

Ruchika Negi

Final Evaluation

This grant supports research into and documentation of Tsungkotepsu, a particular tradition of shawl painting in Nagaland. The study of Tsungkotepsu as a painting tradition alongside its contemporary, predominantly woven form will enable an examination of the visual, material and social cultures of the Naga tribes and an understanding of how certain traditions survive by reinventing themselves and merging with 'larger traditions'. The outcomes will be a monograph, a film, and puppets inspired by Tsungkotepsu motifs. Grant funds will pay for professional fees, travel and living costs, honorarium, post-production costs, equipment hire, raw stock, material costs and an accountant's fee.

Following over 18 months of filming the interiors of Nagaland, interviewing elders of the Ao community and studying the socio-political landscape of Nagaland, Ruchika and her collaborators Amit Mahanti and Jimmy Chishi, finally cut their film in October 2014. Titled 'Every Time You Tell A Story' it attempts to understand the journey of the Tsungkotepsu shawl painting tradition across a historical time frame, by reflecting on the key factors that have impacted Nagaland. Colonialism, Christianity and the political assimilation of the Naga areas into the Indian state after 1947 have been the significant historical points that have shaped the social and cultural practices of the Naga people. In her final report, Ruchika notes how, in a conflicted history such as this, it is even more difficult to trace a 'factual' history of

a tradition like the Tsungkotepsu, which is undocumented and rooted strongly in the oral narratives.

Therefore, for Ruchika and her team, a few written records by colonial researchers which represented Naga history through the gaze of the outsider, became the starting point to understand how external knowledge systems might have influenced and shaped traditions like the Tsungkotepsu. Colonial documents authored either by administrators or missionaries, along with the manner in which the state has museumised Naga culture, forms the bedrock on which the film has been structured. Set on a languorous pace, the film unfolds very softly taking the viewer through verdant hills and winding roads, into the story of Tsungkotepsu. The images at most times are picturesque and the film often feels like a stringing together of pretty postcards. However, the initiated cannot miss seeing an earnest attempt on the part of the researcher and filmmaker to layer this pretty, perhaps outsider's view of Nagaland, with the socio-political tensions that exist in the landscape. However, for those who are unaware of the struggled history there is the danger that the film will remain yet another documentation of the exotic Nagaland.

The first screening of the film took place in December 2014 in Kohima, the context in which the film belongs. The audience comprised writers, intellectuals, students and the public. Programme staff learnt from Ruchika that the film was very well received. The fact that Ruchika and Amit thought it important for them to first share it with the

Naga community is appreciable, since IFA has in the past seen examples of how researchers/ practitioners have never returned to the communities they have worked with. Perhaps the validation from the community has given Ruchika and Amit confidence to travel with the film. The film is now being shown in various spaces and festivals across the country. Recently IFA organised a few screenings of the film in Hyderabad, Mumbai and Bangalore. Interestingly, college students have been particularly receptive to the film.

Alongside the film, the team also worked on a flipbook called 'Rewind and Play'. Jimmy, a visual artist and puppeteer experimented with the design and visual elements of the Tsungkotepsu to create the book. Developed primarily around the image of the warrior's head which is central to the Naga culture, the flipbook has other objects such as a smoking pipe, a walking stick, a spear and so on, in the form of monochromatic shadow puppets, much like the colour patterns on the Tsungkotepsu shawl. Another outcome of this grant is a research paper called 'In Between the Lines' written by Ruchika, along with her collaborators. It must be said that the paper is very well articulated and captures the conflicts around the tradition in ways that the film itself often fails to do, falling prey to the seductive locales of Nagaland. Nevertheless, the film does open up new ways of understanding a particular artistic tradition within the larger context of political and social upheavals.

With regard to the spending of funds, there was a slight problem. The grant term ended in September 2014. However, since the final cut of the film took a little longer to be ready, Ruchika spent close to Rs 50,000 after the grant tenure. This was brought to her notice and she apologised for it since she was not aware of it. She wrote a letter requesting IFA to accept her financial report. On the discretion of the Executive Director, on seeing that the grantees have produced the outcomes that they had promised, the financial report has been accepted.

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