



devi

DIRECTED BY SUBINA SHRESTHA

Silenced No More.

In war they were equals. In peace, their stories were erased.

Devi isn't just rewriting her own story - she's reshaping the narrative for countless survivors, carving out a path toward healing, dignity, and respect.



Run Time: 80 minutes

Country of Production: Nepal/UK/South Korea

Language: Nepali & English – subtitles

Shooting format: 4K/Screening format: DCP/ Sound Format: 5.1

www.devidocumentary.com

**World Premiere at the Hot Docs Canadian International Film Festival
28th April 2024**



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Devi Press STILLS at bottom of EPK

About the film:

Logline:

Nepal's Civil War ended in 2006, but not for Devi; rebel warrior, mother and sexual violence survivor. As those in power try to erase rape from the history of the war, Devi has to battle her own demons before she can begin to build a movement to fight for justice.

Synopsis:

In 1997, 17-year-old Devi's life took a harrowing turn. Arrested during the onset of civil war in Nepal, she was accused of being a rebel, subjected to torture, and endured the unimaginable trauma of rape while in custody. Branded a "victim," Devi faced the weight of social stigma, and battled depression and isolation. Her story didn't end there, however. From joining the rebel frontlines to ascending through the ranks and eventually serving as a member of parliament after the war's end, Devi defied all odds. Devi is an immersive vérité film that follows her remarkable journey. Through intimate encounters with her former lawyer and counsellor, the film digs deeply into personal moments, capturing Devi's unwavering resilience. Supported by her diary, archival footage and breathtaking imagery, Devi reconstructs a history silenced by erasure, rewriting her own destiny in the process, and illuminates the power of survival, the quest for justice, and the conquering spirit of humanity.

Long Synopsis:

Devi Khadka is leading a quiet resistance. As she travels around Nepal, listening to stories of wartime rape survivors, and creating a unified voice for justice, she knows that she's poking a hornet's nest. Nepal's leaders want to bury the shameful truth of wartime rape. As the only public face of survivors, Devi has decided that she can no longer stay silent. But her TikTok, loving teenage daughter just wants her to be a mum.



In 1997, seventeen-year-old Devi, was arrested, accused of being a rebel, tortured, and raped in custody. A civil war had just begun. Rebel leaders revealed her as a rape ‘victim’. Tagged with this shameful taboo, Devi battled depression, social ostracism, joined the rebel frontlines, and rose through the ranks, even serving as a member of the parliament when the war ended.

Shot as an immersive verité, the film travels with Devi, as she consolidates the voices of survivors.

As Devi confronts her former lawyer and seeks consolation from her counsellor, the film dives into deeply intimate and vulnerable moments. Through her diary, supported by archives, Devi reconstructs history erased to rewrite her new destiny.

Director's note - Subina Shrestha

In the early 2000s, my country was embroiled in a vicious civil war between the Maoist guerrillas and the royal government at the time. I was working as a young journalist and filmmaker. Devi had already caught my attention as a woman who had been raped by the police, exposed by Maoist leadership, and vilified by the press. It came as no surprise that she was unwilling to talk to me. After fighting a war in the jungles as a guerrilla fighter, Devi ran for elected office after the peace process, and even served a brief stint as a junior minister. However, over time, she became disillusioned as wartime rape and sexual violence were being erased from Nepal’s history.

By 2019, I had gained a reputation for hard-hitting reporting on issues of social justice and gender rights. Devi approached me with her diary, a memoir detailing the impact of rape on her life. She asked me to help share her story. At that point, Devi's journey became a tale of women's solidarity, faith in their own potential, and the transformative power of owning one's narrative. Concurrently, I had been mentoring Ashmita Khadka, another Maoist guerrilla turned journalist and now a documentary producer. With added trust established through Ashmita, Devi began to voice her aspirations: demanding accountability from the state and the Party. While it seemed impossible, we knew we had to try.

