

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Blessy S. Samjose, Ph.D.

## Night's End/Nishant (1975)

Shyam Benegal

### OVERVIEW

*Auteur* Shyam Benegal is an award-winning Indian film director and scriptwriter. He is known for films with social realism themes. As such, he is a prominent figure within the Indian parallel cinema movement, in which filmmakers aspired to produce films with social meanings instead of films with pure entertainment value. Other stalwarts of the movement include Bimal Roy and Satyajit Ray. *Night's End* is one of Benegal's early films and sets the tone for several later films. His origins in the present-day Telangana state in India inspired him to address the oppressive feudal system in this film.

*Film Overview* In the film's opening scene, viewers are informed that the events occurred in a feudal state in 1945. As such, the film takes a hard look at the feudal system across colonial India, baring its ugliness to viewers. It aims to build social awareness among viewers. This film resonates today because of its unflinching take on oppressive structures and the resulting impact on individuals stuck within. Furthermore, the film's star-studded cast amplifies the strong message. Major award-winners, such as Naseeruddin Shah (Vishwam), Shabana Azmi (Sushila), Girish Karnad (schoolmaster), and Smita Patil (Rukmini), are seen on screen. The film courted critical acclaim at several national and international film festivals, including at Cannes, where *Night's End* was nominated for the Palme d'Or. Nationally, the film won National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Hindi and Bengal Film Journalists' Association Best Indian Films Award.

*Background* *Night's End* intends to shed light on the inequality and economic exploitation authorized within rural Indian feudal systems, especially the sexual violence against women. In this lofty task, several instances in the film's plot resemble crucial events in Indian history, especially the peasant revolts that occurred in the early 1900s. Since these revolts occurred during the Indian struggle for independence, they were read as parts of anti-colonial resistance. However, as the film's plot reveals, these revolts targeted immediate oppressors, such as landlords (zamindars or jaghirdars), rather than colonial masters. Although the violent peasant revolts are not well-documented in mainstream South Asian history, historians have consistently tried to trace the voices, identities, and experiences of oppressed masses belonging to lower classes and lower castes. Therefore, *Night's End* is a valuable addition to re-visualizing hidden parts of Indian history.

Another historical link is the death of countless women and the gendered violence perpetrated against women during the partition of India and Pakistan. The overflowing communal hatred on the Hindu and Muslim sides objectified women, marking them as targets to wound the other side's pride and dignity. Ultimately, women paid the price as silenced victims who could neither speak up nor return to their families and communities. Sushila's plight in *Night's End* resembles the women caught up in the Partition violence.

### MAIN CHARACTERS

Sushila	The protagonist, who is married to the village schoolmaster and has a young son
Schoolmaster	Unnamed; Sushila's husband
Vishwam	The landlord's youngest brother
Rukmani	Vishwam's wife
Landlord (Jaghirdar)	Unnamed; the most powerful man in the village
Anjaya	The landlord's younger brother
Prasad	The landlord's younger brother
Pochamma	A housemaid at the landlord's manor
Priest	Unnamed; the priest at the village temple

Kishanrao  
Shamshuddin

An innocent bystander wrongly accused in the missing temple jewels case  
The village policeman

## SYNOPSIS

In a feudal village in 1945 British India, the film's opening scenes sketch the ultimate authority and control exercised by the landlord and his brothers over the entire village. In addition to stealing the villagers' agricultural yields and unjustly seizing their lands, the landlord and his brothers also take liberties with the village women. The villagers suffer silently because the police, judiciary, and government authorities fear the landlord and are both incapable and unwilling to bring the landlord to justice. When the landlord's brothers spot Sushila, the newly arrived schoolmaster's beautiful wife, they abduct her. Over the next few weeks, they rape her repeatedly. Despite the schoolmaster's pleas, the villagers and authorities refuse to help because they fear the landlord. While stewing in despair, he has a sobering conversation with the equally frustrated village priest. Together, they raise the villagers' social awareness, challenging them to condemn the landlord and demand justice. When revolution breaks out, it turns violent and results in the gory death of the landlord and his brothers. Unfortunately, the youngest brother's wife, Rukmini and the schoolmaster's wife, Sushila, also fall prey to the violence. Only the priest and the schoolmaster show regret at the two innocent women's deaths.

