

Travails of the Nation

Some Notes on Indian Documentaries

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1. A voluminous literature has grown up around what constitutes 'documentaries', and I suspect that the revival which documentaries are presently enjoying, in countries such as the United States and India, will lead to further speculation on the forms that documentaries will take in the future. 'Documentary' became a movement in Britain in the 1930s, and documentaries have ever since been understood to be vehicles of social comment and change. The sense that John Grierson conveyed about the documentary, when apropos of Robert Flaherty's *Moana*, he spoke of it as a 'visual account of the daily life of a Polynesian youth' that had 'documentary value' still remains with us today. See Forsyth Hardy, ed, *Grierson on Documentary*, Faber & Faber, London, 1979, p 11.
2. See the useful discussions in Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy, *Indian Film*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, New York, 1980, pp 43–58 and Prem Chowdhry, *Colonial India and the Making of Empire Cinema: Image, Ideology and Identity*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000, pp 17–38.
3. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, *ibid*, p 43.
4. *Ibid*, p 123.

Though 'Bollywood' has become synonymous with Indian cinema to the uninitiated, there are an ample number of other traditions of film-making in India, not least of which is a tradition of political documentaries.¹ The Indian independence movement, led in the 1920s and 1930s by Mohandas Gandhi, was the subject of the first concentrated phase of documentary film-making. The bulk of these films, however, never received any public screening. The Cinematograph Act of 1918 introduced censorship in India, and the Indian Cinematograph Committee of 1928, while urging the censors to curb their enthusiasm for bringing films before the cutting-board, unequivocally reaffirmed the moral necessity of censorship, especially in a country among whose natives, as many British in India believed, passions reigned supreme.² The various regional censor boards did not only certify Indian films for exhibition but also regulated the entry of foreign films into India and their public screenings. Indeed, 'cheap American films', which were viewed (in the words of one English clergyman) as engaging in outright sensationalism, proliferating in 'daring murders, crimes and divorces', and, more pointedly, as degrading white women in the eyes of Indians, were especially targeted for censorship.³ By the mid-1930s, Gandhi had become a figure of worldwide veneration; moreover, the Government of India Act of 1935, which allowed some measure of autonomy to Indians, implicitly recognised that the Indian objective of full independence was no longer a mere utopian dream. Consequently, numerous documentaries that had been banned were now made available for public screenings, among them *Mahatma Gandhi's March for Freedom* (Sharda Film Co), *Mahatma Gandhi's March, March 12* (Krishna Film Co), and *Mahatma Gandhi Returns from the Pilgrimage of Peace* (Saraswati).⁴

While the history of Indian documentary film-making is well beyond the ambit of this paper, it is instructive to those who might wish to think about political documentaries in contemporary India. Censorship remains, as will be seen, the most pressing problem for documentary film-makers; and the irony is further compounded when we consider, for example, that Gandhi is as much of a pariah figure to the modern Indian

state as he was to the government of British India. Two recent documentaries, *Final Solution* (2004) and *War and Peace* ('Jang aur Aman', 2002), both of which have earned accolades around the world,⁵ furnish an ample introduction to the manner in which Indian film-makers seek to understand the resurgence of Hindu militancy, the marked drift towards zero-sum politics which is everywhere becoming characteristic of the modern nation-state, the normalisation of politics, and more broadly the political culture of the Indian state. In late February 2002, following the attack, which left nearly sixty people dead and many more with severe burn injuries, by still undetermined assailants on a train near Godhra station in Gujarat carrying Hindu devotees returning from Ayodhya, a pogrom was unleashed upon the Muslim population of Gujarat. Scores of journalists and eyewitnesses, and at least a dozen investigative committees, have documented the orchestrated violence that took 2000 (largely Muslim) lives, rendered 150,000 people homeless, and decimated entire Muslim families and communities.⁶ Armed gangs with lists of Muslim-owned houses and shops freely roamed the streets, committing arson and pillage; policemen stood by idly while women were speared in their genitals, or systematically raped by one man after another before being hacked to pieces. Murder and mayhem continued for three days, unchecked by the forces of the state except for the brave conduct of a few solitary policemen whose only reward was reprimands, before any attempt was made to bring the situation under control. Not until a month later had the violence subsided sufficiently that one could aver that the city was no longer hostage to murderous criminals and their political patrons.

