

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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IN SEARCH OF FAMINE / AAKALER SANDHANE (1980)

Mrinal Sen

Bengali language

Film link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SRZqN-b0VpM>



OVERVIEW

Director Mrinal Sen made his first feature film in 1953 but was slow to come into success as his first few films didn't fare well at the box office. Eventually, he tasted both success and controversy with *Baishey Sravan* (*Wedding Day*, 1960) and *Aakash Kusum* (*Up in the Clouds*, 1965). Soon after, *Mr. Bhuvan Shome* (1969), a landmark film, radically altered new cinema and art-house cinema in India. Other films such as *Mrigayaa* (*The Royal Hunt*, 1976) and *Aakaler Sandhane* (*In Search of Famine*, 1980) still retain their impact. Sen won awards at all the major international film festivals, including Cannes, Venice and Berlin. His films usually have a signature shock treatment style that is both cerebral and hard-hitting, coupled with technical jugglery and gimmicks. He was both loved and hated for his uncompromising political stance and critique of the contemporary communist government in West Bengal. Along with Satyajit Ray and Ritwick Ghatak, Sen is considered one of the trio of great Indian filmmakers both domestically and internationally.

Film Sen again received no-strings-attached financial backing for *In Search of Famine*, this time from a young entrepreneur, Dhires Kumar Chakrabarty. The film was shot with practically no working script in a documentary film style; in fact, the date shown at the beginning of the film— 7 December 1980— was the actual date on which Sen began shooting for the film! The film's timeline glides effortlessly from 1980 back to a terrible famine in 1943, touching on 1959, 1971 and even 2nd century BC— underscoring how poverty and hunger are as old as time. The film's forthright portrayal of these themes, and the "moral failing" prostitution, faced scathing criticism from the then-ruling political party in Bengal for the controversial portrayal of governmental policies on rural life. Further, Sen's refusal to play by middle-class expectations of narrative denouement, particularly in the way Durga's story ends, dissatisfied critics.

Despite criticism, *Aakaler Sandhane* remains one of his most awarded films. It won the Silver Bear, the Interfilm Award and the Special Recommendation OCIC Award at the Berlin Film Festival (1981). It was also the Official Selection at the Valladolid International Film Festival (1981). In India, it bagged four National Awards (1981)— Best Film, Best Direction, Best Screenplay and Best Editing (Gangadhar Naskar).



SYNOPSIS

In 1980, a film crew goes to a suburban-semirural location to shoot the film *In Search of Famine*, inspired by the real-life famine of 1943 in Bengal. They stay at a dilapidated palace, owned by a paraplegic old man and his wife. The star actors, producer-cum-organizer and director are cordial and appear get along well with each other. They hire some locals to help with the chores, and Haren, the caretaker, also advises them. They are able to shoot a few scenes despite unseasonable rainy weather. Smita strikes up a conversation with the old lady who owns the palace; her husband passes away midway through the film and Dhritiman lends them a car to fetch their daughter. Devika feels insulted on a negligible matter and leaves the shoot midway. Haren tries to find a replacement for her role as a prostitute and lands the crew in trouble when the local high-caste elders refuse to let any of the village daughters act in such a role, and a few scenes are shot with police protection. Durga, a local maid, shows interest in the role but isn't allowed to act by her husband—her family situation uncannily parallels that of the film-within-a-film character Sabitri (played by Smita). The school headmaster, a man with a strong sense of justice, tries to advise both factions, to no avail. He finally asks the director to pack up and leave with the shoot unfinished, which they are forced to do.

In the film-within-the film set in 1943, we are shown some snippets of what happened during the historical famine that year, such as air raids, gruesome newspaper reports and rice smuggling. We also see parts of Sabitri's story—her obstinate husband and father-in-law refuse to sell their meagre land for rice; they get sick and Sabitri has to sell her body to a contractor for rice and oil; her husband insults her and possibly murders the infant; finally, her whole family dies from illness and starvation and she is forced to migrate.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

<i>Dhritiman</i>	Film director
<i>Jayanta</i>	Producer and manager
<i>Smita</i>	A renowned actress who plays Sabitri
<i>Dipankar</i>	A successful actor
<i>Victor</i>	Another successful actor
<i>Devika</i>	A starlet
<i>Haren</i>	The palace caretaker
<i>Durga</i>	A local maidservant

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Smita

Smita Patil, one of the most brilliant actresses in Indian cinema, plays herself in the film; she also plays Sabitri, the protagonist, in the film-within-the film. Despite her stardom, she is down-to earth, cordial with the other crew members and follows Dhritiman's shooting directions well and faithfully. She is also sensitive to others' problems and cares about strangers.

