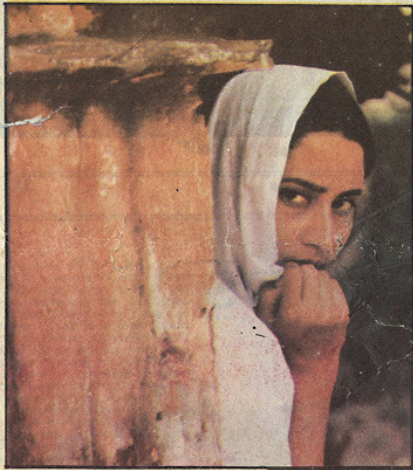


# GHATER KATHA

A Hindi tele-film, *Ghat Ki Katha*, by Goutam Ghose  
Photographs By Kamal Kumar Ghosh



**A**n old ghat on the Ganga reminisces about the days when the giant Ashwaththa, now spreading its tentacle-like roots through cracks in the stone steps, was a mere sapling. Early in the morning, just as a little bird nesting in a cavity in the embankment would fly away after whistling and shaking its forked tail a couple of times, Kusum would come to sit near the water.

For some days she could not be seen. Her friends complained that she had been taken to her husband's house. After a year the

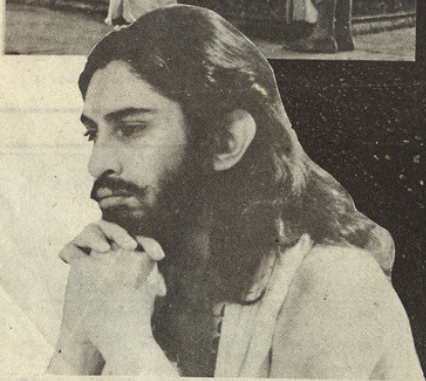
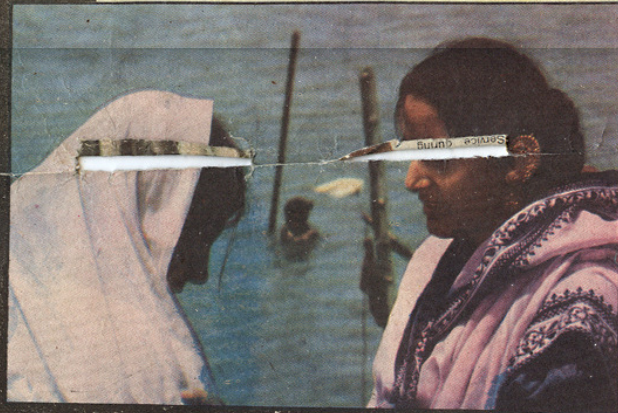
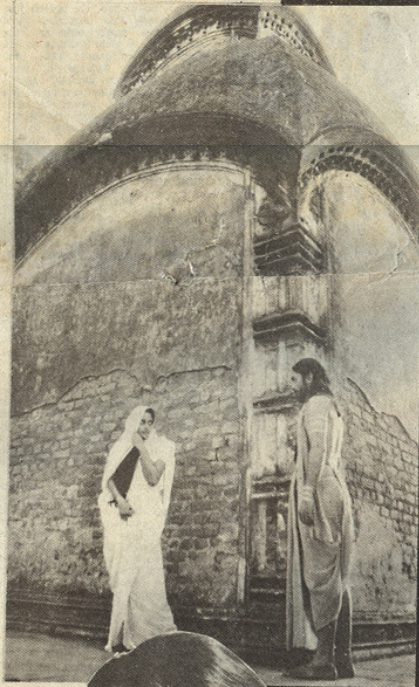
ghat sensed familiar footsteps. Kusum was back as a widow at the age of eight, having wiped the "sindur" off her forehead. There were no bangles around her ankles to tinkle merrily. But she still communed with the water in silence.

Ten years passed. In the month of Bhadra, a tall, fair, young sannyasi with a serene face took shelter in the Shiva temple in front of the ghat. He used to cuddle the children, talk to their mothers about their family, read from Srimadbhagavatam and explain the

Gita. In the month of Chaitra, the fair marking the solar eclipse drew large crowds, including women from the village where Kusum's in-laws lived. They briefly debated whether the sannyasi was Kusum's long-lost husband.

On an evening in the full moon, when the ghat was lonely and quiet except for the crickets chirping, Kusum met the sannyasi. He looked so familiar that only the cry of an owl overhead alerted her to the necessity of covering her

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head in a stranger's presence. Thereafter Kusum would call on the sannyasi every morning. She touched his feet, listened to his religious discourses, washed the temple with Ganga water, plucked flowers and tended to the deity inside.

Suddenly Kusum stopped visiting the ghat or the sannyasi. Then, one evening, they met on the steps. Apparently, the sannyasi had asked her to come. Kusum said she was a sinner and, therefore, staying away. The sannyasi replied that he knew her mind and advised her to confess everything. "I dreamt of my husband speaking words of love to me", Kusum said. "Even on waking I remained in a trance. But the next day he looked different. That is why the darkness in my heart persists". The sannyasi urged her to disclose this man's identity. She refused. He insisted. "It is you", Kusum blurted out and fell into a swoon, with the sannyasi standing as if petrified. When she came to her senses, he gave her his final order, to forget him. Kusum touched his feet before he left. She repeated to herself his last words and slowly entered the water. The ghat knows no more.

—D.G

