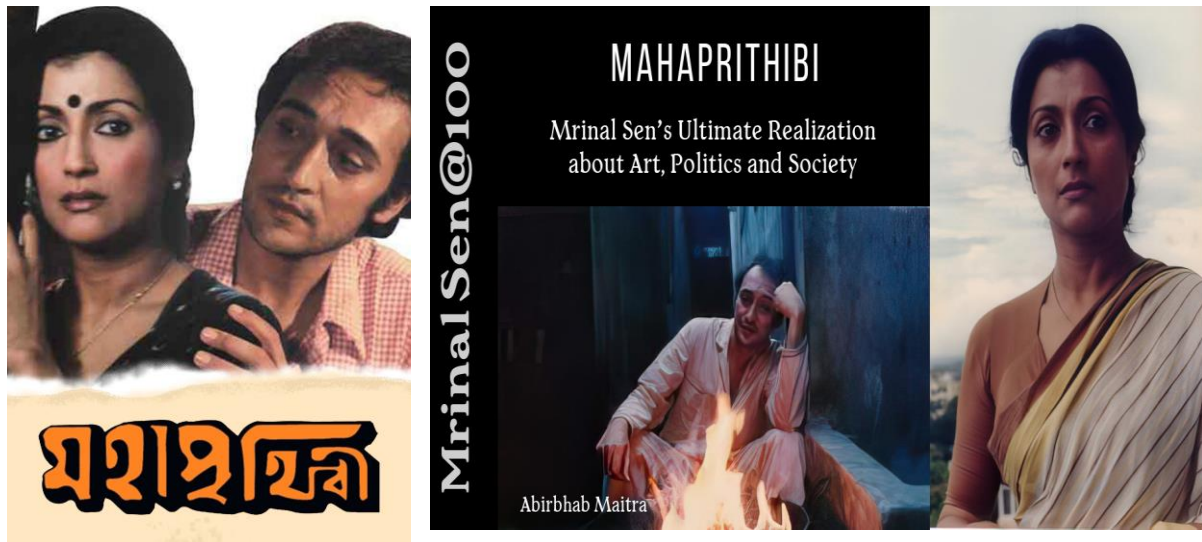


HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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WORLD WITHIN, WORLD WITHOUT / MAHAPRITHIBI (1991) Mrinal Sen

Bengali language

Film link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0n4IMSlual>



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 *Mahaprithibi* (lit. *The Great World*), one of Sen's better films in his later period, successfully reflects the confusion centred round an ideology in the mundane life of a Bengali middle-class family. It's much more complicated and multidimensional than Sen's *Padatik* or *Calcutta 71*, both of which it resembles. Unfortunately, the film did not get much exposure and wasn't even entered in the national film awards; it only bagged a Bengali Film Journalists' Association (BFJA) Best Supporting Actress award for Aparna Sen. Barring a screening at the Youth Forum of Berlin, it did not go to a major international festival.

Background From the beginning of his career, Sen had believed in scientific socialism as the absolute and ultimate truth. Its fall from grace in world affairs— the reunification of Germany (1990) and the dissolution of the USSR (1991), the last bastion of Marxist doctrine— pained Sen, who had never anticipated its obsolescence in a changing world. Under such troubling circumstances, Anjan Dutt, Sen's favourite actor, brought him a manuscript of a play about a middle-aged lady who dies by suicide. While reading it, Sen remembered a news story of a young girl who died by suicide in East

Berlin a week before the reunification. Sen felt that the two suicides had a link, although apparently, they looked so different. After discussing the manuscript with Dutt, Sen added the deceased lady's diary and *Mahaprithbi* came to be made.

