

THE BLACK HEN (Kalo Pothi)



Nepal (2015) 90 minutes

Director: Min Bahadur Bham

Cast: Khadka Raj Nepali (Prakash), Sukra Raj Rokaya (Kiran), Jit Bahadur Malla (Prakash's Father)

Screening 1 November 2017 at Swindon Arts Centre

Synopsis

We are in the year 2001, a temporary ceasefire brings a much-needed break to a small war-torn village in Northern Nepal, bringing much joy among the residents. Prakash and Kiran, two young close friends, are also starting to feel the change in the air. Though they are divided by caste and social creed, they remain inseparable, and start raising a hen given to Prakash by his sister, with hopes to save money by selling her eggs. However, the hen goes missing. To find it, they embark on a journey, innocently unaware of the tyranny brought by the fragile ceasefire.

Reviews



A gentle, humane and beautifully photographed movie from Nepalese director Min Bahadur Bham, whose short film *The Flute* and then this debut feature were hits at the Venice film festival. It is set during the Nepalese civil war of 1996-2006.

Two village boys try to recover their hen, which had been sold without their knowledge to an old man (called Tenzing – a name with great resonance for the British and for climbers of any nationality). Eventually they steal it back and try painting it black to disguise it. And all this happens while fanatical Maoist guerrillas make incursions, kidnapping villagers. Scenes of bucolic calm are interspersed with brutality and violence. There is an all-but-unwatchable moment when the boys smear blood over their faces and pretend to be dead bodies so that the communists will not kill them. This is an engaging movie and a valuable debut, notable for disturbing and unexpected dream sequences, tapping into the boys' deepest fears – sequences that reminded me of Buñuel's *Los Olvidados*.

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

Child actors are the stars of this impressive film set against the backdrop of civil war.

Nepalese filmmaker Min Bahadur Bham's impressive first feature – the winner of International Film Critics Week at Venice last year – closes with a quite baffling piece of political nit-picking: "During the 10 years of Maoist Insurgency (the so-called civil war) in Nepal, 1996 to 2006 – 13,346 were killed, 14,000 migrated to India, 8,000 children . . . joined Maoist militants."

The facts and figures are all the more puzzling arriving, as they do, as a closing scroll rather than an opening gambit. ... Kiran and Prakash are two young boys, hailing from different castes; one is the village headman's grandson, the other is the son of a servant.

They are bonded, nonetheless, by friendship and affection for a hen, whose eggs just might make a difference to Prakash's impoverished family. When the boy's father sells the bird, the chums desperately attempt to raise funds in order to buy it back. As much as they love the hen – and their affection is genuinely affecting – there is even more at stake. Prakash seems to believe that if they can rescue the precious bird, then Prakash's sister, who has run off to join the Maoists, will also return safely.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the natural performances of two boys (and their chicken) are the best things about the movie.

Tara Brady, The Irish Times

Film Facts

- Nepal is a country of a variety of landscapes, which made it difficult for the entire film crew, who sometimes had to walk five days to reach the shooting locations in one of the most remote parts of the country.
- The filming schedule was disrupted as it coincided with Dashain, a traditional celebration which involved all the castes of the area for a fortnight.
- Bham chose two boy actors from more than nine hundred candidates in seventeen different villages.