From the outset, I aimed to make this a collaborative journey. Devi made all the decisions, and we provided unwavering support. Devi's first call was to the lawyer who had assisted in her release in 1997. In a remarkable turn of events, he revealed that seventeen policemen, not just four or five as previously thought, had raped her. Devi had to meet with her trauma counselor to cope with the ensuing collapse. These raw and intimate moments unfolded in real time due to Devi's unyielding trust. We also invited the counselor to join us in all future meetings with survivors. Carefully and deliberately, we treaded with the women Devi encountered, mindful that some of the perpetrators were either protected by or still part of the state. As these women shared their stories,



they collectively inspired us with their bravery. To safeguard their identities, we have chosen to keep them hidden.

Personally, this has never been a neutral storytelling endeavor for me. As a Nepali woman, I have experienced firsthand the patriarchal structures in our society, and I am committed to challenging them. We provided Devi with the legal and financial support necessary for her campaign and the establishment of a support group for herself and fellow survivors—The Undefeated. Sixteen years after the war's end, the survivors met

with the country's leaders for the first time. Devi's demands have reached the UN Secretary-General, and Nepal's parliament has amended the Truth and Reconciliation bill to include rape and sexual violence as serious human rights violations. This victory is not only for Devi and her daughter but also for me and my community. Through making this film, I have come to understand the true essence of the word "Devi": a goddess embodying both creative and destructive powers, inherent within every woman.

Select past press coverage of Devi's achievements in Nepal (In English):

[Living in the shadows of the 'people's war'](#)

[Conflict-era rape victims' trauma compounds](#)

[Long fight against culture of rape and impunity](#)

[Silent no more: Nepal's wartime rape survivors demand recognition | AFP](#)

[Meet the Nepali Woman Leading Calls for Justice for Wartime Sexual Assaults](#)

[Women gang-raped by locals during Nepal civil war recount the trauma](#)

[Women raped during armed conflict ask: Where is the state?](#)

Biographies



Devi Khadka is not just a survivor; she's a force to be reckoned with. Rising from the shadows of war, Devi didn't just endure - she fought back. After the peace process, she didn't retreat; she ran for elected office and served as a junior minister, defying the very forces that once sought to silence her. But her journey was far from over.

With an unparalleled ability to mobilize, Devi traversed the nation, rallying survivors, organizing health camps, and amplifying their voices. Her tireless efforts elevated her to a position of leadership within the transitional justice movement, where she emerged as the de facto advocate for victims of wartime atrocities in Nepal.



Focused yet unwavering, Devi's singular mission remains clear: justice for survivors of wartime sexual violence. From political chambers to international forums, she has relentlessly lobbied leaders, urging them to prioritize the long-overdue transitional justice process. Her advocacy knows no bounds, encompassing political parties, religious figures, civil society, and even the United Nations.

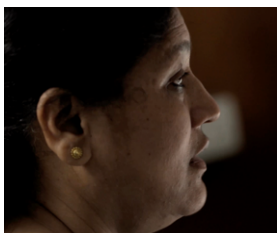
But amidst her crusade, Devi finds solace in the simple joys of family and the tranquility of her countryside farm. It's there, amidst the quietude of nature, that she finds moments of respite from her relentless pursuit of justice.



Devi's daughter, **Rosy** is doing her undergraduate studies, majoring in psychology and English. She's also trained in belly dancing and has been participating in shows. She can be found on Instagram as [@rosy.shrestha](#)



Devi's husband, **Raj Kumar** Shrestha, has now become a farmer while doing his Masters in Sociology. Raj Kumar spends most of his days in their farm in Dolakha where they have planted coffee and avocados. He's also trained as a pranic healer.



Devi's trauma counsellor, **Jamuna** Maharjan, has been supporting Devi with the Undeclared. She's also been running her own counselling work, especially with trauma survivors. www.sajhadhago.com



Pushpa Kamal Dahal became the Prime Minister of Nepal in December 2022 for the second time. Since then, he has repeatedly promised Devi and the other survivors that he'd personally ensure that the transitional justice bill would pass and they'd get justice. He's yet to deliver on his promise.

How the team is managing consent:

The producers and director are experienced in making films involving trauma and security risks. We sought consent before filming, consent for the parts of the filming we want to



include in the film. And, before release, sat with any vulnerable parties in the film and screened it with them so that they had a chance to respond in a safe environment.

