



BAGRI FOUNDATION LONDON INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL

The Warrior

+ *On-stage interview with writer-director Asif Kapadia*

The Rajasthan desert in Northwest India is not a place where you expect to find a theatrical film shoot. It's hot, inhospitable and far from the fleshpot of Mumbai's Bollywood. Perhaps it's less surprising that the one director impetuous enough to film there should be Asif Kapadia, a Hackney-bred Asian on a gruelling eleven-week schedule with a £2.5 million budget to produce his first feature. *The Warrior* is a near-wordless magic-realist tale of a hired clan fighter from centuries past who one day decides to renounce violence.

That such a visual epic, set in a non-literary time and involving no European actors, should, however vestigially, have come from the British film industry is remarkable and a welcome change from the UK norm. As Kapadia, who attended London's National School of Film and Television, says: 'When I was making *The Warrior* there were a lot of handheld, chasing-people-down-the-street films in Britain and that wasn't my taste. I'm not interested in cutting for the sake of it. It wasn't a case of forcing the story along by using cuts, here each cut had to be motivated.'

The motivation for the warrior's change of lifestyle comes when he's ordered by his chieftain to wipe out a village that has been unable to pay its tithe because its crops have failed. In the midst of his trademark burning and slaughter, Lafcadia encounters a young girl wearing a medallion that belonged to his son Katiba, a boy unsuited to the warrior life. Poised to hack off her head, Lafcadia is transported in a vision out of the desert to mountain scenery. Even when the vision fades, he's left with snow under his shoes to show him the experience was significant. When he gives up his trade, his former comrades are ordered to find and behead him. His ex-cohort Biswas decapitates someone resembling Lafcadia and the corpse's head is presented to Katiba to authenticate in a scene which Kapadia says was the inspiration for the whole film. It took him into unexpected realms of experience. 'I had never dealt with action scenes before,' he says, 'and suddenly we were writing a script dealing with horses, hundreds of extras and a sandstorm. I said, "Right, I've no idea how we're going to shoot this, but it'll be fun learning".'

The part of Lafcadia the warrior, is played by Irfan Khan, who trained at the National School of Drama in New Delhi. 'He doesn't have the typical Bollywood pretty face, so he doesn't get starring roles, but in India he's considered one of the country's best actors. He was recommended to me by Tigmanshu Dhulia, the casting director on Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen*, a film that has something of the texture I was looking for. Irfan has real presence, and I liked the way he carried himself. The character doesn't talk very much, and Irfan was perfect because he has a way of giving so much just with his eyes, as though he's seen a lot you don't want to know about. Also he has a real interest in cinema from outside India. Irfan might not have known all the films I would reference, but he knew Sergio Leone's films, and Westerns and Chinese films, so he could understand the style I wanted.'

Nick James talking to Asif Kapadia, *Sight and Sound*, May 2002

Against a panorama of chill blue sky, a man stands on the crest of a desert dune, shadow-fighting, armed with a sword. Nothing else is in the frame but an ancient, twisted tree standing like a malign opponent metamorphosed by some passing deity. The opening shot of *The Warrior* makes it plain where we are in a stark, mythic realm a million miles from the gaudy trappings of Bollywood. Even recent entries at the serious end of Mumbai cinema, such as *Asoka*, look lavish beside this pared-down austerity.

A closer comparison might be with Rajan Khosa's *Dance of the Wind* (1997), which likewise used visual simplicity and clean narrative lines to explore mythic elements in Hindi culture. But while Khosa's film presented us with modern, rounded individuals constrained to measure their needs against timeless values, Asif Kapadia and his co-writer Tim Miller are dealing in archetypes. Several characters, including the protagonist and his chief adversary, are never given names (the names given here are taken from the film's programme notes), and everybody arrives as if furnished with capital letters – The Warrior, The Thief, The Lord, The Wise Old Blind Woman. We never get far inside these people, and clearly aren't meant to.

This makes *The Warrior* a film to admire, but perhaps not one to warm to. Starkly presented as myth, motivations don't follow conventional narrative logic. Under normal circumstances, for example, one might ask what Biswas, who has been ordered by his lord to bring back the head of the warrior Lafcadia, is doing leading his men on a private vendetta up into the mountains, looting and slaughtering seemingly at random en route. But on the mythic level Biswas is the hero's nemesis, and so must simply pursue him to the death. Equally the nature of the mystical bond between Lafcadia, his son and the little girl who is found wearing the son's amulet is never expounded, let alone questioned, but just presented as a given. Storytelling in this mode holds us at arm's length and, with dialogue at a minimum, relies on dramatic action to hold our interest. When, as in the middle section, not a lot is happening attention tends to flag.

Visually the film is stunning, with the rich reds and ochres of the costumes set against the timeless contours of deserts or high mountain peaks. Kapadia, here making his feature debut as writer-director, has an acute eye for landscape, and his use of it as an emotional index for his characters' development sometimes recalls Anthony Mann. But the story seems more like a stripped-down version of another classic Western, Clint Eastwood's *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976), with its wandering loner hero gradually reconciled to the violent loss of his family by the acquisition of a surrogate clan. Riaz, the young thief who attaches himself to Lafcadia, was himself orphaned by warriors perhaps by Lafcadia's own band – and is later adopted by a market woman and her daughter whom he defends against an obstreperous customer. Lafcadia himself is also finally adopted by another mother-and-daughter couple with whom he has mystical links, and the old blind woman whose hands can feel violence in Lafcadia's face serves as wise grandmother to the whole scattered group, her quest for the holy lake undertaken as it were in all their names.

