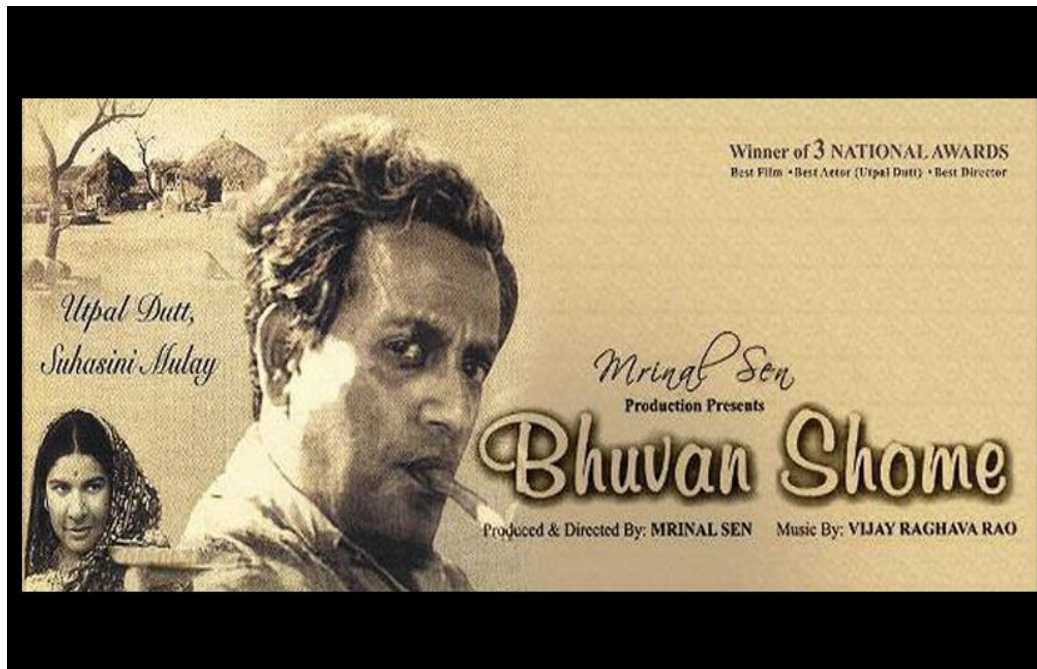


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BHUVAN SHOME / MR. BHUVAN SHOME (1969)

Mrinal Sen

Bengali language



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; this was also his first "hit" film after a series of eight box-office "flops". Other films such as *Mrigayaa* (*The Royal Hunt*, 1976) and *Aakaler Sandhane* (*In Search of Famine*, 1980) still retain their impact. He 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 Based on a "non-filmly" story by Banaphool (*nom de plume* of popular author Balai Chand Mukherjee), the film was conceived under the aegis of the Films Finance Corporation, a government entity encouraging experimental and innovative films at that time. After being initially rejected, it is rumoured that the then-Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, approved the final script. The film was made on a meagre budget of Rs. 1,50,000 and shot entirely in Saurashtra, a Gujarati province in western India famous for the Rann of Kutch, a unique geographic area with both salt marsh and sandy desert. Amitabh Bachchan, who would go on to become India's biggest film superstar, made a modest start with voice-over narration for the film. The film was a runaway success and enjoyed by a large populace. It won three National Awards— Best Film, Best Director and Best Actor (Utpal Dutt)—and was the official selection for the Venice Film Festival.



Cinematic narration Sen liberally uses many of his trademark "gimmicky" cinematic techniques here, including the freeze frame, still photographs, stop motion photography and animation, along with fast-paced folk and classical music. Some notable instances include: Bhuvan Shome in a vertically narrow freeze frame, both still and moving images, while we hear his internal monologue on Yadav's bribery; still photographs of Shome hunting and Gauri swinging on a swing; Gauri bringing him local clothes in stop motion photography where she "jumps" from inside the hut to outside, next to Shome; and most interestingly, an animated office setting with a swinging office door, a desk filling up with files, a revolving chair, a pen writing in mid-air, a phone ringing off the hook etc. and again with animated birds flying around Shome's head as he thinks about his hobby of hunting birds. Each of these ties in with the plot to lesser or greater degree, but one common purpose appears to be reducing the budget.



