

FILM REVIEWS

experience of children. Older and more sophisticated viewers will want better storytelling and a more thorough analysis of the political, military, and humanitarian issues than this film provides.

The film begins by introducing us to the Tonai family, an attractive young couple and their two sons, aged eight and twelve, who live in present-day Hiroshima but who have never been to the annual commemoration of the atomic bombing on August 6. The Tonais have decided to give their children a history lesson and to attend the memorial service together, and we accompany them as they eat breakfast, take the train into the city center, and attend the ceremony.

As the Tonai family proceeds with its preparations, we meet three survivors of the bombing, who each tell us the story of their experience: Matsubara Miyoko, a schoolgirl in 1945 who apparently was one of

the Hiroshima Maidens brought to the United States in the 1950s for reconstructive plastic surgery; Sasamura Hiroshi, the principal of an elementary school; and Masuda Tsutomu, a teacher-turned-painter. *The Spirit of Hiroshima* cuts back and forth among these witnesses, the Tonais, and historical images of the bombing.

The film tells its story through children—the Tonai boys and the survivors who were either children themselves during the war, or teachers working with children. This emphasis highlights the inhumanity of the bombing and appeals to viewers' emotions. However, the film also acknowledges at several junctures that Japan had been waging an aggressive war in Asia and that Hiroshima and its environs were military targets; and Masuda Tsutomu, the painter, asserts that Japan had in fact provoked the bombing by its aggression. The film thus provides a well

balanced, albeit essentially anecdotal, account of the Hiroshima catastrophe.

For adult viewers, the film is unsatisfying. The witnesses, particularly Ms. Matsubara, sincere as they undoubtedly are, seem scripted and wooden. Their accounts are poorly integrated into the story of the Tonais' journey and easily overwhelm it, making it seem superfluous. There is little real analysis of the reasons why the bomb was dropped or its long-term significance. We do not get to know the Tonai family well enough to identify with them, nor are pertinent questions broached about their obvious ambivalence toward Hiroshima's identity as the first city decimated by nuclear weapons.

The Spirit of Hiroshima is thus best suited for younger, less critical viewers. For more advanced high school and college audiences, alternatives would include the ABC News special *Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped* (1995) and *Enola Gay and the Atomic Bombing of Japan* (History Channel, 1995), which interrogate the bombing from "revisionist" and mainstream positions respectively. John Junkerman's *Hellfire: A Journey From Hiroshima* (First Run Features, 1987) examines the work of the painters Maruki Iri and Toshi, and does a superior job of approaching the bombing through the work of artists who devoted their lives to exploring its meaning. ■

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The Hidden Story

A Documentary

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED
BY RANJANI MAZUMDAR
AND SHIKHA JHINGAN

WOMEN MAKE MOVIES
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1996. VIDEOCASSETTE.
58 MINUTES



Photo courtesy of Women Make Movies

The *Hidden Story* is a social history of peasant women whose stories have rarely been documented in traditional sources on Indian women. The video/oral histories of four women from different geographic regions of India, set in 1987, are part of the *Women Make Movies* series. They represent the social structures of the respective communities that have bound these women and reinforce the conclusions in the book, *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, edited by Bharati Ray. The film illustrates the dual limitations of gender and caste that play an important part in the lives of these women.

The video begins with a Hindi movie song. The camera captures the view of the rice



JAPANESE POLITICS & FOREIGN POLICY

The Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University seeks to fill an endowed chair in Japanese politics. This is a tenured position in the Department of Political Science at the associate or full professor level. Interested candidates for this position should have a distinguished publication record and record of teaching effectiveness at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Candidates may specialize in Japanese domestic politics or foreign relations, but in either case must have a demonstrated interest in US-Japan relations and the ability to write for both scholarly and policy-oriented audiences. The successful candidate will be expected to play a leading role in the promotion of Japanese and East Asian Studies at the University, and teach at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including both masters and Ph.D. programs. A Ph.D. is required for this position. Review of applications will begin December 1. Interested candidates should send a curriculum vitae, cover letter, three letters of reference, samples of relevant publications, and evidence of teaching effectiveness to: Japan Search Committee, attn: Harry Harding (chair), Sigur Center for Asian Studies, 2013 G Street NW, #301, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 20052. The George Washington University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer.

fields from a jeep speeding through a monsoon on a highway heading from the outskirts of Delhi to the state of Madhya Pradesh. The first stop is Asna village in Bastar where we are introduced to Mitki Bai, a militant forest preservationist. Prompted by the meager daily wages of Rs.10, Mitki Bai and her supporters defy the orders of the forest rangers, who had barricaded access to the forest, to gather roots, leaves, and mushrooms that supplement their basic diet of rice. While helping themselves to the forest resources, Mitki Bai and her friends also protect the forest from wanton destruction.

