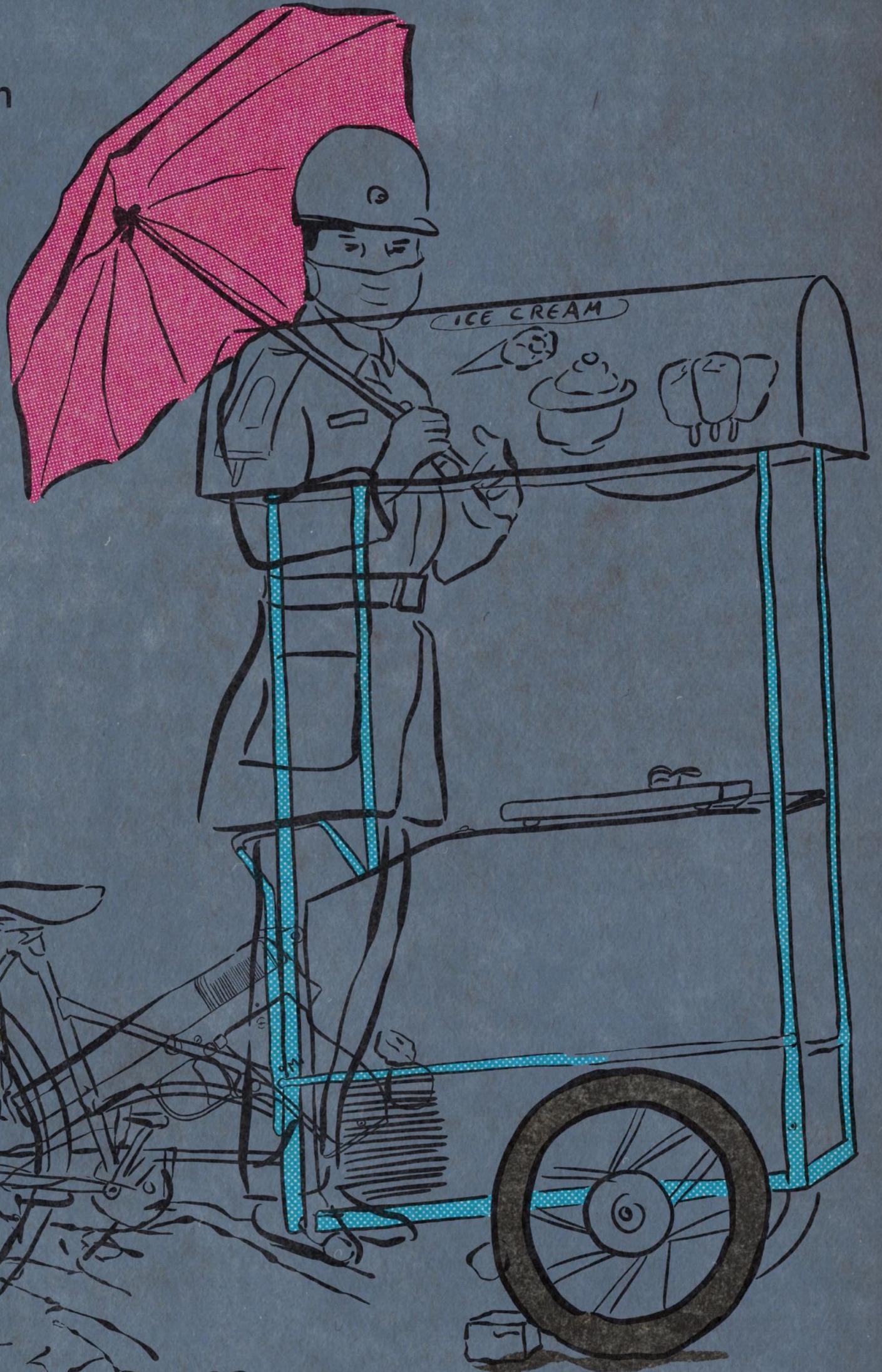


Manipur: Activism & Resilience in an Unreported Conflict Zone

by
Beldan Sezen



front line defenders



Welcome to Imphal, the capital of a former asiatic nation state with its own written constitution.



We merged under duress with the Union of India in 1949.

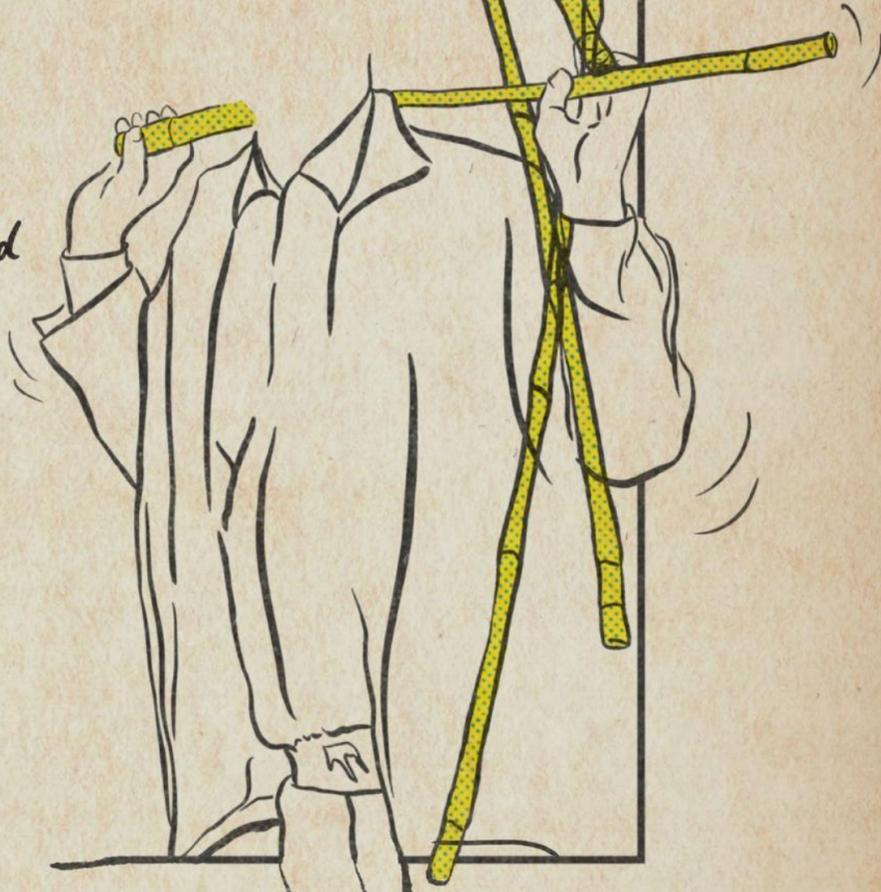
Since then Nation-building has been done at gun point.



For more than sixty years now military solutions backed by India's Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) have failed Manipur.



Continued abuses by police and security forces, insurgencies, impunity, corruption, rape and poverty left the Manipuri people with unfulfilled demands for justice in the world's largest democracy.



justice delayed is justice denied.

Not money or migration but justice.

**Manipur:
Activism & Resilience in an Unreported Conflict Zone**

More than 60 armed groups operate in Manipur, ranging from small outfits to organisations with several thousand members. Besides them, dozens of battalions of the Indian Army and paramilitary forces such as the Assam Rifles are stationed throughout the state at the Indo-Burmese border.

With just over two million inhabitants belonging to 39 ethnic groups insurgency and counter-insurgency alike continue to traumatise Manipur. And in this process women are raped, assaulted, humiliated and murdered. They are left to bear the brunt of the emotional and socio-economic impacts of violence.

Human-rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and all who asks for justice are facing intimidation not only by security forces but also by corrupt government officials whose only path to a better economic life is through loyalty to the ruling party.

There are 20,000 registered widows.

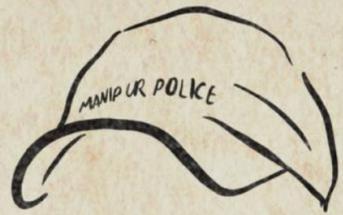


The AFSPA stripped the region of its rights under the Geneva Convention and even the Constitution Of India. With 350 military stations all over Manipur, armed security forces have the power to detain and arrest anybody on mere suspicion without having to be held accountable.

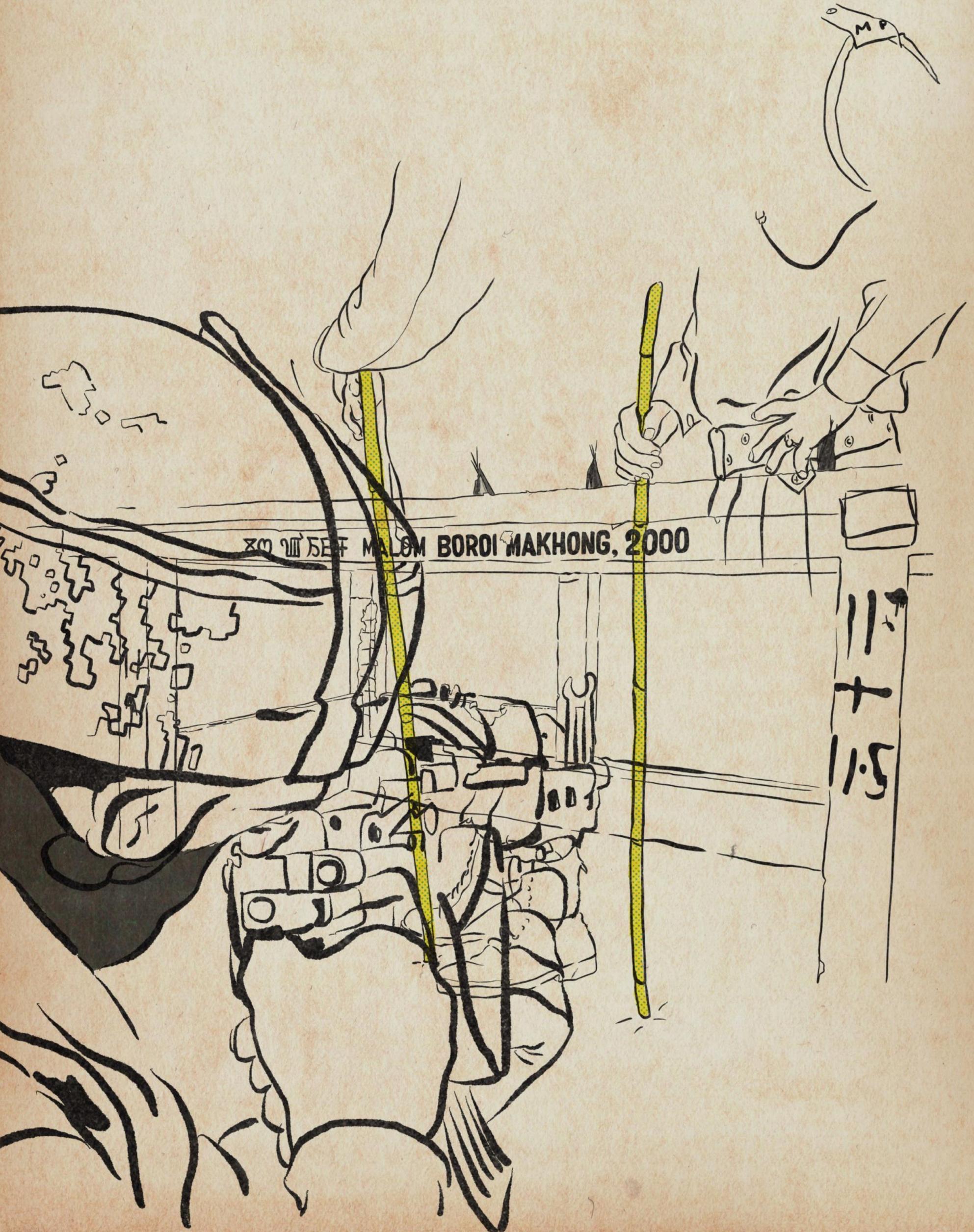
*every 20 people
a soldier*

*every 0.5 km
a patrol*





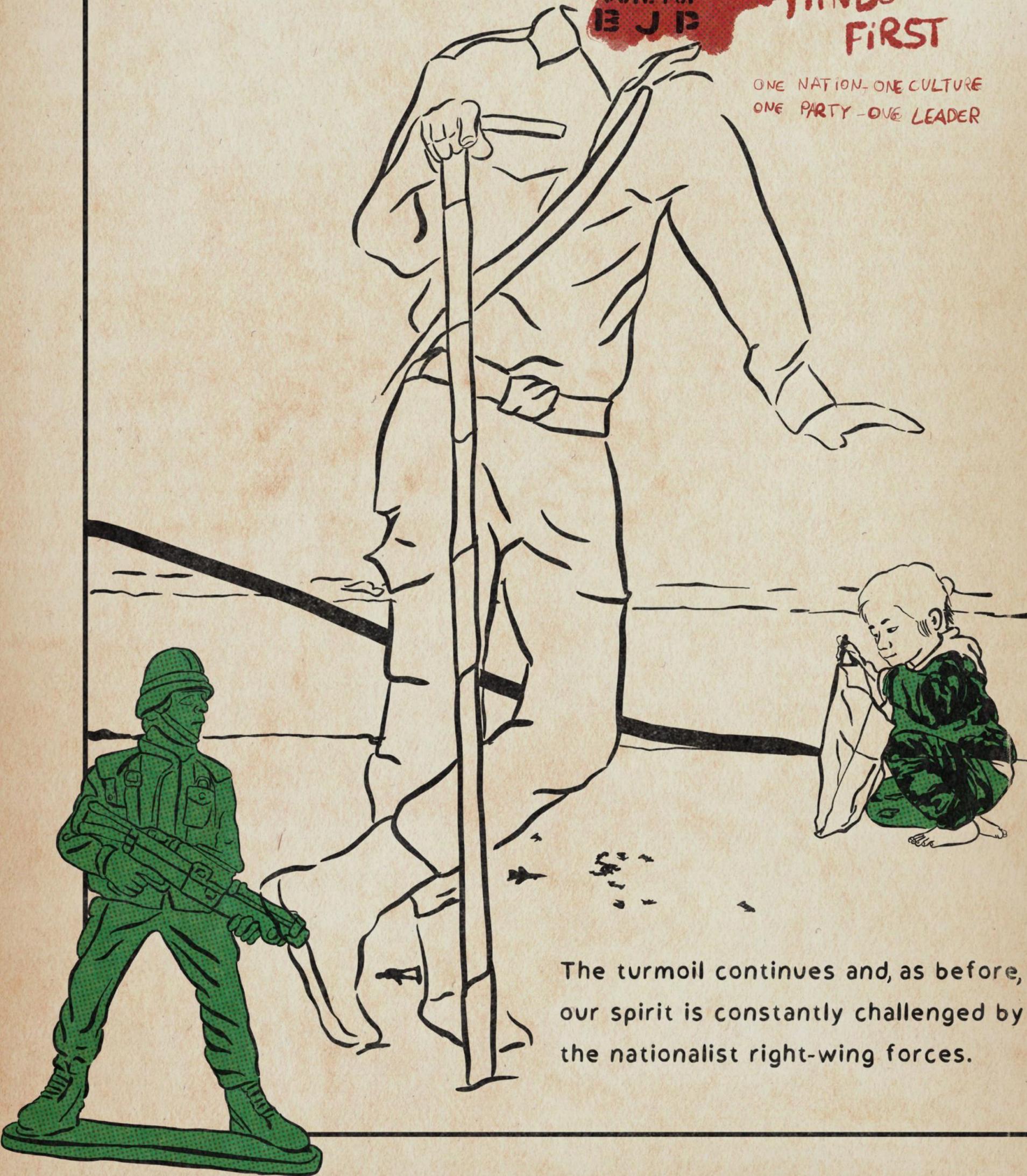
The National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act are yet another way for India to continue its nation-building based on fear and force instead of love, care and dignity.



More than ever before, people here in Manipur live with the threat of being arrested for articulating even the tiniest form of criticism or discontent.

