



Film Guide
India

“War & Peace / Jang Aur Aman,” 2002
Directed by: Anand Patwardhan



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India/USA

Release Date: 2002

Directed by: Anand Patwardhan

Languages: English, Urdu, Pashtu

Running time: 78 min. (part I of 2)

Instructions

You can locate “War & Peace” at most major university libraries or from its U.S. distributor.¹ Should you have difficulty locating the film, please contact AJWS. Before the screening, read through this guide and the material AJWS has provided about India for important background information.

The goals of this exercise are: (1) to introduce and promote critical engagement with the social and cultural background to contemporary Indian nationalist politics and its struggles to define its national identity on the world stage; (2) to use engagement with these issues as a window into many more specific and local social issues at play across the country; (3) to begin to consider the meanings and implications of various interventions; and, in the context of a Group Service Program, (4) to sow a conversational seed for your upcoming trip.

“War & Peace” is an award-winning documentary film that explores a wide range of themes, issues, conditions and psychologies around nuclear armament.² The film loosely moves through social, political and historical issues, in effect showing how tangled and interdependent they are, particularly in the shaping of public opinion. Just what this “public opinion” is, however, seems to elude the filmmaker. As such, the film tends to leave many complexities of the issues it explores unresolved.

Do not be a passive consumer of the film, but an alert, thinking respondent to it. Be prepared for an emotionally-engaged activity, and then try to mobilize the emotional responses you may have to deepen your personal and critical response to the work you are about to do.

Background Information

- According to the director’s Web site: “Virtually all of Anand’s films have faced State censorship. Several have also incurred the wrath of right-wing fundamentalists both in India and abroad. In keeping with the uneven nature of India’s democratic institutions and its sharply divided polity, bouquets have been accompanied by brickbats. But censorship has often led to successful litigation against the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) and against the national public broadcaster, Doordarshan (DD) for refusal to telecast Anand’s films.”³
- India’s nuclear weapons program was started at the Bhabha Atomic Research Center in Trombay. In the mid-1950s India acquired dual-use technologies under the “Atoms for Peace” non-proliferation program, which aimed to encourage the civil use of nuclear technologies in exchange for assurances that they would not be used for military purposes. There was little evidence in the 1950s that India had any interest in a nuclear

¹ First Run/Icarus Films, 32 Court Street, 21st Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201, Phone: (718) 488-8900 Fax: (718) 488-8642, e-mail: mailbox@frif.com.

² Grand Prize, Earth Vision International Film Festival, Tokyo, 2002; International Critics’ Award (FIPRESCI), Sydney Film Festival, 2002; Best Film/Video, Mumbai International Film Festival, 2002; International Jury Prize, Mumbai International Film Festival, 2002; Gold Award, Indian Documentary Producers’ Association, 2002; Best Documentary, International Video Festival, Kerala, 2003; Best Documentary, Karachi International Film Festival, 2003; Silver Dhow, Zanzibar International Film Festival, 2003; Best Non-Fiction, National Film Awards, India, 2004.

³ http://www.patwardhan.com/Censorship/Index_Censorship.htm.



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weapons program, according to Joseph Cirincione of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Under the “Atoms for Peace” program, India acquired a Cirus 40 MWt heavy-water-moderated research reactor from Canada and purchased from the U.S. the heavy water required for its operation. In 1964, India commissioned a reprocessing facility at Trombay, which was used to separate out the plutonium produced by the Cirus research reactor. This plutonium was used in India’s first nuclear test on May 18, 1974, described by the Indian government as a “peaceful nuclear explosion.”⁴

- India’s film industry is the largest in the world in terms of numbers of films produced. A large portion of those films are part of the expansive “Bollywood” genre, the name given to popular Mumbai-based Hindi language films that feature elaborate song, dance and melodrama.

Note While Viewing the Film

Please keep two running lists while viewing the film:

1. Make a list of as many of the juxtapositions between themes or issues that are being addressed as possible (much of the film’s sophistication comes from the film’s hard or “jump” cuts between ideas).
2. Make a note of the signs, banners and slogans that protesters, organizers and activists of all stripes don throughout the film.

Guiding Questions

If you are viewing the film alone: After the viewing, spend a couple of minutes jotting down responses to the questions that follow. Save them and review them when your trip is over. At the end of the film guide, you’ll find additional information and suggested responses to many of these questions.

If you are viewing the film with a group: After viewing the film, discuss these questions as a group.

1. Look over your list of juxtapositions. Are there major shifts or patterns in the list? What does this list suggest (or “prove”)?
2. The film’s opening links Gandhi’s death in 1948 with Anand Patwardhan’s family and personal history and memory, and quickly switches gears to the main theme of the film: nationalism, as it plays out in terms of various identity struggles (around, for example, caste identity). Why would the filmmaker start his film this way?

⁴ <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/india/nuke/>



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3. One of the subtexts of the film is a critique of America’s “industrial-military complex” and Cold War paranoia. The filmmaker clearly does not want India to become too much like the U.S. “War & Peace” also mourns the collapse of socialism in India in the post-Nehru era (the first prime minister after independence) after it became a nuclear power in 1974. The Nehru era is described as an era of non-violence and the post-Nehru era is described as one of “nuclear nationalism,” which is synonymous with and tantamount to “bigotry.” From your reading of the multiple voices and perspectives in the film, is this an accurate description of the broad historical sweep of India’s modern history (from non-violence to nuclear nationalism)?
4. List examples from the film in which religious ideas are used as endorsement for, and disapproval of, India’s nuclear goals. Do you see a pattern emerging regarding *how* religion is used in politics? What do you think is Patwardhan’s attitude toward the uses of religion in Indian politics?
5. The film shuttles between village and city. How much do you think the rural/urban divide shapes Indians’ perspectives on social and political issues? Will your volunteer service take place in a rural or urban setting? What role do you anticipate the broad issues of national identity, and war and peace, explored in this film will have for the people with whom you live and work?
6. Media – cameras, stages, photographers and other technological mediators – appear dozens of times in “War & Peace.” Brainstorm some examples. Why was it important for the filmmaker to show images of image making and image-makers?