SYNOPSIS

Sometime soon after the reunification of Germany (3 October 1990), an old lady (Maa) dies of suicide without any warning to her family. Her husband (Baba), son (Ani), widowed daughter-in-law (Sutapa), mentally ill daughter (Nanda) and grandson (Tinka) are ridden with grief and guilt. Unexpectedly, the prodigal son, Shomu, who had moved to Germany six years ago, returns four days after Maa's death. The film slowly uncovers the circumstances behind Maa's suicide through her letters, snippets from her diary and emotional confessions from the family. The plot, or sequence of events, becomes interchangeable as open and hidden secrets are revealed and personal circumstances are inextricably mingled with politics in the world beyond. 19 years ago, their second son, Bulu, a young revolutionary, was killed by the police right outside their home after Baba told him to escape so as to not endanger the family with a police raid. Maa blames Baba for Bulu's death and had never been able to forgive him. She was also deeply hurt by Shomu's decision to leave them to escape the stigma of an extramarital affair with Sutapa. Shomu had promised to go for only six months but never returned. Ani and Baba learn about the affair from a letter Maa had written to Shomu and given to Ani to mail, but the latter never did so. Sutapa's widowhood, a constant reminder of her oldest son Ranju's (natural) death, also weighs heavily on Maa. On his return, Shomu is stunned by the change in his family. Baba unexpectedly and very unconventionally asks Shomu for a bottle of duty-free whiskey. Sutapa exclaims that it wasn't a home, it was hell. And Ani, a firebrand young Communist, is torn up about the final nail in the coffin of communism (dissolution of the Soviet Union) and becomes increasingly cynical and bitter. Only Nanda remains unchanged and consoles a broken Shomu. They argue about reading Maa's diary; finally, Nanda sets them free by burning it.

CHARACTERS

<i>Maa</i>	an old lady who commits suicide without any warning (played by Gita Sen)
Baba	her husband and the children's father (played by Soumitra Chatterjee)
Ranju	eldest son, now dead. Never seen or heard, only referred to.
Sutapa	Ranju's widow, who lives with her in-law's (played by Aparna Sen)
Bulu	Ranju's second son, also dead
Shomu	third son, moved to Germany for six years (played by Victor Bannerjee)
Ani	fourth son (played by Anjan Dutt)
Nanda	only daughter, suffers from mental illness (Played by Anashua Majumdar)
Tinka	Sutapa and Ranju's six-year-old son
Haran	servant

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Shomu Shomu is Maa and Baba's third son and the film is shown mostly through his eyes and focusing on his emotions. We only see him during a period of intense grief and loss, so it is hard to say if the circumstances brought out the best or worst in him.

Coward The timeline is unclear, but Shomu had an extramarital affair with his sister-in-law Sutapa soon after his brother Ranju's death and Tinka's birth. It was an open secret and Maa, for one, did not seem to be particularly bothered by it. But Shomu was too cowardly to face up to society's scrutiny and chose to escape. He went away to Germany, saying that it was a six-month job, but it took him six years to return. His cowardice caused him to lose all that time with Sutapa and the family and he never got to see Maa again. He also wants to find the truth from Maa's diary, but is too cowardly to push past Baba and Ani's resistance.

Engaged After only communicating with Sutapa for years through letters and generally being distanced from his family, Shomu tries very hard to engage with them after his return. But it would take some time for them to accept him back. Baba and Ani's resistance is the strongest; they give him a seat at the table but barely open up emotionally. Finally, Ani reciprocates by bitterly arguing about world politics and Baba wants him to bring him whiskey. Only Nanda accepts him with open arms.

Sensitive Shomu spends much of the time sobbing and looking despondent, much more than the other family members. Given his theatre background, we can conjecture that he has a very sensitive nature. We see this best in his scenes with his mentally disabled sister, Nanda, who is very

affectionate with him. When she has a breakdown and starts destroying the kitchen, only Shomu succeeds in calming her down.

Maa Maa dies by suicide at the beginning of the film, but its entire trajectory is shaped by her voice-overs reading snippets from her diary, her letters and her conversations with the other family members. She is more heard than seen, but continues to exert a strong influence on her family.

PTSD Since Bulu's death at the hands of the police two decades ago, Maa suffered from intense grief. Eventually, in the absence of any efforts from her family to deal with it or formal mental health counselling, she develops post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This is exacerbated by Ranju's death from unspecified natural causes and Sutapa's consequent widowhood, which she has to witness every day. With Shomu's betrayal in choosing a substandard quality of living in Germany instead of staying with his family, she is scarred further. Her daughter Nanda's mental illness (possibly bipolar disorder) doesn't help either.

Stoic Despite her grief, she appears to be a stoic and practical person, with a very matter of fact attitude about worldly matters, even though she is somewhat withdrawn from them. One instance of this occurs when, sometime after Shomu leaves, she looks in to Sutapa's bedroom and calmly tells her to go to sleep— even though they have a shared loss over Shomu leaving, she doesn't get overly emotional or melodramatic.