LIST OF CHARACTERS

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| <i>Bhuvan Shome</i> | A middle-aged, strict railway officer who takes a day off to hunt birds |
| <i>Amitabh Bachchan</i> | Narrator |
| <i>Gauri</i> | A village belle, Yadav's wife |
| <i>Yadav Patel</i> | A junior railway officer, Gauri's husband |
| <i>Singhdana</i> | A bullock cart driver |
| <i>Gauri's father</i> | Anonymous |

SYNOPSIS

Bhuvan Shome is a stern, incorruptible senior railway officer who decides to take a day off to pursue his new hobby of hunting birds, though he has no practical experience. He arrives at a small railway station and after chastising the officials there, sets off towards a small interior location on the Rann of Kutch, much beloved by migratory birds. On the way, he has the most wonderful adventures— riding on a ramshackle bullock cart, being chased by an angry buffalo and meeting Gauri, a village belle whose husband is coincidentally one of the officers he has written up for taking bribes. Gauri teaches him to shed his urban manners and clothes. Finally, after visiting an abandoned palace, dressing up in local clothes, donning palm fronds to simulate a tree and much trudging over the marshy desert, he is able to shoot and frighten a single bird out of the sky. Gauri also requests him to ask “Mr. Shome”, the senior officer, to be lenient towards her husband, but Shome does not reveal his identity to her. Before leaving, he gifts her the bird to raise as a pet and promises to return. Back at the office, he pardons Gauri's husband and acts bizarrely in the closing scene, indicating that the trip was a transformative experience for him.



SCENES

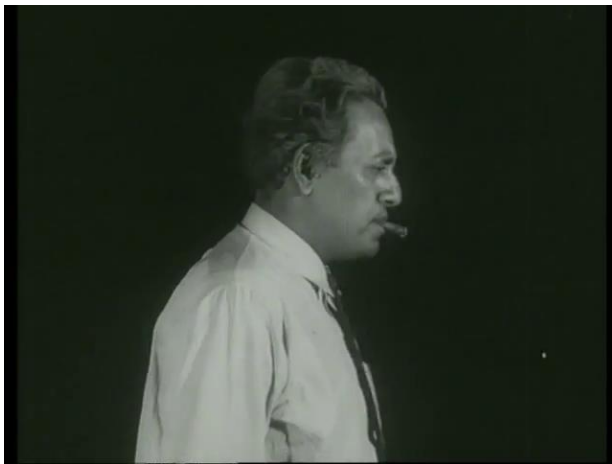
Opening Scene A small rain station in Rajasthan. Yadav and a colleague, two railway officials, are aware that their superior officer would soon reach there and he doesn't like anything to be out of place. Yadav tells his colleague that he's afraid of being reprimanded by Mr. Shome for a small mistake. His marriage consummation ceremony (*gauna*; see under theme) is a few days away, and he would be ruined if he lost his job now.

Mr. Shome appears Mr Shome rudely tells some other railway officials to keep the affairs in order; so long as they keep "duty first, self last" they will be all right; otherwise, there is no point flattering him. We see a freeze frame with Shome's thoughts in voice-over about Yadav, who to him is apparently a deceitful bribe-taker. Yadav glares at Shome leaving in a horse-drawn carriage.



Shome's background As Shome is riding along in the carriage, the voice-over narrator details how Shome is very strict and dismissed his own son from the job. Shome, smoking a cigar, thinks in response that the son found a religious guru and disappeared one fine day, so there's no way he could tolerate such tardiness. The narrator continues, saying that Shome led a dark and lonely life as we see running horses' legs and rolling wagon wheels. He made his wife miserable while she was still alive and is estranged from his son. His colleagues respect him to his face and abuse him behind his back. This is followed by footage of Shome in various clothes smoking a cigar on a black background.

"Golden Bengal"- a historical snapshot The narrator (sarcastically) speaks about "Golden" and "Great" Bengal, while we see images and footage of iconic figures and moments— Vivekananda, Tagore, Satyajit Ray, a riot, a procession with many women chanting the leftist slogan "Long Live Revolution", effigies being carried, etc., leading up to a film workers' strike.



