

archive.nepalitimes.com

Karma of a corner people- Nepali Times

4 minutes

Nation

Karma of a corner people

An exquisitely simple film documents the life of a remote Himalayan village



When the Swiss geologist Toni Hagen travelled across Nepal as the prototypical United Nations consultant in 1952, he would ask villagers what they wanted. Most said they wanted a bridge.

Nepal then, and largely even today, is an archipelago of villages separated by rivers. Without a bridge, people have to make arduous and dangerous days-long detours to get from one place to another. A bridge can make the difference between life and death if the sick can't get to hospital.

In the past ten years, the Maoists destroyed many strategic bridges. In Dailekh people have to make a risky crossing of the Bheri clinging to the tilted steel ropes of a bridge that was bombed

last year. A vital bridge across the Karnali at Rangeli near Kalikot was destroyed by the Maoists in 2003, making a remote area even more inaccessible.

Kesang Tseten went to one of the remotest parts of Nepal, the villages of Tetangche and Simbu in northern Rasuwa near the Tibetan border, to tell the tale of a single bridge. It should be a relatively simple story: a young woman is washed away in a flashflood and villagers get the Swiss agency Helvetas to build a bridge for them.

But this straightforward tale turns into a narrative of present-day Nepal itself. In *We Corner People*, Kesang Tseten has distilled the country's realities into the life of one village, bringing everything into the microcosm: poverty, underdevelopment, Maoism, evangelists, migrant labour, marriage, life and death. Like all great stories, it is told simply in the words and actions of the protagonists themselves.

Village volunteers carry steel ropes up and down the mountains in a perilous group effort, symbolising the hardships caused by Nepal's perpendicular terrain which also exacerbates natural calamities like landslides and flash-floods.

The documentary gets its name from the way the Tamangs of upper Rasuwa describe themselves. "My father and grandfather chose this corner to live in," says an elderly farmer. Tucked away in a dead-end valley, they are the most ignored people of one of the most ignored districts.

But even here, the outside world is creeping in. The activity of evangelical groups means Christians outnumber Buddhists. A farmer says he converted because he couldn't afford any more to

feed the shaman when a family member was sick.

"After I became Christian, I haven't had to give food to the spirits," he says. Villagers tell of the harassment they get from both the Maoists and the army when they go down the Valley in search of work or to buy essentials. A village family gets a letter from a daughter in Kuwait, who writes movingly of not being able to phone home a message as she hasn't been paid by her employer. "It's hard being poor," she writes.

The camera catches the subtle mixture of shyness, sadness, and open optimism in the faces of the people of Tetangche and Simbu. And as the film closes with an exquisite shot of children playing on the bridge, their lingering song resonates. The refined editing enhances the storytelling and the viewer comes away with admiration and respect for the extraordinary lives of these ordinary people.

Kunda Dixit