

Inedia

written by

Aman Kaur Khangura

February 28th 2024
Toronto, Canada
khangura.amankaur@gmail.com

COLD OPEN:

EXT. LANDSCAPES - COLONIAL INDIA - DAY - ESTABLISHING

Vast mustard seed fields sway in the wind. Gentle bird calls on the breeze, juxtaposed with harsh sounds of industry. CLANK. CLANK. CLANK. TURBANED WORKERS build a RAILWAY. The sun is high and hot here- OLD GRANDMOTHERS and YOUNG GIRLS sit under an OLD BANYAN TREE, FANNING themselves. A FARMER WHIPS a WATER BUFFALO pulling a PLOW through a barren field.

PRAYER LOUD SPEAKER
(FILTERED)

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥੧੬॥

PRAYER LOUD SPEAKER
(FILTERED)
(English translation)
...A wise person is one who
neither intimidates any
one nor accepts
intimidation...

ENGLISH TOURISTS take photos with GAUNT VILLAGERS.

A river thrashes against rocks.

A CHILD (2-3), plays with an EMPTY BOWL.

Over this exquisite scene we hear: GLUTTONOUS SOUNDS OF
SLURPING AND CHEWING.

TITLE CARD: INEDIA.

OVER BLACK:

TEXT: Based on real events. But not a true story...

INT. COL. DYER'S HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY - FLASH FORWARD

CHYRON: BRITISH RAJ, 1899.

COLONEL EDWARD DYER (35), is eating at a table in an ornately decorated dining room, surrounded by fine bone china and elegant walnut furniture. He's dressed in a British RED COAT, with the accents of a high officer. He's an upper class aristocrat with an accent to raise hairs.

He consumes rare SWEETBREADS, LIVER PÂTÈ, TRIPE and BLOOD PUDDING. The contents of which, spill over his chin and wedge between his crooked, yellow teeth.

An INDIAN (Late 20's), white-gloved BUTLER, clears the OPULENT PLATES from the table, dressed all in white with a RED SASH round his waist.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

CHYRON: DAY 67.

BRITISH RED COATS hand out SMALL RATION PACKETS to a horde of STARVING PEOPLE.

CLOSE ON: EMACIATED BODIES, PROTRUDING RIBS, DIRTY CLOTHES, BRAWLS, CRYING CHILDREN and CHAOS ERUPTING within the crowd. Their feet kick up CLOUDS OF DUST.

The British Red Coats stand barricaded away from the starving droves, robotically handing out RATION PACKETS to whoever fights their way to the front of the line.

Behind the first line of Red Coats stand the HIGH OFFICERS, among them - Colonel Edward Dyer. He watches the masses intently wearing a rueful expression.

NOTE: Villagers of this time spoke the Punjabi language in a regional Malwa dialect, this dialogue will be italicized.

WOMAN

Take my baby! Please save her!

The Red Coats avert their gaze from the woman, disengaged.

The BABY WAILS in her outstretched arms.

Colonel Dyer commands a SOLDIER to retrieve the baby.

He smiles warmly at the mother.

COLONEL DYER

We are here to help.

VILLAGERS FIGHT over a RATION PACK - the PACKET CONTENTS SPILL onto the ground. A BRAWL BREAKS OUT.

TWO SIBLINGS, break free from the fight, beneath their feet - a TRAMPLED PHOTO of their fallen king.

ASEES (14), stumbles. Her glossy brown eyes laced with thick black lashes peer out beneath a raggedy shawl. Her hand clutches the back of her brother's KURTA - the only family she has left...

TEHAL (9), winces against the cold. He's shy, a nervous nail-biter and currently scooping spilled RICE GRAIN into his pockets. A SILVER BRACELET round his wrist - a last family heirloom, bequeathed by his father.

They thread hands and make a break for it out of the square.

EXT. VILLAGE DIRT ROAD - DAY

Asees and Tehal run barefoot along a dirt path surrounded by barren farmland. RICE GRAIN leaks from Tehal's pockets.

BLACK SMOKE BILLOWS in the distance. The two run faster.

