

IN THE NAME OF GOD

A Semiotic Reading of Five Film Texts

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Anand Patwardhan's documentary film *Ram ke Naam* traces one of the cruelest struggles of modern times—the contentious connection between religion and politics. The multitude that is India, a cultural mosaic, lives with the inevitable moral ambiguities of such a struggle. India, the Churchillian "abstraction" which formed a "functioning anarchy" for John Kenneth Galbraith, faces the unremitting challenge of outgrowing the bitter legacy of the past. India must now come to terms with its new possibilities, uncertainties, intransigencies and dangers. In the Present. Yet, god men have access to power. Legitimacy of state power. Hindus who believe themselves to be Ram reincarnated are willing to die rather than accord minorities, its largest the Muslims, equality. They espouse communalism, the politics of religious hatred. Secularism has been a Bitter Harvest. Among the film's darkest ironies is the chillingly orchestrated Rath Yatra, the Chariot of Communal Fire that resulted in the destruction of the mosque. Babri Masjid is desecrated in the name of god. Ayodhya was a bloody scenario. These god men lust for adventure. Geography is a war game. War is waged in the name of god. You have Shri Ram fast food joints dotting the streets. You swear by Ram. Every Hindu child is Ram's child. Outcaste seamstress Bhandal Devi is not so lucky. Her children are not Ram's. They are "untouchables."

In this land of gods (where are the goddesses?), Hindus worship Tulsidas. His *Ramayana* is the Book of Revelation. In 1528, "looter" Babar built the Babri Masjid. 50 years later, Tulsidas names Ayodhya as the site of Ram's hometown. On 23 December 1949, Ram appears inside the temple. These god men as moral guardians of the nation now reinterpret history. There is an overdose of history in this god land. From leaves and streams to gigantic boulders, history is retrieved to establish dominance. Such is the religious fervor. In 1949, mobs place Hindu icons inside the Ayodhya temple. Thus began the cry for Ramjanmasthan. The Hindu's other burden. The Original Trauma of 1947 must be appeased. Actors and actresses in *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat* serials and the chariots in which they travel are worshipped. Mulayam Singh Yadav is a demon. Mulayam Yadav, who privately repents over his fatal failure to test the N Bomb. Pro-nuclear Yadav would have been reverently hailed as the God of all gods as the "Buddha smiled." But his Mandal Commission is an "ungodly" act; reserve seats for the "backward" castes. Sacrilegious! Shankarcharyas, the Hindu upper castes begin burning and killing. Perform self-immolation like the pious Sita in Good Faith. These purist fanatics spread violent hatreds in the name of god. In the eyes of extremists, communist Mitresen Yadav is no real Man. He is a heathen. The Imams oppose the move to legislate right to maintenance for Muslim women. Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) demand Babri Masjid be declared the birthplace of God Ram. 1986 was decisive. Shah Bano fiasco unleashes a backlash. The Bill bombed. Muslims denied access to the Mosque.

Naming the Ungodly

God men have entered that most tricky, contradictory Zone—Hi-story. Full of paradoxes and blind alleys. Pujari Laldas. Head Priest at Ayodhya is no mean Hindu. Derisive Laldas is a religious dissident within the Hindu orthodoxy. Accused of a communist plot of allowing ordinary Hindus and Muslims to move and mingle freely in the temple. He is hated for his reformist bent by the brazenly bullying VHP. His gruesome murder is a grim irony of a religion that claims a universal tolerance. A frightful reminder of the debased, rotting and rusting times we live in; the unscrupulous use of the sense of roots and history to justify and legitimize xenophobia, tyranny and the dread syntax of ethnic purity. That Ayodhya's temple land has partly been donated by generous Muslims centuries ago, an assertion for which Laldas sacrificed his life to the god fearing Hindu is a religious scandal. For him, the damage to reality is as much political as cultural. He shares the profound anguish of the sacked Tax Officer intimidated by the authority and power of god. Where public corruption is extreme, private anguish is more garish. The bemused officer, who investigated VHP funding sources, sees no hope in a disillusioned age. The priestly Brahmin's massive fraud of public funds siphoned off from coffers of VHP branches around the world (200 in the US alone) in the name of god, will help keep the long-bearded, cooling glasses-wearing fat bellies in saffron robes, flaunting their limousines, in cushy spiritual comfort.