## PLOT

### LANDLORDS

**The landlord and his brothers** The landlord is unnamed throughout the film and is referred to only by his title, "Jaghirdar," and other respectful colloquial terms for "master." He has three younger brothers, Prasad, Anjaya, and Vishwam. The brothers steal the temple jewels to repay their gambling debts. When the youngest brother, Vishwam, admits to losing his locket at the crime scene, Prasad and Anjaya whine about Vishwam, saying, "He always messes things up." The landlord silences them and learns about the robbery. He does not reprimand his brothers for the crime committed. Instead, he pulls Vishwam aside and tells him not to worry about the missing locket.



**The missing temple jewels** The village priest is the first to discover the missing temple jewels and spot the incriminating evidence, a locket, left behind by the perpetrator. He recognizes the locket but cannot use it to publicly identify the criminal because the criminal is the village landlord's youngest brother, Vishwam. When the landlord arrives at the crime scene, he authoritatively instigates a shift in the narrative to identify a scapegoat for his brother's crime. Accordingly, the policeman accuses Kishanrao, the village's infamous alcoholic, of the crime and arrests him. Shortly after, the landlord collects Vishwam's missing locket from the priest.



**Bullies** Prasad and Anjaya are known troublemakers in the village. The villagers fear them and keep out of their way. At home, the brothers bully and heckle their youngest brother, Vishwam, to force his participation in their immoral activities, such as drinking excessively, smoking, gambling, and sexually assaulting the village women. Among the four brothers, only Vishwam is married. One of the brothers' wives had killed herself by jumping into the well. Vishwam's wife, Rukmini, disapproves of her marital family's immorality but is forced to bear them in silence because of her impoverished background. They force Vishwam to sleep with other women even when he insists that he is already married and is unwilling to betray his wife. Out of respect for his wife's sentiments, Vishwam tries his best not to emulate Prasad and Anjaya.



## TEACHER

**The new schoolmaster** The village school receives a new schoolmaster. The unnamed schoolmaster, his wife Sushila, and their young son move into a house near the school building. Over the first few weeks of their stay, they witness the landowner's hold over the entire village with shock and horror. Sushila is unhappy about staying in the village and nags her husband for taking the job. He explains that he had no choice in the transfer and advises her to be careful when going out. Unaware of the village's corrupt social structure, Sushila scoffs at her husband's wariness. Nonetheless, the village men's open stares rankle her. She resists being cowed by the male gaze by glowering right back at the men, especially Vishwam.



### **The feudal system**

The landlord forces a tenant farmer with an overdue loan to relinquish his entire harvest despite knowing the family's survival is at stake. When some farmers arrive to pay their overdue loans and buy back the lands they had lost, the landlord unceremoniously rejects them, claiming that the loan repayment window has already closed. In a scene, Sushila witnesses the brothers terrorizing a villager who had defaulted on his rent. She overhears Prasad telling Vishwam, "Look! Land and women must be controlled with force. If you don't, they will belong to someone else." The villagers, including Shamshuddin, the policemen, are helpless observers. They are unable to go against the landlord and his brothers.



**Sushila's abduction**

When Prasad and Anjaya learn about Vishwam's attraction to Sushila, they plan to take advantage of his desire and trap him. Despite Sushila's screams and the schoolmaster's loud protests, they abduct Sushila from her home in front of a gathering of villagers. Their young son watches in uncomprehending silence from the door.



**Silent villagers**

On the night of Sushila's abduction, her screams draw out several men and women from their homes, but none steps forward to stop Prasad and Anjaya from dragging Sushila away. After they drive away, the schoolmaster yells in anguish at the assembled bystanders, accusing them of enabling evil doers and allowing injustice to occur. He repeatedly asks his mute audience, "Why didn't you help?"