EXT. VILLAGE HOUSE - DAY

Asees and Tehal stand before a BURNING HUT, their home.

HUTS BURN around them. FLAKES of ASH rain down.

An OLD FARMER cries in the distance.

SOUNDS of grief and destruction fill in the air.

Red Coats patrol the area on horseback.

RED COAT SOLDIER 1
Consider this a reminder of your
outstanding debt to the Crown.

A WHIP CRACKS.

STARVING MEN are pushed onto WAGONS like cattle.

Asees watches them. This is how they took their father.

She PACKS the remains of their life into a KNAPSACK: THE RATION PACKET BREAD, RICE GRAIN, DRIED SPICES, A TIN OF SEEDS, TWO SETS OF CLOTHES, A CANTEEN OF WATER and A TATTERED SIKH HOLY BOOK.

EXT. VILLAGE DIRT ROAD - DAY

Asees and Tehal walk the dirt road.

EMACIATED BODIES of poor peasants line the path, the remains of once large families. Those with some hope left, kneel to the ground and pray to their gods. Others stare blankly ahead with dry eyes.

An OLD MAN sits under a SACRED FIG TREE lining the path.

OLD MAN
*They starve us in the daylight and
hunt us in moonlight. Oh lord,
where will we go?*

Tehal watches the Old Man, idly chewing his fingernails.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Only god can protect you now.

Scared, Tehal races to catch up to his sister.

EXT. MUSTARD SEED FIELDS - DUSK

Asees crouches down in the fields, hiding out of sight. She harvests MUSTARD LEAVES, setting them down neatly in a pile at her side.

Tehal steals leaves from the pile to FOLD and TWIST into SIBLING DOLLS and A SHIP.

TEHAL
*How big do you think it will be,
 Asees? Why doesn't it sink? We can
 drink the ocean, right? I heard the
 ship can carry over 50 people!*

Asees shushes Tehal, pulling him down. He holds up the LEAF-DOLLS, PLAYING PRETEND - they're on the run through the woods - LEAF-DOLL RED COATS on their tail.

TEHAL (CONT'D)
*Run away! Run Asees! Tehal, the
 mighty warrior will lead you to
 freedom! He's the biggest, bravest,
 boldest soldier in the world!*

He places the LEAF DOLLS in the SHIP, they're sailing.

TEHAL (CONT'D)
*Captain Sikander, I believe you
 know my father! I am Tehal the
 brave and this is my stupid sister
 Asees!*

ASEES
Shut-up.

Asees continues CUTTING LEAVES off the crops.

Tehal sits down next to her with legs crossed, chewing his fingernails again. Contrite, he was only playing.

Asees SLAPS HIS HAND out of his mouth.

Tehal upset, lays down in the field. She softens, leaning in.

ASEES (CONT'D)

*I heard that ships can be bigger
than elephants with sails taller
than the tallest Peepal tree. Papa
told me at night they have great
feasts. They sing and dance under
the stars like Maharajas and
Maharanis.*

Tehal gets up and does A DANCE for his sister.

She laughs.

BANG!

TWO PATROLLING RED COATS - one of them FIRED A SHOT.

RED COAT SOLDIER 2

Look Willy, a coupla field mice.
First to catch one gets a crown?

RED COAT WILLY

You are on, chap!

They POINT their MUSKETS at Asees and Tehal. Both scramble
and flee, disappearing behind the WALL OF TALL LEAVES.

One of the soldiers readies his reigns.

RED COAT SOLDIER 2

Don't bother. The night will get
them.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Asees GRINDS the mustard leaves on a FLAT STONE, she adds
WATER from her canteen, working it into a PASTE.

She pulls out the FLAT BREAD from the ration pack and divides
it into equal pieces. She puts a few back in the bag, and
spreads on the mustard leaf paste.

Tehal devours his share.

Asees watches him. She pretends she's full and gives Tehal
the rest of her piece. He hesitates to take it.

ASEES

You go ahead, I'm full.

His eyes light up and he eats gleefully.

JANGLE. JANGLE. JANGLE.