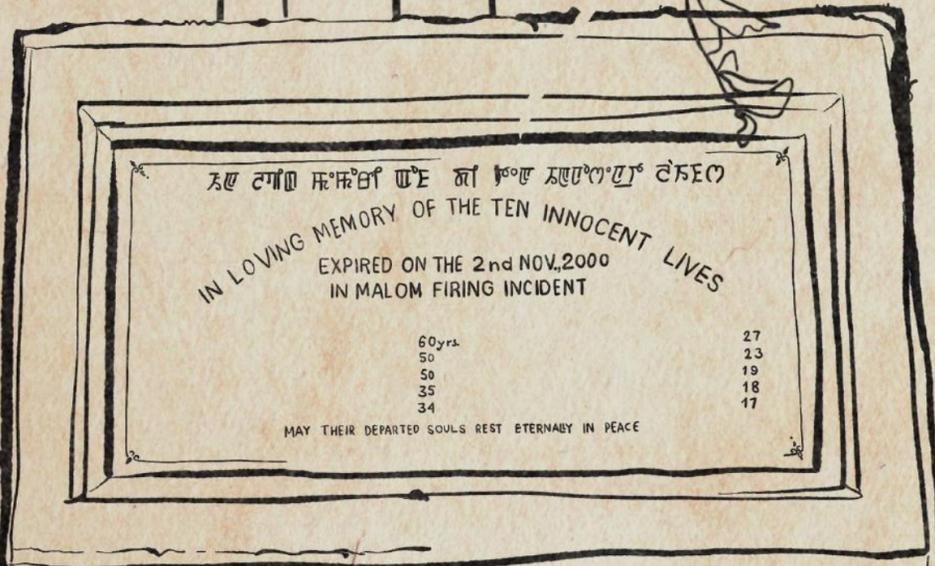
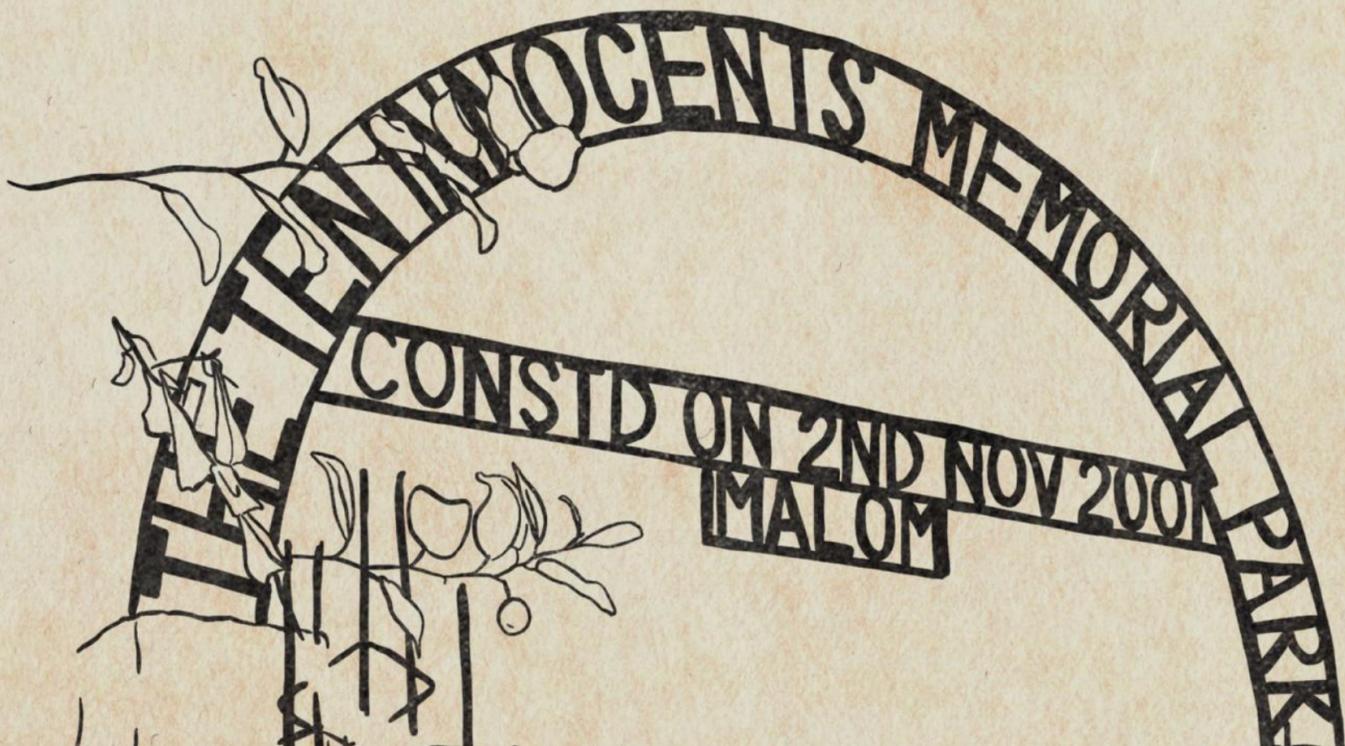


ONE NATION - ONE CULTURE
ONE PARTY - ONE LEADER

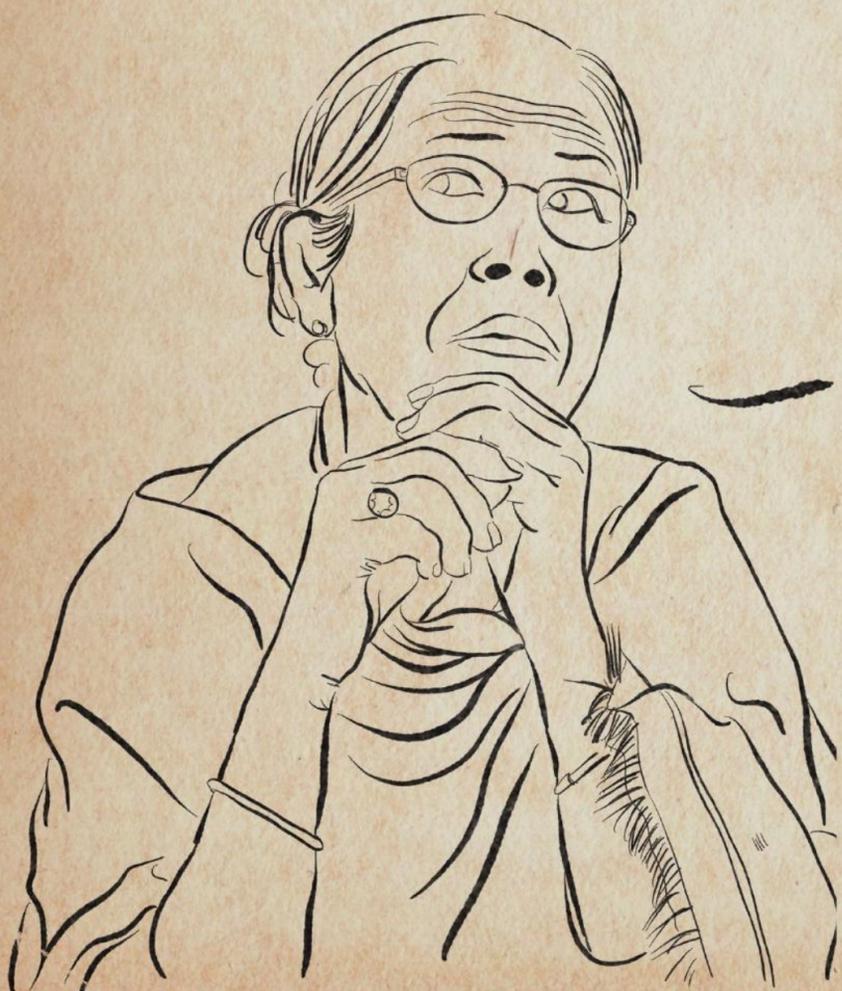


The turmoil continues and, as before, our spirit is constantly challenged by the nationalist right-wing forces.

This is the darkest time in the history of independent India that we have ever seen.



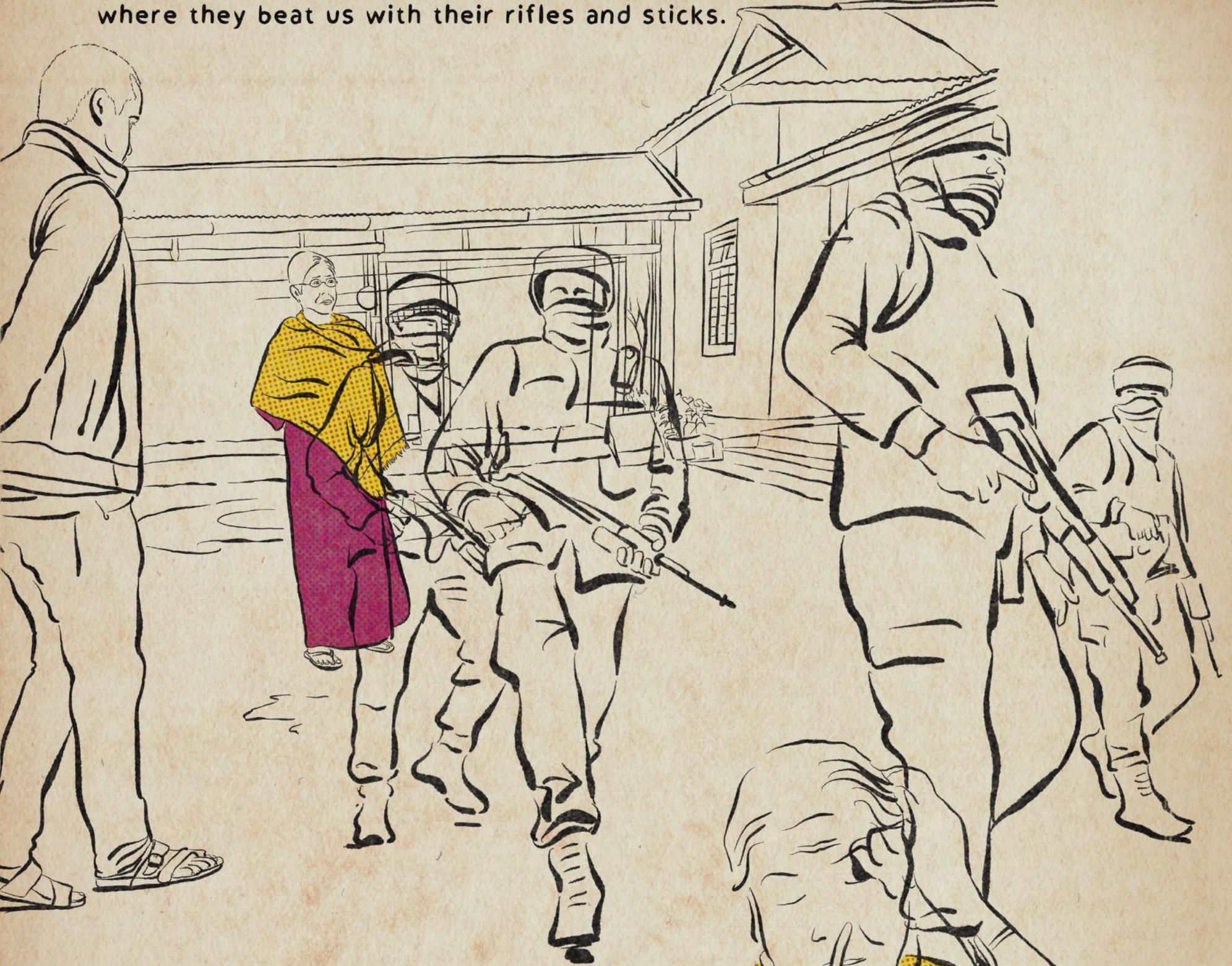
The Malom Massacre



Yes, my two sons and my sister, together with seven other people, were shot dead by Indian security forces. The shooting took place at the bus stop close to my house. A random retaliation for a bomb blast aimed at a military convoy that day.

← Sinam Chandrajani

After the shooting, they raided our houses, forcing people outside where they beat us with their rifles and sticks.



Tell me, which mother can bear to lose two sons and a sister at the same time?



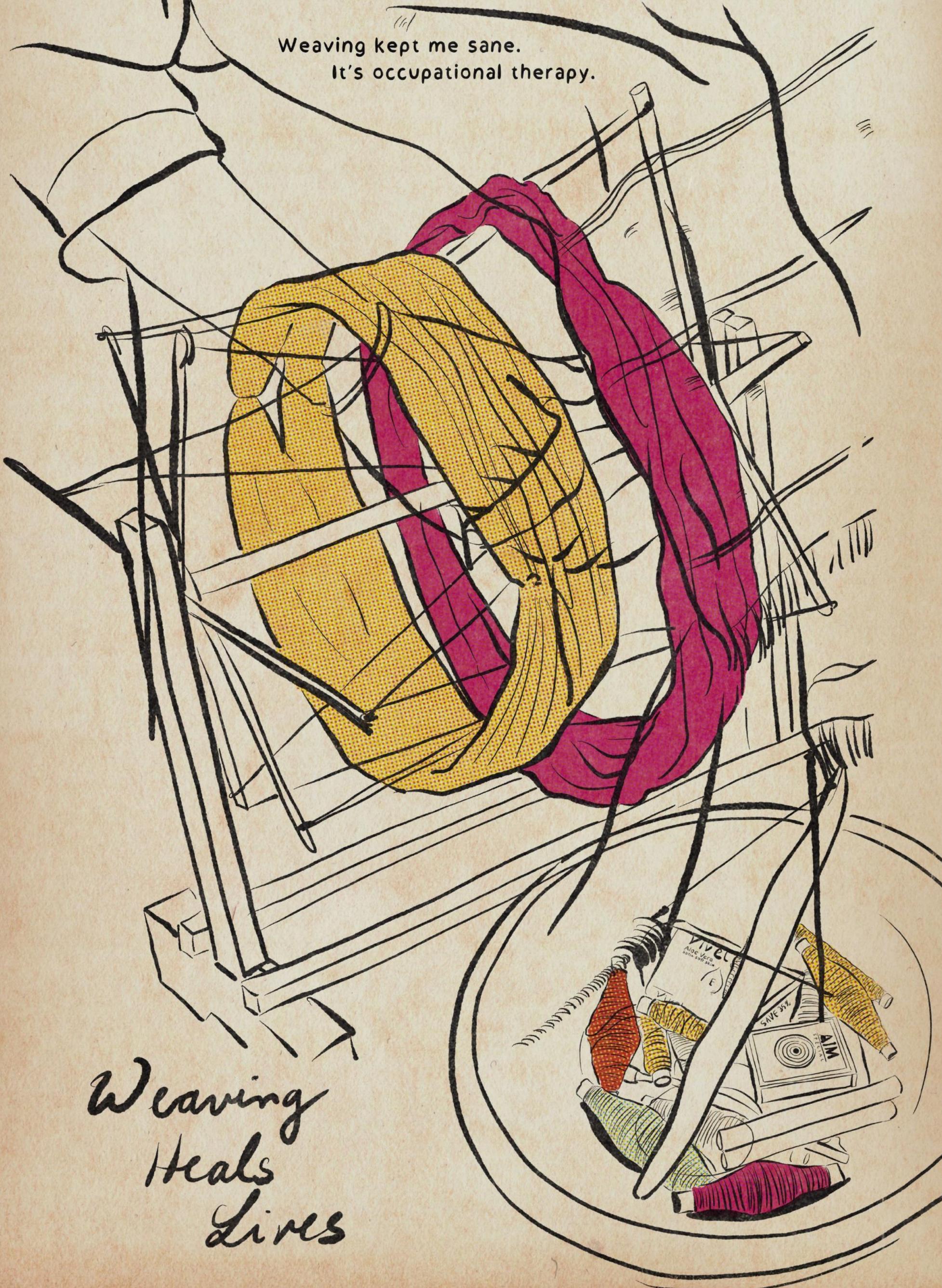
MN 03P



Not knowing how to live with this loss, not knowing how to secure an income, with no justice in sight, I fell into a deep depression.

It all started with a handful of silk cocoons that Binalakshmi, who founded the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, one day put in front of me. With this simple gesture, I came out of my depression. I had something to do. My hands had something to do. In time, I was able to build a sustainable livelihood.

Weaving kept me sane.
It's occupational therapy.



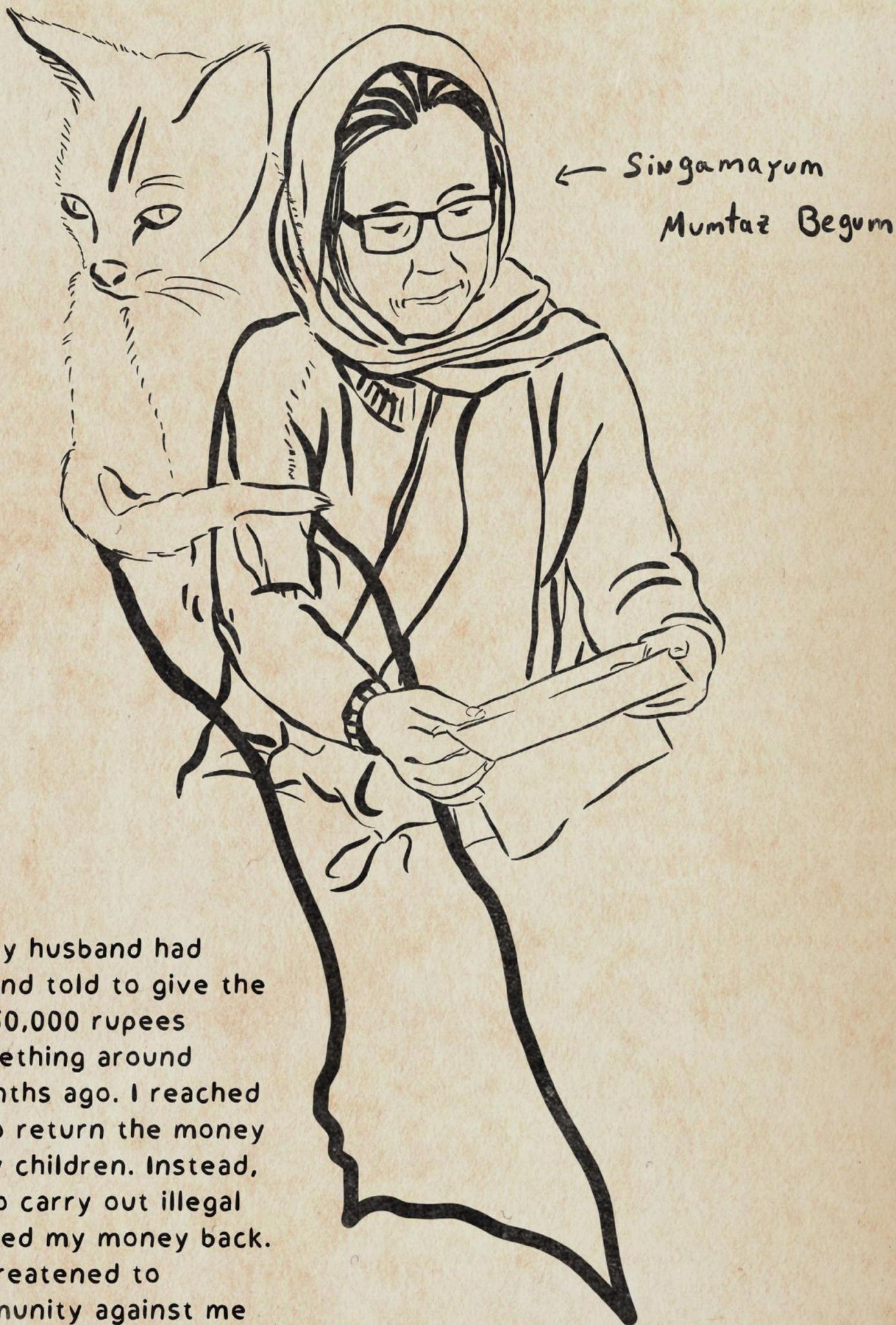
*Weaving
Heals
Lives*

Wearing
villages

**MANIPUR WOMEN
GUN SURVIVORS
NETWORK**



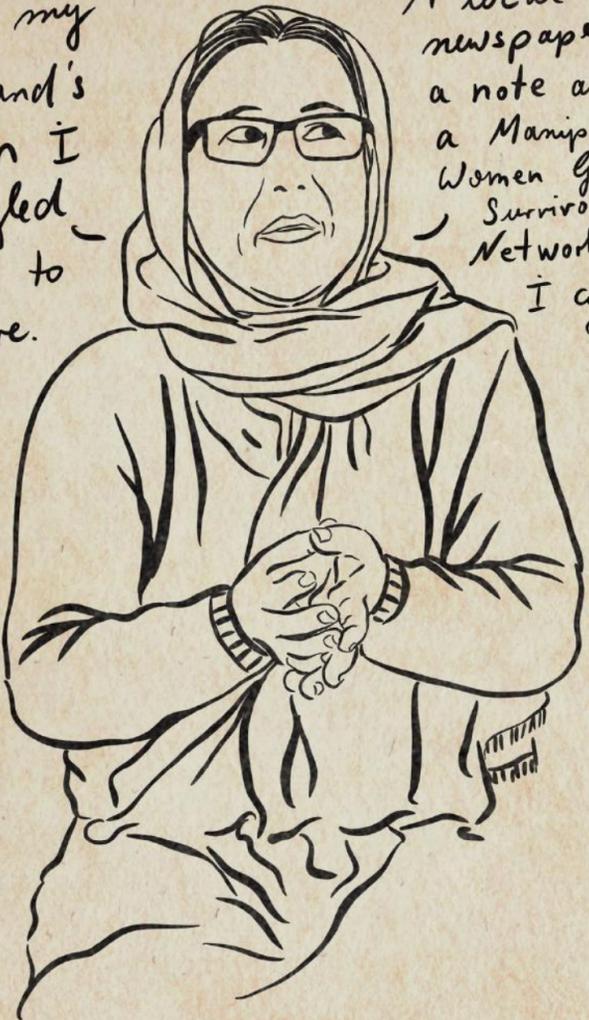
My husband was killed in 2009. He was a lecturer in chemistry. He was called by the Indian Army for a "peace negotiation" at their "transit camp" in Dimapur, Nagaland - that is another state bordering Manipur. While at the army transit camp, my husband called to ask me to send some money as money was meant to "help in peace negotiation". He never returned from the "peace negotiation" meeting called by Indian Army. I say the combined team of Manipur police commandos and Assam Rifles killed him in a case of fake encounter. Following his death, the government accused my husband of being a militant of the armed group People's United Liberation Front (PULF).



