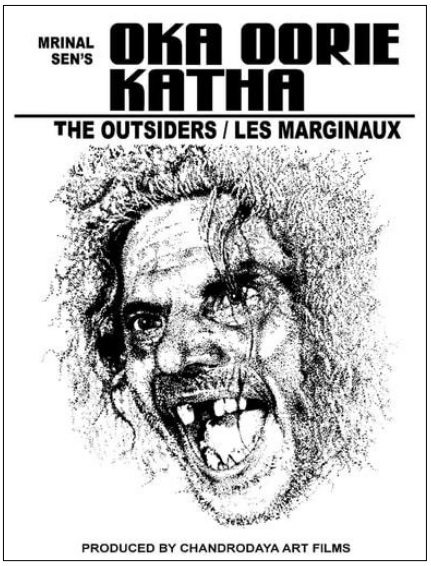
HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Anwesha Maity, PhD.

THE OUTSIDERS */ Oka Oori Katha* (1977)

Mrinal Sen

Telugu language

Film link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUoY9ZOBfec



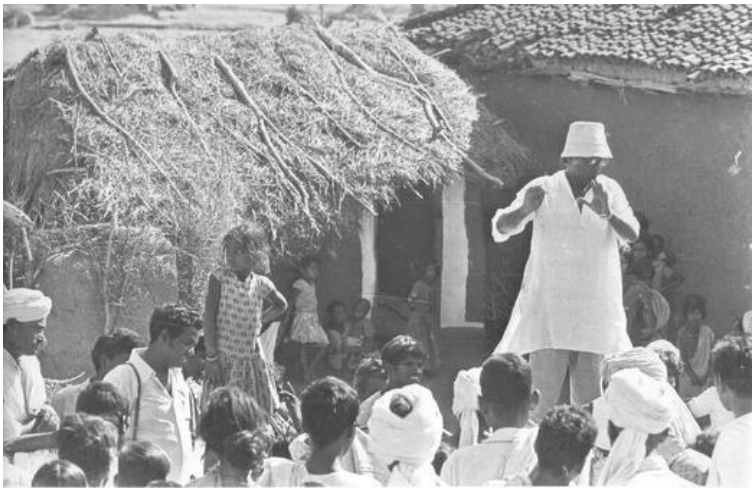


OVERVIEW

Director Mrinal Sen made his first feature film in 1953 but was slow to come into success as his first few films didn't fare well at the box office. Eventually, he tasted both success and controversy with *Baishey Sravan* (*Wedding Day*, 1960) and *Aakash Kusum* (*Up in the Clouds*, 1965). Soon after, *Mr. Bhuvan Shome* (1969), a landmark film, radically altered new cinema and art-house cinema in India. Many critics consider the hard-hitting *The Outsiders* his best film in the post-*Mr. Bhuvan Shome* decade. Other films such as *Mrigayaa* (*The Royal Hunt,*1976) and *Aakaler Sandhane* (*In Search of Famine*, 1980) still retain their impact. He won awards at all the major international film festivals, including Cannes, Venice and Berlin. His films usually have a signature shock treatment style that is both cerebral and hard-hitting, coupled with technical jugglery and gimmicks. He was both loved and hated for his uncompromising political stance and critique of the contemporary communist government in West Bengal. Along with Satyajit Ray and Ritwick Ghatak, Sen is considered one of the trio of great Indian filmmakers both domestically and internationally.

Film Sen adapted the script from Munshi Premchand's last and most brutal Hindi masterpiece of a short story, "*Kafan*" ("Shroud", 1936). The Telugu title, which literally means "A Village Story", seems to suggest that the events are not atypical of a rural setting. The film was financed by Parandhana Reddy, with the stipulation that it be in Telugu; hence Sen had to move the location from the Hindi heartland of Premchand's story to Telangana in the south. He made other changes to plot as well— the film covers almost a year where the story takes place overnight; and in the climactic closing scene, Venkaikh is not clearly intoxicated with alcohol. A more striking change is ideological, with a much more heavy-handed proclamation of labour rights and opposition towards feudal oppression. The emotive landscape, too, is much altered. In the story, it is hard to understand, let alone sympathize with Ghisu's motivations— indeed, the psychology of a dirt-poor, thieving, alcoholic, uncaring villager is an unfathomable abyss to middle-class sensitivities. In that respect, Premchand is perhaps closer to reality. In contrast, the film makes Venkaikh's thoughts and actions much more palatable to a middle-class audience. We can even find some shreds of empathy for him as a victim of his circumstances and even if we don't agree, the logic of his words and actions are not a black box.