Unconventional Maa is an unconventional mother character in Sen's oeuvre. She may have been a conventional housewife and nurturer when her family was young, but with them grown, we see more of her as a person. For one, Baba tells Uncle and Shomu that she was not keen on having the usual post-death Hindu rituals performed for her. Later, her letter reveals that she was not particularly bothered about Shomu and Sutapa's relationship and even indirectly encouraged them to be together.

THEMES

Suicide What is the mental state of a person who dies by suicide? *World Within, World Without* tries to find the answer; especially Shomu, the prodigal son, asks his family members the question multiple times. However, there are no easy solutions and Baba, Sutapa and Ani are mostly inclined to let old troubles die down instead of stirring them up. Baba tells Ani that the series of tragedies over the last twenty years— Bulu's death, Sutapa's widowhood, Shomu's departure— left Maa with nothing else to cling to. This, however, begs the question about timing: these tragic events occurred years ago, so what compelled Maa to take her life now? Sutapa tells Shomu that Maa had for years removed herself from family matters and seemed distanced from everyone, a sure sign of PTSD and depression. However, from the sequence of events it's clear that the suicide wasn't premeditated; Maa behaved normally in the morning of her death, making tea for Baba and so on. Moreover, nothing in the snippets from her diaries or letter indicate that she was suicidal. Perhaps it was her PTSD coming to a head suddenly and without warning— after years of receiving only anguish and pain from events that she had no control over, she finally decided to end it. In any case, just as Sen's previous films had used the *absence* of a core family member as a plot device to examine the interrelationships between the remaining and bereaved family members, this film does the same.

Family Maa and Baba have a large family by today's standards, four sons and a daughter, but this is actually a typical family size at the time in Kolkata. It was also standard, in a setting where joint families were the norm, for sons and unmarried daughters to live with their parents no matter their age. Ani and Nanda are unmarried and it's likely that they would remain so, as Nanda would be hard-pressed to find a husband whose family would accept her mental illness, while Ani seems too much of a cynic and simply disinterested in women in general. Married sons, and their wives and children, also lived in their parents' house, as Ranju did before he died of unspecified natural causes. It was also not uncommon for families to lose more than one child, whether from childhood diseases, accidents or unstable political situations, as in the case of Bulu, who became a Naxalite and was killed brutally by the police.

Co-habitation, however, didn't mean that the interrelationships between the family members were always pleasant; more often, it was a festering pit of resentments. For instance, Maa resented Baba for indirectly causing Bulu's death and was deeply hurt by the loss of her two children— one to death and the other to immigration. Ani resents Sutapa for having an affair with Shomu, though out of respect for his older sister-in-law he leaves the details vague and only whines about "lack of fairness and justice" in the home and how his opinions hold no weight. Baba tries to remain above petty household matters but gets drawn in when he gives Bulu money to run away or asks Shomu for

whiskey. Nanda's bipolar disorder is also a source of constant anxiety: Nanda herself says that she doesn't know why she behaves erratically and the condition is only partially assuaged by medication. When Sutapa says, "it's hell", she doesn't need to explain why.

Parenting Baba and Maa try to guide their children but ultimately give in to their children's needs and wants, as parents often do; and if those choices are harmful, then they empathise and suffer when their children suffer. Keeping in mind that we only see the children after they've grown up, their parents can only guide them so far. Bulu, who was a college student when he died (and the youngest age we see any of the children at), was already old enough to brush away Baba's strict discipline. Baba did try his hardest to dissuade Bulu from running away but finally gave in and gave him some money. Maa did the opposite, by initially almost encouraging him to be a revolutionary (a source of constant guilt for her) and only later asking Bulu if he could step away from his revolutionary cohort—but it was already too late for him; the "party" wouldn't let go of him just like that. Baba and Ani also have a strained relationship, owing to the latter sitting unemployed at home, but there is understanding and agreement there, too, as when Baba supports Ani's decision to not perform the prescribed Hindu rituals for sons after a parent's death or when they decide not to read Maa's diary. Baba, though sometimes annoyed with Nanda's tics, also inquires after her well-being and if she has been taking her medications. But Baba is ageing, exhausted and vulnerable now; we notice this in the scene where he's napping with his grandson in the middle of the day and again when he complains about the cataract in his eyes. It is almost time for him to be parented by someone else. We don't see enough of Sutapa's interactions with her son Tinka to estimate her parental role, though it can be inferred that she's a typical strict but loving mother.