For Further Thought

If you are viewing the film alone: Choose one of the following themes to explore in more depth as you prepare for your volunteer experience. During your time abroad, you may find more opportunities to reflect upon this issue and discuss it with a variety of people you meet.

If you are viewing the film with a group: In groups of 3-4, choose one question to discuss.

1. **Indian Civics.** “War & Peace” shows a stunning array of civic organization – protests, educational activities, speeches, marches, public square rallies, etc. India is clearly depicted as a nation with great activism and civic participation. It is also, quite obviously, a nation with extraordinarily rich complexity, debate and “insider” knowledge. Beyond your actual labor, what, if any, insight or perspective do you think Americans might bring to bear on any given social justice project in India? What, if any, insight or perspective do you think Jews might bring?
2. **The Role of the State.** A villager in a town near India’s nuclear testing site asked with regard to the State, “If a mother feeds poison to her own child, what’s a child to do?” What was his view of the State? The “State as a parent” model is, of course, not the only view of “*What is a State?*” How do you see the role of the State (in India or America) in the world you know, and what would be the most ideal version of it?
3. **Nuclear Security.** Much of the film is a scathing critique of homemade jingoism, an indictment of the ways



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that many Indians, particularly aspiring elites, have adopted the U.S.’s aggressive, military “might makes right” posture. But nuclear armament, in the minds of many Indians – and millions more from countries that are not in the G-8 (including Israel) – guarantees strong national identity, security and self-defense. Should the same distaste for nuclear power be applied equally to the U.S., India, other developing nations that are not yet nuclear, and/or Israel?

Suggested Additional Activities

- Watch the second half of “War & Peace,” “Gandhi” or another Indian documentary film. For ideas, see this Web site: <http://www.angelfire.com/sd/urdu/media/indialist.htm>.
- Watch a “Bollywood” film. The Mumbai-based, Hindi-language film industry is the largest in the world, and Bollywood films enjoy huge popularity in India.
- Read AJWS’ India Country Profile. Familiarizing yourself with this material before the trip will dramatically enhance your experience in India.

For Groups:

- Select one of the recommended readings about your country and have a “book club” night.
- Invite a speaker to discuss politics, religion and/or economics in India. This could be a local immigrant from your host country, a professor, a returned AJWS Volunteer Corps participant, a returned Peace Corps volunteer or another local expert.

Guiding Questions with Additional Information and Suggested Responses

1. Look over your list of juxtapositions. Are there major shifts or patterns in the list? What does this list suggest (or “prove”)?
2. The film’s opening links Gandhi’s death in 1948 with Anand Patwardhan’s family and personal history and memory, and quickly switches gears to the main theme of the film: nationalism, as it plays out in terms of various identity struggles (around, for example, caste identity). Why would the filmmaker start his film this way?
 - The Patwardhan family was deeply connected with Gandhi’s non-violence movement. As the son of lawyers and public advocates, Anand’s choice of film as a medium of activism reflects the importance of film as a vehicle for public discussion (he could have chosen to be a lawyer or an activist), as well as his interest in reaching an international audience for his message.
 - The personal is political, and perhaps more importantly, the political – even at such a large, state- and global-level – is also intensely personal.
3. One of the subtexts of the film is a critique of America’s “industrial-military complex” and Cold War paranoia. The filmmaker clearly does not want India to become too much like the U.S. “War & Peace” also mourns the collapse of socialism in India in the post-Nehru era (the first prime minister after independence) after it became a nuclear power in 1974. The Nehru era is described as an era of non-violence and the post-Nehru era is described as one of “nuclear nationalism,” which is synonymous with and tantamount to “bigotry.” From your reading of the multiple voices and perspectives in the film, is this an accurate description of the broad historical sweep of India’s modern history (from non-violence to nuclear nationalism)?
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Patwardhan’s attitude toward the uses of religion in Indian politics?

- Religion is clearly a flexible force in India – it is used by both the right and the left.
 - One scientist links the success of nuclear testing in the north to fidelity to Vedic traditions and respect for the sacredness of cows.
 - “The Buddha is Smiling” code.
 - In his public address, a Dalit political leader and advocate for a socialist political platform linked Marx with Buddha, and equated poverty with sorrow (sorrow being a core concept in Buddhism).
 - Religious nationalism, particularly orthodox Hinduism and anti-Muslim sentiment.
 - Cross-border peace activism, Hindus and Muslims, Indians and Pakistanis.
5. The film shuttles between village and city. How much do you think the rural/urban divide shapes Indians’ perspectives on social and political issues? Will your volunteer service take place in a rural or urban setting? What role do you anticipate the broad issues of national identity, and war and peace, explored in this film will have for the people with whom you live and work?
6. Media – cameras, stages, photographers and other technological mediators – appear dozens of times in “War & Peace.” Brainstorm some examples. Why was it important for the filmmaker to show images of image making and image-makers?
- The film is ultimately about public opinions and public perceptions, and the clash between perspectives. Self-reflexivity brings the question of how political and public ideas gain currency to the foreground.
 - The film itself is a statement of anti-nuclear, anti-nationalist sentiment. Perhaps making a self-conscious film – as opposed to a rhetorical film that obscures the fact of its own production – offers the audience more room and more respect in forming its own opinions, making its sympathetic agreement with the filmmaker’s perspective potentially more authentic.



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For more information, please visit www.ajws.org.

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