The film, 'Devi,' took years to make because Devi needed that time to be ready. Twelve years after director, Subina, first reached out to her, Devi gave Subina her diary. Ashmita - our Nepali producer and a former rebel fighter herself - carried out audio interviews for months. It was only after the team had gained the trust and consent of Devi, her husband and through them, her children, that we started shooting. Teenager, Rosy, is 18 now, we have resought her consent independently of her parents.

As Devi was raped by the police, we had to be vigilant about what we shared online. As long as she was not public about her activities, we also had to lay low, limiting our fundraising opportunities for years.

Since Devi met the Prime Minister and her campaign hit Nepal's front pages, we have been connecting Devi with diplomats, the UN, global activists and media to get *The Undefeated* the support they need. Nepal's leadership now recognises that the world is watching.

Many of the survivors we met through Devi felt used and abused by the journalists and activists who'd asked them to relive their traumas. From the start we spoke to trauma experts i.e., the Dart centre, about best practices around consent. Even though some women gave us consent, we made clear from the start our intention was to not reveal any of their identities. We have never asked them to share their stories. But as Devi shared hers, some decided to volunteer their experiences. After Devi's own breakdown, we also decided to take a trauma therapist with us to all these meetings.



ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS:

Subina Shrestha: Director/ Producer



Subina Shrestha is a filmmaker and a journalist who likes to push boundaries in storytelling. Her work ranges from print stories in the New York Times, to short fiction in virtual reality. Her news coverage on Nepal's earthquake and its aftermath earned her multiple awards including an Emmy nomination. She was nominated for the Rory Peck Award for her camerawork while undercover reporting in Myanmar during cyclone Nargis. She was a 2017 Nieman fellow at Harvard, a 2019 Global Media Maker fellow at Film Independent, and a 2022 Ochberg fellow at the Dart Centre, Columbia University.

DEVI is her first feature documentary.

Rosie Garthwaite: Producer



As an Exec Producer at BBC World Service's Investigations Unit. Rosie is currently based in London making docs and interactives, mainly about the Middle East and North Africa. She founded Mediadante, producing the Emmy-nominated, The Workers Cup, that premiered on the opening night of Sundance 2017. In 2023 she exec produced Under Poisoned Skies that helped secure a pledge to reduce gas flaring emissions from the Iraqi government and won the RTS for best international documentary of the year. The International Emmy-award winning film Escape from Isis / Escaping ISIS she developed was referenced by the UK Prime Minister in a key speech and shown to the U.S. Congress. In 2014 she Exec produced a CINE Golden Eagle award-winning series following the first Saudi woman up Everest. She is a former British army officer and author of the award-winning book How to Avoid Being Killed in a War Zone published by Bloomsbury in 2011.



Asmita Khadka: Researcher/Producer



Asmita Khadka is an independent journalist and a researcher who's known for her fighting spirit. As a child, she joined the 'revolution' to change the status quo, and as a woman, she became a journalist who challenged the status quo within the Maoist party. She consistently wrote about inclusion, discrimination, and sexual abuse in the party, and became persona non grata. She was the acting editor for the Maoist-run weekly paper, Janadesh. Asmita is a natural organiser. Even though this is her first documentary project, besides producing the film, she's been instrumental in the creation of Aparajit, the first the only organisation led and run by conflict related sexual violence survivors.

Heejung Oh: Producer



Heejung Oh grew up in South Korea, and her life is divided between Seoul and Amsterdam. She founded Seesaw Pictures in 2017, a boutique production company with a slate of award-winning films. She has (co-)produced films selected for prestigious festivals such as Sundance, Berlinale, IDFA, CPH:DOX, IFFR, Hot Docs. She loves working with young and established filmmakers with strong artistic visions and sensitivity. She is an alumna of EAVE, Eurodoc, Rotterdam Lab, and Berlinale Talents, and has been invited to the selection committee of IDFA Bertha Fund, Sheffield Doc/Fest, DOK Leipzig and AIDC.