Widowhood Interestingly, Sutapa, the widowed daughter-in-law, takes on the role of the primary caregiver in the absence of Maa's interest in family matters and Baba's advancing years. In India, traditionally and even today, it is fairly common for widowed daughters-in-law to remain in their marital household and raise any children there. Conservative Hindu Indian societies generally don't look kindly upon widowed women returning to their natal homes, especially with children in tow: once married, women are no longer considered an integral part of their natal families. In fact, even when there is some problem, like domestic abuse in the in-laws' household which forces women to return, often they are not accepted with open arms. Further, with a six-year-old child and Sutapa herself being at least in her mid-to-late 30's (Aparna Sen was 46 when she played the role), there would be a slim chance of her getting married elsewhere and starting a new family. In any case, these topics are never broached in the film at all, and her presence is taken for granted, given also that she's the only working family member and likely responsible for a not-insignificant share of the household finances. In fact, the daily lives of the family would fall apart in her absence. From cooking to taking care of Nanda and old Baba's needs, to managing every other aspect of the household with the servant Haran's help while working full-time, she is the nurturer of the family.

Attraction Unlike many other contemporary directors for whom extramarital affairs and love triangles were the norm, Sen had famously said that he was more comfortable dealing with love after marriage, which was more "complicated, adult and mature". This is the first film in which Sen used an extramarital affair as a plot device. The affair between Sutapa and Shomu is nebulous and referenced only indirectly by family members, so as to avoid an unsavoury topic. There is no indication that Sutapa and Shomu were having an affair prior to Ranju's death and no doubt is cast on Tinka's paternity, which would otherwise be the case as he was born only six months after his father's death. So, the affair's duration is very brief, a year at the most. It's also likely that the couple, who are closer in age, were attracted to each other in their mutual feelings of loss and grief over Ranju's death. In the context of an educated middle-class Bengali Hindu family, it would indeed be scandalous for a brother to marry his widowed sister-in-law, though the practice is prevalent in other parts of India, especially if a male heir is present. In any event, after Shomu's escape to Germany, they only exchanged letters. As Maa writes, "Her life is empty and so is his, which is why they are drawn to each other, secretly, irresistibly, almost without their knowledge". Even upon meeting after six years, Sutapa never verbally admits to loving Shomu. Shomu openly says that he loves her but also recognizes, as Maa does, that she had never been able to forget her dead husband. Only in once scene do we see both of them vulnerable and physically intimate, but Sutapa quickly breaks away.

Immigration Just as the rumour mill was beginning to churn out nasty gossip about Shomu and Sutapa's affair, Shomu gets a chance to move to Germany with a once-in-a-lifetime, fully funded theatre project. He uses the opportunity to escape scandal instead of facing up to his own desires. His contract was for six months and he promised Maa that he would return, but failed to do so. This caused much heartbreak and anguish for Maa, who mentions it frequently in her diary and letters,

admonishing him for losing time away from Sutapa and the family, in the vein of “you only live once”. In Germany, Shomu’s experience is largely negative: he struggles financially and cannot adjust to the weather, the people and the lifestyle, not to mention the inflamed political situation around the reunification of Germany. So why does he wait for six years to return? He gives us no answer but only reassures his family that he was there to stay; but as Maa’s letter reiterates, it may already be too late for him.

Rebellion The Naxalites are a group of far-left radical Maoist communists who remain active in about 40% of India’s geographical area. Their origin can be traced to the splitting in 1967 of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The movement began at the Naxalbari uprising (1967) in rural northern West Bengal but soon spread to Kolkata and other urban centres. Naxalite leaders recruited students and launched widespread violence in West Bengal against “class enemies” such as landlords, businessmen, university teachers, police officers, politicians (right and left both) and others. Bulu was merely one of these many radicalized youth; though he believed in equality across classes, he was also sucked up in a rebellion that considered youth like him expendable. He openly admits to Maa and Baba that it wasn’t safe for his family to shelter him, and the “party” leaders wouldn’t let him get away. While Baba is dead set against Bulu being a Naxalite, Maa has some sympathy towards the ideology and her son’s involvement. Soon after, in 1971, Indira Gandhi launched *Operation Steeplechase* – a large-scale anti-insurgency army (and police) operation against the Naxalites, during which hundreds of Naxalites were killed. Bulu was killed by the police in one such raid. The police officer (at the beginning of the film) openly expresses his disdain for the wasted lives of these youth and the pain they caused their parents by chasing a pipe dream. Needless to say, this disdain is in line with their class interests and a sentiment shared by many middle-class Bengalis to this day, who like to espouse that violence is never the answer, unless of course it’s used for upholding their own status quo.

