



Uttara

The Wrestlers

Buddhadeb Dasgupta

INDIA, 2000

97 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
 Production Company: **Buddhadeb Dasgupta Productions**
 Executive Producer: **Dulal Roy**
 Producer: **Buddhadeb Dasgupta**
 Screenplay: **Buddhadeb Dasgupta**, developed from a short story by **Samaresh Rose**
 Cinematographer: **Asim Bose**
 Editor: **Rabi Ranjan Maitra**
 Production Designer: **Ashok Bose**
 Sound: **Anup Mukhopaphyay**
 Music: **Biswadeb Dasgupta**
 Principal Cast: **Jaya Seal, Tapas Pal, Shankar Chakraborty, R.I. Asad**

Print Source/Foreign Sales Agent:
Buddhadeb Dasgupta, 32-1F Gariahat Rd. South, Flat 3A, Calcutta 700031, India. T (91-33) 473-5545 F (91-33) 473-5545 E bddgupta@cal2.vsnl.net.in

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A clarion call for tolerance and understanding even in the face of personal disappointment and hardship, *The Wrestlers* is a major new film from India by one of its cinematic masters.

Near an isolated rail crossing in rural Bengal, the two men entrusted with its operation, Balam and Nimai, enjoy a close and loving friendship. They pass the time endlessly pursuing their passion for traditional wrestling. Nearby, a pastor and his adopted son Matthew perform works of charity for the destitute local Christians he has converted. The local people are poor but happy.

Balam is called away to his native village by his dying mother and is married off to a lovely innocent girl named Uttara. When he brings her back with him, her presence drives a wedge between the two men and their wrestling turns more violent. The situation is terrible for Uttara, yet she becomes popular in the village for her friendly demeanour. Meanwhile, Hindu fundamentalists swoop into the village, turning the poor against the pastor. (Such activities have dramatically increased recently in India). With the wrestlers lost in their own world on the hill, the only person who comes to his rescue when his church is set ablaze – with him inside – is Uttara.

Within these interlocking stories of serenity shattered by ignorant hatred, Dasgupta frames the action with two Greek

choruses, who wander through the film commenting on and participating in the action. One group of workers from a local dwarf community roams through the action, informing Uttara that their condition makes them more sensitive to those who thrive on intolerance. Another group – an itinerant band of traditional masked dancers – are a shadowy presence throughout the film, and ultimately prove to be the only compassionate heroes left.

Dasgupta's characteristically spectacular cinematography and lovely performances, especially by Jaya Seal as Uttara, ensure that this tragic, beautifully made film is both politically urgent and a lasting cinematic experience.

■ **Noah Cowan**



Buddhadeb Dasgupta is a renowned Bengali poet and novelist whose work has been translated throughout the world. Selected filmography: *Distance* (78), *Bitter Morsel* (79), *Crossroads* (82), *Season's Memoir* (82), *Blind Alley* (84), *The Return* (86), *The Tiger Man* (89), *Their Story* (92), *The Shelter of the Wings* (93), *The Red Doors* (96) and *The Wrestlers* (00).

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