

Char – the island within

A film by Sourav Sarangi

produced by Son et Lumiere (India) , Stefilm (Italy), Final Cut for Real (Denmark)



THE FILM

Meet **Rubel**, a 15 year old boy who lives on an island in the river Ganga, which runs as the border between India and Bangladesh. He says: "People must move as the river moves". The river eroded his home, in fact the entire village, school, green-fields and the large banyan tree where they used to play.

Some years later Rubel's family shifted to a tiny and fragile island called Char. The river goddess created this island for her homeless sons and daughters with the soil she took away. That is local knowledge, and the reason they consider this island their own. But the authorities consider Char a part of the no-man's land zone between India and Bangladesh. So the main land on both sides is guarded by armed border police. The people living on Char are checked every time they venture off their island and enter the mainland. Their ID status is in doubt and no nation considers their welfare its responsibility.

Rubel smuggles rice from India to Bangladesh to survive and to support his family. His family consists of his parents, a younger brother and a sister, lame from polio. His father is old and has been sick for a while. Rubel dreams of a better life and in utter desperation he jumps on a train bound for Kerala in southern India, more than 2000 km. away from Char. His plan is to earn money for his father's operation and his sister's marriage. The trip ends in failure. There is no job and he has to return to Char.



Rubel, 15 years old

Meet **Sofikul**. He used to be Rubel's neighbor in the old village on the mainland. He is 10 years old. His father has been shot dead while smuggling cows into Bangladesh.

Sofikul loves to run. Now he runs across the border with sacks of rice - sometimes in daytime and sometimes at night.



Sofikul at home

Often the guards don't care, or just take a little bribe. But sometimes they make a search, mainly looking for cough medicine, hidden in sacks of rice and smuggled across the border because of its content of alcohol. While Sofikul runs with a sack full of rice his mother awaits at home, sleepless in the night. Sounds of bullets are not rare here.

The families are scattered, but the kids meet on their endless journeys crossing the border. Their little feet defy fatigue. Despair hardly touches their smiles.

In summer the wind blows strong in this changing landscape, the clouds roll. The river swells up in Monsoon. Fenced by the river the landless nomads try to bring back their settled



Rubel exchanges currency for Sofikul

lives. They build their huts, sow seeds, clear the dense grass and they even set up diesel pumps to irrigate the parched earth. Tea-shops are crowded in the night, with television sets that run on discarded car batteries.

In the distance stands the colossal barrage built by India in great socialist spirit to better peoples' lives and to stop all of the water from running into Bangladesh. The grand plan did not help



The Farakka Barrage

Rubel, Sofikul and their families. Their lives are defined by the unintended consequences of this huge wall of concrete.

Sofikul is happy about the smuggling job. He earns money and can buy small things in the market for himself and contributes to the family income. He is not missing school, especially not the homework! Sofikul's grandfather is old, and when he dies his land on Char will be divided amongst Sofi's three uncles. That is Islamic law. The property gets divided amongst the living sons. However, the grandfather does have a choice. He can decide that Sofikul should also get a share, and if he declares that, it will be respected. This land could change Sofikul's life, if it is not taken away by the river.

Rubel has a dream. He wants to join a school on the mainland, where cars move on gas and electric lamps burn brighter than the kerosene lights on Char. He tries to combine school during the day and smuggling during the night. Seeing the world has made Rubel realize that education is his only chance. However, the demands at home build up. His sister is found with a local boy, and the village and family pressure the two youngsters into marriage. The young man runs off after the wedding. Rubel's family takes the young man to court in order to make him honor his family obligations and it is Rubel's responsibility to raise the money for the dowry. He has to come to terms with the fact that, as he says, "education is not for me".

We travel with Rubel to the cracking edge of the island. Will Char erode too?



Another piece of Char disappears into the river

DIRECTOR'S INTENTION

Many moons ago the earth was dry with human ashes. A man prayed for water. The deluge descended from heaven to be called river Ganga, daughter of the mountains. In trust with man ever since!

Many years later other men made the river act as the international border between India and Bangladesh. Ganga obliged. Now the border cannot be moved, but the river moves and tells this story.

The earth cracks. Grass roots, bare now, cling together in vain; gaps widen, small insects and ants run wild on both sides of the darkening crevice. Time passes. Grains of soil give up. The wind falls silent. And it falls.

Winter mist. A boat floats. A white crane patiently waits for the prey. A military check-post stands in guard.

Both man and nature are related in this zone. Myth and modernity operate together in fragility. The kids living on this forbidden land troubled me. Their bright and smiling eyes reminded me of my childhood, but I also saw that they were facing much more serious issues of survival and identity than I ever have had to face.



Sofikul at work – smuggling in the night

VISUAL STYLE

Almost in silence Rubel appears on the edge of the water. A shrill whistle makes the boy disappear amidst shrubs with a sack of rice. We are in a zone, the border between two countries. We are with Rubel again, he has a bicycle to carry the sacks to cross over. There are other islanders who carefully march on in the dark.

