



SPRING NEWSLETTER ~ MARCH 2011

5th Nepali Film Festival

Sunday, April 3, 2011

10:30am-6:30pm

Langara College, 100 W 49th Ave, Vancouver

The popular Nepali Film Festival is back! This year's festival is once again jointly presented by the Trans-Himalayan Aid Society and Langara Continuing Studies.

This one-day festival features compelling films by Nepali Filmmakers about a range of topics - from modern Kathmandu to the wilds of the Himalayas. Visit and explore the vibrant Himalayan Market located in Langara's cafeteria showcasing an array of Himalayan handicrafts, local non-profits that support development projects in the Himalayas, local business sponsors, and refreshments. Join Professor Ramjee Parajulee for an insightful look at the situation in Nepal today.

The proceeds from this worthwhile event will go directly to the Rural Empowerment and Development Initiatives (READI) in Humla District, Nepal, to fund the TRAS-supported educational project there (see Page 5 for a report).

For more information please visit: www.tras.ca/filmfest or contact Marina Guy, the Nepali Film Festival Coordinator, at marina.guy@tras.ca or 604-505-9428

TRAS is grateful for the wonderful support given to the Film Festival by the following sponsors:

GOLD SPONSORS: BikeHike Adventures, Gap Adventures, Maple Care Foundation, Prompt Printers Ltd., Second Wind Personal Training and Group Trekking, Three Jewels Vancouver, Tompkins, Wosny, Miller & Co., Wilderness Trekking.

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FRIENDS OF THE FESTIVAL: A.R.T. Bookworld Productions Ltd., Ajeet and Sachi Gorkhali, Banyen Books, Lionell Voigt, Nepal Library Foundation, Nilson Co., Valhalla Pure Outfitters.

TICKET PRICES

Advance Festival Pass: \$18 Regular. \$10 Student/Low-Income (cash only)

At-The-Door Festival Pass: \$20 Regular. \$12 Student/Low-Income

Advance Ticket Locations

Tickets can be purchased **in advance (cash only)** at Café Kathmandu (2779 Commercial Drive), Ten Thousand Villages (all Vancouver locations) and Videomatica (1855 West 4th Ave).

For advance ticket purchase by phone using a credit card, please call Langara College at 604 323 5322.

Only want to see a few films? (available at the door only)

1 screening: \$10 Regular. \$5 Student/Low-Income

2 screenings: \$15 Regular. \$8 Student/Low-Income

Tickets at the door can be purchased using cash, credit card or cheques. An ATM is on site.

Film Festival schedule on page 7!

~ Film Descriptions ~

Dancing Kathmandu

(43 minutes/2007/Directed by Sangita Shresthova)

Sangita, a dancer of Czech-Nepali origin, journeys to Kathmandu to explore how practitioners in the Himalayan region negotiate Nepal's dance traditions in a period of rapid cultural change. In her attempts to map the current situation of dance in Kathmandu valley, she encounters her own teachers as well as dancers currently coming of age. Dancing Kathmandu tells stories of nostalgia, passion and survival through dance and dancers in the age of globalization.



Living by the River

(17 minutes/2009/Directed by Manoj Raj Pandey)

Living by the River is a film about the survival of Nepal's Majhi people, a highly marginalized indigenous group who have for generations been living and fishing along the banks of the Narayani River near Chitwan National Park in southern Nepal. In the past, the River provided for them and their families, but gone are the days when fish were plentiful and a catch or single throw of a net would be sufficient for a whole day. Their struggle to provide for their families in spite of spending day and night on the water has put this traditional occupation in jeopardy and the livelihood of the Majhi people at stake.

- Special Mention Jury Award at the Third International Indigenous Film Festival of Nepal
- Special Mention Jury Award in Nepal Panorama category of Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival in 2009

Saving Dolma

(62 minutes/2010/Directed by Kesang Tseten)

Saving Dolma, another film in Kesang Tseten's trilogy on Nepali migrant workers in the Gulf, documents the struggles of female migrant workers. Thousands of Nepalese women work illegally in the Gulf to relieve the poverty at home. The film follows the thread of Dolma, sentenced to death for killing a Filipino co-domestic in Kuwait, and presents the multiple responses to this event - the upheaval and fractures of Dolma's family, and the reactions of women's advocacy groups and Nepali society and officialdom. The film provides a rare glimpse into the situation of women migrants in the Gulf States, and exposes the vulnerable conditions of ill-educated and ill-prepared women from a poor country making this enormous journey.

