



—SHAMBHALA



74th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Competition

A film by Min Bahadur Bham

PRESSKIT



150 MIN

NEPAL, FRANCE, NORWAY,

TURKEY, HONG KONG,

TAIWAN, USA, QATAR

2024

2.39:1

DOLBY 7.1

TIBETAN, NEPALESE

SCREENINGS IN BERLIN

WED. 21st, 7:00 PM @ CINEMAXX 5/6/8/9
(advance press screening)

FRI. 23rd, 9:00 AM @ BERLINALE PALAST
(official press screening)

FRI. 23rd, 3:15 PM @ BERLINALE PALAST
(WORLD PREMIERE)

SAT. 24th, 9:30 AM @ VERTI MUSIC HALL

SAT. 24th, 6:45 PM @ HKW 1 - Miriam Makeba
Auditorium

SAT. 24th, 9:00 PM @ HAUS DER BERLINER
FESTSPIELE

SUN. 25th, 3:30 PM @ VERTI MUSIC HALL

— SHAMBHALA

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SYNOPSIS

In a Himalayan polyandrous village in Nepal, newly married and pregnant Pema tries to make the best of her new life. But soon, her first husband Tashi vanishes on the trade route to Lhasa.

Accompanied by her monk de facto husband, Karma, she embarks on a journey into the unforgiving wilderness to find him, evolving into a quest of self-discovery and liberation.



A CONVERSATION WITH MIN BAHADUR BHAM



How did your previous films *Bansulli* and *Kalo Pothi* prepare you for *SHAMBHALA*? How did the project come to life?

My previous films, *Bansulli* and *Kalo Pothi*, serve as essential foundations for *SHAMBHALA*, preparing me to delve even deeper into the narratives steeped in Nepalese culture and societal complexities. Navigating those cinematic terrains equipped me with the necessary tools to tell a richer and more profound story. These experiences have honed my understanding of the power of silence and emotional nuance, vital elements for portraying the protagonist's journey in *SHAMBHALA*. But it's not just about technical prowess; witnessing the resilience and spirit of the communities I filmed has ignited a fervent desire to explore these themes further. My aim with *SHAMBHALA* is to craft a narrative that resonates not only with local audiences but also with a global audience, speaking a universal language woven from the threads of our shared humanity.

The film was shot at the highest settlement, located between 4,200 to 6,000 meters above sea level, what were the challenges shooting at this height? How did it change the look and feel of the film?

Shooting *SHAMBHALA* at altitude presented formidable challenges. It felt akin to grappling with a camera on the moon; every breath became a struggle, and the weather could shift from sunshine to blizzard in mere moments. I can recall a lot of instances where the wind threatened to tear apart the tent housing of the crew or the heavy snowfall buried the equipment! However, these challenges became integral to the film's essence. But the thin air did not make us lose our attention from the wide majestic Himalayas. Additionally, the raw beauty of the landscape, captured beneath skies that seemed impossibly close, became a testament to the protagonist's unwavering spirit amidst adversity.

You worked with a cast, that's essentially made up of non-professional actors from the region. How did you find them and prepare them?

Working with a cast predominantly composed of non-professional actors from the region was a deliberate choice. Discovering them wasn't about perusing resumes; it was about tapping into raw emotion. Despite his lack of acting experience of even the main cast, the authenticity was palpable. Preparation extended beyond conventional methods; we conducted workshops under the stars, drawing from local legends and personal experiences to shape their characters. This collaborative approach infused the narrative with their lifeblood, enriching the storytelling process.

The protagonist's journey through the Himalayan mountains, told with long fixed shots balanced with handheld camera give the film a meditative and immersive feel. How does it contribute to the story? Did Buddhism influence it?

The protagonist's journey through the Himalayan Mountains, captured through long fixed shots interspersed with handheld camera work, hopefully imbues the film with a meditative and immersive quality. These stylistic choices were not arbitrary; they serve to mirror Pema's inner world. The sweeping landscapes, depicted in contemplative shots, invite the audience to inhabit Pema's emotional landscape, experiencing her solitude and introspection firsthand. Drawing inspiration from Buddhist philosophy, particularly the notions of impermanence and mindfulness, the film's visual language resonates with the tranquil aesthetics of prayer flags and the ever-changing mountain vistas. Yet, it's not a rigid adherence to dogma; rather, it's a fusion of influences, resulting in a visual style that feels uniquely Himalayan, deeply personal, and profoundly immersive.