Diary Maa’s diary is a source of constant curiosity amongst the family members, especially Shomu, before her death— they all want to know what Maa writes about. However, after her suicide, the police confiscate it in case they find a suicide note. Upon not finding anything except a heartfelt chronicle of her pain and anguish, they return it to Ani and Shomu. After that, everyone is reluctant to read it and Baba puts it away. Sutapa comments that it would be pointless to read it now as it was all over anyway; it’ll only open up old wounds, even though the feelings of pain, fear and guilt continue. Baba says that he doesn’t want Maa’s words to tear them apart, that’s why he hadn’t read it himself or allowed anyone else to read it. To read Maa’s diary would be, in fact, to face the naked truth about each of their own failings. For instance, Baba would have to face up to 20 years of resentment and feelings of betrayal, as she always blamed him for Bulu’s death. Shomu would also have to face up to how betrayed and lonely he made his mother feel. Although they are aware of Maa’s feelings in general, finding concrete evidence of it would only deepen their guilt and pain in causing Maa’s death. That would perhaps be too much of a burden to bear. That is why Shomu walks away when Nanda offers him the diary. In the end, everyone is relieved when Nanda burns the diary, shifting the responsibility of destroying it to a mentally unstable person, when they themselves would never have been able to do that and free themselves of all the unspoken questions and fears.

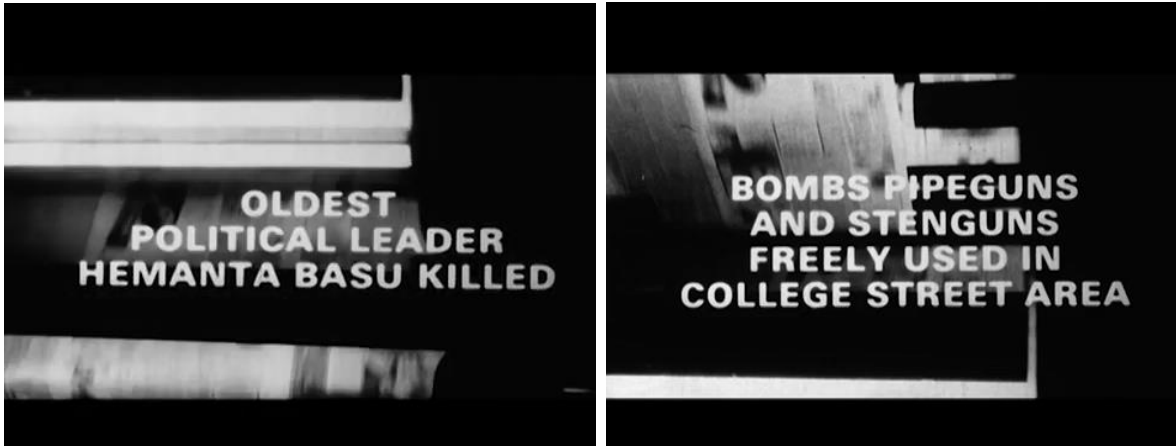
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Why do you think Maa chooses to end her life all of a sudden?
- 2) Every cast member provides a stellar performance in this film. Who resonated most with you and why?
- 3) Analyse the interrelationship between any two characters in the film.
- 4) Do you think Mrinal Sen’s women characters are conventional or pathbreaking? Discuss gender roles in this film.
- 5) Do you think the “world without” is well-meshed with the “world within” in this film, or do they remain somewhat disjointed? Discuss.

SCENES

REBELLION

Naxalite era Machines print newspapers with headlines of horrific murders and assassinations from the Naxalite era. The series ends with MURDER repeated over and over. Machines print many copies of a newspaper, which are then sent down a circular conveyor belt. White headlines appear on



Love and anger In a flashback, Maa tries to mediate between Baba and Bulu. Baba says that he said what Bulu needed to hear and Bulu replies that they don't need to worry about him as he can take care of himself. Baba keeps shouting at him about not attending college and going against some political leaders. Maa hugs him and tells him that there was trouble within his own cohort. Baba asks him if he must continue down his ill-advised path. Bulu says that he has no choice—the party wouldn't let him do otherwise and he can't stay at home. Baba hands him some money before he leaves. The scene where Bulu dies is repeated.