Bishnu Kalpit: Director of Photography



Bishnu Kalpit is an award-winning independent cinematographer and a filmmaker. His short films have won multiple awards in film festivals across the world including a special mention at Banff film festival and best short film at Tasveer film festival. He's worked for platforms like Netflix to channels like BBC and Al Jazeera. Bishnu has worked with Subina for fifteen years. Bishnu's work with the Maoists has given him open access to former members of the party.



Executive Producers:

Sigrid Dyekjær has produced more than 30 documentary films during the last 22 years. She is the producer of the Oscar nominated film 2020 *The Cave* by Feras Fayyad where she won an Emmy for best producer and was nominated for a Peabody Award. She won Best Producer at Cinema Eye 2020 for *The Cave*, and was nominated for Producers Guild of America also in 2020. *The Territory* by Alex Pritz, won two awards at Sundance: Audience Award and Jury's Special Award for Best Craft. Sigrid teaches at the National Film School of Denmark and at DOK Incubator, an initiative supported by Media. She also holds master class lectures at film schools around the world and courses in documentary filmmaking. In 2018 Sigrid had the honour of being accepted as a member of The Academy. In spring 2021 Dyekjaer left her company Danish Documentary, to form her new company Real Lava producing, co-producing and investing in International Documentary Films out of Denmark, backed by French company Newen Studios.

Dennis Paul is the Co-Founder and Chairman of REACT FILMS (www.reactfilm.com) which produces award-winning film and TV content such as *100 Foot Wave* (HBO), *The Story of Plastic* (Discovery), *SLay the Dragon* (Participant), and *The Workers Cup*. He was also the co-founder of the educational non-profit, REACT to FILM, which created a civic education curriculum taught in middle and high schools across the USA. For more than a decade, Dennis has served as a Trustee of the Museum of the Moving Image, where he serves on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors. He has been engaged with numerous non-profit organisations focused on the digital divide, educational opportunities for underserved youth, and using the power of social issue films to help youth find their voice on critical issues and take action to effect change in their communities.

Danielle Turkov & Amy Shepherd - Think-Film Impact Production

Think-Film is a market-leading impact media company that harnesses the power of visual storytelling to drive forward political and social change. The team, led by Founder and Executive Director Danielle Turkov and Global Impact Director Amy Shepherd, work at the cutting-edge intersection of art and policy, partnering with world-leading film, television, AR, VR and music artists to drive forward decisions, commitments and outcomes that bring measurable, lasting change to global situations.

Danielle and Amy's film credits include Oscar-nominated and Emmy-winning feature "*The Cave*" (Feras Fayyad, "*Last Man in Aleppo*"), "*Dark Waters*" (Todd Haynes, starring Mark Ruffalo, Anne Hathaway, Tim Robbins), Oscar-shortlisted and Emmy-nominated "*My Enemy, My Brother*" (Ann Shin), Award-winning documentary "*iHuman*" (Tonje Hessen



Schei), multiple award-winning docu-fiction “La Soledad” (Jorge Arnaud Thielan) and recently released documentary “The Scars of Ali Boulala” (Max Eriksson).

Main Credits:

Directed by Subina Shrestha

Produced by Rosie Garthwaite, Heejung Oh, Subina Shrestha, Ashmita Chaudhary Khadka

Executive Producers: Sigrid Dyekjær, Dennis Paul, Danielle Turkov Wilson, Amy Shepherd

Edited by: Phil Jandaly, Nicole Hálová

Director of Photography: Bishnu Kalpit

Original Score and Sound Design: Craig Sutherland

Colourist: Andrew Elliott

Re-recording Mixer: Jez Spencer

Hot Docs Publicist: C2C Communications, Charlene Coy

Run Time: 80 minutes

Country of Production: Nepal/UK/South Korea

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Stills:



Devi (right) and daughter Rosy



Devi Khadka flanked by survivors of Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) who have chosen not to reveal their identities.



Devi Khadka in Kathmandu, Nepal



Devi established a support group for survivors of CRSV named the “Undeclared.”



Devi and the survivors.



Devi Khadka often retreats to nature in order to battle her PTSD.