The film weaves together several themes of love, marriage, sacrifice, and reincarnation. Mixing tradition with modernity, how did the current Nepalese society influence the film?

SHAMBHALA weaves together various themes such as love, marriage, sacrifice, and reincarnation, juxtaposing tradition with modernity. These themes are deeply intertwined with the current societal landscape, reflecting the tensions and dynamics present in contemporary Nepalese society. Pema's journey serves as a conduit for exploring these themes, challenging societal norms and sparking conversations within communities. SHAMBHALA fosters dialogue and introspection, leveraging the power of cinema to provoke thought and reflection.

You managed to create such a modern and unexpected female lead protagonist; can you tell us a bit more about Pema?

Pema, the film's protagonist, defies stereotypes and emerges as a modern and unexpected female lead. Her character embodies the evolving face of Nepalese womanhood, rooted in authenticity and resilience. Pema navigates tradition with reverence while challenging outdated norms, exemplified in her refusal to be silenced. Her journey is not a conventional fairy tale but a reflection of the multifaceted realities faced by women in Nepal. Pema's resilience in adversity and unwavering determination to forge her own path serve as sources of empowerment, resonating with audiences on a profound level. Her story encapsulates the complexities of contemporary womanhood, offering a narrative of hope and self-discovery that transcends cultural boundaries.

The film is a glimpse into the lives of many Himalayan women and the polyandrous relationships that come with it. It's something in the west we aren't familiar

with. Does that reflect the current way of life in the mountain today?

The portrayal of polyandrous relationships in SHAMBHALA offers a nuanced glimpse into a complex aspect of Himalayan culture. While polyandry is depicted in the film, it's important to recognize that cultural practices vary widely across regions and households. SHAMBHALA strives to portray polyandry with respect and sensitivity, drawing from research and conversations with local communities. By shedding light on diverse lived experiences, the film challenges stereotypes and encourages viewers to embrace cultural diversity. Ultimately, SHAMBHALA serves as a catalyst for dialogue and understanding, fostering empathy and appreciation for the rich heritage of Himalayan cultures

Weaving all those elements together (non-professional actors, local language, real locations and traditional folk instruments etc...) contributes to the authenticity of the film, how important was it for you to stay true to those aspects?

Authenticity lies at the core of SHAMBHALA, permeating every aspect of its production. From the use of non-professional actors and the inclusion of the local dialect to filming in real villages and incorporating traditional folk instruments, every decision was driven by a commitment to truth and respect. For instance, despite initial concerns about audience comprehension, we opted to retain the local dialect in film, allowing the raw emotion of the performances to transcend language barriers. Filming amidst the breathtaking yet harsh Himalayan landscape posed its own challenges, but capturing the essence of the place was paramount. Authenticity, therefore, isn't merely an aesthetic choice; it's a means of honoring the spirit of the community and culture, amplifying voices often marginalized in mainstream narratives.

Your short Bansulli (2012) was Nepal's first entry to the Venice IFF. Now SHAMBHALA is the first Nepalese film that enters in Berlinale Competition, how did cinema evolve the last years in Nepal?

The evolution of cinema in Nepal has been nothing short of remarkable in recent years. From Bansulli's historic entry at the Venice Film Festival to SHAMBHALA's debut in the esteemed Berlinale Competition, Nepalese cinema has garnered increasing recognition on the global stage. This evolution is testament to the dedication and talent of Nepalese filmmakers, who continue to push boundaries and explore new creative frontiers. Advancements in technology and a growing appetite for diverse narratives have further fueled the industry's growth, enabling Nepalese filmmakers to reach wider audiences and tell stories that resonate on a universal level.

You are becoming a leading figure in Nepalese cinema, how do you feel about this?

