



News and Reviews

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War and Peace

>> Directed by Anand Patwardhan. 2001. 3 hours.

This film by India's leading documentary filmmaker is so important that one could justify its requirement as part of the education of all high school students and undergraduates in America.

Review

War and Peace was inspired by the anomaly of India, which won its independence through

the non-violent campaigns of Mahatma Gandhi, aspiring to becoming a nuclear power by conducting three underground nuclear tests in Pokhran, Rajasthan, in May 1998. The tests led to strong diplomatic protests and economic sanctions by the United States, retaliatory nuclear tests in Pakistan, protests within India by anti-war and anti-nuclear groups, and government-supported counter-rallies in favor of nuclear armaments. In his two-part,

three-hour documentary, which in its present form has been banned in India, Anand Patwardhan explores the implications of the tests, the dangers of nuclear war and the human cost of uranium mining.

Patwardhan's style is to alternate between scenes contrasting the exuberant pride of Indian nationalists in their country's joining the nuclear club with the distress of their opponents who ask why a poor country like India is wasting precious resources on huge military expenditures. Since India's nuclear arsenal is intended to intimidate its neighbor, Pakistan, Patwardhan visited Pakistan after its government answered the Indian challenge with tests of its own. The film shows how popular



responses to nuclear testing in Pakistan are identical to those in India, and concludes that each country is the mirror image of the other. In both India and Pakistan, "government" is depicted as the

obstacle to friendship between peoples, and in both countries fundamentalists favor the bomb because it will help spread their religion—Islam in one case, Hinduism in the other—throughout the world. A major theme of Patwardhan's is the religious basis of nuclear arming. He shows how educated people, including the nuclear scientist who directed the tests, speak in one breath of the triumph of science and technology and the magical power of Hindu gods and ancient Hindu traditions. In both India and Pakistan, common people identify themselves with their nation's new global status as a nuclear power, and one man speaks of how Pokhran "ignited his manhood." Another theme explored by Patwardhan is how attitudes toward the tests follow class and caste divisions—

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COURTESY OF FIRST RUN/ICARUS FILMS

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Asian Educational Media Service

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. AEMS offers information about where to find audio-visual media resources for teaching and learning about Asia, and advice about which ones may best suit your needs. In addition to *AEMS News and Reviews*, published quarterly, services include a free call-in/write-in service and a Web site. To add your name to our mailing list, request additional copies of the newsletter to use in workshops or to share with your colleagues, or ask for help in locating resources, please contact us.

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What's New?

New Assistant Program Coordinator

In our last issue, we introduced Alfredo Arcila, our new assistant program coordinator. Since then, Alfredo decided to accept a job with the U.S. Government. We are sorry he is gone, but wish him well in his new position.

In his place, we have hired Xian Barrett. Xian graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in East Asian Languages and Cultures and has studied and worked in Japan. He brings skills, experience, and enthusiasm to AEMS, and we are delighted to have him here. (A note from Xian appears below.)

New Regional Resources

<http://www.aems.uiuc.edu/HTML/AsianResources.htm>

Building on the success of our Afghanistan page, we are creating Web pages for other parts of Asia in the news. Over the summer, pages on India, Pakistan, and Kashmir were built. In the fall, we added Indonesia. Most recently, Xian and our graduate assistant Valerie Holshouser Barske have been collecting information on North and South Korea. All these pages include Internet links to lesson plans, images, news, and cultural information about these regions. ♦

—Sarah I. Barbour, *Editor*

At the beginning of January, I was appointed to the position of Assistant Program Coordinator at AEMS. In my short time here, I have come to appreciate the level of thought that has been put into the various facets of this organization.

My ties to issues related to Asia have grown over a long period of time. I am a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in East Asian Languages and Cultures with a concentration on Japanese history and language. While enrolled at U of I, I was fortunate enough to study abroad for ten months at Konan University in Kobe, Japan. After graduation, I worked as a teacher of English and human rights education in rural Kyushu as part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. Additionally, as a person of Chinese descent, I have always had an interest in China. Working with AEMS allows me to pursue and enrich these interests.

I also feel very fortunate that at the same time, through AEMS' expansion into other areas of Asia, I have many opportunities to broaden my knowledge about Asia.

