



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2021; SP7: 64-72

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(Special Issue)

“Twenty-First Century: Cultural and Economic Globalization”

Depiction of Ethnic Identity in the North-East Indian Novel in English

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2021.v7.i7Sb.8677>

Abstract

India is a place of variety with multicultural and multilingual dimensions. Various cultures are fused here with the inner bond of unity amid diversity. Thus, various religions like Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs coexisted here with friendship and loyalty. India with regional barriers like language or culture made a unique place in the globe. It had a history of more than a thousand years of amalgamations of different cultures. Every corner of India has a special unique feature which we cannot imagine! But the North-East culture has something to look upon with especial eyes. As literature is the eye of society, I am taken the works of literature available in English from the Indian North-East region where at least eight Indian state lives with unity in diversity. They have only one thing in common - the river Brahmaputra- which may be the backbone of North-Eastern civilizations! Here in this paper, I am trying a very brief survey of those states with their depicted reality that may be available in some selected novels of indigenous novelists.

Keywords: Ethnic identity, tribal, migration, marginal voice, race, etc.

Introduction

The Brahmaputra is one of the greatest rivers of the world, traversing three nations and many cultures, as it flows from Tibet through Northeast India and Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal, on an extraordinary journey spanning nearly 3,000 kilometres... The river is revered in legend, ballads, and contemporary literature as the most visible face of Assam and the northeast, dominating the geography, history, and cultures of both Arunachal Pradesh and Assam...The Brahmaputra's extraordinary power can be seen in a simple fact: this single river carries as much water as almost all the rivers of India put together." (Hazarika 2006:245) ^[12].

The Brahmaputra is a river of the birthplace of a new culture and this is seen in various documentation of different books related to the culture that it reflects. Arup Kumar Dutta and Sanjay Hazarika make a beautiful observation in this regard. In his book, The Brahmaputra Arup Kumar Dutta shows the values and rituals, manner and culture, religion, and belief of the people of Brahmaputra valley. Strangers of the Mist by Sanjay Hazarika portrays a beautiful inter-relation between geography and psychology, 'mainstream' and 'other', an oral history of the tribes, and the epic the battles fought! Various descriptions also show a different entity of the main ground which relates the people of the land and the natural ecology: "The unbroken green of the landscape as seen from the Brahmaputra is soothing, and the rustic environment, unsullied by ugly scars of industrialization, imparts to the ambiance an extraordinary quiescence. Copses of the plantain, bamboo, coconut, betel nut, and other palm half- conceal clustered helmets, with thatched roofs and bamboo walled cottages. The hills rise in gentle slopes from the fringes of the valley, taking on a steeper gradient as one proceeds north to south." (Dutta 2005:67)

The people of the land called themselves into separate existences into the questions of identity, nationality, homeland, or insider/ outsider conflict. Tilottama Misra, in her editorial note in *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*, Fiction mentions: "An intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiation with 'other' cultures is a recurrent feature of the kinds of literature of the seven north-eastern states. Each small community or linguistic group has responded through its oral or written communication to the majoritarian cultures from either mainland India or from outside the borders of the country, in its own distinctive manner.

The people of this land co-existed with natural surroundings more than the other parts of Indian city life. They have more exposure to rustic life than the common people of the city. They believed that 'Nature never did betray/ The heart that loved her (Wordsworth). Keeping in view their oneness with nature, Margaret Ch. Zama aptly remarks: "The great variety of people of the North East survived through the centuries because they were one with ecology, and developed their indigenous knowledge systems to sustain both themselves and the environment that accommodates them."

Contemporary politics of the region is volatile which adds another dimension to its ethnic culture and ecological significance. In his book *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, Sanjib Baruah observes, "Questions of social justice in Northeast India are significantly more complex today than what the regime of protection was originally designed to accomplish. The informality of the arrangements exposes a large number of poor people to a more vulnerable legal position than that already implied in the marginal nature of the economic riches they occupy." (Baruah 2008:197)

We are dealing with the region of India where the natural and racial diversity is so vast that may form a different cultural outlook. It is quite separated from mainland India based on religion, culture, language, race, and thinking process also. The mainland Indians are also not very familiar with these states. According to one survey 87% of Indians, resided outside the Northeast states, cannot even speak the name of all seven states. The survey also states that 52% had a negative perception of the region and their thought-process was dominated mainly by the factors of violence and insurgency. Even 30% of Indians were not seeking employment in this region.

There may be a diverse range of perspectives to analyze but there are mainly three different stances:

1. Northeast political affairs are dominated both by state and non-state actors.
2. Continuous changes of identity formations and the sense of community in the borderlands.
3. The different perspectives to analyse and calculate peace concerns.

The present study would be focused on and around the following points:

1. End of hunger and poverty;

2. The entire Northeast region should be taken as per with the other part of India in respect of economically as well as politically.
3. The region should be freed from ethnic, territorial, and political conflicts.
4. The economy needed sustainable growth.
5. The region has the ground of a vast and busy network of socio-cultural flows.
6. Ethnic groups might be assured that there will not be any illegal migration.
7. Women, girls, children may be empowered.