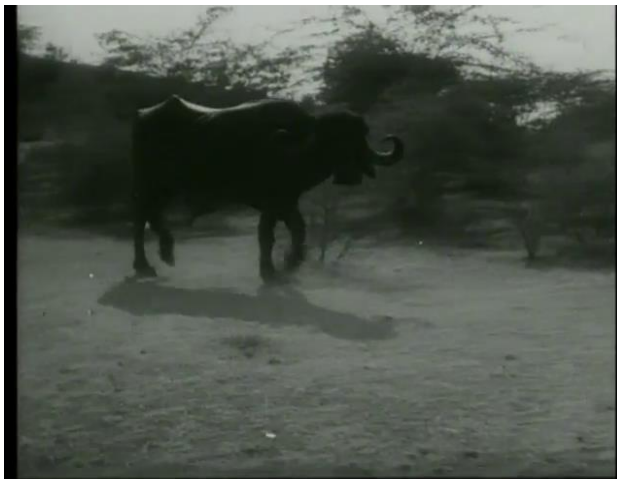
Shome's world The narrator says that Shome belongs to this Bengal—he retains his “pure Bengali character” even after living in other places for most of his life, while we watch Shome briskly walk a long verandah in his signature robe, cigar in hand. Shome's world is shown in animated footage, with a swinging office door, a desk filling up with files, a revolving chair, a pen writing in mid-air, a phone ringing off the hook, closing with Shome writing at his desk. The narrator says he's led this life for 25 years, but one day decided to take up hunting as a hobby. Rather than big game, he decides to hunt birds and becomes an ornithologist.



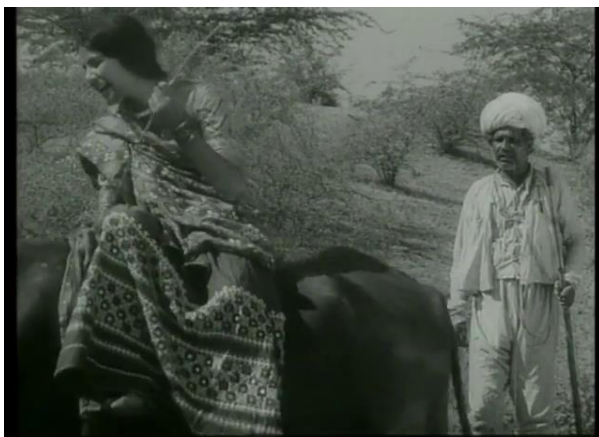
Hunting expedition Back to the present, Shome travels in his carriage through a busy city to his bungalow; his hunting expedition begins the next day. At dawn, he nods off aboard a ramshackle bullock cart while a white-turbaned, tipsy cart driver sings a popular Hindi film song. The cart driver, Singhdana, tells Shome that he learnt Hindi as he interacts frequently with officials from other places. They travel through an arid, uneven, open landscape with little vegetation as the cart driver sings a cheerful Hindi film song, “Let them call me wild”. Shome tells the cart driver to slow down as he's afraid that the cart will fall apart. But Singhdana says he'll be late for the birds so he drives too fast by tickling the bullocks with his feet. Singhdana learns the Bengali word for ‘tickling’.



A buffalo chase They pass a small village, Shome intently watches women carry tiered pots of water on their heads. Singhdana tells Shome his life history and Shome enjoys the conversation. The bullocks suddenly stall at the sight of a very large and very angry buffalo. Singhdana tells Shome to run away with his gun and belongings while he chases the buffalo. The buffalo catches up to Shome, but they are finally able to drive it away. The bullocks, however, have run away with the cart. The men keep panting and running to and fro.



A young woman appears A young woman for runs out and stops the stray buffalo, which is actually hers. Shome has climbed up on a tree while Singhdana shouts at the woman. She laughs at them, then jumps on the buffalo and rides away. Shome and the cart driver are astounded. He tells Shome to keep walking through the sandy, bushy landscape while he whistles for the bullocks in order to locate the cart.



Lost in sugarcane field Shome meets a local man who doesn't speak any Hindi and asks for directions towards the river/birds. The man leads him through a tall sugarcane field but Shome gets lost.

Hunting birds Finally, he reaches the birds, which fly away. The woman sets up a string cot and goes in search of someone. She sees Shome trying to shoot a crane while smoking his cigar and tells him that the bird will fly away because of the smoke. He shoots and misses; she laughs at him.



A light-hearted moment She tells him to rest on the cot or come home with her, following her father's orders, as the birds won't return for a while. They chat and laugh about hunting birds and eating plant-based food. She jokes that the bedbugs should bite him as he kills innocent birds. Her father arrives and tells Shome that she has learnt Hindi and how to read and write in the city; she's his pride and joy. They head back to the man's hut in a nearby village.



A little rest Shome rests at the man's hut and comments on how well the buffalo listens to the young woman. The father tells Shome that his daughter's name is Gauri and she's proficient at many things, including searching for birds. Her *gauna* ceremony is coming up, but she hasn't become worldly wise at all. Her husband is a railway ticket collector and a decent fellow. Gauri brings out some food; Shome objects that he brought his own but grudgingly accepts the hospitality.



