



Drawing the Tiger Discussion Guide

Directors: Amy Benson, Scott Squire,
Ramyata Limbu
Year: 2015
Time: 96 min

You might know these directors from:

This is the debut feature-length film from Amy Benson and Scott Squire.

Ramyata Limbu co-produced and directed “Daughters of Everest” and co-produced “Sari Soldiers.”

FILM SUMMARY

Co-directors Amy Benson and Scott Squire were commissioned by an American NGO providing educational scholarships to Nepalese schoolgirls to film a promotional video on the NGO’s work. Having met with the three girls they were hired to film, they were immediately struck by Shanta Darnal. She was different; she had a special spark. Determined, intelligent, and a step ahead of the rest, she was the embodiment of hope in a society where subsistence farming and the deadlocked cycle of poverty affect the majority of her countryfolk.

Shanta was offered an education. She was provided with pocket money, a place to stay, books, and the chance to be something above and beyond the dreams of her village folk. She had everything everyone else around her was lacking. Consequently, when she takes her life at the film’s midpoint, we are shocked. Why would she do this?

DRAWING THE TIGER investigates the ambiguity of Shanta’s decision. It returns to her village with the help of Nepalese co-director Ramyata Limbu, offering Shanta’s parents a sounding board for their sorrow. Staring discomfort straight in the eye, the film offers no answers, no reasoning, but rather serves as a mirror of the reality that not everything is as it seems. Were there clues to Shanta’s suicide? Her brother Kumar’s words echo after the fact: “Village life is hard, but city life is lonely.”

DRAWING THE TIGER is Shanta’s legacy; as well as a meditation on fate, suffering, and a progressive version of hope. Her death and the tale of her plight serves as a reminder that true change requires a multi-faceted approach. Through tragedy, DRAWING THE TIGER offers a deeper hope.

FILM THEMES

Presented with the chance to break the generational cycle of poverty through an NGO-supported education, Shanta instead takes her own life, reminding us that lasting solutions are often complex.

THE LABORIOUS CYCLE OF POVERTY

In debt and focused on the daily grind, life never presented a brief glimpse of relief for the Darnals. Unable to make ends meet, each day a struggle with no end in sight. “We live this short life and we have so much to worry about,” gasped Chhabilal, Shanta’s father. With the short-term so overwhelming, the future was unknown. A life lived in poverty can be a cyclical trial of survival, struggle, and pain.

EDUCATION AS THE FUTURE

In a world filled with poverty, education is desirable. Literacy is equated with ability, power, and confidence, best expressed by Shanta’s sister-in-law Rabina: “There is a big difference between educated and uneducated people. They are confident. They are not afraid.” Educated people make things happen, carve their own path, rewrite fates, and transform destinies. Children burn the midnight oil doing homework, working towards a future with unknown potential, and entire villages pin their hopes on a child gaining an education and returning to change it all.

WESTERN DISCONNECT

With the standard of living higher in the West than in the developing world, many people, organizations, and governments of developed nations set out to provide tangible assistance to those in need. An education is a proven way of lifting people out of poverty. Books, teachers, housing, and spending money are provided. Yet, Shanta’s suicide serves as a haunting reminder that quick fixes and one-dimensional solutions are too simple for the complexities of humanity.

DESTINY

Chhabilal resigned himself to the power of something greater, the tiger ever ready to hop off the page and consume him. “You can’t erase fate,” he stated. By believing that life is a series of fateful encounters out of his control, he simply carried on. In this view, however full of frustration, anger, stress, poverty, toil, and grief a life may be, the challenge of changing the pattern is out of reach. Shanta chose another path. As her brother Kumar said, “In my village there is no one like her.” By embracing her power to control her destiny, she set out where no one around her dared.

GENDER INEQUALITY

In Nepal, women have a high mountain to climb to liberation and self-sufficiency. Not only is education a class issue, it is more acceptable for a man to learn to read and write. Shanta was breaking boundaries and rewriting the rulebook by seeking a higher education, and her dream to be a doctor was completely theoretical. She was a pioneer without a map for women and girls. She had no female mentors. There was no one—especially not a woman—in her life, or even in Nepal as far as she knew, who had ‘made it.’

“No matter where you go, your destiny goes with you.”

Kumar Darnal

“I don’t think she will get married. She has a brain.”

Saraswati Darnal

“See me not as a daughter, but as a son.”

Shanta Darnal

FILM FACTS:

- DRAWING THE TIGER had its world premiere at the 2015 Hot Docs Festival in Toronto, Canada, and went on to screen at many international film festivals, including winning the Best Documentary Award at CAAMFest and the UNICEF Award at the Film South Asia Festival.
- Co-directors Amy Benson and Scott Squire are a wife-husband team running NonFiction Media in Seattle, U.S.A. They describe their work in documentary photography, multimedia, and video as residing “at the intersection of journalism, anthropology, and fine art.” In 2008 they were commissioned by an American NGO to make a promotional video on three girls in Nepal to whom they had granted scholarships, in order to show the potential of education to change lives. Shanta Darnal was one of these girls. When she took her life, the NGO asked Benson and Squire to remove her from the video. At this point they knew they had to make a film on Shanta and the Darnal family.
- Benson and Squire first traveled to Nepal in 2008. They returned in 2010, 2011, and 2013. Assistant DP Karki filmed the final footage of Kamal preparing to leave for Malaysia.
- DRAWING THE TIGER’s working title was “The Girl Who Knew Too Much.”
- Shortly after Shanta died, Benson met Nepal-based co-director Ramyata Limbu, who helped them navigate political issues during filming.
- Amy Benson once taught at an all girls’ school.
- The filmmakers applied for over 30 grants and pitch forums to fund DRAWING THE TIGER and received grants from the Pacific Pioneer Fund and the Sundance Institute, in addition to running two successful Kickstarter campaigns.
- According to the Nepal Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Study from 2008/09, suicide is the number one cause of death for women and girls in Nepal between the ages of 14 and 49. IN 2015, the WHO ranked Nepal 7th in terms of suicide rates globally, with 6,480 suicides annually. Shanta, who left her family for the city at the age of 12, was 17 when she took her life and just one year from graduation. She had tried to buy rat poison, one of the leading ways women in South Asia kill themselves, the week before her death, yet she ultimately died by hanging.
- Nepal, a landlocked country bordered by China and India, has eight of the world’s ten highest mountains, including Mount Everest. Around 81 percent of the 27 million people practice Hinduism, the highest percentage of any country, followed by Buddhism and Islam. With a low-income economy, Nepal is classified with “least developed status” by the U.N., something the government has vowed to shift by 2022.
- Although education has improved in Nepal since democracy was introduced in 1951, the country is still lagging. As of 2011 the literacy rate was 60

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Donate** to [support Drawing the Tiger](#). The team is working to fully develop a suicide awareness and prevention curriculum using clips from the film.
2. **Read** about the work of the [Global Girls Project](#)—a collaborative writing project working to lead and empower girls across the world. [Contribute](#) if you have a story to tell.
3. **Learn** more about the work of [UNGEI](#)—the United Nations’ Girls’ Education Initiative—and their work to ensure rights to education and gender equality for all children.
4. **Sign** [this petition](#) to support education for girls in Nepal at Force Change.

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In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.