There are so many nations about tribal concerns. The immigration factor is major important in the politics of the region. The fact is that there are decades when Hindu Bangladeshi immigrants were occupying land in the region bringing down the proportion of tribes in the population from 58% in 1951 to 31% today. Grant Wyeth writes in his essay 'The Importance of India's Remote the North-eastern States' that sandwiched between Bangladesh to the west, Myanmar to the east, and Bhutan and China to the north, the northeast states of India remain geographically isolated from the rest of the country. He also remarks that these states also culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct, primarily speaking Sino-Tibetan and Austro-Asiatic languages, rather than the Indo-Aryan languages of northern India, also with a strong Christian presence.

Although the Northeast has less value in economics or physically, but in recent decades the strategic value of ASEAN engagement becoming a central pillar of India's foreign policy directions. The very important event is that China claims the north-eastern state Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet and this is the major cause of dispute between the two Asian giants.

India's Look East Policy is the backbone of North-eastern state's foreign policy:

1. State security: China's assertive posture.
2. Territorial disputes in the South China Sea.
3. Loose and fragile Government systems.
4. Lack of initiatives on economic fronts.
5. Hilly areas are the physical hindrances.
6. Various institutional and diplomatic factors.

India's Look East Policy was launched by former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1991. Its focus was only on Southeast Asian countries. The Look East Policy to reconnect with Asia as part of India's economic globalization. It aims to look at the economic crisis and balance of payment crisis. India's Look East Policy is needed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. China's economic reform prompted India to reach out the desire modifications. This policy also says about India's desire to stabilize north-eastern states. This policy argues that Reforms and liberalization causing sustained economic growth. The main objectives of this policy are the Development of roads, railways, and infrastructure. After the policy, we have Diplomatic engagements with southeast and defence ties.

On the literary grounds based on the imaginary stands which are clearly based on the realistic grounds of contemporary situations, the novelists are taking the

depictions near to their hearts. The novels are the true pictures of their lives on the grounds of Northeast. Various characters are thus taking presentations of these grounds. They are the true embodiments of the conflict-ridden Northeast. When we study the novels, we have thus the better realistic situations presented imaginatively.

Priyanka Kakoti in her article *'Voices from the Periphery: Indian English Writing from the Northeast'* comments that the majority of the contemporary writings of the region are based on 'cultural memory of the shared history. She also continued with Bhabha's argumentation. "According to Bhabha, on one hand, while nationalism is a pedagogic discourse as it claims a fixed origin for the nation and asserts a sense of continuous history, on the other hand, nationalist discourses are simultaneously performative and must be continuously rehearsed by the people to maintain a sense of comradeship."

Neeraja Rashmi writes in the very preface of NCERT's *North-East India: People, History, and Culture* that "Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim are eight states located in the North East of the country and command special importance in India, not only because of their location but also their cultural and historical uniqueness. They are known as eight siblings and referred to as 'eight sisters' or 'seven sisters and one brother'. These states cover an area of 2,63,179 sq. km, approximately eight percent of the country's total geographical area, and house around 3.76 percent of the total population of the country. Around 98 percent of the boundary of these states has international borders. The states have distinct cultures and multiple ethnic groups and are a fine example of unity in diversity. The variety of ethnic groups, languages, and religions reflect the multi-cultural character of the states. The region houses over 200 of the 635 tribal groups in the country, speaking a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages and dialects. States like, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland are predominantly inhabited by tribes with a certain degree of diversity among the tribes. States like Assam, Manipur, Tripura, and Sikkim are inhabited by people of various religious denominations like Hindus, Christians, and Muslims and a combination of local tribes and communities." Several books crossed its meaning beyond narration and presented the core of the heart of those tribes into their natural surroundings!

Mamang Dai's novel *The Legends of Pensam* presented Arunachal Pradesh in three dimensions: tradition, modernity, and ecology. The narrative gives history, myth, tradition, memory, and fiction into the circular whole as each of it linked with the common weaving. The landscape is rich with its cultural heritage and nobody can understand the bond it. Adis lived with it and can't be separated according to the author: "Adis practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world". There is eco-feminism in the very third chapter entitled 'Daughters of the Village' where nature and woman relationship compared simultaneously. The woman is here represented with a caring attitude. She is like that of the shelter as that of nature to its animals. The author is deeply affected by the changing scenario of the people who live in those lands. The change of lifestyle and imposed

mannerism, as well as cultural hegemony in the name of globalization, had made deep effects in the following chapters of the novels. The effect of the alienation from the ancient value system and the consequent crisis due to the loss of traditional values had made this novel a significant representational value in respect of the ethnic ancient customs. The sub-section entitled "the scent of orange blossom" of the third section of the novel has a resonance of this eco-mystical tone. Prasanta Das comments about this particular situation in this respect: "The stories in Dai's slim book revolve around several generations of an Adi family. In an elliptical way, *The Legends of Pensam* covers quite a bit of history: the first contact with the British in 1911 in which a British political officer and some sepoys and coolies were killed by Adis in the village of Komsing; the punitive British expedition of 1912; the building of the famous Stilwell road during World War Two; and the winds of change that are sweeping traditional structures and values in today's Arunachal Pradesh. There are recovered stories from private archives as well, like the love affair between David, a British intelligence officer, and Nenem, the daughter of a village headman."