5. *Final Solution*, directed by Rakesh Sharma, is the first Indian film ever nominated for the Grierson Award, one of the most notable awards conferred on documentary films; it is also the recipient of awards at film festivals in Berlin, Hong Kong, and Zanzibar. *War and Peace* is the recipient of awards at film festivals in Tokyo, Zanzibar, Karachi, Mumbai, Sydney, and elsewhere.

6. A dozen investigative reports have been put together in *The Gujarat Pogrom: Indian Democracy in Danger*, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 2002; see also Siddharth Varadarajan, ed., *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy*, Penguin, New Delhi, 2002.



Final Solution, 2004, Rakesh Sharma



Final Solution, 2004, Rakesh Sharma

Barely two or three months had elapsed before the first documentaries on the Gujarat killings were beginning to circulate. Gopal Menon's *Hey Ram! Genocide in the Land of Gandhi* allows the victims a dominant voice: here a retired man who describes how his forty years of savings went up in smoke when rioters ransacked his home, there a woman who recalls her pregnant niece, whose stomach was slit open and her foetus tossed into the fire. But Menon's film illustrates all the difficulties to which political documentaries, particularly those made to meet the exigencies of a situation, are susceptible. The opening frames of the film establish what Menon construes as the genealogy of the violence in Gujarat, namely the conflict over the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, a sixteenth-century mosque eventually destroyed by Hindu militants in December 1992, that was claimed by them to have previously housed a Hindu temple.⁷ Menon's film offers no insight on the rise of Hindu militancy, the ideology of Hindu supremacy, caste and class politics in Gujarat, or the relationship of communal violence to urbanisation. It is true that the people aboard the train that was partly set ablaze at Godhra were Hindus and their families returning from Ayodhya, but Menon entirely overlooks the troubled history of Hindu-Muslim relations in Gujarat over the last four decades, and is unable to offer any account of why the conflagration should have commenced in Gujarat. Most viewers would have thought that the words 'Gandhi' and 'genocide' stand in stark opposition, but in Menon's film they occupy much too easily, and inexplicably from the point of view of the common viewer, the same space. One cannot doubt that the film-maker intends to evoke the mournful irony that the very same state which proudly claims Gandhi, the principal practitioner and theorist of non-violent resistance

7. See Vinay Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003, pp 141–85.

in modern times, as its native son should have been the breeding ground for sustained eliminationist violence against Muslims. But neither 'Gandhi' nor 'Mahatma', the honorific (meaning 'Great Soul') by which he was known throughout the world, have ever been words that had only a monochromatic existence. As far back as 1920–22, during the first nationwide non-cooperation movement against the British under Gandhi's leadership, violence was committed *in* Gandhi's name. In the north Indian town of Chauri Chaura, Indian nationalists burned down a police station and killed over a dozen Indian policemen while shouting slogans, '*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*', 'Long Live Mahatma Gandhi'.⁸ Gandhi was aghast at these developments, as is, evidently, Menon today. But that the killings might be waged with ruthless abandon precisely because in Gandhi's Gujarat one expected otherwise is a consideration which seems far removed from the film-maker's mind.

As Menon's camera moves from one victim to another, it begins to read much like one of the many first-hand, partly investigative reports that surfaced amidst the killings and in the immediate aftermath. The film as sociopolitical document does not necessarily have the advantage of immediacy, and it might be handicapped by lack of distance. More complex is Bombay film-maker Suma Josson's *Gujarat: Laboratory of Hindu Rashtra* (2002). Josson charts the ascendancy of Hindutva, the ideology of Hindu supremacy that seeks to distil Hinduism into its purest essence, and interviews with its advocates, as with civil rights activists and political opponents of Hindutva, furnish some backdrop to understanding how Gujarat has become the site of efforts to secure a Hindu nation (*rashtra*). Josson's film adds more sociological depth to the narrative of Hindu violence in Gujarat. But that question again surfaces: just how did Gujarat, 'the land of Gandhi', become so hospitable to advocates of Hindu militancy? One might have thought that the legacy of Gandhi would have worked to make Gujarat, which also boasts higher degrees of urbanisation, literacy, and industrial development than most other Indian states, into a model state for the rest of the country.⁹ Yet Gujarat has been subject to insistent communal strife. These apparent anomalies are left unexplained, which is again inexplicable considering the argument advanced that Gujarat represents the laboratory of the Hindu nation. If, as we know, the word 'laboratory' exists on multiple registers, we must perforce ask how far Gujarat mirrors the nation, and what Gujarat portends for the future. In his own way, Gandhi turned Gujarat into a laboratory for the perfection of his doctrine of *satyagraha*, non-violent resistance. How far are the advocates of Hindutva playing on this legacy?

