

SUMMARY OF THE FILM:

Where we rats lurk is an artistic intervention into Mrinal Sen's film Akaler Sandhaney (In Search of famine). Using the strategy of a film within a film, Akaler Sandhane, made in 1981, deals with both the famine and an urban filmmaker's efforts to make a film about the famine, using as their location a village that the famine had seriously affected. Sen's self-reflexivity and critique in this film are aimed not only at revealing the filmic process but also at interrogating the capacities and incapacities of an urban filmmaker's attempt to 'authentically' represent the rural and the (im)possibility of such a film.

Where we rats lurk asks: what are the limits of self-reflexivity and auto-critique in Mrinal Sen's Akaler Sandhaney, and can they be unsettled without undermining their critical potential in filmmaking practices; is it possible to pursue this unsettlement through inflecting Sen's film with a fable, that emanates from a space of subalternity; moreover, can this unsettlement be enacted in and through the practice of film itself?

The intervention weaves together clips from Sen's film, footage from the fieldwork conducted in 2019 as part of a PhD in artistic practice, and a fable called "rat". The fable and its accompanying clips are from Anjali Monteiro and K.P. Jayasnkr's film Kahankar: Ahankar.

DESCRIPTIVE TRANSCRIPT:

00:00:02 - 00:00:16

<v Audio Descriptions> [Running Train] The video cuts between Mrinal Sen's film Akaler Sandhaney and the fieldwork footage. Shots of a train passing behind a green field from Mrinal Sen's film is interspersed with fieldwork footage of the interior of a moving train through its window, and the train tracks

00:00:16 - 00:00:37

<v Audio Descriptions> [Bengali Protest Song] We see cars, vans, then trucks with people riding on the top passing along a road with a green field behind from Sen's

film. This is intercut with fieldwork footage shot of a road captured through the windscreen of a car.

Voiceover: 7 September 1980. A film crew from Kolkata is going to a village for a film shoot. The name of the village is Hatui. The name of the film is...

00:00:37- 00:01:13

<v Audio Descriptions> [Bengali Protest Song continues] We see Ram (the PhD researcher) riding in the back of a car. The video then cuts to a clip from Sen's film. A van is passing along a road with a small village behind. The camera zooms in on an old man.

The old man says: The gentlemen are here to take snaps of the famine. But the famine is imprinted on our bodies.

00:01:13 - 00:01:36

<v Audio Descriptions> We see a film being shot within Sen's film, there is a film crew and a director. The video cuts to a 'movie clapper', then to a close up on the director, then to a group of boys are running alongside the film crew's vehicle.

The director in Sen's film says: Get Ready. Dipankar, get ready. Please move from the front.

The film crew say: Silence. Start sound. Ready. Camera. 15 by 1, take 2.

The director in Sen's film says: Cut.

The boys say: Cut. Cut...Cut...Cut...Cut...

00:01:36 - 00:02:13

<v Audio Descriptions> Clips from Sen's film is interspersed and overlaid with the fable 'Rat', which is from K.P. Jayasankar's film Kahankar: Ahankar. We see a mud wall with an illustration of a rat made with dye/food. The video cuts to a woman walking with a headland of wood in a dry landscape, then to two men installing a light

on a film set amongst some plants, then back to the woman in the landscape. The video goes back again to the illustrated wall, depicting the load of wood, the woman and the rat, where she has accidentally cut off its tail. This imagery then becomes layered with the footage of the two men installing the light on the film set, and we see that the rat has taken the sickle.

Voiceover: Once there was a rat, with a thorn in his tail. He was looking for some help. He saw a woman with a headload of wood. Pull out the thorn, oh sister, he said. Please pull it out. She slit his tail with a sickle to take out the thorn. The sickle slipped, and the tip of his tail broke off. The rat got angry. He demanded... give me my tail back or give me your sickle. The rat took the sickle and went on. A rat with a thorn in his tail, became a rat with a sickle.

00:02:13 - 00:02:24

<v Audio Descriptions> We see fieldwork footage where it seems that the researcher is conducting a technical check before going out on shoot. We see a cluttered coffee table, and the camera focuses on a walkie talkie, which then cuts to a group of people cycling on a road from Sen's film.

Voiceover: Hello!!! Mic Check! Mic Check!!! Cut... Cut... Cut...