**The schoolmaster's efforts**

The night of Sushila's abduction, the schoolmaster bangs on the landlord's door demanding the immediate release of his wife. The landlord watches the schoolmaster from the window and wordlessly dismisses him. Met with silence, the schoolmaster reports the crime to the village policeman, Shamsuddin. He refuses to help the schoolmaster file the case and tries to placate him, saying his wife is already ruined. Then, he asks if the schoolmaster will take back a fallen woman. Although the question shocks the schoolmaster, he replies in the affirmative, saying he would take his wife back.



**No witnesses**

The policemen inform the schoolmaster that he needs witnesses to file a case. Therefore, he goes back to his neighbors and other villagers, asking them to step forward as a witness. Although Sushila was abducted publicly in front of the whole neighborhood that night, none of the villagers consents to be witnesses. Their fear of the landlord freezes them into inaction.

**The case cannot be filed**

Following the villagers' betrayal, the schoolmaster seeks the help of higher officials in the district. The district's police inspector raises the same questions about witnesses and refuses to file the case. A lawyer advises the schoolmaster to give up, saying that only disgrace would come of daring to bring a case against the all-powerful landowner. He also points out that the victim, Sushila, might be unwilling to support the accusation out of shame.





**Coming to terms with trauma** When Sushila wakes up the morning after the abduction and rape, she shudders at the memory of the sexual assault she suffered and is shell-shocked. Making matters worse, the abrasive housemaid, Pochamma, pounds on Sushila's door and orders her to get up. Skittishly, Sushila exits the room and watches Vishwam's wife, Rukmini, perform the morning *puja*. When she spots Prasad, she quickly retreats to the dingy room and locks the door. Pochamma jeers from the other side, saying that locked doors do not stop the manor's men from taking what they want. She advises Sushila to give up the fight because there is no escape from this nightmare and no way back. She points out that Sushila's husband would never take her back and that the whole village would point fingers at her and spit in her face.



**An unlikely ally** Rukmini is wary of Sushila because she knows that Sushila was abducted for her husband's pleasure. However, she pities Sushila and her bereaved young son. She donates some of her clothing to Sushila because Sushila's clothes were all torn in the ordeal. Learning that Sushila has not eaten anything for the whole day, Rukmani pleads with her to eat something for her son's sake.



**The brothers' broken moral compass** Prasad and Anjaya get drunk and complain about Vishwam's reticence and lack of appreciation for their efforts to secure Sushila. They point out that their eldest brother abstained from Sushila for Vishwam's sake. Furthermore, they express displeasure toward Sushila for acting like a "frigid corpse" when they raped her. In their long diatribe, they leave no room to acknowledge their crimes in abducting and raping her.



**Sushila's resilience**

Although Sushila resigns to her tragic fate, she tries her best not to give up entirely. When she asks Pochamma if her son is missing her and asking for his mother, Pochamma replies that he refuses to talk about his mother. She acerbically adds that her husband, like other men, would remarry and move on. An angered Sushila shuts the window in Pochamma's face.

**Husband and child: Life without Sushila**

As days turn to weeks, the schoolmaster begins to take over his wife's chores, such as cooking and caring for their young son. He brings his son to his day job as the village school's teacher. He is tired of running after different officials and their refusal to help. He starts visiting the village temple to find solace. Seeing the schoolmaster's deep anguish, the priest empathizes with him, imploring him to hold on to faith for his young son's sake. The priest philosophizes that suffering is in the nature of human existence from birth to death.



**Husband and kidnapped wife meet** One day Sushila and her husband, the schoolmaster, run into each other at the temple. They are very awkward with one another. Sushila asks about his welfare and their son's well-being. When her husband asks the same question at her, she turns scornful. She resents his inaction in coming to her rescue and expresses anger at being abducted and used like an animal by men of the landowner's household. He explains that he approached different authorities with little to no success. However, she fires back, saying a caring husband would have expressed his devotion by setting fire to the manor and murdering the men who had shamed his wife. There is no room for flimsy excuses in Sushila's painful reality.



