

REPORT

Script Development Workshop

Under Stepping Stones: Engaging with Youth in South Asia on Sexual Violence And Impunity & Body of Evidence Projects

A Zubaan Workshop for Theatre Practitioners and Performing Artists

Dates: December 3-6, 2018

Venue: Bordoloi Hall, Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati , Assam

Zubaan's Script Development Workshop on Sexual Violence and Impunity was held for three and a half days in Guwahati, Assam, bringing together theatre practitioners/activists, students, etc. from various parts of Northeast India. The workshop's main purpose was to open channels of communication on the topic of sexual violence and impunity, moving away and beyond merely academic research and writing. With the narratives and the vast body of qualitative knowledge gathered through the SVI project, which resulted in eight books, the workshop planned to not only introduce these narratives but also use it as material for engagement through different art forms. The three days of the workshop was interspersed with participatory theatre activities, speeches, screening of performances, and group art.

Day 1:

The workshop began with an introduction by theatre practitioners, Lapdiang A. Syiem and Yengkokpam Purnima Devi, who were also the resource persons for the workshop. Bidisha Mahanta, from Zubaan, briefly introduced the project and the project background followed by a session of ice-breaking through the medium of art and craft. Lapdiang and Purnima used the device of craft to





illustrate how we perceive our own self, with sketches, newspaper cuttings and colours, and then talk about ourselves through our art. This activity helped break boundaries and warmed the participants into the setting which was necessary for the groups, with their diversity in geography, education, class context, and in preparation for the sensitive material which would be discussed in the next couple of days.

Day 2:

The first session of the second day began with a theatre exercises, which involved partnering with different sets of people.. This helped build trust and comfortability.



The second session started with a breakdown of the concept of impunity by Laxmi Murthy, from Zubaan, and a detailed

background of the SVI project and how it unfolded in the five countries. Participants responded with their own experiences of sexual violence an impunity and we continued the discussion with extracts of stories from the SVI volumes – Beth’s story and stories of caste based impunity from *Faultlines of History- India Papers II*, Suzette Jordan’s interview from *Breaching the Citadel- India Papers I*, etc.

After lunch we continued the discussion on the idea of impunity and what it means for the



North Eastern region. In this session, we had Thingnam Anjulika Samom speaking on Luingamla, the women’s movement in the Naga hills of Manipur and the after effects of the Thangjam Manorama’s rape and murder case.

Anjulika Samon talked about the brutal instance of the rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama by the troops of the 17th Assam Rifles under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, and the protest by the Meira Paibis that accompanied this. She also spoke about Luingamla Muinao, the fifteen-year old who was assaulted by the army officers and the resistance that emerged through the act of weaving and using the weave, and subsequently the Naga shawl carrying the weave, as a form of protest and preservation of the memory.. She also spoke broadly about the feminist movement in the Northeast, which began among the women of the Naga Hills, and later was joined by the Meitei women from the plains. The current movement in Manipur also looks at the disjunct from the Meira Paibi's nude protest after the Manorama incident, the delay in justice even after a decade and half and the sensationalization of the protest in national and international media that followed. It engaged with the question of how impunity works even in cases of mass media attention and awareness and how institutional systems preserve it.

The final session of the evening, we had the screening of a few performances by theatre artists on the idea of Sexual Violence. First was Maya Krishna Rao's solo production, "The Walk", followed by an earlier performance of Yengkokpam Purnima on AFSPA and sexual violence – a contemporary dance performance titled *Nerves*. This was followed by clipping of a performance by Mallika Taneja – *Allegedly*, and a clipping of the performance by Imogen Butler-Cole's *Foreign Body*. The day ended with further theatre exercises.

Day 3:

After a couple of theatre exercises and discussions on the way to use the body and performativity, we had Dolly Kikon's talk and a lively discussion which drew parallels between performativity in theatre and academics, and using the body to develop new kinds of academia. She talked about the



limitations to text, and the need to bring different forms like poetry, visuals, etc. and her own experiences of using different forms. Dolly's essay on Beth which discussed the idea of

nationalism being a source of impunity also laid the ground for how sensitive research and research related activism has to be – taking into account geographical and political contexts.

After lunch, we organized the participants into groups of five, which comprised both of practitioners from the Northeast, and students of TISS Guwahati. We encouraged the groups to start developing their own material on the topic of sexual violence and impunity, using both their theatre knowledge and practice and supplemented by inputs from the students who came from different social and cultural locations.

Day 4:

After a brief session of theatre exercises, and participants being visibly more comfortable after three days of trust building exercises and movements, we again broke into groups to work on the presentations. Laxmi, Bidisha, Lapdiang and Purnima moved between the groups to discuss and facilitate the presentation planning and ideation, which continued till we broke for lunch.