I found out that my husband had been threatened and told to give the insurgent group 150,000 rupees (which equals something around \$2,000) a few months ago. I reached out to ask them to return the money so I could feed my children. Instead, they wanted me to carry out illegal activities if I wanted my money back. If I failed, they threatened to instigate the community against me and have me killed.

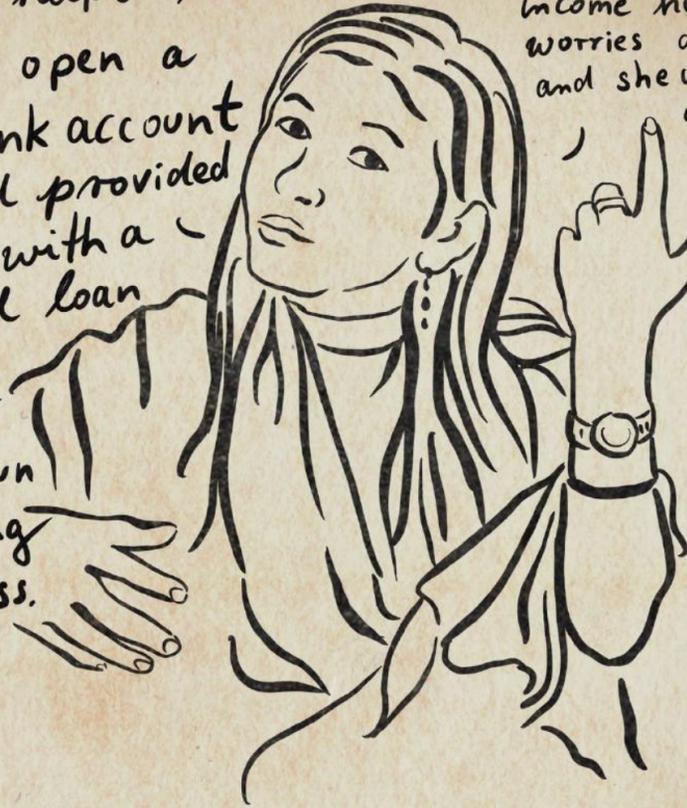
As desperate as I was, I declined.

After my husband's death I struggled hard to survive.



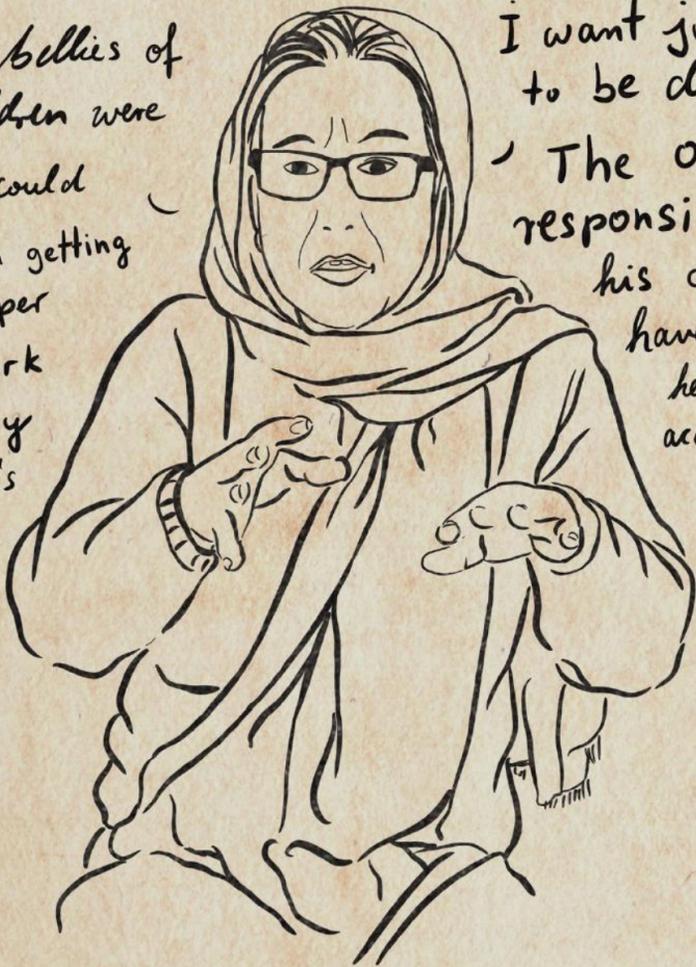
A local newspaper had a note about a Manipur Women Gun Survivor's Network and I contacted Reena.

We helped Mumtaz to open a bank account and provided her with a small loan to start her own weaving business.



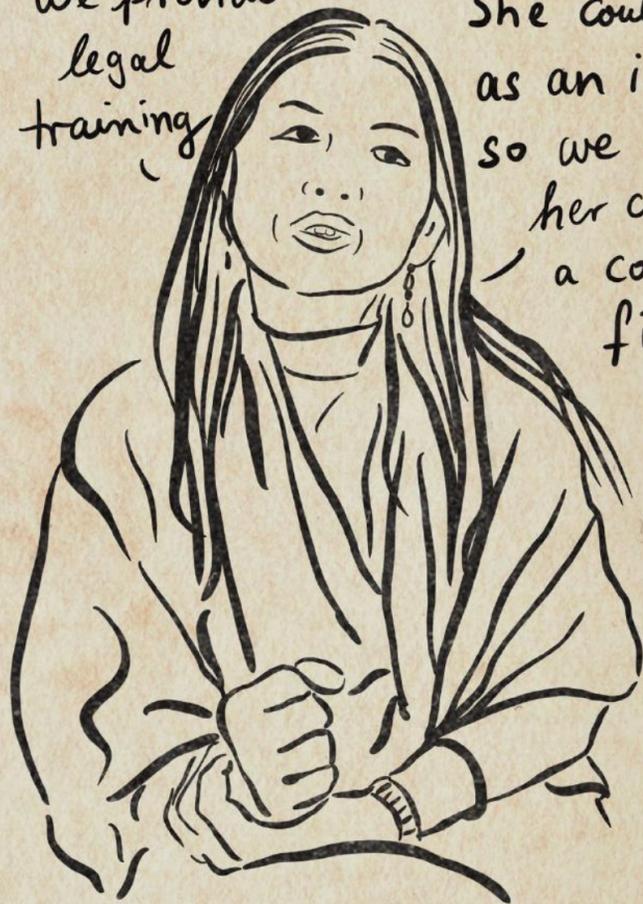
With a steady income her worries decreased and she was able to plan for her future.

Once the bellies of my children were filled I could focus on getting the proper paper work about my husband's killing.



I want justice to be done. The ones responsible for his death have to be held accountable.

We provide legal training



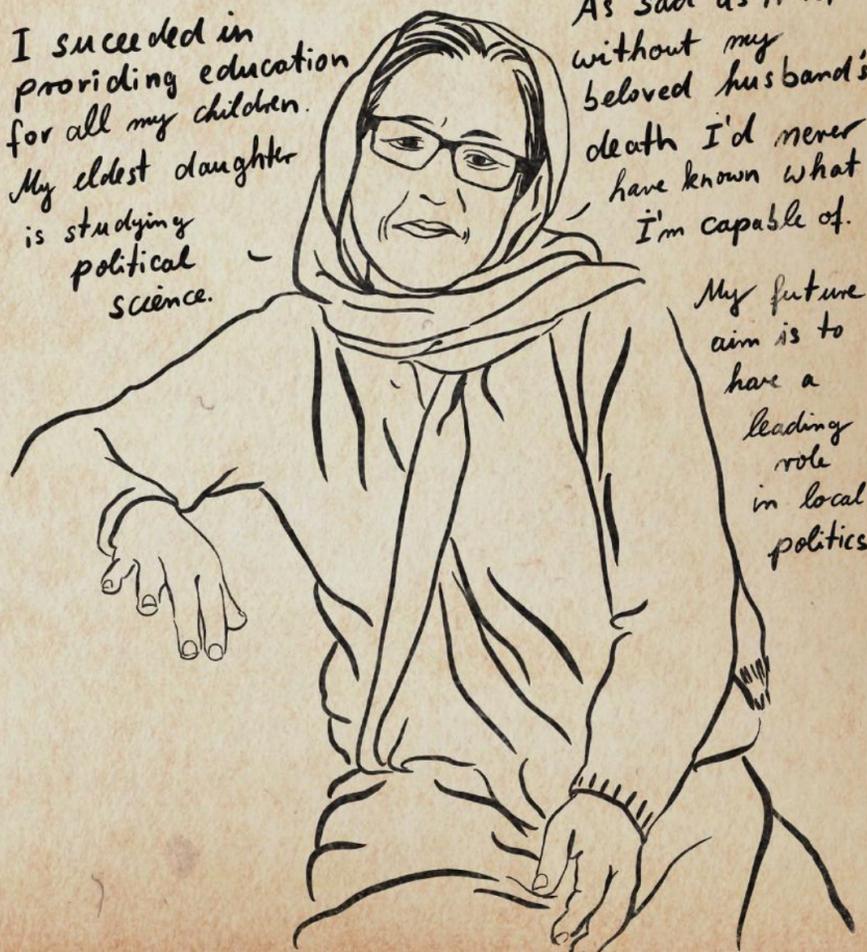
She couldn't file as an individual, so we included her case in a collective filing against the state government.

Trust is gained by setting examples.



Mumtaz now works with the network to help other women survivors all across Manipur. She is one of the strongest survivors and has become a leader among Muslim women in the state.

I succeeded in providing education for all my children. My eldest daughter is studying political science.



As sad as it is, without my beloved husband's death I'd never have known what I'm capable of.

My future aim is to have a leading role in local politics.

A steady income, no matter how small the amount, provides some mental peace. It allowed Mumtaz to focus on state funds that she was eligible for. It allowed her to educate herself about her rights and took her out of the vulnerable position of not knowing - a position that is exploited by everyone in power. When she started to share her knowledge and the little money she had in her community to empower other women, she received threats from the very same group that extorted money from her husband and later tried to blackmail her. When she filed the petition for the investigation of her husband's killing she received "advice" to mind her own business. It was her understanding that no one is above the law, and her belief in justice encouraged her to continue. She learned that written proof is needed for her to be taken seriously. That she has a right to be.



Most importantly, though, with the help of our network Mumtaz, like so many others, managed to become economically independent and provide for the future of her children. No small accomplishment.

The Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, yes. It's the first initiative of its kind in India. It was formed to help women like Mumtaz whose lives have been changed dramatically because of gun killings of a beloved husband, father or son, be it by state or non-state actors or unidentified gunmen. I mean, we see around 300 women every year becoming widows, not to forget orphaned children.

We attempt to lift women above the trauma and agony by helping them to open bank accounts and providing seed money for setting up livelihood measures, so they can lead their lives with new-found courage.

Working to Ensure Women, Peace, Justice & Disarmament

CONTROL ARMS FOUNDATION OF INDIA

Imphal West, Manipur

#WarOnRape

The Network also collaborates with committed young people who believe in helping the gun survivors and in controlling the use and spread of small arms.

Most of the survivors are skilled in making handloom and handicraft items, and in agricultural occupations such as fishery, poultry or mushroom farming. With our micro-finance in the form of interest-free loans, women are successful in setting up sustainable, ecologically responsible and economically independent livelihoods.

Every 22 minutes a woman is raped in India Is this fair?

70% Married Women Fall Trap to Domestic Violence

300% rise in acid attacks in the country

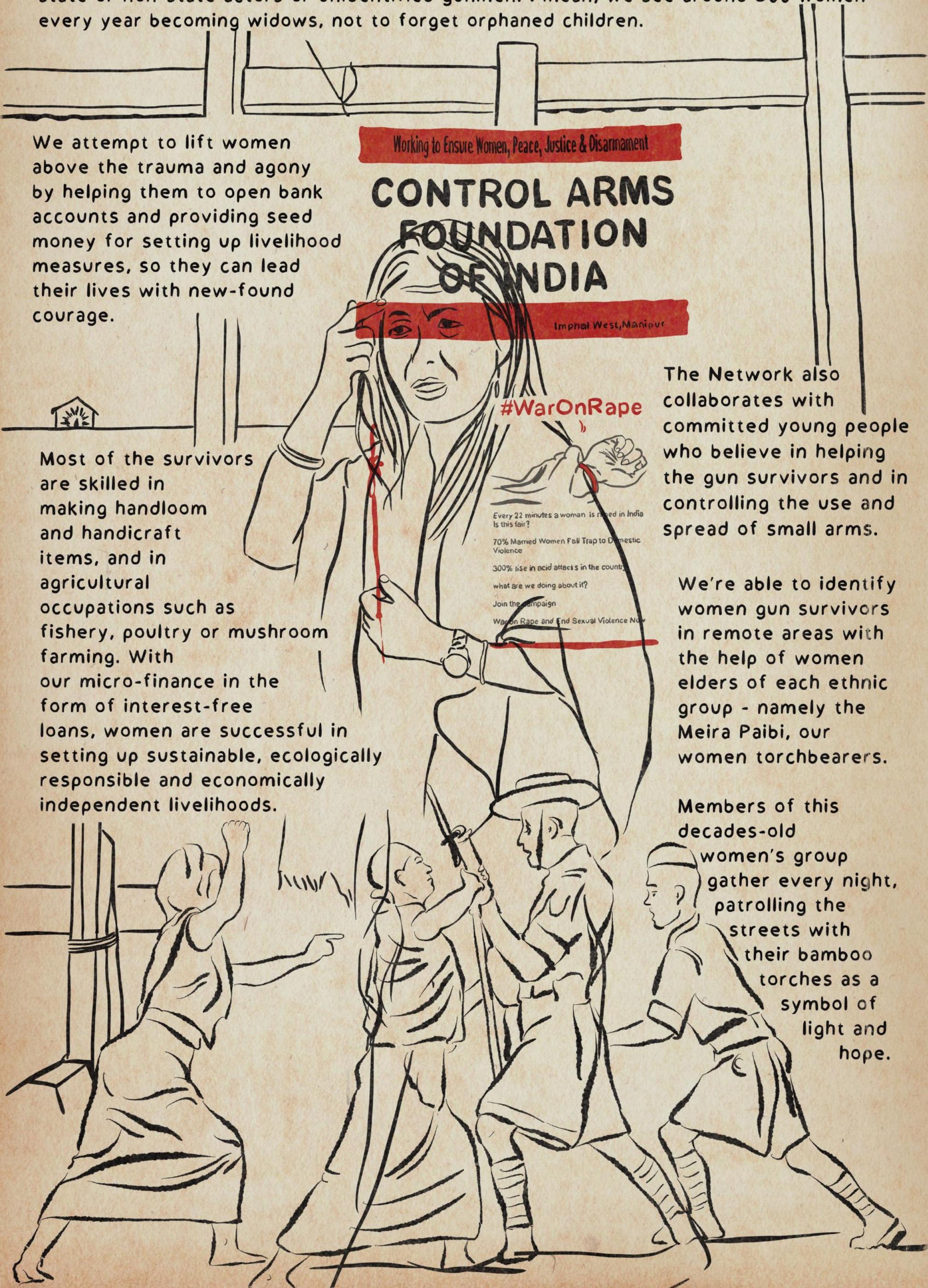
what are we doing about it?

