

An Interview of Manipur Civil Women Organizations

Bemthoibi Ngangbam

PhD Research Scholar
Department of English, Arts Faculty
Delhi University
Orcid: **0009-0009-5115-824X**

Manipur is a state in the North-eastern part of India, with a population of 3.1 million as per 2022 Aadhar Statistics. There are various civil organizations starting from the *Meira Paibi* itself to smaller civil groups which work for safeguarding human rights of the local population.

'Young Women Help Organization' and 'Organization for Indian Women against Crime' are two organizations that operate in Manipur for women related issues and family conflict. The presidents of these organisation – Thangjam Santi Devi and Arambam Ongbi Robita Devi respectively, publish a monthly journal documenting all the cases that came to them for resolution. *Nupigi Punshi* (A women's life) is published by 'Young Women Help Organization' and *Women and Crime* is published by 'Organization for Indian Women against Crime'. The editor (President) of both the journals publishes the cases with the consent of the victim, culprit, or their family. However, there are cases where they do not reveal the identity of the victim or the family. They publish these journals with an objective of spreading awareness among the women in Manipur about the prevalent crime and violence incidents in domestic life.

Young Women Help Organization (YWHO)

Young Women Help Organization (YWHO) is a civil society help group founded on 6th June'2011 and the journal was published on the same day at G.M. Hall in Imphal. It is a state level organization. Around 1000 women were gathered on the foundation day and was broadcast by Imphal Satellite Television (ISTV), a cable network based in Imphal, in maximum location of Manipur. When the organization began, there were 30 members including 20 staff members.



They are not related to any government or non-government organization socially or economically. It is a group of women who are enthused in helping the women in Manipur irrespective of the class or community. The women had started the organization to help and provide justice to the woman whose cases may have piled with other cases at the government court of Manipur or may have died without revealing to anyone. In some cases, the organization also help monetarily to the victim or the family. Further, they have planned a short home for the homeless or abandoned women.

The head office of YWHO is located at Konung Mamang, Imphal East, and the journals are printed at Yaibiren Communications at Uripok Khwai Brahmapur, Imphal west under the ownership of Thangjam Shanti Devi. Although the office is placed at Imphal Valley, they have a contact person in every locality in Manipur. The crime and violence incidents collected are either informed by the contact person, newspaper or approached by the victim or their relatives to the organization.

Currently the organization have 50 staff in total out of which 9 are main members. The following table is the role in the organization and their qualification.

Sl.no.	Name of the member	Role in the Organization	Qualification/ Profession
1.	Thangjam Shanti Devi	President cum Legal Adviser	Lawyer
2.	S. Bashanti	Adviser	Hr. Secondary Hindi teacher (Retired)
3.	W. Gunni	Adviser	Literate
4.	A. Memma	Adviser	Panchayat Secretary (Retired)
5.	Sushila	Secretary	Graduate
6.	Sh. Pramila	Joint- Secretary	Matriculate

7.	P. Bidyabati	Publicity	Class X
8.	M. Manbi Leima	Treasurer	Matriculate
9.	Th. Bimoti	Worker	Literate

The revenue of the organization is generated by selling the journal copies and by organizing non-profit events such as beauty pageants. Moreover, the victim or their family donates to the organization after their case has been resolved.

Interview #2 I have conducted interview with Thangjam Shandi Devi editor of Nupigee Punshi and

President cum Legal Advisor of Young Women Help Organization

Date: 25th January'17

Place: Young Women Help Organization Head office, Konung Mamang, Imphal

Q. When does the organization and the journal started and how many members were there when it started? Were the members only women or a mixture of all genders?

Mrs Shanti Devi: The monthly journal *Nupigee Punshi* started from July'2011 along with the organization *Young Women Help Organization*. All together there were 30 members when the organization started, however, only 20 members were the leading members. The reasons for the lack of participation of the other 10 members were due to family and commuting issues.

The members are mostly women but we do have male workers as without their help in such a society is very hard to go out especially while we deal with late night cases. Moreover, the distribution and circulation of the journal are mainly done by men.