Down-to-earth Despite her real-life (and reel-life) stardom, Smita is surprisingly down-to earth. She dresses simply and modestly in cotton sarees, does not use makeup or extravagant beauty aids, is friendly with everyone and not afraid of getting a little mud on her shoes by walking around the village. She doesn't have an inflated ego or commanding manner even when she interacts with the lowest ranks of the crew members. In short, she has a quintessential girl-next-door image.

Sensitive Smita easily connects with others, be it her fellow actors or the locals. She notices the old lady and Durga right after she arrives. She soon strikes up a conversation with the old lady, who's actually the mistress of the palace, but now much impoverished. Smita also consoles her after her paraplegic husband's death and gets Dhritiman to arrange for a car to bring her daughter home, checking on her again later. Smita also tells Durga to take the day off to tend to her sick infant and assures her that her wages will be paid.

Talented Smita is a talented actress, who plays Sabitri's role in the film-within-the film convincingly, be it her appearance or expressions. Two scenes stand out— one when she suffers her husband's interrogation as to where she was so late at night and how she got rice and oil, admitting calmly, without any drama, that there is no point in talking about it. The other scene is the last, where she, while leaving the village forever like many others, stops near a tree, looks back and breaks down sobbing for her lost home and dead family.



Dhritiman

Dhritiman plays the director of the film-within-the film, leading the cast and crew to the location shooting. He is not referred to by name, only as director-*babu*. He is a young, level-headed, idealistic man with a serious demeanour and is good at explaining what he wants from his cast and crew.

Level-headed The director handles all the challenges of location shooting as well as can be expected, with some help from his producer, Jayanta, and the palace caretaker, Haren, of course. He has a good grasp of the nitty-gritty of camerawork, prop and light placement, and he is often seen advising the crew. With the cast, too, he clearly states his expectations and is both professional and cordial. He also handles the tricky situation with the village leaders diplomatically and gets noticeably angry only one or two times during the shoot.

Spontaneous Although the director has a serious demeanour and rarely laughs or jokes with his cast and crew, he is spontaneous when it comes to film-making. He mostly works without a script and explains

parts of the story to the actors as they go along, right before the shoot. In one sequence, while trying to shoot at a busy marketplace, he is unable to have the thronging crowds cleared, but changes his plans right then and shoots something else.

Idealistic The director is idealistic and sincere, which is why he planned the location shoot at a place that he knew had been ravaged by famine, for purposes of authenticity. He wants to show the audience the true “faces of famine”, with sensitivity and empathy in a realistic way. The creed of film-making stands above all else for him; so, when Devika throws a fit and leaves midway, he calmly says, “No one is indispensable” and begins a search to fill the role. Finally, however, his ideals come to naught as he and the crew are forced to leave the town, with the film unfinished.

Durga

Durga is a local woman who works as a maid for the palace where the film unit stays, subsequently taking up employment with them. She is shown in a few fleeting scenes at the beginning of the film but gains importance in the later half when she spontaneously reacts to Smita’s acting. She is chosen to fill the prostitute Malati’s role in the film-within-the-film, but her husband doesn’t allow her. She is left alone at the end of the film, with her husband missing and infant dead, just like Smita’s character in the film-within-the-film



Curious Durga, like the other locals, is very curious about the exotic film crew from the city. She often watches the film shooting along with a whole crowd of villagers and even speaks to Smita about her infant’s illness, sensing a kindred soul and requesting to take the day off.

Empathetic Her most intense moments are when she directly identifies with the plight of Smita’s character Sabitri in the film-within-the-film, When the husband character tries to dash the infant on the ground to kill it, she shrieks spontaneously with Sabitri. When Sabitri leaves her village behind and cries, so does Durga. Indeed, Durga’s and Sabitri’s life circumstances are uncannily similar.

