

Asian cinema

Deep trouble

An Indian film stars at the world's biggest festival of Asian film
Busan, South Korea | from the Economist print edition

“WATER” is the third part of an elemental trilogy by Deepa Mehta, an Indian director with a reputation for liking hot potatoes.

In “Water”, she turns to the plight of India's widows, who are often regarded as non-persons. Though suttee has been illegal for a long time, many widows still suffer under an extreme interpretation of a 2,000-year-old Hindu tradition whereby a wife is half of her husband and when he dies, she is in effect half-dead too, and should be consigned to an ashram or house of confinement.

After the script of “Water” was passed by India's official censor in 2000, shooting began in the holy city of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. However, Hindu fundamentalists were quick to protest, burning down the main set and seizing and destroying all prints and the original negative of the film. With no insurance cover, Ms Mehta had to abandon her project. But she remained undaunted, and spent the next few years raising the money to shoot the film again. A Canadian businessman came to the rescue and “Water” was remade in Sri Lanka, using a bogus working title as a precaution. It also required a new cast since one of the leading characters, a child, had grown into an adolescent in the interim.

Was it all worth it? Absolutely. “Water” combines a humanist message, political courage and visual poetry in a way not seen since the death of Satyajit Ray. It is the finest Indian film for a generation.

The story is told through the eyes of a six-year-old girl who is sent to an ashram after the husband she had barely known suddenly dies. [Still a child, all she craves is her mother, but even this is denied her. The child's story is paralleled with that of another widow, who falls in love with and expects to marry a high-caste idealist but commits suicide when his father advises him not to rock the boat and to take her as a mistress instead.

The film is set in the 1930s against India's growing independence movement, and its conclusion is more upbeat than you might expect.] Mahatma Gandhi, on a stop at the local station, makes an impassioned call for reform which inspires the child-bride and the now bereaved lover to flee the town together and accompany Gandhi to a brighter future.

READING AND UNDERSTANDING

- A quick overview of the text:

This article deals with an, whose is not afraid of topics. The topic here is

The shooting was as the team was faced with a series of due to

Yet thanks to..... and

Water was and it's turned out to be a

- A closer look at the text:

1. Is there a verb in the subtitle?

- No, the subtitle is a nominal sentence.
- Yes, the verb is

2. From the first paragraph, can you tell whether Deepa Mehta is a man or a lady?

- No, I can't.
- Yes, she is a lady
- Yes, he is a man

3. Deepa Mehta likes to eat potatoes when they are very warm.

- True.....
- False.....
- How should we know?

4. « Elemental » refers to.....

5. 2nd paragraph: “suttee” is the English version of an Indian word. What would be the French version?

- suttee*, same thing in French.
- something more French:.....

6. “Though suttee has been illegal for a long time,...” means :

- Bien que le s..... ait été illégal pendant longtemps,...
 - Bien que le s..... soit illégal depuis longtemps,...
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7. Does the journalist tell us what an ashram is?

- No, we are supposed to know.
- Yes, an ashram is

8. In the 3rd paragraph, find all the words referring to filmmaking.

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9. Find a good translation for the title.

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10. Last two paragraphs: read them carefully to make sure your understanding is perfectly clear, then translate the passage in brackets into French.