Join the campaign

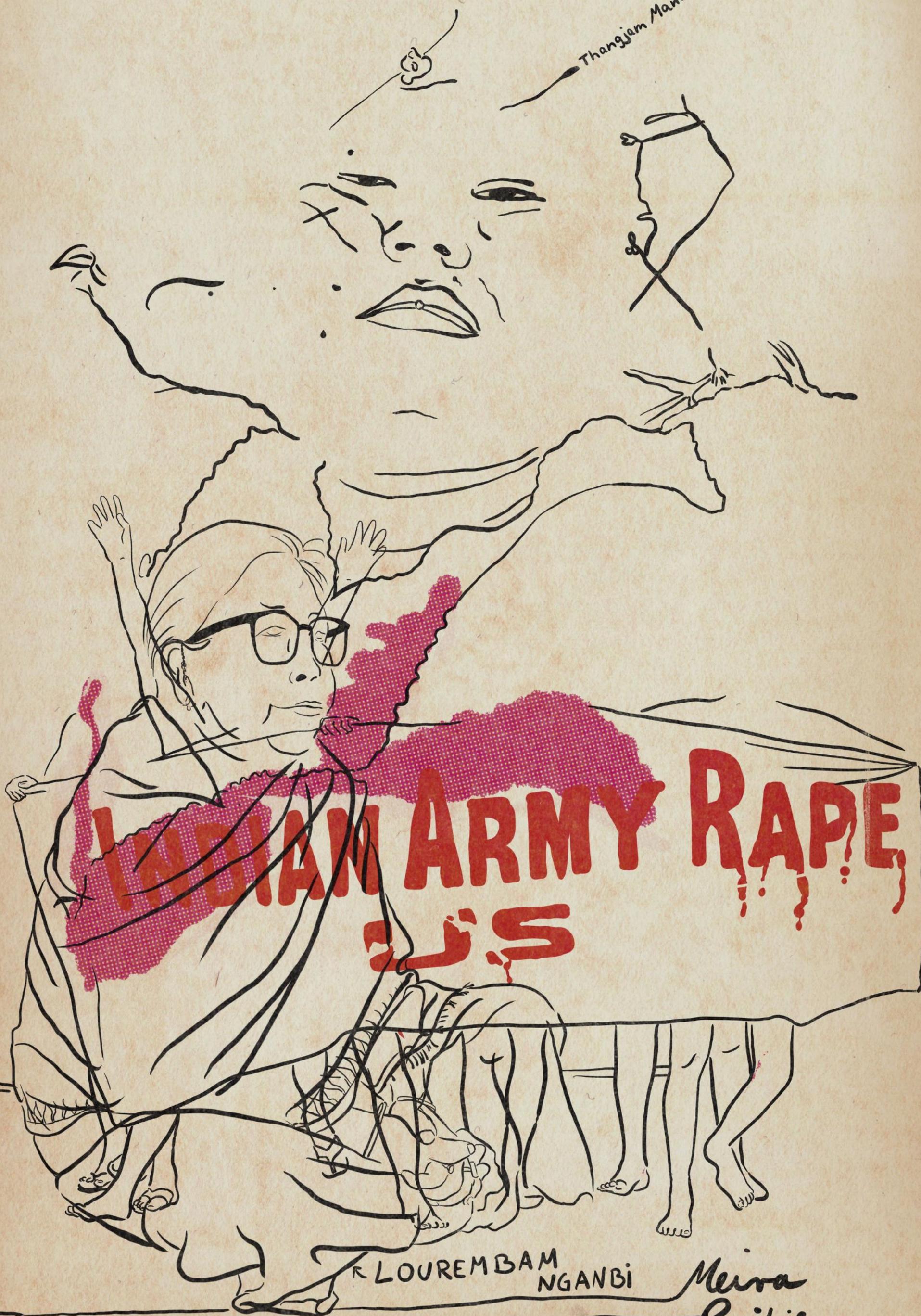
War on Rape and End Sexual Violence Now

We're able to identify women gun survivors in remote areas with the help of women elders of each ethnic group - namely the Meira Paibi, our women torchbearers.

Members of this decades-old women's group gather every night, patrolling the streets with their bamboo torches as a symbol of light and hope.



Thangjam Manorama

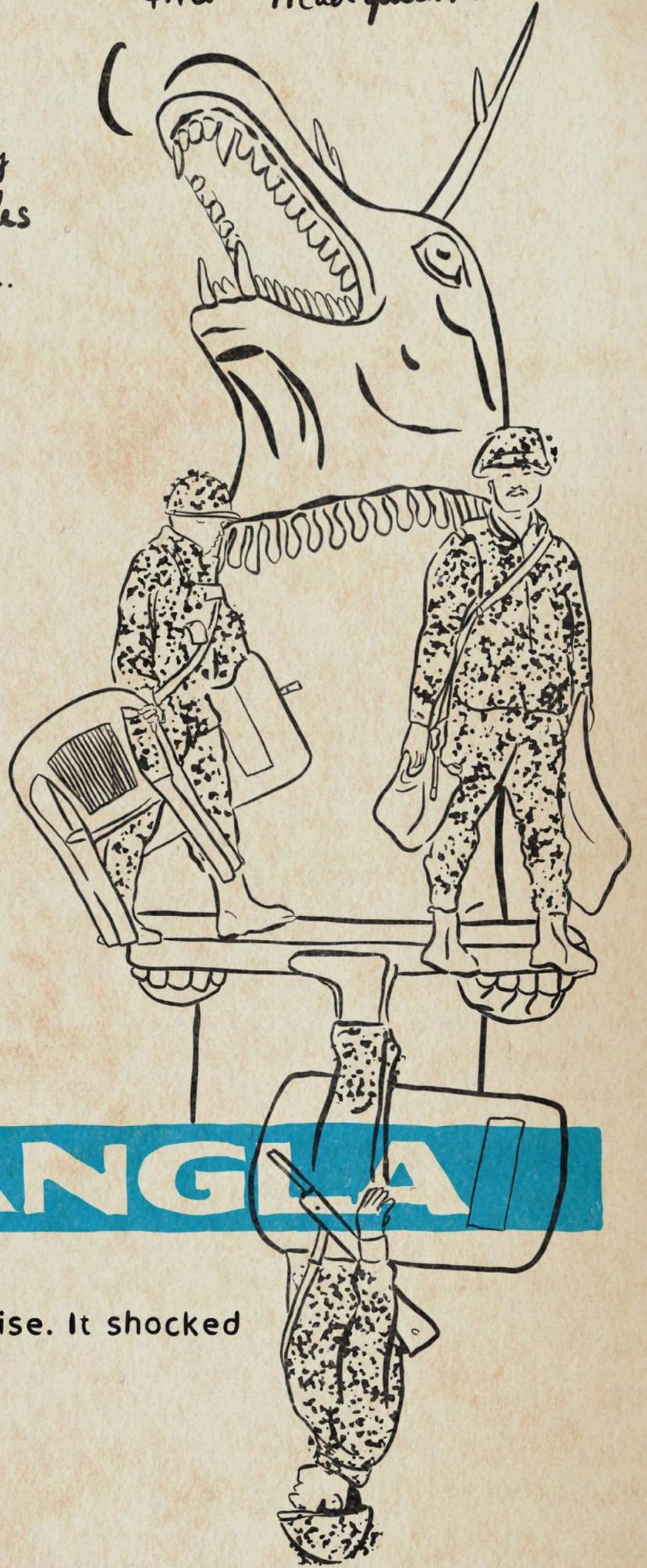
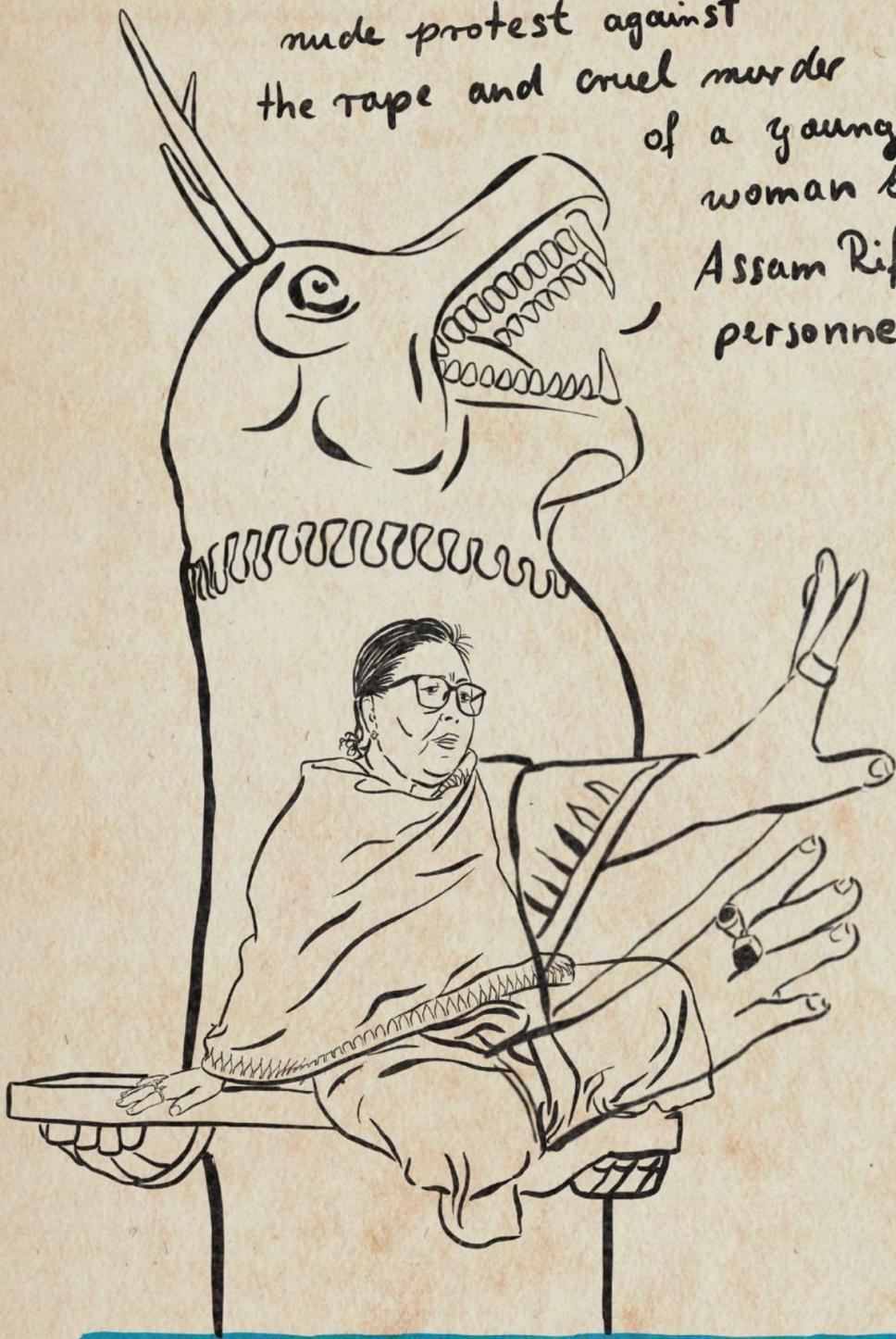


R LOUREMBAM
NGANBI

Meira
Paibis

In 2004, twelve members of the Meira Paibis staged a nude protest against the rape and cruel murder of a young woman by Assam Rifles personnel.

Their action forced the military to move their headquarters.



ਮੈਰਾ ਪੈਬਿਸ KANGLA

The nude protest took everyone by surprise. It shocked the army and the whole country.



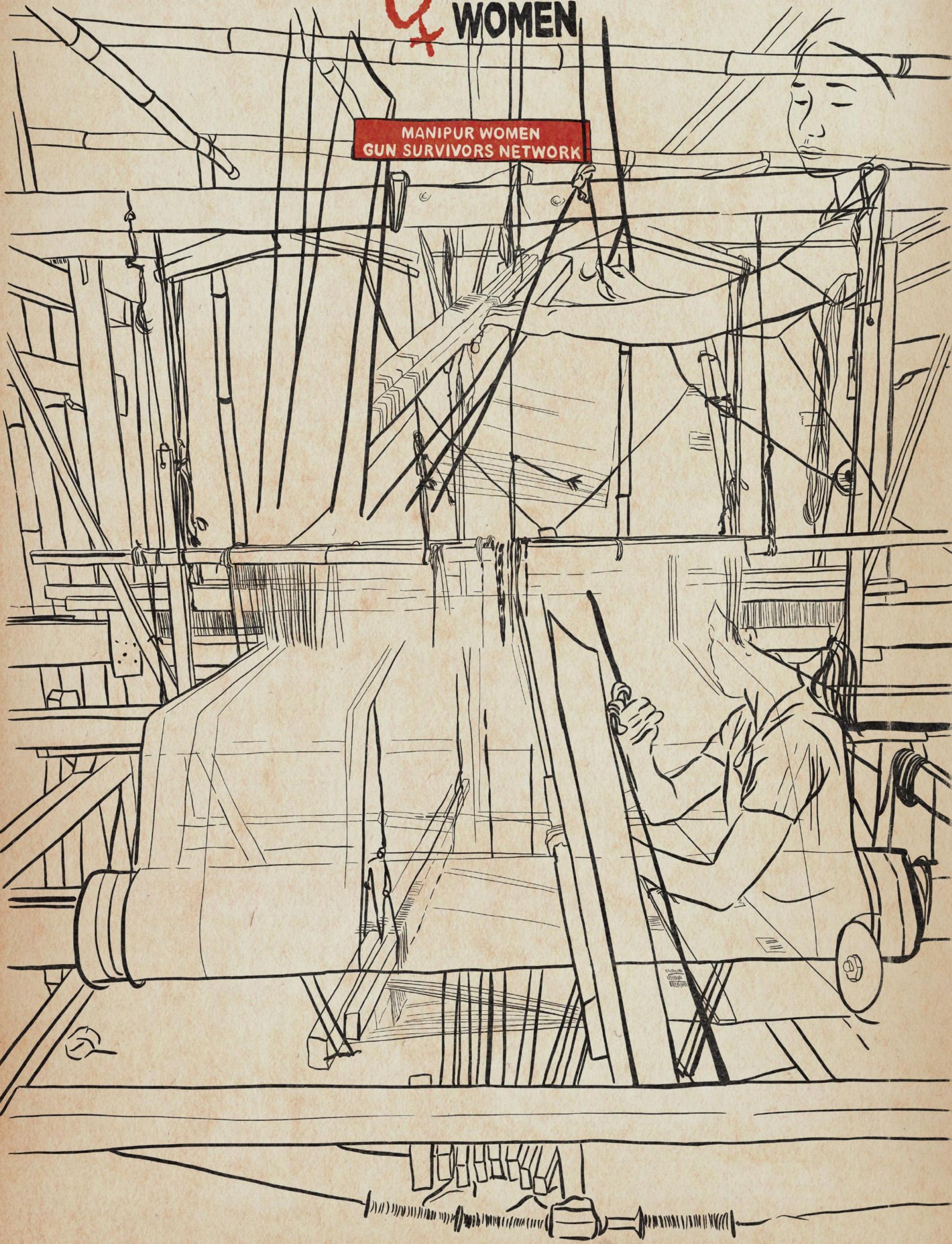
Non violent Interventions

Since the 1980s, the Meira Paibis have fought the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, alcoholism and violence against women.



No
TO VIOLENCE
AGAINST
WOMEN

**MANIPUR WOMEN
GUN SURVIVORS NETWORK**



NO IMPUNITY

To any one

IN RAPE/SEXUAL ASSAULT

*including men
in uniform*

Manipur is a deeply patriarchal and controlling society, where fear is present everywhere and the law is always manipulated.

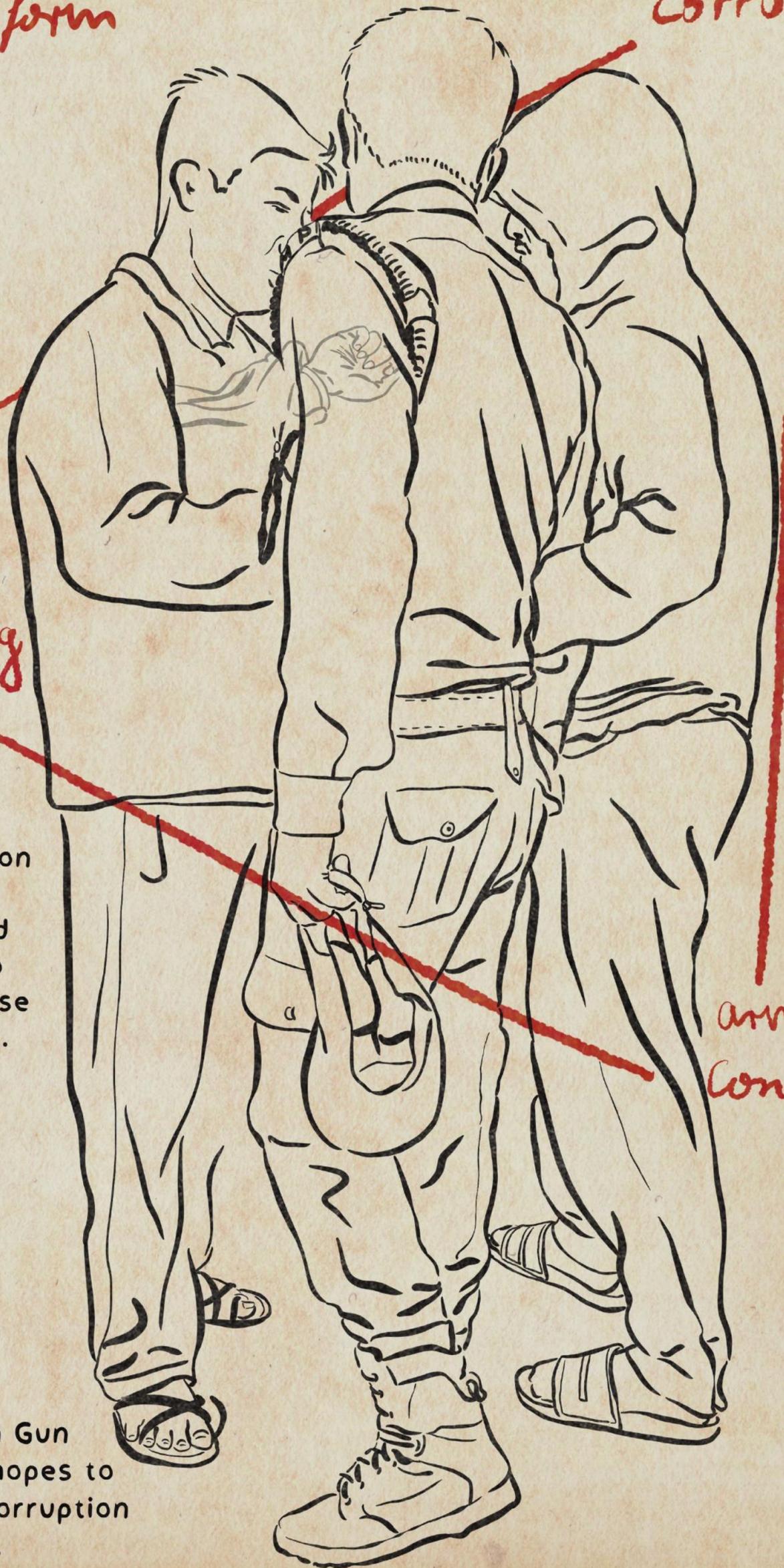
corruption

*Narrow -
trafficking*

The disturbed situation in Manipur has been misused by arms- and drug traffickers, who are supported by those in positions of power.