A pet bird and a husband Gauri's father leaves for some work. Gauri tells Shome that she's worried about her pet bird after her *gauna* ceremony, when she will live at her in-laws' house. Shome asks her about her ticket collector husband, but following Hindu custom, she won't utter his name or write it. She suddenly changes the topic and prattles on about her pet bird. Then she shoos Shome inside to lie down and rest. We hear suspenseful music and see a framed picture of a man, a train engine and Shome's disgruntled face— all indicating that he has identified the husband: Yadav (from the opening scene).



Subterfuge Gauri asks Shome why everyone but the buffalo is afraid of him. Shome asks about the man in the framed picture but she shyly says, "He's nothing to me". Shome says Yadav is "wicked". She agrees, saying Yadav doesn't understand why she can't write letters to him everyday after doing her chores. When Shome says he also works in the railways, she innocently asks him if he is acquainted with a senior officer named "Mr. Shome", who is "wicked" and "mean" and writes up junior officers on minor grounds. Shome doesn't reveal his identity; instead, he tells her that Yadav takes bribes.

An altercation Gauri reacts strongly, saying that Yadav only gets his salary and some tips. Shome replies that tips are bribes. She angrily counters that he doesn't know anything; "Mr. Shome" is jealous as no one bribes him and she doesn't need to see his face to know what sort of horrible person "Mr. Shome" is. Suddenly, they hear gunshots, which scare away the birds.

A change of clothes She brings him an armful of local clothes and tells him to change, as the birds would be frightened of his western clothes, marking him as an outsider. He laughs and thinks that it is a joke, but she nags him until he changes. After changing, he complains that the clothes stink but she assures him that will make the birds less wary. She ties him an elaborate, lopsided turban in a local style with a long and twisted piece of cloth. She takes his gun and gives him a long stick instead.



Ghost bungalow They jog briskly across a wide-open space to a “ghost bungalow”, which is now abandoned, a summer palace for some bygone king. Shome says it’s “fantastic”. She tells the story of how the queen would swing on a swing and listen to stories all day. Shome is fascinated by her. She suddenly notices a large flock of birds, but they fly away.



Hunting on the salt marsh desert Shome and Gauri rush to the top of a hillock on the wide-open salt marsh desert. She jogs away to hide and he looks over the landscape. She spots birds and gestures him to hurry closer. They run to a good spot. He positions himself and she reassures him to shoot. He misses. She comforts him by saying there's too much blowing sand and the birds will return.



Pretend tree She drags some large leaves over the dunes, panting, then tells him to tie them around himself and pretend to be a tree. He shoots and a bird falls. She picks it up it and says it's alive; it just fell from being shocked by sound of the shot.



Goodbye? After changing back into his own clothes at the hut, they leave with the bird, which Gauri says he can keep as a pet. She walks some distance with him. Before they part, she tells him hesitantly that she will write to Yadav to not accept tips again and that he should request "Mr. Shome" to be lenient towards Yadav. Otherwise, she won't be able to complete her *gauna* ceremony and live at her in-laws' with her husband.



Return Shome keeps walking and remembering Gauri (shown in photographs). Suddenly he turns around and walks back all the way to Gauri's home. She's singing a folk song about being at the in-laws' house, while swinging on a swing and embroidering. He gives her the bird to keep as a pet, then finally leaves, promising to return.



Yadav pardoned Back at the railway office, Shome calls Yadav to his office and shows him the bribery report. Then unexpectedly, he tears up the report and tells Yadav to burn it, leaving him with a warning.



Closing scene Shome then jumps up from the chair, starts singing a tune, tries to climb out of the window and, taking off his tie, points at the camera with a stick. He then moves the papers on his desk and lies down with his head on a stack.

The narrator explains that a few days later Yadav wrote to Gauri that his job was safe and he was being transferred to a larger railway station, meaning more “greasing of the palm” and a higher income.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Bhuvan Shome

Bhuvan Shome is the protagonist of the film. A stern railway officer and Bengali living on the other side of the country, he is a lonely man facing midlife crisis. He takes up hunting birds as a hobby and takes a day off to hunt birds somewhere in the marshy sand desert of Kutch. He returns a transformed man after his day-long experience with the simple and spontaneous locals, like Gauri and the bullock cart driver.

Rigid Shome is introduced as a serious bureaucrat of the Indian railways—honest, incorruptible and rigid in following the rules. “Duty first, self last” is his motto. Not one subordinate officer has kind words to say about him; in fact, in the introductory scene he berates three subordinate officers about the sorry state of affairs as soon as he arrives at the small railway station, then glares at Yadav before leaving on the wagon. His whole life revolves around his work, as described by the voice-over narrator and in the animated sequence that seems to ridicule such a life. Indeed, in an interview, director Mrinal Sen pointed out: “Our intention was never to tame a tough bureaucrat. On the contrary, our intention was to “corrupt” a bureaucrat suffering from Victorian morality.”