Love in the Time of Insurgency is a novel that also depicts the landscape with human relationships. The ecology of the landscape and the surrounding natural beauty show the calm atmosphere and nourishing scenery when the actual tumults happen during the Second World War. The local language and culture were disrupted heavily with the arrival of the missionaries and all of certain Nagaland witnesses a sudden drift from the traditional value systems. The novel tells the stories of Sharengla and her near-about areas dominated by contemporary events like war and the following ravages and man-made hazards. The topology had greatly disturbed with war and that is described with these following lines of her: "Slowly she climbed a nearby hill and reached the top. She looked at the village at her feet, looking so sad and devastated amid the soft rippling hills, the ribbons of streams and rivers. Some houses were still burning, pigs and chickens scurrying helplessly around. The village church, too, burned. The spire was licked by small shooting flames and bits of burning wood beginning to fall from it. The cross was no longer visible". The local culture and modernization become a foil to each other, but the government makes sure that the globalization effects must have their true impact on scientific thinking and developmental policies. Those tribal peoples have not any information about the technical and scientific developments that are going on in Europe or America; and truly with the advent of modern scientific society and developed civilization they entered into the new realm far superior in engineering but far differed from the lap of nature: "But don't you see how Christianity and education have widened our outlook, released us from the bondage of a superstitious and parochial existence?" Keating asked, impetuously. "Thank god for Reverend Pettigrew and Dr. Brock. They opened schools and churches in the villages and gave us new ideas, and the benefits of modern medicines and machines. The government has set up a modern administration, built roads, ended things like head-hunting. Are these not the very things that we wanted?...."

The intimacy with ecology is so much that one can have a 'green self' inside one's roots of identity. Charley in

Dhruba Hazarika's *A Bowstring Winter* writes boldly, "I'm of the hills, and the hills are in me". Here nature is personified with the allegorical characters named after names of months-U Naiwieng (November), UNohprah (December), U Kyllalyngkot (January). In this novel, John and Don Kharkongor make an argument about the importance of the mother language over anything globalized.

Like Mahasweta Devi's protagonists, Rukmini also a central figure in Mitra Phukan's *A Collector's Wife*. Here we see that she is searching for something in her inner self. Set in the background of terror, violence, and insurgency of the 1970s and 1980s the novel provides the insecurity against the inferior complex posed by the illegal migration from Bangladesh. The artistic element of the novel shows the rich imagery of landscapes like rivers, mountains, and woods having a separate identity from that of the Goa or Tamil Nadu -the essential Northeast. In the plot, Rukmini's infertility is shown against the natural order of progression. But when we see the sudden pregnancy of her then she is over-enjoyed of it and celebrates it with the natural landscape. Here the break of the natural order is also shown with the unhappy marriage of Rukmini and consequent relationships between Siddhartha and Priyam; and Rukmini with Manoj. But the novel shows its true colour when we look at the background of the society of Assam especially about Assam Movement.

Priyanka Katoki writes in her article '*Voices from the Periphery: Indian English Writings from the Northeast*': "The Assam Movement forms the backdrop of Mitra Phukan's novel *The Collector's Wife*. Rukmini, the District Collector's wife who is the protagonist in the novel ponders over the question of death. Kidnappings, extortion, killings become the order of the day and even the Superintendent of the police is not spared. While Rukmini sets out on a journey towards self-discovery, she unravels various questions of identity as well. These questions of identity not just concern the individual but the community also. Phukan through Rukmini points out the students who played a major role during the Assam Movement. As Rukmini observes the students gathered for the agitation, she notices that the girls who used to dress in salwar kameez to college are clad in mekhela sador to assert their Axomiya identity. She looks at the bright, young faces of boys and girls and notices their facial features which is a mosaic of the Mongoloid, the Austric, the Aryans, and the Dravidians: "...the almond eyes, the golden skins of the Mongoloid, the curly hair of the Austric, the dark complexions of the Dravids, the fine features and fair colourings of the Aryans, were all present in the crowd of young faces before her. And they wanted to rid the land of foreigners!" (Phukan, 91). Here lies the irony of the entire Movement.

