



SENIORS FREE MATINEE

Heat and Dust

+ intro and Q&A with Adrian Garvey, Film Historian

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Speaking of a shrine once sacred to Muslims, a character in *Heat and Dust* wryly reflects how it is now equally sacred to the Hindus: 'Everything gets mixed up together in time in India.' The whirligig of time is at the heart of Ruth Praver Jhabvala's short but complex novel from which James Ivory and Ismail Merchant have drawn one of their best films. The idea is simple. Anne, a young Englishwoman of today, becomes intrigued by the mysterious story of her great aunt Olivia, the first wife of Douglas, who had been a civil servant – a district 'collector' – in India in the 1920s. Encouraged by the reading of Olivia's letters to her sister Marcia, Anne determines to visit India and learn the secrets of the scandalous life which had led to Olivia's divorce from the upright Douglas more than half a century before. The film divides itself equally between Anne's modern quest and the reconstructed life of colonial India in the 20s, weaving a complicated but illuminating pattern out of the domestic and political intrigues. As a meditation on time, or colonialism, or national character, or on fashions in religion, philosophy, or medicine, or on the immutabilities of sex, *Heat and Dust* is as wise as it is unpretentious.

The resonances set up by the constant leaping of the gap between the two periods are tactfully used to sustain rather than interrupt the film's rhythm. There are obvious dangers of glibness in such opportunities: the drawing room of Dr and Mrs Saunders' villa in the Civil Lines is now the Satipur Post Office. The breadwinner of the family with whom Anne lodges, Inder Lal, works in an office which was once the preserve of the lonely and bored Olivia; Douglas' quarters are now the town hall. But these ironies are understated and their delicacy is a tribute not only to Ivory but to the work of the production designer Wilfred Shingleton. Architectural adaptation occurs at every level except the highest. Inder Lal takes Anne to visit the Nawab's palace 15 miles outside the town. It is still magnificent, but a magnificent shell. The guide shows them reluctantly round a shuttered mausoleum. In this gloomy shrine to vanished splendour, Inder Lal offers more than friendship to Anne, which, for the moment, she declines.

And what is the hidden correspondence here? Why, of course, the very heart of the mystery, for Olivia's secret, eventually known to the world, was to have fallen in love with the princely Nawab and to have been obliged, by both communities, to have an abortion. Not that the Nawab himself had demanded it. Far from it. It is one of the pleasant complexities of the piece that, while the Nawab sees the birth of a son to the wife of the British District Collector (he has no doubt that the child will be his, or that it will be a boy) as an affirmation of his virility (his own wife having proved barren), his mother, the impressively regal Begum, regards the event as a disgrace to be prevented at all costs. The ironies are more extensive still, however. The British authorities are convinced that the Nawab is in league with local bandits, the dacoits; and that his illegitimate offspring has been conceived as a revenge on the British colonial presence. Thus the poor unborn creature becomes the symbol of multiple incomprehensions.

Heat and Dust

Director: James Ivory

Production Company:

Merchant Ivory Productions Ltd

Producer: Ismail Merchant

Associate Producers: Rita Mangat,
Connie Kaiserman

Production Co-ordinator: Shama Habibullah

Production Manager: Peter Manley

Location Manager: Deepak Nayar

Production Assistants: Nancy Varden Berg,
Piyush Patel

Assistant Directors: Kevan Barker, David Nichols,
Gopal Ram

Continuity Clerk: Jane Buck

Replacement Continuity Clerk:

Renée Glynn [uncredited]

Screenplay: Ruth Praver Jhabvala

Urdu Dialogue: Saeed Jaffrey

Hindi Dialogue: Harish Khare

Based on the novel by: Ruth Praver Jhabvala

Director of Photography: Walter Lassally

Assistant Photographers: Tony Garrett,
Rajesh Joshi

Editor: Humphrey Dixon

Assistant Editor: Mark Potter Jr

Production Designer: Wilfrid Shingleton

Art Directors: Maurice Fowler, Ram Yedekar

Set Dresser: Agnes Fernandes

Costumes: Barbara Lane

Costume Assistant: Mary Ellis

Make-up: Gordon Kay

Make-up Assistant: Mohamed Amir

Title Art: Eyre & Hobhouse

Titles: Camera Effects

Music Composed and Conducted by:

Richard Robbins

Flute: Pandit Chaurasia

Sarang: Sultan Khan

Sitar: Nisar Ahmad Khan

Percussion: Zakir Hussain

Piano: Michael Reeves

Synthesizer: Mick Parker

Singer: Ameer Mohammed Khan

Associate Music Director: Zakir Hussain

Conductor: Harry Rabinowitz

Sound Recording: Ray Beckett

Sound Re-recording: Richard King

Sound Editor: Brian Blamey

Assistant Sound Editor: Tony Bray

Cast:

1920s. In the Civil Lines at Satipur

Christopher Cazenove (*Douglas Rivers*)

Greta Scacchi (*Olivia Rivers*)

Julian Glover (*Mr Crawford*)

Susan Fleetwood (*Mrs Crawford*)

Patrick Godfrey (*Dr Saunders*)

Jennifer Kendal (*Mrs Saunders*)

The Palace in Khatm

Shashi Kapoor (*The Nawab*)

Madhur Jaffrey (*The Begum*)

Nickolas Grace (*Harry*)