*armed
conflict*

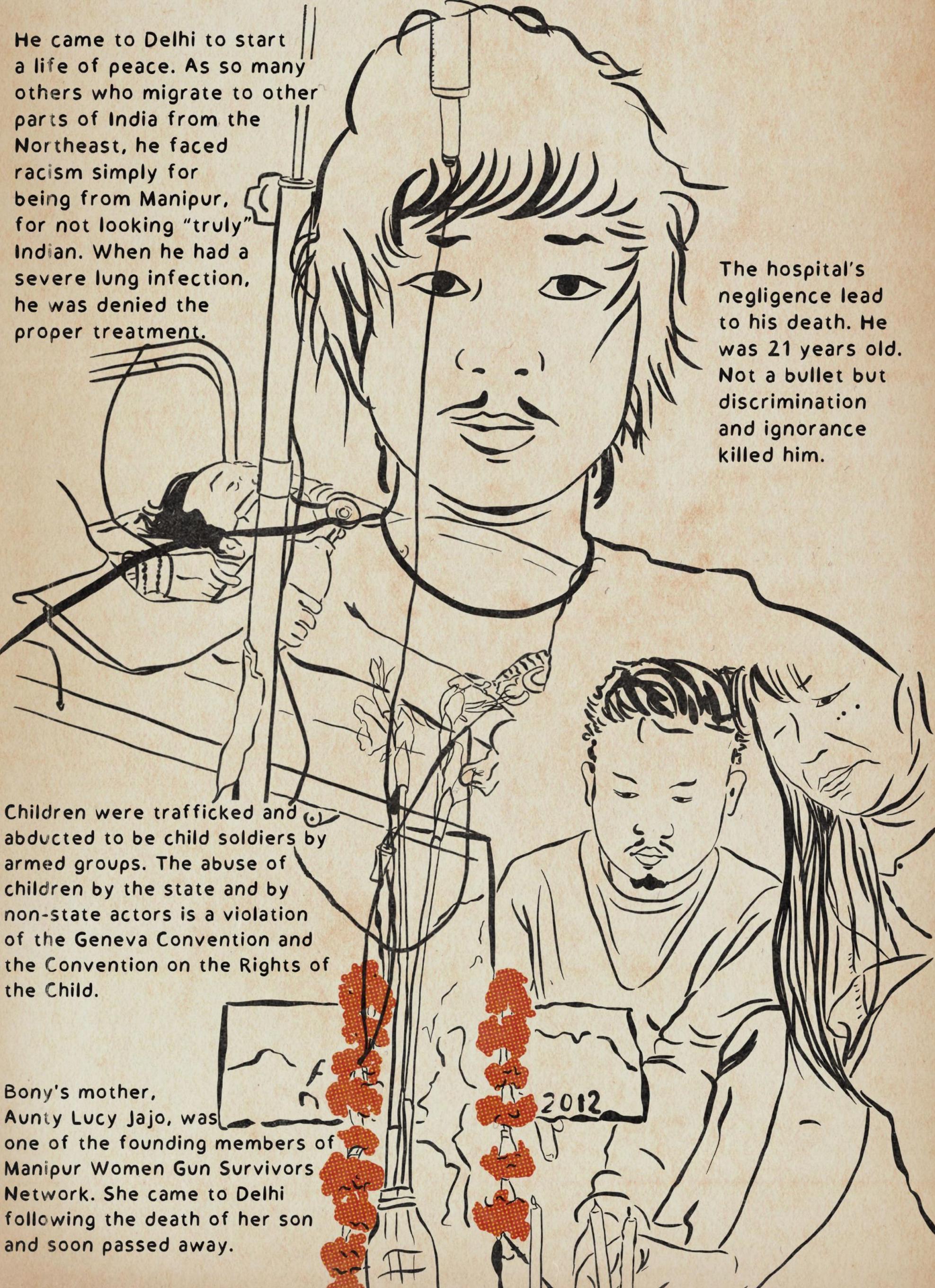
The Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network hopes to fight violence and corruption with the rule of law.



Mutum Bony Jajo was forcibly recruited as a child soldier. He survived by freeing himself and, together with his brother, managed to rescue five other teenage children who had been abducted and made child soldiers, too. It took them two weeks to cross the jungle to get back to Manipur, where they encountered further threats. Bony decided to move to Delhi, where he worked as a volunteer for the Control Arms Foundation of India.

He came to Delhi to start a life of peace. As so many others who migrate to other parts of India from the Northeast, he faced racism simply for being from Manipur, for not looking "truly" Indian. When he had a severe lung infection, he was denied the proper treatment.

The hospital's negligence led to his death. He was 21 years old. Not a bullet but discrimination and ignorance killed him.

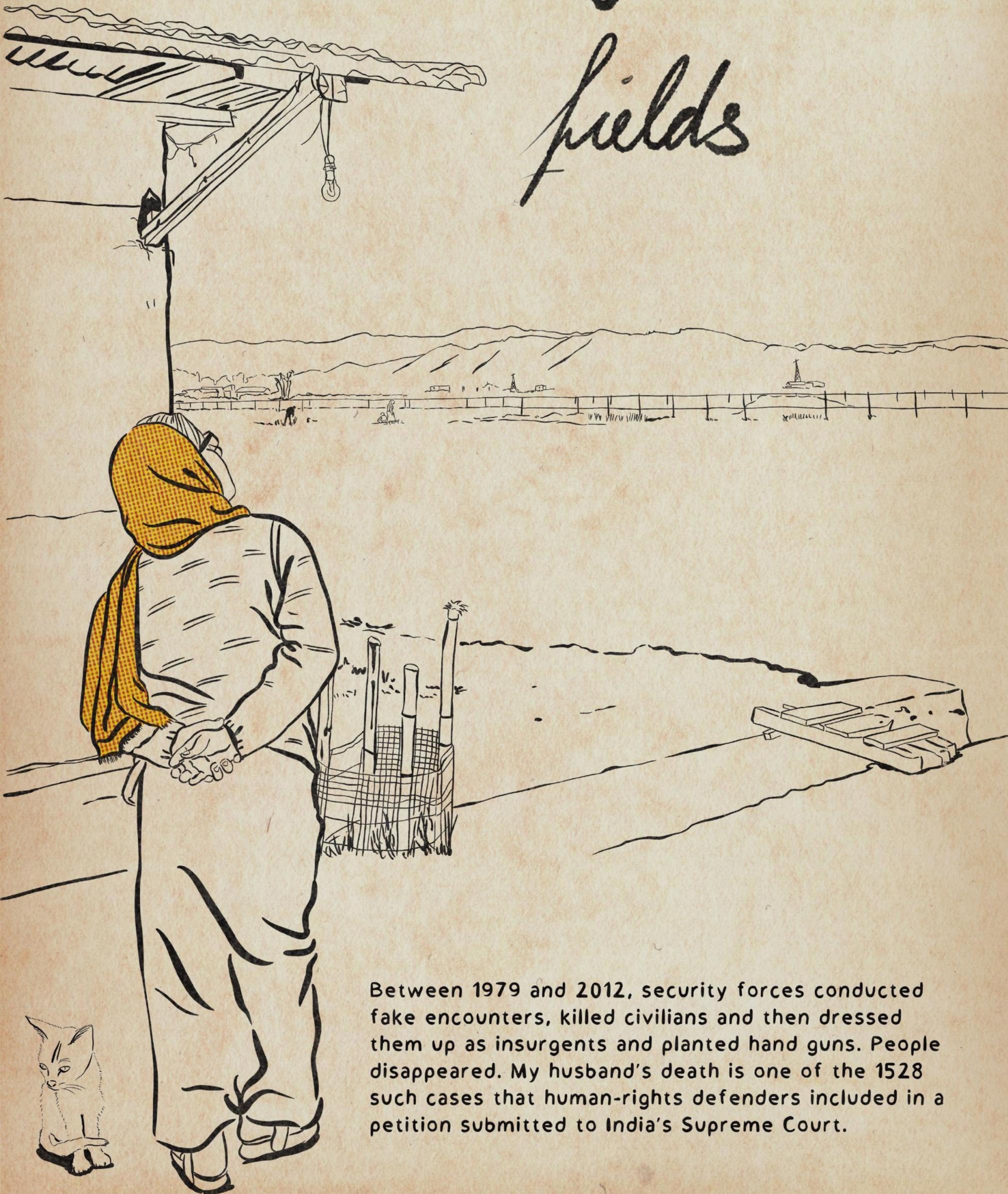


Children were trafficked and abducted to be child soldiers by armed groups. The abuse of children by the state and by non-state actors is a violation of the Geneva Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

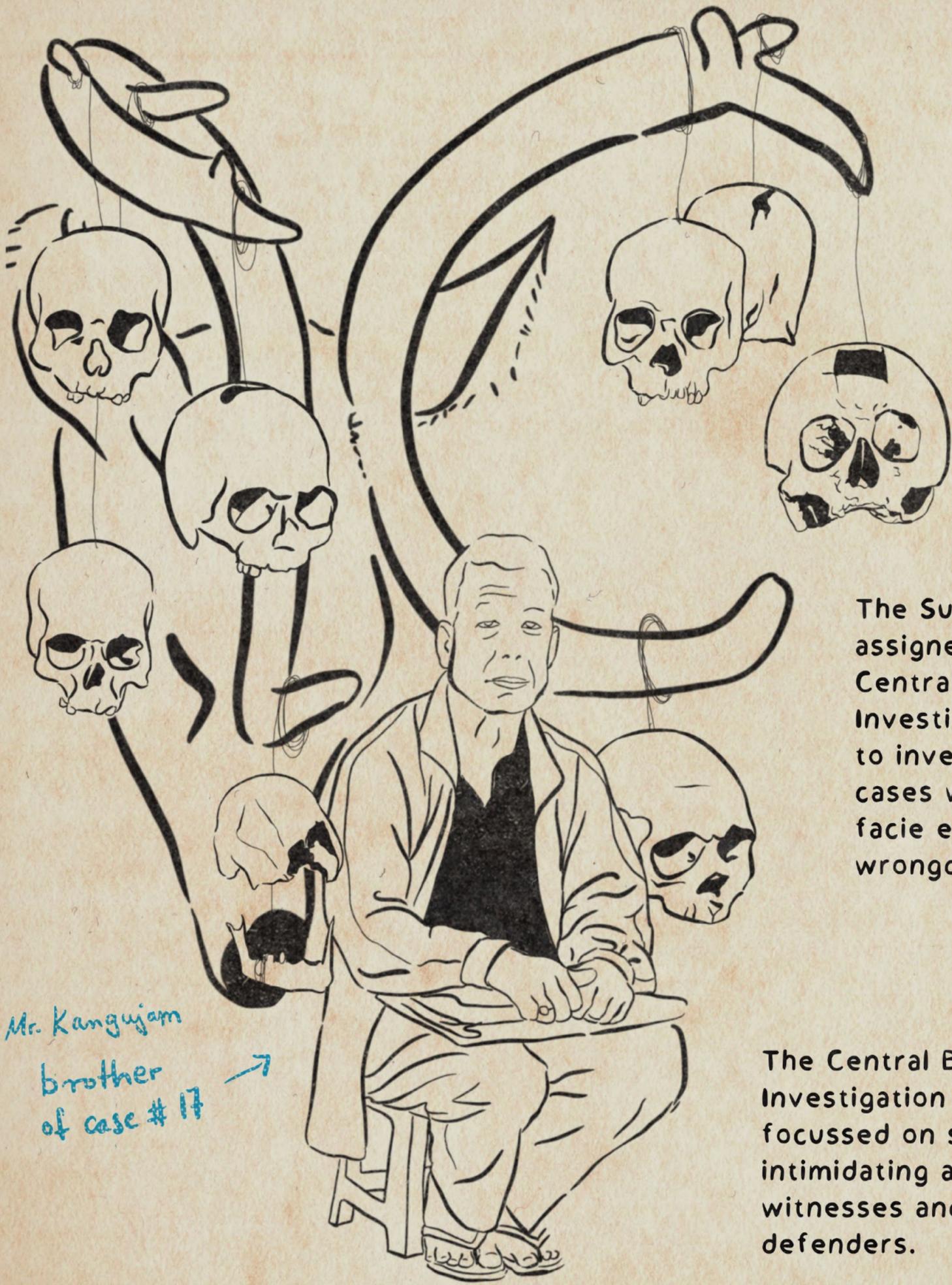
Bony's mother, Aunty Lucy Jajo, was one of the founding members of Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network. She came to Delhi following the death of her son and soon passed away.

killing

fields



Between 1979 and 2012, security forces conducted fake encounters, killed civilians and then dressed them up as insurgents and planted hand guns. People disappeared. My husband's death is one of the 1528 such cases that human-rights defenders included in a petition submitted to India's Supreme Court.



Mr. Kangujam
brother
of case # 17 →

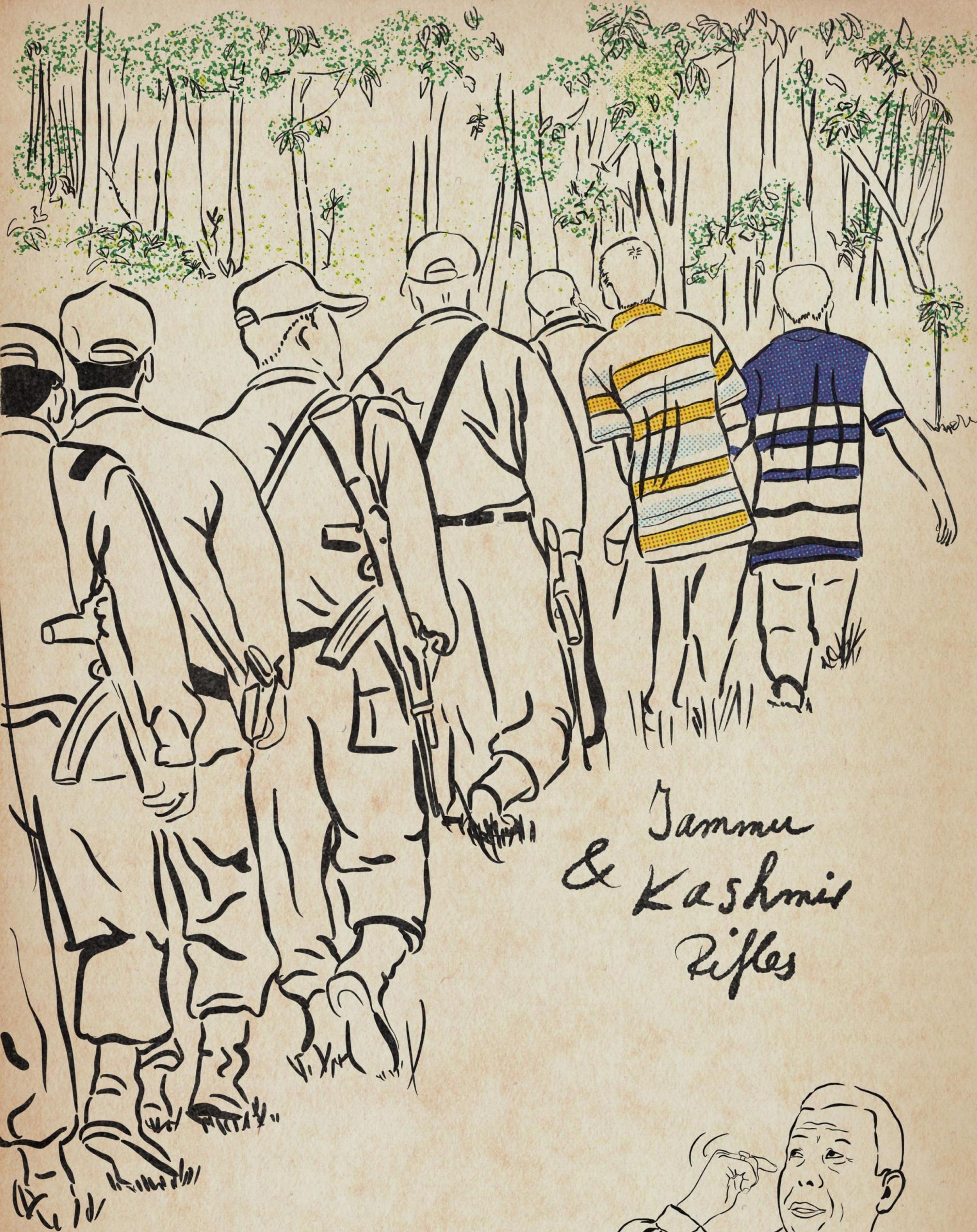
The Supreme Court assigned the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate 98 cases with prima facie evidence of wrongdoing.

The Central Bureau of Investigation instead focussed on systematically intimidating and harassing witnesses and human-rights defenders.

A list of victims of enforced disappearance was submitted to the CBI with regard to the discovery of unidentified human skulls and bones in 2014. There were hopes for long-awaited closure, for peace and justice.