00:02:24 - 00:02:45

<v Audio Descriptions> [Sound of rain and thunder] The video cuts between Mrinal Sen's film Akaler Sandhaney and the fieldwork footage. First we see a close up of the director, then rain pouring down in a courtyard from Sen's film. After that, a shot of a flooding field from fieldwork footage. Then back to Sen's film where we see a man shaving.

The shaving man says: I don't think it's going to stop. It will continue for the whole day.

The director in Sen's film says: So, is the shooting stopped?

A crew member from Sen's film says: Let's see.

00:02:45 - 00:03:55

<v Audio Descriptions> [Kids playing] The video cuts between Mrinal Sen's film Akaler Sandhaney and the fieldwork footage. We see an aerial view of some boys playing football in the mud. Then we cut to footage from Sen's film of a woman in a yellow sari who is sitting with a group of men, and back to the boys playing. We see the woman holding a photograph. The video then cuts to fieldwork footage of women in a flooded field sowing paddy, and then to a girl from Sen's film who is picking leaves from a tree.

The woman in a yellow sari from Sen's film says: Hey, let's play a game. An exciting game. Tell, which period? Answer. Which period does this photograph belong to?

They say: Should I say? Should be 1943. Yeah, 1943. I can't say just by looking at the photograph. Famine. It's the famine of 1943. Should I say? 1959.

The man next to her says: He knew it. I had told him.

The woman in a yellow sari from Sen's film says: Oh!!!

The man next to her says: In 1959, there was a mini famine.

The woman in a yellow sari from Sen's film says: This one?

They say: 1943. I also think it's 1943. 1943. 1959. 43. 43. 1943.

The girl on the tree from Sen's film says: Cut.

00:03:55 - 00:04:31

<v Audio Descriptions> Clips from Sen's film is interspersed and overlaid with the fable 'Rat', which is from K.P. Jayasankar's film Kahankar: Ahankar. We see the mud wall with the illustration of the rat again, which then fades into the footage of the two men installing the light on the film set. We cut to video of the filmmaker walking with two other men in a village. The video fades to a close up of a basket being woven. Then it fades back to the mud wall with the illustration of the rat with a few baskets. The video then cuts to a boy running through a green landscape.

Voiceover says: The rat with a sickle came to a village of basket-makers. They were slitting the bamboo with their teeth. "Take my sickle and it will make your work easy." They thanked him for the favour. Soon the sickle broke. The rat demanded - give my sickle back or give me your baskets. He took their baskets and moved on. A rat with a thorn in his tail, became a rat with a few baskets.

The boy says: Cut...Cut...Cut...Cut...Cut...

00:04:31 - 00:04:49

<v Audio Descriptions> We go back to footage from Sen's film where we see the same woman in a yellow sari.

The woman in a yellow sari from Sen's film says: Guess this one. Come on!

They say: Should I say load-shedding? Power crisis. [Men laughing] Darkness at noon.

The woman in a yellow sari from Sen's film says: Past...Present...and Future.

00:04:49 - 00:05:09

<v Audio Descriptions> [Sound of car and train engine] The video cuts between Mrinal Sen's film Akaler Sandhaney and the fieldwork footage. We see the previously used shots from Sen's film where a train is passing behind a green field, with a car passing along the road in the foreground. This is intercut with fieldwork footage of the view of trees and buildings as seen from a a moving car.

00:05:09 - 00:05:23

<v Audio Descriptions> The video cuts to footage from Sen's film where the film crew are looking at famine photographs in black and white, and the camera pans out to see a man and a woman who are looking closely at the photographs.

The man says: See.

The woman says: Where did you find these photographs?

The man says: We had to hunt for them. Newspaper offices... Private collections...
Is there any dearth of photographs?

00:05:23 - 00:05:24

<v Audio Descriptions> Then the video cuts to the close up on the director and then to people by the side of the road shot from a moving vehicle.

The director from Sen's film says: Cut. Cut.

00:05:25 - 00:05:58

<v Audio Descriptions> Clips from Sen's film are interspersed and overlaid with the fable 'Rat', which is from K.P. Jayasnkr's film Kahankar: Ahankar. We see the mud wall with the illustration of the rat again, which is then overlaid by footage of the film crew, then a close up on a clay pot being thrown. We then return to the mud wall illustration, and to the boy running through a green landscape.

Voiceover says: The next stop of the rat with the baskets was a village of potters. The potters were carrying clay in their hands. "Take my baskets. They will make your work easy." They thanked him for the favour. They made a number of pots that day. Soon all the baskets wore out. The rat demanded - give me my baskets back or give me your pots. A rat with a thorn in his tail became a rat with many pots.