Having been an educator in both Japan and here in the United States (on the elementary level), I can fully empathize with the difficulty in providing the very best materials for students on an educator's schedule. AEMS provides many valuable resources to aid educators in teaching and learning about Asia. I hope you won't hesitate to utilize us to make your job a little bit easier. ♦

—Xian Barrett, *Assistant Program Coordinator*



War and Peace

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the poor and the "untouchables," or Dalits, oppose the tests, while the middle class and upper caste Hindus applaud them. A third theme is the plight of the villagers who live in the vicinity of Pokhran, which has been used by the army for nuclear tests since 1974. The government co-opted their fields for the test site, has ignored their protests over the destruction of their crops from radiation, and brushed aside their pleas for a hospital to treat the many cases of cancer and birth defects among them. While the government celebrates Pokhran Day and officials speak emotionally of the new

international respect India has gained because of the tests, a group of Gandhian scientists visits the village to gather evidence of the contamination and to photograph the sick and the dying in order to publicize the terrible effects of the government's policy.

Part II of the documentary takes the viewer from South Asia to Japan and the United States. Through photographs and interviews, Patwardhan shows the results of nuclear war in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He uses footage from 1945, and the viewer is spared none of the human horror and devastation of the Japanese cities. Against that background, he shows the

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Gao Rang (Grilled Rice)

>> Directed by Claude Grunspan. 2001. 52 minutes.

Americans have real and fictional visual familiarity with what Americans call the Vietnam War—Hollywood movies, great PBS documentaries, books by American photographers and photojournalists—but few have a visual perspective from the “other side,” that of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

One of the earliest attempts to document the dual perspectives of the American/Vietnam war was *As Seen By Both Sides: American and Vietnamese Artists Look at the War*, curated in 1989 by David Thomas and the Indochina Arts Partnership. Since 1994, with the lifting of the American embargo, more visual materials by Vietnamese photojournalists, filmmakers, and artists have become available. One of the most dramatic was the Tim Page and Horst Faas 1997 exhibition, *Requiem*, with an accompanying book, honoring photojournalists on both sides who died or went missing during the French and later American wars in Indochina. This continues to be an anchor exhibit at Hanoi’s War Remnants Museum and has toured the United States. Last year the National Geographic Society published *Another Viet Nam: Pictures of the War Seen from the Other Side*, edited by photojournalists Douglas Niven and Christopher Riley featuring photographs taken by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong war correspondents.

In the same vein comes Claude Grunspan’s 2001 documentary, *Gao Rang (Grilled Rice)*. Grunspan documents the experience of Vietnamese soldiers/cameramen who filmed the wars against the French and the Americans through interviews with the filmmakers and projectionists. He includes some original footage of

the filmmakers’ work, much of it self-conscious propaganda to rally the troops and the citizens in North Vietnam’s cause. One filmmaker says, “Things were clear. It was them or us,” and another tells us that his job was to show the “heroic fight against American aggression.” In one scene babies are lowered in a line of suspended cradles into a bomb shelter, while in another 1953 snippet about Dien Bien Phu, young soldiers are photographed smiling in victory. Over the 30-year period of war, most young Vietnamese soldiers would not return home, nor would many cameramen, who were also at risk in combat zones from bullets, bombs, and malaria. For them, however, Ho Chi Minh’s words rang forth: “Nothing is more important than independence and freedom.”



As Grunspan states on his Web page (see sidebar, page 6), he first thought of the project when he met one of the war cameramen at a dinner. Fascinated by the drama of the story and the complexity of the cameraman’s perspective, he decided to return to Vietnam and make this documentary. He tracked down several other Vietnamese wartime cameramen, and this film is the result.

The film has significant value for scholars of Vietnam. Even though most original footage is mere snippets, these wartime materials make this a compelling documentary in itself as it reveals the brutality of war. There is Uncle Ho with the troops fighting against the French, footage of anti-aircraft gunners, the image of an American warplane falling from the sky, the pilots parachuting down into the hands of their captors, dive-bombers at the DMZ, the resulting destruction of B-52 raids on Hanoi, and women warrior-farmers with rifles strapped to their backs ready to shoot at the warplanes overhead, face to the earth and back to the sky, planting rice to supply the heroic soldiers.

The documentary also provides a self-reflexive glimpse into the minds of characters important to the development of a nascent Vietnamese film industry. This is a human interest story: the principal figures, cameramen and projectionists, reflect on their role during the war, and how they might have shot images differently given the perspective they now have a quarter century past. One states that he regrets not having a “critical historical awareness” and that they “could have left much better images.” Everything was made to look too easy, with impeccably dressed soldiers and their cheerful countenances. One filmmaker confesses

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