

HAF 16 The New Wife



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: India

GENRE | FORMAT | LANGUAGE | RUNNING TIME: Gothic, Horror | HD | English, Hindi | 100 mins

DIRECTOR:

Shashwati TALUKDAR

PRODUCER:

Anjali PANJABI

HAF GOALS:

Funds, Co-producers

BUDGET:

US\$653,500

SECURED BUDGET:

US\$85,000

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

Shashwati Talukdar and P. Kerim Friedman

2011 *Please Don't Beat Me, Sir!*

ONE-SENTENCE SYNOPSIS

A Himalayan Gothic tale about a young bride's discovery of the secrets haunting her respectable new family.

SYNOPSIS

Uma is a young woman very much in love with her older husband, Neel Kumar. They move to the lovely little town of Dehradun in the Himalayas, where his widowed mother lives in a large Punjabi Baroque mansion. Uma feels loved and accepted by her mother-in-law, and the entire household makes her feel very welcome. Growing up as an orphan, she finally has the family she dreamt about her entire life. Neel is a successful architect on assignments all over the country, and she is poised to start a successful interior design business. The well-off Kumar household lacks nothing except the sound of children's laughter. And that too will come, because Uma is also pregnant.

This idyll is shattered when strange occurrences start to plague Uma. Milk that was fine one minute turns sour the minute she touches it. Cold breezes blow through the house. Then one day she almost gets killed. The housemaid, Kalavati begs her to get an Ojha (a clairvoyant), who prompts her to investigate the house. She finds out that the house stands on the grounds of a 19th century structure that saw a great deal of violence in the British times. She does rituals to appease what she imagines are unquiet spirits, and it looks like things are normal. Only they are not. The strange and frightening occurrences start up again, with even more malevolence. And slowly, she comes to realize that her wonderful upper middle class family harbors dark secrets and not everything is as it seems. She unravels the mystery of the house and its inhabitants' history, but is it too late for her?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

This story comes from my encounter with a murdered female infant. I was eleven years old and I was walking home from school. There was a canal that ran beside the road I took everyday. And that is where I saw her. She was caught in the eddies that swirled around the locks to catch the current as the water rushed down the valley. The corpse was going round and round in the violent water; she was unable to escape its thrashing urgency. Young as I was, I understood only too well the lesson that this infant girl being beaten mercilessly by the current was teaching me. Despite my loving parents, as a girl, I was not welcome in Indian society. Decades have passed, but that image has never left me.

I see this film as a tribute to the Gothic traditions in Indian cinema, as seen in Satyajit Ray's *Monihara* (1961), Kamal Amrohi's *Mahal* (1949) and *Madhumati* (1958). The first two are works of Gothic genius, and the second a folklore masterpiece. Formally sophisticated, these films use cinematic form rather than special effects to achieve their aesthetic value. All these filmmakers share a certain truthfulness and rootedness in their cultural milieu.

I bring my experience in theater, art, experimental film and documentary to this project.

Documentary filmmaking has taught me to be nimble on my feet and use the resources I have wisely and economically. Art and Experimental cinema have helped me develop a distinctive voice and work on my aesthetic choices. And theater has given me a vocabulary to work with actors. It feels as if I have been training to make this film my entire life.

DIRECTOR

Shashwati TALUKDAR

Shashwati Talukdar is an independent filmmaker who started out in the New York TV and film industry as an assistant editor working for Michael Moore, and doing projects for HBO, BBC, Sundance, etc. Her recent films include the award winning *Please Don't Beat Me, Sir!* (2011) and *Wall Stories* (2014) a hybrid film set in her hometown, Dehradun. Her most recent short, the Himalayan Gothic, *The Girl 2014*), is touring the festival circuit. Her work covers a wide range of forms, including documentary, narrative and experimental. Her work has shown at venues including the Busan International Film Festival, the Margaret Mead Festival, and the International Film Festival of India. Her experimental films and video art is regularly shown around the world, including the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, the Kiasma Museum of Art and the Whitney Biennial. She has been supported by entities including the Tribeca Foundation, Asian Cine Fund in Busan, the Jerome Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, and received the James Yee Mentorship award from the Center for Asian American Media and an IFP fellowship among others. Shashwati has an MFA from Temple University, USA. She lives between Taiwan, India and the US.

PRODUCER

Anjali PANJABI

Anjali Panjabi has worked in the Mumbai film industry for over fifteen years. Her credits include: *Shifting Lines of the Desert* (dir. Pushpendra Singh, 2017, as producer), won Busan ACF Grant; *Chotey Shah* (dir. Sabiha Sumar, 2016, as producer); *Good Morning Karachi* (dir. Sabiha Sumar, 2013, as executive producer (India)/line producer); *Zinda Bhaag* (dir. Farjad Nabu and Meenu Gaur, 2013, as production consultant), Pakistan's nomination for Oscar 2014; *Radhe Radhe: Rites of Holi* (dir. Prashant Bhargava, 2013, as creative producer); *Voice From The Sky* (dir. Farhan Akhtar, 2008, as line producer, pre-production), *Words with Gods* (Segment "God Room") (dir. Mira Nair, 2012, as line producer); *Patang* (dir. Prashant Bhargava, 2011, as casting director), world premiered at Berlin Film Festival; *Little Zizou* (dir. Sooni Taraporevala, 2008, as line producer/production manager); *A Few Things I Know About Her* (2002, as director), Winner of Silver Conch at MIFF 2002 and the National Award for Direction (Non Feature 2003).

PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Marvi Films

Marvi Films is a Mumbai-based company. The company has been set up to produce narratives, documentaries and other media. The aim is to create International quality projects from a South Asian perspective.

Anjali PANJABI, the founder of the company, has over 15 years of experience in the film industry. Currently she is also working on *Dawaatnama-The Invite*, directed by Sabiha Sumar, along with Vidhi Films and Heimat Films. Previously she has worked on projects with Mira Nair, Sooni Taraporevala and Prashant Bhargava, amongst others. Anjali is also a documentary filmmaker. Her documentary films have won awards, including the National Award.

Four Nine and a Half Pictures, Inc.

Four Nine and a Half Pictures, Inc. is established in New York State, USA. It produces independent films, documentary, fiction and experimental art. It also works as an independent contractor to produce and post produce media for television, corporate and educational entities. In the capacity of providing post production services Four Nine and a Half Pictures, Inc. has worked with entities like the BBC, HBO, Lifetime, Cablevision, NBC etc. in the United States.