – you might as well say it because that's the only way they'll understand. And so, I answer the questions because it's important to me to express that there are many different ways of being Indian, many different ways of being a woman, many different ways of being a Muslim. And that a border can be a line in your head, not just on the ground.