Submissive Despite being the breadwinner and financially supporting her disabled husband and two-month-old infant, she is completely controlled by her husband and cannot go against his wishes. The husband, caught up in the controversy created by the higher-ups, refuses to let her even watch the film shoot, let alone act in the vacant prostitute’s role. While she angrily tells him that he cannot stop her from being unfaithful or rebellious, she later folds and leaves her job with the crew.

Alone Durga’s tale, though told only briefly, ends with her unhappy fate. At the end of the film, we don’t see what happens to the other characters or even if the film is completed or not. We see only the end of Durga’s story: “A few days later, Durga’s son died. Her husband is missing. Durga is all alone”. One cannot but wonder if she would have had a different life had she defied her husband and joined the film crew, maybe even becoming a famous actress in time— a denouement in tune with middle-class expectations— instead of returning to her conventional rural life and aspirations.



THEMES

Film within a film Sen was inspired by Federico Fellini's autobiographical film *8 ½* and drew heavily upon his own directorial experience for this film, particularly the making of *Wedding Day (Basihey Sravana)*, another famine film from his early days. Sen and his crew went to location with hardly any script, similar to the crew in the film who make up dialogue and action sequences on the fly. Indeed, if nothing else, *In Search Of Famine* faithfully documents the travails of location shooting—be it lack of round-the-clock electricity, running water or other basic urban amenities including good food and cigarettes, or staying at a dilapidated palace the keys of which took three months to acquire, or unseasonal rainy weather or overenthusiastic and unmanageable crowds disrupting shooting. The clear contrast between the urban crew and the rural populace—insiders and outsiders—is further underscored by every film crew member retaining their real-life names and identities versus the villagers who are assigned imagined names and roles. Finally, the outright disapproval from and conflict with the village leaders ultimately forces them to pack up and leave. This stems from the inability or unwillingness of the conservative villagers to distinguish fiction from reality, especially when the topic of a respectable woman acting the role of a prostitute arises. This also highlights the peculiar but seamless blend of reality and performance, present and past, film-within-a-film meta-referential nature of *In Search Of Famine*.

Famine Famine is the stated topic of the film, but Sen, in his signature style, avoids all but the lightest touch of melodrama. There are no scenes directly featuring emaciated, skeletal bodies hungrily grabbing at food and other common images associated with famine. Instead, this conventional imagery is reformulated into a parlour game where the crew, relaxing after dinner or lunch, are shown photographs from various famines (1943, 1959, 1971) and have to guess the date correctly.

A more direct challenge to the audience comes right from the beginning of the film, when a random emaciated old man, accompanied by an equally emaciated woman and infant, comments, “City people are here to film the famine. Famine! It’s written all over us”— an acknowledgment that city folk are completely out of touch with rural realities. A similar dissatisfaction is repeated several times once the charm and excitement of the film crew’s arrival wanes. In one scene, Jayanta, the producer-cum-master-of-all-jobs, is cornered at the marketplace tea stall by the local well-off gents. They complain that the film crew is buying up all the decent food in area so the locals have none: “They came to take pictures of the famine and sparked off another famine”. However, to be fair, this appears suspiciously like the typical middle-class squabbling common to semi-urban spaces that shows no recognition of the economic boost that jobs related to the film shoot is bringing to the lower-class characters like Durga, who are getting paid much better.

Of course, the film-within-the-film is more direct still, with Smita’s character in the film losing everything in the famine after having to sell her body and being forced to migrate away from home just to survive. In another scene, actors dressed as villagers discuss the military occupation of their village. One reads aloud from a newspaper about a nearby air raid involving British and Japanese airplanes and a dead

baby carried off by a dog. "Famine is all around us...jackals and vultures reign", they read. There is also a "Faces of Famine" sequence featuring some typical images, though these are not so harsh as the photographs shown in the film.