Although it wasn't much of a success at home given the grim topic, *The Outsiders* won a National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Telugu (1977). It was also appreciated in a major way at Cannes and London and bagged a number of international awards, including the Special Jury Award at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival and a Special Award at the Carthage Film Festival.







LIST OF CHARACTERS

Venkaikh	A disgruntled old villager
Kistaiah	Venkaikh's son
Nilamma	Kistaiah's wife

SYNOPSIS

Venkaikh and Kistaiah are a good-for-nothing father and son who live in an impoverished village in the Telangana region of south-eastern India. They often starve as working is too much trouble and opportunities to steal and sell the stolen goods are few and far between. But hunger sometimes forces them to take on hard work for the landlord. When they try to laze off during work, they are reprimanded and Kistaiah's wages are cut. Venkaikh is particularly loud about how the landlord is cheating them and believes that hard work is for fools. One day, Kistaiah meets a young woman from a neighbouring village, Nilamma, and then marries her against Venkaikh's wishes, even going to far as to separate their living quarters. Initially, they get along, but soon Nilamma is irked by both father and son's laziness. She gets pregnant and, despite well-meaning advice from other village women, has to continue to perform hard manual labour to feed herself and her uncaring family. They grow further estranged and it almost comes to blows between Nilamma and Venkaikh. One day finally, she collapses from overwork and pregnancy complications while Venkaikh and Kistaiah are away stealing potatoes. Their neighbours advise Venkaikh to call the midwife, but he sends them away and instead tells Kistaiah to wait and watch as it will be all right. And they have no money to pay the midwife so she wouldn't come in any case. Nilamma dies. The next morning, they go begging for alms to burn her in a new sari. The landlord generously donates a few coins and other rich villagers follow suit. With the warmth of the handful of coins, Venkaikh feels "intoxicated". He wishes that he had a better life and that he could "give life to our dead child" (his daughter-in-law and possibly his own eight dead children), while the image of Nilamma's dead face buzzing with flies burns up.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Venkaikh

Venkaikh, the "outsider" protagonist of the film, is a disgruntled villager with little respect for social norms. He and his son Kistaiah have a terrible reputation in the village for being drunkards and thieves. While it is easy to peg him as a villain and the direct cause of Nilamma's death, he is a complex character with contradictory sides and shades of grey.

*Indolent*Venkaikh is indolent to the core (except in carnal matters, which is not shown).He would rather drink his money away than save it, rather steal than work hard to earn his keep and rather have his family members die than beg and borrow to save their lives. However, unlike Kistaiah, his indolence stems from a moral/ philosophical realization that his circumstances make everything he does futile. By refusing to work, and by begging and stealing, he not only mounts his protest but goes against existing social norms.

Angry He is completely disenchanted with the realities of village life and the constant cycle of oppression. He is quick to express his anger towards the cheating landlord and his henchmen, especially when drunk; he even invents the chant, "We slogging idiots work our flesh and bones rotten/ The cheating landlord eats our share and fattens".

Snivelling Simultaneously, he does not hesitate to fall at the landlord's feet, beg for mercy and try to worm his way out of tough situations by flattering the landlord, as we see when father and son shirk work. But this isn't always successful; once the landlord realizes that Venkaikh had been singing disrespectful chants about him while drunk, he has Venkaikh beaten up.

Sensitive We see his sensitivity in a few rare instances, adding another layer of complexity to his character. We sometimes see his looks of pity and consternation towards Nilamma's woes and he even voluntarily takes on hard manual labour by carrying sacks of grain for her sake. But given his estranged nature, his anger and callousness win over. After her death, he sighs at the baby quilt she was sewing and is regretful, but it is too late.