In Search of the Riyal

(86 minutes/2009/Directed by Kesang Tseten)



In Search of the Riyal is the first documentary of Kesang Tseten's trilogy on Nepali migrant workers in the Arabian Gulf. Since the 1990s, Nepal has provided a pipeline of cheap labour to the Gulf, emptying villages of their young men who set out to escape poverty for wages of US \$5 to \$7 a day in the alien and stultifying conditions of the Qatari desert. Theirs is an admirable mission, a test of luck and resilience. The film shows glimpses of gritty migrant conditions, rarely captured. The stories of disillusionment and, sometimes, empowerment reflect the enormity of the Nepali migrant's journey.

- Special Mention Jury Award in the International category of Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival in 2009

The Rat Hunters

(45 minutes/2009/Directed by Pradeep Kumar Sharma)

The Rat Hunters documents the lifestyle of a rat hunting community from South Asia called "Mushahar" (literally meaning 'rat eater'). The Mushahars depicted in the film are members of a landless tribe considered 'untouchable' in Nepal. The film follows a five-day bamboo-trading journey on an ancient oxen cart in the southern plains of Nepal's Terai region on the border of India. Centring on Bikon Saday, a sixty-year-old Mushar man, and his fellow traders, the film exposes the hardships they face as impoverished bonded labourers working for a local landlord.

Pradeep Kumar Sharma is a Nepali-Canadian filmmaker based in Vancouver. He will be in attendance and available to answer audience questions.



Malaamee (Funeral)

(20 minutes/2008/Directed by Subarna Thapa)

Confusion spreads through a rural village after the local miller abruptly passes away and there are no able men to carry the deceased. All the men have left the village in search of work and only the women and children remain.

Sherpas - The True Heroes of Mount Everest

(95 minutes/2009/Directed by Otto C. Honegger, Frank Senn and Hari Thapa)



Sherpas - The True Heroes of Mount Everest showcases the work, hardships and life of the Sherpas at Mount Everest. The film follows the expedition of the Swiss mountain guide Kari Kobler and his European climbers as they climb the highest mountain in the world, a feat unimaginable without the support and guidance of their hired Nepali Sherpas. Among the Sherpas is Dawa, who has peaked Everest thirteen times. Throughout the film, the Sherpas share their stories, feelings and fears on the climb. They tell us bluntly what it means for them to work for Western climbers and to act as their leaders on the top of the world, sometimes risking their own lives to save a Western client.

- Best Film Jury Award in Nepal Panorama category of Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival in 2009

Mukundo

(105 minutes/2000/Directed by Tsering Rhitar Sherpa)

The first feature film by Tsering Rhitar Sherpa, Mukundo shares the life of Dipak and Saraswati in Kathmandu. A devoted father and an adoring husband, Dipak works as a security guard, while Saraswati happily tends to traditional housework. Their home is modest, and their two girls are happy. Saraswati's life would be perfect if only she could give her husband a son. On the advice of a stranger, Saraswati prays to a new spirit with miraculous results. When the blessing turns to tragedy, the distraught couple appeals to Gita, a jhangrini or healer, revered as a powerful spirit medium. Gita's own crisis of faith forces all three to a dizzying climax, leaving the lines between secular and spiritual desires eerily blurred.

"I am always disturbed and confused by all the rituals and beliefs, which are so much part of our society that we tend to take them for granted. The film is an expression and exploration of this confusion, and I feel that the art of shamanism is the perfect metaphor for expressing this in the context of present Nepali society." Tsering Rhitar Sherpa

- Academy Awards Consideration (Nepal) for Best Foreign Language Film, 2000
- Winner of Best Screenplay at the Nepal Film Award in 2000



Update from the Little Flowers Crèche, Dharamsala

The Little Flowers Crèche is run by a Parent Association, which does an excellent job of looking after the crèche and the building. Recently we heard from Pema Lhamo, the Secretary: "First of all *Tashi Deleg* to all the members of Trans-Himalayan Aid Society from the members of the Parent Association of Little Flowers Crèche. We hope you all are fine.