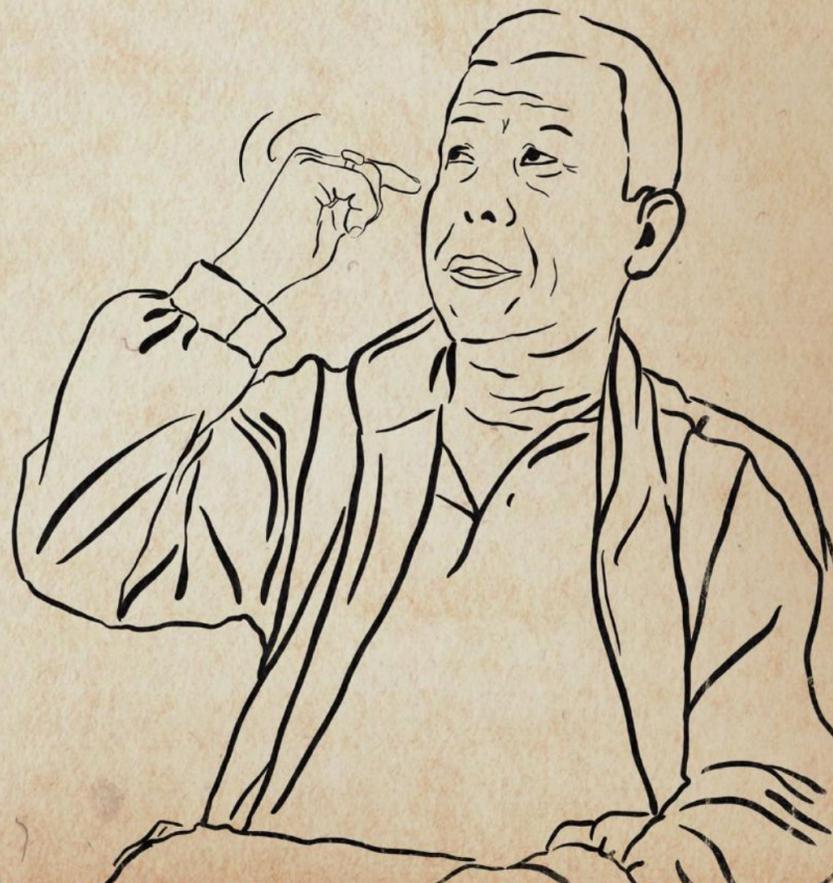


still waiting.



Jammu
& Kashmir
Rifles

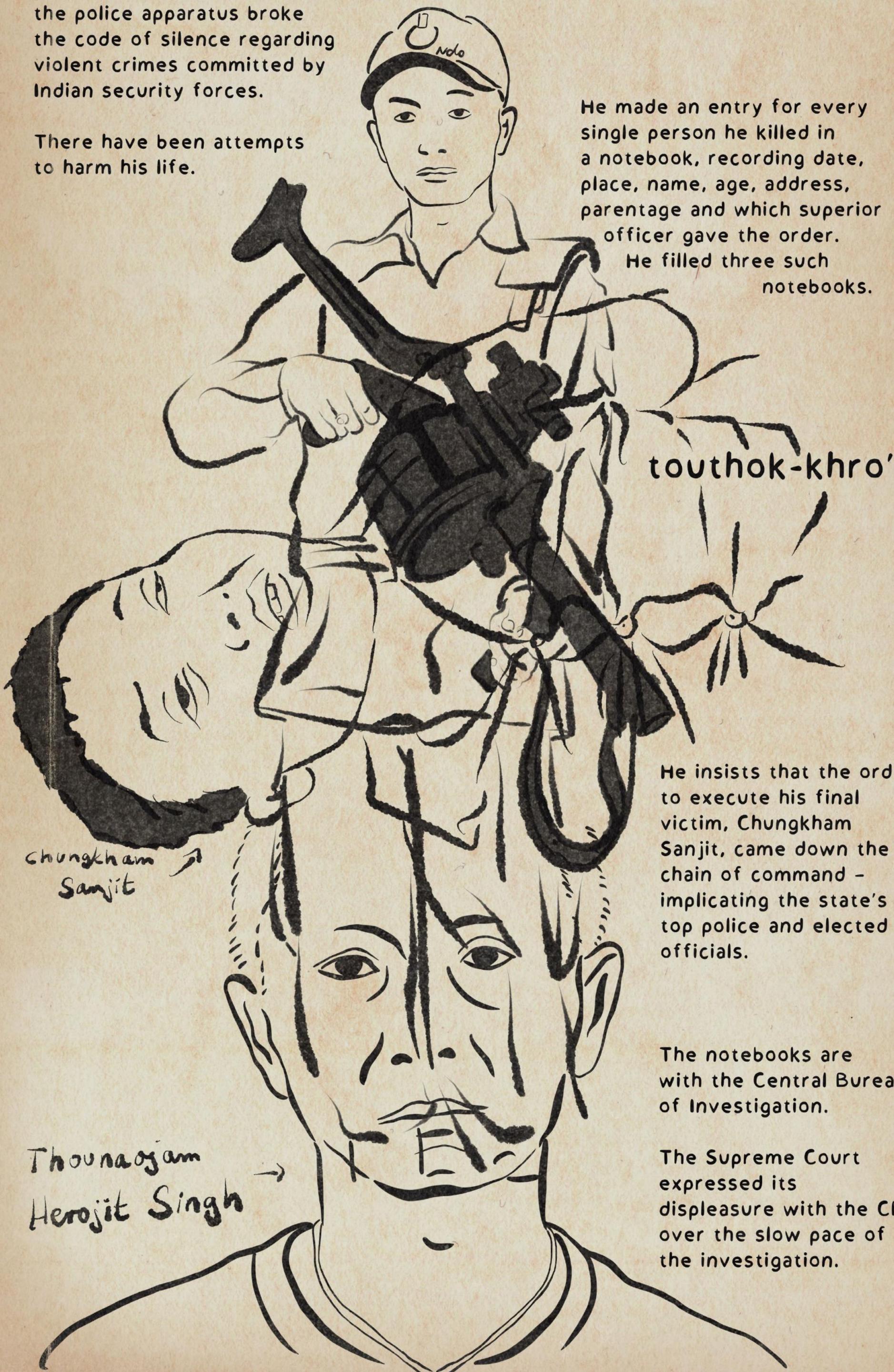
My brother was picked up on his way to
the lake. He wanted to go for a swim.
That was 23 September 1980. I haven't
heard from him ever since.



A suspended Manipuri police commando became a whistleblower and admitted to having carried out extra-judicial killings. Under orders that "these fellows must be eliminated", he single-handedly killed over 100 people. His crucial revelations about the police apparatus broke the code of silence regarding violent crimes committed by Indian security forces.

There have been attempts to harm his life.

He made an entry for every single person he killed in a notebook, recording date, place, name, age, address, parentage and which superior officer gave the order. He filled three such notebooks.



Chungkham Sanjit

Thounaojam Herojit Singh

touthok-khro'

He insists that the order to execute his final victim, Chungkham Sanjit, came down the chain of command - implicating the state's top police and elected officials.

The notebooks are with the Central Bureau of Investigation.

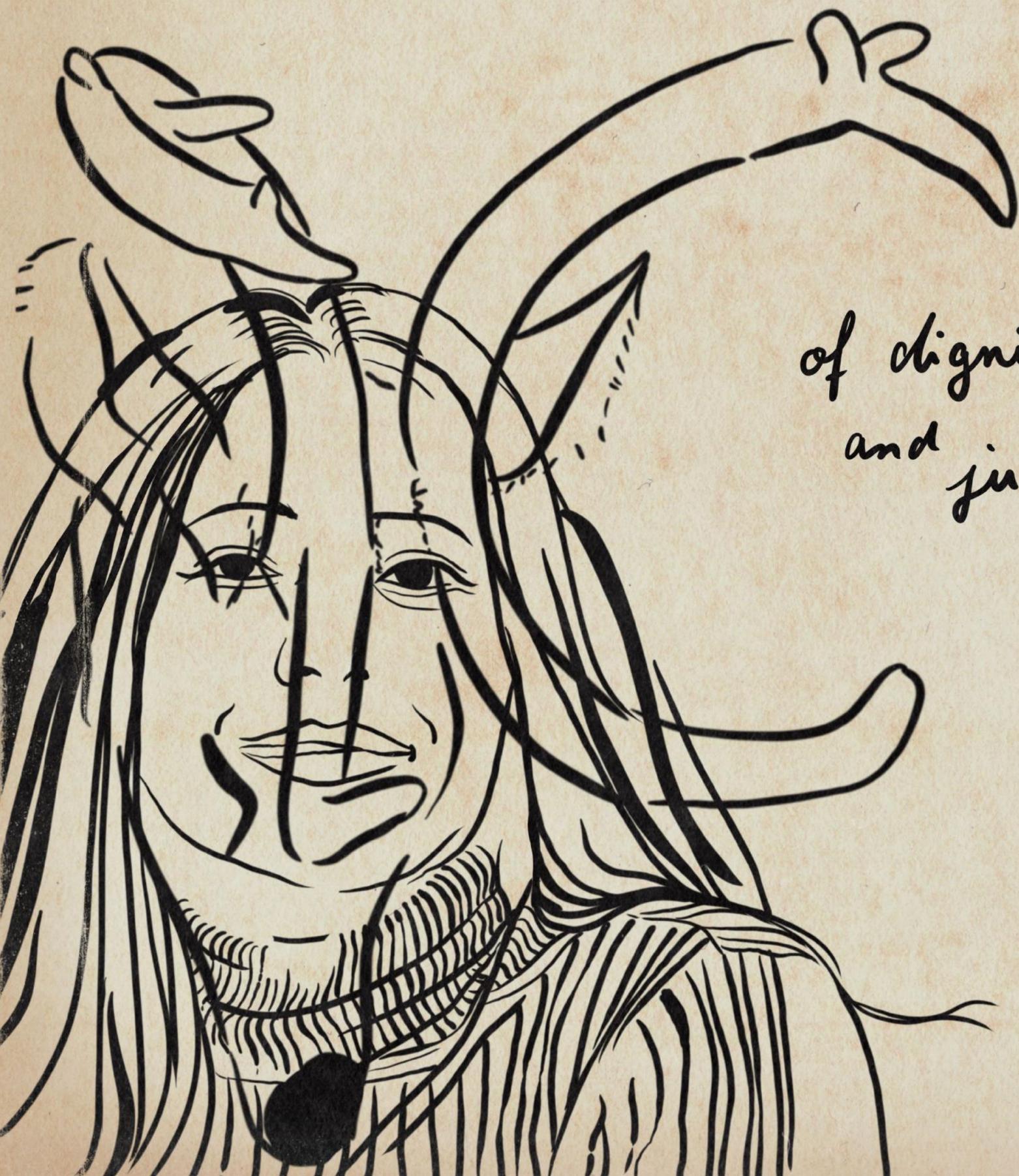
The Supreme Court expressed its displeasure with the CBI over the slow pace of the investigation.



on your Under
"We can always trace the skeletons back
to where the security forces have been."

Imagine you're growing up with the saying: "Don't ask questions or you'll be shot dead". Imagine people getting shot without having asked anything. Imagine everywhere you turn there is a soldier, a police man, a paramilitary unit, a security guard, a traffic police officer losing his cool out of nowhere and beating any random passing car with his bamboo stick. The same bamboo stick that is swung with the same power against human bodies to keep them in order. You consciously or unconsciously know all the different weaponry you face daily. Rifles, hand guns, automatic, semi automatic, with knives attached, full-metal or with wooden parts, causally slung around a uniformed shoulder while chatting with a street vendor. Sandwiched between insurgents and government forces alike you know about the midnight knock. Trust and betrayal. Day in, day out.

People disappear, people die, people become poor, people become corrupt, people conspire. While women are being raped, men are being randomly killed.



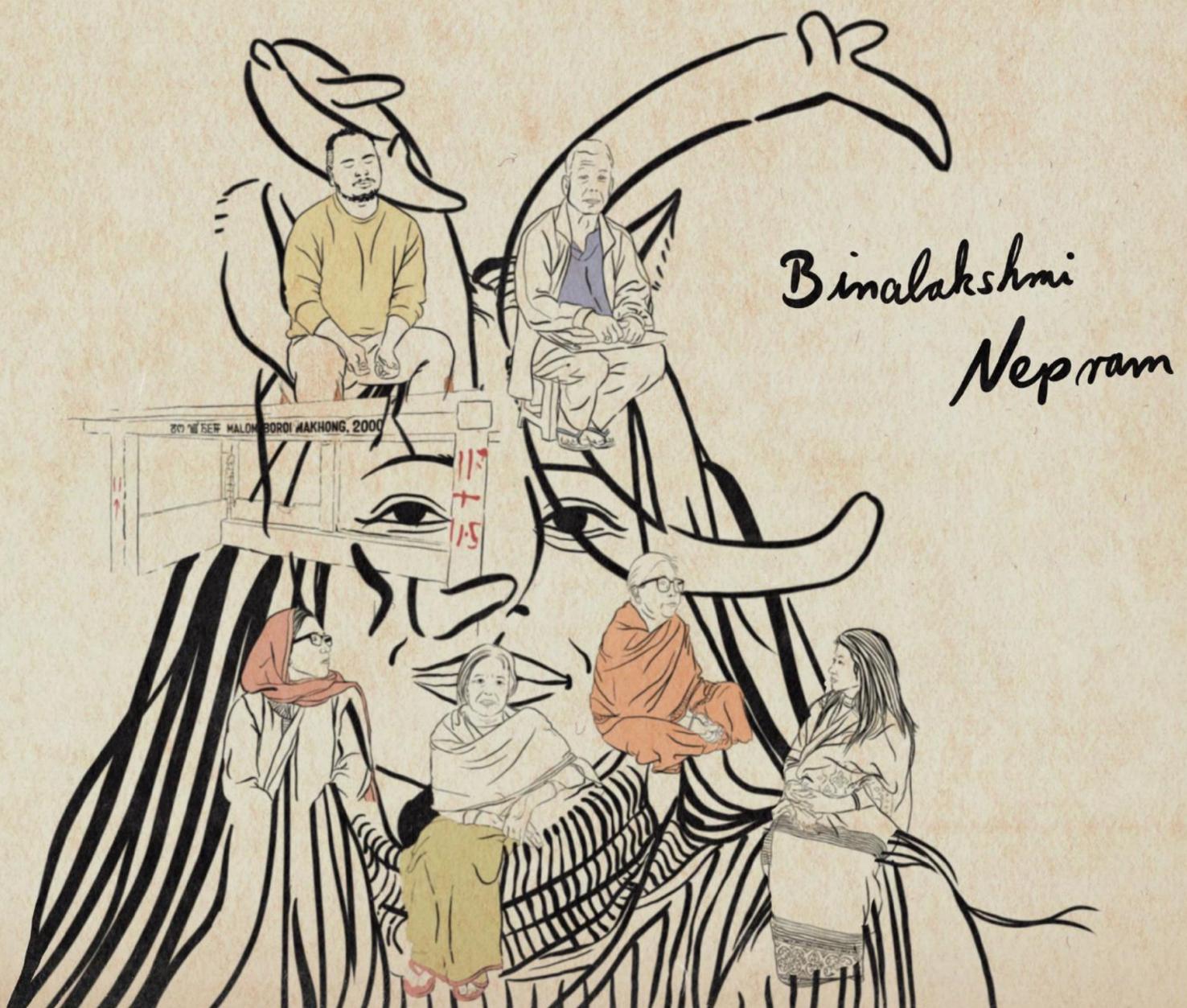
*of dignity
and justice*

Those "slow-killings", as you call them, take the lives of 3-4 people daily. Rage and pain turn into despair or into a will for change; to uphold the law. In the city streets, the hills, the outskirts. That's the world you know. Imagine leaving your world, that is Manipur, and realising that there is an India without soldiers everywhere. As much of a relief as Delhi is, you're confronted by another inconvenient truth. For your fellow Indian people, Northeast India is the "backyard" of the nation, and their superiority leaves you once again not worthy enough to receive the same treatment as anyone else. You don't look "Indian enough". Faced with blunt racism, you witness again the injustice that harms and sometimes costs the lives of Manipuri people.

You grew up knowing that the rule of law is what will ensure your safety and whatever is left of your dignity. That law, that ensures the same rights for all citizens of India. Including you. And then you witness how a young man is shot by armed gunmen. In front of your eyes. Fight or flight?

You also grew up in a century-old tradition of nonviolent activism led by women. Torchbearers. Believing in economic independence and education, you pick up that torch and found the Manipur Women Gun Survivors Network, the Northeast India Women Initiative for Peace, the Control Arms Foundation of India. With offices in Delhi and Imphal, you're part of a network that exposes human-rights violations. For being a voice for the voiceless, for using the constitution to uphold the law, you receive awards and death threats alike. And finally, you pick up a case that no one else dared to touch. The David to your Goliath. Justice delayed is justice denied, right? You and your small team succeed. The price? Exile. So you continue from afar.