Callous Again, we see his callousness particularly when it comes to the women in his life— Nilamma and his own long-dead wife. When Nilamma chastises them for lazing around, they almost come to blows when he picks up a stick to hit her. And he is so embittered by the loss of his eight offspring—

taking the trip “from home to burial ground and burial ground to home” over and over and over— that he is completely desensitized to Nilamma’s pregnancy complications and refuses to call the midwife.

Nilamma

Nilamma is a young woman from a neighbouring village who catches Kistaiah’s eye one day and marries him against Venkaikh’s wishes. Although initially she gets along fairly well with both husband and father-in-law, her pregnancy estranges the men and finally she dies of neglect during childbirth complications.

Hard-working This is her defining trait and source of her problems with her marital family. From the very first scene to almost the very last, Nilamma incessantly performs hard labour—carrying on her head baskets of soil or cow dung cakes for sale, grinding grain, fetching water from the well and so on. She believes that one can have a good life as a reward for hard work, which utterly contradicts Venkaikh’s philosophy.

Dissatisfied The first days of her marriage were reasonably content, with Kistaiah bringing her treats and playfully draping himself in her sari. But after she gets pregnant, she soon grows dissatisfied of a lifestyle where she gets nothing back from her husband and father-in-law even after working hard to feed them throughout her pregnancy. She mostly suffers in silence but sometimes can’t help but get into arguments with them.

Neglected No kind words or special attention comes her way from her marital family— only neglect— and she has no way to escape from the situation. Despite her financial independence, she is still chained to patriarchal expectations whereby her husband is supposed to care and provide for her, especially during a crucial time like her pregnancy, as she complains a few times. But she continues to swallow neglect day after day, until one day she collapses and then dies.

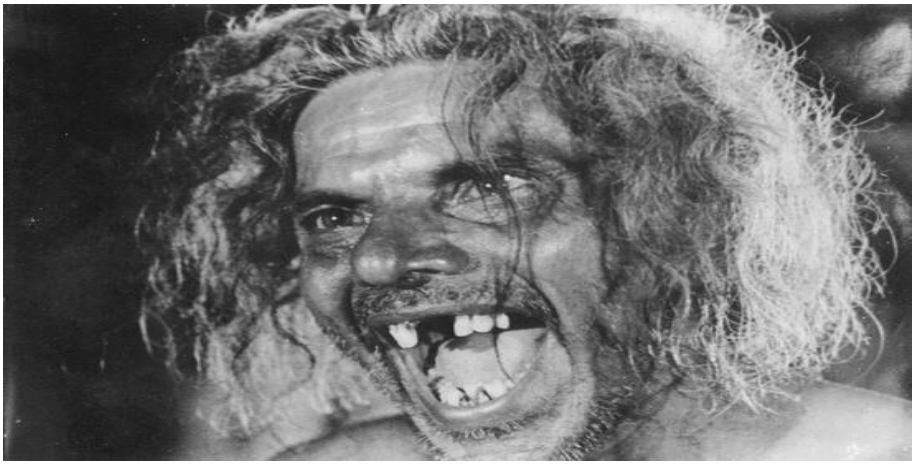
Kistaiah

Kistaiah is Venkaiah’s mild-mannered, opportunistic son, who has inherited all his bad habits but none of the morals. Although he is initially caring towards his wife and separates their living quarters from his father’s, he ends up neglecting her during her pregnancy, which leads to her death.

Opportunistic Whereas Venkaikh steals to sabotage the rich villagers and fill his belly, Kistaiah steals for pleasure or fun and easily gets caught, whether it be while shirking work to smoke or when he steals mangoes from a rich villager’s tree. Kistaiah’s defiance has no strong roots in right or wrong; he only knows the easy path.

Spineless Caught between two strong-willed personalities, his father and his wife, Kistaiah often finds himself at a loss and ends up going along with the more familiar option, his father. Only once does he stand up to protect Nilamma from Venkaikh— when the latter picks up a stick to hit her.

Uncaring The “honeymoon period” in their marriage passes too quickly, almost as soon as Nilamma gets pregnant and he begins to show less and less concern and affection towards her. He casually calls her a “bitch” when she asks him to run errands and leaves her alone in the hut to die while he sleeps peacefully outside, following Venkaikh’s advice to do nothing. Even after her death, he doesn’t touch or examine her body, running to Venkaikh to confirm that she isn't breathing.