Tolerant Thus it seems somewhat incongruous how quickly he drops his stern manner and ego as soon as he is with the locals; he chats quite unaffectedly with the bullock cart driver, a random villager, Gauri and her father. The film does not elaborate on this sudden sea change in behaviour. Perhaps in his excitement for an adventure-filled day pursuing his favourite hobby, he drops his stern facade and reveals a more child-like self. Or perhaps his long work experience in dealing with rural people in various parts of India had given him an idea of how best to deal with them. He is also surprisingly receptive of Gauri’s suggestions on how to properly hunt birds—she’s convinced that the smoke from his cigar and foreign clothes would drive them away and makes him drop his cigar and change his clothes. Interestingly, after his return, Shome seems to have quit smoking as well, another positive effect of meeting Gauri.

Adventurous Shome is clearly in the throes of a midlife crisis in this film. He takes up a hobby that has no connection to his overwhelmingly work-dominated life. And it is not just any hobby, but one that requires him to get outside the safe confines of his office. And what an adventure it turns out to be: a day full of novel experiences: riding a ramshackle bullock cart; being chased by a dark and mountain-like angry buffalo right up a tree; changing into malodorous local attire provided by Gauri; pretending to be a tree by donning a ring of large palm fronds around himself and so on. All of this in order to frighten a lone duck out of the sky with the sound of his rifle. That he perhaps had *too much* fun is seen in the closing scene, when he acts in quite the bizarre manner (perhaps mimicking Sen’s own experience of boredom and ennui as a medicine salesperson) as he jumps up from the chair, sings a tune, attempts to climb out of the window and points at the camera with a stick, all the while grinning like an errant child with its hands in the cookie jar. Thus, his day-long adventure was both enjoyable in-the-moment and transformative in the long term.

Gauri

Gauri is a young woman who lives in a remote village with her father and is married to Yadav, a junior railway officer. Her family seems to be well-to-do; she has received some basic education in the city and not lost her *joie de vivre* to poverty. She meets Shome accidentally and ends up being his guide to hunting birds, bringing a breath of fresh air into his life with her simplicity in the process.

Fearless Our introduction to Gauri shows her as a fearless and confident young woman. For instance, the angry buffalo that had been chasing Shome and his bullock cart for some distance, ending with Shome having to climb up a tree to save himself, was actually her pet and she immediately calms it down. When Gauri sees Shome’s predicament, she laughs at him, then jumps on the buffalo and rides away. Both Shome and the bullock cart driver are stunned. Shome utters “Mahishmardini” under his breath, comparing her to the fierce Goddess Durga in her buffalo-demon-slaying form. Only later is it revealed that she had raised the buffalo from when it was a calf and she’s the only person the bad-tempered brute acknowledges. Gauri certainly has a knack for dauntlessly confronting and then taming wild or frightening creatures—be it a migratory bird or even Shome himself.

Honest Gauri is both honest and innocent, a combination that is tricky for Shome to handle simply due to inexperience. She innocently complains about “Mr Shome” who is making her husband’s life

miserable and keeping them apart, all because of his overscrupulousness in considering tips as bribes. Although she says unflattering things about him, this honesty and innocence paradoxically endears her to him, perhaps because he himself holds honesty in such high regard.

Imaginative Gauri has a vivid imagination, as seen in the scenes when she prattles on about her pet bird and at the abandoned palace when she spins a story of bygone kings and queens, the latter sitting at that very spot and swinging on a swing. The charming and completely unaffected way in which she lets her imagination loose endears her to Shome.

Resourceful Rural life makes one resourceful as not many conveniences are available. And this is true for Gauri. She always seems to have a solution to every problem and knows how to navigate her surroundings well. For instance, she instructs Shome on how to hunt birds successfully by not smoking, by changing into smelly local clothes and by donning large fronds to pretend to be a tree—though perhaps this last is an overkill.

