

ANGHI

OFFICIAL SELECTION 2026
tiff Platform
TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL



WINTER HYMNS FILMS



FILM SYNOPSIS

In 1960s Nagaland, a Konyak chief and his son are the last in their village yet to convert to Christianity.

When an American missionary arrives, his presence unsettles the fragile balance of their world, forcing them to face what must be kept — and what must be left behind.

THE PLOT



Angh, set In the remote hills of 1960s Nagaland, Anghba, a Konyak chief, and his mute son are the last in their village yet to convert to Christianity. When his wife, the Queen Chief, passes away early in the story, her death leaves a silence that weighs heavily on both father and son.



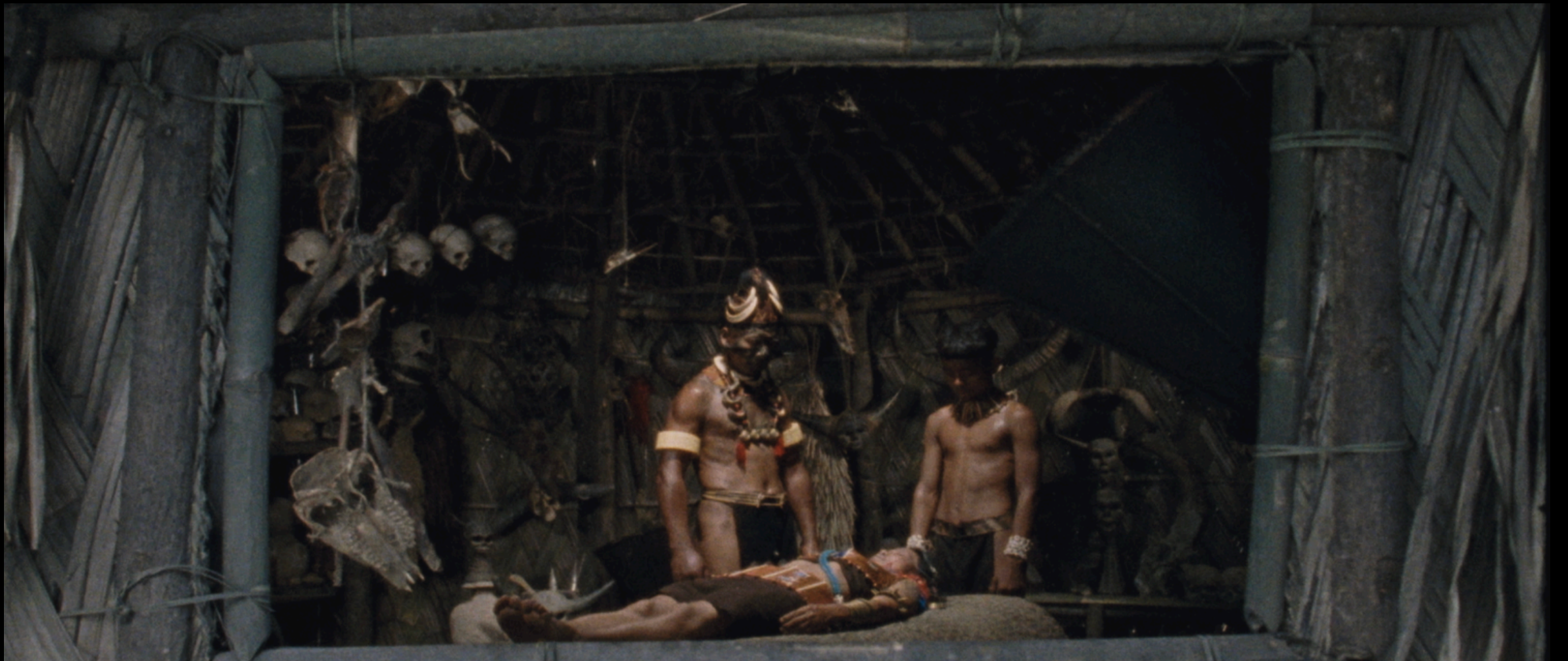
Her absence becomes the heart of their struggle, as Anghba clings to his fading traditions while trying to keep his small family alive.