Q. Does the journal focus only on crime against women or is it crime against all irrespective of gender?

Mrs Shanti Devi: The journal focusses only on crime against women. However, we also look forward to ideas and views of existing and upcoming women artists. For example: In the January'17 journal we have an article on the views of a leading female actress Miss.

Leisangthem Tonthoi on the importance of education to achieve a happy life. Further, we also put moralistic articles and satires on the current scenario of Manipuri society and sometime interesting quotes.

Q. Is there any reason politically or personally behind such journals, why journal and not any other means?

Mrs Shanti Devi: (tears in her eyes) There is no political reason or intension behind initiating such organization and journal. However, personally I can feel the pain and sufferings faced by the women. Being a widow, I did face problems personally and being a lawyer too, I could see many cases faced by women. Therefore, I have decided to serve the women and bring justice to such down-trodden women.

Q. How or from where does the organization maintain its financial condition?

Mrs Shanti Devi: We do not have any person in particular to support us financially. However, we manage our funding from two ways – firstly, the income that we generate by circulating the journals and the donation given by the victims. For example – when we deliver justice to any woman, they are delighted to give some donation to the organization. Such donations are done by their own will without asking.

Q. How is the circulation of the journal done? How many copies are printed every month? Is it profitable?

Mrs Shanti Devi: The journals are printed at *Yaibiren Communications* at *Uripok*. We print around 1000+ copies in the last week of every month. We have many hawkers that help us to circulate the journal. They collect the journals from the press and distribute it to the bookstores such as Rajesh book store and Atom book house. Moreover, we also circulate the journals through the daily newspaper's hawkers of Manipur.

The journals are indeed profitable enough to contribute for the maintenance of the organization. However, the profit declines during festive season as people hardly buy such journals during such occasions.

Q. Currently how many staffs are working under the organization?

Mrs Shanti Devi: All together there are 50 members excluding the hawkers and out of which 15 members come to the office regularly. However, there are many volunteers, both male and female, that help us in our time of need.

Q. Who are the regular customers of the journal?

Mrs Shanti Devi: Our regular customer includes wide range of people both man and women, young and old. However, our main focuses are the young women so that they will be careful to

avoid any dangerous situation and to raise their voice if they are in any such situation. We are also open to feedbacks from our customers and one of such feedbacks is the script issue. The youngsters these days do not know how to read the Bengali Script. They either follow English or Meitei Script. Therefore, they had suggested us to use alphabets instead of Bengali Script.

Q. Why did the organization come up with this idea of circulating journal rather than any other means such as campaign or activist talks?

Mrs Shanti Devi: According to me, reading is a process of changing the thought process of the readers. And I think camp and activist talk or meetings are limited to few and are not something personal, such incidents and knowledge should be understood and analysed personally by the individual. Moreover, as far as possible I have avoided uses of vulgar languages that we had indeed faced during the journey. The stories that are recorded in the journals are not filtered except for few. The name of the victim and the accused are not changed.

Q. Does the organization has any tie-up or backed up by any political or insurgent groups?

Mrs Shanti Devi: We do not have any tie-ups or backed up by any group. Our members are common women and man who came out to abolish the crime faced by the women in our society

Q. What is the process of collecting news or facts for the journal?

Mrs Shanti Devi: We get the news via newspapers, calls and sometime self-reported by the victim. In circulating awareness, the journal helps a lot as most of the calls that we received are through the phone numbers provided in the journal. The pictures in the journal are first hand – we took the pictures ourselves when we go to crime area. Sometimes, the victim came to us after facing a severe domestic violence and so we collect the evidence that very moment.

Q. Since Manipur does not have any paper mill or any export house, how does the organization manage the paper for printing the journal?

Mrs Shanti Devi: Indeed, it is very hard now since we are facing shortage of paper due to prolong blockage at the national Highway No. 39. For the next month (February) the content is ready but unfortunately, we are unable to print the journals due to shortage of paper.

Q. Are there any common issues or crimes that are faced by the women in Manipur?

Mrs Shanti Devi: The most common issues that we come across are the rape, domestic violence due to extra marital affairs, financial issues. But I think most of the issues faces by the women are due to lack of education and the social stigma. As an educated mother will give a better

society. Moreover, I think widow remarriage or divorce should not be a taboo as in the western society. I really feel bad as our society does nothing to help a helpless widow and looks down upon her if she interacts with any man who wants to support her and tags her as 'sex worker' or 'prostitute'.