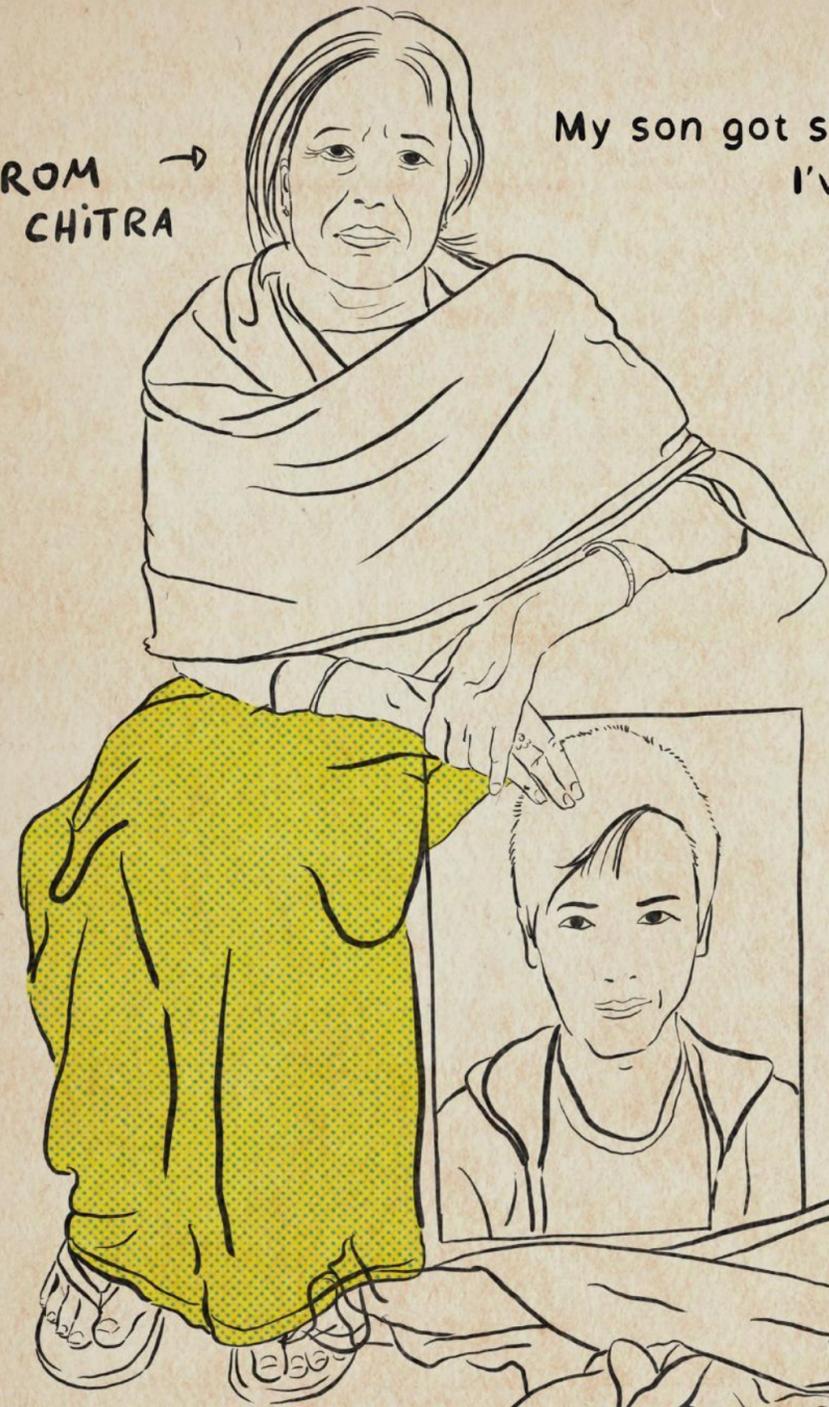
You never have been very successful in not asking questions anyway.



FROM →
CHITRA

My son got shot by the Chief Minister's son.
I've been asked why I won't compromise.

He tried to race with my son Roger, who was just nineteen, to show off to two women who were on a two-wheeler. Right here on Airport Road. When my son raced past his vehicle, the Chief Minister's thirty-year-old son, while still driving in his car with his friends, pulled out his pistol and fired two bullets into my son's body. In full public glare. It wasn't his first killing. He was my only son.

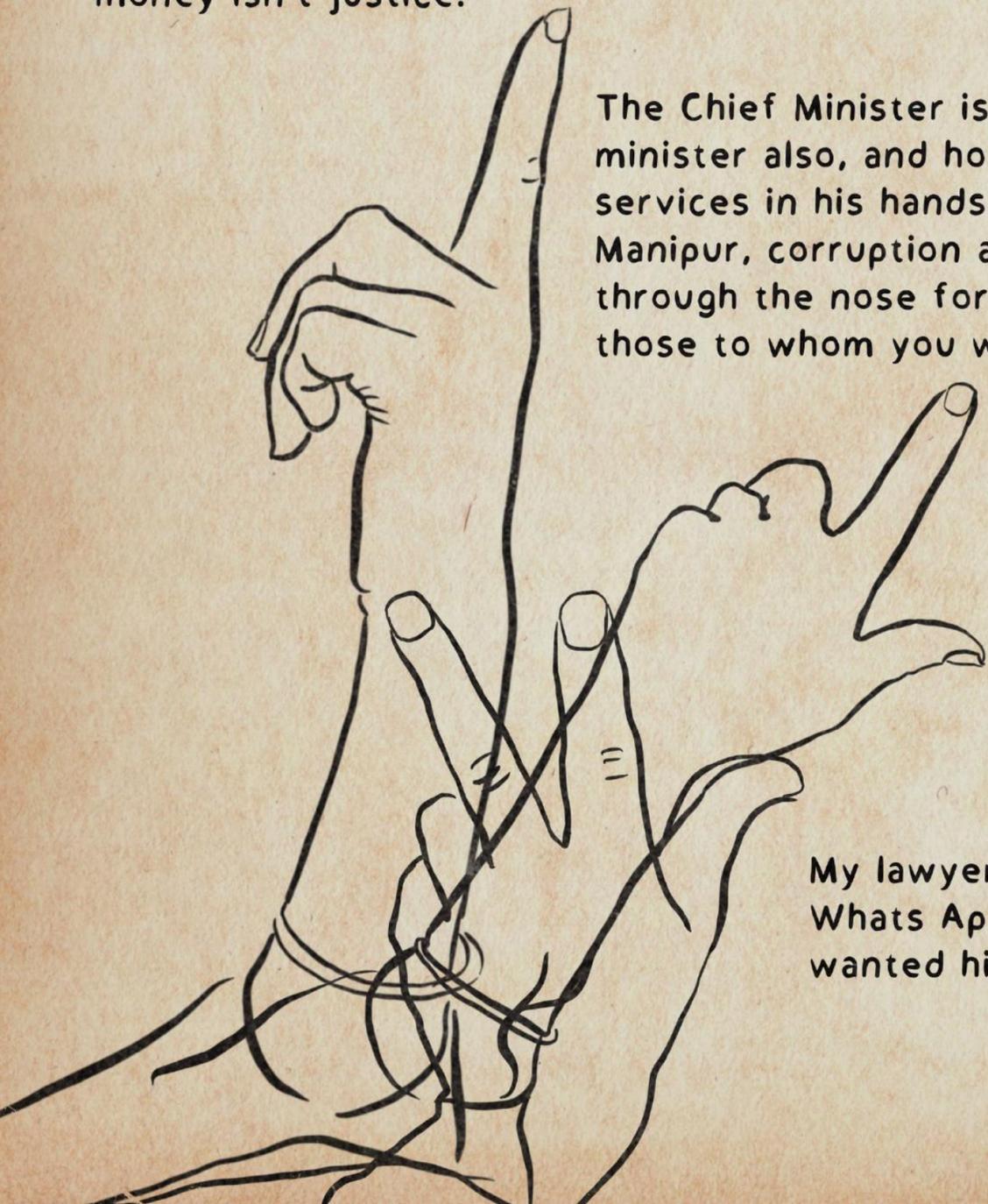


I've been offered 3 crore rupees, equivalent to almost 400,000 USD, but money isn't justice.

The Chief Minister is a powerful man. He is the home minister also, and holds all the state forces and intelligence services in his hands. The police are his. You see, here in Manipur, corruption and crime are very high. One has to pay through the nose for any of the government jobs. You owe those to whom you work for.

I told the Chief Minister, I'll offer double the amount, will you let me kill your son ?

My lawyer in Delhi was threatened through Whats App messages by armed groups. They wanted him to leave the case.



The police failed to protect us. I filed a report. My nephew, who helped me, got picked up and tortured for 15 days. They made him sign a confession that he is working for an armed group.

Since then, my family is afraid. They won't speak to me.

I have been threatened many times and attempts to kill me. I had to change houses due to these threats.

No one wanted to be associated with me. Or my case.

Two local human-rights activists, who are well known in our community, refused to help me and simply returned my files.

I finally met Binalakshmi Nepram, who managed to find me a lawyer in Delhi.

After lots of effort, the Chief Minister's son was sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment. But many sources told me that the culprit is walking free.

The Supreme Court of India listened to our plea for protection and we were able to get a favourable hearing. The Supreme Court ordered the sending of Central Reserve Police Force to guard the house as I fear for my safety.

The case continues and threats still persist. My face is puffy and I worry if I'm being poisoned. I've been advised to not eat any food outside.

I can't trust anyone. Not even near ones.

੨੦੨੦

HUM AAPKE
HAIN KOM?

JUSTICE DELAYED
IS JUSTICE DENIED
LET US HONOUR
LAW

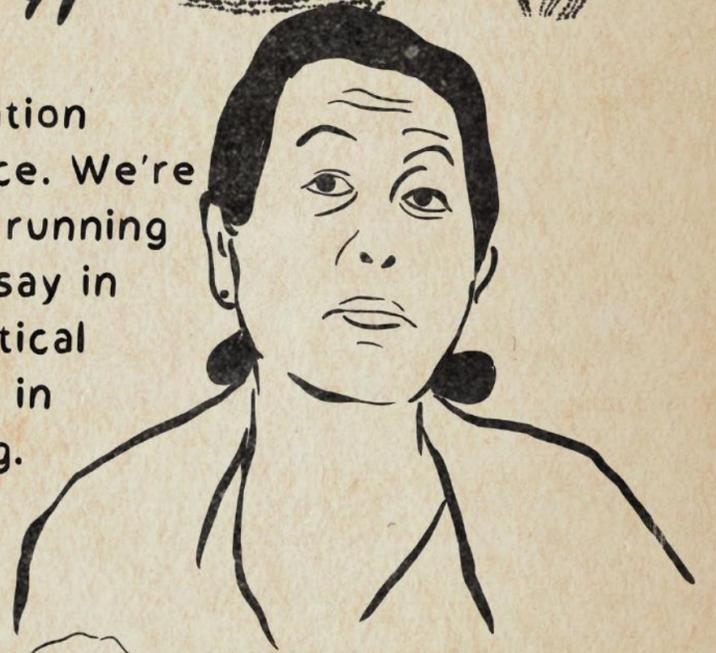


"Generation Equality"

Generation equality realizing women's rights for an equal future
Generation equality Campaign demands equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work an end to sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women and girls, health care services that respond to their needs and their equal participation in political life and decision-making in all areas of life.



When it comes to the negotiation table, we women have no voice. We're used as human shields, we're running businesses here but have no say in anything else. We want a political voice. We want to participate in political decision-making.



Organize
the
World

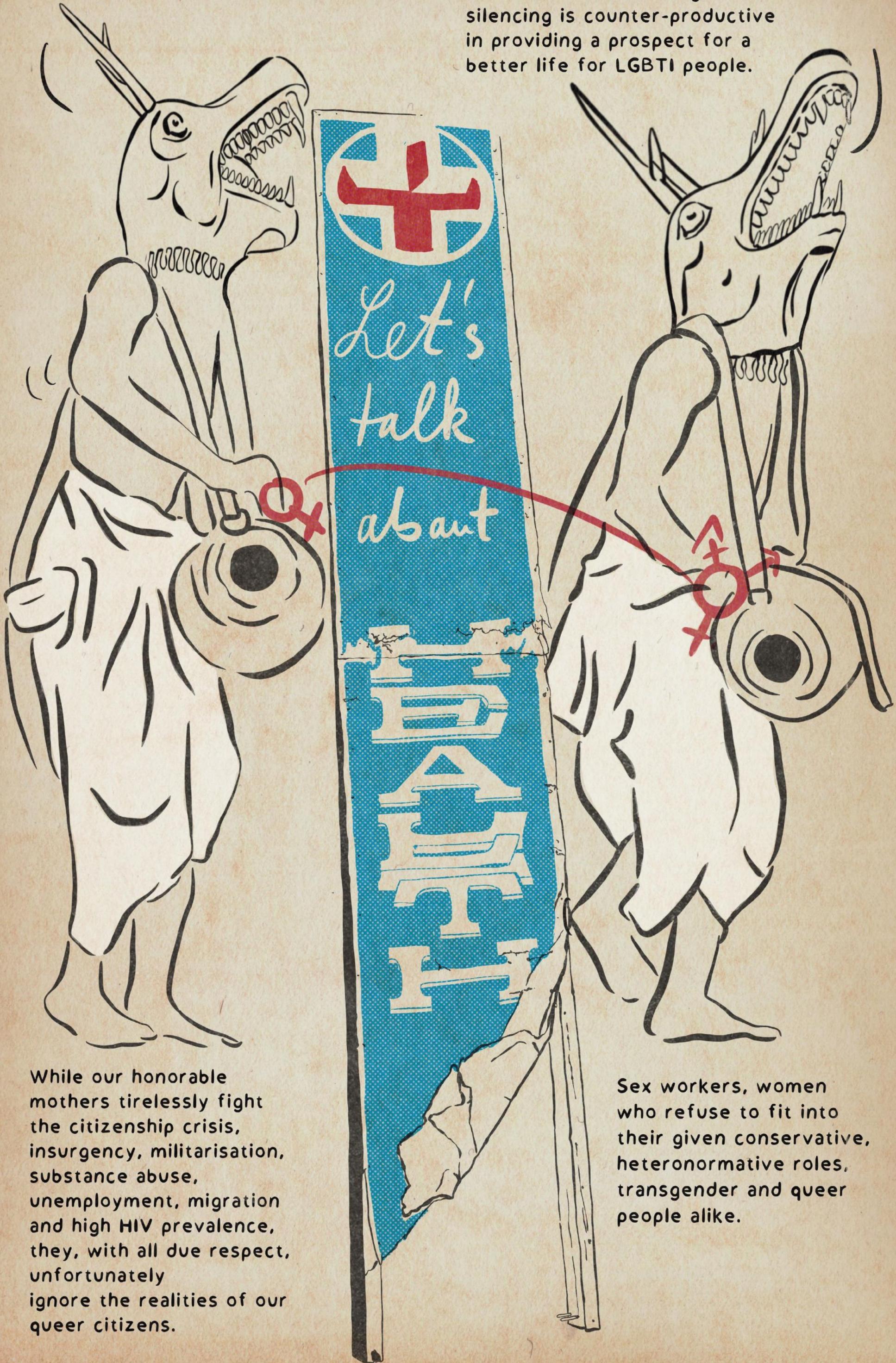


We are a patriarchal society in which men decide everything.

This has to change.

Exclusiveness, stigma and forced identities make people sick.

The method of shaming and silencing is counter-productive in providing a prospect for a better life for LGBTI people.



While our honorable mothers tirelessly fight the citizenship crisis, insurgency, militarisation, substance abuse, unemployment, migration and high HIV prevalence, they, with all due respect, unfortunately ignore the realities of our queer citizens.

Sex workers, women who refuse to fit into their given conservative, heteronormative roles, transgender and queer people alike.

