

## FILM REVIEWS

heroic companion Dhebo raises difficult classroom issues. Students will also need to be informed about the tradition of heroic disembowelment. The video does not explain comparative folklore traditions into which some of the actions of the hero fit, such as the exchange of weapons in the final battle, and only references or omits entirely many of the Pabuji tales, including the post-apocalyptic final segment. Despite the issues raised by *sati* and blood revenge, students will want to know what happens after Pabuji leaves the scene.

Background information for classroom use can be extracted from John Smith's comprehensive text, *The Epic of Pabuji: A Study, Transcription and Translation* (Cambridge University Press, 1991). Smith provides information and instructions on how to download the complete text of the epic at: <http://www.bombay.oriental.cam.ac.uk/index.html>.

Information on the tradition of cloth paintings to which the *par* belongs and examples of such scroll paintings are at the *pichwals* Web site: <http://www.rajasthanweb.com/painting/pichwais.html>.

Maps of Asia to help place Pabuji geographically and historically related instructional materials and model lessons are at the Asia Society's Asian Education Resource Center K-12 Web site: <http://www.askasia.org>.

The epic of Pabuji and the performance tradition of the *bhoppo* will interest teachers of literature, social studies, music, art and theater. However, for most students the animation techniques juxtaposed with bits

of footage from actual performances and village life in Rajasthan will need to be explained separately from the narrative thread of the six hundred-year-old story. Without source material to sort out geographical locations, names of characters, and cultural expectations, students with some background may tangle anything they know about religious beliefs, especially concerning Rama, Indian visual arts and Indian music, into the Pabuji epic. Students with no background preparation may come away more confused than enlightened.

At the end of the video students are asked to speculate on what will happen as television becomes more common in rural India. Whatever the answer, the filmmaker's claim that this video offers a rare chance to "catch history by the tale" as this art form disappears over the edge of time is true. ■

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## A Voice of Her Own

### Women and Economic Change in Asia

PRODUCED BY THE INFORMATION OFFICE  
ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK  
6ADB AVENUE

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DIRECTED BY ANDREA KALIN  
PRODUCER: MATTHEW WESTFALL

DISTRIBUTED BY SPARKS MEDIA PRODUCTION  
1997, 23 MINUTES. COLOR

Where do women fit into the pattern of rapid economic change in Southeast Asia, where traditional values, illiteracy and enormous poverty weigh heavily against new prosperity and increased opportunity? What share of the proceeds do women receive in this region where they have been called "the speechless ones" and where "... poverty wears a woman's face"?

Educators should welcome this short film produced by the Asian Development Bank which profiles the challenges and changes facing women in three Southeast Asian nations—Cambodia, the Philippines, and Bangladesh. Since filmmakers have been more attentive to societies in East Asia, documentary footage on the role of women in Southeast Asia is a welcome addition to the educational archives. The short eight-minute clips on each country highlight major economic and social issues. Through interviews with women in government, academia, business and self-help

organizations, the video paints a picture of growing awareness and limited progress in literacy and employment opportunities.

The video opens with a collage of images depicting the dramatic societal and economic contrasts one sees in these countries. The segment on Cambodia begins with the stark reminder that this nation is host to 8–10 million landmines which claim over 300 lives a month, and is clearly still hampered by the dark shadow of the Khmer Rouge legacy. As the narrator eloquently observes, "The people are in passage from pain to memory." With many young men dead, and institutions and the intellectual community decimated by the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodian women carry the burden of restoring their country. And reconstruction is just beginning.

Over half of the households are headed by women, most of whom cannot read or write. Telling words come from an illiterate woman early in the film. "If you don't have

education, it's like you are a blind person." Studies show that when women are educated, they have fewer children and seek better health and educational opportunities for their offspring. The issue of education for young girls in Cambodia remains problematic, however. Curricula in elementary schools emphasize a submissive role for women through required readings such as "Rules of a Lady," which stresses that young girls should prepare themselves to be good wives and mothers who follow their husbands' commands without question. Parents continue to pull girls out of school when they are old enough to help with chores and younger siblings. By the secondary level, almost all girls have dropped out of school. The fact that the university in Phnom Penh lacks dormitory facilities for women underscores the educational barriers which hold women back in Cambodia.

The video touches on the issue of adolescent prostitution as a growing problem for young girls with limited education throughout Asia, where women are contracting the AIDS virus faster than anywhere else in the world. One notable segment features a young girl who has managed to escape prostitution, but the video does not sensationalize the problem. Social and sexual subordination of women continues to be prevalent, with a high incidence of domestic violence.

