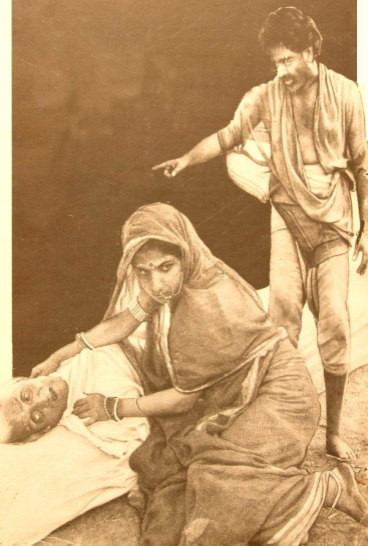


A NFDC PRODUCTION

অন্তর্জলী যাত্রা

THE VOYAGE BEYOND
LE VOYAGE AN DELA
DIE LETZTE REISE

A film by Goutam Ghose





PERSPECTIVE

The times in which *Antarjali Jatra* is set was one of great societal change, and re-awakening. The Bengal Renaissance of the 19th century challenged many customs and practices that had established themselves in Hindu Society through antiquity. Since the vast majority of Brahmins were illiterate, or even neo-literate, the Hindu scriptures were extremely vulnerable to misinterpretation and misrepresentation. It is in the 19th century that Sanskrit scholarship was secularized by the British rulers, who wanted to understand the ancient laws of the country they ruled. The Brahminical monopoly on the reading of ancient texts being broken, mainly by German and British Indologists, several distorted interpretations of Hindu laws came to be challenged, and specially the perverse rituals that these had perpetrated through the ages. Primary among them was *Satidaha*—the practice of burning Brahmin widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands or *Suttee*, as it came to be known to the Western world.

The origins of *Suttee* is shrouded in mystery, but its practice has been recorded in history down the ages, from Alexander's campaign documents to the proceedings of the Moghul court. In the 19th century, however, the practice had taken particularly gruesome characteristics, mainly by the use of brute force to burn unwilling widows. The growth of Western learning, and the wave of social and religious reform in the 19th century, found in *Suttee* a cause célèbre. New scholars, like Sanskrit also pointed out a discrepancy in the main text on which the Brahmins based the practice of *Suttee* upon. A mere change of one syllable in the text transformed a perfectly innocent funeral rite into gruesome murder. And such changes were quite plausible, since the entire body of Hindu texts survived for centuries through an oral tradition. A simple mispronunciation could well have led to this practice of horrifying manslaughter. The exercise of threatened Brahminical power and the position of women as chattel in Hindu society, which gave them few rights or privileges, helped to strengthen the murderous practice of *Suttee*.

The leaders of the Hindu social and religious reform movement in the 19th century found in Lord Bentinck a determined and intelligent supporter. Raja Ram Mohan Roy led a long and relentless struggle against the Brahmin scholars of the day, and Hindu society itself came to be divided on the question of *Suttee*. In 1829, Bentinck passed the law which made *Suttee* a criminal offence, with retribution worthy of culpable homicide. In the light of the East India Company's policy of appeasement with Indian religious and social mores, Bentinck wrote, "Prudence and self-interest would counsel me to tread in the footsteps of my predecessors. But in a case of such momentous importance to humanity and civilization, that man must be reckless of all his present or future happiness, who could listen to the dictates of so wicked and selfish a policy".

But law alone could not put down totally a practice, however brutal, that had been consecrated by time. The battle against *Suttee* continued long after Bentinck's promulgation of law, and its practice continued to sporadically haunt the conscience of Indian society in the 19th century. *Antarjali Jatra* takes place after 1829, and the story must be seen in the light of important social events. Some of them are not even directly related to the practice of *Suttee* itself. One must remember that *Antarjali Jatra* belongs to a time when other reform movements, like the remarriage of Hindu widows, was in full force. The culmination of such movements finally came with the establishment of the *Brahmo Samaj*, a breakaway Hindu religious sect that tried to re-interpret the ancient scriptures in their pristine form, and even discontinued the practice of idolatry. The first appearance of Bengali prose in William Carey's translation of the Bible; the spread of Western science in the new university student community; the gradual awareness and growth of the Indian freedom movement in which the working class participated—all this is of consequence in the understanding of *Antarjali Jatra*. It refers to a phase in Indian history from which a modern nation started to emerge, a movement that continues even today, a fight that is kept alive by the immolation of Roop Kanwar in Rajasthan on 4th September, 1987.

