

“Nepali documentary challenges traditional presentation”

by Narayan Wagle

Kathmandu: A film by a Nepali filmmaker - in this on-going South Asian documentary film festival organized by Himal Magazine - has demonstrated that documentary filmmaking can find perfect tandem with audience in theory and presentation. This film, in contrast to Nepali feature films which are cheap imitations of Hindi films, provides a fresh perspective in the genre of documentary filmmaking and places Nepali documentary filmmakers in the same league as its South Asian counterparts.

Kesang Tseten Lama's film, “We Homes Chaps,” exhibited in the packed theatre of the Russian Cultural Centre on Saturday was immensely successful in touching the hearts of the audience, leaving many moist with tears. His film isn't about some devastating event nor does it deal with an inconsolable tragedy. Rather, it is a simple story presented with content and flow in unison so as to have evoked the audience emotion.

Shown on the third day of the third Film South Asia '01 in Kathmandu, ‘We Homes Chaps’ recounts a journey the filmmaker made to his school after three decades since graduating for his school's centenary. Established in 1900 in the small town of Kalimpong with Mt. Kanchenjunga in its background by a Scottish missionary Dr. Graham, “the Homes” was intended for Anglo-Indian orphans and displaced children. Later, the school took in Nepalis, Bhutanese, Khasi, Naga and Tibetans from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds.

During the centennial celebrations, Kesang meets up with his classmates after a very long time (batch of 1971). Like the filmmaker himself, many OGBs (Old Girls & Boys, as they are called), now migrated to London, Melbourne, and New York, have made that long journey back to the school where they spent 10-14 years of their lives, from childhood to adulthood. As expected, memories and emotions are evoked and, gradually, these OGBs reveal glimpses of their feelings about their childhood. Some, with tears in their eyes, remark on the difficult and precarious life that would have awaited them if not for the ‘Homes’. Many had no homes or families to go back to. As one said, “we found home here when we didn't have one of our own.”

Though the film tells a simple impassioned story, why it stands out from the crowd is its unique presentation. Much of the credit for this uniqueness goes to Kesang for his obvious storytelling skills, as he effortlessly weaves himself in the film as one of the characters while providing the point of view and narration, as well as to Ranjan Palit's brilliant camera work. With almost a feature-film-like plotting this documentary has broken the traditional mould of documentary filmmaking. The director amply demonstrates that he is not only a sensitive writer but possesses equal command of the filmmaking medium.

This documentary, though dealing with reality, has a quality of being a wholly imaginative feature film, but unlike many documentaries, it doesn't show complicated and intense interviews nor does it indulge in intricate background or incident. This almost-70 minutes long film glides like music and the audience unconsciously finds

itself participating in the filmmaker's journey. For his serene, sensitive and thoughtful film, Kesang won a heartening applause and made the host country proud. The heartening reception of the film was also evident in the remarks made by filmmakers of the sub-continent present in the screening. 'We Homes' Chap' is arguably the best film of the festival shown till now.