



BUDDHA COLLAPSED OUT OF SHAME - Buda as sharm foru rikht

77 Minutes, 2007, Iran

Director and Writer: Hana Makhmalbaf

Cast: Nibakht Noruz, Abdolali Hosenali, Abbas Alijome

Synopsis

Amidst the wreckage beneath the ruined statue of the Buddha, thousands of families struggle to survive. Barkay, a six year old afghan girl is challenged to go to school by her neighbours son who reads in front of their cave. Having found the money to buy a precious notebook, and taking her mother lipstick as a pencil, Baktay sets out. On the way she is harassed by boys playing games that mimic the terrible violence they have witnessed that has always surrounded them. The boys want to stone the little girl, to blow her up as the Taliban blew up the Buddha, to shoot her like the Americans. Will Baktay be able to escape these violent war games and reach the school?

Review, Dereck Malcolm, This is London

Movies about young people and by very young directors are a notable feature of Iranian cinema and the latest striking picture from that country, *Buddha Collapsed out of Shame*, centres on a six-year-old Afghan girl searching for an education and is written and directed by 19-year-old Hana Makhmalbaf who directed *The Joy of Madness*, a documentary about the making of her elder sister Samira's film, at *Five in the Afternoon*.

Her father is the leading Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and her sister, Samira Makhmalbaf, had a feature film in competition in Cannes before she was 18. Rough and ready as it sometimes is, this broadside against the Taliban, set in the Afghan city of Bamian, works wonders at times.

Bamian is near the massive fifth-century Buddhist carvings that were destroyed by the Taliban, causing an international outcry. Hana's film has a smiling, poverty-stricken little girl called Baktay (Nikbakht Noruz) inspired by a neighbour's recitations to go to the local school. She hasn't even got a piece of paper or a pencil and has to barter some eggs to get them.

Her first lesson is on economics and it is well beyond her. The next is cultural studies, where she is threatened by a cabal of boys who persist in playing "Taliban". The bullies are easily equated with a stifling theocracy but the didactic nature of the film is leavened by its naturalistic playing. If this is what kids face, Hana suggests, imagine what adults have to go through. It may be naively done, but it still packs a punch. Iran, of course, does not support the Taliban, so the Makhmalbaf family's censorship problems back home do not apply here.

Awards: Asian Film Award: Best Film 2008, Berlin: Crystal Bear and Peace Film Award 2008, San Sebastian: Special Jury Prize 2007.

Interview with Hana Makhmalbaf

Buddha Collapsed out of Shame

1-Where does the film take place?

Hana Makhmalbaf: Most of the film is shot under the remains of Buddha statues, which were destroyed by Taliban in 2001, in Bamian of Afghanistan.

2- How did you choose your casting?

Hana: I visited many schools in Bamian and its suburbs for my actors. I saw thousands of children and auditioned hundreds until I cast the few whom I felt best suited my story.

3- How did you find directing the children?

Hana: Hard but rewarding at the same time. It was hard because they weren't familiar with cinema. In their city there has never been a film shot before. They have never even had a local TV station so they could get used to seeing their own image in a box. In directing them I tried to take a different approach than usual. I tried to make it seem like a game to them.

4- When you watch the film now do you feel that you have said what you intended to by making it?

Hana: By showing today's picture of Afghanistan, I tried to depict the effects of the recent years' violence on the country. So that the adults could see how their behavior affects the younger generation. Children are the future adults. If they get used to violence, the future of the world will be in great danger. A teenage boy in the film says: "when I grow up I will kill you". Because as a child he has been through lots of violence so it has become part of his usual life. I think that children's real school is observing and copying their parents' behavior or other adults around them. For instance, a few years ago in their city, Bamian, one of the harshest massacre of all times happened, in which many men and boys were beheaded in front of their wives' and mothers' eyes. The irony is that; even those who had come to rescue Afghanistan, they first destroyed it and then didn't find the time to rebuild it, until the next so called rescue group came and went through the same destruction and violence again and again and again. First, it was the Russian communists, then the Taliban showed up, and now the Americans. One was communist, the other Muslim and the last one either atheist or Christian. But they all had one thing common, and that was "Violence". And this violence has been injected over and over from three different groups into the culture of the people in this country so strongly that you can see it in their children's play. The children in this country, unlike the American children who learn violence through Hollywood action films, have learnt it by witnessing some of the harshest ones happening to their relatives in front of their eyes. They have witnessed their fathers being beheaded in their gardens in front of their eyes.