Rakesh Sharma's *The Final Solution* (2004) is easily the most capacious of the handful of documentaries on the Gujarat killings. Though it has travelled widely on the international film festival circuit since it was completed in early 2004, the film still awaits a certificate from the Censor Board of India. In denying the film certification, the censors objected that 'the film promotes communal disharmony among Hindu and Muslim groups and presents the picture of Gujarat riots in a way that it may arouse the communal feelings and clashes among Hindu [and] Muslim groups'. They noted, in particular, that the film is detrimental to 'national unity and integrity', and that 'certain dialogues involve defamation of individuals or body of individuals. Entire picturisation is highly

8. Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern University Press, 1921–2', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, pp 288–346.
9. Achyut Yagnik, 'The Pathology of Gujarat', *Seminar*, no 513, 2002, pp 19–22. The entire issue is devoted to the Gujarat killings.

provocative and may trigger off unrest and communal violence. State security is jeopardized and public order is endangered if this film is shown.¹⁰ Considering that, as the reams of evidence collected by various investigative groups have indubitably established, the killings were orchestrated with the complicity of the state,¹¹ the argument that *Final Solution* jeopardises 'state security' would have been comical if it were not macabre. Yet, the words 'Final Solution' are clearly calculated to provoke, and in the course of the film Sharma seeks, and not always obliquely, to establish similarities with Nazi Germany. The authority of the *Oxford English Dictionary* is invoked as the word genocide is splashed across the screen, followed by the definition of genocide contained in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). Whether the dialectic of the text, the image, and 'commonsense' works, in this instance, to the director's advantage is disputable. Article 2 of the Convention describes genocide as various acts of injury, harm, and killing 'committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such'.¹² Were the perpetrators of the killings intent on destroying Muslims as a group, or were they keen that the killing of some Muslims should serve as an object lesson to other Muslims and even, from the standpoint of the killers, to Hindus – especially Hindus who, led astray by the tolerant traditions of their faith and the non-violent teachings of Gandhi, are construed as soft, effeminate, and incapable of comprehending that Islam is incapable of existing alongside another faith in peace and harmony?¹³ The textual definition of 'genocide' hobbles the film-maker's case, but in some conversational sense of the term to which the images speak the word 'genocide' does not seem entirely misplaced.

In its longest version, the film runs for 3 hours 40 minutes; however, since audiences are not habituated to documentaries of this length, Sharma generally screens one of two shorter versions, either 100 minutes or 148 minutes in length. Part I, entitled 'Pride and Prejudice', offers insights into Hindutva's vociferous attempts to instil pride in an unabashedly militant conception of their faith among Hindus, and the price that the Muslims of Gujarat have had to pay to make Hindus feel 'secure' in their own homeland. Initial shots of 'Gaurav Yatra', or a Hindu pilgrimage of pride, are interspersed with interviews of schoolboys and their teachers; the camera then moves on to the refugee camps where nearly 150,000 victims of the pogrom were lodged. Even as victims recount the brutalities they survived, or were forced to witness, the camera cuts, with chilling effect, to a speech by Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat, who pompously declaimed on first being told of the massacres, 'Every action has an equal and opposite reaction'.¹⁴ The subsequent three parts, 'The Terror Trail', 'Hate Mandate', and 'Hope and Despair', are similarly structured. Occasional footage from a Gujarat Government VCD on Godhra, snippets from the *Concerned Citizens Tribunal Report*, and coverage of speeches by Narendra Modi and other ideologues of Hindutva, such as Praveen Togadia and the religious leader Acharya Dharmendra, punctuate scores of interviews with victims and their families, perpetrators and their patrons, and bystanders. Among the very first shots with which *Final Solution* opens is of a schoolboy, perhaps six or seven years old, describing the mutilation of his father and the rape of his aunt; and, as the film closes, the boy

