

## EYEBLAZE # 8

# INDIA SONG



Originally published: *One+One Filmmakers Journal*, November 23, 2012 by Clara Pais and Daniel Fawcett

**Part 8 of our regular column in which we give short personal introductions to those unique gems of cinema that stand alone and are unlike anything else. Each week we focus on a film that has inspired and influenced our own work as filmmakers or has expanded our understanding of what cinema is and could be.**

'I came to India because of India song, that tune makes me want to love,  
I have never loved, never loved anyone'

### **The film:**

We see an orange sun setting over a hazy landscape, a young girl sings and laughs. Then a woman's voice speaks softly in French, conversing with a younger girl, their words draw us into the film with a story about a young beggar girl who after finding she was pregnant was forced out by her parents so she walks to India. They talk also of her encounters with a white woman whose lover followed her, secret night time encounters and promises of marriage. A few moments later a melancholic melody played on a piano gently meanders under their words, the slow softness of this opening settles our minds and attempts to create in us a receptivity for the beautiful but desperate visions that follow. *India Song* is a very special film comparable to very little else that we have seen, maybe Jacques Rivette's *Celine and Julie go boating* comes close or maybe Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*, even Alain Resnais *Last year at Marienbad*, but really it stands alone in its tone, style and form.

The film plays out like a memory, dreamy, wistful and full of regrets and longing. Focusing on a group of people, chiefly a French ambassador's wife and her male companions as they dance and meander around in a large mansion on a hot Summer night in 1930's India. In the voice-over the young girl asks 'That light?' and the woman answers 'The monsoon', the young girl asks 'That dust?', 'Central Calcutta' the woman answers. The dialogue moves on like this in small fragments, questions and answers from which we piece together a narrative, information reaches us indirectly,



poetically, and we feel our way through this film, it is not a film to try to force or pin down, it has to be received and reflected upon.

On one level it could be said that very little happens but if one has been successfully seduced by the opening sequence then you will find yourselves receptive to a great deal of ideas and feelings. The actors voices play over, sometimes as dialogue sometimes as comment on the action, but never do the actors on screen move their mouths, this seems to internalise everything, making the whole film feel as if it exists beyond normal time and reality. The camera moves slowly as do the actors, often seen as reflections in mirrors or framed by doorways.

In some moments the voices seem to summon or create the images on screen, as if their words come first and the action grows from them, in others they seem to be responding to the images as if they are watching the film and commenting on it. The first time we see the main actors is nearly 10 minutes in, a man dressed in white leans against a large mirror, he stands so still that he could be a waxwork. In the mirror we see the reflection of a man and a woman slowly dancing, we see what the man sees, sat with our gaze fixed on the dancers as his is, all the while that melancholic tune plays on the piano.

This is a film about the past, a past that is being clung onto, a past that probably never really existed, an imagined past dressed in nostalgia. The actors move like ghosts through the house haunted by memories as they act out their social rituals as if hypnotised, the past lingers in the present like the incense smoke which burns throughout, wafting by an open window. We can almost feel the oppressive heat of the night, the tension that lets us know something has got to give.