**Murmurs of social reform** After Sushila's visit, the schoolmaster refuses to settle into complacency and accept the landlord's injustices. Instead, he convinces the priest to join hands with him on a mission to reverse the injustice. They aim to inspire the villagers to protest and revolt against the landowner and his brothers. At subsequent village gatherings, the priest and schoolmaster covertly mingle among the villagers provoking them to reconsider the oppressive social structure and rise in revolution against the reigning tyrant. As the informal leaders of a social reform movement, they reason that the villagers should fight back for the sake of their children's future.



**The rebellion sparks**

A temple procession bearing the village god's statue makes its way through the village slowly toward the landlord's manor. As is customary, the landlord and his brothers prepare to make an honorary appearance at the festivities. In a sudden twist, when the landlord approaches the head of the procession bearing the ceremonial offerings, the schoolmaster experiences a sudden burst of anger and pushes him to the side. The schoolmaster's anger spreads to other villagers milling about, and they all gang up to beat the landlord.

**The violence snowballs**

The villagers grow emboldened as they beat the tyrannical landlord to a pulp and storm the landlord's manor. Seeing the attack on their older brother, Anjaya runs to close and bolt the manor's front door, and Prasad runs to fetch the hunting rifle. The crowd breaks open the front door and kills Anjaya on the spot. Prasad shoots into the crowd from the window and wounds the schoolmaster and several others. However, the rushing mob captures and beats him to death.



**Revengee** Seeing the mob turn on his older brothers causes Vishwam to panic and run. He manages to pull Sushila along and does not wait to see if his wife, Rukmini, is following. Sushila keeps looking back, wanting to go back and fetch Rukmini. Although they run far to the top of a hill, the enraged mob is merciless in their pursuit. Ultimately, the uncontrollable mob reaches the top and kills Vishwam and Sushila.



**Rukmini's death** Unlike the landlord and his brothers, Rukmini is shocked into immobility when she witnesses the mob's violence. She slides down and resigns herself to the crowd's bloodlust. The ravaging crowd kills her in their mindless frenzy as they stomp through the landlord's manor.



**Tragedy and remorse** After the villagers abandon the ruined manor, there is a deafening silence in the manor. The priest finds Rukmini's broken and discarded body and feels deep remorse about the revolution he helped unleash. He sits beside her corpse, contemplating life, death, and the struggles of the living. Ultimately he covers her up with his holy garment and departs the accursed manor. Similarly, the schoolmaster grieves his wife's death and calls out her name, despite knowing that the mob has already killed her.



## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Sushila** As the main character with a tragic end, Sushila's characterization in *Night's End* is rounded and undergoes evolution throughout the film. In the opening scenes, she is a newly arrived woman in the village. While negotiating her place in the social hierarchy, she stands out from the other village woman because of her inner confidence, strong self-worth, and urbane mannerisms. She is a devoted wife and mother but does not believe in meek obedience to her husband's patriarchal authority.

**Brave** Several instances in the film demonstrate Sushila's bravery. When she walks through the village, she is aware of men's open stares, especially Vishwam's. Nevertheless, she does not allow a man's objectifying gaze to cow her. Instead, she boldly returns their stares with glares of her own. Despite the recurring sexual assaults she suffers in the landlord's manor, she displays bravery in maintaining her mental fortitude and refusing to surrender to madness. She never loses her courage in the face of household members' and servants' insults that attack her dignity.

**Resilient** Resilience is Sushila's most notable quality. Despite the daily brutalizations she suffers at Prasad's and Anjaya's hands, she displays resilience in her ability to reassemble parts of her original self. She refuses to succumb to the hopelessness plaguing her while confined at the landlord's manor. Instead, she resiliently strives to make the best of her situation. For example, she connects with Rukmini, Vishwam's wife, and gains a valuable ally.

