

OFFICIAL SELECTION

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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2026

Shot on 16 mm

A FILM BY THEJA RIO

ANGH

Produced by NANCY NISA BESO & THEJA RIO







FILM SYNOPSIS

Set in the remote jungles of Nagaland near the Indo-Burma border in the early 1960s, ANGH follows Anghba, a former headhunter and the last surviving chief of an abandoned Konyak village, who lives in isolation with his ailing wife and his young, non-speaking son, Amao. Rooted in the oral histories and spiritual traditions of the Konyak people, Anghba holds fiercely to the beliefs and ways of life passed down through generations. But the world around him is changing. The arrival of an American missionary brings Christianity deeper into the hills, and neighbouring villages begin to embrace a new faith and a different future. Anghba, however, remains determined to preserve the traditions and beliefs that have defined his people for generations.

As food grows scarce and illness settles over his household, the fragile balance of their world begins to shift. While Anghba retreats deeper into tradition, Amao becomes increasingly drawn towards the unfamiliar possibilities emerging beyond the forest. An intimate father-son story unfolding at a moment of profound cultural change, ANGH is a meditation on faith, identity, belonging and survival. Capturing a landscape, community, and history rarely seen in world cinema, the film reflects on the fragile space between preservation and change, as the boundaries between past and future begin to blur.





HISTORICAL REFERENCE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 favour 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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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.

— Theja Rio, *Director*

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ANGH
ANGLONG KONYAK



AMAO
SOBINO RENGMA



WHITE PRIEST
DOUGLAS HENSHALL
BEST ACTOR BAFTA



MALAM
GANPAI KONYAK



HONTEIH
WANTON KONYAK



QUEEN CHIEF
AMAH KONYAK

CAST

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





THEJA RIO

Writer/Director

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.



NANCY NISA BESO

Producer

Nancy Nisa Beso is an award-winning Indian film producer whose work spans independent cinema, international filmmaking, and commercial production. Based between India and the UK, she has built a career around distinctive filmmakers and stories that are deeply rooted in their cultural worlds while resonating with audiences internationally. Nancy combines creative instinct with extensive production expertise, from development and financing through production and international festival strategy. She is committed to building long-term collaborations with filmmakers and producing ambitious, filmmaker-driven cinema that can travel across cultures and borders.

A Film & TV Production graduate of the University of Westminster, London, Nancy began her career in radio and television before moving into film and commercial production. Over 15 years, she has produced 10 feature films, 100 television commercials, and 150 digital and branded-content projects, working with leading broadcasters, studios, agencies, and creative talent.

Her film credits include *The Fable*, directed by Raam Reddy, which premiered at the Berlinale in 2024, and *The Elysian Field*, directed by Pradip Kurbah, which won Best Film at the 2025 Moscow International Film Festival. Her short film *Ade (On a Sunday)* premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam and won Best Film at the 2024 MAMI Mumbai Film Festival. Her earlier credits include *Waiting*, directed by Anu Menon, and *The Illegal*, directed by Danish Renzu, reflecting her long-standing commitment to independent Indian cinema and filmmaker-driven storytelling. Her latest feature, *ANGH*, written and directed by Naga filmmaker Theja Rio, is the sole Indian film selected for the Platform Competition at the 2026 Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). Set in 1962 Nagaland and made predominantly in the Konyak language, the film reflects Nancy's growing focus on distinctive, culturally specific stories and filmmakers whose work brings new perspectives and voices to international audiences.



GAURAV DHINGRA

Executive Producer, World Sales & Distribution

Gaurav Dhingra is the Executive Producer of ANGH and the founder of Jungle Book Studio, an independent film company working across development, production, distribution, and world sales. Over the past two decades, he has built his career around a simple belief: stories rooted in a specific culture can resonate with audiences everywhere when they find the right champions and the right pathways.

Rather than being defined by a single role, Dhingra has worked across the entire filmmaking ecosystem from developing projects and producing films to building international partnerships, shaping distribution strategies, and representing films in the global marketplace. Through Jungle Book Studio, he continues to connect distinctive Indian voices with international audiences while bringing compelling global cinema to India.

His last film, *Stolen*, premiered at Venice before being acquired for a global release on Amazon Prime Video. His feature, *Angry Indian Goddesses*, India's first female buddy film, won the Audience Award at TIFF and went on to release in 77 countries theatrically before getting acquired by Netflix.

His feature documentary, *Faith Connections*, an India-France co-production, won the Audience Choice Award at IFFLA before being acquired by Netflix for its global release. *Beyond the Known World*, starring David Wenham (*The Lord of the Rings*), Emmanuelle Béart (*Mission: Impossible*), marked the first official India—New Zealand co-production, further reflecting his commitment to internationally collaborative, cross-cultural storytelling.