THEMES

Society- Poverty The first thing any viewer notices is the utter poverty the villagers live in. Sen characteristically depicts poverty sans melodrama, in a historically accurate, matter-of-fact way. To be fair, most villagers have some meagre possessions and work and are able to afford one or two poor meals each day. The situation is more stable than, for instance, the abject poverty and suffering faced by the rural class during famine, as shown in Sen's other films. But the dilapidated, tiny mud houses, the unpaved, dusty streets, the faded, torn and scant clothing and no recourse except the landlord's "mercy" all point to a very low standard of living. And after backbreaking labour every day, most seek solace in drink and spout empty revolutionary sentiments. Only Venkaikh is brave, angry and estranged enough to put them into words. Indeed, as he repeats over and over— the villagers will always remain poor, regardless of how hard they work, because the landlord will continue to suck them dry. His grandfather's lands and father's house have all been taken, he says, and all that's left is the loincloth on his body. And they can take that, too!

Politics – oppression The Telangana region where Sen transplanted Premchand's story had a long history of oppression by the local Muslim landowners (*zamindar*s), and stories of oppression similar to the one in the film were commonplace. Indeed, that the *zamindar* is the highest authority for the villagers in every sphere of life is seen throughout the film. He orders, quite arbitrarily, a middleman to "crush the buggers underfoot" if they refuse to work; to reduce wages to half; to drag away a big goat from a hapless village woman; to dispense advice, verbal abuses and beatings to Venkaikh and his son as the situation dictates. This oppression is often enforced violently by several henchmen armed with sturdy sticks and no one in the village dares to contradict them. Of course, oppression must be sweetened sometimes lest it lead to village-wide rebellion, and the landlord knows this tactic well. Venkaikh reminisces about a feast twenty years ago where the food was heavenly and everyone ate so much that they couldn't move. The landlord generously gives gifts when his bullock cart wins the race and alms when the father-son duo go begging for alms to cremate Nilamma, setting an example for all the other rich villagers to follow.

Work Venkaikh and Kistaiah are an aberration in the village. They have made starving into an art form and would rather starve and steal than work to fill the landlord's coffers. Indeed, most of the income we see them making in the film is from stolen goods, not hard work. Venkaikh's philosophy in the matter is well articulated, especially when he's drunk; and Kistaiah follows his father unquestioningly. His gems include the caustic song Venkaikh made up: "We slogging idiots work our flesh and bones rotten/ The cheating landlord eats our share and fattens". Another is: "All hard-working people are fools". And also: "Once into the quicksand of work you're sucked to death". Only in one instance does he deviate from his conviction and work hard for Nilamma, but that doesn't stick. We also see group action in a single instance, when the villagers decide *en masse* that they will not work for half wages. But the consequences of this are not clear, as soon after they are shown working in the fields and digging soil again. It would be easy to categorize this anti-work philosophy as sloth or indolence, but in this feudal/ pre-capitalist context, it is a radical, if not revolutionary, stance to take.

Helplessness Thus, the unholy nexus of poverty- oppression-work continues in a toxic cycle that will not be broken for many years to come. As expected, this leads to a general atmosphere of helplessness, more so in some cases than others. While the landlord's oppression continues, we see the hapless villagers looking on without protest in many instances. But the most poignant moments are framed around Nilamma's pregnancy. When she collapses from overwork, Venkaikh sends the well-meaning villagers away and refuses to call the midwife as it will be futile— the "bitch will not come without money" and they have none. He sat by helpless through his own wife's nine childbirths and now teaches Kistaiah to do the same. To be fair, a less estranged/ disaffected person would have surely have begged, borrowed and done everything possible for the midwife to come and help, promising to pay later. But all Venkaikh can do, after gathering alms for the funeral, is to get "intoxicated" by the "warmth of the coins". He then throws out his wishes into the world, in one of the most hard-hitting moments in Indian cinema: "Give life to our dead child"— indicating not just Nilamma but also his other dead children—just before the image of Nilamma's dead face buzzing with flies burns up.

Selfishness Practically every character in the film is selfish and concerned only for their own comfort or welfare. Venkaikh leads the list with his utter detachment from every social norm; his behaviour towards his family members is usually as harsh as towards outsiders. For example, the opening scene shows how he would rather have his own son starve than work; later, after putting in a single day's effort, he decides selfishly to ignore Nilamma's health throughout her pregnancy.

