



Left: Film Director Kavita Joshi.
Right: Manorama's custodial death in Tales from the Margins.
PHOTO: KAVITA JOSHI



Forgotten protests

Indian filmmaker Kavita Joshi tells how she worked when making a documentary on women activist in the “forgotten” Indian region of Manipur.

By Hilde Marie Tvedten

Many different issues will be raised after the screening of a documentary by Indian filmmaker Kavita Joshi at the GIJC. The film, “Tales from the Margins”, shows the protests of women activists in the violence-ridden region of Manipur in India.

Joshi's recent projects have focused on women and their protests for justice and rights. When meeting people in difficult situations, she and her team were very conscious of their approach.

- I think a big problem is that we as filmmakers, journalists or documentarists often go to “take” rather than to “give”. We walk in, wanting people to open up their lives and their deeply personal tragedies, so that we can do our work.

In the process, we interview people, probe, question and open up old wounds. But we give back very little of ourselves, she says.

Manipur is a place that is little heard of in India. The region is experiencing insurgence and unrest. It was important to Joshi to take her time to build trust with the people there, who had experienced much skewed coverage from the media. She wanted to build a relationship that went beyond the professional aspect.

- My first priority became to speak to people, rather than to “interview” them in any sense of the word. My team and I would visit people, and talk, share a conversation, a cup of tea or a meal. Over many such conversations, meetings, and sharing, we began to build up a delicate trust, Joshi says.

In the documentary, we meet a group of wom-

en who protested naked in front of the paramilitary headquarters. The killing and alleged rape of a young woman in 2004 made the group of women go to the length of this unusual protest, a protest which made it to national media. Later, the women experiences that dubious charges had been framed against them.

Mostly female crew

Joshi is currently creating training material on gender and the media. The fact that she also had a female camera person with her, reflects on the film in different ways, Joshi explains.

- As women we had a certain access culturally that men might not have had in the same situation. We were also viewed differently by the soldiers, who did not see us as being threatening in the same way as a largely male team. Often