The arrival of an American missionary known as the White Priest brings food, medicine, and kindness — but also questions about what must be kept and what must change.



As hunger deepens and the lines between faith, gratitude, and survival blur, Anghba's son begins to see hope in the world the missionary represents.

Between the pull of his ancestors and the promise of something new, Anghba must confront a world that is moving on without him — and decide how much of himself he is willing to let go.



HISTORICAL REFERENCE



The Konyaks, one of the largest Naga tribes, were historically known for their rich traditions, unique identity, and the practice of headhunting—a ritual that symbolized valor and status in their society. Their lives were deeply rooted in their animist faith, which celebrated nature and ancestral spirits. The Konyaks lived in tightly-knit villages ruled by chiefs, or Anghs, and their vibrant culture was reflected in intricate tattoos, wood carvings, and oral folklore. Headhunting, while brutal, was intertwined with their belief system, representing a rite of passage, honor, and community strength. These traditions defined the Konyaks' way of life until the mid-20th century when missionaries arrived in the region.



The arrival of Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries marked a turning point for the Konyaks. American Baptist missionaries, along with British colonial forces, introduced a new religion that promised salvation, education, and modern healthcare. As conversion spread, Christianity gradually replaced the animist faith and traditional practices, branding many of them, including headhunting, as barbaric. The missionaries' influence extended beyond religion, reshaping governance, social structures, and even the Konyak identity. Rituals and festivals tied to their indigenous beliefs faded, and many abandoned their cultural practices in favor of Christian ideals. Over time, the once-feared headhunters transformed into devout Christians, their villages now dotted with churches instead of skull houses, and their history preserved more in memory than in practice. This transition, while offering new opportunities, also led to the erosion of centuries-old traditions, leaving the Konyaks grappling with the balance between preserving their heritage and embracing modernity.



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DIRECTORS STATEMENT

After the success of the short film, I knew this story of a fading chief and his mute son was meant to be a feature. Their world was too rich to exist within the limits of a short. Having lived away from my culture for years, the process became a homecoming. A call to rediscover my roots and to tell our stories on our own terms.

Angh is loosely inspired by true events that took place in the hills of Nagaland. Watching Indigenous cinema from around the world reminded me that we too have something rare to offer. A history and way of life unlike anywhere else. Shot on 16mm, the film is performed almost entirely by non-actors, except for the White Priest, and told in a tribal language spoken by fewer than 100,000 people. It is an act of preservation as much as storytelling. A way to ensure that our voices, our faces, and our language endure. It is my dream to take these stories to the world and have them finally see and hear us.

– DIRECTOR, THEJA RIO



CAST



ANGH
ANGLONG KONYAK



AMAO
SOBINO RENGMA



WHITE PRIEST
DOUGLAS HENSHALL

BEST ACTOR BAFTA



MALAM
GANPAI KONYAK



HONTEIH
WANTON KONYAK



QUEEN CHIEF
AMAH KONYAK



CREW

WRITER/DIRECTOR:	THEJA RIO
CO WRITER:	JAMES DAVIS
PRODUCERS:	NANCY NISA BESO, THEJA RIO, JAI VIR RODGERS, BERNARDO ANGELETTI
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:	GAURAV DHINGRA
DOP:	ADAM PIETKIEWICZ
PRODUCTION DESIGNER:	MARGARIDA CAETANO DIAS
COSTUME DESIGNER:	MANISHA GARG
EDITOR:	TANYA CHHABRIA
COMPOSER:	SAGAR DESAI
SOUND DESIGNER:	SUSMIT NATH

WRITER/DIRECTOR THEJA RIO

Theja Rio is an Indian writer/director from Nagaland whose work has screened at Oscar & BAFTA-qualifying festivals the world over. His debut short *Angh*, exploring cultural resistance in Nagaland, won a Special Jury Award at Clermont-Ferrand, screened at Palm Springs, and later featured in art gallery lectures in France.