A deadly night In another flashback, many police arrive in the neighbourhood. Maa wakes Baba up. Baba says that they're surrounding the area and will now raid all the residents for insurgents in hiding. Baba tells her that she shouldn't have let him (Bulu) into the house as now the police might arrest Shomu and Ranju as well. They open the bedroom door to Bulu's knocking. Bulu opens the back door of the house and runs away quickly. We hear a loud gunshot. Maa immediately breaks down and blames Baba for driving Bulu away.



Death by police A young man runs through narrow lanes. Next is a still photograph of a man covering his face with sounds of gunshots fired in the background. The photograph burns up.



Waiting Some lights flicker on black screen; it is a Kolkata street at night. The camera moves to the interior of a house, where a woman wearing a white sari sits despondently. It is Maa. Baba (who's younger now), asks who she's waiting for past 1am at night. Baba says that he won't return; Maa says that he said he would. She asks if anyone would inform them if he was caught or if anything happened to him. Loud gunshots shatter the silence.



SUICIDE

A death On a busy Kolkata morning, a young man (Ani) bangs on his mother's (Maa) door and calls for her as the rest of the family stand around. Neighbours peek and one comes to investigate. Father (Baba) says that Maa was acting normally and even made him tea earlier. Ani keeps banging on a second door to the room and finally breaks the door. Neighbours crowd around the narrow lanes and follow a police jeep, giving directions to the police. A dead body covered with a sheet is carried out on a stretcher and loaded onto a police van. The body is cremated in an electric crematorium chamber.

A gathering The family is gathered in the living room. The daughter (Nanda, mentally ill) constantly bangs a spoon on a cup, making an annoying, repetitive noise. The daughter-in-law (Sutapa, widow) takes away the cup, but Nanda keeps knocking on the saucer. Their uncle (Baba's brother) visits and chastises Ani for not doing the rituals, such as shaving his head within the prescribed third day after death. Ani, annoyed, says he doesn't believe in customs and storms away.

A disagreement Sutapa and Ani argue about following the post-death rituals. He angrily tells her that no one in the family follows rules, least of all her. Everyone is stunned. Baba is annoyed Nanda's noise-making and yells at her. Nanda angrily throws the spoon aside and storms away. Uncle asks if she had been taking her medication, and Sutapa says not in the last few days. She then picks up her six-year-old son from the bed and shoves him outside the room to get ready for school.

The prodigal returns Baba says that Maa herself wasn't too keen on rituals. They have another visitor, this time from Germany. The neighbours stare at him. Everyone is flabbergasted as he says that he took a cab since none of them came to pick him up at the airport. It's the prodigal son, Shomu. Baba walks away from him. Shomu asks what happened and where their Maa is. Ani looks away and Sutapa sobs. Ani tells him to freshen up; they have to visit the police station.

At the police station The police officer asks Shomu when Maa last wrote to him. He pulls out her diary and tells the brothers that she was disappointed with her family, all except their sister. Baba and Sutapa didn't want to hand over the diary, but the police had to take it. But they didn't find a suicide note, so they are returning the diary. The police officer asks about their older brother, Bulu, who was a revolutionary. "Those youth were so inconsiderate of their parents' pain," he says.



Accusations Sutapa's son plays with a toy machine gun gifted by Shomu. Shomu tells Baba that he can perform the rituals for their Maa. Baba says that it's not necessary. Shomu is heartbroken and accuses Baba, Ani and Sutapa of never considering her feelings even though they live under the same roof. Ani says that from breaking down the door to burning the body at the crematorium, he did everything all alone by himself. Shomu sobs.

A meltdown Nanda is having a meltdown, throwing all the dishes in the kitchen. Sutapa tries to stop her but is pushed aside. Shomu runs in and grabs her roughly, shaking her back to her senses. They all leave the kitchen one by one. Shomu comforts Tinka, who was outside, then goes to Nanda's room. She tells him she doesn't know why she behaves that way. Sutapa waits at the door, then gives Nanda a glass of water.