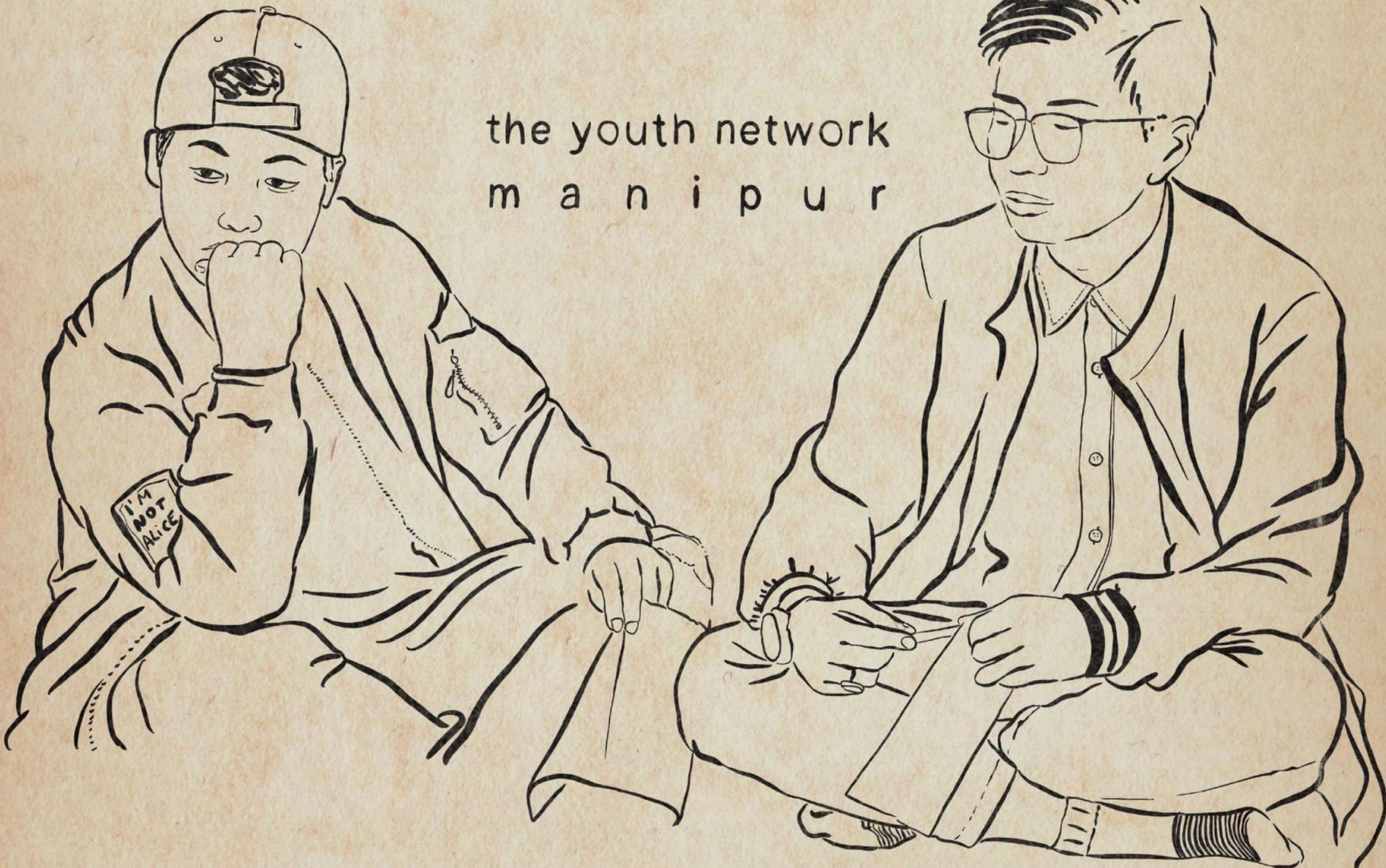


ya all

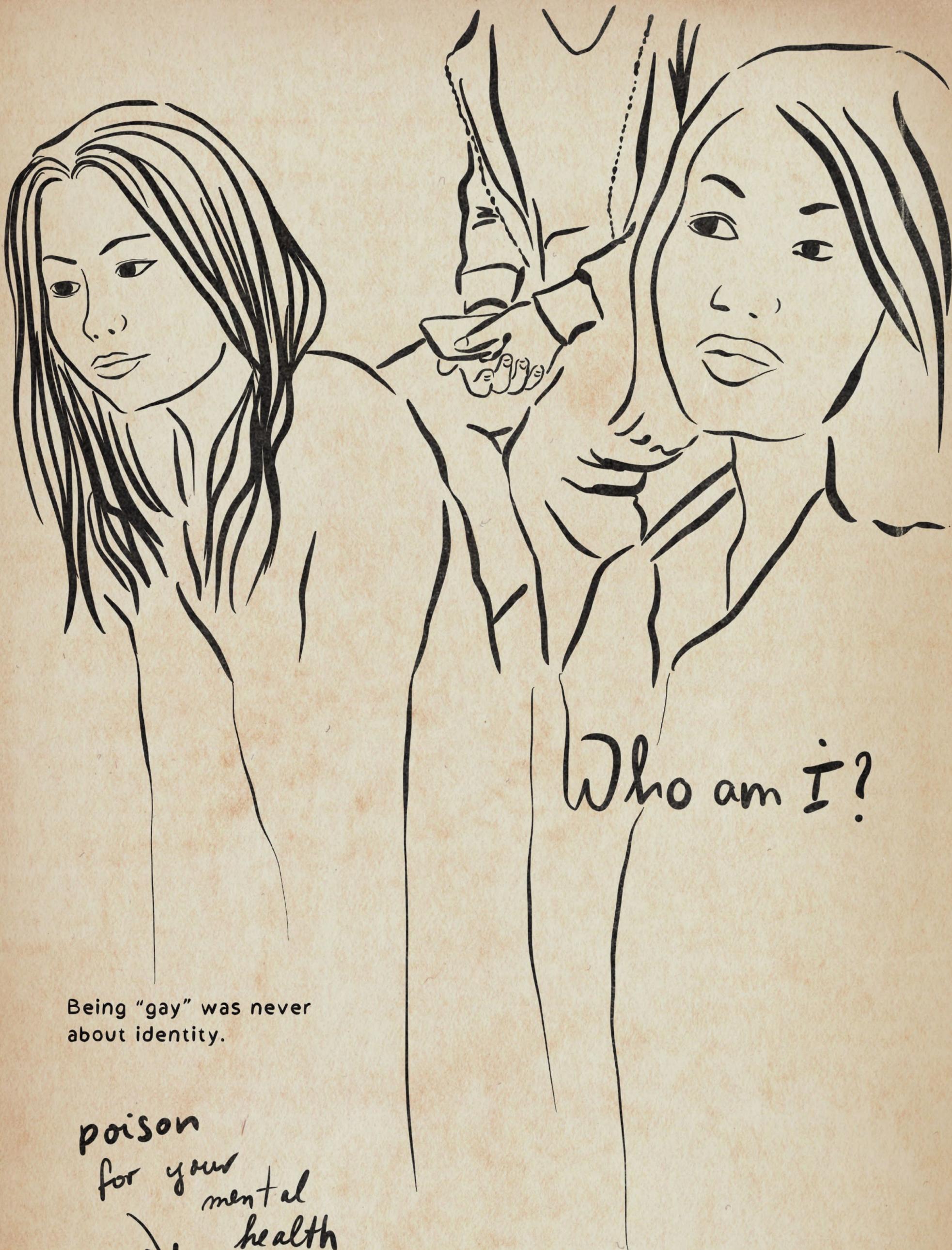
ਯੇ ਆੱਲ

Ya_All, which reads as "Yawol", in Manipuri translates to Revolution.

the youth network
m a n i p u r



We are the first registered youth network in Manipur and the Northeast that is led by queer youth and is working openly at the grassroots level on youth and queer issues.



Who am I?

Being "gay" was never about identity.

poison
for your
mental
health

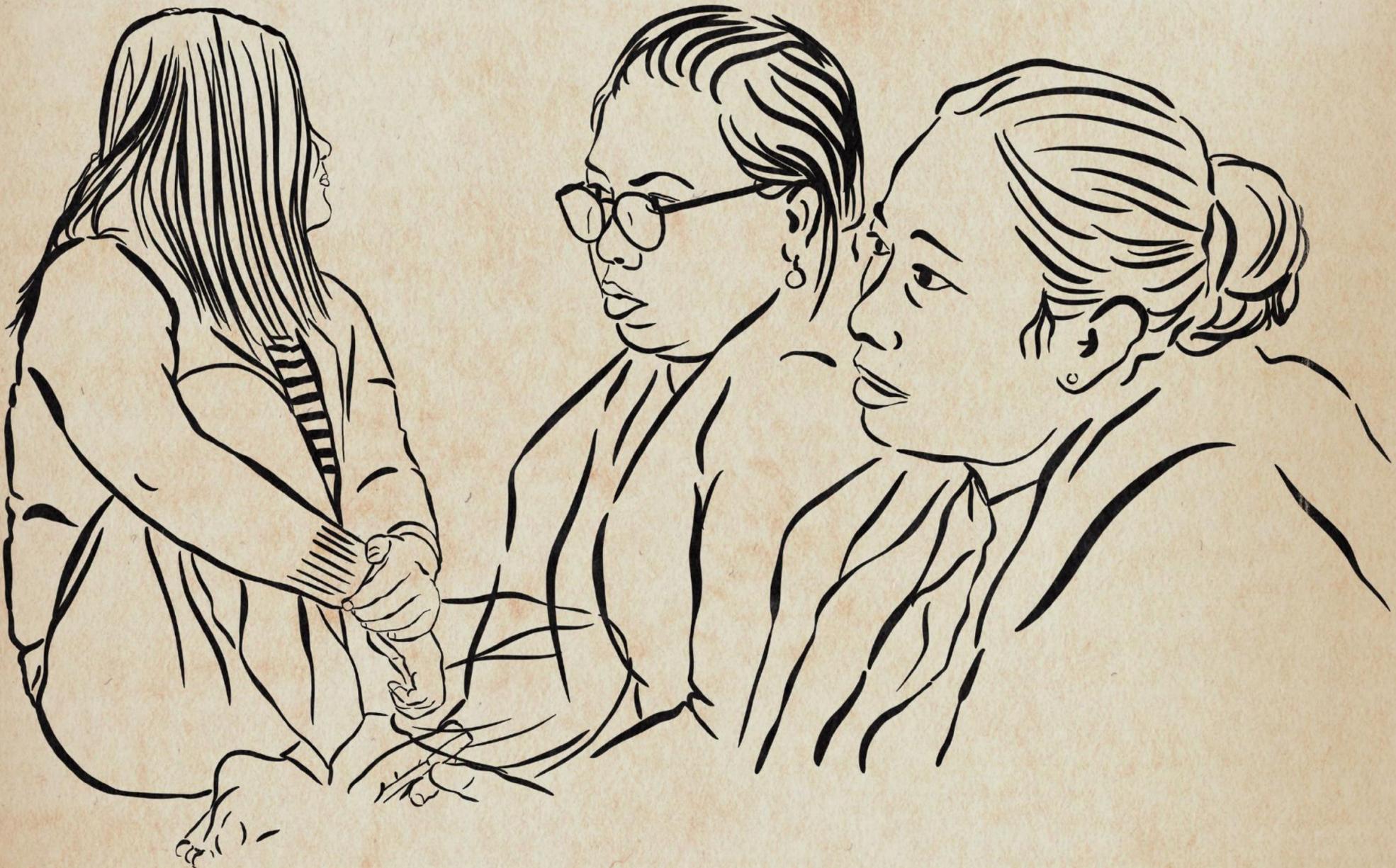
As long as you can reproduce it's fine. As long as you don't talk about "it", it's fine. So go get married and make a child for your parents. What's the big deal? Does being gay makes you unable to reproduce?

It's my decision if I want children or not.

Three main obstacles to good health for queer youth lie before us.

Queer people are very much prone to substance abuse. The discrimination against individuals who abuse drugs is so high that no one talks about substance abuse among the queer community in India. This, in the long run, affects their health and their productivity at workplaces.

Sexual and reproductive health issues also affect queer youth, as does mental health. Most people do not access health services because of homo-negative set-ups or heteronormative settings in health centres and institutions. The language used in the medical field is as insensitive as it is heteronormative.



Queer people are judged based on their behaviours even before they seek therapy—all because of a lack of queer-affirmative treatment.

To address these issues, we have partnered with the Mariwala Health Initiative, which has hand-held us in creating a mental health space for queer youths in our co-working space. We provide free peer counselling and also link professional therapists with our clients for free counselling services. Another partner, for reporting crimes like online bullying and extortion, is Blued, a gay dating app, with which we have opened a helpline for Northeast India.

Another issue is employment. Without safe workplaces, queer people are left with few options. Gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals are still very invisible in Manipur. Where transwomen get stereotyped as workers in the beauty industry, trans-men prefer to get into jobs that are seen as “man-worthy”. And because of these stereotyped occupations, many are lured in by the idea of fitting into a role that shows how “manly” or how “womanly” they are, rather than aiming for any other productive and diverse things they could do.

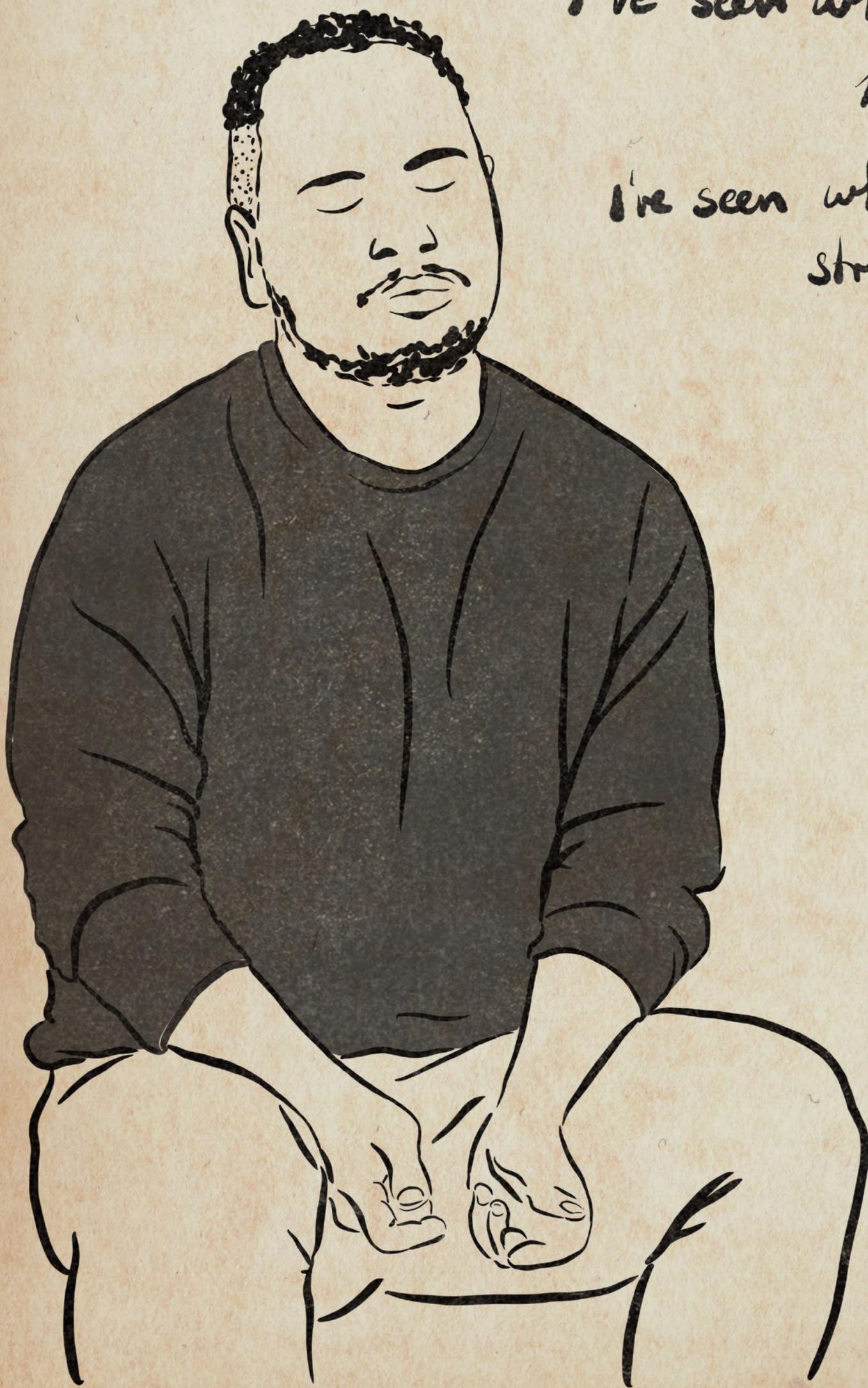
Health has always been a tool to talk about sexuality, the structure of sexuality. So we talk about health.

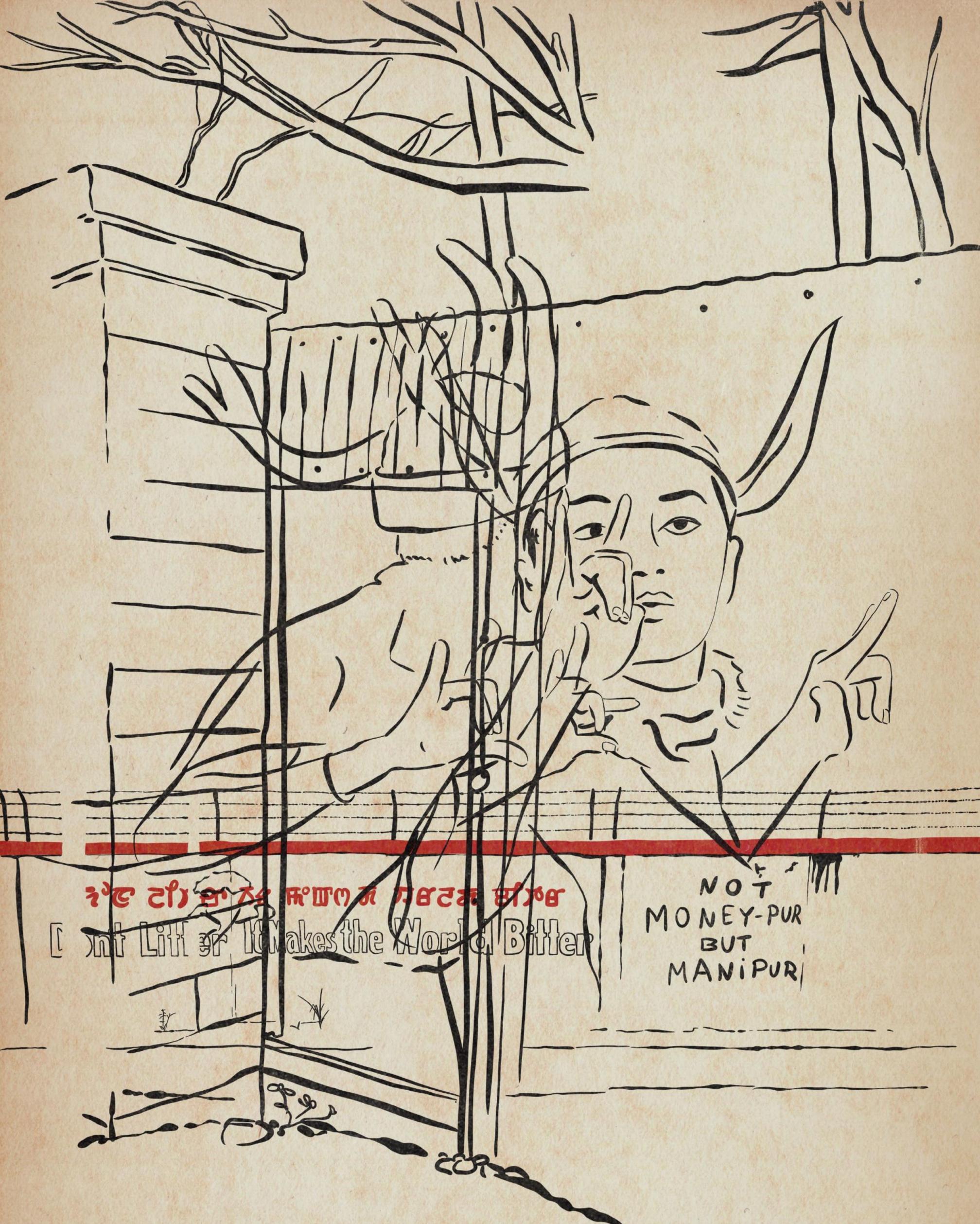


Queer Manipuri and Northeastern people breathe the same air, enjoy the same sun, and share the same country as the mainland people, and, therefore, we believe we should get the same love, attention and rights.

I've seen what
freedom is

I've seen what
struggle is.





ਜੇ ਦੀ ਖਾਣੇ ਸਾਥੀ ਨੇ ਮੁਠਕਾ ਖਾਏ

Don't Let it Makes the World Bitter

NOT
MONEY-PUR
BUT
MANIPUR

When I go out, I don't know if I'll come back alive.

This has to stop.

2010

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