Looking back on my journey in Nepalese cinema, I'm incredibly grateful for the support and inspiration I've received from countless individuals, from actors and crewmembers to fellow filmmakers and audiences. The encouragement I've received has been instrumental in shaping my creative path. One experience that particularly stands out is working on SHAMBHALA. It was a challenging project, but seeing how it resonated with both local and international audiences was incredibly rewarding. It solidified my belief in the power of Nepalese cinema to tell stories that transcend borders and cultures. Storytelling has always been close to my heart. Growing up, I was captivated by the myths and legends passed down through generations in my community. Now, as a filmmaker, I strive to create stories that not only entertain but also spark conversations and offer new perspectives on our

shared humanity. As for the future of Nepalese cinema, I'm excited to see the diverse voices and stories that continue to emerge. I'm particularly passionate about mentoring young filmmakers and providing them with the opportunities and resources they need to bring their visions to life. Ultimately, I believe that Nepalese cinema has the potential to reach even greater heights, and I'm committed to playing my part in its growth and success.

— BIOGRAPHY MIN BAHADUR BHAM

Nepalese filmmaker Min Bahadur Bham holds Masters degrees in Buddhist Philosophy and Political Science while pursuing a PhD in Anthropology. His short, *Bansulli* (2012), Nepal's first entry to the Venice IFF, followed by his debut feature *Kalo Pothi* (2015), which won the FEDEORA Best Film Award at Venice Critics Week, and became Nepal's official Oscar entry. Acknowledged for nurturing emerging talent, his productions have graced the festivals like - Venice, Berlinale, Rotterdam and Busan.

His second feature, *SHAMBHALA*, made history as Nepal's first film in the Berlinale Competition section.



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— FILMOGRAPHY MIN BAHADUR BHAM

- 2015 *The Black Hen* - won FEDEORA Best Film Award at Venice Critics Week
- 2012 *Bansulli* Short Film - Nepal's first entry in the Venice IFF



CAST & CREW

Pema	Thinley LHAMO
Karma	Sonam TOPDEN
Tashi	Tenzin DALHA
Dawa	Karma Wangyal GURUNG
Ram Sir	Karma SHAKYA
Rinpoche	Loten NAMLING
Sheperd	Janga Bahadur LAMA
Pema's Friend	Tsering Lhamo GURUNG
Tashi's Friend	Tsering Chooble TOWA

Director	Min Bahadur Bham
Screenplay	Min Bahadur Bham, Abinash Bikram Shah
Cinematography	Aziz Jan Baki
Assistant Directors	Tsering Choden, Kiran Shrestha, Nipil Sharma
Production Design	Ramlal Khadka
Production Managers	Pemma Tsewang Bhote, Gorkha Bahadur Budha
Casting	Min Bahadur Bham
Costume design	Dorjee Dradhul Gurung
Makeup Design	Dorjee Dradhul Gurung
Editing	Liao Ching-Sung, Kiran Shrestha
Sound	Tu Duu-Chih, Tu Tse-Kang, Samrat Khanal, Dikesh Khadgki Shahi

CAST & CREW

Original Music	Nhyoo Bajracharya
Vocal/Composer	Ani Choying Drolma
Post-production Supervisor	Aditya Basnet
Thangka (painting) Artist	Pasang Dolpo
Production	Shooney Films, CDP, Ape&Bjørn, Aaru Production, ZK Films, Yi Tiao Long Hu Bao, Bangdel and Shakya Production
Producer	Min Bahadur Bham
Executive Producers	Debaki Rai, Liao Ching-Sung, Roger Huang, Ruben Thorkildsen, Can Aygor, Salina Shakya
Coproducers	Catherine Dussart, Verona Meier, Shuk Fong Chong, Zeynep Koray, Justine O. Bibhakar Sunder Shakya
Associate Producers	Rajesh Prasad Khatri, Jeremy Chua, Lee Chi Lin
Countries	Nepal, France, Norway, Turkey, Hong Kong, Taiwan, USA, Qatar
French Distributor	Epicentre Films
International Sales	Best Friend Forever

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