Siddhartha Deb's *The Point of Return* is set in the backdrop of corruption in the bureaucracy, communal violence, and ethnic clashes between tribal groups. Based on Meghalaya, especially on the city Shillong, the novel provides the history, maps, and memory of the land. It gives the true picture of a father-son relationship. The novel has four parts-Arrival, Departure, Terminal, and Travelogue. Here we see the character of Dr. Dam who has ethnic connections to Bangladesh especially called at that time East

Pakistan or previously East Bengal. But here in Shillong, he has been treated by locals as a cultural minority. Having spent so many years in the region and doing government jobs for so many years, he now still treated as 'other'. So, the post-post-colonial notions of identity formations are also seen in his existential problems. Prasanta Das writes in the article *Indian English Writing in the North-East* that "Though the town is never named, *The Point of Return* is set in Shillong and tells the story of Dr. Dam and his son Babu. Dr Dam has served as the director of the state's dairy and veterinary department and, in the first part of the novel, we see him visiting the pension office where, despite his service to the state, he is treated with indifference by a callous and corrupt bureaucracy. One of Deb's achievements is the creation of an utterly convincing character in Dr. Dam. He is a man of the Nehru era, an earnest official dedicated to implementing his portion of the Five-Year Plans. Through Dr. Dam, we re-experience what men of that generation believed in and how they acted and felt in certain situations. When intelligence officers suspect a couple of visiting Danish professors of being spies, Dr. Dam dismisses "the very notion as absurd, not understanding that paranoia was very much a part of India he served so eagerly, and that the nation he imagined being shored up through the efforts of people like him was ultimately a fortress, that everywhere around him new battle lines were being drawn and fresh groups of people were being defined as outsiders, borders bristling with barbed-wire teeth." (221)

Dr. Dam was forced to flee East Pakistan during Partition. To his son, growing up in India, the notion of an ancestral village is "quaint and distant" (178), and his father's experience of being uprooted and rendered homeless has little or no meaning. Babu thinks his world is different from that of his father's and feels safe even when the xenophobic rage in Meghalaya explodes in a violent movement against "outsiders". His illusory world is destroyed when he and a friend are assaulted (as was his father in an incident years earlier) and he experiences the same feelings of powerlessness, fear, and alienation his father had a generation earlier in East Pakistan. Deb employs a linear but backward chronology – the novel begins in 1987, with Dr. Dam suffering a heart stroke, and ends in 1979 – and mixes both third-person and first-person narratives. This technique, which mimics the workings of memory, is effective in giving us a sense of how Babu slowly begins to make sense of his reticent father's life. In the process, he also understands the story of the Bengalis who, in the words of a character in the novel, "have suffered once from one of the cruelest jokes in history, only to suffer again" (215). *The Point of Return* can easily bear comparison with Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) which also deals with memory, cartography, and the post-colonial nation. Deb's novel is arguably the better novel since it lacks the somewhat abstract quality noticeable in *The Shadow Lines*.

Deb's other novel *Surface* termed the Northeast remote parts as 'region'. It looks like having no identity of it and only some supposed existence. The novel is a memoir of Amrit, a reporter of *The Sentinel*, who has a journey due to his reporter job in the region. It is the state of Manipur in which his journey has recounted the contemporary issues like politics, economy, society, and life of Manipur in the

novel. At the level of ethnic clashes or violence, we have various layers to analyse-political, economic, and social. Especially the novel dictates the causes of the Kuki- Naga conflict in the state. Again, Prasanta Das writes in the above-mentioned article, "Surface paints a bleak picture of the Northeast. One of the few redeeming moments occurs when Singh, near the end of his journey, scrutinizes an Imphal crowd and notices that it consists of people: "I slowed down, and in what I had so far thought of as a homogenous crowd, I began to see distinct, individual faces, some calm and resigned, others wracked by doubt; faces that were here not just to defend some boundary or other but to show the uncaring, unheeding world that they existed and could not be forgotten."(253). But the predominant mood is pessimistic: the novel views the Northeast as a region condemned to be relegated forever to the margins of the nation. According to Prasanta Das, "The differences in the themes and moods of *The Point of Return* and *A Bowstring Winter* reflect the differences in the experiences of the two communities, Assamese and Bengali. Unlike the Bengalis who were variously employed, the Assamese community in Shillong consisted mostly of Assam government employees (civil servants, staff, etc.) and their families. When Meghalaya was formed and the capital of Assam shifted to Dispur in 1972, the Assamese left Shillong almost en masse for the plains of Assam. Thus, the Assamese, in general, have not faced the attacks on "outsiders" which have periodically convulsed Meghalaya since 1979. Despite some feelings of bitterness at the reduced size of their state, many members of the Assamese community have retained warm memories of the town where they once lived, worked, or grew up in. Hazarika's fondness for those Shillong years is quite evident in *A Bowstring Winter*. Though the novel is set in the mid-seventies it is revealing that he mentions the Assam State Transport Corporation bus station in Shillong."

