

SCRIPT TITLE

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FADE IN:

EXT. AYODHYA ROYAL DISTRICT - DAY

Ruins. Cracked stone and scorch marks mar streets and half-ruined buildings. Faint embers peek through blackened wood. Dried bloodstains scattered against walls.

A hollow silence fills the air, broken only by the creak of abandoned signs and newly mounted banners of the Shadow King swaying in the cool Ayodhyan wind.

The palace, fractured but standing, casts dark shadows over the once lively and bustling area.

The faint sounds of chanting and procession drums echo from within the castle.

INT. PALACE THRONE ROOM - DAY

The setting sun casts a purple-golden hue across the large chambered room.

Dark armored soldiers stand at attention, facing toward a damaged throne. They slam their spears down and chant in unison.

Standing in front of the throne is the SHADOW KING. His figure masked in darkness, outlined by heavy plated armor and a flowing cape.

An attendant places a horned crown on his head.

The chanting stops and the soldiers kneel.

INSERT:

The Shadow King holds in his hands a signet with a sun engraved on it. He tosses it out a broken window.

The signet falls through the air.

MATCH CUT:

EXT. AYODHYA OUTER GATES - NIGHT

INSERT:

A different, but matching sun signet, illuminated by the light of a torch, bounces against the chest of RAYAN (18) as he runs.

END INSERT.

Rayan, lean, athletic, with slightly unkempt dark hair, flees through a broken crevice in the wall. He clutches at a wound that bleeds through a scruffy tunic and down through ripped dhoti pants.

The sounds of a patrol guard chasing behind.

PATROL GUARD 1
Did you see where he went?

PATROL GUARD 2
No. Must've slipped outside the wall.

PATROL GUARD 1
Should we go after him? The Shadow King will be furious if we don't catch the runaway.

The Patrol Guard looks around, checking to see if anyone else saw what had happened.

PATROL GUARD 2
Catch who?

PATROL GUARD 1
The kid we were just--
(catching on)
--Ah, I mean, you're right. It must've been a goat I saw.

PATROL GUARD 2
Yes. A goat. Definitely not worth reporting or risking our lives for.

PATROL GUARD 1
Of course. We wouldn't want to make the Shadow King worry about such a trivial matter.

The two Patrol Guards cough and resume their patrol, walking back the way they came.

Rayan, listening from the other side of the wall, breathes a sigh of relief. He backs away and hurries out into the darkness and away from the city.

FADE TO BLACK.

OPENING CREDITS.

SUPER: "ASHES OF AYODHYA - SEASON 1, EPISODE 1: RAYAN, PRINCE OF NOTHING"

FADE IN:

EXT. NIVASA VILLAGE - DAY

A small village of straw huts surround a central gathering place. Lush greenery and trees fill out the area. Just beyond the village lays grassy farmland and grazing livestock.

Rayan helps an ELDERLY WOMAN (60s) with sifting seeds into a bowl.

All words in *italics* are spoken Hindi.

RAYAN

Here you are. Hope these seeds can last you longer than last time.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Thank you, Rayan. I always appreciate your help.

RAYAN

Of course. Just say the word and I'll be there, dadi.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Such a nice young man. Have I told you that you remind me of my son?

RAYAN

Only about twenty times or so now. But I'm glad. It's an honor to be given such a compliment.

Rayan laughs as he helps the Elderly Woman to her feet.

RAYAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to get going now. Is there anything else you need?

ELDERLY WOMAN

No, that's all. Are you going to see Laksh and Siya?

RAYAN

Yep.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Tell them I say hello, then.

RAYAN
I will. Bye *dadi*.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Goodbye, Rayan.

Rayan waves as he trots off toward the fields.

EXT. NIVASA FIELDS - DAY

Light green grasslands, flattened in areas that have been trampled over. The bright sun shines down from clear skies.

Two figures practice swordplay with wooden sticks.

On the left, a tall, athletic, dark-skinned male. LAKSH (18), moves quickly and decisively, his posture forward and confrontational.

On the right, a slender female with hair tied back in a neat bun. Her movements are precise and economical, seamlessly flitting between observation and reaction to Laksh's aggressive swings.