Here, all the toddlers and staff of the crèche are keeping well and the weather is still very cold in Dharamsala. At present we have 26 kids in the crèche. One of our child carers resigned from her work, so we have recruited one new carer.

Our term of management is soon going to end and new Members of the Parent Association have to be elected in mid March. In the meantime we are planning to paint or white wash all the walls of the crèche and do some repair and renovation of the crèche.

For the coming Tibetan Losar (New Year) of Metal Rabbit Year, the members of the Parent Association, staff, and toddlers of Little Flowers Crèche wish a very Happy, Healthy and Joyful Year to all the members of the Society! Thank you very much for your gracious support of the Tibetan Community."

New Volunteer and Two New Directors for TRAS

Emily McCance happened upon the TRAS booth at the Hycroft Christmas Bazaar – we are so glad she did, because ever since Emily has been working hard on the planning committee for the Nepali Film Festival!

“After spending the last five years studying and travelling around the world, I’m very happy to be back in Vancouver and volunteering with an organization that fits so well with my passions and volunteer goals. After finishing university in 2009, I spent six months working for the Olympic Torch Relay and travelling the country from coast to coast. Unable to sit still upon my return, I took off to India, Nepal and Tibet, where I spent five months volunteering, trekking and travelling through the Himalayas. During this trip I gained a lasting love and connection to the region, and I believe wholeheartedly in the invaluable work that TRAS does. Right now I’m looking forward to my next adventure - spending a month living with a Masaa tribe in Tanzania and fulfilling a lifelong dream of climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro.”



Amrit Dhatt’s studies and interests make her a perfect ‘fit’ with TRAS and we are delighted she took the initiative to contact TRAS and offer her invaluable help. Amrit has joined the Board of Directors as the Volunteer Coordinator.

“I am very enthusiastic about being a part of TRAS. It is closely associated with my personal interests in the region and my professional interests in international development. I have worked on issues of human rights and development within South Asia, and have visited the Himalayan region. Currently, I’m doing research on issues of displacement amongst Tibetans in exile in India and I hope to be able to use my background knowledge and experiences to make a meaningful contribution to the important work that TRAS does. I am also excited to be taking on the role of Volunteer Coordinator, as I get the opportunity to interact with so many passionate people.”

Kassandra Bonn is a glutton for punishment! Not only has she been one of our most active volunteers over the past year, now she has taken on two new roles for TRAS. She is helping Russil Wvong with the sponsorship program and she has agreed to join the Board of Directors as Secretary.

TRAS thanks them all for their commitment and enthusiasm!

Tuting Adult Literacy Project

Pema Tashi, the Project Officer for the Department of Education, Tibetan Government-in-Exile, writes that it is really difficult to communicate with the Tibetans in the remote Tuting region, in Arunachal Pradesh, but here are the facts she has managed to learn:

“They have already started the classes in five villages from July and 93 women are attending the classes. Weekly they have two classes, Wednesday and Friday. The rest of the week they work in the fields. Frankly speaking, most women are not attending the classes regularly. It is a huge drawback. Though we can understand that there is lots of work for women in the fields and at home, we still encourage them to educate themselves. I think it will take some time to convince them, even though the request for the classes came from the Mothers Association in Tuting. There is no doubt that all the women are illiterate. They have not received any education before.

Ten years back, even their children were deprived of education. After the demographic survey in 1996, hundreds of children were given an education in Tibetan schools located in the Northern India such as Chauntra, Mussoorie, Dalhousie etc.

Though I do not have direct contact with the women, whenever I get in touch with the Representatives of Tezu and Tuting, I always urge them to encourage women in getting an education and they do that. The opportunity these women are getting from your generous support is very precious.”