Hassan writes about identity roots, clash of culture, and concept of home in her novel *Lunatic in my Head*. She opines that issues of identity are born out of the insider-outsider conflict. According to her, the outsider may get an identity crisis when he gets the fear of losing his originality. The novel also deals with contemporary issues like politics of displacement, migration, and ever-rising voices for new homelands. There is always the doubt and distrust relationship between the so-called outsider-insiders. Set in the ecology of Shillong the novel depicts the post-colonial notions of 'self/ other' debate. Here Priyanka Kakoti writes in *Voices in the Periphery* that "The novel *Lunatic in My Head* is also preoccupied with the dichotomy of the insider and the outsider. Hasan's characters that are people born and brought up in Shillong but are non-Khasis must pay prices for being dkhars. In the novel, among Aman's group of friends, Ribor is a Khasi and hence it is Ribor who often saves him and his friends whenever other Khasi boys try to bully them. During one of his walks in the town, when a car approaches Aman, he feels insecure because Ribor is not with him and he can very well recognize the driver of the car to be a Khasi fellow. But then he is relieved when the person halts the car asking for a match to smoke his cigarette and does not bully him. He says that not all Khasis are bad; there are some good ones as well. The incident involving Aman and Ribor along with the channawalla Sarak Singh where the channawalla is bullied by a group of

Khasi boys because he is an outsider reflects the troubled times in Shillong."

A Naga Village Remembered by Easterine Iralu describes the great battle of Khonoma in 1879-1880. It is set in the background of the advent of Christian missionaries. The novel portrays the tribal faith, festivals, myths, legends of Nagaland. The beautiful landscape also grows concerned when one can notice the descriptions of hills, rivers, and forests of Nagaland. It is a novel of the geopolitical description of the village Khonoma. The beliefs of the tribes are seen following the theoretical framework of Eco-feminism. Although the writer's concern with the degeneration of ecology also irritates the writer. The patriarchy seems rather harsh and superstitious regarding women here in the novel. Here two women are considered as wicked or 'Kirhupfumia' so they not have any permissions of marriage. Here women's voice remains unarticulated as they are treated like 'the second sex' by the patriarchal social set up.

The concept of gender inequality is also seen in *A Terrible Matriarchy* by Iralu. Here everybody is astonished to hear that a woman is exploited by another woman in a matriarchy. It is the story of five-year-old girl Dielieno, who had been denied education due to the factor that "education is wasted on girls". Here in the plot, we come to know that Dielieno's aspirations had been sacrificed due to her brothers' opportunity. Her grandmother embodies the traditional attitude towards a girl-child even within the family: "In my Father's Day, boys never did any work because they had to look after the village and engage enemy warriors in warfare. The household that did not have a male heir was considered barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would only have one man to protect them. That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best of food. And we should." (Iralu 2007: 37)

The novel does not only say about the woman's condition in society, but it also depicts that everybody is used to the set-up of the mentality. Although it seems that the grandmother is the oppressor here but, she is the victim of the patriarchal value system where everything is set and believed according to the tradition.

The Jnanpith Award Winner Indira Goswami has done a lot for the environment, ecology, and ethnicity in the North East. Her literary works abound in ethnic and ecological concerns. Although her novel *Pages Stained with Blood* has a set of communal rioting in Delhi immediately after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, her main concern is to show that terrorism mainly based on isolation from the mainland and a sense of being ignored, neglected, and deprived of the equal treatment with the mainstream. She is lamenting the pathetic condition of the innocent victims. The main points of concern here in this novel are to discuss the causes of terrorism, separatist movements and their origins, causes of bombings, killings, and exhortations, and the communal clashes between various groups and religions. This novel is not only having connections with the Indira assassination case but significantly it reflected the same roots of extremism that Goswami sees throughout her entire life in

Assam Movement. So, this shadow of the Northeast insurgency what the novel impliedly presented.

Goswami's novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* reflects the history of the temple Kamakhya. It's the story of a man named Chinnamasta Jatadhari, a hermit who leads a movement against the ritual of animal sacrifice and is supported by some spirited young man like Ratnadhar. There is the personal liking of a British lady Mrs. Dorothy Brown to Jatadhari also gives spice to the story. The novel provides the myth, culture, ritual, society, and legends of Assam. There is the ritual called Ambabachi which connotes the menstrual period of the goddess, symbolically presented as the mother of the earth. Kumari puja also shows the motherly feelings of the goddess. The pages of the novel distinctly provide the nature-woman relationship quite like that of the eco-feminist viewpoints. Here exploitation of women suggests the violation of the natural order. There are such instances in a society where women were tortured both mentally and physically which is quite antagonistic to the natural psychological order. The violence against women is seen as compared to the violence against nature. Animal sacrifice is the main custom in the puja of temples, and this is seen also as violence against the natural order.

A House with a Thousand Stories by Aruni Kashyap is set in the background of activities of militant group like ULFA who has such strident regionalism for upholding the values of Asamiya Jati. The dream independent Assam causes the notions like ethnonationalism, ethnic identity, and violence. The novel shows the sandwiched situations of the common mass that have caught in between the military group and the armed forces of the centre. Mayong or the land of magic is the setting village of the novel where Pablo, the protagonist had visited twice- on a wedding and a funeral. The novel paved the statement that the strong sense of ethnonationalism feels self-governance. There is a rift between the state and the centre as the common perception that the common mass is treated like a second-class citizen. In the story, Moina-Pehi becomes a tragic event due to the suicide of the former. The story reveals that the groom's brother is a member of the insurgent organization and everyone including the bride could not stop believing that there will be nothing but death. The comment of the aunt is quite exclusive- "It's better to cut out Moina into pieces and throw her body into the Brahmaputra than marry her off to a groom whose younger brother is a rebel". (210-211)