The priestly power structure seeks to stifle community under the cloak of Ram. Bombay's bloody *yatra* spearheaded by these militant god men will go to Keshi and Mathura. VHP and Bajrang Dal (youth wing of the VHP) compile a list of "disputed" sites of Babri Masjid type. In Mathura, a Muslim shrine stands on the supposed birthplace of the God Krishna; In Benares, a site allegedly sacred to Shiva is in a Muslim locality. The Bhumi puja for Ram temple in Halmodi. Gujarat, a predominantly Christian area, is held. Christians flee. The purity of Ram will eliminate the impurity of Akbar, the "trespasser." In the holy battle for *mandhir*, Nathuram Godse, a member of the Hindu fanatic Rashtriya Sevak Sangh (RSS) is elevated to the vast multitude of deities, an astounding 330 million (from the most minus tree to Brahma and Allah). One cannot miss these sleeping forms because you jostle pass them in the everyday life. Godse is God. He banished *ahimsa*, lynchpin to Bharat's National Pride. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's non-violence is an affront to Ramraj. For Gandhi, that fiery pacifist, there is no other god than truth. For Ram *bhakts*, warfare and weaponry, the godly instruments of mass destruction will re-establish a battered nation's lost honor. These weapons of god saved Ayodhya 500 years ago from the traitorous Muslim hearts. Disciples of Ram show their national allegiance and resolve to fight with blood and bullets "centuries of impurity," in the name of god. Is this Hinduism? *Neti neti*, would have been Gandhi's Vedic answer.

Anguished Mahant Bholadas has lived 34 summers in Ayodhya. "It was God's city, full of peace," he laments. "At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will wake to life and freedom," raved Nehru, fifty-five uneasy years ago. That night of innocence dissipated into a nightmare overnight. If 1947 was a 'moment of awakening,' many, Bholadas reminisces, did not awake...In Muzaffanagar, trainloads of dead bodies were exchanged between the two divided nations. "We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell," said Jawaharlal Nehru, on Freedom Day. That idealism has been blown away. The frontier that separated the two countries stands erect in the minds of Hindus and Muslims. Krishna Lal Advani, the Union Home Minister of the ruling National Democratic Alliance, the wrecker of Ayodhya who flirts with the Shiv Sena militia, argues with perfect Stalinist fervor Hindus' right to protect the sacred from the profane. Dilawar Butt, a former member of the National Guard, remembers how he helped torch a market in the city of Lahore in 1947, killing several hundred Hindus; "Our chaps would kill with really good spirit. We did not feel anything." To counter the Muslim demand for Pakistan, Hindus promised a "graveyard-stan." In the turbulent sea of secularism, one billion kinds of difference compete for recognition. In the messy ocean of communalism, horrific violence has been intermittently breaking out between Hindus and Muslims. In Bombay, that inexhaustible metropolis. In Punjab, where years of state terror and armed resistance have left a legacy of militarized Sikhism. Meerut, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Surat, Kashmir, Assam have seen terrible communal ethnic/killings.

The film probes slowly and painfully through the mists of half accurate memories, equivocations, contradictory versions trying to establish what happened and why. Patwardhan engages his subject matter with startling directness and force, depicts with appalling and ferocious clarity, his vision of the tragic consequences of religious sectarianism for ordinary people. The inexorable progress towards the slaughter of the innocents, with which the film climaxes, conjures up images of a world of fantastic terrors, harrowing memories. In that relentless intensity of sight, the marvellous is the eruption of contradiction within the real. The deepest rifts are ones found within the self. The film charts this chasm of the subject. It digs up invisible and subterranean histories, to discover crueller, starker, darker truths. The gut-wrenching ambiguities are the kind of truth that is beyond politics. That 'Ram was born in Treta Age', that 'modern history cannot establish the truth' offers us a blinkered, absolutist worldview. The censoring religious zealots are merrily comfortable with such fundamentalist certitudes. The film abounds in surrealist humor and history. Ram appears inside the *mandhir* to proclaim Ramraj. A national delusion Hindu saffronists indulge in. The Lotus symbol-carrying BJP's passionate embrace of the communal card (Ayodhya) as a means of shoring up its eroding ground support. The proclamation of Hindus as the "Chosen People," the coming Hindu Imperium, the National Dream of every god man to be realized, enabled by demonic fury, hate and rage, strange gods who stalk the land inciting mass killings, "God sent Hindus'" chosen blindness to cruelties against Muslims for believing in Allah and not Brahma, Hindus' rhapsodic, even frantic eagerness to convince the unconverted that God is answer to the crisis of identity, are uniquely hyperbolic moments ironized, satirized to show with varying