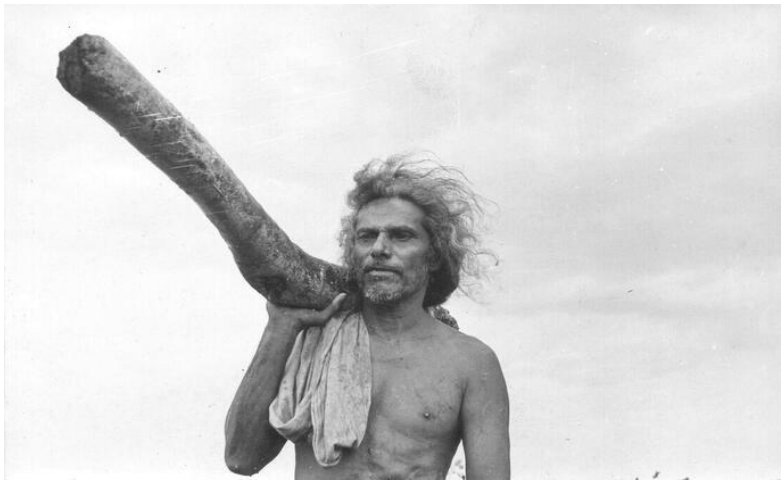
Kistaiah, similarly, always chooses the easy way out—be it by stealing or ignoring Nilamma's desires and comfort. Their joint selfish decision not to beg at the midwife's feet to help Nilamma though her difficult labour and childbirth—though they have no problem begging in general—ultimately leads to her death. The landlord and other moneyed villagers are also similarly selfish and oppressive. Examples are the owner of the mango orchard who punishes Kistaiah for stealing a few mangoes and the landlord's henchmen who drag away a woman's big goat without paying for it. The one notable exception is a woman who often enquires about Nilamma's health and carries Nilamma's message that she is well to her mother; perhaps they hailed from the same village. She is also the only person who cries after Nilamma's death.

Gender violence For the pan-Indian lower and lower- middle class, the women of the family working themselves to (often literal) death in order to feed their lazy/ drunkard/ abusive fathers, husbands and sons is not at all uncommon even today. Nilamma finds herself in this situation with no recourse. She has no father and her mother is a burden on her uncle. She cannot even consider returning to her natal home after the neglect she faces from both husband and father-in-law. Kistaiah once casually calls her a "bitch", not to mention the many heated interactions with Venkaikh. To feed herself and her family, she has to continue doing hard manual labour even when heavily pregnant, despite warnings from the other well-meaning villagers. One of the most striking instances occur when she is gulping down rice by the handful though distressed by Venkaikh's abuses. Suddenly, she can take no more and shouts "I HAVE TO EAT"!! While that does subdue Venkaikh's ire for a while, ultimately both father and son's callousness is responsible for her preventable death from pregnancy complications. Death from pregnancy complications and lack of medical care is also, sadly, too common in this context.

Parenthood Venkaikh sets a strong, if misguided example for Kistaiah to follow in all spheres of life, from work to family. Early in the film, we see the father-son duo slacking off from work; Venkaikh cleverly hides himself, but Kistaiah gets caught by the landlord for carelessly leaving his basket right on the path. Venkaikh then teaches him to beg and plead at the landlord's feet so that wages aren't cut in half, but that's to no avail. They love spending their nights drinking and brawling at the tavern, then singing crude songs and hurling abuses at the landlord and other rich villagers. They make plans and steal from orchards and fields together; when caught, they are also reprimanded together by the landlord and village elders. They indeed have a terrible reputation in the village! Their only point of contention is Nilamma, who, for a while, disrupts the father-son camaraderie; but not for long—Kistaiah begins to avoid her once she gets pregnant. And as she single-handedly takes on the responsibility of feeding the family, father and son start slacking off, playing games, drinking and thieving again. Venkaikh himself neglected his wife and instils that behaviour in Kistaiah as well, so much so that the son calmly falls asleep and stays asleep, ignoring Nilamma's groans of pain all night until she dies. As such, Kistaiah is not only Venkaikh's biological son, but his spiritual heir as well.