Comaraderie From the opening scenes, the camaraderie amongst the film crew is apparent. This is captured in the theme song, "*Hein samhalo dhaan ho*" ("Let's protect our rice"), a still-famous revolutionary song by a prominent theatre group composed by one of the stars of Indian music, Salil Chowdhury. The song is repeated in another sequence when the whole crew travels to a nearby location to shoot; rather than revolutionary fervour, though, the mood is one of an enjoyable picnic. The actors Dipankar, Smita and Victor, the producer Jayanta and the director (Dhritiman) in particular share a cordial relationship where they are open, funny and vulnerable with each other. Dipankar proudly shows Smita "the heritage of Bengal" when they arrive at the temple complex and share scenes and laughs throughout. They cordially share meals and relaxation time, chatting and laughing with each other, like one big happy family. Jayanta even looks out for Devika, who attracts undue attention with her inappropriate clothing and grooming choices, but unfortunately that leads to conflict as she was too much of an egoistic starlet to mesh with the rest of the crew or perform in the role of a village prostitute.

Oppression/ poverty Sen delineates the toxic cycle of poverty and oppression well, particularly in the film-within-the film which is closely paralleled by the real-life experiences of the locals. Sabitri, the character Smita plays, is controlled by an obstinate, terminally ill husband and an even more obstinate, sicker father-in-law who refuse to sell their meagre plot of land to one of the moneyed villagers. But their obstinacy finally causes their death from illness and starvation, not sparing Sabitri's infant either. At the end, she has to leave her home to survive. When some of local leaders approach the headmaster to take sides in their conflict with the film crew, the headmaster points out that they don't want the film to be completed because it exposes their own misdeeds. One of them stole land from poorer villagers for peanuts, which is similar to Sabitri's story; another became rich overnight and went from owning a single hut to many acres of land. Other characters also directly or indirectly complain about poverty. For instance, there is the caretaker, Haren, whose family business (weaving handloom cloth) has been ousted by power looms and driven them into poverty. There's also Durga, who is poorer still, is somehow making ends meet by working as a domestic maid and isn't allowed by her husband to act in the film which would have made her more money.

Gender roles – Prostitution The main point of conflict between the film crew and the villagers arises after Devika refuses to shoot and leaves abruptly and Haren, as an over-enthusiastic ex-thespian, takes on the task of finding a suitable replacement. However, while one of the upper-caste leaders is more than willing to make some money, he refuses to "sell" his daughter into prostitution because she would be playing a prostitute's role in the film; he calls Dhritiman and Haren "pimps" and shows them the door. He raises such a stink that other families, including Haren's own, refuse to "sell" their daughters and the shooting grinds to a standstill. The locals refuse to recognize any distinction between reality and performance and stick to their conservative morality, as if the stigma of performing in a prostitute's role would rub off on their own daughters in real life. In this, they are not very far off the mark; historically, Indian women acting in cinema were considered tainted by the "director's couch" and in possession of loose morals—in short, prostitutes. So, for a respectable, unmarried woman acting the role of a prostitute, it would be a double whammy. Even Durga, a lower-caste, lower-class woman, isn't allowed by her husband to act in the role, even though she is fascinated by the role. That these otherwise faithful, pious woman had no choice but to prostitute themselves so the entire family doesn't starve to death in the famine is also seen as a moral failing by Dhritiman, who does not recognize it as (ultimately) life-affirming labour.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss what you learned about famine and poverty from the film. Does the film make this difficult topic more approachable?
- 2) Of the characters who take up most screen time, who do you find most compelling and why?
- 3) The film has a complex narrative style and numerous characters. Do you think this sort of excess is necessary for the story that the film is trying to tell? Did the excess get in the way of your appreciation of the film? Why or why not?
- 4) Analyze the representation of women in the film. Smita, Devika, Durga and the old lady all show different facets. Discuss.
- 5) How is prostitution portrayed in the film and in the film-within-the-film. Is the controversy convincing? Did the film change your opinion of prostitutes?

SCENES

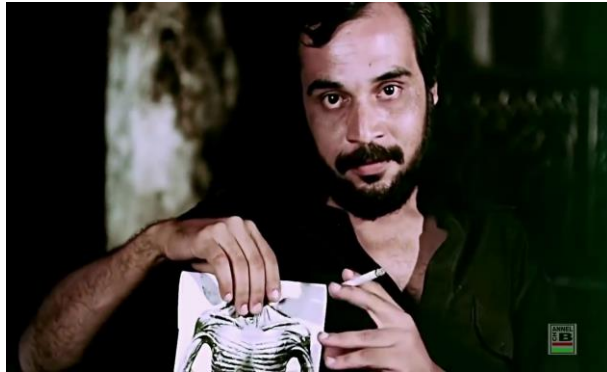
“Famine! It’s written all over us” The film opens with fields of lush green crops framed by a red train on the horizon and a road on which many jeeps, cars and trucks pass. The voice-over narrator says that on 7 September, 1980, a film crew travelled to a village to make a film about a famine that killed five million Bengalis in 1943. We see the roads change to unpaved village streets to the background score of a popular and famous revolutionary farmers' protest song from 1948 (“*Hein samhalo dhan ho*”; “Let’s protect our rice at all cost”) and opening credits. An emaciated old man by the roadside says, “City people are here to film the famine. Famine! It’s written all over us”.