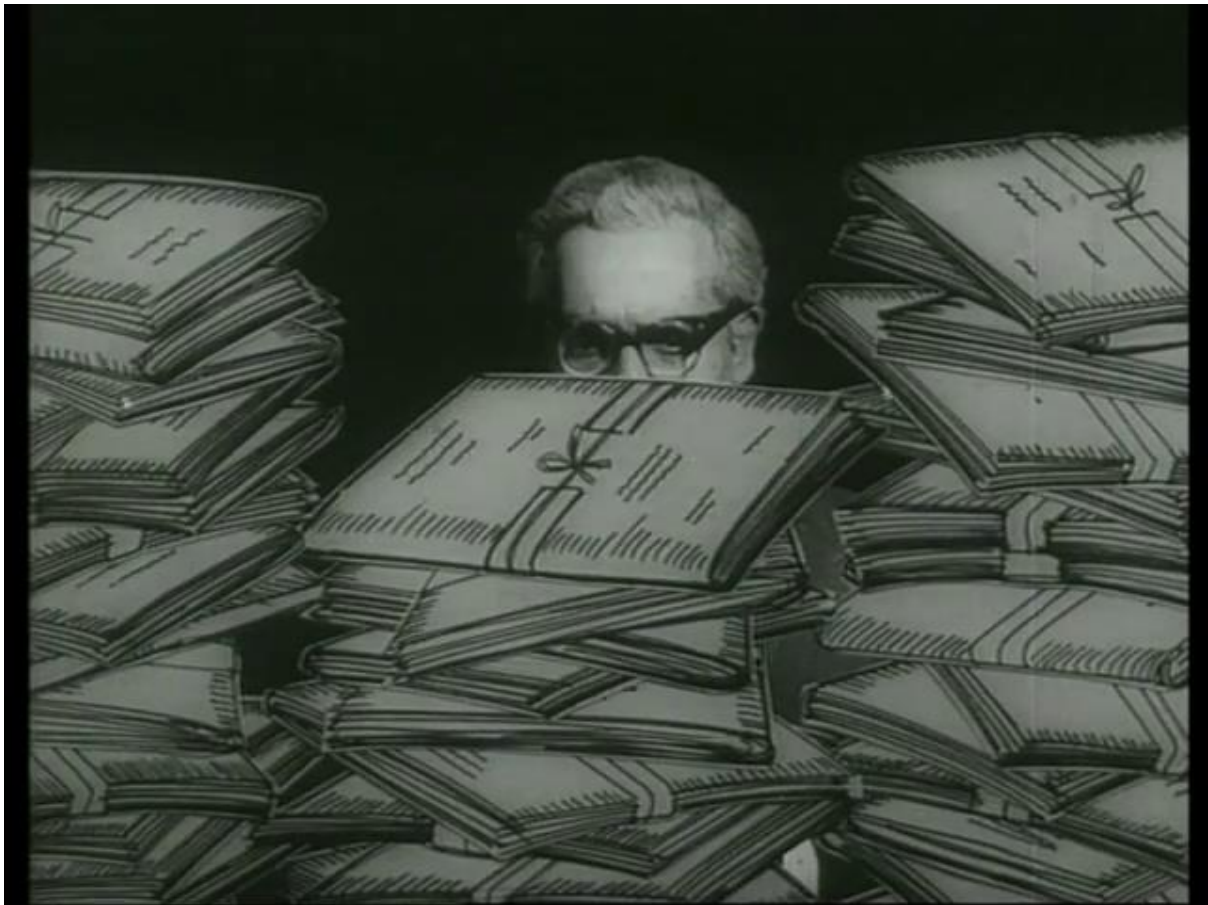


THEMES

SOCIETY

Leisure / Escape

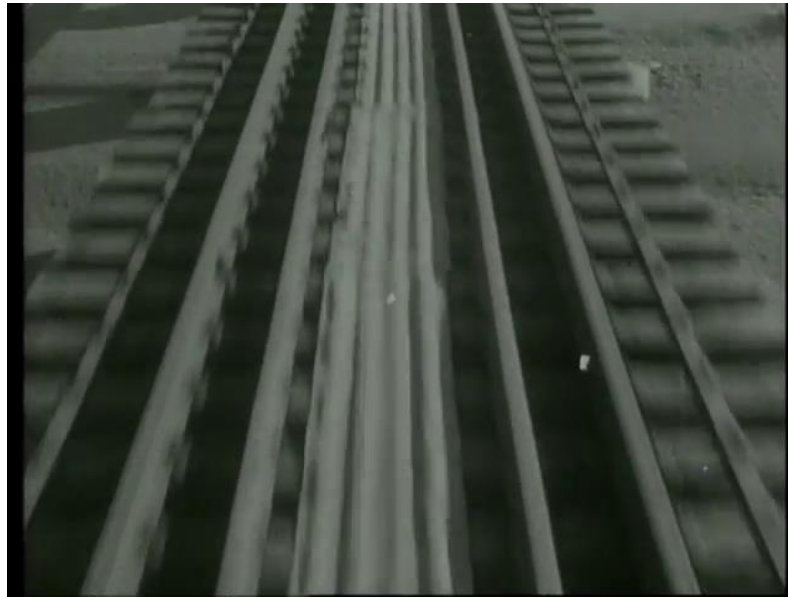
Shome has no concept of a proper work-life balance or how to enjoy leisure and downtime after work. Being a workaholic, he dislikes those who shirk work and labels them lazy and incompetent, as he directly reveals in an early internal monologue. However, facing midlife crisis, he wishes to escape his workaholic nature by taking up a hobby. But here too, he defaults to a “work hard, play harder” mode. Indeed, it is impossible to characterize his day trip as leisurely or relaxing— with hours upon hours of being jolted on a bullock cart, running from a buffalo, climbing up a tree, scuttling through a sugarcane field and trudging up and down the salty marsh desert and unpaved roads all day! An optimistic reading of his bizarre behaviour at the end could be that this small taste of escape might have the power to radically transform his workday; but in all likelihood, it would perhaps make his daily life much more unbearable because he will keep yearning for this escape but rarely get it.