Beyond feature films, he continues to lead international productions across more than 100 countries on globally recognized formats including *The Amazing Race*, *Ice Road Truckers*, *Rennervations*, and *World's Toughest Trucker*.

For Dhingra, ANGH represents everything Jungle Book Studio stands for: a deeply local story with universal emotional power. Its selection in TIFF 2026's Platform Competition reflects his ongoing commitment to championing bold, filmmaker-driven cinema and helping exceptional stories travel beyond borders.



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.

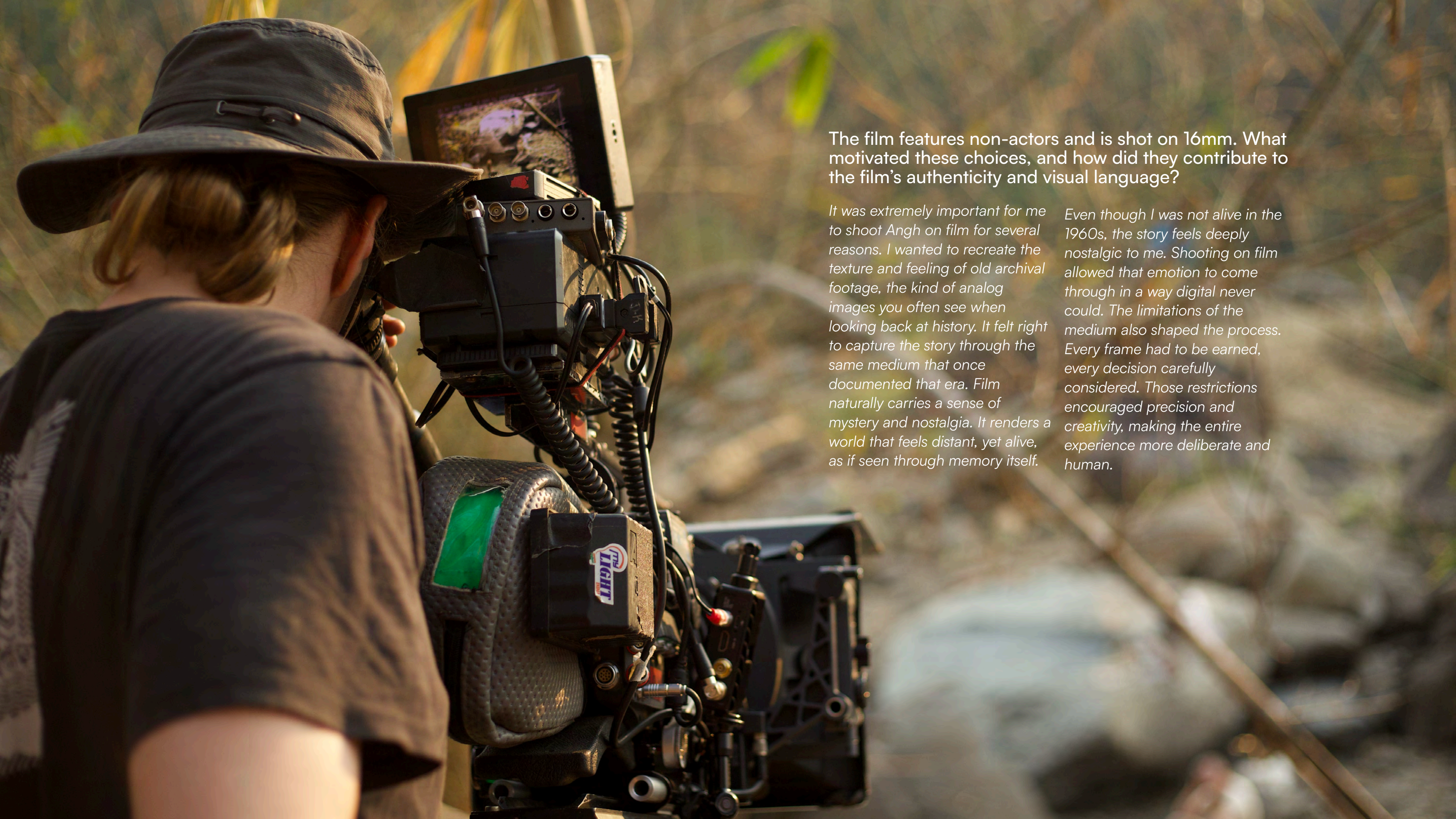
IN CONVERSATION WITH THEJA RIO....

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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