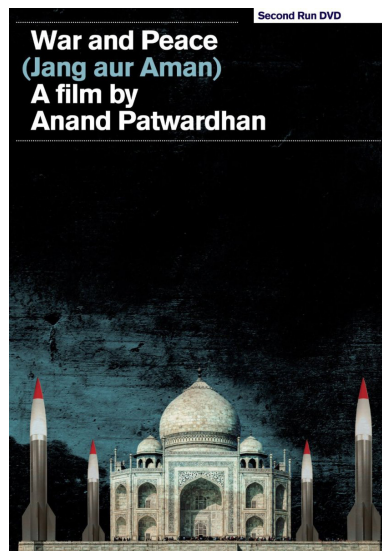


Article

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## War and Peace: A Reflection



*War and Peace* are antonyms and more often than not they appear as either-or, but through his movie Mr. Anand Patwardhan explores the new meanings assumed by both 'war' and 'peace'. The peace which swore by the Gandhian philosophy of 'Ahimsa' has lost its way in the present day and is overridden by the nuclear arms race. The new 'peace' is characterised by the emergence of nuclear nationalism and a false sense of democracy. The ultimate irony lies in the endorsement of 'weapons of war' as peaceful. Nuclear disarmament has been reduced to an act of cowardice, where the two biggest so-called democracies namely America and India manufacture consent of people through propaganda, a propaganda which promotes militarization and trivializes human lives. It seems that the film suggests that nations are in constant 'war with peace' or have found 'peace in war' and in some way the meanings of war and peace tend to move towards a convergence.

The film's narrative is a series of flashbacks, which takes the viewer through the history of

events traced in India, Pakistan, USA, and Japan. It brings to the foreground India's nuclear mania in the backdrop of religious fanaticism, bogus nationalism, and delusional pride. The movie raises some poignant questions on the issue of pride and jingoism by presenting the situation of that section of the society which has borne maximum consequences of militarization and yet has received minimum representation from the media, political parties and the state. Those citizens of society who have been deceived into believing the 'India growth story' cannot see the growth perpetrate down to them. The nation has been shown to victimise and exploit its citizens while it itself falls prey to western ideologies. The film very silently argues this changing ideology of India, which has made it abandon the ideals of non-violence and all other 'isms' mentioned above have conquered and diminished Humanitarianism. The discussion of 'nuclear armament' has been reduced to a discussion of the elite and the literate who dominate the public sphere and debates about the pros and

cons of bombs. The discourse of these discussions is the language of the learned NGO lobbies, armed forces, the nuclear scientists, the cultural icons (renowned dancers and musicians), and so excludes and marginalises individuals who are the first to bear the brunt of the proliferation of arms and ammunition.

*War and Peace* is ideologically tilted towards pacifism, anti-militarization and raises enquiry into nuclear armament from an ethical and moral point of view. Mr. Patwardhan gains support for his argument by interviewing members of the civil society, cultural community, and the survivors of the twin bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He contrasts this view with the pro-nuclear stance taken by nuclear scientists, right wing politicians and the common people. But the film goes beyond to rationalize this contradiction. It suggests that scientists and politicians propagate the pro-nuclear view merely to promote their personal agenda (as shown in the Tehelka expose), while common people fall for it only because they are fed on half-baked knowledge. This ignorance leads to a fake euphoria and patriotism. The film elucidates capitalism, religion, and politics as fertile breeding grounds for counterfeited jingoism. Religion is mixed with politics is mixed with corporate profit to gain popular support. Holding the Pokharan nuclear test on Buddha's birthday, coding the success of the test as 'Buddha is smiling', showing Hindu deity Ganesha blessing the weapons of devastation and the appearance of the 'holy animal' cows at the nuclear test site all feeds into and plays with the religious sentiments of people. This religious undertone gives the issue a more emotional appeal than a rational one. For some, the religious connotations change the meanings and definitions of constructs. This redefinition of militarization makes individuals forgetful; they forget to question the purpose of nuclear armament and the expenditure incurred by the nation for the same. Mr. Patwardhan further argues, that not only religious and political leaders, but

also privatized media channels take advantage of people by giving them filtered information on issues of national importance and act as gatekeepers. The film plays the news coverage of the Kargil war, Indo-US ties, Indo-Pak relationship and gives the impression that channels sensationalise news for personal gains of TRP's and increased viewership. It is suggested that media is driven by crony capitalism and has played a major role in justifying war and nuclear bombs to the common people. The film gives feelers that the media consciously and selectively isolates information which shows the downside of nuclear proliferation like congenital disorders among children, conversion of fertile land into waste land and heavy contamination of soil and water alike around nuclear test site and the uranium extraction factories.

*War and Peace* draws similarity and commonality between India and Pakistan, and how the two countries who share so much in terms of history and culture, who together fought the British colonial rule, faced similar developmental problems post-independence, have been caught up in a competition to prove their superiority by outnumbering the other in terms of the bulk of nuclear tests performed. The film throws hints that this race to the finish line will finish everything and more important developmental issues of health and education will be pushed further away.

With the death of Mahatma Gandhi, the movie suggests the symbolic death of tolerance, peace, ethnicity and secularism while the movie ends with the 9/11 attack on the WTC symbolizing that a new war against terror will commence which will lead to more militarization and bombing at the hands of powerful nations in the name of maintaining peace and harmony. This makes a suggestion that science and technology has become a slave of national biases and stereotypes. These biases are all pervasive and have permeated through generations. Some instances from the movie propose this inter-generational nature of fun-

damentalism like the time when an elderly man says that “the younger generation wants to reach the moon but I want to live on earth” or when the young crowd in India and Pakistan have been shown to take to the street in jubilation of a successful nuclear test and also when a Japanese man recalls the nuclear explosion and talks about how “these things tend to skip a generation”.

So, this film raises some larger questions, it talks about the stakeholders in society namely the nation, government, corporate, individual and the issue of identity. An individual has a personal identity which is being hijacked by his/her religious identity and national identity. Political, religious, and nuclear has become personal, leaving no room for distinctions. ‘War and Peace’ shows that there is a latent need among Indians to be a part of a country that is just like any other ‘developed’ nation - economically, culturally, and militarily. India has become a more consumer driven economy lead by free market forces, has moved towards westernization by abandoning some of the traditional cultural practices. It has been portrayed that individual agenda is affected by political and media agenda. Political, religious and media propaganda has been Interestingly shown throughout the film in journalist re-

porting, political rallies etc. The documentary throws light on the euphemistic labels used to masquerade agendas. Words like ‘superpower for nuclear power’, ‘little boy for a nuclear bomb’, ‘Atom Bomb Vajpayee for Atal Bihari Vajpayee’, ‘Big brother for the USA’ are some examples.

But the narrative is not all negative and pessimistic; the documentary shows that many people across the world oppose nuclear bombs. It also shows that a lot of individuals can see through the propaganda and have begun to question. Not everyone is buying into the ‘one’ promoted notion of progress. People are questioning the state and the media. The voice of a villager asking, “why did these deadly diseases not happen in the past, in our previous generation?” is also a question, to which answers are required. Answers which are multiperspective, which take into account the complexity of the issue and the pluralistic nature of the term’s ‘development’ and ‘progress’. But while India has paved its path for “nuclear-ism”, will it fatigue the state and its people of all the compassion, empathy, and love? Will people forget Bapu and desert his ways? Who will define nationalism and for whom? There is and will be a struggle to find answers to these questions.

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