On a positive note, the narrator points to self-help organizations such as the Cambodian Women's Devel-

opment Association, which are trying to help women become more self-reliant. A new governmental office, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, holds to the goal of insuring that women's needs are at least recognized, though it lacks resources and staff. This segment also profiles a young woman who has advanced professionally despite her parents' reservations. "If you don't work, you waste yourself. You waste your life," she observes. Such awareness is a beginning, but the viewer is left with the feeling that the legacy of a prolonged civil war and the strength of traditional attitudes continue to hold back the vast majority of Cambodian women.

A different set of problems faces women in the Philippines, where clear economic gains and a glossy veneer of fashionable clothes, throngs of cars, and urban construction veil the fact that almost one-half of the population lives in poverty. Here there are educated female university graduates eager for employment as teachers or accountants, yet an excess labor supply and limited capital have created a situation where these women can earn more as domestics working overseas than they can in their own country. This exportation of skilled labor, thought to be a short-term phenomenon, has developed into an economic pattern that has government officials concerned.

Through interviews with women senators, university professors, and small business entrepreneurs, viewers come to understand efforts to reverse

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For CGP program guidelines, quarterly newsletter, annual report, or more information about these or other CGP programs, please call or write to:

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*This short, informative video is packed with information and promises to be eminently useful in the classroom. It puts a human face on economic statistics from these three developing nations.*

this trend. The Asian Development Bank has stepped in with Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) loans to women at low interest rates, providing seed money to encourage women to start their own businesses. Organizations such as "Women in Finance and Entrepreneurship" offer further support for enterprising individuals. Again, the narration mentions studies which demonstrate that when women become wage earners, the benefits go to their children and families, with some individuals earning respect from their husbands. Thus, the entire community profits from women's expanded opportunities. A basic message of hope is conveyed in that community-based, grass roots NGOs are playing a critical role in helping women in the Philippines and elsewhere in Asia.

In Bangladesh, a patriarchal society and one of the most densely populated regions of the world, women are promised in marriage in their early teens, and opportunities to step out of the confining customs of marriage have been limited. The video portrays a burgeoning garment industry as changing the economic context and leading to a social revolution of significant proportions. Most of the garment workers are poor, illiterate young women from rural areas who are making a bid for

some degree of economic self-reliance. Long workdays are the norm and substandard conditions are common, but employment in the garment industry is a step forward, enabling some young women to earn three times the average national wage. Lacking the ability to read, however, few advance beyond the position of sewing machine operators.

Some factories are beginning to offer literacy classes and day care. The efforts of community activists and grass roots organizations such as the "Center for Women's Initiatives" are providing support, even helping to finance hostels as safe lodging for female workers in the urban slums where most live. The challenge in Bangladesh is to convince more factory owners to provide day care and literacy classes, two key factors which enable women to remain in the work force even after bearing children, and to be eligible to advance to supervisory levels. Interviews with two male business managers show that some men as well as women are interested in aiding this effort. Until this third country profile, all interviewees in the video were female, suggesting that women themselves have taken significant responsibility in bringing true social change to their peers.

The narration provokes thoughts about law and justice as well. Constitutionally,

women are considered equal in most Asian countries, but equality under the law does not automatically translate into equality in practice. Traditional attitudes and customs have impeded progress, and most women in these countries continue to suffer poverty, illiteracy and poor health. Yet the video makes clear that the “speechless ones” are beginning to find their voice and have made measurable economic gains in at least two of these three countries.

This short, informative video is packed with information and promises to be eminently useful in the classroom. It puts a human face on economic statistics from these three developing nations. It provides an excellent overview of the economic and social challenges facing women in three distinct Asian settings, and raises important questions about economic modernization. A useful exercise would be to have students make a checklist of questions they should ask about economic change and the role of women in developing countries. Literacy, the strength of traditional values, the educational system, the role of government, the status of day care, the role of private businesses, the importance of local grass roots efforts, consideration of basic issues such as housing—the film touches on all of these issues and invites further exploration by the student. Interestingly, one factor not explored in any of the three segments is the issue of health care, an important indicator of a society’s attitude towards its citizens. Overall, the division of this video into three clear segments results

in a “classroom friendly,” flexible product that teachers could use for a variety of purposes.

The director consulted with over sixty individuals and ten organizations; music credits include original compositions and Cambodian court music. Clearly, authenticity and appeal were top priorities. Along with such excellent films as *Small Happiness* by Carma Hinton, which depicts women in rural China in the 1980s, and “The Story of Noriko,” a *Faces of Japan* video about a young woman seeking business employment in Japan, educators have at hand some superb documentaries which begin to give a picture of women’s roles in Asia. *A Voice of Her Own* would be an excellent choice for inclusion in a high school curriculum. ■

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