SON ABROAD

Maa's disappointment The clock ticks. We see Maa writing with her voice-over (from the dairy), which says that Shomu told Sutapa that he would be returning from Berlin. But he wouldn't write to her and neither would she. He doesn't understand how claustrophobic her days were after that night 19 years ago.



Shomu Returns Shomu gingerly enters Maa's room. Her saris are still hanging on the clothes rack; he smells them. He starts sobbing, looking at the unkempt room. Ani paces outside the room. Shomu stands under the fan (from which she presumably hung herself).



Shomu and Sutapa Shomu looks at Sutapa cooking in the kitchen. She tells him that Maa had removed herself from everything. Shomu asks her why she didn't tell him about Maa; she replies that it would only have saddened him. She tells him that she will be returning to work the next day. Shomu asks if she would continue wearing the widow's white and if she still loved his older brother (her dead husband, Ranju). He loved his brother and her [Sutapa], too, he says. But she denies any feelings for him. He says everything has changed— he can hardly recognize anyone except Nanda. In a voice-over, Maa says that despite what neighbours said (about an extramarital affair between Shomu and Sutapa) she understood them and she was disappointed and hurt by Shomu leaving them to move to Berlin without a second thought.



Reminiscence Shomu runs away, laughing manically, remembering a mock argument with Maa from his childhood which we hear in the background. He walks down a narrow corridor with a high roof, remembering snippets of her voice, until his reminiscence is shattered by a loud gunshot. He starts coughing. The image of the body being put inside the electric crematorium burner is repeated.

Comfort Baba, Nanda and Shomu sit together. They took her body to the morgue, Baba says, and when he entered the room he saw the little Tinka standing, staring at his (dead) father's (Ranju's) portrait, then sobbing and hugging the old man all night. Nanda cries out, making loud, strange noises, while Shomu comforts Baba. Sutapa enters. The spell is broken. Shomu walks away.



Reading Maa's dairy Shomu asks Ani why they're not reading Maa's dairy. Ani says that his opinions have no value at home and he should ask Baba. Shomu goes to Baba, only to find grandfather and grandson napping. Sutapa asks him to come inside her room after he hesitates to knock on her door. Sutapa says that there's no point in reading Maa's diary now as she's dead, 'even though the feelings of pain, fear and guilt continue.' She hasn't read the dairy but she knows about everyone's guilt. She asks him to stay when he tries to leave.



Sutapa's story Sutapa continues that no one wants to hear her story. Her husband died six months after the child was born and Shomu also left after a year, never to return for six years. She asks why he returned and he doesn't have an answer. But he wants to know why Maa died like this. Nanda appears at the door with the diary and gives it to Shomu. But he refuses to take it and walks away. Sutapa starts sobbing that she can't take it anymore.



Shomu's departure In a voice-over playing on the city nightscape with dotted static and moving lights in the darkness, Maa describes that Shomu went away, saying that the trip was free so there was no reason to not go on a six-month theatre workshop and Sutapa knows the real reason why. In a flashback, we hear Maa asking Sutapa, who's awake next to her son, to go to sleep as it is late.

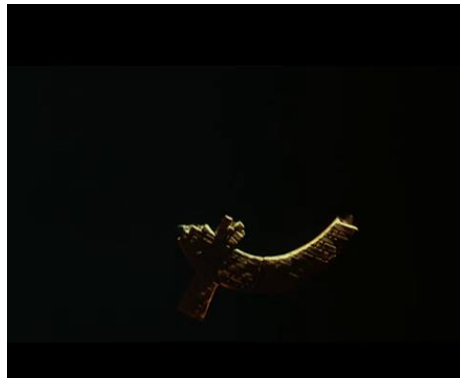
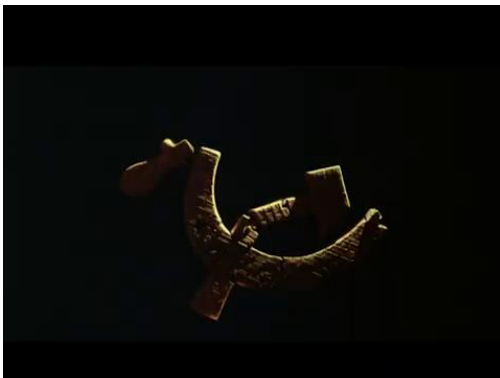