Marriage Sen again shows a dysfunctional marriage in this film (similar to that in his *Wedding Day).* In fact, (like Malati in that earlier film) if Nilamma had a father or a guardian more concerned about her well-being than getting rid of a burden that is a girl of marriageable age, they would never have fixed a match with a groom like Kistaiah, given his terrible reputation. Moreover, the relationship between Nilamma and Kistaiah begins with sexual attraction—gifting and eating a mango together is a prime example. This is often the case in rural settings, but the marriage fails to develop into something true and lasting. Meddling in-laws are quite the norm in the context, but many a marriage has surely survived that. As such, Venkaikh's mere presence wouldn't be so disruptive had Kistaiah been less easily influenced by him. Further, once his sexual desires are satisfied and Nilamma gets pregnant, he has no idea how exactly to interact with her, given also her constant, if justified, nagging about working for pay instead of lazing and thieving. If Venkaikh had not been part of the household, Kistaiah would have been more easily influenced by Nilamma's hard-working, straightforward nature and maybe even transitioned into more of an upstanding person in the village. Unfortunately for the marriage, Venkaikh outlived Nilamma.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) What do you think of Venkaikh's and Kistaiah's approaches towards work? Are they the same or different? Do you agree with both/either of these approaches? Discuss with two examples.

2) Discuss the nexus of poverty, oppression and work that we see in the film. Does the film hint at any possible solution to break out of this cycle?

3) Analyse gender roles and gender violence in this film with two examples.

4) Was Nilamma's death preventable? Discuss.

5) Why do you think Sen refrains from using his signature "gimmicky" cinematic techniques in this film?

SCENES

Opening Scene One of two men, sleeping on the bare floor in a hut, is awakened by a crowing rooster. He walks outside and relives himself behind a rock, then wakes up the other man, his son. They talk about not doing any work that day. The father, Venkaikh, chastises the son, Kistaiah, for being a “greedy bugger” and asking for food all the time instead of starving as they did the day before. While Venkaikh lies down and falls back asleep, Kistaiah sweeps the floor.

Opening Credits On a black background with the father-son duo scrambling to pick up leaves from the ground, the name of the film in Telugu, with the caption, “A Village Story”, appears, along with credits set to past-paced percussion music.

Shirking work Male labourers are digging up soil, singing a folk-devotional tune, while the women help carry the soil in baskets. The landlord, walking by, orders a middleman to “crush the buggers underfoot” if they refuse to work. He trips on a basket. They find Kistaiah hiding and smoking and yell at him for shirking work.





During work Emerging later, Venkaikh tells Kistaiah to be more careful in hiding the basket so as to not be found easily. Father and son, transporting the soil, talk about the landlord’s surprise visit, that the “fox should die” and that Kistaiah should pretend to beg for mercy by falling at the landlord’s feet to stop him from cutting wages. All the labourers get paid at the end of the workday. But Kistaiah only receives half wages despite falling at the landlord’s feet.

“All hard-working people are fools” At night, at a toddy shop, they get drunk and sing songs. “All hard-working people are fools”, working themselves into their graves, while the landlord fattens himself, says Venkaikh, adding that the other half of Kistaiah’s wages were stolen by the cheat landlord. The other villagers may all agree now, he suggests, but when hunger strikes, they will be right back to their back-breaking toil. They stumble to the landlord’s house chanting a slogan and are chased away.

Heavy rains In the morning, the landlord and his minions find them sleeping on a field. They run away, laughing. Later, there are heavy rains and the hut leaks, soaking father and son. Venkaikh predicts that all the rich villagers' stores and homes will be flooded and they will need their services. True enough, an underling comes to ask for help, but Venkaikh chases him away, as he had begun repairing their own hut. But that roof is rotten beyond repair. Venkaikh has an idea to chop up and sell stolen firewood. They sell the firewood at the market.





Remembering a wedding feast At night, while cooking a meagre meal, Venkaikh reminisces about the feast they had at the landlord's daughter's wedding years ago, the year when his own wife died. Kistaiah complains no one feeds them that well any more. Venkaikh says that the rich continue to loot and cheat the villagers regardless.