At the Palace The film crew arrive at a complex of old Bengali-style terracotta temples. Smita Patil, a renowned actress, is mentioned by name. The whole crew is very noisy. They walk to a crumbling, enormous palace behind the temple complex, where they will be staying. Dhritiman, the director, walks around the palace while the voice-over narrator delineates a history of the building. Victor, an actor, has found a shelf full of encyclopedias. Dhritiman and Victor talk about how moneyed the owners were, if not cultured.

No electricity Jayanta, the manager, checks if the generators are working properly since there is no electricity. He tells Dhritiman that oil prices are too high due to the Gulf War, so the generators will be running only during shooting hours.

Camaraderie amongst the crew Dipankar shows Smita photographs of emaciated children from the Bengal Famine during World War II. Dhritiman tells Smita that 5 million Bengalis dropped dead of starvation without a single bullet or bomb being fired. He shows a photograph of “starving Buddha”, a sculpture from the 2nd century AD— Smita and Dipankar are fascinated. Jayanta asks them about what they will eat for dinner. Later, he tells Dipankar, Smita and Victor that it took him three months to get the keys to all the 21 rooms in the palace.



A chat with the Haren Dipankar, Smita, Victor and Devika (another actress) walk through a banana grove. Dhritiman chats with the palace caretaker, Haren, at his home. At a nearby hut, an old man, Haren’s uncle, weaves cloth on handloom. Haren says that business is not good. He is from a family of weavers, but grew passionate about folk theatre. He performed for a while but had to quit after his father’s death. He wanted to commission a contemporary script on Karl Marx from Kolkata, but couldn’t find dedicated performers. Dhritiman seems shocked that this simple villager knows about Marx.



Guns of Navarone A man with a loudspeaker, seated on a rickshaw pedalled by another man, shouts about an upcoming screening of *The Guns of Navarone* and throws flyers, which children pick up. Dhritiman looks on, astonished.



First day of shooting The shooting begins but is disrupted by unseasonal cloudy weather. Dipankar and Smita laugh about how Dipankar tripped and fell down to make the shot look authentic and cut his foot. The whole village has gathered to watch the shooting. The Haren tries to shoo the children away while they wait for the clouds to clear. The local doctor shows up and promises to help. They complete the scene after several tries.

Smita meets the owners of the palace Smita goes to meet the lady of the palace to get an authentic insight into the film's story. She's an older lady, with a bedridden husband. She is very happy that the film crew is there as it brightens her lonely life with her paraplegic husband. Her daughter can't visit often and she's anxious about emergencies. The old man groans that Smita should be offered food, but his wife says that tea is enough.



Smita tells the lady that they will be shooting a marriage scene and the palace will look lovely, not broken down, on film. Smita's character in the film has an obstinate father-in-law and husband who won't sell their meagre land even when they are starving from the famine. The lady says she did see a few people like that during the famine. Those were the good days, just before the famine, she says— they were rich and their marriage was celebrated with much pomp and fanfare.

Dhritiman meets the headmaster Crew members set up the shooting area at night with much discussion and argument. A crowd of villagers gather and are very noisy. Jayanta takes the old, bearded school headmaster to meet Dhritiman. The headmaster says he hated the only film he watched many years ago and has no interest in the performative arts. He is not religious, but believes in having faith in one's ideals even unto death, like the freedom fighters. The wedding scene is shot briefly. Every time Dhritiman says "Cut", we see random villagers and children running, yelling, "Cut! Cut!"