5- The title of the film is Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame but in reality weren't the Buddha statues destroyed by the Taliban?

Hana: Yes, you can say that they were. You can also see this at the beginning and the end of the film. But I got this title from a metaphorical quote from my father "Mohsen Makhmalbaf" which meant that even a statute can be ashamed of witnessing all these violence and harshness happening to these innocent people and therefore, collapse. Not just because of the meaning behind the sentence but also most of the story takes place in front of the empty place of Buddha's statute so I felt the title serves the film right in both ways.

6- Did you have the complete story in mind before shooting or did it happen as you shot?

Hana: At the beginning there was quite a poetic storyline. It was about a one day journey of a 6 year old girl, who gets encouraged or rather, instigated by the boy next door to go to school. Since she doesn't have a notebook she sells their chicken's eggs to buy the basic stationery, but her earning is not enough to cover for the pencil so she takes her mother's lipstick instead to use as pencil. Unaware of the steps one needs to take to be enrolled in school, she goes to every school on her way but she gets rejected.

When the first part of shooting in spring was over, during the editing I felt that the characters in the film were somehow incomplete. So I went back to my mother “the scriptwriter” and we started to work again on the plot and eventually, the second part of shooting and editing started. In fact, the one day story that we see in the film was shot in three different seasons; spring, summer and autumn.

7- Who is the hero in the film?

Hana: No one, not even the girl. Because she does not achieve her goal at the end. She even accepts to die temporarily, or collapses like the Buddha statue, when she is asked to by the boys towards the end of the film. She has no other choice. She goes a long way to different schools to learn a humorous anecdote. But no one teaches her the short story she is looking for. But she learns other things during her journey in real life. Not only there are no heroes in this film for me, but also describing and trying to simplify the characters in the film, who represent people in real life, is quite difficult for me. Each character represents different layers of life in the film. It also depends on the way I am going to look at this film. For example, look at the girls and the boys next to each other. When the boys are seriously playing their fathers in the wars, the girls are also lost in performing as their mothers; putting make up on their faces. This all happens in a country where guns can be made out of tiny sticks, schools can be invaded by just a lipstick or a city can be bombarded in your imagination with a simple toy like a kite, as in the film.

8- Tell us about your last two films and your experience in cinema up to now?

Hana: My second experience was Joy of Madness, which was a behind the scene documentary of the film "At Five in the afternoon", shot by digital camera with no team but myself. At first, the idea was to shoot the problems Samira, my sister was facing while shooting her film in Afghanistan but eventually the final film turned out to be about the situation of women in Kabul after the American invasion.. My first film, The Day My Aunt Was Ill, was a short film made in our home with a simple handy cam when I was 8. there is a nine year gap between my first short film and my first feature film " Buddha collapsed out of shame". During those 9 years I was constantly active in some other professional films as stills photographer, assistant director, etc.

9- Why in Afghanistan and not in Iran?

Hana: Any story that may interest me and anywhere it may be possible to obtain permission for making I will make my films. I have many stories that take place in Iran and hopefully one day when I have the permission I will make them. Now it is not an easy time.

10-How do you anticipate the future of Afghanistan?

Hana: The Taliban are gone but their impact still remains on this culture. Continuous wars in Afghanistan have destroyed the culture more than the country. The violence that has raided the souls of the children through wars in this country may erupt as new complex in the future. Ahmad Shah Massoud used to say: “A good politician is not one who analyzes the future well. He is one who well understands today.” When I am in Afghanistan I feel that the world does not even comprehend Afghanistan’s present day problems. How does it suppose to build its future?!

12-Why does the young Hana make films? Does she want to be a filmmaker like the rest of her family members or does she have a word of her own to say?

Hana: As an 18 year old girl living in Iran under current conditions and having to bear with ideological, political and social pressures I have a lot to say. But I write most of them in the form of short stories for myself. If writing does not reduce any pain from those who sympathize with me, at least it reduces my own psychological pressures. My word in this film despite not being made in Iran is about common sufferings that exist both in Iran and Afghanistan. Both societies have cultural/political problems alike.