**Maternal** Sushila treasures her son and expresses unconditional love in caring for his needs. There are montages in the film's early scenes showing Sushila's routine arranged around her son's daily activities. Her maternal affection becomes an anchor that grounds her and restores her sanity. For example, during her first days of confinement at the landlord's manor, Rukmini encourages Sushila to keep up her strength by reminding her to finish her meals for her son's sake.

**Schoolmaster** The schoolmaster is a newly appointed transfer teacher at the village school. Both the schoolmaster and his wife distinctly stand out among the villagers. While the village men are dull

and lifeless, the schoolmaster expresses a passion for his teaching profession and extends genuine affection toward his young pupils.

*Faithful* The schoolmaster dearly loves his wife, Sushila, and their young son. When Sushila is abducted, the schoolmaster expresses his faithfulness to his wife by never giving up on her. Knowing that the landlord's brothers sexually defiled Sushila, the villagers advise him to give up on his wife and remarry. He rejects their advice and continues to seek help from various government officials to rescue Sushila.

*Determined* Although the schoolmaster is a powerless man in the village, his determination challenges the wealth and power at the landlord's disposal. Even when his case accusing the landlord is turned away by multiple government officials and police, he is determined to correct the injustice, even if he has to go at it alone. Ultimately, he persuades the priest and convinces the entire village to revolt against the landlord and overthrow his regime.

**Landowner** The landowner is the wealthiest and the most powerful man in the village. He is the eldest of four brothers. He always carries a harsh and forbidding demeanor, intending to establish his authority and dissuade insubordination among the villagers. In addition to his harsh demeanor, he cultivates a muscular physique stressing the importance of exercise and body building. Moreover, like most conservative patriarchs, he is a perennial loner. He even opts out of hanging out with his younger brothers.

*Cruel* The landowner conducts his affair by imposing his order on his family and the rest of the village. Therefore, his actions often sanction an extreme level of cruelty. For example, when a tenant defaults on an overdue payment, he evicts the tenant's family from their house. He also breaks their possessions publicly in front of a stunned crowd of gathered villagers to reinforce his regime of fear.

*Authoritarian* Drawing his power from land ownership, the landowner exercises tyrannical control over every aspect of village affairs. For example, when Vishwam's locket becomes incriminating evidence in the temple jewels robbery case, the landowner uses his power to recover the locket and cover up his brother's involvement. In addition, the landowner economically exploits his tenant farmers in several instances involving land ownership and profit from harvests. He refuses to relent even when the tenant farmer's survival is at stake.

**Prasad and Anjaya** They are two of the landowner's younger brothers who are very much alike and take after the landowner's bad examples. Although they lord it over the villagers, they fear and obey their older brother. They fear him because he controls the family's purse strings and is the ultimate authority in the village. Nevertheless, they constantly heckle their youngest brother, Vishwam, goading him to emulate their life of indolence and indulgence.

*Evil* Protected by their elder brother, they never hesitate to do evil and never worry about the consequences. For example, when they visit the market, they take goods from merchants without paying and terrorize the villagers daily. Furthermore, they terrorize the women in the village by using them as sexual objects. When they see a woman who catches their fancy, they arrange for her to be sent to the landlord's manor. For example, when they learn about Vishwam's attraction to Sushila, they abduct her from her home in front of her husband and the whole village. Their evilness is multiplied by the confidence that no one dares to challenge or stop them.

**Vishwam** The youngest brother, Vishwam, holds a soft spot in his elder brother's eyes. Although Vishwam is not innately evil like his older brothers, he is spineless and is easily convinced to fall in step with his brothers. He constantly expresses self-doubt and the need to prove himself. Although he holds affection for his wife, he wavers in his devotion after sighting Sushila.

*Spineless* As the family's youngest, Vishwam is treated like a child and is never punished for his mistakes. For example, when Vishwam carelessly leaves behind his locket at the crime scene when stealing temple jewels, the landowner tells him not to worry and cleans up the evidence. Vishwam



is also susceptible to his brothers' lures. Prasad and Anjaya frequently convince him to get drunk with them.

