

A high-angle, wide shot of a rugged mountain valley. A river winds through the center of the valley, surrounded by steep, barren slopes. The sky is filled with large, white, puffy clouds against a deep blue background. The word "AVALANCHE" is superimposed in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the image.

AVALANCHE

AVALANCHE (Bahman) A Badakshan film project by MAP productions. 2009



AVALANCHE (Bahman)

Hichigh, Badakshan, Pamir mountains, Tadjikistan.

HDV 1080i Color 70 min. and 52 min TV version.

Language: Sughnani with English subtitles

A "Reactive" film.

Avalanche is a documentary film that wants to become a tool for invigorating the life of one of the smallest but highest communities in Tajikistan. Hichigh. From the smallest community of around 25 inhabitants we understand a major issue that is fueling all the communities in Badakshan specially and Tajikistan in general.

The lost of culture and traditions and the loss of labor force, migrating to Russia, is leaving this village and the region without strength to recover. With this documentary we want first to document this reality to the world, and to the community, and then try to activate while filming the lost bounds with the old traditions, ways of living that were under severe sign of disappearing. We want the film to activate those lost traditions, in a way to recover and to try to solve the generational gap that separates the village being self-subsistent to be dependent on external money arriving from Russia emigrates. Starting from one of the smallest communities can mean a lot specially if we manage to exemplify with it a bigger picture and issue and how to combat it. The work migration is a terminal force for all this communities and is acting like an avalanche to all these communities that are struggling to survive in a modern world. Communities that survived majestically the most extreme isolation during centuries and that nowadays in modern day globalization will disappear if nothing is done.

From the Highness you see everything.

We have chosen one of the highest inhabited villages of Badakshan to become a symbol, an example, a beginning. This village is having problems to survive due to its location and economical situation. Most of the traditional crops have been abandoned, a part of the old infrastructures are not working or are in really bad state, from the Mill, to the metal workshop, from the irrigational system to the wood workshop, the khalifa function in the village has been diminished, and there is no so much celebration and rituals as before, the village seems to be vanishing. Traditions are being forgotten by the younger generations, the shepherd tradition is also getting lost, families are stopping to cultivate and wait for the money from Moscow to arrive to buy basic things that were before cultivated. The changing of climate is also affecting the water supply and a new irrigation system is needed to supply the whole village. The idea behind the film is to activate again all these traditions all this knowledge, the film will be an excuse for the villagers to open again the mill, to improve the irrigation system. To rebuild musical instruments, The film will be a sort of workshop.

The lesson of the small (from micro to macro)

Focusing on the small community will allow us to work more concretely and to delimitate the real problem behind these communities, which are in higher risk of extinction.

How can a film help such a smallest community? We want to hire the villagers as actors, the youngest to learn again those traditions, to rework some of the lands that were abandoned and also to reactivate some of the village old activities (mill, metal workshop, potatoes crops, wool, carpets, wood works, pottery, herbal medicine (traditional healing), stone reading, cosmology, house construction)

Film as a motor (Fiction as Reality)

The film production will be developed with local people, as a kind of a workshop, old people with knowledge will be hired as advisers and actors to teach the young, the film will act as a sort of exciting tool to learn to come back to the roots to give new value to some traditions they thought disappeared and out of fashion, The film will work both ways to the old who believe all these traditions are becoming obsolete and to the young who believe they didn't exist anymore or were useless.



Log line:

The film traces the last days of life of Hichigh one of the highest inhabited villages in the world, which is planned for evacuation before the winter comes.

Synopsis

Zulobi, the 85 year old khalifa of Hichigh, doesn't want to leave the village where he has lived all his life, one of the most remote and high inhabited villages of Badakshan, the village is planned for evacuation before the winter, due to high risk of avalanches and landslides after the last earthquake. The death of the village will bring light into the threat and ties that has kept this community together and that now will separate them.

While they await to abandon the village, the stories come up and their memories revive the ghosts of the past, that come back, to regain their redemption,

At nights the village is surrounded by a pack of wolfs that due to a bad autumn are coming down for the sheeps and goats, that will make the village feel close together and that will inspire new friendships and new ties in the village.