READI Nepal Readies for Year 2

Although a few details remain to be ironed out, TRAS will be supporting the second year of the educational pilot project in Humla District, Nepal. Below are excerpts from the latest report:

Highlights of ongoing initiatives

(May 2010 to January 2011)

With the valuable support from TRAS, READI is implementing an inclusive quality education program in Simikot, Humla District. From May 2010, the organisation supported 20 children in the district regardless of caste, gender and ethnicity who are deprived of education due to poverty. READI's plan to achieve this noble goal was to assist those children with tuition fees, qualified teachers, books and stationery, food and living costs. Furthermore, READI has planned to support the parents of those children to improve their livelihoods by involving them in different entrepreneurial activities. Following are the highlights of activities that were successfully carried out during 2010:

- Hostel set up and successful operation
- Enrollment of the 20 children in the private school
- Teacher training at Rato Bangala School, Kathmandu, for 2 teachers
- Children's Library established in Simikot
- Income generation activities (planned for Feb 2011)
- 12 days training in cooking and accommodation management followed by a 5-day refresher course for the hostel cook.

At a recent board meeting the READI Humla board weighed the progress against the plans and decided to continue all the activities of 2010 in the coming years. All the board members were encouraged by the progress made during the short period.

Year 2 & 3 Project Goals

The overall goal of the proposed project is to bring social change through inclusive quality education to children from needy households. READI's experience in the community has diagnosed the fact that **EDUCATION** is the key for development. In fact, its lack is the root cause for poverty and underdevelopment. Our organization has a strong motive to start everything from education and include other sectors around it to have a lasting effect. Objectives will be:

- Support education for the children of dalits, ethnic minorities, conflict-affected people and the poor. Continue to support the 20 children and encourage other parents to send children to school.
- Initiate child-friendly teaching and learning methods and develop a module that can be adopted in trans-Himalayan regions of Nepal. Maximize knowledge gained at Rato Bangala School. The two teachers will continue acting as a resource for the District Education Office, and coaching the 20 children before and after school.
- Improve health and sanitation for participating families through education and awareness.
- Identify entrepreneurship opportunities and encourage income generation.
- Strengthen knowledge development through optimum use of library and resources. Already increased demand on the library service has led to requests to add more books. 300 books will arrive from the Asia Foundation to augment the Nepal Library Foundation's gift.
- Change local food habits by showing that local organic produce is more nutritious than expensive imported white rice sent by the government.
- Hold business and micro enterprise development workshops. Give counselling and financing advice. (Already an apple-drying project has begun) Tourism is growing, and appropriate trainings will be offered.
- Give health and sanitation trainings, and encourage the use of available but under-utilised government health facilities.

Ans Mueller Remembered (by Dorothea Leach, TRAS Patron)

At the end of January 2011, Ans Mueller, a past Director on the Board of TRAS, died in Vancouver. We remember her as an avid hiker, she knew our mountains well, but her favourite destination was the Himalayas where she and her son Michael undertook more than half a dozen treks, often accompanied by Beth Whitaker, also a Director of TRAS. Ans was an accomplished photographer and her wonderful slides introduced our members to the magnificent landscape of the Himalayas where many of the Tibetan refugees, who were our concern, found security and help.

She was very interested in the culture, religion and art of Tibet and Nepal and had taken lessons in the Nepali language which was most useful when she led treks. With her experience and knowledge she was an excellent leader on treks and as a Director her advice at Board meetings was a great help to all of us. When she retired we missed her guidance.

Even when Ans was disabled by Parkinson disease, she continued her support and interest in the work of TRAS. We remember Ans with affection and are grateful for her valuable contributions to our efforts to improve the hard lives of the people in the Himalayan mountains which she so loved. We extend our sincere condolences to Michael.

! NEWS FLASH !

Government of Canada to facilitate the immigration of up to 1,000 Tibetan refugees living in Arunachal Pradesh in India

This is welcome news indeed! The TRAS Board of Directors is delighted that Canada will welcome Tibetans from this remote region, because they certainly are amongst the poorest. TRAS has long tried to help in Arunachal Pradesh, through sponsoring children, an agricultural project, and providing books to the school libraries in the settlements of Choephelling and Tezu. We are also supporting the Tibetan women in the scattered Tuting villages in their efforts to learn to read and write. We wonder if any of those whom TRAS has touched will be coming to Canada. No plans have been made as yet, but the TRAS Board is keen to help in some way. More about this later.

