S1 - 16. INDIA, THE ASTRONOMER MAHARAJA (**)

Director(s): Danièle RICHARD

Writer(s): Serge BRUNIER, Bruno BUCHER

Before observing the stars through telescopes, man had invented instruments to be able, both, to follow the movement of stars and planets throughout the nights and seasons and to predict their return in the skies.

In the boiling heat of Delhi, Serge Brunier takes us to an observatory that is unique of its kind. Despite the absence of telescopes, Jantar Mantar is one of the historic sites of ancient astronomy. This observatory is the work of Maharaja Jai Singh II who, in the 18th century, had monumental stone instruments built to accurately measure the position of the stars. At the same period of time in Europe, Galileo's telescopes had already been in use for over a century, it had been accepted that the Earth revolves around the Sun, that planets are other worlds that are sometimes surrounded by moons just like ours. This new knowledge has even spread to Asia. But India's history with the sky goes back to ancient times - in Hinduism the cosmic order determines the social order on Earth and there is a strong belief in astrology. Relying on his expertise of the stars and the calendars, the astronomer Maharaja wanted both, to consolidate his power over his people and widely spread his knowledge among them. To do so, he built more observatories of stone in several cities around India such as Benares, where Serge ends his journey...an amazing journey that navigates between astrology and astronomy.

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