Post lunch, we had presentations by the five groups, who chose different mediums to present their ideas and stories on sexual violence and impunity. While some of the groups, like the theatre group from Sikkim, chose to focus on local stories of sexual violence and migration, other groups chose different aspects to focus on, including the impact of impunity on both the survivor and the perpetrator. Every performance was followed by an extensive feedback session from not only the perpetrators but also the participants who had different perspectives on dealing with the question of impunity after three days of working around the concept.

We concluded the workshop with a final session by theatre practitioners Rosemary Kikon and Papari Medhi, who spoke about their own experiences of working through creative art forms to talk about the the violence and discrimination subjected to North-East women in mainland urban centres, especially Delhi. Rosemary's performance with Lapdiang, *Requiem*

for the Dead Sisters, which was performed at Zubaan's Cultures of Peace in November 2018 at Ahmedabad, details the voicelessness of victims of sexual violence survivors from the Northeast in the metropolitan cities of India and the impunity that perpetrators enjoy due to their cultural and geographical locations. Papari also spoke about being an unconventional looking theatre artist and talking about politically sensitive matter through theatre, while not being taken seriously at the same time. The discussion was livened by the speakers and the participants were eager to follow up with more questioning, especially when dealing with impunity, nationalism and sexual violence and using theatre as a medium to open up this discussion.



**

Agenda

Script Development Workshop

Under Stepping Stones: Engaging with Youth in South Asia on Sexual Violence And Impunity & Body of Evidence Projects

A Zubaan Workshop for Theatre Practitioners and Performing Artists

December 3-6, 2018, Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati

Time slotted: Morning (9:30am to 12 noon)

Afternoon (2pm to 6pm)

Aim: To look at cases that have been recorded or incidents that can be shared by the participants. How do we look into these records/materials and work towards the development of scripts that will be translated into performance?

The group constitutes participants (associated with theatre groups and performances) from all around the states of NE India and students from outside the North East but who are based here either through their work or education. The language of communication is English. However, since we are a varied group we will also be working in Manipuri, Assamese and Hindi and other languages by engaging the participants themselves in translation.

Resource persons: Yengkokpam Purnima- a theatre artist based in Manipur who has been trained at the National School of Drama, New Delhi. She also comes from a training of physical theatre where her performances looks at the body as a language of expression.

Lapdiang A. Syiem- a theatre artist based in Shillong, trained at the National School of Drama, New Delhi. Further training in physical theatre from the Commedia School, Copenhagen, Denmark. Her work looks at Khasi folk narratives and adapting them for a contemporary audience.

Rosemary Kikon- A spoken-word poet and theatre artist trained at the Commedia School in Denmark. She writes her own material and translates them into performance. She has performed around the world in experimental theatre spaces.

Dolly Kikon teaches Anthropology and Development Studies at the University of Melbourne (Australia). Her monographs include *Life and Dignity: Women's Testimonies of Sexual Violence in Dimapur* (2015) and *Experiences of Naga Women in Armed Conflict: Narratives from a Militarized Society* (2004). She has also contributed to the *India Papers II: Faultline of History* under the Sexual Violence & Impunity series and the anthology, *Centrepiece: New Writing and Art from Northeast India* (Zubaan, 2017).

Thingnam Anjulika Samom is an independent journalist based in Manipur. Her journalistic writing has focused on gender and conflict in Manipur. She has been a contributor to

Garrisoned Minds: Women and Armed Conflict in South Asia (Panos South Asia, 2016), *Centrepiece: New Writing and Art from Northeast India* (Zubaan, 2017) and is currently editing a book on Manipur for Zubaan.

Papari Medhi is a theatre practitioner in Assam. She is a graduate from the National School of Drama, New Delhi and works with new forms of theatre as part of her activism. She also devised a form of theatre called Performed Conversations to introduce and talk about sensitive issues with an audience.

3rd December
3pm-6pm

Introductory session: The group will begin the session together with an introduction by each of the participants.

The introduction will not begin with their names but with the following questions:

1. Why they joined the workshop and what are their views on coming together like this.
2. We will also encourage them to tell us a bit about their theatre background, if any, and how they hope to engage with all the other participants.

We hope to begin with an understanding that we are there together in a free and safe space where we hope to challenge ourselves and gradually address issues of sexual violence and impunity.

This exercise will be carried out in a circle that begins with a small warm-up just to get everyone in an open state of mind. **(3mins each to everyone)**

The name exercise- The participants will be given a sheet of paper. They are free to use magazine cuttings/newspaper cuttings (collage), water colours, crayons or pencils which will indicate their names and what they mean to them through these mediums.

(We will not disclose this exercise yet to the participants since our aim is to allow a natural response about their own selves when they are there in a new space with new people).

The rest of the evening will end with the sharing of the small piece of art they have produced based on their own names.

