

PROJECT PROFILES

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Co-production market
Mea Culpa (S Lan)
 Director Prasanna Jayakody
 Language Sinhala

M*ea Culpa* tells the story of Pubudu, a 27-year-old Sri Lankan medical professional whose work has thrust him into a world of ethnic violence, revolutionary ideas and suicide bombings. Determined to make a change, he gives up his job to become a painter and embarks on a philosophical exploration of the roots of violence.

The story is based on the experiences of the film's co-director, Sumudu Guruge. "This film will not be a documentary but create a new genre of feature films — the inspiration thriller," says director Prasanna Jayakody.

His first feature, *Sankara*, about the inner turmoil of a monk, was released theatrically in Sri Lanka and won the Silver Pyramid at the Cairo International Film Festival in 2006. His second film *Karma* (2010), about a man troubled by guilt following his mother's death, screened at film festivals including Rotterdam and Busan. A theatrical release in Sri Lanka is expected in 2012.

Mea Culpa will go into pre-production in early 2012. Pubudu will be played by Sri Lankan actor Saumya Liyanage. The film will be produced by Rasitha Jinasena's Colombo-based Sky Entertainers, which also produced *Karma*.

Nandita Dutta

MEA CULPA

Producer Rasitha Jinasena **Production company** Sky Entertainers **Budget** \$500,000 (₹125m)
Finance raised to date \$150,000 (₹37.5m) from Sky Entertainers **Contact** Rasitha Jinasena, rasithadj@gmail.com



Co-production market
Scarlet Poppy (Afg-Ind-US)
 Director Peter Bussian
 Language English, Pashto

US photographer and film-maker Peter Bussian describes *Scarlet Poppy* as an exploration of Pashtun culture that is critical of the American involvement in Afghanistan. The story revolves around a jaded US contractor who becomes involved with a Pashtun widow, leading to tragic consequences.

"It is a love story set against the backdrop of war — not a story about war — and I think this sets it apart when you look at Afghan-themed films," says Bussian. The director has worked extensively in Afghanistan since 2001 when he was invited by the Taliban to "show the world the real Afghanistan". He also starred in Siddiq Barmak's feature *Opium War*.

Scarlet Poppy will shoot partly in India as the security situation makes it difficult to shoot entirely in Afghanistan. Produced by Barmak, the film has US-based Lotus Entertainment and India's True Cinema on board as co-producers. US actor Chris Messina (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*) is attached to play the lead.

Bussian and the producers have raised half the budget of the film and are now looking for further partners to complete the financing. The project was selected to take part in this year's Asian Project Market at the Busan film festival.

Liz Shackleton

SCARLET POPPY

Producer Siddiq Barmak **Production companies** Barmak Film (Afg), Scarlet Poppy LLC (US), Lotus Entertainment (US), True Cinema (India) **Budget** \$2.4m **Financing to date** \$1.2m raised by Lotus **Contact** Peter Bussian, info@scarletpoppyfilm.com



Co-production market
Stranger Across The Seas (Ind)
 Director Sangeeta Datta
 Language English, Spanish, Bengali

S*tranger Across The Seas* is based on true events in 1923, when Nobel Prize-winning Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore fell seriously ill in Argentina. The writer Victoria Ocampo offered him her home to recuperate, igniting a relationship of passion and poetry.

"The film will be a moving love story between two strangers from different continents, united by their love of poetry," says director Sangeeta Datta. "The treatment will be inspired by their letters and poetry and use archival footage."

Datta was associate director on three films by Bengal's Rituparno Ghosh — *Choker Bali: A Passion Play* (2003), *Antarmahal: Views Of The Inner Chamber* (2005) and *The Last Lear* (2007) — as well as on Sarah Gavron's *Brick Lane*. She also directed the feature *Life Goes On*, about a father confronting his daughter's life choices after his wife's death, which won the audience award at the London Asian Film Festival in 2010.

Her new project will be produced by Datta's two UK-based production outfits — SD Films and Stormglass Productions. Set in Europe, India and Latin America, Datta is looking for co-producers from those regions. "We are in conversation with some major Indian and Spanish stars," she says.

