

Filming Change in the Ancient Society of Bhutan

By Sophia Purekal

Although a small, secluded Himalayan Buddhist kingdom, Bhutan has a nascent film industry that is bursting in its creativity and vibrancy. In this year's ISAFF, Tasveer screens *Travelers and Magicians*, the first Bhutanese feature film to be distributed in the United States. Its producer, Lama Khyentse Norbu, is both a highly revered spiritual leader and also somewhat of a pioneer filmmaker in Bhutan. His first exposure to the art came as a religious/cultural consultant for Bernardo Bertolucci's *Little Buddha* – a film which includes juxtaposition of Bhutan with our own emerald city. In 1998, Norbu produced *The Cup*, a short film and true story about a 14-year-old monk who is feverishly obsessed with soccer and pines to find a way to watch the World Cup finals.

Audiences are limited in Bhutan because theaters are scant. The country also suffers the same problem of others in South Asia, having to assert itself against a Bollywood influence, while it still needs Bollywood for training and technical support. Internally, however, there are a few production houses committed to fostering an indigenous cinema. A common theme for Bhutanese cinema – evident in *Chepai Bu*, by Pek Hang Audio Visuals, as well as in *Travelers and Magicians* – is how the very spiritually guided culture of Bhutan confronts Western culture: no doubt an important concern for Bhutan as it takes it undergoes cautious programs of modernization.