In 2023, his short *Ade (On A Sunday)* premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and won 'Best Film' at the MAMI Mumbai International Film Festival. That same year, he completed *Remains*, a post-colonial psychological horror short, which premiered at the Cambridge Film Festival and competed at Camerimage.

An alumnus of the National Film and Television School (UK), Theja has shot extensively on 16mm and 35mm. He recently completed principal photography on his debut feature *Angh* and is in pre-production of his second *Ade (On a Weekend)*, marking his continued commitment to visually rich, indigenous storytelling.



PRODUCER NANCY NISA BESO

Nancy Nisa Beso is an accomplished film producer based in India and the UK, recognized for her versatility in both indie and commercial cinema. A film graduate from the University of Westminster, London, her journey in media began at a young age with local radio and television. This early experience set the foundation for a successful career working with leading broadcasters, film studios, and advertising agencies.

Her films have gained recognition at international film festivals, with her latest short film, Ade (On a Sunday), premiering at the Rotterdam Film Festival and winning Best Film at the 2024 MAMI International Film Festival.

With over 10 feature films, 100 TV commercials and 150 digital branded content projects to her credit, Nancy's extensive production knowledge and collaborative approach bring out the best in her team, making each project a rewarding experience for all involved.



INTERVIEW WITH THEJA RIO



WHY 'ANGH' AS A DEBUT FEATURE?

Angh felt like the only honest place to begin. I come from Nagaland, a place that has changed more in a few decades than most do in a century. From once being headhunters to now the most Baptist state in the world, our transformation has been both remarkable and painful. Yet our stories have rarely been seen or heard beyond our own hills. I wanted to make a film that speaks from that silence, not as a historian but as someone born from its aftermath.

The film stays loyal to the perspective of the Angh, the village chief, allowing the audience to see change through his eyes. His silence, pride, and grief capture what it means to lose not just a way of life but a belief system. I wanted viewers to understand that loss without judgment, and to feel the quiet dignity of a man watching his world disappear.

The story of the chief and his son reflects the conflict I grew up around — between faith and tradition, modernity and memory. Making Angh as my debut feature was an instinctive choice. It is my way of returning home and letting our history speak for itself.

HOW WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH NON-ACTORS, ESPECIALLY HAVING THEM SHARE THE SCREEN WITH SOMEONE AS SEASONED AS DOUGLAS HENSHALL?

Working with non-actors was one of the most rewarding parts of making *Angh*. It was not only the cast but also much of the crew who were locals experiencing a film set for the first time. There is no film industry in Nagaland, so professional actors are rare, and most of the technical crew came from outside. What we had was a mix of complete newcomers and experienced professionals working side by side.

Despite their different backgrounds, everyone approached the project with sincerity and passion. The energy on set was warm and collaborative, and soon it felt like one team moving with a shared purpose. The non-actors were understandably nervous at first, especially working with someone as seasoned as Douglas Henshall, but they adapted quickly and earned his respect.

The beauty of casting non-actors is that you choose people who already live close to the character in spirit, culture, and manner. They bring their own truth to the screen. It makes the film feel alive, because the characters do not just exist in the story—they exist beyond it.



THE FILM FEATURES NON-ACTORS AND IS SHOT ON 16MM. WHAT MOTIVATED THESE CHOICES, AND HOW DID THEY CONTRIBUTE TO THE FILM'S AUTHENTICITY AND VISUAL LANGUAGE?

It was extremely important for me to shoot *Angh* on film for several reasons. I wanted to recreate the texture and feeling of old archival footage, the kind of analog images you often see when looking back at history. It felt right to capture the story through the same medium that once documented that era. Film naturally carries a sense of mystery and nostalgia. It renders a world that feels distant, yet alive, as if seen through memory itself.

Even though I was not alive in the 1960s, the story feels deeply nostalgic to me. Shooting on film allowed that emotion to come through in a way digital never could. The limitations of the medium also shaped the process. Every frame had to be earned, every decision carefully considered. Those restrictions encouraged precision and creativity, making the entire experience more deliberate and human.



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