10. Personal email communication from Rakesh Sharma, 25 September 2004.
11. 'We Have No Orders to Save You': State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat', *Human Rights Watch*, 14:3, April 2002.
12. George J Andreopolulos, ed, *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1994, pp 229–33.
13. For a more elaborate interpretation along these lines, see Vinay Lal, 'On the Rails of Modernity: Communalism's Journey in India', *Emergences*, 12:2, November 2002, pp 297–311.
14. As reported in the *Times of India*, 2 March 2004 and other dailies: see *The Gujarat Pogrom*, op cit, pp 6, 126.

appears in an extended conversation with Sharma himself. He describes all Hindus as 'bad', and says, quite unbelievably, that he is prepared to kill them all. Sharma reminds him that he, too, is a Hindu. We witness the boy struggling with this difficult truth: if the film-maker before him appears to be a nice man, then all Hindus surely do not stand condemned. But if they do, then Sharma cannot be the Hindu he claims to be: this appears to be, logically speaking, the easier reality to accept. If framing devices are ordinarily intended to furnish closure, Sharma resolutely refuses such comforts; moreover, by concluding with excerpts from his conversation with the schoolboy, he draws sustained attention to the question, generally little explored in India, of what the voices of children tell us about communalism and how they mediate unspoken social truths.

It has become customary, in political documentaries, such as those made on the Gujarat killings or on the movement to prevent the damming of the river Narmada, to interview civil rights leaders, human rights lawyers, peace activists, liberal academics, and others whose sane and politically resistant voices in the name of peace, human dignity, and justice provide assurance, howsoever slight, that the institutions of civil society are not entirely corrupt and that some modicum of decency remains amidst flagrant and openly contemptuous displays of murderous and intimidating violence. Rakesh Sharma offers no such placebos: there are no candlelight vigils in the memory of victims, nor does he show any street demonstrators holding placards with the usual slogans demanding justice and insisting on 'peace not war'. Some might argue that there is no effective political intervention that does not hold out hope for the future, and that Sharma's evident aim in shaming, exposing, and penetrating Hindutva is at odds with his failure to show resistance to Hindutva at work. I wish to suggest, however, that Sharma's evident intent in showing the violence unadorned, in all its nakedness, augurs a new and important stance on the part of the Indian documentary film-maker. It is remarkable, too, as a clip from Part II, quite inexplicably deleted from a shorter version of the film, unequivocally suggests how much the spectre of Gandhi still looms large over those who are inclined to see him as effeminate old man whose death was necessary to pave the way for the emergence of India as a muscular Hindu nation-state.¹⁵ One victim of the massacre at the Gulbarg Housing Society in Ahmedabad remarks, 'They say Gujarat is Gandhi's land, the home of non-violence. But it [the violence, as policemen stood by] was bestial. It was terrorism.' Sharma's camera then cuts to a speech by Praveen Togadia, a physician by training who might reasonably be dubbed the Hindu doctor of death, so palpable is his hatred of the Muslim and his embrace of violence: 'Terror was unleashed at Godhra station because this country follows Gandhi. We don't want Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence.' It is Gandhi's non-violence, Togadia argues, that compelled the Hindu to kneel before the Muslim, and fed the Muslim's habit of engaging in terrorist activity. As I have previously remarked, the fear of Gandhi ties the modern advocate of Hindu militancy across decades to the British who came to see Gandhi as an unusual, determined, and irrational foe of the colonial state.

Sharma's achievement, considerable as it is, is not unique. At least among documentary film-makers working in the socialist tradition,

15. The definite piece remains Ashis Nandy's 'Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi', in *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980, pp 70-98.

