

Indian film searches for god in Nepal's Himalayas

Indian film director Sanjay Srinivas is poised to hit the big screen with 'God Lives In The Himalayas', apparently the first full-fledged Indian feature film made in Nepal and with a Nepali cast.

Four years ago, Srinivas had created ripples with 'Silence Please...The Dressing Room', a thriller with India-Pakistan cricket rivalry as its centrepiece. His new film has been shot mostly in Nepal and in the Nepali language.

It stars one of Nepal's most popular former beauty queens, Malavika Subba.

'Srinivas could have made this film anywhere,' Subba told IANS. 'We are very honoured that he chose to make this film in Nepal. It is a wonderful medium for promoting tourism and Nepal's culture.'

Srinivas, a management graduate, forayed into the entertainment industry as a play director and wrote, produced and directed successful English plays like 'The Dressing Room', 'Psy-Clone' and 'Chaplin in Love'. Later he entered filmmaking by directing 'Silence Please...The Dressing Room', an adaptation of his play by the same name.

Srinivas wrapped up the shooting for his 90-minute film 'God Lives In The Himalayas', narrated through the eyes of four children, in the Kathmandu valley and the nearby towns of Bandipur and Panauti.

However, his ambitious plan to shoot in the high-altitude locale of Samboche in the Himalayan region had to be canned after the children fell prey to high altitude sickness.

But undeterred, Srinivas switched strategy and instead shot the snow-clad mountain scenes in India's Jammu and Kashmir.

Initially, the film was to be released at the Cannes Film Festival in May but with rain and bad weather delaying the shooting in Nepal, only portions of the film are likely to be shown, Srinivas said. It is expected to hit Indian screens at the end of this year.

The story unfolds after a religious ritual goes terribly awry and Siddharth, the child protagonist, loses his mother to devouring flames that also leave his father grievously injured.

The uncomprehending boy then starts a journey to the Himalayas, where he is told god lives, to ask for his mother.

'Siddharth poses his questions to god, questions that all mankind has pondered since time immemorial,' says Srinivas' Chequered Flag company.

'In a scene as powerful as Lord Krishna's narration of the Bhagwad Gita to Arjuna, Siddharth's life is forever changed - and so shall our viewers' as they come to bathe in the joys of god's revelation to this simple boy.'

The director, known for looking for fresh twists, was mulling the plot in his mind two years ago when

he came across Sunil Thapa, the Nepali film industry's leading villain, and the two decided to join forces for the venture.

While Thapa's Precious Art Films is handling the post-production work, the American company LongTale is handling worldwide distribution.

The Nepali film industry stars Dhiren Shakya and Melina Manadhar play the lead adult roles in the film while Siddharth's mother is played by Subba, who was Miss Nepal 2001.

The film is in Nepali - apparently Bollywood's first venture in the language - with English subtitles. The music is by well-known Nepali band Kutumba.

Realising the potential of the film to lure more Indian tourists, the Nepal Tourism Board has supported the venture.

After Bollywood icon Dev Anand discovered Nepal as a picturesque locale with his 'Hare Ram Hare Krishna', other directors have also trained their lens on the Himalayan nation. And this film could certainly pave the way for more Nepali stars to enter Bollywood, after diva Manisha Koirala.

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