It was three years ago, while making his film *La Mana* (‘Not allowed’) on his marriage to a Khasi woman and the anxieties in the hill tribe in general about such mixed marriages, that filmmaker Tarun Bhartiya came face to face with the difficulties in procuring archival footage and relevant images and videos for his subject. “There are very few places to go to for accessing the visual history of the northeast,” he said.

A representative of the Sasakiwa Peace Foundation, Japan, who was attending a seminar in Guwahati with Mr. Bhartiya, suggested that he commenced research on it, and thus the base for the North East India Archive was laid. Come October and the first of its kind, public, non-commercial audiovisual archive on and in the northeast will be formally functional.

### Addressing access

It will be situated at the Department of Mass Media, St. Anthony’s College, Shillong, where students, scholars, researchers, filmmaker and film enthusiasts would be able to access the material offline. The archive will also have a digital/web platform of its own.

Supported by the Sasakiwa Peace Foundation, the launch will be held at St. Anthony’s College and simultaneously announced at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival (YIDFF). To mark the launch, YIDFF will have a special section of films from northeast India this year, titled ‘Rustle of spring, whiff of gunpowder: From the North East India Archives’, and curated by Asako Fujioka. An important component of the archive will be the cinema of the northeast. There are also news reels and Films Division documentaries, and footage from early local cable news channels. “It’s difficult for filmmakers and students to access even each other’s films,” says Nathaniel Nampui Majaw, Project Director of the archive and Assistant Professor in the Mass Media Department of St. Anthony’s College. “We are not even able to access films from the States next door,” said Mr. Bhartiya – a gap that the archive hopes to plug.

Mr. Bhartiya, who is the research consultant for the project, has also gathered material from sources such as the Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, the British Library and the National Library of Wales. Veteran Manipuri filmmaker Aribam Syam Sharma has already pledged all his films to the archive. There is one available roll of the first Khasi film made by a Khasi filmmaker – well-known historian Hamlet Ba-reh’s *Ka Synjuk Kiki Lapheh Syiem*, on the 30 chiefs who founded Khasi society. A film conservation workshop will be held in December under the tutelage of filmmaker and founder-director of the not-for-profit Film Heritage Foundation, Shivendra Singh Dungarpur.

### User-friendly

Besides films, the archive will also feature audiovisual material of anthropological value, like a set of pictures of indigenous people taken by Welsh Calvinist missionaries from late-19th and early-20th centuries from the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth. There is also a 1919 documentary on tea, and *Headhunters*, a BBC documentary on the Nagas. “It won’t just be a repository but [a] properly catalogued [archive] for easy access,” said Mr. Bhartiya, a native of Bihar who grew up, married and settled in Shillong. “Users can interact with the images and offer multiple levels of information.”

Mr. Majaw concurred, “It’s not just about collecting material and putting it under lock and key.” An interactive space has been conceptualised for the users. “They can have their own vision, and create their own narratives and playlists from the material available,” he added.

In preparation for the formal start of the archive, a northeast India Archive Summit will be held in Shillong on July 19 and 20.