Meenakshi Shedde

STRANGER ACROSS THE SEAS

Production companies SD Films (UK), Stormglass Productions (UK) **Budget** \$10m **Finance raised to date** Seed finance for research and development **Contact** Sangeeta Datta, sangeetadatta@me.com



Co-production market
Free Fall (Ind-US)
 Director Sopan Muller
 Language Hindi

Set in Mumbai, *Free Fall* is a story of the love-hate relationship between two siblings, separated during childhood and brought together more than a decade later as very different individuals. It attempts to question ideas of gender and sexuality through a story of love, longing, crime and passion, in which alternative sexuality and cross-dressing are dealt with matter-of-factly as a way of life.

"*Free Fall* has all the elements of gripping mainstream cinema — drama, emotions, sexual conflicts, complicated relationships, dance and action — but at the same time it steers clear of over-simplifying characterisations and situations," says writer-director Sopan Muller.

Muller worked as a co-producer on Dev Benegal's *Road, Movie* and as first assistant director on Benegal's *Split Wide Open* and *English August*. He has previously directed adverts, TV films, documentaries and corporate films. *Free Fall* will be his feature directorial debut.

Resul Pookutty, the Oscar-winning sound designer of *Slumdog Millionaire*, is on board as a producer, along with Los Angeles-based Susan B Landau, who produced *Road, Movie*.

The project has also gone through the first selection round for the Mahindra-Sundance Institute Screenwriters' Lab, which will take place in India in March 2012.

Nandita Dutta

FREE FALL

Producers Susan B Landau, Resul Pookutty **Budget** \$1m (₹150m) **Finance raised to date** None **Contact** Sopan Muller, sopan@sopanmuller.com



Co-production market
Kumari (Nepal)
 Director Tsering Sherpa
 Language Nepali

A Kumari is a young girl who is worshipped by Nepalis as the incarnation of the goddess Taleju. This story follows the journey of a former Kumari, who must overcome numerous hurdles as she makes peace with her past and live a normal life.

"The film is also about my own ambiguity towards the entire belief system that at times overshadows wisdom and spirituality," says director Tsering Sherpa.

Tsering's 1997 documentary *The Spirit Doesn't Come Anymore*, profiling an old Tibetan shaman, earned him the best film award at Film Southasia, and best indigenous film-maker of the year at the Parnu Anthropological Film Festival in Estonia in 1997.

In 2000, Tsering made the feature film *Mask Of Desire (Mukundo)*, which was Nepal's official entry to the best foreign-language category of the Academy Awards. The film also screened at film festivals including Gothenburg in Sweden. In 2006, he directed *Karma* — a feature about two Buddhist nuns — which screened at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival in 2008.

Kumari is in pre-production. It will be produced by Mila Productions, which produced all of Tsering's earlier films.

Nandita Dutta

KUMARI

Producers TBC Production company Mila Productions **Budget** \$300,000 (₹15m) **Finance raised to date** \$100,000 (₹5m) **Contact** Tsering Sherpa, mila@wlink.com.np



Co-production market
The Bicycle (Ind)
 Director Khanjan Kishore Nath
 Language Assamese

T*he Bicycle* follows two young boys, Nipu and Raju. When Raju's bicycle suddenly goes missing, Nipu and his family are blamed for the theft — and Nipu promises to find the bicycle by any means necessary. What he does in order to buy back the bicycle, and what happens when he returns it to Raju, form the premise of the film.

"The story of my film is very simple and this simplicity makes it interesting," says director Khanjan Kishore Nath.

The Bicycle, which will be shot in the north-eastern Indian state of Assam, is to be Nath's debut feature as a director. During his college days at the Zee Institute of Media Arts in Mumbai, he made short films including *The Quest*, *Twilight*, *The Horizon*, *Waiting For and If*. *The Quest*, the story of a poor couple who are expecting a child, was screened at India's National Student Video Film Festival in 2006, the Madurai International Short Film Festival in 2007 and the National Short Film Festival in 2008.

Ramdhenu Films, a production company founded in 2006 by Nath and several friends in Assam, is producing the film, which is in pre-production. Ramdhenu previously produced *The Quest*.

Nandita Dutta

THE BICYCLE

Producers TBC Production company Ramdhenu Films **Budget** \$100,000 (₹5m) **Finance raised to date** None **Contact** Khanjan Kishore Nath, khanjan23@rediffmail.com