

# WHO AM I?

**SYNOPSIS** by producer, Norbu Wangchuk from Bhutan, who works in the Bhutanese Film Industry

Who Am I? is a fictional story developed based on the highly complex Buddhist philosophy of Emptiness. What expresses the identity of a person or an object? The human coined words like “I” and “Names” illusively identifies a person or an object. Who am I? delves into the story of a young lad who craves to know himself especially in the context of his family roots and legacy.

The film opens with a newborn boy child abandoned in a thick jungle and is picked up by a caretaker of a monastery who is on his way home. There is also a girl child born in a village and the parents bring the child to the monastery for blessings. Both these children are blessed and named Drukda and Mendrel respectively and they grow together, and we see Drukda performing extraordinarily in the field of academics, sports and cultural activities.

However, as he is about to complete his 12th grade, his foster father dies and on the deathbed, he discloses the secret of Drukda’s life-that he was found in a forest. This makes Drukda homeless and he comes to a town for a job. While facing some problems with the urban youth, Drukda gets a government scholarship based on his extraordinary academic performance in class 12.

There is another parallel story, which concerns Mendrel’s life. Mendrel grew up with Drukda and they are in love. Mendrel’s father abandons his family for a new lady leaving Mendrel and her mother in misery, which necessitated the mother to remarry. Mendrel is unsuccessful in her academic pursuit and has to live in the village. Her step-father takes advantage of her and she bears his child shattering all her dreams of marrying Drukda.

Another character named Tshongdey, who hails from an aristocratic and rich family, falls in love with Drukda who happens to live with her family while in the city.

Drukda returns finishing his studies only to discover that his young love Mendrel has become mother of a child. He also discovers his mother who is a nun taking refuge in the mountain hermitage. His father is someone who is unknown even to his mother, who we shall all presume to be known from the realm of Gods.

The movie is with English subtitles and selling well in New York.

## **Review by Ian and Susan Davidson, FVFS**

Some touches of Bollywood come as a surprise in this tender story of would-be lovers Drukta and Mendril who, through no fault of their own, follow different paths. Because of his academic performance at school, Drukta completes his education in the big city and abroad. Although the daughter of his benefactor would happily marry him, Drukta’s only interest is in discovering the secret of his birth and finding his mystery mother who apparently abandoned him at birth.

Mendril meanwhile, falls foul of her stepfather and ends up bearing his child.

This tale could end up a tragedy for all involved – unless the story of Drukta’s birth can be discovered and true love can take effect. But can it work out for Drukta and Mendril after all they have been through?

This is a simple story, well told, but perhaps lacking some of the subtlety of European films – yet with a lighter touch than many films from the USA.

Although a somewhat amateurish production in some ways, it does have a heart, and its biggest drawcard is its unusual source country – Bhutan.  
3 stars. (out of 5)

#### **Review by John and Gail Arkins, FVFS**

This film from Bhutan is an interesting mix of simple, amateur and modern concepts.

The issue, which commences almost as supernatural, traverses the whole of the film as the singular item, from where did Drukta come.

The photography is beautiful, showing Bhutan at its best. There is a dichotomy between the old and the new throughout the whole film, the religious traditions of the country, the modern Paro international airport, the modern dance and the mobile phone use.

This is a gentle film, the subtitles at some times are small and not easily seen thus distracting from the images and the story. Acting can at times be amateurish but this does not detract from the story.

While this may not be to everyone's liking we believe that it provides an interesting education on the world of Bhutan, a country that measures a GDP of Happiness. We gave it 3.5 stars.

#### **Review by John Turner, FVFS**

This is not an easy film to review in that the plot is basic but verging on the metaphysical and the denouement varies from the sublime to bordering on amateurish. The dialogue is often stilted but this could be the fault of the subtitling.

The screenplay is straightforward except for flashes of fantasy in scenes of imagined future developments. The marrying of the ageless life in the village with the later sequences in the city are well handled in so much that the first appearance of a mobile phone comes as a shock.

Sound effects are often over-emphasised but the photography is fine throughout, especially the forest scenes.

The most attractive aspect of the film is the music and the highlight for me was the ensemble at the warehouse in the city when Drukta becomes involved in a drunken party. The choreography of this fairly long scene would have been good in a more ambitious film. Otherwise Drukda's introduction to city life is pretty ho-hum.

The later scenes where Drukda has finally made his way in the world and goes to find his childhood sweetheart, discovering his unknown mother as a by-product, fits well with the earlier scenes but is rather undervalued, given the title.