THE VOYAGE BEYOND

The delta of the mighty Ganges; a derelict little temples on its banks; lonely funeral ground where the local Hindus burn their dead; with the solitary presence of Baiju, a low-caste untouchable who builds the funeral pyres. It is here that an old and dying Brahmin Sitaram is brought in by relatives and friends, to lie on the banks of the holy river, waiting for death. While the whole community of Brahmins wait, Ananta the astrologer discovers that the planets foretell Sitaram's imminent death, but he must take a mate along with him. So the widowed Sitaram must be married off to create the mate the stars demand. For a poor Brahmin, it represents a possibility of being saved from the shame of an unmarried nubile daughter and the glory of her cannonization as a Sati. Sati - an ancient practice of wives going in alive with their husbands into the funeral fire. In Sitaram's ailing body, life flows faintly on.

With Brahminical power threatened by history, and the practice of Sati being prescribed by infidel British law, the idea enthuses the Brahmins. Sitaram's lingering on enthuses them further and his wedding with the young Yashobati is finalized. The only discordant note is struck by Baiju's sarcasm, and his pleading in vain with the village doctor to inform the constabulary. But the high priestly class need take no heed of a drunken untouchable.

Yashobati arrives at the funeral grounds as a bride for a dying old man who is condemned

to Satihood. Ironically, her Brahmin father is forced to take a loan of silver from the untouchable Baiju. The proximity to youth and the sensual promise of marriage seems to revive the dying Sitaram.

A night of fever pitch excitement for the Brahmins, and of a drunkenness and bawdy songs for Baiju, also passes. But Sitaram's life hangs on by a slender thread. Sitaram's sons wait anxiously to take possession of the key that is tied to the old man's clothes.

When Yashobati unknowingly throws it away, they fight over it brutally and leave. So do the bystanders, whose patience wears thin with waiting. The old man, his young bride and Baiju are trapped in a primal drama of love and passion, jealousy and hatred, fear and the yearning for freedom.

The full moon rises, Sitaram's condition deteriorates, a deliriously drunk Baiju implores Yashobati to run away. But she cannot, caught in the web of her superstition and fear, brought up to believe that from one rebirth to the next, marriages are made in heaven.

Baiju's anger finally breaks through the impasse, and tries to murder the old man. Yashobati fights him relentlessly, and the physical act itself draws them together. In the soft mud of the delta, they become the primordial man and woman.

It is nature that brings this drama of passion to its violent conclusion. A tidal bore comes down the mighty Ganges, till now a silent spectator. As its turbulent waters sweep Sitaram away, Yashobati tries to save him. Baiju, who knows the power of the river, can be nothing but a witness to the inexorable destruction.





LE VOYAGE AN DELA

Le delta du Ganges puissant; un petit temple abandonné sur son banc; lieu de funérailles isolé où les Hindous locaux brûlent leur morts; avec la présence solitaire de Baiju, un roturier intouchable qui construit les feux funéraires. C'est ici qu'un vieux Brahmin Sitaram Mourant est amené par sa famille et ses amis, pour attendre la mort, couché sur le banc de la rivière sacrée. Pendant que la communauté entière de Brahmins attend Ananta, l'astrologue découvre que les planètes prédisent la mort imminente de Sitaram, mais qu'il doit prendre un conjoint avec lui. Donc, la veuve Sitaram doit être mariée afin de créer le conjoint nécessaire. Pour un pauvre Brahmin, cela représente une possibilité d'être sauvé de la honte d'une fille nubile célibataire et la gloire de sa canonisation comme Sati. Sati - une pratique ancienne des femmes se jetant vivantes avec leurs maris dans le feu funéraire. Dans le corps malade de Sitaram, la vie s'écoule faiblement.

Avec le pouvoir Brahmanical, menacé par l'histoire, et la pratique de Sati étant prescrite par la loi infidèle anglaise, l'idée enthousiasme les Brahmins. L'attardement de Sitaram les enthousiasme encore plus, et son mariage avec la jeune Yashobati est finalisé. La seule note discordante est frappée par le sarcasme de Baiju, et ses plaidoiries futiles au docteur du village pour informer la police. Mais un prêtre de classe supérieure n'a pas à faire attention à un roturier ivre.

Yashobati, arrive aux lieux des funérailles, une mariée pour un vieil homme mourant qui est condamné au Sati. Ironiquement, son père Brahmin est forcé de prendre un prêt d'argent de l'intouchable Baiju. La proximité à la jeunesse et la promesse sensuelle de mariage semble ranimer le mourant, Sitaram.