Anand Patwardhan has no peers in India. His career has spanned three decades, and his oeuvre includes films on the Bombay textile strike of 1982–83, political prisoners, Indian farmworkers in British Columbia and their efforts to unionise, the dispute over the now-destroyed Babri Masjid, the politics of masculinity and sexuality in contemporary India, the controversy over the damming of the Narmada river, and India's nuclear testing. Patwardhan has been there to document the principal milestones in the political life of the nation over the last three decades, and it would be no exaggeration to suggest that Indian documentary film-makers, even when they have surpassed him, have initially had to work in his shadow. Patwardhan has remained resolutely uncompromising both in his objections to Hindu militancy and in adhering to a rigorous critique of the culture of violence generated by the political arrangements of the modern Indian state, and his films have repeatedly encountered the opposition of the Censor Board. Indian authorities engineered the removal of his epic film, *Jang aur Aman* ('War and Peace', 2002) as the inaugural film of the Kolkata Film Festival in May 2002, three months after officials at the American Museum for Natural History (New York) shamefully succumbed to the pressure of supporters of Hindu militancy in the United States and postponed scheduled screenings of Patwardhan's films.¹⁶ 'My film is based on the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence', says Patwardhan. 'It exposes the political hypocrisies of India, Pakistan and the United States regarding the nuclear issue. They have a problem with the way I have put forward my argument. But [they] cannot point a finger at the factual data I have used in the film as it is true.' An essay by Patwardhan, entitled 'How We Learned to Love the Bomb', is more explicit in its denunciation of the obscenity of nuclear armaments and does not mince words: 'I now have the same feeling of disbelief at the moral bankruptcy and intellectual idiocy of a nation that is mindlessly euphoric about its acquisition of weapons of mass destruction.'¹⁷

Jang aur Aman, though largely an exploration of the political climate of India and Pakistan following the nuclear testing by both countries in May 1998, draws on the precedent created by the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Patwardhan is just as daring in his criticism of the aggressiveness of the American military and nuclear machine as he is of the nuclear pretensions of India and Pakistan. Advocates of nuclearism within the Indian and Pakistan militaries are allowed a voice in *Jang aur Aman* – but this is all the more effective because, when placed in juxtaposition with the immense problems of the poor in both countries, and particularly of the rural populations around the test sites and the uranium mines, the military perspective begins to look short-sighted, even demented. Yet Patwardhan understands that the nuclear ambitions of both states have widespread support among diverse strata of society, and not merely among rabid communalists and the supporters of Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse. Achievement in this domain is viewed as an index of technological prowess, and many people have come to accept the view that nothing earns a nation-state respect in the world as much as its nuclear status. Both in India and Pakistan, as *Jang aur Aman* poignantly reminds us, the 'successful' nuclear tests of 1998 were celebrated on the streets with explosions of firecrackers and the distribution of sweets.

16. Ronita Torcato, 'Through the Viewfinder', *Hindu Magazine*, 14 April 2002, online at: <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/mag/2002/04/14/stories/2002041400290500.htm>

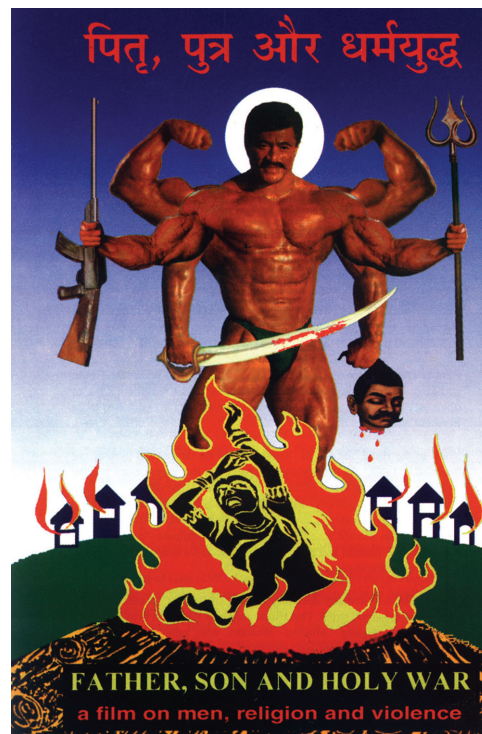
17. Online at: <http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/spedition/nuclear/feature1.htm>