Zulobi will establish a new relationship with Azam a young shepherd, hoping to pass away to him a knowledge he was keeping for his son, long gone to Moscow, from which he hasn't heard in a long time.

Zulobi seems to accept finally he will never see his son again. and in a certain way Azam becomes a testimony, and finds in Zulobi a father figure from which to learn and keep alive their traditions.

Director's note

The film is a documentary cross between an observational film and a pure landscape film, narration will be "slight" following the everyday life of some of its inhabitants, the central issue of evacuation will be presented early in the film, through some conversations allowing the rest of the film to overcome from that point.

I want all the images to have the drama implied.

Conversations will be mainly off screen as sort of memory that emanates from the village, radio messages and also some conversations between women will allow to understand the issues related to their life and the villagers relationships between each others. The film will be a sort of reenactment film of this few days before the evacuation, Although the evacuation will be fiction but a sort of guided documentary. A reenactment of some of the inhabitants stories or actions which they have told us.

Zulobi the Khalifa is the dying spirit of the village refusing to die. Unable to trespass his knowledge his wisdom, he is left with the hope of the coming back of his son, long gone to Moscow. His resistance to stay puts in doubt the whole social structure of the village, we understand the strings and ties that have for long established the equilibrium in the village and also we discover through them their life stories, That spring little by little along the film.

The landscape (the mountain and the clouds) will be a central character of the film and will be contrasted with the inside shots of their lifestyles. The spectator should be tied to the village he should be drawn into its inner rhythm and Pace, a relation to it has to be established through inside sound and outside sound, the spectator should navigate through it, as if he was living with them, coming and going through different parallel stories.

I want to capture the richness and complexity of this lifestyle, the purity and still untouched relation with nature and isolation, I want to understand the social ties and relations this small community establishes between themselves, a microcosmos of old traditions and rituals that still persist, and coexist in an interesting layering of traditions and modes. My first feeling in the village was of an admiration and surprise to see how they manage to survive independently autonomously, producing their own hydro energy, their own flour, their own food, fruits, cattle, self education, metallurgy, it gave at the same time an archaic feeling and also an extremely futuristic sensation like a sort of future society surviving after the apocalypse.



Footnotes:

**qiyama. resurrection and the last day, when mankind would be judged and committed forever to either Paradise or Hell, in ismailis it also came to be used in reference of the end of a particular cycle in the history of mankind..."

"man seeks the benefits of the intellectual eternity, in order that the collectivity of human souls may one day rise to intellectual eternity and thereby, to salvation."

Location

Hichigh a small isolated village only accessible by foot through 3673 meters of mountain, south of former Peak Communism (7495m) in the Pamir mountains of Tajik Badakshan, Hichigh is one of the highest inhabited villages of the Region, and probably in the world.

This village still subsists without electricity, self autonomously, surviving through agriculture, and cattle. A Village composed of only 7 houses, inhabited by 30 people, where the majority of adult workers left for Khorog, the capital or to Moscow in Russia and what is left is women, children and old people.

Five different families, five different generations coexist in a millenary social structure nearly untouched through centuries, crossing through Persian traditions, soviet influences, and modern globalization.

38°55'N 72°01'E

Shooting schedule

The shooting should be structured in 2 periods Spring, from March to April, and Autumn from october to november the days before the winter arrives, with it's first snows.





Views of Hichigh



Views of Hichigh



Views of Hichigh



Views of Hichigh



All of the inhabitants of Hichigh.



Research Focus

Introduction.

The region of Badakhshan located in the highlands of Pamir Mountains, is perhaps one of the most interesting places in the world for its geopolitical situation and its preserved traditions, sharing its territory with ex Soviet Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, Pakistan and China, it is considered to be one of the highest inhabited region in the world, and the core of Badakhshan is in the highlands of Tajikistan. The isolation created by mountains provided protection for local culture and created and developed particular traditions, feelings and beliefs which are expressed in their traditional music, dances, religious rituals and architecture.