Q. Are there any future plans or contributions to the society apart from the organization and the journal?

Mrs Shanti Devi: Soon we are planning to set up a home for the victimized women. Sometime, the victims have no place to go and often end up staying with the one whom she does not want to be with as she does not have anywhere else to go. Therefore, I am planning for a place where they can think, retrospect and analyse themselves their wants away from any interference.

A conversation with two members of the organization after the interview with Mrs. Shanti Devi.

Mrs. Bidyabati and Mrs. Bimoti had shared some interesting incidents that they had faced while trying to help the victims. They have been working since the very first day of the organization. They narrated their experience that in one case they were chased away by the husband of the victim using abusive language and told not to come again. Further, I asked if their family members, especially their husbands, supported them to be a part of such organization where women had to stand up against those men who wronged women. They replied that they did face some issue initially but seeing their enthusiasm their family doesn't stop them from taking up such responsibility. Moreover, Mrs. Bidyabati said that she completes her household before she steps out from her house for the organization. Hence, she balances the household tasks and works as a member in the organization.

Organization for Indian Women against Crime

Organization for Indian Women against Crime was founded on March' 2013 at Delhi University complex, along with Manipur Students' Association Delhi (MSAD). It is a national level civil society organization founded to help the abandoned and downtrodden women and prohibit crime and violence against women. The organization claimed that they had worked with Young Women Help Group, at state level and separated after 2/3 years for national level organization. The head office of the organization is located at Chhawla, New Delhi and its branch office is at Keisampat, opposite Sangai Express, Imphal West. Recently, the branch office

had relocated at Canchipur near Standard Robarth Hr. Sc. School, Imphal East. The funding of the organization comes from donation from the local MLAs or Ministers and by organizing non-profitable shows such as Miss Contest.

Currently, the organization has 500 members from 60 Kendras, out of which 5 main members of the organization are given below in the table –

Sl.no.	Name of the member	Role in the Organization	Qualification/ Profession
1.	Arambam Ongbi Robita Leima	President	Graduate
2.	Soubam. Sobita Devi	Adviser	Head Mistress for upper primary school
3.	N. Ganga Devi	Adviser	Head Mistress at Hiyangthang Khomdon Girls' High School
4.	Ng. Tejkumar	Legal Advisor	Director Prosecution
5.	Diana	Worker	Under Graduate(Pursuing)

The crime and violence incidents collected are through the channels of network that they have in every Kendra, newspaper or approached by the victim or victim's family. All the details of the incident are collected and reported by the organization itself without any mediator. The organizations either go to the place where the incident occurred and collect the information or the victim approaches them by coming to the office or via calls. Apart from the journal, *Women and Crimes*, they also employ social media such as Facebook and Youtube channels (both in Editor's name – Robita Leima) to spread their awareness. In the social sites, they share posts related to the crime and violence along with pictures and videos that they had recorded while interacting with the victim or their family. This page is managed by Robita Leima and is

followed by 7,270 followers. The Youtube channel covers the site of the violence and crime and the interaction with the victim or their family.

The organization had also produced a film *Sekmai Turel* as an awareness program. The film was directed by Dhnaraj Khomdran and it was cast by Jolly as Takhelei, the victim; Bony as Achouba, victim's first husband; and Pritam as Chinglen, victim's second husband.

Takhelei is a married woman with two daughters who earns her living by doing odd jobs at Sekmai River. Her husband Achouba wastes away his time in alcoholism and torturing his wife. Subsequently, Chinglen, a wealthy truck owner, sympathise with her hardship and succeeds in eloping with Jolly. After eloping she found out that he is already married with a daughter. There too she faces hardship and torture in his hands, and he abandons her in a tribal village. Later, she was tricked into prostitution by a woman from the same tribal village. The film ends with Takhelei committing suicide near Sekmai River. Thus, projecting the crime and violence perpetuated by men as well as women towards woman.

The film was screened in all the film theatres in Manipur, both rural and urban. Later, the film was screened at 100 localities as awareness program by the club members of the locality as a charity show.

