

## **Defining Indigenous Nepali Cinema**

By Sophia Purekal

The prevalence of Bollywood has been evident in Nepali cinema since the government began making films in the 1960's and 70's. Private film making began really to flourish only in the early 1990's, but having imported Bollywood cinema for more than 40 years left unfortunate effects. Even today, Nepal, imports more Bollywood film than any other South Asian country, and the majority of Nepali cinema tends to mimic Bollywood. Nepali filmmakers have actually suffered for this practice, as filmgoers who seek plots of sex and violence would prefer the technically advanced Bollywood films, anyway. Within this milieu, however, exists a very special Nepali parallel cinema that started to take off only several years ago. Films like Nabin Subha's *Numa Fung* (2002), which looks at the choices and dilemmas present in the lives of Nepali women, capture audiences because they reflect the lives of Nepali people. Filmmaker, Tulsi Ghimirey's film, *Darpan Chhaya* (2001), met with great success because of a certain "Nepaliness" it celebrated, and renowned producer/director, Yadav Kharel makes films such as *Aadikavi Bhanubhakta*, *Prem Pinda*, and *Sree Swasthani*, in order to preserve glimpses of the country's history and culture for posterity. Naba Raj Dhakal and Gyanendra Bahadur Deuja's *Muna Madan* (2003) – the first film treatment of a work of classic Nepali literature, by Laxmi Prasad Devakuni – depicted a national character that made it worthy of recommendation for an Oscar, the first indigenous Nepali film to achieve such national acclaim.

A very courageous type of filmmaking is being done at the grass-roots level also, through independent documentary. Durba Basnet's *The Killing Terraces* (2000) premiered at the 2001 Film South Asia – a film festival of documentaries of South Asia, held in Kathmandu every two years – was the first time residents of Kathmandu and of the world could see the faces and hear the testimonies of unaligned people caught in the middle of the conflict. Other documentaries, such as Mohan Manaili's *Jogimara ka Jyundaharu* and *Seeking Peace in Karnali* – as well Narayan Puri's 2001 feature film, *Aago* – seek to make known the reality of this third presence, but face many government censorship hurdles.

The past year or so has given a blow to Nepali film making, as the struggle between the government and Maoist rebels has grown more violent, and restrictions of movement make people less willing and able to support cinema. There is less money available to invest in films, and the industry continues to face the competition of Indian imports. As much as they desire to define a cinema of their own, many filmmakers also fear that the fate of their art lies not so much in their own hands as in those of the government and the Maoist leaders.