Ethics: THICS: Bribery vs. tip

This is a recurring topic in Shome’s internal monologues as well as conversations with Gauri, though the film does not show a single instance of tipping or bribery. Bribery and corruption on all levels are rampant in India, but no one generally considers tips to be bribes— Shome is an exception in this. Customers, especially more well-to-do ones, understand that low-level employees’ salary don’t match inflation rates and are usually open to giving tips. The amount is often small and in return one can hope for some small niceties or, in some cases, for pending paperwork, for example, to be completed quickly. Shome is initially displeased with Yadav about taking tips, but after discussing the topic with Gauri, he is able to change both her opinion and his own on the ethics of taking tips, which is a minor infraction at best and not prohibited by law or otherwise. Shome himself reports to superior officers, and if Yadav or any other low-level employee were actually embezzling or taking bribes to any noticeable extent, Shome by himself wouldn’t have the discretionary power to pardon that person within the organizational structure of the mega-institution that is the Indian Railways.

Change / Motion Repetitive footage of moving train tracks, rolling wagon wheels, rolling bullock cart wheels, flying birds and other bodies in motion take up a sizeable amount of the film. Shome himself, too, is almost never static, but always journeying from one point to another—first he arrives at the little railway station, then rides a wagon, then again a bullock cart, then finally he walks over the desert and then back to the railway station, even walking down a long corridor on his day at the office in the penultimate scene. While all this movement has almost nothing to do with the plot *per se*, it visually represents a core theme: try as we may, nothing stays still; change is the only constant. The best laid plans fall apart and one has to improvise and fly by the seat of one's pants, literally, for instance, when fleeing from the angry buffalo or traipsing through a sugarcane field. The experience is also a great contrast to Shome's daily, office-bound, sedentary life. Shome may or may not have previously taken time off from work for his hobby— hunting birds—but this particular trip changes his hitherto stern and stoic workaholic mindset into something more fluid.



RELATIONSHIP

Marriage: *Gauna* (consummation of marriage) To a non-local audience, the marital situation between Gauri and Yadav likely seems odd, to say the least. She doesn't wear the more obvious markers of being married (like red vermilion *sindoor* in the parting of her hair) and she lives with her own father, yet tells Shome that she is married. But this is not a contradiction— in some northern and western Indian cultures, including Gujarat where *Mr. Bhuvan Shome* was filmed, child marriage and *gauna* are a prevalent practice. Families usually arrange weddings between their young children (and even newborns) to strengthen family ties; however, the girl remains at her natal home until puberty. Once the bride has attained puberty and usually also after the husband is financially established, the *gauna* ceremony is celebrated as the first step towards conjugal union as the bride leaves her natal home, moving to her in-laws' house. Both Yadav and Gauri are shy and excited, looking forward to beginning their new life together after their *gauna*. But in this particular case, Yadav's career, which is at Shome's mercy, is a deciding factor for their *gauna*, as they are a relatively older couple. And it is only by a stroke of good luck for the young couple that Shome chances to meet Gauri on his hunting trip and is moved enough by her to decide in the couple's favour.

Friendship Although they interact in a very friendly manner and Shome greatly enjoys her imaginative and vivacious company, it is hard to characterize Shome and Gauri's relationship as a friendship between equals. There are many barriers: they are too different in age, personality, status and background for this to be anything other than a chance meeting; remembered fondly yet never pursued. Also, Shome lies to her about his identity, which cannot be a basis for true friendship. That said, there is a little something extra that occurs almost *naturally* between a lonely middle-aged widower and a young woman who lives apart from her husband, a faint but still noticeable erotic frisson. Shome is visibly thrilled when Gauri touches his shoulder in one scene; Sen himself gave this

direction to the actress while shooting. Also, it is extremely unusual for a married but sexually uninitiated girl of 16 or 18 from a conservative, rural background to be so open and free with a male stranger. So all her actions perhaps point to her (unconsciously?) exploring her own sexuality and considerable erotic appeal in a *not obviously* erotic way— possibly for the pardon of her husband. She probably won't remember Shome after a few days, but he will remember her forever.