REVOLUTION ENDS

Berlin Wall Baba complains about his eyeglasses. Sutapa braids Nanda's hair and says it's cataract. Shomu says Baba should have surgery. Ani asks Shomu about the Berlin Wall. Nanda asks Sutapa not to tie her hair so tightly. Baba says he watches the news on TV. Ani asks Shomu if he got a rock from the wall. Ani and Shomu argue about why breaking the Berlin Wall was necessary. Ani gets very angry and Shomu mocks him. Sutapa asks them not to fight. Ani brings the topic back to the young men who were killed for revolution, like his brother. He rants about how the loss of these lives means nothing now that revolution and socialism are dead. Baba supports him.



Death of revolution We are shown footage of people climbing across the Berlin Wall, footage of wars, protests, burning buildings (all old TV footage) as the communist hammer and sickle progressively breaks into pieces. Maa's voice-over screams that she will never accept the deaths to be in vain.



UNHAPPINESS

A drink At night, Baba, Shomu and Sutapa wait for Ani to return to have dinner. Baba offers Shomu coffee or drinks, if he drinks now. Shomu tries to sidestep the topic, but Baba is insistent on knowing if he brought any duty-free alcohol. He wants some and angrily asks if Shomu can give him some. Baba refuses dinner and walks away in a huff. Sutapa tells Shomu that Baba likes to drink sometimes, but hardly has money for it. Shomu, disturbed, says that his own expenses in Germany were too high, all while going through his bag and pulling out a bottle of whiskey angrily. Sutapa looks on as he takes the whiskey bottle to Baba and opens the door for Ani. Suddenly Baba yells, "Take it away." Sutapa comments, "It's not a home, it's hell! Hell!" Shomu emerges from Baba's room clutching the whiskey bottle. He sobs as Baba bangs the door shut behind him, then opens it and pours all the whiskey into a cactus pot. Ani sees this but doesn't comment. Nanda comes and hugs Shomu.



In search of escape Shomu asks Ani if he shouldn't have returned. Ani accuses Shomu of running away, though he, too, would have done that if he had had a chance. His older brother tried to escape but was shot to death. Ani acknowledges that he hid a letter from Maa to Shomu; after reading it, he couldn't send it. Sutapa chastises him for it, but Ani replies that no one in that house can speak about fairness and justice. Ani pulls out the letter and reads it.

Maa's letter Some time ago, Maa wrote that Sutapa told her that Shomu would return soon. She then searched Sutapa's room for Shomu's letter. We see Maa writing and her voice-over narrating Shomu's letter—that he was in financial stress in Germany and could lose his job at any moment, but Maa shouldn't know or she'd be sad. But he betrayed them all—he said he'd go for six months but didn't return for years. His cowardly act cheated Sutapa of time spent with him and time from his parents as well. Sutapa couldn't forget her dead husband, Ranju, but that doesn't mean that their (extramarital) relationship was a lie, just as the deaths of Bulu and other young men weren't lies. She writes that it's too late for Shomu even if he returns.



Baba's angst Ani is about to hand the letter to Shomu, but Baba takes it. Baba says that he knows their complaint of not letting them read Maa's words; he himself hadn't read the diary. He gets emotional, saying that he doesn't want her words to tear them apart.

Tears At night, Shomu goes to Baba's bedside, sits there and starts sobbing. Sutapa watches from the door, then lays a hand on his shoulder. He hugs her while they both cry; but she quickly runs away. We see a montage of some newspaper headlines like "Betrayal" and "Communal Violence all over the country".



Baba and Shomu Sutapa leaves for work, after reminding Nanda to take her medicines and telling Shomu to stay at home. Baba says he doesn't understand the political unrest everywhere; he's losing hope and trust in everything. Shomu says that's just like the family. He asks why Maa committed suicide. Baba says it was likely a series of tragedies— Bulu's death, Sutapa's widowhood, Shomu's departure. She didn't have anything else to cling to. Shomu laments that he should have come four days sooner. He says that they don't understand him and he couldn't save Maa anymore.



Letting go The servant Haran comes running to say that Nanda was burning Maa's letters and dairy. Baba tries to stop her but the pages are burnt. Shomu looks on, then continues putting the remaining pages in the fire, ending with a letter, which he glances at for the first and last time.