**Flaky** When Prasad and Anjaya invite him to join their deviant activities, he is not firm in saying no. Vishwam's decisions about Sushila are examples demonstrating his flakiness. After Sushila is abducted and confined at the landowner's manor, Vishwam never tries to save her. When his brothers brought other women into the manor for their pleasure, Vishwam declined them out of respect toward his wife. However, when they bring Sushila into the manor, he does not stay away from her. During the villagers' revolt, he panics and runs away instead of facing the mob.

**Childish** Vishwam is childish because of his pampered and spoiled upbringing. He takes offense quickly, tries to prove himself in front of his brothers, and falls prey to the weakest persuasions. For example, although he is not interested in Prasad and Anjaya's immoral activities, he makes a show of rejecting them to appear firm and decisive. However, he repeatedly falls for their traps and tricks. After Sushila is abducted and raped by the older brothers, Vishwam brings her a gift hoping to flatter her. When she rejects his attention, his ego is bruised. He then shouts at her to express his superiority. He never tries to empathize or take responsibility for his role in Sushila's abduction.

**Rukmini** Rukmini is Vishwam's wife. She married into the landowner's household because of her family's impoverished condition. She declares her abhorrence of the landowner's family and resents her family's poverty that forced her to marry Vishwam. Although she is powerless in the landowner's patriarchal household, she strives to do her best to help Sushila and the maidservant, Pochamma.

**Tolerant** Despite knowing that Sushila was abducted specifically for Vishwam, Rukmini reigned in her anger towards both Vishwam and Sushila. As Vishwam's wife, she was well within her rights to resent Sushila and make life difficult for her. However, she chose not to take her anger out on Sushila. Instead, she empathized with her as a woman and helped her by meeting simple needs like clothes and food.

**Priest** The priest is a quiet, introspective man who carefully observes the goings-on in the village. Although his inaction in the earlier scenes indicates a certain degree of cowardliness, he makes up for it after he joins hands with the schoolmaster.

**Patient** Throughout much of the film, the priest is a silent observer of the landlord's tyrannical rule over the village. As the first person on the scene after the theft of temple jewels, he discovers the evidence left behind by the thieves, Vishwam's locket. Despite his apparent anger at the landlord's family for daring to extend their irreverence to temple affairs, he is forced to relinquish the evidence and stomach the injustice because of the landlord's power. He exercises patience in waiting for the right time to pursue the matter and correct the injustice.

**Moral** As a man of god, the priest believes in moral living and disapproves of the landlord's doings. The schoolmaster's conversation with the priest provides an example. This conversation differed from the conversations with other villagers. While the other villagers advise the schoolmaster to abandon his wife and move on with life, the priest empathizes with the schoolmaster. Ultimately, when he realizes that the schoolmaster refuses to stomach the injustice, he steps up and joins the schoolmaster. He works hard on his mission to restore morals and correct injustice.

## **THEMES**

**Feudal System** The film's setting in 1940s rural colonial India allows it to explore exploitation sanctioned by unequal distribution of power and resources within a feudal system. As the one owning the most land in the village, the landowner (*jagirdar*) wields ultimate authority and has the last say in matters big and small. The landlords are the only ones with pockets deep enough to weather the hardships during famines and droughts. Therefore, the impoverished villagers have to borrow from the landlords or sign away their lands to survive during hard times. Consequently, the villagers are beholden to the landlord

and must give in to the landlord's wishes. The complicity is compounded by the generations of forebears who had lived in oppressive conditions. Many scenes in the film show the villagers as mute spectators when they see their peers suffering at the landlord's and his brothers' hands. They appear dazed and forlorn in the face of the landlord's formidable authority. Their helplessness is evidence of being traumatized and locked in survival mode.