The official news release from the Government of Canada is quoted below, and can be accessed at:
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/releases/2010/2010-12-18.asp>

Ottawa, December 18, 2010 — *The Government of Canada intends to facilitate the immigration of up to 1,000 Tibetan refugees living in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in India over a five-year period, Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney announced today.*

"Our government's openness to Tibetan refugees is in keeping with Canada's best humanitarian traditions," said Minister Kenney. "We look forward to working with the Government of India and the Tibetan-Canadian community on the implementation of this program, and on welcoming these individuals to Canada."

Special immigration measures will be developed in response to a request by the Tibetan community and will focus on individuals who meet specific criteria. These measures aim to maximize the involvement of communities in Canada by focusing on individuals who have secured the support of the Canadian-Tibetan community or other interested supporters.

Canada has a long-standing tradition of facilitating immigration for various groups around the world by matching prospective immigrants to community sponsors in Canada through private sponsorships. This is done at no additional cost to Canadians because initial settlement costs, including housing, are guaranteed by sponsors.

This humanitarian initiative will assist Tibetan refugees in Arunachal Pradesh, who live in remote and isolated settlements.

"I would like to recognize India's long-standing support for the Tibetans in India," added Minister Kenney. "This is

Canada's opportunity to complement India's support for this vulnerable population."

This is not the first time Canada has assisted Tibetans. In 1972, Canada established the Tibetan Refugee Program and resettled approximately 230 Tibetans in Canada who had been living in Northern India. This new initiative, which will bring in up to 1,000 Tibetans, is another example of Canada's efforts to reach out to the Tibetan community.

What this news release does not mention is that it was George and Inge Woodcock and TRAS who helped arrange for that planeload of Tibetans to come to Canada in 1972! They were settled mostly in Alberta and Ontario, but gradually many made their way to BC, with the help of the Woodcocks and the Leaches.

Later, other Tibetans were able to make BC their home. Among them were Tsering, currently of White Rock, and her husband Rinzin Samang, both raised at the Tibetan Homes Foundation in Mussoorie. Rinzin remembers the auspicious day when the revered George Woodcock came to visit Mussoorie, and much later in Canada, Tsering became very close to Inge, caring for her as she aged. Last summer, Tsering took her 15-year-old twins, Tara and Yeshey, back to her home village in Tibet itself for the second time to visit their relatives. The twins told Dorothea Leach about their visit:

A Visit to Tibet

by Dorothea Leach

Last summer my friend Tsering took her children to her home village in Kham or, as it is known now, Szechuan. They looked forward to seeing their relatives again even though it would take several days to get used to the altitude of almost 15,000 feet.

Their orphaned mother had left home in 1985 with 32 other villagers with India as their destination. They walked for 16 days to reach the border of Nepal and once in India Tsering was sent to Mussoorie in the foothills of the Himalayas to the Tibetan Homes Foundation where she learned English. Her brother who had already immigrated to Canada sponsored her to come to BC in 1987 and here she met Rinzin who had also been a student for several years in Mussoorie. Both remembered hearing about Dr. and Mrs. Woodcock's devotion and great help to the Tibetan settlements in India. They married and are so grateful to be here. They feel working hard has enabled them to give their children wonderful opportunities for their future.

As with so many immigrant children, the twins answer their parents in English, but last summer in Tibet, they had to try their limited knowledge of Tibetan. They soon lost their shyness to communicate as best they could with their relatives, and their Tibetan quickly improved.



The twins' cousins

The local school, a modern building where children are taught by Chinese teachers mostly in Chinese and very little Tibetan, was closed for the summer. However, all children are expected to help with chores, the girls in the house, cleaning, washing clothes and looking after younger siblings and the boys outside with animals or field work. About 80% of the villagers have yaks, sheep, chickens and

some have horses. In the summer the animals are driven to higher meadows where the villagers also gather mushrooms and medicinal herbs which are sold to Chinese traders. For hundreds of years this trade has existed between the two peoples. Tibetans also took salt, butter and wool into China and exchanged these items for tea, brocade and other items useful and desired by Tibetans. Now the trade is in Chinese hands.