Patwardhan has been active on behalf of the rights of the urban poor, slum-dwellers, refugees, the industrial proletariat, tribals, and political dissenters; and while he works, in many respects, from the periphery of Indian society, he retains a discerning eye for the gravity of politics. Though his 1990 film, *Ram Ke Naam*, or 'In the Name of Ram', an exploration of the controversy over the Babri Masjid before the mosque was torn down by militant Hindus in December 1992, might be said to have earned him very wide recognition, Patwardhan had already earned a considerable reputation for himself with films such as *Prisoners of Conscience* (1978, 45 min). Here Patwardhan offered a withering critique of the internal emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi from 1975 to 1977, which led to the incarceration without trial of 100,000 people; however, as the film plainly makes clear, these were not the only 'prisoners of conscience' in India. Political issues have generally been at the forefront of Patwardhan's work, and in 1995 he entered into the raging debate over the Sardar Sarovar project which, when completed, will have displaced not less than 150,000 people (largely *adivasis*), and possibly many more. Patwardhan's *Narmada Diary* (co-directed with Simantini Dhuru, 60 minutes) focuses on the efforts of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, or Save the Narmada Movement, to make the economic, social, cultural, indeed moral costs of development, to which state planners are oblivious, widely known.

Among Patwardhan's films, *Pitra, Putra, aur Dharmayuddha*, known in the English-speaking world as *Father, Son, and Holy War* (1994), has been of particular interest to students of cinema and observers of contemporary Indian life. Completed shortly after the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the bomb blasts that tore apart Bombay in early 1993, Patwardhan attempts in this daring film of two parts to weave together a narrative on political violence that considers the nexus between communalism, the changing culture of the contemporary Hindi film, violence towards women in many domains of Indian society, vernacular forms of masculinity, and other aspects of Indian society and culture. Patwardhan is nuanced enough to understand, unlike some other liberal and secular commentators, that communalism cannot merely be viewed as the logical outcome of illiteracy and deep-seated traditions, and some of the film's most touching moments are seen in the interviews conducted with working-class women who are firmly persuaded that there is no inseparable gulf between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' and that tensions between the two communities are greatly exploited by politicians. Indeed, Patwardhan's suggestion, borne out by many scholarly studies, is that the educated are more attracted by communal thinking, and the conceit that the Hindu tradition is a spectacular and unrivalled repository of the world's timeless truths sometimes leads the educated Hindus to embrace absurdities. Patwardhan's camera takes us to a Hindu temple in south India where a ceremony is held for childless couples whose greatest desire is to have progeny, and it then lingers on a highly educated couple (with university degrees from Britain) who state, with the utmost seriousness, that the ritual chanting of the Vedas produces sonic vibrations that can render a barren woman fertile. Hindu women, the viewers are told with perfect assurance, commingle freely with their men, and unlike Muslim women have not been held back by obscurantism and repressive traditions. Though there is something comical in the argument that the

highest truths of physics were all anticipated in the Vedas, this supposed 'insight' has a firm place in middle-class Indian consciousness. We have here entered the domain, not of the irrational, but of the hyper-rational.

Precisely because *Father, Son, and Holy War* is Patwardhan's most ambitious film, it is also emblematic of the conceptual and political shortcomings of Patwardhan's firmly liberal and humanistic worldview. A crude distinction between matriarchy and patriarchy furnishes the framework for Patwardhan's cinematic observations, and Patwardhan overlooks the fact that didacticism is often cinema's weakest point, just as it is of poetry. When Patwardhan revels in the detail, in (to use Clifford Geertz's famous phrase) the 'thick description' of phenomena, he is brilliantly lyrical and suggestively transgressive. His roving camera works by association: body-building contests, street vendors peddling herbs guaranteed to embolden the penis, and middle-class boys wildly enthused by Rambo are drawn, with a considerable degree of conviction, into the same orbit of masculinity. But when Patwardhan's camera ceases to do its walk, he begins to falter. Viewers are led to believe that matriarchy engulfed the entire world in remote antiquity before men, the hunters, began to assert their presence and change the rules governing most societies. This thesis of the matriarchal origins of cultures does not, of course, originate with Patwardhan, but he seems quite unaware of the depth and breadth of feminist scholarship and of the difficulties that some strands of feminist scholarship – not to mention other scholars who are entirely hostile to what are viewed as ahistorical and romantic conceptions of the early history of humankind – have with sketchy representations of supposed matriarchal pasts.