The horror is so much that Mridul narrated to Pablo the incidents like this-"More killings were taking place every day....The East Bengali villagers who use the Pokoria River most of the time say that they have started finding body parts of unknown human beings at regular intervals, almost every fortnight or so. They are so scared they haven't informed the police." (Kashyap, 53)

The conditions of the state Assam are so pathetic that every page of the novel provides us the hellish killings of the innocents. There are passages like this where the matter of discussion is secret killings- "Goptohotyā?.. There is nothing secret about secret killers. Everyone knows who is killing around the state, for which they are working secretly. Two years ago, my uncle's son had gone fishing in the Pagadiya and he ended up having the fish hook stuck to a

rotten man's wrist" (Kashyap, 68). There are elements that show clearly that the existence of the ethnic riots in the context of a separate country- "newsreader telling us how the militants came and massacred who had taken shelter in a camp after a prolonged ethnic riot" (Kashyap, p.7). Further, the motive of ULFA is clear when we read the passage- "The ULFA wanted a separate country called Asom and wanted to free Assam from what they called Indian imperialism, so they fought with Indian forces with guns, bombs, AK-47 rifles, kidnappings, op-eds, books published under pseudonyms and jingoistic music albums released abruptly that had words like 'sun', 'blood' and 'sacrifice' in their titles" (Kashyap, 10).

Naga poet and novelist Easterine Kire won The Hindu Prize for his novel *When the River Sleeps* in the year 2015. Here in this novel, the protagonist is Ville. The character may be compared with other characters like Doctor Faustus of Christopher Marlow as both these characters are seeking mysterious powers! In this novel, we have a hunter's story to find a stone that may help him to have untold powers. This stone may be found in the river far away from civilization and cultures! The 'mythopoeia imagination', as told by a critic, gives rise to high seriousness into the story of supernatural creatures like daemons, sorceresses, etc. The story is about the search for the 'hearthstone which may be comparable to the heart of the Naga culture. Thus, impliedly the novel gives us the allegorical presentations and comparisons between the plot of the novel and its quest for the heart-stone to that of the unknown findings of Naga culture which also has preserved for ages into mystery as the stone is preserved into the river-bed! The allegorical storyline thus gives us the interpretation of the prestigious values of the Naga culture, ritual, civilization, ethics, custom, and values to that of the value of this mysterious stone called 'hearthstone. Here the novelist tries to portray the story of the rapid growth of urbanization which is at once the enemy of the rich but eroding culture of the Nagas. According to a critic the danger lies in the core of the problem of existence and it lies in "their rituals and beliefs, their reverence for the land, their close-knit communities, and the rhythms of a life lived in harmony with their natural surroundings".

In the paper '*The code of 'paralok' in A Bowstring Winter by Dhruba Hazarika*' Sri Sarat Kumar Doley writes "In *A Bowstring Winter* by Dhruba Hazarika, the suggestion of a blutbruderschaft that exists in Khasi culture serves the same purpose as it is imagined to have served the old German knights. Although talking about loyalty, friendship, and trust would be an anachronism in the context of post-modern cultural insanity, there is a section of society that still thrives on its broad shoulders. The concept of 'paralok' is an allusive cultural ghost in Khasi society and encompasses all sorts of idiosyncratic understandings that need to be investigated. It is as if existent and understood by each member of this society and escapes understanding at the same time. The novel has a thematic commitment to unravel the mystery of 'paralok' and goes about the business by collecting several gangsters associated with famous teen game and putting them in blood-shedding collisions in the beautiful town of Shillong. The characters themselves try to engage in a search for the old code of life that might serve them in good stead. As they live in a cruel and

untrustworthy context of life, they need the obsolescent view to be revived. Once upon a time, Dor Kharkongor believes, it existed between Charley, James, and himself: "it was a code of friendship. Like a bowstring: tight. Like an arrow: straight". (239)

Nandita Haskar is a very much important writer in terms of migration and its effects in North East India. In the book *The Exodus is Not Over: Migrations from the Ruptured Homelands of Northeast India* there is a very evocative description of the existential problems of the Indian North East. Into the book review, Sakira Shahin opines that "The book by Nandita Haksar *Exodus Is Not Over: Migrations from the Ruptured Homelands of Northeast India* is a book which on the one hand is a very close and intimate reading of the lives of migrant workers while on the other is also announced and clear revelation into the effects of globalization and development in the lives of people, who have for generations known only the traditional (though not necessarily undeveloped) tribal way of living. It requires the deft and diligence of someone like that of the author to weave the detailed narratives of the four migrant workers and provide a comprehensive understanding of not only their lived experiences but also the larger socio-cultural contexts within which these experiences manifest. Nandita Haksar traces the personal life journeys of our Tangkhul Naga migrants from the Ukhrul district of Manipur, two women, and two men. The book is perhaps the first of its kind in terms of delineating from up close the condition of migrant workers from the north-eastern regions to various parts of the country and abroad. The book no doubt adds to the burgeoning literature on internal migration in India, an issue with immense political exigency today. What is unique, however, is that, unlike previous accounts, it uses a bottom-up approach of narrativizing the migrant workers lived experiences and emotional upheavals, dwelling on intricate details of their lives rather than simply deliberating on the socio-economic deprivation, insurgencies, and deadly clashes experienced routinely by the people of this region. The latter aspect, although important to deliberate upon, becomes implicit through the personal narratives as well as the author's inputs, thus making the experience of reading the book a far more rewarding one."

