



Reason

Anand Patwardhan
India



powerful priest caste) project of supremacy, which recruits the powerless in an endless war against imaginary demons. Invoking such a war gives its instigators absolute control and total impunity.» Patwardhan's film sets a much-needed spotlight on these mechanisms in Indian society.

While the negative response to Western nationalism is present and heard in the world, a similar response to Hindu nationalism in India is rather weak outside of India. Many take for granted that India is a Hindu nation, and they fail to see that Hindu nationalism and white supremacy are two faces of the same coin. The situation is very serious, yet Patwardhan chose to end his film on an optimistic note, anticipating that good will prevail inevitably. But after facing reality in this more than four-hour-long film, this ending feels forced: It feels as if it is more of a desire than a light at the end of the tunnel. Hopefully reason and kindness will prevail. Perhaps if the world pays attention and understands that the mysterious India everyone knows or dreams of has a dangerous dark side everyone should care about – maybe then a change for the better can become a real possibility.

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INDIA: Covering more than a century of Indian history, Patwardhan weaves a story that exposes the roots of Hindu nationalism and the endless war against India's «imaginary demons».

BY BIANCA-OLIVIA NITA

The extreme right is on the rise all over the world, but how many people in the Western world follow and understand the proportion and implications of the extreme right in India? Patwardhan's documentary feature *Reason* – which won the IDFA Award for Best Feature-Length Documentary at its last edition – is both an overarching lesson in Indian history and a wake-up call for the rest of the world. The film is a thorough examination of the Indian far-right, its rallies, hate speech and effects, in parallel with the people who dare to resist and speak against this delirium – many of which end up paying with their life for their courage.

The film is both an eye-opener and a mesmerising experience, an intense rollercoaster trip through a slice of India's past and present – each minute adding to an unsettling portrait of what is gradually becoming one of the largest secular democracies in the world.

Hindu nationalism and the illusion of the «Golden Age». Covering more than a century of Indian history, Patwardhan weaves a story that is as clear as it is complicated, exposing the roots of Hindu nationalism and the hate for «the Other». The effects of the Hindutva – the ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life – can be seen everywhere in society, and the film illustrates the way this ideology fuels caste prejudices and promotes the anti-egalitarian principles spawned by Brahmanism.

Some of the events featured in the film have appeared in

the international media over the years. It becomes clear that they've not been isolated or randomly selected, yet their magnitude and their cumulative impact becomes particularly evident when witnessing these events against the Indian social and political backdrop. *Reason* makes it clear just how deeply deteriorated the social fabric is: the disappearance of activists has become routine in India. Routine, also, is the marginalisation of the Dalits (the «untouchables» or «backward castes») and Muslims, the manifestations of hyper-nationalism, the spreading of accusations of anti-nationalism, and the mounting unrest amongst university students.

What the far-right taps into is an illusion of a «Golden Age»: A time before Christians and Muslims supposedly came to ruin the perfect equilibrium of an ideal Hindu country. But this time period never truly existed.

Just like any extreme ideology, Hindu nationalism is rapacious and incorporates any symbol, historic figure and superstition that can help legitimise its ideas. Truth is not a quest, but something the leading figures claim to possess, and so the world is suddenly divided into the ones who support the truth and those against it: the traitors, the outsiders that must be eliminated.

Anti-nationalists paying with their life. Adding to this, the spiritual layer of this form of extremism opens up a whole world of paranoia and manipulation in a country where spirituality and superstition have long potentiated one another. As a result, all sorts of mystics and magicians that pretend to be able to produce gold or perform circus-like acts

are used to serve the ideological agenda. Organisations like the Goa-based political group Sanatan Sanstha (which was founded by a «hypnotherapist») and its activities are as dangerous as they are surreal.

In all this madness, the voice of reason has not disappeared but seems to be struggling to be heard. Names like Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and M.M. Kalburgi might not be international household names like Mahatma Gandhi, but what all of them have in common is that they've been killed by the same ideology. Dabholkar, Pansare and Kalburgi fought for the preservation of inclusion, secularism and reason in India, and each one of them was

murdered. The film tells each of their stories – an ode to the people they were, and an illustration of the risks standing up against extremism presents.

Recruitment of the powerless.

The film itself is an act of resistance. The director believes that hatred spread through all layers of society and infiltrating the government is a threat to real Indian values. In his director's note Patwardhan states that «More than a monolithic religion, Hinduism

is a dynamic composite of indigenous cultural practices combined with those borrowed over the ages from passing streams [...] Sanatan, Aryan, Vedic, Hindutva on the other hand is a Brahminical (originally emanating from a

A mesmerising portrayal of India's extreme right

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