"Men become animals to scare away the animals" They hear loud banging sounds to scare away animals that come to raid ripe crops. Venkaikh says, "Men become animals to scare away the animals". Both of them start yelling in unison just for the fun of it.

Nilamma Kistaiah steals mangoes from an orchard; a naked boy sees him. Later, he and many villagers admiringly watch a wedding procession pass, with the bride and groom on a beautiful palanquin. We see Nilamma for the first time. She is also admiring the procession. Kistaiah follows Nilamma, gifts her a mango and strikes up a conversation with her.

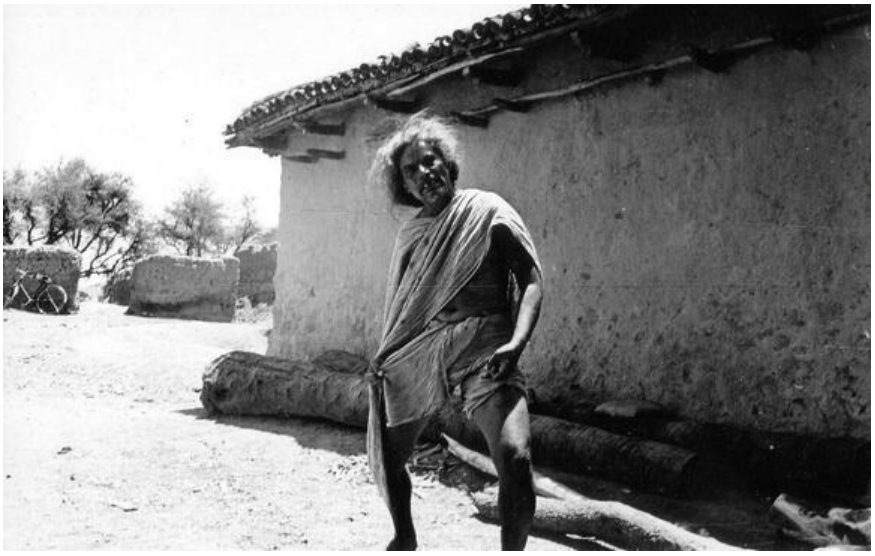




Mango thief

As he walks near the mango orchard, the naked boy tells his father, the orchard caretaker, that Kistaiah was the mango thief. The caretaker chases Kistaiah, hurling abuse at him. Nilamma misleads the owner and saves Kistaiah. The landlord reprimands Venkaikh for father and son being thieves and drunks and advises him to work hard. Other underlings say that they're incorrigible and shameless. Venkaikh remains silent.

Oppression The landlord’s minions drag away a village woman’s goat as a gift for the landlord's guest. Some villagers look on, while others commiserate and accept their fate. Venkaikh, seeing this, says that his grandfather's lands and father’s house were all taken— all that’s left is his loincloth. They can take that too.



Marriage on the cards At night, father and son eat the stolen sour mangoes and talk about Nilamma. The next morning, Kistaiah says that he wants to marry her; Venkaikh is dead set against it. They argue. Kistaiah angrily starts to repair the hut while Venkaikh gives him directions. Later, Kistaiah builds a separate roof outside for his father as there’ll be a woman in the hut soon. Venkaikh advises Kistaiah to beware of the “quicksand of work” after marriage.





Wedding The landlord drops by with some advice that Kistaiah should marry and that Venkaikh, being old, should think of God. Father and son visit Nilamma's home. The marriage is fixed. Nilamma's mother praises the prospective match. The simple wedding is quickly celebrated and Nilamma walks to her in-laws' house.





Happy days after marriage While Kistaiah and Nilamma laugh and chat, Venkaikh, unable to sleep outside with the noise, is annoyed. Nilamma promises to make a new man of her husband; Venkaikh starts shouting from outside, frightening Nilamma. When she goes to bring water the next morning, village women admire the new bride and ask a lot of questions. On her return, she playfully chases Kistaiah who is pretending to steal her sari by draping it around himself. A few elderly villagers see them and titter approvingly.

Venkaikh works hard Venkaikh has brought rice, which Nilamma cooks for them. He complains to Kistaiah that he has never worked so hard even for his own family; he carried heavy sacks for this strange girl at the landlord's warehouse all day. But he won't do it again. They eat.