The resource persons will then brief the participants on what we hope to address, and raise questions about the need for intervention and dialogue through the medium of the theatre; the role that the theatre comes to play starting by addressing awareness for the urgency and necessity to maintain ethical standards by different institutions- medical, legal and research. The role it should play in terms of interaction and dialogue with the audience. But most importantly to humanise and give face to the narratives of the subjects of abuse.

4th December 2018

9:30am-11am

Purnima will begin with warming up exercises (we request the participants to wear comfortable clothing in which they feel easy to move about. The hall must be clean so we can either be barefoot or with socks).

11.30 am-1 pm

On chits of paper we will make groups depending on the number of participants. Each will pick out a number so that we divide everyone into mixed groups. This will help them engage with new people.

We will then discuss cases from the extracts in detail and how, through them, we address what sexual violence and impunity is. The discussion will be led by the resource persons.

2pm - 6pm

Slot in Anjulika's talk and discussion (1 and a half hours)

The participants in the groups will either choose a case study (we will have extracts/printouts of them) or a study that they would like to explore together. This will emerge within the group. The group work will begin with a discussion on the cases and what they would like to pick out as points of focus and analysis. The resource persons will be engaged in the discussions to assist the groups.

We hope to end with a round session discussion where we bring out our thoughts on the day's work and stories that emerge through the exercises.

5th December

9:30am- 10:45am

Warming up and some theatre games:

An understanding of the use of space and how to adapt to spaces that do not have conventional structures of performance: educational institutions/non-theatrical spaces, parks, the streets, open spaces etc. How to facilitate group energy and how to maintain that energy accordingly to different spaces?

11am to 12:30pm

Dolly Kikon's session and discussion

2pm-6pm (depending on the energy of the group)

Further discussions and working towards short presentations within the group. A general discussion will take place to encourage different voices to speak out about the material they would like to share and how they hope to approach it before they begin working.

There will be key points as we break down the case studies as it emerges in a form that can be developed into a script.

Each group needs to be aware of what their points of focus are depending on what they choose.

In this session we will also have short video clippings of performers who have addressed sexual violence in their own ways. This will give the participants an idea of different styles and approaches.

6th December

We will begin with warming up exercises for the first hour and a half (this is also a way to sensitise the participants on the importance of the body and its expression since Purnima and Lapdiang come from a background of challenging their bodies and developing a language that breaks barriers that words may not).

We would like to slot the rest of the day to the participants to work towards a presentation of 5 mins to 10 mins each.

Rosemary Kikon, Dolly Kikon and Anjulika will be invited to watch and comment on the pieces. Here Rosemary will bring in her own inputs of addressing performance.

This will be the concluding session on how to take the work further into a script and subsequently a performance.

- We need to address sexual violence and impunity from the context of NE India.
- Many of the participants come from their own regions and are aware of their ground realities.
- How do we navigate these realities through the theatre while addressing: ethical issues within medical institutions, law institutions and even within our close knit communities?
- What we hope will be generated is an active participation and sharing of stories that come from the participants themselves and how this material can form important content in the process of creating narratives around SVI.

Participant's List

Karry Padu	Itanagar	Female	The Wild Flower Production/ Arunachal literature & art Festival
Madhu Raghavendra	Guwahati	Male	Poetry Couture
Lakden Lepcha	sikkim	female	Sikkim Ethnic Theatre
Gulal Salil	Guwahati	Androgyne/Gender non-binary	TISS Writer's Crew
Ayatree	Guwahati	Female	TISS Writer's Crew
Krittika Bhuiya	Guwahati	Female	
Kartika Meher	Guwahati	Male	TISS Writer's crew
Suraj K.	Guwahati	Queer	TISS Writer's crew
ISAAC L VARAY	Guwahati	male	TISS Writer's crew
Basil Pallimalil	Guwahati	Male	Tiss Writer's Crew
Shreya Chowdhury	Guwahati	Female	TISS Writer's crew
Hridinayana Dutta	Guwahati	Female	TISS Writer's Crew
ARJAMA KALITA	GUWAHATI	Female	TISS Writer's crew
Kankana	Guwahati	Female	
Biru Tamang	Sikkim	Male	Sikkim Ethnic Theatre
Chiranjit	Manipur	Male	Umbilical theatre, Manipur
Thangjam Jatishor	Manipur	Male	Umbilical theatre, Manipur
Anees Noronha	Shillong	Female	St. Anthony's College, Mass Media Department, Meghalaya
Emidaka Mabel Lyngdoh Kharkongor	Shillong	Female	St. Anthony's College, Mass Media Department, Meghalaya
Jaya Singh	Guwahati	Female	TISS Writer's crew
Longshibeni Kikon	Guwahati	Female	
Rajashree Barman	Guwahati	Female	Jirsong Theatre
Rekha Lahon	Guwahati	Female	Jirsong Theatre
Nilakshi Hazarika	Guwahati	Female	Jirsong Theatre