"Beauty of the land is the theme of the novel. It is about how a woman, feminist in thought, evolves in rural Assam. I wanted to bring the rural flavor of Assam in front. Guwahati and other cities are just like any other metro city. It is this rural life-my ancestral house, the vicinity which I have described," writes Suravi of her debut novel in *Voices in the Valley*. Sana Amir in the article in *The Hindu* writes: "Apart from meticulous details of fresh green tea gardens, purple ferns, an exotic variety of orchids, chirpy little birds, one-horned rhino, iridescent long pathways, this novel is about rural life, ethnic clashes, militant activities, women's rights, and violent elections." The protagonist in this novel is Millie. She is the embodiment of feminine mental strength with her resistance against patriarchy and orthodox social conditions. Consequently, she became the student leader to mark her voice more prominent. She once says, "Women in Assam are much stronger than all states of India. They are quite broad-minded and western in thoughts. The problem of inheritance of land by the male member of the family is all over India. It is just that Assamese girls are more outspoken. They raise this issue of property a lot in Assam."

Sudeep Chakravarty writes a brilliant introduction into the opening of his book *Highway 39: Journey through a Fractured Land*. Here we see the Asanga, the Naga, her mother, her father of the neighboring Sangtam. In this introduction we see the background of the story in context, "We are talking about 1995. The Government of India was still two years away from inking a bizarre ceasefire agreement with the largest of the Naga rebel factions, the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah). Operations were on against this group and a rival breakaway of the NSCN, the Kaphlang faction, in the Indian state of Nagaland and several districts in the neighboring states of Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh."

One of the poignant descriptions of the introduction paves the real cause of the Naga conflict in respect to the historical incidents even before the time of Jawaharlal Nehru. The protagonist Asangla describes her complete distrust against the system of government that is running on-"Asangla's distrust was rooted in the horrors that Jawaharlal Nehru's India visited upon her people when some Naga leaders led by Angami Zapu proclaimed a 1951 plebiscite as proof that Nagas wanted to be independent of India. Nagas would stand their ground, they said. They had been trying to make a case for a separate identity and separate lands since 1929 when a group of Naga elders petitioned the Simon Commission in London to let the Naga Hills be."

The description of these issues is very realistic, as Chaliha report urged in capital letters: "THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO BLOODSHED IS RECOGNIZED." But the epic reply can be seen by the author himself in the following pages -

"And, India is also trying to 'be friends with people of Manipur of nearly every ethnic and political hue.

And...

And...

And...

The story of the 'Northeast' is still the story of our times, the unfinished story of India's integrity."

Mamang Dai's novel *The Black Hill* focuses on the tribal resistance against the approaching British colonial power. T. Rexlin and Dr. R Mercy Latha comment in their article, "As the title of the paper suggests, the story of the novel, *The Black Hill*, is from 'Border'. As per the novel, the black hill is the Border in itself, bordering many communities and nations. To be exact, the novel points out the Mishmee hill that lies 'in-between' Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh. Mamang Dai explains that this border is "India's easternmost road that ends in the wall of mountains delineating the country's international border at the tri-junction with the Tiber, China and Myanmar" (290). In China, it was called as Qilinggong Mountains. Again, it is hard to define whether the hill falls under the premise of India or Tibet. Many tribal and indigenous communities of Tibet and India, religious propagandists and by-passers claim freehold authority over the hill and have drawn borders on their own. The focus of this paper is not to decide the border but to study it as it is. The story of the novel is neither about the people of Tibet nor about the people of North-eastern India, but the settlers and by-passers of the hill.

The story of the novel begins with the introduction of a seventeen-year-old girl named Gimur whose eyes are focused on the sky waiting for the moon to rise and imbibe her. She belongs to Abor tribe in Mebo village which has rich traditions and ethics to follow. This village is situated at the interior parts of Mishmee hills far-reaching from strangers. She has a blue tattoo on her chin which qualifies her as a part of Mebo Village. She was pampered by her mother, friends and a brother come to friend Lendem. She was taught to be a woman who obeys and abides by the beliefs of the community. But Gimur was "...uncontrollable and daring, more like a boy..." (2). She falls in love with a man, Kajinsha, who is from another tribe of Mishmee hill. His tribe is settled at the border of Tibet which was already under the control of China. He was married to an ailing woman from a Tibetan tribe for the sake of developing a good relationship with the tribe. Kajinsha's tribe marks the border of Indian Territory and they are the frontline defense of India. He is aware that his marriage with the Tibetan girl is just a trap by which they crawl slowly into the lands of Indian Territory. Apart from this awaiting internal feud among tribes, he visited Mebo village to warn them about the strangers' entry into the hill."