Father Son and Holy War, 1994, Anand Patwardhan



War and Peace (Jang aur Aman, 2002), Anand Patwardhan

Patwardhan's understanding of patriarchy is not more sophisticated, and the assumption remains that one can write a seamless history of patriarchy – however much it might be dressed up, disguised, deformed, or diluted. Patwardhan finds nearly every aspect of Indian culture deeply implicated in the workings of patriarchy, and at times it appears that the speeches of the Bal Thackeray, the rantings of a Sadhvi Ritambhara or Uma Bharati, the sexual fantasies of young Indian men who fill the country's cinema halls, the street culture of many Indian cities with their roving groups of young men for whom any young or attractive woman is reasonable prey, the fears of impotence that quacks exploit with colourful public demonstrations of the aphrodisiac effects of Indian herbs, the sexual molestation and rape of women in communal conflicts, and the deeply protective culture of Rajput men are all expressions of one single tale of a conflicted, thwarted, and emasculated male sexuality. One has the impression that Patwardhan does not always quite think through his theses, nor is he fully aware of the politics and regimes of representation; and yet, in his understanding of the sexual politics of resurgent Hindu communalism, Patwardhan remains India's most astute and daring documentary film-maker and one of the country's most sensitive commentators. Again, Patwardhan conflates patriarchy with masculinity, but it is remarkable that he should have zoomed in on masculinity, long before anyone in India (or, for that matter, almost anywhere else) had appropriated it as a fitting subject of scholarly inquiry and cultural commentary.

Though no documentary in India has garnered anything remotely resembling the visibility attendant upon Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a rare enough phenomenon even in the United States, Indian documentary film-makers are now poised to take a critical place in the

debates that have become central to Indian politics and the most pressing socioeconomic and cultural issues of the day. Documentaries have become, as well, the sites for a radical new political aesthetics, as the films of Amar Kanwar so provocatively suggest. *To Remember* (2003) has no soundtrack: shot in New Delhi's Birla House, where Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948, this very short film renders homage to Gandhi and the people who, in visiting this national shrine, remember his spirit. It is no accident that Kanwar deploys silence to enter into Gandhi's spirit: silence was one of the many idioms through which Gandhi wrought conversations with himself, stilled his anger, and tested his commitment to *ahimsa* (non-violence), and subtly compelled the British to parley on his terms.¹⁸ By contrast, the voice-over occupies a commanding place in *A Season Outside* (1998), an exploration, through the border at Wagah, of the divide between India and Pakistan. That 'mythical line', which the two countries fear to transgress, is only twelve inches wide but, speculates Kanwar, 'perhaps several miles deep'. What healing powers, asks Kanwar, can non-violence bring to our pain, and how can non-violence aid in making possible retreat without loss of dignity? *A Night of Prophecy* (2002) creates its own distinct space but is dialectically engaged with similar themes. Gandhi had often stated that the litmus test of a democracy is how it treats its minorities and its dispossessed, and Kanwar travels to Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Nagaland, and Kashmir to film the voices of protest of those who, whether on account of their caste, religion, or political sensibilities have found the Indian nation-state to be cruelly inhospitable. Their sadness, anger, dignity, and spirit of resistance are compelling, and their collective tale has enough music and noise in it that the soundtrack requires no narrator at all. Kanwar's use of the soundtrack is in itself a study in politics.

Indian documentary film-making has evidently come a long way from the time, merely a decade or two ago, when the Films Division of the Government of India monopolised the production and distribution of Indian documentaries. It is true that no Indian political documentary can expect a commercial release, and that even screenings on the state-owned Doordarshan or privately owned television channels are rare. In this respect, whatever the censorship codes, the absence of a viable distribution network for documentaries, particularly those that are resistant to the political culture of the Indian state and the free-market agendas of India's corporate and modernising elites, itself constitutes a form of censorship. Nevertheless, there is every reason to believe that a future awaits Indian documentary film-makers. When, early this year, the organisers of the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) sought to subject Indian documentaries to the guidelines of an archaic and repressive censorship code, 300 film-makers originated a 'Campaign Against Censorship' and conducted a six-day film festival that ran concurrently with MIFF. This campaign has now been reconstituted into a more permanent forum, 'Films for Freedom' [www.freedomfilmsindia.org], and one can consequently indulge oneself in the belief that documentary film-makers will no longer exist at the margins of political and artistic activity in India.

18. See Vinay Lal, 'Too Deep for Deep Ecology: Gandhi and the Ecological Vision of Life', in *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*, eds C K Chapple and M E Tucker, Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, 2000, pp 183–212.