



The Sari Soldiers

A film by Julie Bridgham



“It gives new meaning to the words courage and resilience.”

-Stephen Holden, *The New York Times*



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The Sari Soldiers

SYNOPSIS



Filmed over three years during the most historic and pivotal time in Nepal's modern history, **The Sari Soldiers** is an extraordinary story of six women's courageous efforts to shape Nepal's future in the midst of an escalating civil war against Maoist insurgents, and the King's crackdown on civil liberties. When Devi, mother of a 15-year-old girl, witnesses her niece being tortured and murdered by the Royal Nepal Army, she speaks publicly about the atrocity. The army abducts her daughter in retaliation, and Devi embarks on a three-year struggle to uncover her daughter's fate and see justice done. The Sari Soldiers follows her

and five other brave women, including Maoist Commander Kranti; Royal Nepal Army Officer Rajani; Krishna, a monarchist from a rural community who leads a rebellion against the Maoists; Mandira, a human rights lawyer; and Ram Kumari, a young student activist shaping the protests to reclaim democracy. The Sari Soldiers intimately delves into the extraordinary journey of these women on opposing sides of the conflict, through the democratic revolution that reshapes the country's future.

CREDITS

2008, 90 minutes, Color
English/Nepali Subtitled (English)

Director

Julie Bridgham

Co-producer

Ramyata Limbu

Editing

Mona Davis

Cinematography

Julie Bridgham

Dinesh Deokota

Kumar Shrestha

Music

Christopher James Thomas

Manose Newa



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DIRECTOR BIO



Julie Bridgham has been working in documentary television for the last ten years and is based in New York. She has lived in Nepal off and on for over five years where she produced and directed numerous documentaries including several for the United Nations, as well as the independent documentary feature "AT THE EDGE OF SUFFICIENT" focusing on two families of traders in Nepal's most mountainous and isolated region. She directed and produced "INDENTURED DAUGHTERS," a documentary on Nepali girls sent into bonded labor, as well as the films "HOPE IN THE HIMALAYAS" and "CHILDREN OF HOPE." She was a Producer, Director, Shooter and Writer on the 26 episode documentary series "EXOTIC ISLANDS" for the Travel Channel, and a Producer and Writer for the 13 episode series "ROYAL FAMILIES OF THE WORLD." She has worked on series for the BBC, the Discovery Channel and TLC.

Before working in documentary television, she worked in Costa Rica as a Project Officer for a UNDP project, and in Bolivia as a researcher for the human rights organization Andean Information Network.

Festival Screenings

Please visit wmm.com for an updated list.

Human Rights Watch Film Festival, New York; **Nestor Almendros Prize**

Human Rights Watch Film Festival, London



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QUOTES



"Impressive... give[s] credence to the old feminist saw that if women were given power, they would speedily put an end to war..." *Variety*

"Balanced, moving and comprehensive... it also shows how circumstances can radicalize even the most middle-of-the-road people. Something we should pay more heed to given the current state of world affairs." *Eye for Film*

"Utilizing an impressive impartiality, the director presents a vivid array of women who range from a die-hard Maoist guerrilla leader to a fresh-faced army recruit and a strident student activist." Chris Barsanti, *Filmcritic.com*

"Bridgham's overarching portrait of political upheaval is compassionate and insightful, ...the director discovers a symbol of both inspirational human rights advocacy, and the terrible tragedy of tyranny." Nick Schager, *Slant Magazine*

"Intimate and engrossing, the film gives us six commitments and hopes." Stanley Kauffman, *The New Republic*



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By RONNIE SCHEIB

Julie Bridgham's impressive "The Sari Soldiers," shot in Nepal over the tumultuous three-year period following King Gyanendra's dissolution of parliament and seizure of absolute power, profiles six women enmeshed in their country's political and social struggle. One of several recent docus that give credence to the old feminist saw that if women were given power, they would speedily put an end to war, "Soldiers," which won the Nestor Almendros Prize at New York's Human Rights Watch Film Festival and was picked up for distribution by Women Make Movies, could enjoy a limited theatrical run before wider exposure in niche markets.

Within a clearly established context of ongoing civil strife between Maoist guerrillas and repressive monarchist militia, Bridgham first centers her docu on the courageous call for justice of an "untouchable" single woman, Devi Sunuwar, who insistently comes forward to testify about her niece's rape, torture and murder by Royal Nepalese troops. In retaliation, government forces, not finding Devi at home, instead "disappears" her 15-year-old daughter Marina.

Devi's search for her daughter continues throughout the docu, becoming front-page New York Times news and a landmark court case, thanks to the continued support of Nepalese human-rights activist Mandira, the second of pic's strong femme protagonists.

Meanwhile, out in the countryside, feisty, elderly matriarch and fervent monarchist Krishna mobilizes her village to successfully defend against occupying Maoists.

Among the Maoists, whose forces are 40% women, Bridgham singles out the equally dedicated Kranti, brigade commissar and mother of two, whose earnest analyses of the monarchy's exploitation of the people are enlivened by a decidedly feminist slant.

Soon the government, imitating the Maoists' successful incorporation of women into all cadres of the rebel army, begins accepting female officers. Rajani, whose room at home still sports stuffed animals, decides to swap her medical studies for military training, partly out of deference to her brother, who was killed in combat.



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Finally, back in Kathmandu, pro-democracy student activist Ram Kumari watches hundreds, thousands and finally millions of civilian protestors fill the streets, as Maoists and political parties form a coalition against the monarchy.

Given the eminently sensible sextet of women Bridgham has chosen as a representative snapshot of the Nepalese people, the resulting armistice is hardly surprising -- but one wonders how long the peace will last. Skeptics include Krishna, who, along with other village women, berates the male politicians who come out of the woodwork to rally once the serious fighting is over.

Pic is uniformly well shot, edited and scored.



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