

Stills from
Yugantar Film Collective *TAMBAKU CHAAKILA OOB ALI*
(*Tobacco Embers*), 1982 [courtesy of the artist]



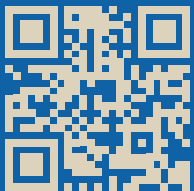
D I F F U S I O N

S U M M E R F E S T I V A L S E R I E S

DIFFUSION is a new summer festival series that will take place across 10 events (on site and online) including screenings, talks, workshops and critical writing intersecting with recent non-fiction moving image works.

re:assemblage collective since 2016 this collective has been committed to championing underrepresented voices and perspectives through public film/video screenings. We are itinerant and intentional. We are "reassembling" assumptions about artist film/video practices: who is shown and the forms of works championed. The re:assemblage collective was co-instigated by Christina Battle and Scott Miller Berry and is currently comprised of Faraz Anoushahpour with Miller Berry and calls Tkaronto/Toronto home.

Generous support for DIFFUSION 2022 provided by
Canada Council for the Arts (Public Outreach programme);
Toronto Arts Council with funds provided by the City of Toronto.



linktr.ee/reassemblage
www.reassemblage.ca
reassemblagecollective@gmail.com

E S S A Y

An injury to one is
an injury to all

by Indu Vashist

1984- Clayoquot Sound, Vancouver Island

"You, white people living on welfare, have nothing better to do than to disrupt the lives of hardworking taxpaying people. I have children to feed. You fucking hippie."

"Fucking hindoos, go back to where you came from! You don't give a shit about the land. These trees are sacred and you will have to go over our dead bodies to get to them."

"Who do you think makes the toilet paper that you smudge your dirty rotten shit on your ass with? Can you live without your toilet paper? Who pays taxes so that your freeloading ass can sit here and protest? Don't tell me where I'm from and what I know about land! Bloody tree hugger!"

The *War in the Woods* sparked animosity between unionized Punjabi mill workers, white environmentalists and indigenous activists throughout the late 1980s to the mid 1990s on Vancouver Island. At the turn of the 20th century, Punjabi workers came to Canada to work in the lumber, pulp and paper industries. The goals and methods of the union movement fit hand in glove with principles of Sikhism: *Kirt Karnal*/ earn an honest living and *Vand Chhakna*/ share one's resources with others. Due to widescale militant unionization, these workers were the highest paid labourers in the world, with benefits that later generations could not even imagine. I owe my teeth and student loan-free status to my forefathers who fought long and hard for those gains.

The alarm about the environmentalists was sounded at the IWA Local 180 meeting which occurred every Sunday on Brae Street in Duncan. During these meetings, workers spoke about their experience of being sawmill workers and the impact that this labour had on their lives. The work was so dangerous that their employer sent employees gifts whenever they had 100 days accident free. They discussed how the gruelling shift work interrupted their domestic lives. They discussed how they needed alcohol and painkillers to be able to work. They discussed how the environmentalists were a threat to their livelihoods.

The mainly white Friends of the Clayoquot Sound employed non-violent tactics that included blockades of logging roads and tying themselves to trees, hence the term 'treehugger'. This resistance strategy first emerged in the early 1980s in India where *Chipko Andolan* (literally 'treehugger movement') activists like Sudesha Devi put their bodies on the line in order to stop the rapid deforestation of the mountains of northern India. The Friends of Clayoquot set the scene for contemporary environmental movements including the Fairy Creek Blockade which is currently trying to stop logging of similar old growth forests on a different part of the island.

In the 1990s, as a budding environmentalist, I was deadlocked in binary positions with my shop steward father: environment vs. living wage; Punjabis vs. White people; feminism vs. patriarchy; us vs. them. It was when I came across Radha Kumar's classic book *The History of Doing* and Deepa Dhanraj's films that I first understood that struggles can only feel successful when they arise from a shared understanding of the needs of the collective balanced with the consideration of individual needs.

In *Tambaku Chaakila Oob Ali* (1982), the viewer is invited to participate in compassionate consensus-making discussions where the women workers of the tobacco factory talk about what it feels like to work there. They discuss the impact that low wages and sexual abuse have had on their sense of self-worth. As they discuss their lived realities, they are able to formulate the demands of employers based on those material and affective conditions. Through these consciousness-raising sessions, they are able to ensure that no one is left behind on their own and that every person's needs are considered. This process of coming to decisions together changes them individually and thus they are able to change their collective realities.

In *Sudesh* (1983), the women of the village have been observing the impact of the changing economy and the degradation of the natural world on their lives. They encounter activists who recruit them to participate in existing movements. These women are fed up with their conditions and are looking to change them, putting their bodies on the line. They are imprisoned and targeted by gangsters and cops alike. At the end of the film, while the movement was technically successful, the protagonists are left with a bitter taste after they are left out of the decision-making within the wider movement.

Both of these films awakened memories of being involved in leftist struggles in various parts of my life: the feeling of being high on victories resulting from working together and the crash when neglected fissures in those high moments became gaping holes. As I watch these films, my mind returns to the age-old question: What is to be done, now? A question that Luke was asked in the Bible. A question that Nikolai Chernyshevsky asked in a novel of the same name. A question that Lenin asked in several forms. A question that has followed me throughout my life. A spiritual question. A political question. An existential question. A question born of despair. A question that can only be answered in unison, in solidarity, in honesty. A question that will always need to be asked with an answer that will always need to be revised.

Indu Vashist is currently the Executive Director of SAVAC. She is interested in art that is not precious and words that are precise. She is also a yoga teacher and Somatics Educator.