The summers at that altitude are very sunny and warm but at night it gets quite cold. The twins enjoyed very typical Tibetan picnics with the large family, also outings to the town where there is a large monastery with relatively few monks. Many parents now want their children to have an education and only a few boys join a monastery. Not many people have a car, and small motorbikes are popular. Minibuses are used for shopping trips to the town where the shops and stalls are mostly owned by Chinese selling tea, rice, clothing and those food items not produced at home. The only hospital is also there with Chinese doctors but the patients have to pay and therefore often turn to the Tibetan doctors and healers. Babies are usually born at home and families look after the elderly as there are no elderhomes for them.

Tara and Yeshey enjoyed their time with their relatives living in the old Tibetan-style family home, the wonderful scenery and sharing the culture in which their parents had spent their childhood, which was a very special experience for them. They were sad to leave but look forward to another journey there one day.



Nepali Film Festival schedule

Sunday, April 3, 2011

TIME	THEATRE 1	THEATRE 2	THEATRE 3	THEATRE 4
10:30	10:30am DOORS OPEN / HIMALAYAN MARKET OPENS (Ticket sales and market in cafeteria)			
11:00	11:00am • <i>Mukundo</i>	11:00am • <i>Sherpas: The True Heroes of Mount Everest</i>		
11:30			11:30am • <i>Living by the River</i> • <i>The Rat Hunters</i>	11:30am • <i>In Search of the Riyal</i>
1:00	Himalayan Market and Refreshments in the Cafeteria			
2:00	2:00pm • <i>Dancing Kathmandu</i> • <i>Malaamee</i>	2:00pm • <i>Saving Dolma</i>	2:00pm • <i>Living by the River</i> • <i>The Rat Hunters</i>	2:00pm • <i>In Search of the Riyal</i>
3:45			3:45pm <i>Discussion with Dr. Ramjee Parajulee</i>	
4:45	4:45pm • <i>Mukundo</i>	4:45pm • <i>Sherpas: The True Heroes of Mount Everest</i>		
5:00			5:00pm • <i>Dancing Kathmandu</i> • <i>Malaamee</i>	5:00pm • <i>Saving Dolma</i>
6:45	Festival Closes			

Note: the Himalayan Market is open from 10.30am-6pm in the Cafeteria

TRAS

**Supporting health
and education for
children and youth in
the Himalayas**

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A fervent desire for education is the theme running through this newsletter – villagers in Tibet; farsighted residents of remote Humla, Nepal; Tibetan mothers in Arunachal Pradesh, India; parents in the Tibetan community in Dharamsala; villagers bringing their children to the Buddha Academy in Kathmandu: all want to give their children a better future. **YOU** can help TRAS help them!

Sponsorship Report

Note from the Editor: Marion Tipple, after years of looking after the sponsorship program for TRAS, has handed the position of Sponsorship Director over to Russil Wvong, who has helped Marion behind the scenes. The TRAS Board extends its heartfelt thanks to Marion for doing this demanding job, for streamlining and computerising it, and for her passion for helping the children of the Himalaya. We are very glad that Marion will remain a Director, and will continue to give TRAS the benefit of her great knowledge of the Himalayan region. If you have queries about your sponsored child, or wish to start sponsoring a child, please address your questions to Russil at sponsorship@tras.ca. Thank you, Russil, for taking this on!

A \$400/year donation will provide food, education, and health care for a child, along with a secure place to live. We are looking for sponsors for the following children, at Buddha Academy in Kathmandu, Nepal:

Kelish Rai (boy, age 9)

"The parents of Kelish hailed from a remote village and have lived in Kathmandu for many years. They came here for work and a better life. He has one elder sibling who attends local school in Kathmandu. His mother has a small restaurant where she earns not enough to meet the family's need. His father has no job. Therefore his mother is facing difficulty to pay for his school fees. We found him quite needy and accepted his admission here in class IV."

Nima Lhakpa Sherpa (boy, age 11)

"Nima Lhakpa was born in a peasant family in Dolakha district. It lies close to the border with China. He has one younger sibling with the family. They work hard in the little farm and grow mostly potatoes. Sometimes, they could earn a little money from the surplus potatoes they sell. His parents are now aware of the importance of education. So, they brought Nima down here to Kathmandu and requested help. He has been to a village school in class V but due to poor English, he was placed in Class III."



Buddha Academy classroom