Une nuit d'excitation fiévreuse pour les Brahmins, et d'ivresse et de chansons obscènes a lieu. Mais la vie de Sitaram tient bon sur un fil délicat, les fils de Sitaram attendent anxieusement de prendre la clef qui est attachée aux vêtements du vieil homme.

Quand Yashobati la jette inconsciemment, ils se disputent brutalement et s'en vont. Les spectateurs impatient, en font autant. Le vieil

homme, sa jeune mariée et Baiju sont attrapés dans un drame d'amour et de passion, de jalousie et d'haine, de peur et d'aspiration pour la liberté.

La pleine lune se lève, la condition de Sitaram détériore, Baiju ivre et délirant implore Yashobati de se sauver. Mais elle ne peut pas, prise par ses superstitions et sa peur, ayant été élevée à croire que d'une renaissance à une autre, les mariages sont fait au ciel.

La rage de Baiju éclate finalement et il essaye de tuer le vieil homme. Yashobati lutte contre lui inflexiblement, et l'acte physique les attire l'un à l'autre. Dans la boue douce, ils deviennent l'homme et la femme primordial.



L'ordre de la nature conduit ce drame de passion à sa conclusion violente. Une tempête descend sur le puissant Ganges, spectateur silencieux jusqu'à maintenant. Yashobati essaye de sauver Sitaram qui est emporté par les eaux turbulentes. Baiju, connaissant le pouvoir de la rivière, ne peut être qu'un témoin à l'inexorable destruction.



DIE LETZTE REISE

Das Deltagebiet des mächtigen Ganges-baufällige kleine Tempel an seinen Ufern-eine einsam gelegene Bestattungsstätte, wo die Toten der hier lebenden Hindus eingäschert werden-nur Baiju lebt hier, der Unberührbare, der für die Scheiterhaufen zuständig ist. Der im Sterben liegende Brahmanengreis Sitaram wird von seinen Verwandten und den Angehörigen der obersten Kaste hierhergebracht, damit er an den Ufern des heiligen Stromes sterben kann. Während die Brahmanen auf seinen Tod warten, findet der Astrologe Ananta heraus, daß die Planeten Sitarams baldigen Tod voraussagen, aber er muß eine Lebensgefährtin mit in den Tod nehmen!



Sitaram ist Witwer, und man muß also sofort eine Frau für ihn finden, weil das in den Sternen geschrieben steht. Eine Heirat wurde für einen armen Brahmanen bedeuten, daß er der Schande enttrint, eine unverheiratete heiratsfähige Tochter zu haben-und dazu noch die große Ehre, der Vater einer "Sati" zu sein. Sati, die uralte Sitte, wo sich die Ehefrauen lebendig in den Scheiterhaufen des Ganges werfen, um so Seligkeit zu erlangen. In Sitarams altem verbrauchtem Körper flackert das Lebenslichtlein nur noch ganz schwach.

Die anwesenden Brahmanen sind von der ganzen Angelegenheit sehr angetan, zumal sie ihre Macht, die sie als Angehörige der obersten Kaste haben, durch ein Gesetz der Engländer bedroht sehen, in dem "Sati" streng verboten wird. Da Sitarams Tod auf sich warten läßt, beschließen sie, die Eheschließung mit der blutjungen Brahmantochter Yashobati zu vollziehen. Baiju, der Unberührbare, ist ganz und gar nicht von der Sache begeistert und hält mit

sarkastischen Bemerkungen nicht zurück. Vorgeblich bittet er den anwesenden Landarzt, die Polizei zu benachrichtigen. Aber die Brahmanenpriester halten es für unter ihrer Würde, den betrunkenen Unberührbaren zu beachten.

Yashobati, verurteilt, als "Sati" zu sterben, erreicht die Verbrennungsstätte als Braut für den sterbenden Alten. Es ist bittere Ironie, daß ihr armer Vater als Brahmane sich ausgerechnet von dem Unberührbaren Baiju Silbermünzen leihen muß, die zum Vollzug des Ritus benötigt werden. Die Nähe blühender Jugend und die bevorstehende Hochzeit erregen den alten Sitaram dermaßen, daß er wieder aufzuleben scheint.