Interview #2 I have conducted interview with Arambam Ongbi Robita Leima, the editor of *Women and Crime* and the members of the *Organization for Indian Women against Crime*

Date: 27th January'17

Place: Young Women Help Organization Head office, Konung Mamang, Imphal

Q. How does the organization and the journal *Women and Crime* started and how many members were there when it started?

Robita Leima: The organization was founded as Young Women Help Organization on 6th June'2011 at G.M. Hall, Imphal West. And on the same day the journal *Nupigi Punshi* (edited by herself) was published on the same day. Around 1000 women were gathered from various districts of Manipur as initiative members.

In March '2013, the organization split and formed Organization for Indian Women against Crime at Delhi University Campus along with MSAD. And the journal *Women and Crime* was also published the same day.

Q. Is the content of the periodic focus only on the crime/violence against women or is there any other theme?

Robita Leima: The cases that we deal are only crime and violence relate to women and so the items in the journal are the cases that the organization had dealt in that month.

Q. Is there any particular reason political or personal behind such journals, why the journal and no other means?

Robita Leima: I believe that reading is an act by which people can reflect and it can reach places where internet or electricity cannot reach. However, we also have Facebook page and Youtube channels which are accessible easily from anywhere.

Q. How is the finance of the organization maintained?

Robita Leima: The activity of the organization is financed from the donations given by the victim's family after their case had been resolved and we also generate some revenue by selling the journals.

Q. How, the circulation of the magazine done is, is it profitable?

Robita Leima: We circulate 14,000 journals on ever 25th of the month. The journals are distributed by newspaper hawkers or are sold through bookstores.

Q. Who are the regular customers?

Robita Leima: I cannot point out for any regular customer, however, these are bought and read by people of all ages. The demand for the journal is high in rural as compared to urban areas.

Q. Why the printed form rather than just the activist way?

Robita Leima: I believe that reading is a means by which a person can reflect to the society. Moreover, in the journal we had projected the picture from both the angles, that is, from the perspective of the victim as well as accused. The journal also acts as a link between the public and the organization as it comprises of all the contact details of the organization.

We are also active in social media – we update most of the violence against women at our Facebook page along with pictures and videos. We also spread the awareness through our Youtube channel.

Last but not the least, we had also produced a film based on the crime and violence faced in Manipur, namely, *Sekmei Turel* cast by Bony, Pritam and Jolly as awareness program.

Q. Any other tie-ups to make the organization successful?

S. Sobita and N. Ganga: No, we have no tie-ups or connection with any government or nongovernment organization. We are an independent organization.

Q. How is the collection of content and pictures done?

Robita Leima: We have our own reporter and photographer who collect the news from the place of crime or violence. So, the pictures in our journals and the story are collected by us only. It is a raw publication of what we had collected.

Q. Any other plan for future betterment of women

Organization: Recently we notice that the rate of divorce is increasing and to help these women we are planning for a bigger house for them. Moreover, we are also looking forward for awareness programs in relation to drugs, cyber-crime and exploitation of women.

After the interview, I got the opportunity to sit in a case related to extra marital affair.

The issue was raised by the wife's mother to the organization few days before the sitting and the husband and his family were summoned on this date (27th January'2017). Both the groups were allowed to settle in the Board Room, where all the prominent members were present (picture in appendix). The victim (wife) was asked to speak first then the husband was countered accordingly. The family of both the sides were also interrogated on the relation between the couple. Later, the organization found the man guilty as he was involved with another woman and tortured his wife and children at home. The liable punishment was announced without any delay.

In a society like Manipur, where corruption and lawlessness prevail such civil society is a must. They are curative in nature and not bias to gender, class, or community. They also seek legal support and help for serious crimes like rape and murder. These organization also avoids exploitation of women as they enlighten the women with their awareness programs and provides a platform where they can reveal their pain and sorrow without any fear. Further, it enhances the judgement process, as unlike the government court it is not piled up waiting for registration, lawyer fees or lawyer.

Works Cited

Personal Interview

Devi, Thangjam Shanti. Editor. *Nupigi Punshi*. 25th January'2017

Leima, Arambam Ongbi Robita. Editor. *Women and Crime*, 27th January'2017