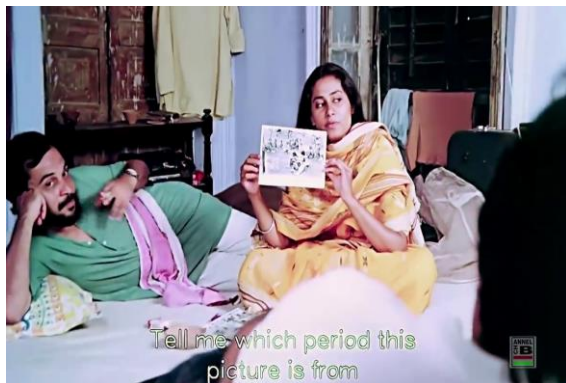
Authenticity Dhritiman shouts at Devika, another actress, for plucking her eyebrows and cutting her hair short, thus ruining the rustic look. She should be more respectful of the thousands of women she's representing, Dhritiman tells her. The makeup man says he'll try to cover it with makeup.

The convoy scene Everyone loudly sings the song from the beginning of the film (“*Hein samhalo dhan ho*” / “Let’s protect our rice at all cost”) while sitting in a van and driving to the location for the “convoy scene”. Victor, dressed as a land contractor, inspects a bamboo grove. Three actors dressed as villagers discuss the military occupation of their village. One reads out from a newspaper about an air raid on a nearby city involving British and Japanese airplanes and a dead baby carried off by a dog: “Famine is all around us...jackals and vultures reign”.



Smita’s scene Smita, acting as a villager, is questioned about her sick family by another older villager who wants to buy their land. The villager says they should migrate to Kolkata where the government has opened relief kitchens, Smita’s husband returns from work with no rice, only useless pieces of paper money. The headmaster praises the acting and gives his blessings.

The old man dies Heavy rains disrupt shooting. Smita and the others play a game where everyone has to guess the date of famine photographs. That night, everyone hears someone groan and cry. Smita goes to look. It is the palace lady crying; her paraplegic husband has died. The neighbours arrive with their condolences and want to cremate the body right away. Dhritiman offers the use of a car to bring the dead man’s daughter from a village some distance away. Jayanta reprimands Devika for wearing a nightdress instead of a saree with so many visitors around.

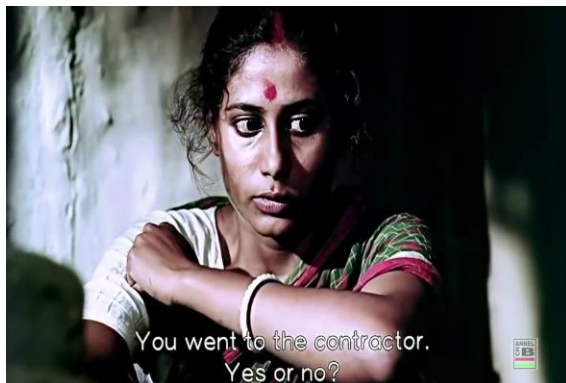


Devika sacked Dhritiman sets up at the location to resume shooting, but Devika refuses to come because she felt insulted by Jayanta’s comment and wants to return to Kolkata. Dhritiman decides to let her go as “no one is indispensable”. He changes tack and shoots random villagers in a “Faces of Famine” sequence.

The next part of the film's story Dhritiman tells Smita and the actor playing her husband about the next part of the film's story. Sabitri's (Smita's) father-in-law dies and her husband falls sick as does their child, but he will still not sell the land. The village has become a graveyard. Sabitri goes to Malati (the character supposed to be played by Devika), who is now a full-fledged prostitute. Sabitri sells her body to a "city *babu*" and returns with rice and oil that night. Durga, a maidservant working for the film crew, overhears the narration and appears to be disturbed.



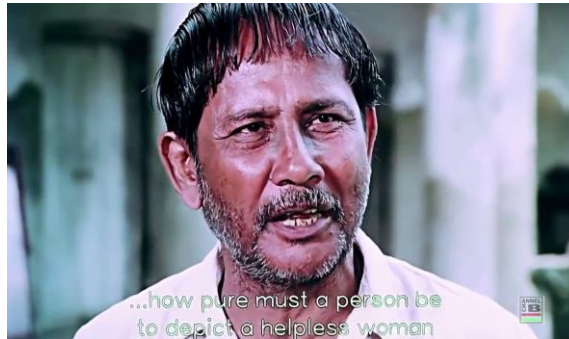
Shooting Another Scene At night, they shoot the next part of the film. Sabitri returns and lights an oil lamp. Her husband wants to know where she got the rice and oil. She doesn't reply and he is infuriated as he knows "she went to the contractor from Kolkata". He hits her and breaks the cooking pot with rice in it. He then tries to dash the infant to the ground, but shooting is interrupted by Durga's scream. Durga returns to her own home with husband and infant.