PSYCHOLOGY

Loneliness Shome is described at the beginning of the film by the voice-over narrator as a very lonely man. He is a Bengali who lives in another part of the country, bearing with him all the lofty ideals of the Bengalis but having no sense of community or belonging. He made his wife's life miserable with his many idiosyncrasies while she was alive and is estranged from his only son after he sacked the latter from his job over a small misdemeanour. He has devoted his entire life to the job, keeping "duty first, self last"; while this has earned him a grudging respect, it hasn't earned him friendship or trust. His colleagues and junior officers have only unkind things to say about him behind his back. Shome seems aware of this to a certain extent. This is represented visually by him standing and pacing to and fro in front of a completely black background, signature cigar in his mouth, with a disgruntled expression in his face. Later on in the film, though he is rarely unaccompanied by another character, the landscape itself reflects his loneliness, with the vast and empty sandy marsh desert stretching as far as the eye can see. Although he may have companions, like the bullock cart driver, or Gauri and her father, they have nothing in common with him and cannot understand his loneliness, enmeshed as they are in a rooted community, sharing their simple needs and wants. Neither does Shome make any effort to connect with them in any emotionally meaningful way. He simply doesn't know how to do so. Although the experience itself becomes a transformative one for him, paradoxically, this was to be the bureaucrat's ultimate tragedy, hemmed in on all sides with claustrophobic official duties while yearning for the freedom of the wilderness.

QUEST

Introspection Related to change and loneliness is Shome's capacity for introspection, triggered largely by Gauri's simplicity. So much so, that he returns to her house after they have parted and gives her the bird to raise as a pet, as he is no longer comfortable with killing an innocent creature. When he finally leaves, instead of saying "I'm leaving", he says, "I'm coming", following common usage in many Indian languages that Gauri taught him. He also promises her that he will return to listen to her singing, but not to hunt. His memories of the trip are later visually represented in flashbacks of still photographs and short scenes from his experience after he returns to the office. Some repeated images include Gauri swinging at the abandoned palace and bringing him some local clothes in stop-motion photography; lines of women carrying pots of water; stumbling through the sugarcane field and lying supine in the desert aiming at the birds. Sen does not use the sudden freeze frame cinematic technique to verbalize Shome's internal monologue as seen in the beginning of the film, perhaps to distinguish pleasant memories from unsavoury ones (about his son and Yadav).

APPEARANCE vs. REALITY

Secrets In his life and workplace, Shome is widely known as an honest and incorruptible officer; his early dissatisfaction with Yadav is because Yadav takes tips, which he considers to be bribes. So it seems a little incongruous that he hides the fact that he himself is the dreaded "Mr. Shome" when Gauri asks him, more than once, about her husband's predicament and to relay to "Mr. Shome" her earnest request not to dismiss Yadav from his job. Perhaps he was so enchanted by her simplicity, spontaneity and complete lack of regard for status that he thought it better to keep her in the dark, as surely she would resent him if he revealed his true identity to her. Rather, he takes it as an opportunity to discuss the rights and wrongs of taking tips and ultimately convinces her at the end when she tells him she will request her husband not to take any tips. Gauri, for her part, does not suspect anything amiss and doesn't hesitate to criticize "Mr. Shome" harshly, which, thankfully, Shome accepts with more-than-expected grace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Sen uses many jarring/ "gimmicky" cinematic techniques throughout the film. Select any one of these and analyze its significance to the plot.
- 2) What is the role of landscape to the story and to Shome's inner world? Discuss with specific examples.

- 3) Which aspect of Shome's character was the most incongruous to you given his background? Why?
- 4) Which aspect of Gauri's character was the most striking to you and why?
- 5) Did you notice any erotic frisson between Shome and Gauri despite the great difference in their ages? Discuss.
- 6) Do you think Yadav would actually stop taking tips/ bribes at his new posting? Why or why not? How does the answer to this question shed light on the film's ending?
- 7) Sen mentioned in an interview that the "intention was to 'corrupt' a bureaucrat". In that light, do you think the ending of the film is tragic or comic? How do you envision Shome's life after his bird-hunting experience?