RAYAN
Who's winning?

Laksh turns his head to Rayan. Siya takes advantage of the opportunity to land a tap on his head.

SIYA
Me now. Three-two.

LAKSH
No fair. Rayan distracted me.

SIYA
The Shadow King's soldiers won't care if you're distracted.

Laksh huffs and steps back to a mark in the dirt that appears to be a reset spot. Siya does the same on her side.

Rayan plops down on a nearby rock to watch.

Laksh and Siya clash sticks a few more times, exchanging points back and forth. Despite Laksh's physical advantage, Siya manages to keep pace with him by timing her attacks when he oversteps.

Whack.

SIYA (CONT'D)
Ten-ten. Call it a draw?

LAKSH
(out of breath)
What, you tired already?

SIYA
From the sound of it, I'm the one
who should be asking you that. But
no, I just figured Rayan wanted to
join in.

LAKSH
But Rayan always wins.

RAYAN
I don't always win.

SIYA
Yeah you do.

Laksh and Siya both give Rayan the same judgmental look.
Rayan sheepishly shrugs.

RAYAN
Fine. How about I fight both of you
at the same time then. 2v1. That
should be fairer, right?

Siya turns the same judgmental look toward Laksh, eyeing him
up and down.

SIYA
You want me to team up with this
gadha? That honestly might be
harder than fighting you alone.

LAKSH
Very funny.

SIYA
I know right, I'm hilarious.

RAYAN
So we doing this?

LAKSH
2v1. You sure?

SIYA

Yeah I mean even for you that seems
a bit unfair.

Rayan grins and picks up a stick.

RAYAN

Guess there's only one way to find
out.

He strikes a battle pose and does a "bring it on" gesture.

Laksh and Siya look at each other, nod, and attack.

The sound of sticks hitting one another, mixed with laughter
and banter.

EXT. NIVASA VILLAGE - NIGHT

Laksh lays on a straw mat, a wide smile on his face.

Siya wraps cloth bandages around Rayan's head, who winces in
pain.

RAYAN

Yeah the backflip jump was
definitely not the move.

LAKSH

I can't believe you actually tried
that. I thought it was a joke when
you said you were learning how to
do a flip the other day.

Siya finishes wrapping.

SIYA

Is that okay? Too tight?

Rayan pulls on the bandages lightly.

RAYAN

Nope. It's great. Thanks, Siya.

SIYA

Please don't try that again.

RAYAN

Don't worry. No more backflips for
me.

From inside the hut, the Elderly Woman from before appears.

ELDERLY WOMAN
Dinner is ready.

Rayan and Laksh leap to their feet at the word "dinner". They rush inside, followed by Siya.

INT. NIVASA VILLAGE: HUT - NIGHT

A spread of roti, lentils, and soup sit atop a hand-sewn rug.

Rayan, Laksh, and Siya fill bowls and begin to eat. Random chatter between bites.

Rayan takes a moment mid-meal to reflect, rubbing the sun pendant on his neck between his fingers as he watches his friends smile, talk, and eat. His own smile fades for a moment as we...

FLASHBACK

INT. PALACE GREAT HALL - NIGHT

YOUNG RAYAN (7) and faceless family members sit around an ornate marble table, eating various prepared meat and vegetable dishes.

Young Rayan plays with his food and one of the faceless family members, his mom, chastises him. He pouts and goes back to eating.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. NIVASA VILLAGE: HUT - NIGHT

Laksh and Siya look at Rayan.

SIYA
Rayan...Rayan!

Rayan snaps out of his daydreaming.

RAYAN
Huh? Oh, sorry.

LAKSH
You good?

RAYAN
Yeah, no, I'm good.
(beat)
I'm good.

Laksh gives Rayan a reassuring pat.

Siya hands him another roti and the Elderly Woman pours him some more soup. The group goes back to eating, this time in silence.

A horn sounds in the distance.

LAKSH
What was that?

SIYA
A horn? Is there something
happening today, *dadi*?

ELDERLY WOMAN
It's nothing that I know of.

The horn bellows again, closer this time.

RAYAN
It almost sounds like...