Filling Devika's role foile The next day at the marketplace, one of the well-to-do villagers complains to Jayanta that the film crew is creating a famine by buying up all the local foodstuff. Haren pushes Dhritiman to meet a local girl from the respectable high-status Chatterjee family to fill Malati's role. She is a film buff. Dhritiman narrates the next part of the film's story and Malati's role. The girl's father refuses to prostitute her, mistaking the story for reality and calls them "pimps". He sends them away.

The reality of acting Jayanta and Dhritiman shout at Haren for embarrassing them. Haren gets angry and says that he has played many negative roles as a folk theatre actor, but was never hated or shamed. Neither was Smita, when she played the role of a "defiled woman...how pure must a person be to depict such a helpless woman". Dipankar calms him down. Later, Haren wants his daughter to act in the film, but his wife and uncle object strongly, saying that it was scandalous. "Shame on you! Selling her for a little money". He is completely heartbroken that his wife and daughter don't trust him, as he tells Dhritiman.

The village up in arms A local impoverished Brahmin man proposes his daughter for the prostitute's role despite knowing the risks. But Chatterjee, as a doyen of the Brahmin upper-caste community, tells the impoverished man that he won't allow it. Dipankar says that the village is up in arms. Some of the leaders meet the headmaster, who says that they are overreacting. They say that they have horrible memories of the famine when contractors from Kolkata did unspeakable things to the village women. The headmaster counters that they are enjoying the fruits of their own and their previous generation's exploitative practices; that's why they don't want the film to depict reality.



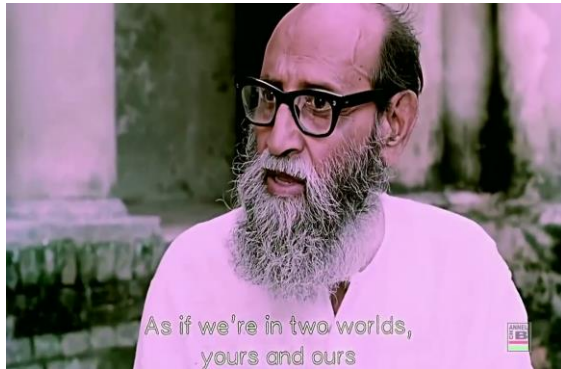
The film shoot continues Dhritiman shoots a scene with a file of ragged villagers leaving the village. He directs Smita, while continuing the story that her whole family is dead, her child being murdered by her husband. Durga, watching the shoot, cries. The next morning, she shyly speaks to Smita about her infant's illness. Smita promises that her wages won't be cut if she misses work that day.



A night shoot They do a shoot at night with police protection in case the villagers create trouble. It's a scene where sacks of rice are being smuggled to the black market. "Right under the police's nose", the inspector jokes. In the film, Sabitri hides and watches the rice being smuggled while Dhritiman directs from atop a camera trolley. Durga has an altercation with her disabled husband about rehearsing for the prostitute's role.

Durga leaves The next morning, the owner of the palace, now dressed in a widow's white saree, tells Smita that Durga came early that morning to tell them that she wouldn't work there anymore. Durga also returned the day's wages that Smita gave her earlier. Smita is agitated.

Plans at an end The producers discuss strategies to deal with resistance from the villagers. The headmaster arrives and confirms that they won't be able to complete shooting. But he advises them to find the resolve that they began with and that the fault lies on both sides. The villagers may be superstitious, he adds, but the film crew, representing city elites, have oppressed them for decades, too. Everyone is stunned. The shooting unit packs up and leaves. Haren and his youngest daughter, holding a can of Ponds brand talcum powder, watch them leave.



Closing scene The voiceover narrator tells the continuation of Durga's story— her infant dead and husband missing, she is finally all alone.

