



# NFB FILM

## STUDY GUIDE

### FIFTY MILES FROM POONA

*Black & White — 20 minutes*

*Produced by the National Film Board of Canada, 1959*

**Suggested Uses:** Social Studies classes in junior and senior high schools.  
Anthropology classes in university.

### SYNOPSIS

FIFTY MILES FROM POONA examines the religious, familial, traditional and working aspects which contribute to Hindu life in India, showing how integrated these have become and how difficult it would be to discuss one without the other. We are afforded an informative and intimate look at family living in an Indian village as we accompany a Hindu farmer and his family through a typical working day, following the young couple, Vishnu and Rukmini Shevale as they go about their respective duties.

### BACKGROUND TO THE FILM

The Shevale family have lived in the village of Phursangi for several generations. Most people in the village belong to the traditional warrior group known as Marathas who have for many ages been farmers.

The Shevales, better off than most Indians, own an average-sized farm consisting of six acres. The number of acres peasants may own varies from one to fifty. Crops are grown all year round.

#### Religion

To the Hindu, religion is a total way of life. The Hindu worships a plurality of gods and follows no formal creed. He regards certain rivers and pools as holy.

The mark on the mother's forehead is not a caste mark but is worn by all women, regardless of caste. The necklace she wears corresponds to the western wedding ring.

*Prajapati* — Master of created beings, father and protector of those who beget.

*Hanuman* — The Monkey god, patron of strength and loyalty, and a supreme being in the legendary history of the Hindu people.

*Namaskar* — A vague term, here signifying a prayer to the gods to have more such meals.

*Ganapati* — The household god, before whom a lamp is lit as an offering for a good day.

*Sindur* — A mark made by women at the parting of the hair, signifying that the woman is married and the husband living. (The "tika" mark referred to in the film is a similar marking.)

*Varuna* — The water god.

#### Clothing

*Sari* — Women's traditional dress, hung loosely from the shoulders.

*Dhoti* — Men's dress, worn tucked around the waist.





## CONCEPTS

The following are the main learning concepts presented in the film. These points should be clear before showing the film because by knowing them a more accurate judgment may be made of the extent to which the film will be of use in the class. Some of these concepts are more difficult than others and their degree of application will be governed by the grade level at which the film is used:

1. To the orthodox Hindu, each man is a member of some caste and each caste is part of the whole.
2. Religion influences all aspects of Hindu life.
3. Each day proceeds according to established custom.
4. Custom dictates family behavior and relationships.
5. Such common wear as the sari, the dhoti and the turban all perform unique functions.
6. Deep and unwavering devotion to the land is a prime characteristic of the Hindu farmer.

## SUGGESTED CLASS PREPARATION

### a) Introduction:

To gain as much as possible from this film it is suggested that it be utilized after the class has had some acquaintance with the main facets of Indian life — i.e. religion, climate, geography, etc.

Some discussion of Canadian family life prior to the showing would assist in comparing this aspect of the two cultures. Similarly, the part religion plays in Canadian society might be discussed, in order to form a basis for comparison. Students may be quite intrigued with the turban sequence and some could attempt to master this technique following the showing. Such Indian articles as saris, jewellery, etc. could be displayed around the classroom before the showing.

### b) Words Which May Cause Difficulty: (see also "Background to the Film")

dung	dhal	tika	Namaskar	Prajapati	Hanuman
kum-kum	fennel	monsoon	Marathas	Varuna	Rama
bullock	kajal	plantain	dhoti	Aarum	chappatis
wani-shop	sindur			sari	brinjal (vegetable)

(Note: Several of the above terms are defined within the film and thus have not been defined under "Background".)

### c) Directive Questions Raised in the Film:

1. What is the status (equality, rights, etc.) of Indian women in relation to men?
2. Compare the conveniences found within the Indian home and the Canadian home.
3. On what livelihood do most Indian villages depend?
4. Name some fundamental differences between the Hindu conception of the gods and that of the ancient Greeks.
5. What part does religion play in an average Indian day?

## SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Take up and discuss the directive questions. Relate them as much as possible to various concepts presented in the film.
2. Discuss, or prepare a paper on, the following:
  - a) A comparison of family relationships in India and in Canada.
  - b) A comparison of the influence of religion on daily life in India and in Canada.
  - c) A comparison of the standards of living and of living conditions in India and in Canada.
  - d) A comparison of the Indian diet and the Canadian, noting the vitamins present in each.
3. Draw the Shevale couple, emphasizing the sari of the mother and the dhoti of the father.
4. Prepare a typical Indian menu.

## RELATED VISUAL AIDS

### Films:

The Commonwealth of Nations series:

No. 4 CRISIS IN ASIA (NFB — 30 minutes)

No. 7 POVERTY AND PLENTY (NFB — 30 minutes)

THE WAR ON WANT (NBF — 15 minutes)