Suddenly we are stopped by a group of Indian villagers. They are equipped with weapons. We must turn back as there is a fight with Bangladeshi's across the border.

We follow Rubel who boards a train to get away from the uncertainties of living in Char. He tries to find a job two thousand kilometers away from

home and we follow his journey in uncertain lands.

The monsoon arrives. Dark clouds spread across the sky like an orchestra symphony. Lightning strikes the yellow earth. The rain increases. The dam nearby must release excess water. The flood looms large.

PRODUCTION STATUS

"Char – the island within" is being directed and produced by Sourav Sarangi at Son et Lumiere, Kolkata (Calcutta), India. The co-producers are Stefano Tealdi from Stefilm in Torino, Italy and Signe Byrge Sørensen from Final Cut for Real ApS, Copenhagen, Denmark.

So far the film is being co-produced with NHK in Japan (commissioning editor Ryota Kotani). It has also received support from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark (Danida), The George Foundation in Switzerland and the film project has been awarded 5,000,000 KRW from the Asian Network Documentary (AND) Fund 2011, June 2011, and the best pitch prize of EUR 6000 from Arte - International Relations at Open Doors in Locarno, August 2011. RAI TRE in Italy (commissioning editor Lorenzo Hendel) has committed to the project.

See finance plan attached.

TIME SCHEDULE

We will continue to shoot until December 2011 and we will start the editing in January 2012, finishing in April 2012. The final post production will be done in Japan in May 2012 and we will be ready to deliver the film to the broadcasters and to festivals in late May 2012.

FACTS

Director/Producer:	Sourav Sarangi
Co-producers:	Stefano Tealdi & Signe Byrge Sørensen
Shooting format:	Mainly HD (Sony EX3), also night vision cameras, small HDV-cameras, underwater camera.
Delivery format:	HDCam SR
Versions:	100 min. (NHK and festivals) 52 min. (other broadcasters)
Budget:	EUR 257.000
Release:	May 2012

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Sourav Sarangi (India) has studied geology and has later studied film editing at the Film and Television Institute in India (FTII). He has worked for several private broadcasting networks in India as a programme director and now he primarily works with international co-productions, as an independent director and producer.

Sourav Sarangi normally dedicates long periods of time to observe and interact with his characters to transfer the inner reality to the cinematic format. He has a special eye for visual details and his work is characterized by minimalism, simplicity and poetry.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY:

2008 - Bilal

Golden Award Al Jazeera International Documentary Film Festival, 2009
Best Documentary (Horizons) DOK.FEST, Munich 2009
Best Documentary We Care Film Festival, India, 2009
Best Documentary IDSFFK, India, 2009
Best Documentary ZIFF, Zanzibar 2009
Silver Ace Las Vegas International Film Festival, 2009, Jury Special Award
Festival Internacional del Cine Pobre de Humberto Solás, Cuba 2009
Silver Palm Mexico International Film Festival, 2009
Special Screenings:
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, An exhibition of contemporary films from India, 2009 and OVNI Archives, Spain, 2009

2006 - Erosion

BFJA Award for Best Documentary Director, 2006
CMS Vatavaran, Delhi, (Best Documentary, 2007: Water for All); Madurai Water Film Festival, 2007 (Best Documentary)
Festival Screenings:
Kerala SIGNS, 2006
3-Screens Film Festival, New Delhi, 2006
Bodrum Film Festival, Turkey, 2006
SIEDS, Bangalore, 2007
Film South Asia, Nepal, 2007
Bollywood and Beyond, Stuttgart, Germany, 2007
Ekotofilm, Bratislava, Slovenia 2008



PRODUCTION

Co-producer Stefano Tealdi (Italy) has studied Architecture in Turin, and then went on to becoming head of production at Politecnico di Torino. In 1985 he co-founded Stefilm (IT). Since 1988 he has developed and produced one-off documentaries and documentary series, all international co-productions involving the main European and North-American broadcasters.

Co-producer Signe Byrge Sørensen (Denmark) has been a producer for 14 years, the last six with Final Cut, now Final Cut for Real. Her focus is on documentaries, and she has produced documentaries in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Senegal, Thailand and Argentina, besides Denmark and Sweden. She holds an MA in International Development Studies and Communication Studies from Roskilde University, Denmark.



PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Son et Lumiere (IN) is a reputed film and video production house located in Calcutta, India. It has several independent documentaries and television productions to its credit as well as an efficient technical infra-structure.

STEFILM (IT) - founded in 1985 by Elena Filippini, Edoardo Fracchia and Stefano Tealdi. STEFILM's priority aim is to produce high quality films and TV-programmes promoting talents and international projects which focus on strong human story-lines.

Final Cut For Real (DK) is an independent film production company, based in Copenhagen, Denmark, and founded in 1993 as Final Cut Productions. Today Final Cut for Real is primarily focused on creative documentaries. We care for filmmakers - and films with vision & artistic value.

CONTACT

Stefano Tealdi//Stefilm International s.r.l// Via B. Galliani 5B 10125 Torino // Italy
+39011 6680017 //www.stefilm.it// stefano@stefilm.it