Barry Foster (*Major Minnies*)

Amanda Walker (*Lady Mackleworth*)

Sudha Chopra (*chief princess*)

Sajid Khan (*dacoit chief*)

Daniel Chatto (*Guy*)

1980s. In Satipur Town

Julie Christie (*Anne*)

Zakir Hussain (*Inder Lal*)

Ratna Pathak (*Rita, Inder Lal's wife*)

Tarla Mehta (*Inder Lal's mother*)

Charles McCaughan (*Chidananda, 'Child'*)

Parveen Paul (*Maji*)
Jayant Kripilani (*Dr Gopal*)
Leelabhai (*Leelavati*)
UK 1982
130 mins

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Seniors' Free Matinee: Heat and Dust + intro and Q&A with Adrian Garvey, Film Historian

Mon 7 Aug 14:00

Experimenta: Metal Machine Movies

Wed 16 Aug 18:10

Relaxed Screening: Gregory's Girl + intro and discussion

Mon 21 Aug 18:20

Projecting the Archive: Face the Music (aka The Black Glove) + intro by Josephine Botting, BFI Curator

Tue 22 Aug 18:10

Art in the Making: Grove Music + discussion

Tue 22 Aug 18:20

REBEL CINEMA: OUSMANE SEMBÈNE AT 100

Guelwaar

Mon 7 Aug 20:35; Thu 17 Aug 18:10

Black Girl (La Noire de...) + Niaye

Tue 8 Aug 18:10

Xala + Borom Sarret

Wed 9 Aug 20:10; Sat 26 Aug 17:30

Mandabi + Tauw

Sat 19 Aug 20:30; Wed 23 Aug 18:05

Camp de Thiaroye

Sun 20 Aug 15:50

Faat Kiné

Wed 23 Aug 20:35; Wed 30 Aug 18:00

Emitaï

Sat 26 Aug 14:20 (+ pre-recorded intro by season programmer Chrystel Oloukoï)

Ceddo

Sat 26 Aug 20:40

Mooladé

Mon 28 Aug 18:20; Wed 30 Aug 20:30 (+ intro)

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The outcome is seen, thankfully, in terms of human and personal joy and misery rather than as collective political guilt. No Aunt Sallys are set up, but an extensive and sympathetic review of all our foolishnesses is the focus of the film. Ivory seems at his most relaxed for some time, as if returning to home ground. The quality of observation smoothly matches that of the novel. We warm to the perfect balance of sympathy and witty distance as the bored, imaginative but unformed Olivia is drawn into the Nawab's net. But this is to caricature the way in which the Nawab is himself conceived: he is as much drawn into hers. For all his pride, savoir-faire and princely splendour, he is endearingly naive and impressionable in those areas where it hurts to be vulnerable. He is as much seduced by this innocent as seducing. These two are the heart of whatever bald generalisations we want to make (and the film forbears to) about the ways in which the two nations, the coloniser and colonised, have fallen in and out of love with one another.

There are differences between the book and the film. On the whole they are differences of emphasis. Major Minnies has no time for 'Our Friend' when he (the Nawab) indulges the banditry of the dacoits. But he acknowledges that 'he is' – with relish and regret – 'a Prince'. Minnies is given to quoting couplets of Urdu poetry which speak to him of other, softer dimensions, of a life not of spirit and sense as a soldier knows, but of spirituality and sensuality which a soldier must resist. There is less of this major in the film. There is less, too, of that other 'dimension'. The films of Ivory and Merchant have sometimes been found wanting in wholeheartedness. Their good taste has seemed, from time to time, to make them turn aside from the extremes of degradation or exaltation. Here for instance they avoid any mention of some important elements in the book: the suttee (the enforced suicide of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre) which provokes riots that Douglas is obliged to put down; or the fact that one of the treatments meted out to Inder Lal's epileptic wife is the application of a red-hot poker to her feet and arms; or the physical decay of the old peasant woman whom Maji and Anne tend in her dying hours. These are symptomatic omissions and might be defended.

What is less defensible is the absence of a final note of aspiration in Anne's chronicle, which robs the film of part, at least, of that other dimension towards which she has been honestly stumbling. Anne's sojourn in the mountains ends the book: 'I'm impatient for it to stop raining because I want to move on, go higher up. I keep looking up all the time, but everything remains hidden. Unable to see, I imagine mountain peaks higher than any I've ever dreamed of; the snow on them is also whiter than all other snow – so white it is luminous and shines against the sky which is of a deeper blue than any yet known to me. That is what I expect to see. Perhaps it is also what Olivia saw: the view – or vision – that filled her eyes all those years and suffused her soul.'

It would be hard to match the depth and simplicity of this prose. But if there is one regret to record against this excellent film it is that Ivory has not quite given us a glimpse of the invisible mountains, but has, diffidently, perhaps, or embarrassedly, lowered his eyes at the last minute. Otherwise there is nothing to reproach, especially in the performances of Greta Scacchi as Olivia, Julie Christie as Anne, Christopher Cazenove as Douglas and, brilliant in his Englishness and his Indianness, Shashi Kapoor as the Nawab; nor the photography of Walter Lassally which does equal justice to the design, the landscape and the interiors, both of the buildings and the people.

Gavin Millar, *Sight & Sound*, Winter 1982/3

Programme notes and credits compiled by Sight and Sound and the BFI Documentation Unit

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