



Synopsis

Often excluded from the privilege of image creation, Nepali Dalits, like many under-represented populations, have relied on others to tell their stories. Co-directors Jes Therkelsen and Phoebe Gilpin spend three months holding small workshops through rural and urbanized Nepal teaching Dalit activists and journalists how to use different forms of media to tell stories. Gilpin and Therkelsen's efforts, woven together with the videos the activists produce of themselves within their communities, forge an intimate collaboration.

Tone and Style

Clean Hands is unique among documentaries that deal with caste discrimination in that it celebrates those who are Dalit rather than sensationalizes or simplifies. Documentaries on Hinduism often focus on the plight and suffering of lower caste individuals. The young men and women who play roles in this story are full of ambition, hope, and humor.



One of the most dramatic, beautiful, and geographically diverse countries in the modern world is also one of the poorest and most socially divided. Nepal, renowned for its pristine Himalayan backdrop, has annals of untold stories of caste discrimination. And those that are told, are often misrepresented.

Background

The practice of untouchability, where upper castes will not consume anything 'polluted' by the touch of a Dalit (lowest caste, untouchable), has been illegal for fifty years. It is as old as Hinduism itself and remains a way of life for the fifth the Nepali population who are Dalit. The Dalit movement, which strives for equality among all peoples, has been steadily growing in recent years. Young activists have raised their voices against the discrimination that so many face.



With a population that is more than half illiterate, the ability to create images is an imperative tool for disseminating information. Teaching media to an unrepresented population gives the community the freedom and power of self expression.

Potential

Clean Hands is a portrait of hope and determination rising above the malignancy of discrimination. More importantly, the film is a unique exploration of media creation, the power of visual communication and the importance of telling stories.



In Nepal, television and radio media are commonly either censored by the government or produced by foreign media. The creation of one's own image is uncommon.



Deprived of necessities such as running water, sanitation, and sound nutrition, image creation is an inconceivable luxury to the Dalit population.

Filmmakers

Jes Therkelsen (Producer, Co-Director) has seen his award-winning films screen nationwide. He has won the Institute for Humane Studies' Film & Fiction Fellowship twice, the Roland Wood Fellowship thrice and the Scholar Research Grant Award. He was the 2006 National Gallery of Art Film Fellow and the 2007 Flaherty Film Fellow. Therkelsen is an adjunct faculty member at American University and is co-founder of Sensory Media Arts. Before filmmaking, Therkelsen worked as a geologist with USGS, NASA and the NJ DEP. He received his B.A. from Amherst College in Massachusetts and has lived in New Jersey, Arizona, Maryland, Greece, Germany and Nepal. He currently lives in Washington, D.C. with a bamboo stalk and a cactus and likes to ride his bike a lot.

Phoebe Gilpin's (Co-Director, Editor) unique media background began in theatre arts and writing, and migrated into film and video. She received her B.A. in Film and Digital Media from UC - Santa Cruz. Her past works include experimental theatre projects, documentary video, and narrative films. She's worked in both the corporate realm, earning a Telly Award while working for Chris Layhe Associates Inc., and independently producing documentary films. Phoebe helped lead the Santa Cruz company Creative Armada for three years, overseeing its management and artistic workflow before co-founding Sensory Media Arts. In 2007 Phoebe accepted an internship with the director of photography from the Smithsonian Photographic Services in Washington, DC. Lingering in Washington, she's produced video for non-profits and independent documentarians in the district. When not making art she prefers to hike, bike, and cook tasty foods.

Production Status

This film has been in development since January 2008 and production since June 2008. Principal photography is slated to be complete by August 2008. A fine cut is projected to be completed by January 2009.

Distribution and Outreach

The documentary will be oriented toward the broadcast, festival and educational markets. The style fits into PBS style programming, such as POV, Frontline, and Independent Lens, as well as the networks general initiatives toward such subject matter. In addition, the documentary will be submitted to national and international documentary festivals such as Hot Docs!, Silver Docs, and the Amnesty International Film Festival. The documentary will also be an excellent resource and educational tool for university-level classes and will be distributed on the educational market. Alternative screenings can be arranged through local human rights organizations.



Dalan, the first teleserial soap opera produced by Dalits about Dalit issues, was shot in Baglung.

Access and Collaboration

This film is made possible through the collaborating with Jagaran Media Center, International Commission for Dalit Rights and the Advocacy Project.