A flash of realization crosses Rayan's face. He leaps up and runs out of the hut.

LAKSH
Rayan? Wait!

Laksh and Siya get up and follow after Rayan.

EXT. NIVASA VILLAGE - NIGHT

Rayan stands upon a rock that overlooks past the village toward the dirt road. In the distance, torches bob up and down, held by figures on horseback.

The horn bellows again as the villagers begin to gather.

SIYA
Rayan, what is it? What's wrong?

RAYAN
It's the Shadow King's army.
They're coming this way. A patrol
by the looks of it.

Whispers amongst the villagers.

LAKSH
What? Here? Do you think they--

RAYAN

--I don't know.

LAKSH

Well what should we do? We can't
fight off an entire patrol. Unless--

RAYAN

--No, we're not going to fight
unless we have to. For now, let's
hide and see what they want.

SIYA

Keeping the villagers out of harms
way should be our main priority.

RAYAN

Agreed.

(hopping down)

Come on. We can climb the big
banyan tree and watch from above.

LAKSH

Good idea. That way we can get the
jump on them if they do try
anything.

The trio make their way toward a large banyan tree next to
the village. En route, Rayan whispers their plan to the
Elderly Woman, who nods in acknowledgement.

EXT. LARGE BANYAN TREE - NIGHT

Rayan, Laksh, and Siya stand crouched atop one of the large
branches that extends outward toward the village.

The trio watch the Shadow Army patrol halt at the entrance to
the village, dismounting from their horses and approaching
the VILLAGE CHIEF (70s).

EXT. NIVASA VILLAGE - NIGHT

The Village Chief bows to the PATROL CAPTAIN (30s), who steps
forward from the troops.

VILLAGE CHIEF

To what do we owe this late night
surprise?

PATROL CAPTAIN

The Shadow King has requested us to collect taxes from outlying villages in the countryside. As repayment for protection provided to you as a part of the Suryavaaran Empire.

VILLAGE CHIEF

We've received no protection.

PATROL CAPTAIN

You misunderstand. In being a part of the lands owned and controlled by the Shadow King, you inherit the innate protection that comes from it. Other nations dare not harm you because they fear His Royal Highness. And it is for that protection that you are being asked to pay.

VILLAGE CHIEF

Well how much do we owe then?

PATROL CAPTAIN

Fifty silver panas.

Shock befalls the faces of the villagers as they murmur amongst one another.

VILLAGER 1

Fifty panas? Each of us are lucky to make two panas a month.

VILLAGER 2

This is robbery.

VILLAGER 3

Isn't there anything we can do?

The Village Chief looks at the Patrol Captain, whose grin betrays his apathy and amusement. He looks back at his villagers, worry settling into their eyes.

VILLAGE CHIEF

(turning back)

How long can you give us to gather the money? It may take some time.

PATROL CAPTAIN

You have 'til sunrise.

More worried murmuring from the villagers.

PATROL CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 If you are unable to pay, we will
 have no choice but to take the
 people of this village to the
 capital as indenture servants until
 your debt has been paid.

VILLAGE CHIEF
 The capital is so far. I fear many
 of us wouldn't survive the journey.

PATROL CAPTAIN
 Then you best be sure to find
 enough money, old man.

MONTAGE

- The Village Chief talking with the villagers
- A pair of villagers pulling out their savings from underneath a rock inside their hut
- Villagers pouring money into a pot

END MONTAGE

EXT. LARGE BANYAN TREE - NIGHT

Rayan, Laksh, and Siya watch and listen from above.

LAKSH
 What do we do? There's no way
 they'll be able to scrounge up
 enough.

RAYAN
 I don't know.

SIYA
 You don't happen to have any extra
 money from back when you fled the
 palace do you?

Rayan shakes his head.

RAYAN
 Pfft. I wish.

LAKSH
 I think we can take 'em.

SIYA

And risk the villagers getting hurt? Or worse, killed? And what if we can't? We get captured, Rayan's identity is found out, and we're either dragged to the capital as slaves or executed on the spot.

LAKSH

You heard that captain. If we don't do anything, they're gonna drag the whole village away anyway.