intensities of pain, how one's entire picture of the world is false, a mental construct. Not only false, but a world based upon a monstrosity—the reconstruction of reality from rubble. A world where the impossible really happens. One of the most crucial battles of our times as the film admonishes—is the war fought over the nature of reality.

In the Name of God is about the agonizing journey towards creativity and destruction pursued in the name of god. During the English civil war, both armies marched into battle singing hymns. Soldiers have always been encouraged to die by the idea that they have god on their side. If partition saw the terror of war in the name of god and nation, then communal violence marked the horror of peace in the name of god and country in postcolonial India. Hindus assiduously go to war to demolish the Babri Mosque for Ramjanmasthan. Ram is the Great Tormentor. Ram is no Redeemer. Ram embodies obdurate mania. The film's intellectual rigor lies in its refusal ever to abandon the human dimension to evoke a sense of ambiguity, which enables to keep the subjects three dimensional. The great events are treated as a series of shadows. Ram's men appear nothing more than mere rules. They are theorists of morality. The film derives its immense power from the seething portrait of the link between faith, corruption and death. The film's aesthetic beauty is its subtle observation and depiction, excellent melange of reminiscence and recreation, which run through most of Patwardhan's documentaries.

In Ram ke Naam, all versions risk suspicion. God men's histories are as unreliable as history itself. Before the camera is vivid, belching hilariously unstrung people. The film's humanism lies in its intense political awareness of genuinely suppressed histories and its capacity for reimagining and questioning the values we hold sacred which is inimical to fundamentalist certainties. No more cosy simplicities. What is before us is an interim report from the consciousness of the artist. Brutally frank in tone, the film is a secular revolt into the territory of the sacred. To swim against the unceasing communal tide whirling in the sea of indifference and hopelessness. To rescue from the salvaged ruins, the bruised and broken struggle in its stormy journey into a more peaceful world. The message is loud and clear. Ideals corrupt. Often. There is collaboration, self-deception, self-betrayal and self-denial. *In the Name of God* in the end is one of the most illuminating metaphors of our time.

Arms and the Man

In Memory of Friends, a characteristically unlaconic film in terms of narrative, yet lavish in dry humor, is punctuated by a collage of analysis, struggle, persuasion, argument, polemic thinking that add up to despair and hope. Punjab. A land of the five rivers, one of India's richest granaries. A state where the cry of "Inquilab Sindabad" (long live the revolution) is no longer heard. Years of State-Centre bickering and rivalry have militarized Sikhism. Once a lush land with agricultural splendor, the separatist demand did not simply spring from the clash between an intransigent Centre and a recalcitrant State. The conflict is layered. Punjab's rich peasantry, the upper-caste Jats, maintained a lucrative exploitative system of class inequality. To counter Red Revolution, into the murky muddle rode

Green Revolution. Capitalist agriculture produced its brand of farmer. A revolutionary end to all peasant woes. The 1970s was the high point of Naxalite movement. Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi's "Garibi Hatao" (Remove Poverty) proved futile. India came under a state of emergency. Operation Blue Star is launched. Like the storming of the Bastille, in the Golden Temple Storm in Amritsar in 1984, many fell victim. The killing of fundamentalist Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, one time Congress protégé, sparked off waves of anger. Indira Gandhi's death at the hands of her Sikh bodyguards in 1987 led to the massacre of 3000 Sikhs in Delhi. Anti-Sikh rioters set themselves out to murder, pillage, rend and gore. The film pays a tribute to the socialist legacy of Bhagat Singh whose memory was appropriated by the British, nationalists and later communalists. A young socialist revolutionary, Bhagat Singh, along with Rajguru and Sukhdev, was hanged at the age of 23, on 23 March 1931, charged by the British with treason.