Context.

1. Isolation.

Most of the villages in Badakhshan are situated in narrow valleys created between high altitude peaks, separating village from village. Some of them are hidden in unreachable points; that are accessed only by foot. This remoteness and internal development of thought based on Ismailism, has created a highly spiritual life style. It makes us wonder, why this people are living in these places and are so connected to this land, a not very generous land for living conditions. It reminds more of a self - exile, protection, and ascetics longing for spiritual search, which became a way of life.

2. Ismailism

The population of Badakhshan is Ismaili of Shia Islam, and at the same time it's interesting to see how the old remains of pre Islamic religions like Zoroastrianism, Tibetan Buddhism and local Pagan religions have fused in some points with Islam. These echoes of other religions remained in Badakhshan because of isolation, or a late arrival of Islam. But relatively progressive understandings of many human problems make us think of the inherent difference of Ismailism and other branches of Islam, or even between Ismailism in Badakhshan and other places where this religion is spread.

3. Language

Another interesting thing about the region which makes it so unique is the big amount of local autochthonous languages, which are different from one another. It is believed that the Pamir group of languages has retained a lot of ancient characteristics of Old Iranian Languages, brought about by territorial seclusion. Two languages of this group have disappeared in the last century, and many of them are in the danger of vanishing.

4. Architecture

The architecture in Badakhshan is also a unique style with a very particular set of modes and space dwellings which still has been ignored by occidental architectural scholars dedicated to research ancestral traditional architecture, badakhshani style has an evident Zoroastrian background, mixed with Shia Islamic Symbols. For instance, each column in the house, each place and corner has its significant meaning. The identical way of distributing space, structure and same techniques in building are repeated through Badakhshan, with a slight change in each house. The strong relation of the house with the four basic elements and the distribution of it makes of the badakhshani house a paradigm of architectural thought, The tradition of not using windows and leaving minimum possibility of light entrance in the house makes the houses very intimate and mystical.

5. Music

Music of Badakhshan expresses all feelings, sentiments, philosophy, traditions these people have developed and are preserving through centuries. Inaccessibility to the Pamir Mountains has been an important factor in protecting the unique local musical tradition. Music of Badakhshan has an important role in expressing Ismaili thought through the poetry of songs, Ismaili emotions through the human voice, isolation of its lands and confrontation of harsh natural environment are expressed in exceptional rhythms of Pamiri Music. Songs sung by men on religious rituals and gatherings has sense and importance of religious prayer.

While incredible female songs, sung in local Pamiri languages usually are on melancholy, yearning, alienation, separation, unattainable love and longing to God.



Calendar of production

1.Pre - production and research: January-August 2008.

First research trip november 2008

Shooting: 8 weeks,

First shooting period Spring March-April 2010.

Second shooting period October-november 2010.

Post production: 6 weeks, December-january 2010/11

Film finished for Broadcasting: January 2011.

Visual Teaser:

Watch a visual teaser for the project in youtube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQqiK5G>

keyword:Hichin

Partners of the Film

FUNDS:

1. Open Society Institute
www.soros.org

2. The Cristensen Fund
www.christensenfund.org

Organisations:

1. Amesha Spenta
www.pamirtours.tj

Production Houses:

1. FABRICA
www.fabrica.it

Television:

1. RTSI
www.rtsi.ch



A project by MAP productions

MAP productions, Uzbekistan-Spain. Founded in 2009 by Saodat Ismailova and Carlos Casas as a platform to develop projects that bridges and provides new maps for a better understanding between cultures. Map is an organization devoted to develop projects in countries in process of development and by way presenting their cultures to the world creating awareness and providing a tool for these cultures to survive the process of globalization. MAP uses audiovisual tools to invigorate exchange between cultures, via film, music and the arts, MAP traces old traditions and researches new upcoming ones that are struggling in the process of globalization. Activities range from documentaries to feature films, from workshops to exhibitions, from conferences to music compilation. All cultural activities that forge the exchange between cultures.

www.mapproductions.org

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