SIYA

You're not seriously considering fighting them though. They have armor and swords and bows. And we have...sticks.

Rayan watches the movements of the patrol squad, who has set up a sort of makeshift camp by the entrance of the village.

RAYAN

What if we did have weapons? And they didn't?

SIYA

What do you mean?

A glint flashes in Rayan's eyes.

RAYAN

Follow me.

He slides down from the tree, dropping down under the cover of the night's darkness.

Siya looks to Laksh who shrugs and follows. Siya rolls her eyes.

SIYA

I've got a bad feeling about this.

She drops down after Rayan and Laksh.

INT. NIVASA VILLAGE - NIGHT

The Village Chief counts the panas in the pot.

VILLAGE CHIEF

Thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five.

(MORE)

VILLAGE CHIEF (CONT'D)

(beat)

Only thirty-five.

VILLAGER 1

What do we do?

VILLAGER 2

Are we sure this is everything? No one is trying to get away with hide a few extra panas?

VILLAGER 1

Well we're going to need more than just a few extra panas.

VILLAGER 3

Now isn't the time for us to start doubting each other.

VILLAGE CHIEF

Please be calm. We all understand the stakes and what it means if we don't put together enough coin.

The Villagers nod grimly.

VILLAGER 2

Maybe we can offer crops or jewelry to make up for the missing panas?

VILLAGER 1

You heard him before. If we can't amass enough coin, he'll drag us away to the capital. And by the sounds of it, that's what he wants to do.

VILLAGER 3

Still wouldn't hurt to just see. We have until sunrise, so he can't do anything to us yet.

VILLAGE CHIEF

I will ask the captain if he would be willing to make an exception.

VILLAGER 2

Be careful.

The Village Chief takes a deep breath and walks toward the makeshift camp.

EXT. MAKESHIFT PATROL CAMP - NIGHT

A few pitched tents. Packs with rations, along with armor and weapons lay strewn across the ground.

The Patrol Guards talk and eat around campfires. Two in particular look rather familiar.

PATROL GUARD 1

Why do we even bother waiting around? Not like the villagers will have enough panas to pay.

PATROL GUARD 2

Captain likes to watch 'em squirm. And said something about destroying their spirits by letting it slowly sink in that they're doomed.

PATROL GUARD 1

Can't tell if the captain's a genius or a monster. Or both.

PATROL GUARD 2

Well, better them than us.

PATROL GUARD 1

Cheers to that.

PATROL GUARD 2

Cheers.

The two Patrol Guards tap their cups together.

Behind them, Rayan, Laksh, and Siya sneak into one of the tents.

INT. MAKESHIFT PATROL CAMP: TENT - NIGHT

Inside is dark, but the vague outlines of various weapons and supplies can be seen lining the sides of the tent.

LAKSH

(whispering)

Ow, my toes.

RAYAN

(whispering)

Sorry.

SIYA

(whispering)

Quiet! Do you want to get caught?

RAYAN

C'mon. Let's grab what we need and get out. Laksh, did you get the oil and the cloth?

Laksh holds up a frayed rag and a small flask.

RAYAN (CONT'D)

Perfect. Grab whatever you need and pour the oil. After that, well, just do your best not to get hurt.

SIYA

I can't believe we're actually doing this.

LAKSH

They're not giving us much of a choice. The village doesn't have the money, we're running out of time, and that Patrol Captain looks like he might change his mind any second. I'd rather take my chances fighting than roll over and let them drag us back to the capital.

RAYAN

I hate to admit it, but Laksh is right. If they find out who I am, I'm as good as dead anyway.

SIYA

But what about the villagers? The Shadow King will just send another patrol.

RAYAN

We can worry about that after we deal with this one.

Siya sighs in resignation. She looks around and picks up a talwar, along with a belt that she holsters a handful of daggers into.

Laksh rubs his hands together and picks up a gada mace and a shield, donning an extra set of armor.

Rayan grabs a talwar of his own, then notices a bow and quiver with arrows in a corner. He takes up the weapon and ammo, slinging the latter over his shoulder.

RAYAN (CONT'D)

Ready?

Laksh rolls his shoulders a few times.