Nationalist agitation for independence reached its peak in 1922. Non-violence as the only means of struggle had been shunned. Anti-government violence breaks out in Chauri Chaura in 1928. The Hindustan Socialist Republic Association is formed. In the escalating violence, Lalraj Patrai, anti-colonial activist is killed. Counter violence ensues in which British Administrator Saunders is gunned down. Karkaltalan, the hometown of Bhagat Singh became a fierce site of resistance with a heightened separatist cry for Kalsa Raj in the post-independence Punjab. Khalistani separatists and the state that connived in the assassination of moderate Akali Dal leader Longowal, make claims to Singh's memory. Jaimal Singh Padda and Baldev Singh Mann, two tireless firebrands of the Revolutionary Unity Center, the surviving fragment of the drifting Left left of the truncated Left, who carried the socialist message of Bhagat Singh, are silenced by the flames of religious frenzy fanned by Khalistani militants, in the name of another god. But. "Where is God? What is he doing? Why does he allow this human misery on earth? Down with Him!" were the words of Bhagat Singh in his last work *Why I am an Atheist*. *In Memory of Friends* attempts to salvage many truths, buried in the lap of god.

The harsh twists and turns of history create a sense of déjà vu in the larger story of Punjab's metamorphosis. In the 70s, Indira Gandhi helped finance the politico religious figure, Bhindranwale. States often provide arms to fight the enemy's enemy who collaborates with the state in the name of wiping out "terrorism." Americans gave Contras ground plans, blueprints and maps of key Nicaraguan installations to help them with their "terrorist" program. In the interest of authoritarianism, Indira Gandhi led Congress was prepared to foster communalism. Divide and rule, that colonial evil. Bhindranwale was used as a tool to split the vote of the Akali Dal Party. History is replete with such tragic ironies. The idea of Khalistan, once a pipe dream of a few, seemed real for many, in the aftermath of revenge killings of Sikhs following Indira Gandhi's death. In Trilokpuri, a Delhi suburb, 350 Sikh midnight children were burnt alive. Hari Singh's beard was ripped off by Hindu mobs and set fire to him. Pal Singh, who escaped death, was earlier indifferent to the Khalistan movement. He sees liberation in it for Sikhs. Women were raped and massacred. Some were made to witness their male relatives tortured to death. That Orwellian logic

is apt for politics in general and especially so for the subcontinent; a mass of lies, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. Fundamentalism grows fiercer and entrenched on such triffrids of bigotry. Be it Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian.

When nationalism and religion are inextricably intertwined, the nation becomes a time bomb. A fragile Left of secularist Sikhs and Hindus who fight the two intrusive forces of evil by taking the message of unity to the villages, kindles the hope for Punjab. Lyrically conveyed through the nostalgic melody of Communist International and Rajbir's haunting "We do not believe in that god," epitomizing the fire of communalism ignited in the name of god. Aragon's view of God is that he was a disgusting and vulgar idea. The story of Punjab is how the two factions have fallen into the dreams of separate gods. The film's remarkable realism is its refusal of all exaggeration, hyperbole. From this springs the filmic narrative's authority; the partition of territories begins always with a partition of the mind.

Pop Nationalists in the History House

If *In Memory of Friends* is about the unveiling of human illusion, the very incompleteness of the struggle for power, a struggle shaped by the hard realities of limitations—boundaries of space, time, will and possibility, *Father, Son and Holy War* (FSHW) is about the opulence of human fantasy. The documentary weaves dreams into reality, myth into magic and truth into fantasy. The film depicts a whole people's capacity of carrying its inherited history and myth and the constant striving for generating new ones in the name of competing gods.