More harassment from the landlord for stolen palm fronds Kistaiah has stolen some palm fronds to make a fence; one of the landlord's underlings comes to take the fronds back and then verbally abuses father and son. The underling says that he will make them repent and they'll die of starvation. After they leave, Venkaikh, silently gulping down his rice until then, says that's the normal course of things and no one is spared. Nilamma looks on, frightened.

A feast The landlord promises a big feast in honour of new temple gods. Venkaikh sees many food items, like rice, chickens, bananas, watermelons etc., being delivered and says, “Landlord gains God’s blessings at poor people’s cost! Die bastards, die!” A group of local singers arrive for the festive occasion and the villagers are very excited.





Nilamma gets pregnant Kistaiah brings home some snacks for Nilamma. After teasing him for a while, she whispers something in his ear. A villager woman advises Nilamma to be careful as it’s her first pregnancy. The woman is unhappy that the men laze around while Nilamma works, despite her condition. At home, the men play a board game and ignore her while she does chores. When she asks them to go to the market, Venkaikh eventually stops the game and tells his son to go to the market while Kistaiah calls her “bitch”. They both leave.

The landlord always wins The villagers gather to watch a bullock cart race. The landlord’s cart wins as expected and is led in a long procession though the village. Venkaikh and Kistaiah sarcastically shout praises. The villagers’ seasonal work continues: digging up soil, planting and harvesting crops.





Nilamma's woes Nilamma also continues to do a lot of work and chores despite feeling unwell. Her many tasks are shown in a continuous scrolling shot while a lullaby plays in the background and she works alone. Venkaikh shouts at her for not doing any chores like cooking and lighting the lamp one evening. Nilamma finally tells him that she is too exhausted to work anymore. He seems to understand but also gets angry and shouts at her again.






Argument Venkaikh leaves the house and Kistaiah follows him, entreating his father to not be angry at Nilamma and to return. Venkaikh returns but shouts at her again for eating. She screams that she has to eat and live for the child's sake. Nilamma continues to do manual labour day after day. She is now heavily pregnant.





Venkaikh beaten up The landlord hears a drunken Venkaikh shout the disrespectful chant about cheating landlords and has him thoroughly beaten up. At home, Nilamma chastises them for not working and has another argument with Venkaikh. When he tries to hit her with a stick, Kistaiah finally intervenes and stops him. Nilamma cries and sobs.





Days go on The villagers stop harvesting work over half-pay and outsiders coming to steal their jobs. Venkaikh is pleased. Nilamma continues work, carrying heavy baskets and water pots and bending forward to grind grain. She falls.





Thievery Elsewhere, Venkaikh and Kistaiah plan and then steal some potatoes at night, in front of Sen's signature black screen. But they are soon chased by dogs and banging drums and run for their lives.





Venkaikh's callousness, helplessness and guilt They hear Nilamma screaming in pain. But there is a crowd around the house and they throw away the stolen potatoes. The villagers reprimand them for leaving Nilamma alone and ask Venkaikh repeatedly to call the midwife. Venkaikh says that the midwife won't come without money and they have none. Venkaikh tells his son to sit by helplessly as he himself had done. His wife went through nine births, some stillborn and some alive, but all the other infants except Kistaiah soon died. He tells Kistaiah that Nilamma will survive the night and goes to sleep, despite Nilamma's cries of pain.





Nilamma dies The next morning, everything is *too* quiet as Kistaiah wakes up. Nilamma is dead, along with the unborn child. The villagers gather at their hut once more. The villager woman who was fond of Nilamma cries. Venkaikh sighs at the baby quilt Nilamma was sewing, then tells Kistaiah that the corpse will putrefy. They need a new sari and firewood to cremate her. While alive, they could not give her a new sari, but they must get one for her cremation.





Begging for money They go to the landlord and other villagers to beg and raise the money for Nilamma's cremation, as her dead face with flies on it is shown several times. Their palms quickly fill up with coins. Venkaikh says he is "intoxicated" by the money and if he had a handful of coins every morning, all his wishes would magically come true. He names some of his wishes, like sacks of rice, a nice house and "give life to our dead child".





Closing scene We see an image of Nilamma's face burning, followed by closing credits