And now and then *The Warrior* captures something of the authentic otherness of legend. One such moment comes when Lafcadia, amid the mayhem of a sacked village, is confronted by the girl with the amulet given to her by his son. He is briefly transported with her to the high mountain pass where she'll later find him, then, back once more in the heat of the desert village, where he lifts his foot to see a footprint of snow beneath it. The image lingers, gathering resonance as the film proceeds.

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, May 2002

THE WARRIOR

Director: Asif Kapadia
©/Presented by: FilmFour
Production Company: The Bureau
In association with: Senator Film Produktion GmbH
With the participation of: British Screen
Developed with the assistance of: Equinoxe
Executive Producers: Paul Webster, Hanno Huth
Producer: Bertrand Faivre
Co-producer: Elinor Day
Line Producer: Mark Hubbard
Film Services India Line Producer: Eleanor Chaudhuri
FilmFour Executive in Charge of Production: Caroline Hewitt
British Screen Executive in Charge of Production: Peta Inglesent
Unit Manager: Rajen Rajkhowa
Production Manager: Rakesh Mehra
Production Supervisor: Trevor Ingman
Production Co-ordinator: Soledad Gatti-Pascual
India Production Co-ordinators: Claire Bennett, Ajai Kapur
Himachal Production Co-ordinator: Annie M. Matthews
Indian Production Services: Film Services India
Prep Location Manager: Chand Bhat
Rajasthan Location Manager: Sanjay Malik
Post-production Supervisor: Miranda Jones
2nd Camera Director: PIRAMO Vyas
Associate Director: Amit Kumar
1st Assistant Directors: Guy Heeley, Kanchan Ghosh
2nd Assistant Director: Geoff Dibben
3rd Assistant Director: Mohua Guha Thakurta
Script Supervisor: Pat Rambaut
Director Casting: Tigmanshu Dhulia
ADR Voice Casting: Brendan Donnison, Vanessa Baker
Screenplay: Asif Kapadia, Tim Miller
Director of Photography: Roman Osin
Camera Operator: Georges Diane
2nd Camera Camera Operator: Deepti Gupta
Focus Puller: Doug Lavender
Clapper: Nathan Wiley
2nd Camera Clapper Loader: Rajesh Khale
Stills Photography: Jeremy Sutton-Hibbert
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Alan Amin
Special Effects Assistants: Sheikh Annuddin, Harun Wagmare
Editor: Ewa J. Lind
Production Designer: Adrian Smith
Supervising Art Director: Henry Harris
Stand-by Art Director: Isolde Sommerfeldt
Art Director: Roy Aguiar
Costume Designers: Louise Stjernsward, Mala Dey, Sujata Sharma
Chief Make-up/Hair: Lesley Lamont-Fisher
Make-up/Hair Artist: Derek Lloyd

Titles Design: MUNKI
Titles/Opticals: General Screen Enterprises
Music Composed/Orchestrated/Conducted by: Dario Marianelli
Saranghi Musician: Ustad Chote Ghulam Sabir Khan
Voice Musician: Suranima Negi
Dilruba Musician: Baluji Shivastav
Percussion Musician: Simon Allen
Music Performed by: The Irish Film Orchestra
Music Recorders: Andrew Bolan, Nigel Zacharias
Music Mixer: Steve Price
Sound Design: Andy Shelley
Dubbing Mixer: Paul Carr
Dialogue Editor: Johannes Konecny
Fixer ADR: Sundar Sethuraman
ADR Editor: Colin Ritchie
Foley Editor: Tim Barker
Stunt Co-ordinator: Alan Amin
Stunts Horse Wrangler: Usman Shamsi

Cast

Irfan Khan (*Lafcadia, the warrior*)
Puru Chhibber (*Katiba, Lafcadia's son*)
Sheikh Annuddin (*Biswas, the warrior*)
Manoj Mishra, Nanhe Khan, Chander Singh, Hemant Maahaor (*warriors*)
Mandakini Goswami (*shawl seller*)
Sunita Sharma (*the girl*)
Shauket Baig (*clerk*)
Gori Shanker (*Tarang village headman*)
Prabhuram (*blacksmith*)
Wagaram (*blacksmith's son*)
Ajai Rohilla (*quarry foreman*)
Noor Mani (*Riaz, the thief*)
Sitaram Panchal (*dhaba stall owner*)
Chander Prakash Vyas (*dhaba stall man*)
Sanjai (*dhaba stall man*)
Anupam Shyam (*lord*)
Amit Kumar (*market trader*)
Damayanti Marfatia (*blind woman*)
Trilok Singh (*cart driver*)
Pushpa Negi (*restaurant owner*)
Karuna Sarah Davis (*restaurant girl*)
Rakesh Mehra (*rude customer*)
Anuradha Advanti (*lord's wife*)
Madhu (*woman singer*)

UK/France/Germany/India 2001©
86 mins

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Ahimsa: Gandhi the Power of the Powerless

Sun 20 Jun 15:00

Searching for Happiness...

Tue 22 Jun 20:50

Nazarband Captive

Wed 23 Jun 20:45

A'hr Kayattam

Thu 24 Jun 18:00

The Salt in Our Waters Nonajoler Kabbo

Sun 27 Jun 15:00

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Opening Night: UK Premiere: Drifting + intro

Thu 15 Jul 17:50

UK Premiere: Love Poem + intro

Sat 17 Jul 12:00

Spring Tide + intro

Sun 18 Jul 15:00

Back to the Wharf + intro

Wed 21 Jul 17:50

Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue + intro

Sat 24 Jul 14:00

Closing Night: UK Premiere: Shadows + intro

Sun 25 Jul 15:10

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