Cartoonist turned nation builder, Tiger riding Shiv Senait, Bal Thackeray who believes he is Shivaji reincarnated. Pride of Maharashtrians. His dream, turn India into a Hindu Utopia. Shiv Sena, cynic quips, is India's Taleban, that phenomenal communal nonsense. Hindutva, the new politics of BJP-Shiv Sena Inc., a frighteningly naive, absurdly murderous political program proclaims messianically that God cannot be defined without the devil. Muslims, fiendishly evil, Hindus, impossibly go[o]d. As the film portrays, there is mutual vilification of each other. Both extremists are unbearably intolerant. The erasure of Babri Mosque is a step in the ending of Hindus' dishonor, hegemonic power reinforced through coercion and persuasion. For Muslims, it brings in its violent wake, shame and humiliation. A humiliation produced by the operation of hegemony. Flames of communal fire rage into the sky. Hindu mobs plunder, loot, pillage Muslim property. In Meerut, where the women wallowed. In Bombay where the night cried. Bombay, the city of Patron Goddess, Mumbadevi. A city which celebrates Mumbadevi Day. In Bombay, as the story of Seema, the Muslim social worker reveals, women are stripped naked, raped and mutilated. A charred body lies scattered, like an artistic installation on the hot burning street. Disciples of Ram, ideologues of Hindutva or just plain rogues preying on anti-Muslim prejudice, spread the message. Ban or Burn. There goes Roop Kanwar, set alight on her husband's funeral pyre in pursuit of Rajput glory. Rani Sati Sarva Sangh promotes *sati* as a woman's human right. An entire commercial district where Muslims had prospered is set ablaze in Bombay, the most hotch-potch of cities.

For Hindutva god men, war is glamorous because of its intimacy with death. They revel in violence, it is "real pleasure" for them; M. F. Hussein, the "Muslim deviant," or "demon masquerading as Allah," Hindu goons set fire to his paintings for his "offensive, insulting, abusive" portrayal of Goddess Saraswathi. A Christian missionary, "the devil incarnated" and his two sons are burnt alive in Orissa. In Meerut, the mutilated corpses of Muslims floated in the river. This is Holy War. Jihad. Babri Masjid was the death knell. Innocent lives were engulfed with clouds of smoke, weeping, death and wicked men posing as God.

Shambu Maharaj, a Hindu despot resents the birth control pill more than he resents Muslims. "Earn 500 now and save 50,000 later" unfurls a gaudy banner at a Sex Determination Test Centre in the noisiest of cosmopolitan centres, Bombay, a city of fissiparous antagonisms. Indignant Bal Thackeray in his continued battle for lost territory threatens to undo 1947. Islamabad is India, howls Thackeray. Heterosexist Potency Pill sellers, self-appointed protectors of the emerging Hindu nation, promote *Shilajit*, in defense of monogamous heterosexual marriage. Modern Hindu youth is ignorant of his *sanskriti* that comes down to him from the Vedas. Hindu youth declared LIC Positive, Lack of Indian Culture. The aphrodisiac sellers' ecstasy is as intense as the erotic delight of Hindu arsonists who revel in carnage and mayhem; 'we had a holiday.... We are not afraid of anything...we are Hindus....' The casual random tone of the hysterical brings out all the startling insights, the evocative anecdotes.

India is under trial. The Great Pickle with its many flavors. The first segment of the film *Trial by Fire* is suggestive of the upheavals that beset the country. Secularism, democracy, freedom under trial. As the second part provocatively evokes, India is a *Hero Pharmacy*. These un(godly) heroes rampage baying for Muslim blood, savage and mug a whole community, becoming its tormentor, move to rid the land of all its "eunuchs," "Harijans," drive out the Evangelists, tame the Adivasis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Jains under a new Hindu Tyranny. Hinduism that "mild religion" is under attack from the "rapacious Islam". Muslims are held the scapegoat for all its discontents. Goddesses are as belicose as their male counterpart. Sadvi Rithambara of the notoriously feared RSS is Hindu nation's Durga. She summons Hindu *bir bhaiyo* to fight against the "fourshortened." Rithambara, the embodiment of victimhood. Goddesses too are victims of "Muslim violence." Swords replace AK 47s, knives and clubs give way to grenades. Medieval art of warfare is embellished with modern weaponry. These Hindu Goddesses hunt for Muslim wombs. Rape is a "soft" weapon in moments of heightened insecurity. It provides rapists "cover" in communal outbreaks.

