

# I AM *Belmaya*

---

DIRECTOR: SUE CARPENTER CO-DIRECTOR: BELMAYA NEPALI  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: CHRISTOPHER HIRD



## SYNOPSIS

A story 14 years in the making, set in patriarchal Nepal, following an uneducated young woman's transformational journey from subjugated wife to documentary filmmaker.

Dominated by her husband, her family and society, Belmaya is desperate for independence. But in much of Nepal, men rule and women obey. Here, in one of the poorest nations on earth, women are daughters, wives, mothers - but rarely individuals in their own right.

Born a Dalit (the lowest, 'untouchable' caste), orphaned at the age of nine, and trapped in an abusive marriage with a baby daughter, Belmaya at 21, has given up hope of finding happiness.

Rewind to 2006, when Belmaya, then a feisty teenager living in a girls' home in Pokhara, participated in a photo project. Impassioned and inspired, she was eager to change her discriminatory world through photography. But that window closed when the home locked away her camera.

Now she gets a second chance, this time to train in documentary filmmaking. Picking up the camera once more, her old spark returns. Determined to create a better life for her young daughter, Belmaya gains the skills and confidence to forge a new path. But are her resentful husband and conservative community ready for this?

An inspirational and moving tale of rebellion, courage and hope, shot over five years, as Belmaya battles to take charge of her story.



**YEAR:** 2021  
**RUN TIME:** 81 mins  
**LANGUAGES:** Nepali, English

[www.belmaya.com](http://www.belmaya.com)

**PRESS**

ARPR - Alex Rowley  
[alex.rowley@ar-pr.co.uk](mailto:alex.rowley@ar-pr.co.uk)



## SUE CARPENTER

*Director, writer & producer*

Sue has been involved in Nepal and women's rights for 20 years. A journalist and photographer, she moved into filmmaking in 2013. Her first film, *There's Something About Molly*, won Best Short Documentary at the Good Dog Film Festival in Sydney, 2016. She has gone on to make several short films including *Alice and Nana* (2016) and *The Wonderful Walk* (2019). Sue co-founded Asha Nepal, an NGO supporting trafficked women in Nepal. In 2006-2007 she lived in Pokhara, running the *My World, My View* photo project, where she met Belmaya. Sue is a Trustee of GlobalGirl Media UK, empowering young women through digital media training. *I Am Belmaya* is her first feature-length film.

## BELMAYA NEPALI

*Co-director*

Born in a hill village near Pokhara, Nepal, to a low-caste family, Belmaya, 27, has had very little formal education. Orphaned at the age of 9, she moved to a home in Pokhara and was learnt photography aged 14. She participated in exhibitions in Nepal and London and her work was included in a book, *My World, My View*. In 2014, aged 21, she started to learn documentary filmmaking. *Educate Our Daughters*, her graduation film, has been selected for 7 international film festivals, and won 3 awards, including Best Short Film at UK Asian Film Festival and Best Women's Film at NCIFF. She was commissioned to make her second film, *Rowing Against the Flow*, about boatwomen in Pokhara, by Thomson Reuters Foundation. She lives with her daughter, Bipana, 8, in Pokhara.

## CHRISTOPHER HIRD

*Executive producer*

A leading figure in UK independent documentary making, he founded Dartmouth to pioneer new ways of funding, producing and distributing feature documentaries in the UK — particularly those which aimed to have an impact. Among the films which have been shown at international festivals, won awards and been sold to broadcasters and platforms across the world are: *The End of the Line* (2009), *Fire in the Blood* (2012), *McCullin* (2013), *Still the Enemy Within* (2014), *The Divide* (2016), *The Coming War on China* (2016), *Lost in Vagueness* (2017), *Children of the Snow Land* (2018) and *The Ponds* (2019). *Massacre at Ballymurphy* (C4, 2018) was nominated at the RTS, Broadcast and BAFTA awards and *A Cambodian Spring* (2017) was the only documentary nominated in the Outstanding Debut category in the BAFTA Film Awards.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:

*“Injustice is invariably my chief motivator, particularly where women and children are denied their voice, or where a dominating force uses their power status to subjugate others. It has inspired me to write articles, set up charities and projects, and now to make films.*

*The conflict between speaking your truth and judiciously keeping your mouth shut strikes a particular chord for me. Having grown up in a traditional, male-dominated household in Britain, where emotions were held in, I identify with Belmaya's desire to conform to what society expects of her, yet being unable to suppress what she fiercely feels.*

*In 2006, I went to live in Nepal for 9 months, where I led the My World, My View photo project. It was then that I met the spirited teenage Belmaya. It wasn't until the evening I left Nepal that I saw her true vulnerability. She broke down in uncontrollable tears. It touched me deeply. I felt she'd never before been valued or championed. She remained on my mind over all our years apart, until we finally reconnected in 2014 and started filming her journey together.*

*I was determined that Belmaya should not be the passive subject of this documentary, but have an active role in the telling of her story. As she became a competent cameraperson, so she took more control of the filming, taking us behind closed doors to the heart of her life as a wife and mother.*

*Having the tools to tell her own story, along with the platform to express herself, has transformed Belmaya's outlook. It has made me trust in the process of documentary filmmaking, and confirmed to me that we all need to be able to speak from our hearts and be heard.*

*Above all, we need to have agency over our lives and our stories.”*





## CO-DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:

*"I used to be a different person, unable to speak, dependent on others. My parents died when I was young, I had to work in the fields, and I missed out on much of my education. That's the biggest thing that has held me back. If my brothers had sent me to school, I would have progressed further, I could have stood on my own feet. But they didn't focus on me.*

*When I first picked up the camera at 14, it opened up another world. Through filmmaking I learnt to use my brain more. It has helped me see life from different perspectives. If you only look from one angle, you can't make a film.*

*I wanted to turn what I'd learned into reality and move forward. In our society girls are behind. We are always being discriminated against. That's why I made my film, Educate Our Daughters. I want to inspire other Nepali women to pursue their dreams and strive for independence. My message is, 'Don't stand back thinking you can depend on someone else. You're the one to look after yourself.'*

*Because of filmmaking, my inner strength has grown. I've learned to advocate for myself. Now I'm unafraid to speak my mind, no matter what others think. "*

*“I am hugely touched and impressed by this beautiful work. A daring and heart-breaking film, which fills one with hope and admiration. Five shining stars from me”*

JOANNA LUMLEY

*“Such a raw, powerful film. One of the best documentaries I've ever seen”*

SOPHIE COUSINS, THE LANCET

*“An important and inspiring film about female empowerment – Belmaya proves that filmmaking can be life-changing for girls and women anywhere”*

ANNA SMITH, GIRLS ON FILM PODCAST

*“My heart is singing. It's so refreshing to come across a real story. You just speak the truth and this comes out so beautifully in the film”*

THOMAS KELLY, PHOTOGRAPHER

*“From He Named Me Malala to The Eagle Huntress and I Am Greta, we see that young women are taking charge of their own destinies... Now we can add to this list the superb portrait of a young Nepali woman lifting herself out of subjugation through photography and filmmaking, I Am Belmaya”*

WILLIAM HEMINGWAY, UK FILM REVIEW





TIDETURNER  
FILMS 

dartmouth  
films