Mitki Bai's networking with other women in the village results in regular meetings demanding permission to enter the forest and for reforestation (the planting of Mango and other useful trees). The movement gathers momentum, spreads to twelve neighboring villages, and later to the entire district.

Despite being chastised by their menfolk for shirking domestic chores, 400 women march to neighboring villages to gather support, and ultimately 2,000 women march to the collector's office in Jagdalpur where their demands are finally met. Mitki Bai's life as a lower-caste Bathra is atypical because she performs rituals of the Brahmins such as *surya namaskar* and an elaborate *pūja* around the *tulsi sthal*.

Sarala Sardar from Bankura district in West Bengal is another forest conservationist. A member of the Bhumige tribe, Sarala is co-owner of the Tus-sore plantation that the women struggle to maintain. Although from different regions of India, Mitki and Sarala believe that women have a close affinity and interest in preserving the forest. Instinctively they are aware of

the utility of preserving the forest; they know what fruits mother earth will provide, and what should and should not be cultivated on her soil. Sarala, like Mitki, was conscious that men were not supportive of their networking efforts, and as members of Forest Protection Committees or as Forest Rangers their interests were purely administrative. Thus women organize *samitis* (committees), meet the district authorities, and make their demands known in order to elicit changes. Both Sarala and Mitki are leaders seeking change and are reasonably successful.

The third woman, Gora Bai, is from Suni in the district of Bikaner, Rajasthan, the desert region in Northwestern India. Even though Gora Bai is a Muslim by birth, her language and customs are typically that of the majority Hindus. For most of her forty years of married life, Gora Bai has worked long hours. Her day begins at sunrise with chores such as milking thirty cows, churning forty kilograms of milk into butter, making cow dung cakes for fuel, grinding nine kilograms of wheat, cooking *rotis*, and working in their dry desert field from 9 a.m. to sunset.

Years of hard work have left Gora Bai wrinkled and aged. She has experienced Rajput domination and perpetual indebtedness to them. Her family is repaying the loan that her father-in-law had taken from the Rajput landlords. Although they own a piece of land, Gora's family lives in perpetual poverty because of poor yield from the arid, barely productive soil.

A self-styled historian of her community, Gora relates the discrimination that her Dhadhi community faced at the hands of the Rajputs. During the fifties and sixties she drew water for 200 cows at the only well in the

village and would get in return a mere two pitchers of water for her family. When Gora shared water with the untouchables of the village, who were prevented from coming anywhere close to the well, she was chastised by the Rajputs.

The other farm woman is Kamakshi from Magra, near Kanchipuram in South India, whose plight is worse than that of Gora Bai. She, along with the other women from her community, work on the *Mudaliars'* land cultivating rice and other crops. These women face double discrimination, from the upper-caste land owners as well as from their menfolk who expect them to perform all the domestic chores and also the back-breaking jobs of transplanting rice, threshing, and winnowing the grain.

Although Kamakshi does not make any effort at organizing the women to protest discrimination, she is aware that her society has not changed. According to her, the upper caste treat them in the same manner as they did before India's independence. Kamakshi would like to evoke change so that her daughter and the younger girls in the village will not have to go through the cycle of poverty and discrimination that she has endured.

As an untouchable, she describes the humiliation they suffer every day. Until independence, her community was not permitted to enter the temple, the worst form of segregation. Although her community is permitted entry into the temple today, they have their own temples where gods and goddesses have appearances that are representative of their community, not that of the Brahminical tradition.

Unlike Mitki and Sarala, Gora and Kamakshi are not involved in protest movements.

However, they have a vision to do whatever they can in order to break the cycle of discrimination and poverty. The common threads that bind these women's experiences include their position in society, economic worth, gender, and religious beliefs which are different from the dominant Brahminical tradition of India. Despite these limitations, Mitki and Sarala have demonstrated that networking can bring about change, slowly but surely. Gora and Kamakshi are optimistic that someday their conditions will improve.

The videotape is a useful educational tool for students of Indian women's history, women's studies, and sociology. For the most part, the video captures or "recovers" the history of these women in their environment. Photography is good; however, narration could have been supplemented with more captions, at least for pertinent information such as the names of the tribes, people, and places because they are not easy to follow. ■

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