### Who made it:

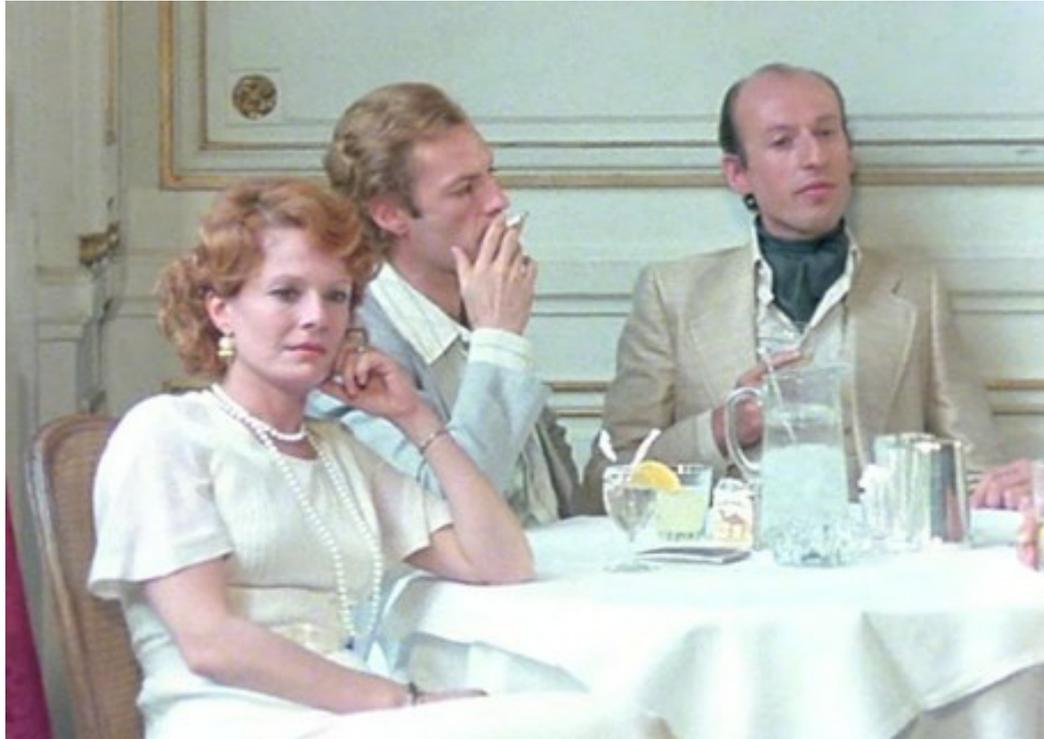
Marguerite Duras was a well-known French writer, playwright and film director. She was born in Indochina, where she lived with her mother and siblings in relative poverty during her childhood. As a teenager she became involved in an affair with a much older and rich Chinese man, after which she moved to France to study at the Sorbonne. These early experiences were often revisited and explored in her later work. In both writing and filmmaking she developed a formal style that reinforced her main themes, echoing the blurring of boundaries between the act of remembering and actual past experiences, and the constant development of one's own personal history. Jean-Jacques Annaud, who directed the film adaptation of her book *The Lover*, has said: 'Destruction. A key word when it comes to Marguerite Duras, who uses her novels, her plays and her films to study herself in as many mirrors; she identifies herself with her work to the point that she no longer knows what is autobiographical fact and what is fiction.'



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### Why it's important to us:

For us what is captivating in this film is the emotional effect it has on us and the mood and atmosphere it stirs within us. That we can be moved without understanding all that the film is saying, that it is almost subliminally effected, is remarkable. Whatever the context of the film the feelings expressed are that of a deep sadness, a longing and regret, and the poetic form of the film allows us as viewers to engage freely in this and indulge in our own relationships to these feelings.



The film's form and the experience it offers is excitingly unique, time isn't a linear experience in *India Song*, it feels as though the things that were, that are and could be are all superimposed, existing in the same plane of experience. The effect is perhaps closer to the experience of being hypnotised and led to delve into the deep pools that exist within. Everything is carefully composed to maintain this thick, enchanting, hypnotic atmosphere. The actors main purpose seems to be channeling intense, contained emotions, which they do with their whole selves, even though their mouths don't move, their body, their movements and their gaze are all screaming. We are reminded of something Jodorowsky said of his own film *Holy Mountain* 'The characters in my films never move their mouths when they speak. It's a film, why should they move their mouths?'

*India Song* was written as a play and traces of that are seen here but it feels like a work that could only really exist as a piece of cinema, images and thoughts conjured up in the darkness from the memories of experiences and times that may never even have existed.

**How to see it:**

There is a region 1 DVD of *India Song* available from Amazon but unfortunately it doesn't have any English subtitles. The full film is also on Youtube but again without subtitles. As far as we can tell there isn't a subtitled release available, this is a real shame as this unique film deserves to be seen. You may be able to find a copy on a torrent.

**Further viewing/reading:**

We haven't seen or read any of Duras' other work yet so it is hard to recommend. Her most well known book is *The Lover* (1984) which is an autobiographical account of her youthful affair with an older Chinese merchant. Several of her books and plays have had film adaptations, directed by herself or others.

It is surprising that her films are not more easily available as all written accounts of them indicate that they are at the very least of interest in the context of this famous writer's work. Moreover, they are all apparently rather experimental in form, and according to Wikipedia she has directed 18 films.

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