Die Nacht vergeht mit viel Aufregung für die Brahmanen und Trunkenheit und anzüglichen Lieder seitens Baijus. Aber Sitaram lebt immer noch. Seine Söhne warten schon ungeduldig darauf, daß sie den Schlüssel an sich nehmen können, den der alte Mann in seiner Kleidung verknötet hat.

Wenn Yashobati diesen Schlüssel aus Versehen wegwirft, entsteht ein bitterer Streit zwischen den Söhnen. Schließlich verlassen sie den Sterbenden zusammen mit den anderen, denen die Wartezeit allmählich zu lang wird. Zurück bleiben der alte Mann, die junge Braut und Baiju als Gefangene in einem Urdrama von Liebe und Leidenschaft, Eifersucht, Haß, Angst und der Sehnsucht nach Freiheit.

Der Vollmond geht auf, Sitarams Befinden verschlechtert sich. Baiju ist betrunken und wie von Sinnen. Er fleht Yashobati an, mit ihm davonzulaufen. Aber sie ist gefangen im Netz der Angst und des Aberglaubens. Von Kind auf hat man ihr eingetrichtert, daß Hochzeiten von einer Wiedergeburt zur anderen im Himmel geschlossen werden.

Baijus Zorn kennt schließlich keine Grenzen mehr, und er versucht, den Greis umzubringen. Yashobati wehrt sich verzweifelt, und durch die körperliche Nähe finden sie zusammen. Im weichen Sumpf des Deltas werden sie das ursprüngliche Paar.

Die Natur selbst bringt dieses Drama der Leidenschaften zu einem gewaltsamen Ende. Eine Flutwelle ergießt sich in den mächtigen Ganges, der bis dahin unbeteiligter Zuschauer war. Wie die turbulenten Wassermassen Sitaram hinwegreißen, versucht Yashobati, ihn zu retten. Baiju, der die Macht des Stromes kennt, ist hilfloser Zeuge der unerbittlichen Zerstörung.



DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

Major Documentaries:

NEW EARTH	(1973)
HUNGRY AUTUMN	(1975)
CHAINS OF BONDAGE	(1976)
PARAMPARA	(1985)
THE LAND OF SAND DUNES	(1986)

Feature Films:

MAA BHOOMI (OUR LAND)	(1979)
DAKHAL (THE OCCUPATION)	(1982)
PAAR (THE CROSSING)	(1984)

HUNGRY AUTUMN

Main Award, Oberhausen Film Festival.

(1978)

Diploma of Merit at Leipzig. (1977)

MAA BHOOMI

Best regional film, Telegu. (1980)

DAKHAL

Golden Lotus for the best feature film of the year 1981.

Silver medal at Figuera De Foz, Portugal. (1982)

Participated in the Director's Fortnight at Cannes Film Festival. (1982)

PAAR

• Best actor award at Venice Film Festival. (1984)

• National award for best actor, actress and best Hindi Film (1985)

• Unesco award at Venice.

• Fipresci award, Redcross award at Verna Film Festival. (1987)

THE LAND OF SAND DUNES

National award GOLDEN LOTUS for the best documentary, 1986.

ANTARJALI JATRA

THE VOYAGE BEYOND

A film by **Goutam Ghose**

Story	Kamal Kumar Mazumder
Language	Bengali
Format	35m.m./1:1.66 Ratio
Colour	Eastman Colour

Cast:

Shatrughan Sinha • Promode Ganguly • Shampa Ghosh • Basanta Chowdhury • Robi Ghosh • Sajal Roychoudhury • Mohan Agashe • Kalyan Chatterji • Rathin Lahiri & others.

Crew:

Research	R.P. Gupta Nirbed Roy
Additional dialogue	Sunil Gongopadhaya
Art Direction	Ashoke Bose
Make up	Debi Halder
Costume	Neelanjana Ghosh
Editing	Moloy Banerjee
Sound	Joyti Chatterjee Anup Mukherjee

Production Designer	Dilip Banerjee
Production Controller	Kalyan Dasgupta Shanu Banerjee
Assistant Direction	Sabyasachi Mukherjee Sudhendra Ganguly Mohan Koda Sajal Mitra
Assistant Camera	Dilip Banerjee Bejoy Anand Sanjoy Bhattacharva
Assistant Editing	Ratan Sarkar T S Mani
Production	National Film Development Corporation Ltd.
Executive Producers	Ravi Malik Debashish Majumdar

Scenario, Camera, Music & Direction Goutam Ghose

Public Relations	Profile Advertising & Consulting Services (Pvt.) Ltd.
Publicity Designer	Cine Media.