Muslim extremists lust for blood of heretics. Like the fundamentalist Hindus, they burn books and effigies, plant bombs in busy intersections in retaliatory attacks and consider themselves to be true followers of Prophet. The more you burn, the closer you get to heaven. Blindfolded by Islam, they dream their paradise on earth, to be founded on the bedrock of Islam. Taslima Nasreen, who shamed the debauched religious clerics in Islamic culture for their abuse of women and minorities in *Lajja*, Ahmed Kasrani, stabbed to death by

fanatics, Naquib Mahfouz threatened for his dissenting views. Salman Rushdie. Islam's Enemy number One. This Islamic stranglehold like the Hindutva's, cannot last long. Mullocracy's hold on the community is fragile. The use of individuality, family and community as weapons of control is increasingly being undermined. Women have courageously challenged the immoral culture of *karo kari* (honor killing). The height of hypocrisy is when the Maulanas do not question covert or overt forms of oppression in Muslim culture; the penalties for prostitution (stoning to death), mutilation, the prohibition of homosexuality, the obnoxious Law of Inheritance which allows a widow to inherit only an eighth share and which gives to sons twice as much as it does to daughters, the Islamic Law of Evidence which makes a woman's testimony worth only half that of a man. In 1991, in Iran, the Mullahs gave 800 women 74 lashes each for not wearing a veil. Writer Miriam Firouz is tortured in jail. Konca Kuris, radical feminist was kidnapped in 1998. Her mutilated body was later found dumped in a pit by the fundamentalist Hizbollah who seeks an Islamic revolution in Turkey. Her "crime" was to highlight extreme violations of human rights by Islamic groups who want to play God. "No one has the right to do that" was her firm, unambiguous political conviction.

They are hell bent on preserving this paradise. A paradise where change is arrested, where the only constant is unchange, where mortals are reduced to codes, mere damn rules in the name of an affronted religion. A paradise of a people whose proud history is a chain of unchange. Paradise as an absolutist, unchanging entity frozen in time where the opposite of sacred is profane, where life without God is beneath contempt, where reality and morality are treated as givens. To say they are imperfect human constructs is a sure way forward to damnation. Hybridized, humanized ways of being a Hindu or Muslim is a precarious possibility when the only sacred idea is god. God is truth. Change is crime. Luis Manuel once said he would give his life for a man who is looking for the truth. But he would gladly kill a man who thinks he has found the truth.

FSHW is a pugnacious, fiery, fierce film. A film to fight with and to be infuriated by its realist representation of the human hurt, the social divisions, the awful destruction of life caused by Holy War. For all its actants, the art of storytelling is akin to that of coming to be. They appear neither sentimentalized nor distorted, larger than life and risible. Pure and impure, chaste and coarse are juxtaposed by making them echoes of one another. Patwardhan avoids coarseness at the most brutal of times. He is unforgiving about the naivetes and hypocrisies of Hindus and Muslims. The film is sequential, though fragmented, episodic and a good deal more gripping. Events are presented with nuggets of hard, irreducible truth. His is a very piercing eye. He is the recipient of stories. Truth is hard to establish but it still needs establishing. In its dramatization of ideas of morality and sexuality, the film's imaginative power is its depth, attention to detail, thematic reflection and its keen political edge. The film's primary purpose is to lay bare the whole wretched whale for viewers to understand and not to judge. At best, FSHW is baroque in its visual imagery, sans magical realist embellishment even when it celebrates the optimism of resistance. FSHW is ultimately a rigorous attack on the macho ethic that underpins communal politics in the late modernity.

Rivers of Rage

If the attack on the Babri Mosque by the Jan Sangh turned BJP and Shiv Sena combined was to recover the buried holy sites of Hindu worship, the film *A Narmada Diary* diarizes events in the theatre of Politics of Water. It documents how new modern, holy, temples-dams-have increasingly come to replace old archaic unholy ones. The film is a scathing indictment on the indifferent and cynical state's attempt at violently uprooting a whole community of Adivasis, destroying their livelihood and culture, sacrificing human life, habitat, drowning their temples and shrines in the pursuit of prosperity of a few.

Dams in the name of god. The taming of the Narmada River in the Narmada Valley of the state of Gujarat, like the conquest of Babri Masjid is an ongoing struggle. The Shrewd Taming of a vast valley of a people in the Adivasi region is prompted by profit rather than prosperity, greed rather than benevolence. The god men clamor for temples, land, rivers, mountains, they stake for the very air you breathe. Pinjaribhai, whose meager belongings was snatched by the rising flood waters and reduced to the status of a refugee, is remarkably perceptive; "Why some gain so much and some lose?" This does not go down well with the callously cold Chunibhai Vaidya, pro-Dam activist whose popular slogan is 'development at any cost.' Adivasi women must act like the 'bride-to-be' who must leave her ancestral home and everything she owns behind to follow her newfound male spouse for a new life in a distant land. "It is painful but she eventually leaves."