**Patriarchy** The film pays close attention to entrenched patriarchy in South Asia, especially within feudal systems. As newly arrived outsiders, the schoolmaster and Sushila are unaware of the landlord's authority extending over the entire village. Fearing for his wife's safety, the schoolmaster tries to convince Sushila to stay indoors. As a confident and brave woman, Sushila refuses to comply with the gendered restrictions imposed on women. The feudal system and patriarchy work hand in hand to establish the pecking order for individuals in the village. Consequently, women are pushed to the very bottom of the social structure and are treated as sexual objects and dispensable bodies. For example, the landlord and his brothers normalize molesting and sexually abusing any woman in the village. They publicly abduct the newly arrived schoolmaster's wife, Sushila, with no regard for her screams and her husband's protests. Instead of helping the schoolmaster recover his wife, the villagers advise him to forget about his wife, considering her a soiled woman. They recommend that he remarry and move on. Likewise, Pochamma, the maidservant at the landlord's manor, cruelly reminds Sushila that her husband will no longer want her. She is jaded by years of working at the landlord's manor and watching the brothers use and dispose of many village women.

**Feminist solidarity** The film explores the poignancy of feminist solidarity within patriarchal and feudal societies in Rukmini's and Sushila's interactions. On Sushila's first day in the landlord's manor, she stares into the distance, traumatized by the sexual assault she suffered the previous night. Although Rukmini and Pochamma are aware of the men's evil doings, they are helpless to prevent them or help the women escape. However, Rukmini takes pity on Sushila, lending her clothes and other necessities. When Sushila is too traumatized to eat or care for herself, Rukmini takes the initiative to speak kind words and encourages her to keep living. As a result, Sushila grows to care about Rukmini. When the manor's servants do not show up to work, the brothers order Rukmini to do the servants' chores. Although Sushila was not directly ordered to work, she volunteers to help Rukmini. The bond between the two women reappears in the final scene when the villagers storm the manor, seeking to kill the landlord's family. Sushila tries her best to include Rukmini in the escape plans.

**Revolution** The anti-colonial movement in early 1900s India inspired freedom in the broadest sense among the oppressed masses. Consequently, the masses demanded freedom from the European colonizers and local tyrants, such as the landlords. The film's violent ending demonstrates a peasant revolt, much like many others recorded in South Asian history. Although nationalist leaders, such as Gandhi, condemned these acts of violence, they are critical examples of grassroots revolution within the Indian struggle for independence. The film identifies the schoolmaster and the priest as the masterminds behind the revolution. As unnamed individuals known only by their professions, they bear a strong resemblance to the educated, upper-caste men who led the Indian struggle for independence. Furthermore, the revolution at the film's end gathers momentum and causes the deaths of innocents like Rukmini and Sushila. Their deaths are similar to innocent deaths during the Indian freedom struggle when the agitation and high spirits powering the nationwide movement caused unintended casualties.

**Family** The affection between family members is a recurring theme in the film. The landowner's and the schoolmaster's families demonstrate familial bonds. Although the landowner is cruel and tyrannical towards villagers, he reserves a soft spot for his three brothers and shows special concern toward his youngest brother, Vishwam. On more than one occasion, he pulls Vishwam aside to ask about his well-being and offers advice. Similarly, the family bond between the schoolmaster, Sushila, and their young son is very notable. In the early scenes, Sushila cares for their young son's morning routine and toilette. After Sushila is abducted and taken away, the schoolmaster tries to maintain the same routine that Sushila had perfected to restore a sense of normalcy for his young son.

**Death** The film's tragic and violent end deserves attention. During most of the film, the villagers appear like the living dead because they have lost their agency. Nevertheless, when they declare their freedom and avenge the injustices, long-suppressed emotions emerge as bloodlust. The

landlord and his brothers pay for their evil deeds with their life. Although the villagers aim their anger at the landlord and his brothers, as members of the landlord's household, Rukmini and Sushila become unintended casualties. The film calls attention to women's and children's vulnerabilities within oppressive social structures.