The boy says: Cut...Cut...Cut...Cut...Cut...Cut...Cut...

00:05:58 - 00:06:27

<v Audio Descriptions> [Bengali Protest Music] We see the film crew from Sen's film singing and clapping on a bus. The video cuts to fieldwork footage of a vegetable market.

00:06:27 - 00:07:06

<v Audio Descriptions> [Sound from a vegetable market] The video cuts footage from Sen's film panning produce for sale laid out on the ground, then cuts to a busy vegetable market. The video focuses on two men having a conversation.

One of the villagers from Sen's film says to the film producer: So, you are here. I have come here for shopping.

The producer says: I can see that.

The villager says: Can you tell what is happening?

The producer says: Why? What's wrong?

The villager says: We can't get anything...vegetables, meat or eggs. Everything is taken away to the cities. Whatever little is left, we can't get that either. Because cinema people need them.

Another villager sitting next to these two says: The gentlemen came here to make a film on famine... and ended up creating one.

00:07:06 - 00:07:10

<v Audio Descriptions>

Then the video cuts to the close up on the director in Sen's film and then to people by the side of the road shot from a moving vehicle.

The director in Sen's film says: Cut.

The boys say: Cut...Cut...Cut...Cut...

00:07:10 - 00:07:42

<v Audio Descriptions> Clips from Sen's film are interspersed and overlaid with the fable 'Rat', which is from K.P. Jayasnkr's film Kahankar: Ahankar and fieldwork footage. We see the mud wall with the illustration of the rat again. The video cuts to a woman watering vegetables in a field. Video of vegetables growing is overlaid with video of the PhD researcher talking with other people in a circle, sitting on the ground outside. A microphone is visible between them. This is then overlaid again

with the mud wall illustrations. The video then cuts to the boy running through a green landscape

Voiceover: In the next village, they were growing vegetables. They were using small utensils to water them. The rat with the pots said - take my pots, they will make your work easy. They thanked him for the favour. After a while, the pots broke. The rat demanded - give me my pots back or give me your vegetables. The rat with a thorn in his tail became a rat with lots of vegetables.

The boy says: Cut...Cut...Cut...

00:07:42 - 00:08:11

<v Audio Descriptions> We see a close up of the director in Sen's film. The video then cuts to footage from Sen's film taken from a moving vehicle of a road with a horse and cart by a green field. Then there is a fast paced cut between a portrait of the director from Sen's film and the PhD researcher. This fast paced cut between Sen's director and the PhD researcher happens a couple of times, and is interspersed with footage of the road from Sen's film.

The director in Sen's film says: Famine...Faces of famine... [Sound of a car] Cut.

00:08:11 - 00:08:32

<v Audio Descriptions> Clips from Sen's film are interspersed and overlaid with the fable 'Rat', which is from K.P. Jayasnkr's film Kahankar: Ahankar. We see the mud wall with the illustration of the rat again. This is then overlaid with footage from Sen's film of a crowd of people in a village, with the director and cameramen looking on from a roof above. Over this we see footage of grain being ground into flour by two women from Jayasnkr's film Kahankar: Ahankar.

Voiceover: Then the rat came to a famine-stricken village of cowherds. The rat with the vegetable said - take my vegetables and have a grand feast. After the feast, he said - give me my vegetables back or give me your kettle. The rat with a thorn in his tail became a rat with a big bullock.

00:08:32 - 00:09:04

<v Audio Descriptions> We continue to see the footage from Sen's film of a crowd of people in a village, with the director and cameramen looking on from a roof above.

The director from Sen's film says: Clear the way. A path has to be constructed here. It won't work if there is a crowd. Move Backwards! Move Backwards! I want this place to be absolutely clear. [Commotion] We can't manage. It's impossible. [Commotion] Pack Up. Pack Up.

00:09:04 - 00:09:45

<v Audio Descriptions> [Running Train] After a black screen, the video fades to fieldwork footage of train tracks as seen from the moving train. This cuts to the PhD researcher riding in the back of a car with others.

Voiceover: [Bengali Protest Music] 12 June 2019. A film crew from Sweden is going to a district to shoot. The name of the district is West Midnapore. The name of the film is... Where We Rats Lurk.

00:09:45 - 00:10:43

<v Audio Descriptions> We see the end credits.