No development is possible without dams. Dams generate power. Dams produce electricity. They enable roads and highways. Never mind the centuries-old culture, sacred history, to hell with harvest Festivals of Holi! Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement) led by Medha Patkar stands defiant. In the state of Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel, the Great Visionary of Sardar Sarover is god. His ashes are immersed at the Dam site. His widow promises to keep Patel's promise of development. Arundathi, a member of the sacrificial squad prepares to stage *Jalsamadhi* (self-drowning as protest). For Adivasis, whose fertile lands and fields have been washed away by the gush of river water, their relatively self-sufficient way of life has been sacrificed at the altar of progress for someone else. Rehabilitation is mere rhetoric, a shameful sham. The state provides no care: rehabilitation, health, education. It even withdraws concern. Repeated failures of fulfilling rehabilitation needs of local people prove beyond doubt the choices Adivasis are left with. World Bank that finances global reservoirs of social misery and degradation is indignant to local grievances. They are sensitive to local elites' appeals for more cash to fatten their private coffers. Disbelieving Bhulabhai despairs over her cattle and crops, drowned in the Narmada in a flash. Pale faced Hirooben is forcibly evicted. She refused to move from the land that sustained her family. The whole community. The entire region. "Operation Manibeli" is launched. Thirteen families from the green valley are removed by force. Manibeli becomes a symbol of Adivasi struggle to liberate from the bondage of unfreedom. Adivasi protesters are *lathi* charged. Rehmal is killed enabled by police brutality, that tool of coercion. Development of modern temples is enabled largely by brute force.

The risk of submergence caused by dams is no crime, damologists argue. The intention behind the move is innocent is the amorphous logic of the state. Prosperity for all. For greater common good. Jalod in the Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh faces submergence. The construction of the Maheshwar Hydro Electric dam is underway. Dams are actually about the negation of nature. The Maheshwar dam is one of 30 large dams being built on the Narmada River. China's Three Gorges Dam is another destructive exercise in the guise of development. No God cares about the human and cultural costs in mega projects. Dams built amidst sleepy villages, the distress of the affected is calculated astoundingly in cash terms. Development that ostensibly reinforces progress does not encompass what human beings really care about. Peace, social security and freedom. It does not ask what kind of world people wish to live in. Development often ignores and discounts the consequences of the choices made for them. It does not address the grievances and aching of people who are forced to cope with the enormous toll it ultimately brings. Full of context and complexity, the documentary is a catalogue of awkward, unpackaged truths. *A Narmada Diary* is a powerful social critique of a system with all its dubious paradigms that perpetuate a deadly cycle of prosperity for few, poverty for the rest.

Bombay's Heart of Darkness

Bombay our City is a documentary about the embattled lives of workers, about shocking poverty, the appalling city life of four million slum dwellers. This industrial labor, the construction workers, the domestic servants, brush makers, the rag recyclers and sellers of rat poison-is one half of the city's population. Their repressed histories tell a different story. Many have lost their own land to rapacious feudal landlords, exploited and forced out of villages. They exploit the city, living in "filth, gutters and squalor," charges a Bombay business tycoon, hair dyers who aspire to be Great Citizens on the backs of "degraded people who live like rats." For the business elite and the affluent, slum dwellers are a 'menace, a social scourge, health hazard' since "60% are criminals and they smell," snaps an upper-class Bombay socialite, angry that Bombay's Gothic architectural magnificence and scenic splendor is diminished by the wretched of the earth; "the walking beggars and lepers." The city wallahs dream of a Greater Bombay. They repent over the lost feudal glories. Those in hutments, classified as "encroachers," left with only a garbage dump, who believe that "if the poor left, Bombay would starve" dream their life get better. From city authorities, to advertisers, middle-class housewives to police commissioners pull off cocktails and tea meetings to devise strategies of "fighting the evil, removing the eyesore, ridding the city of all its "untouchables."

