

## *War and Peace*

Directed by Anand Patwardhan  
First Run/Icarus Films, 2002

Anand Patwardhan's excellent documentary *War and Peace* on the nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan is the sort of film that is often ignored in the U. S. because it deals with issues that most Americans feel are not of immediate interest to them. This is unfortunate for two reasons: first it means that people are missing a moving and informative documentary and secondly it is an indication of the complete lack of interest that many Americans have about events occurring beyond the U.S., Western Europe or the Middle East. This is an epic documentary that was filmed in India, Pakistan, Japan and the United States to allow Patwardhan to explore the complexity of this issue over the course of its 170 minutes. The film shows how a combination of religious fundamentalism, nationalism and political corruption in both India and Pakistan has led to a Cold War style stand off that has come close to developing into a nuclear war several times in the past few years. In addition, it shows how the nuclear industry has affected the lives of ordinary Indian citizens who live near nuclear test sites, and uranium processing facilities.

The film begins with the assassination of Gandhi which for Patwardhan symbolized the death of the potential for a tolerant, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society on the Indian subcontinent. What has occurred since Gandhi's death, Patwardhan argues, is a gradual splintering of India society and a corresponding rift between India and Pakistan as religious fundamentalism became stronger in both countries. This division has been exploited by political and religious leaders on both sides who try to win support by demonizing their opponents. Indeed throughout the film, we see religious and political leaders trying to show some sort of a tie between religion, nuclear weapons and the prestige of India. Ganesh is often shown blessing nuclear weapons and a 1998 underground nuclear test at Pokhran was actually held on the Buddha's birthday. We also see the scientists who created the Indian nuclear program being praised by Hindu leaders at a special ceremony celebrating India's nuclear program.

However, Patwardhan also shows people who are trying to heal the splits between the various communities in India and Pakistan. We see a group of Indians, many of whom were officers in the wars between Pakistan and India meeting with government officials, military officers and ordinary citizens in Pakistan. We see a group of doctors who are traveling to various nuclear sites in India to test people for radiation related diseases and educate people about the dangers of radiation exposure. We also see peace activists and artists who are trying to counter the divisive rhetoric of nationalist politicians and religious leaders.

Probably the most moving section of the film is a series of interviews with a survivor of the bombing of Hiroshima who visits India to talk about his experience of the nuclear blast that destroyed his home and killed his sister. He later invites Patwardhan and a delegation of Pakistan and Indian peace activists to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki and attend special ceremonies at the Hiroshima Peace Museum on Hiroshima Day. Patwardhan includes footage from the nuclear blast at Hiroshima to show the dangers of India and Pakistan's current path.

The main issue in this nuclear race seems to be respect. The film contains innumerable references by India scientists and politicians to how the tests at Pokhran have put India "on the map" and how Indians no longer need to feel inferior to other more powerful nations like the United States. Even some of the leaders in the villages surrounding the test site argue that despite the dangers of underground nuclear testing, the prestige the test have lent their village are worth the risk. Patwardhan's goal is to show the real risk that these people are running and he succeeds admirably.

*Reviewed by Jonathan Derr*