LAKSH

Armor's a bit stiff, but yeah. I'm good.

RAYAN

What about you, Siya?

Siya grips the hilt of the talwar tightly. She exhales nervously.

SIYA

As ready as I'll be I guess.

RAYAN

Okay, I'm going to start pouring the--

PATROL GUARD 1 (O.S.)

--Hello? Is someone in there?

The trio freeze.

RAYAN

Uh oh.

A shadow passes over the entrance to the supply tent.

EXT. MAKESHIFT PATROL CAMP - NIGHT

The Village Chief, escorted by a guard, stands outside the largest tent in the camp.

The Patrol Captain steps out from the tent.

PATROL CAPTAIN

Ah, do you have the money?

VILLAGE CHIEF

Well, not exactly.

A slow grin begins to creep across the Patrol Captain's face. He does little to hide it.

PATROL CAPTAIN

(feigned sympathy)

Aww, well that is disappointing.

He crosses his arms.

PATROL CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 So then why are you here? Surely
 not to beg, right?

VILLAGE CHIEF
 I have come to ask if you would
 accept crops or jewelry as
 compensation to make up for some of
 the panas we owe.

The Patrol Captain's grin has evolved into a full fledged smile.

PATROL CAPTAIN
 You know, I am sympathetic to your
 plight, truly.

The Village Chief looks hopeful for a moment

PATROL CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 But I will ask you this: do you
 think the Shadow King has any use
 for your pitiful crops or jewelry?

The Village Chief's hopes are immediately erased.

VILLAGE CHIEF
 But--

PATROL CAPTAIN
 --There are no buts. The money owed
 or your bodies. Those are the only
 forms of payment we will take back
 with us.

The Patrol Captain gestures to the guard to take the Village Chief away.

Sudden shouting draws the attention of everyone.

PATROL GUARD 2 (O.S.)
 Fire! Fire! The camp is on fire!

The Patrol Captain turns to see the supply tent set ablaze, smoke billowing up into the night sky. His ears perk up at the sudden sound of fighting as a Patrol Guard flies backway, landing unconscious at his feet.

PATROL CAPTAIN
 What the--

LAKSH (O.S.)
 Hiya! Take that you Shadow Army
 scum!

Laksh swings his gada and sends another Patrol Guard backwards, into another tent. He pounds his chest in excitement.

LAKSH (CONT'D)
Is that all you've got? C'mon!

An arrow whizzes by and impales yet another Patrol Guard, dropping him. Then another. Rayan follows up behind Laksh, bow in hand.

RAYAN
Siya, watch your left.

Siya clashes swords with a fourth Patrol Guard. She parries a strike then bashes the Patrol Guard's head with the pommel of her sword.

RAYAN (CONT'D)
Nice one.

SIYA
Y'know, I kind of expected these
guys to be tough--

Siya suddenly coughs. Rayan and Laksh turn to look at her.

The tip of a talwar blade sticks out from her chest.

RAYAN & LAKSH
Siya!

The Patrol Captain smiles as he pulls the blade out. Blood spurts from the wound as Siya collapses on the ground.

PATROL CAPTAIN
Foolish children. You've just
condemned this entire village...

He looks down at Siya's motionless body.

PATROL CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
...and yourselves.

Rayan nocks an arrow and draws back the bow as the Patrol Captain barrels toward him. Laksh rushes to intercept--

LAKSH
Rayan!

CUT TO:

INT. INN - NIGHT

Rayan shoots up from the bed, sweating profusely. He looks around the room. Laksh softly snores from the bed opposite.

Rayan takes a deep breath, clutching the pendant at his chest.

His features are more worn, hardened now.

RAYAN

Siya...

He lays back down, staring up at the ceiling.

INT. PALACE THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

The Shadow King sits on his throne, listening to the report of a different Patrol Officer.

PATROL OFFICER

--still alive...outskirts of
Tapovan...sun pendant...

SHADOW KING

Find him.

The Patrol Officer nods and leaves. The Shadow King watches him leave, twirling a small dagger. He smiles.

Beside him, with a blank expression, dressed in dark black and purple robes, stands Siya.

END PILOT.