Bombay's billboards galore. "Hot shot, just aim and shoot," "Let's keep Bombay looking good," "Discourage able beggars" adorn the city. While capitalist prosperity makes the rich richer, the workers are daily made dirt poorer. The working poor are often represented as brutal peasants leading narrow violent lives. The workers use their most powerful weapon-strength of their numbers to resist their eviction. An extremely distressed municipal worker speaks of his everyday torment when he must bulldoze slums of fellow dwellers. The spirit of freedom that the Indian Constitution exudes, justice.

equality, liberty, fraternity has yet to touch the lives of destitute Hindus and Muslims. The Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic celebrates the freedom of those at the top of the heap. Freedom for the slum dwellers is an illusion that hangs before their limited human eyes. They chant:

*When the people are hungry
Independence is a lie
Forget caste and creed
Join the Family of Workers
Demolish the Parliament of Lies
It is a false rule.*

The struggle in the critical present is not just one of excavating subaltern histories from beneath the rubble of dogmatism and tyranny. History is canonized in the name of Manu and Mohamed, Bible and Zend Avesta, *Mahabharat* and *Mahawamsa* by god men who carry AK 47, the cyanide capsule, *Bhagavat Gita*, Quran, *Thripitaka*, *Thirukkural* at the same time. As the films amply demonstrate, the hardest struggle is to win back the freedom in the widest sense, in relation to oneself, to one's multiple histories. The marginalized who resist from the margins show courage, which is ultimately a value not of art but of life. The forward march to freedom is no easy battle as the 15th century poet Saint Kabir of the working class makes it abundantly clear:

*Saints. I see
The world is mad
If I tell the truth
They rush to beat me
If I lie, they trust me
Hindus claim Ram as the one
Muslims claim Rahim
Then they kill each other
Knowing not the essence
With prayer beads and caps
And brows of holy paint
They lose themselves
In sacred hymns
But know not their own souls
Many holy men I have seen
Teachers of holy books
They acquire disciples
Venerate graves
But know not god
The world goes on like this
And yet they call me
But Kabir asks
Who is the one insane?*

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THE BALANGODA MAN

Sankajaya Nanayakkara

The objective of this short essay is the presentation of an outline of the fragmentary prehistoric record of Sri Lanka. Special emphasis will be placed on some selected prehistoric sites found in the Sabaragamuwa Province, the recovered prehistoric hominid remains and the associated material culture.

Based on the present fossil, geological, and genetic data, scientists conclude that the human ancestor, australopithecus, diverged from the ape line about five to six million years ago. The emergence of the anatomically modern humans or *Homo sapiens sapiens*, to which biological category all the people in the world belong to, can be traced back to at least 100,000 years.

Three models compete to explain the origin of anatomically modern *Homo sapiens* or officially named as the *Homo sapiens sapiens*. These three hypotheses are known as the multiregional hypothesis, the population replacement hypothesis, and the genetic replacement hypothesis, which is basically a synthesis of the above two hypotheses (Feder and Park 1997: 304-341).

The basic idea of the multiregional hypothesis is that *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved independently in different regions of the world. According to the population replacement hypothesis, *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved in a limited geographic area in the world. Afterwards, they migrated from this limited area into other regions of the

world, physically replacing the indigenous groups of archaic *H. sapiens* in these habitats. Genetic replacement hypothesis states that *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved in a limited geographic area in the world, migrated from there and mated with indigenous archaic humans in other geographic regions of the world. This migration and interbreeding resulted in modern genes replacing archaic ones.

The present palaeontological, genetic and archaeological data favor the population replacement hypothesis. The dominant narrative in physical anthropology is that the *H. sapiens sapiens* evolved in Africa, south of the Sahara, from a local archaic *H. sapiens* population, sometime after 200,000 and before 100,000 years ago. From their place of origin, the newly evolved *H. sapiens sapiens* migrated to other regions of the world and interbred with the indigenous archaic *H. sapiens* of these regions such as, the Neanderthals and other archaic groups in Europe and South West Asia and possibly even with the vanishing *H. erectus* population in South East Asia. Due to some adaptive advantage, moderns replaced the archaics everywhere there was contact between these two groups.

The great chronicle of Sri Lanka, *Mahavamsa*, dated to sixth century AD or somewhat later, or the fifth century AD writings of the Chinese traveler Fa Hsein describe indigenous inhabitants of Sri Lanka as sprits, *yaksas* and *nagas*. These historical sources are conspicuous in lacking any detailed account on these early inhabit-