In the article '*Images of Women in Mamang Dai's Fiction*,' Easter Daimari writes poignantly: "The protagonist in Mamang Dai's novel *Stupid Cupid* is also such a woman called Adna, who leaves her home town Itanagar and settles in New Delhi, a city over 2000 km away from the Northeast after doing a hotel management course in Guwahati and Calcutta. She inherits a piece of property: a four-cornered house in South Delhi and transforms it into a guest house or a love nest for couples and singles to come together "for an afternoon, a day and sometimes for months." Adna has liberal views of life and she loves the liberal ways of Delhi. While the elders of the village warned youngsters like her about the cruelty of Delhi and advised them to get married and settle down in the locality, Adna says that she liked everything about Delhi. She says... this anonymity was the very thing I liked. After the watchful expectations of a small town, being a total stranger among strangers was a relief and a pleasure... I like the heavy evenings, filled with diesel fumes and smoke, and the heat burning our faces... dusty trees in full bloom...Coming out of restaurants we would stand under the trees and puff at our cigarettes. It was all very different from where I came" (Dai 2009, 14).

Adna reveals herself to be a diehard romantic and Delhi becomes the city of her dreams. She believes that she has found love, freedom, and independence in Delhi. But does migration to the cities really allow Northeastern women to completely defy patriarchy and their marginalized status, or do they face newer forms of oppression there? Migration also brings about questions on the identity and citizenship of Northeast women.

It must be acknowledged that women's experiences are varied as well as the patriarchal oppression that they face. An emphasis on 'difference' would shatter all illusions of homogeneity in the experiences of women. Women are not only oppressed by men within patriarchal relationships but there are also other areas of oppression in their lives which they experience in a gendered way. Mamang Dai's fiction

aids a comprehensive understanding of Northeastern women's experience of migration. Mamang Dai highlights that there is a huge gap between the migrant woman's aspirations and expectations from the city and the resulting reality." Thus, in the novels of Mamang Dai we see the true conditions of migrations which is the real cause of the issue here. Although the characters are imaginary, the arguments they provide are genuine under the situations in which one may suffer after the Independence and the consequent migrations.

Koushik Barua's famous novel *Windhorse* shows the Tibetan resistance against the cultural and armed hegemony in the region. It shows the Chinese aggression in the land against the authority of Dalai Lama. The historical background of China-Tibetan conflict paves beautifully into the novel of Koushik Barua.

The Girl from Nongrim Hills is a 2013 fiction novel by Indian author Ankush Saikia. It's a story of Bok and Kitdor and the trip to Nagaland where Kitdor lost 50 lakhs rupees in purchasing arms. Absolutely the story centers round the real backdrops of insurgency situations and the consequent socio-political tumult.

There are several viewpoints regarding the constant demographical change in Assam and other parts of Northeast India. The fear of the natives is about the effect on the culture and demographic changes of the locals. Nowadays there is a constant protest against the CAA. When the Bill became the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) on December 10, 2019, then Assam and other parts of Northeast India erupted anger and protest. The opinion varied according to a critical opinion- Is immigration from Bangladesh to Northeast India is a myth?

A silent yet steady settler colonialism displaced numerous ethnic origin people from their century-old homeland. According to this viewpoint, Bangladeshi foreigners will alter language composition, but Muslim Bangladeshi foreigners will protect their native language. This group of activists propagating the theory that 1.9 crores (sometimes 2.5 crores) Hindu Bangladeshi will come to Assam and will wipe out Assamese culture.

Another group that is happy to accept #CAB 2019 if Muslim immigrants are accepted.

Thus, it is relevant and proper to study and understand the roots of the identity problems of the indigenous tribals and their identity fear which is now in their unconscious. The manifestations of protests certainly argue for contrary viewpoints and not a single perspective. When we read literature, this fragmentation of identity, ethnic clashes are also apparent in the novels of Northeast writers. Although the novels portray imaginary characters, their setting and situations are real and the circumstances they provide are their practical problems and experiences. I hypothesize that Indian Northeast ethnic identity is rather fluid, and we cannot have a single voice. So, this paper is highlighting the local voices and the consequent reasoning and circumstances.

Because of the above-mentioned background and details, I see a lot of scope for work on the following lines to study and explore the issue of ethical identity and its depiction in the North-East Indian Novel in English:

Political and cultural isolation of the Northeast and its root causes.

1. To display nature and natural setting in the background of ethnic clashes.
2. To solve the causes of racial identity for nations
3. To solve the widespread poverty and unemployment and increasing economic disparities

Increasing mobilization for economic and political space by more and more socio-economic groups is causing turbulence in an environment of limited resources and constrained capabilities of redistribution of wealth.

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