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The Journal welcomes well researched articles from Humanities and the Social Sciences. Articles should be sent directly as email attachments to the editors. Sections will be provided for input on creative writing as well as book reviews. Submitted manuscripts are considered for publication with the understanding that it has not been already published, or submitted for publication elsewhere. The final decision of selection of articles for publication rests with the editors.

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**MZU JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND CULTURAL
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FOREWORD

The present issue of MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies has encapsulated the eclectic concept of culture and its dynamics, especially while pertaining to the enigma that it so often strives to be. The complexities within varying paradigms, that seek to determine the significance of ideologies and the hegemony that is often associated with the same, convey truly that the old must seek to coexist, in more ways than one with the new. The contentions, keenly raised within the pages of the journal seek to establish too, that a dual notion of cultural hybridity that is so often particular to almost every community has sought too, to establish a voice. Voices that may be deemed ‘minority’ undoubtedly, yet expressed in tones that are decidedly clear and vivid.

The issues that have been argued within the framework of the journal raise many significant queries: what would culture studies be, bereft of the vast dynamics of shifting paradigms and interpretations within the framework of deliberation and debate? What are the considerations that one must appropriate to aspects of morality, folklore, religion and memory? Can identity, (always in a flux), ever be bereft of its politics of location and (dis)location? Is integration a requisite, and what are the ways in which one can achieve of the same? Would creative writing and translation bring about the much needed bridge towards carving new interpretations on identity?

MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies

Even as contributors have deliberated in earnest over varying perspectives situated on culture studies from interdisciplinary stances, this well edited journal brings to focus a reinterpretation of ‘concrete’ archetypes within the framework of an eclectic deviant.

*Margaret L.Pachuau
Professor and Head
Department of English,MZU*

EDITORIAL

It gives me immense pleasure to present the June 2017 issue of the MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies, which had its launch in 2014. Within this short span of time, the Journal has evolved into a space for critical enquiry and creative expression of the many facets of literature and culture, spanning across a wide array of issues and perspectives related to these.

The current issue addresses various aspects of literature and culture from the diverse viewpoints of language, popular culture, folk culture, modernity and its implications, textiles and similar forms of folk art, media and politics, gender issues, and poetry. I am grateful for the huge response that I have received to the call for papers from scholars and academicians who have contributed from different parts of the country. Their varied and valuable insights into the dynamics of literary studies, culture, and identity of Northeast India and beyond have no doubt immensely enriched the existing scholarship these areas.

It is our hope this issue helps readers gain fresh perspectives and that the Journal continues to facilitate discussion and dialogues on various areas of literary and cultural studies.

*Dr. Cherrie L. Chhangte
Editor*

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Integration through Language

Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama

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It is a true that language is a crucial unifying factor for people across the globe regardless of race, creed or colour. The further one strays from the location of one's roots, the greater the affinity found with persons one can converse with in one's own language. And yet, when the subject - "Integration through Language" becomes the focus of discussion, I believe it is important to pause and give a thought to what language is it that we are referring to in the first place – one's mother tongue, the vernacular, the official language, or global English? And as for 'integration' - which is a politically laden word these days, it could mean anything from integration as a nation, as a community, or integration of an ethnic group.

In the light of the above, I hope to throw up some aspects of the language debate on the whole to help one see that for a country like India in particular, any attempt to achieve integration through language will invariably also have to address issues of linguistic identity at the national, regional or ethnic levels. I begin with a quote from Joga Singh regarding the one nation – one language myth :

The colonial concept that a nation-state requires a single unifying language has influenced policy makers in many parts of the world, yet imposition of a so-called “neutral” foreign language has not necessarily resulted in unity, nor have

relatively monolingual countries like Somalia, Burundi or Rwanda been guaranteed stability. In fact, government failure to accept ethnolinguistic diversity has been a major destabilizing force in countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka (9)

According to many linguists, two trends are distinctly visible in the contemporary language scenario – one, the diminishing usage, prestige and dominance of English and two, the rising importance of languages other than English in all domains of language use. Of course, only time will tell if this will prove true in the case of India where the dominance of the Hindi language is being privileged more than ever before. It is also true that due to commercial compulsions and globalization, most countries of the world are presently engaged in learning the languages of other countries.

The conservation or preservation of languages is significantly different from the preservation of monuments and ancient artifacts. Languages are social systems and do not have an existence free of the human consciousness. Therefore, a given language cannot be dissociated from the community that uses it. “Quite logically, therefore, preservation of a language entails the preservation of the community that puts that language in circulation.” (PLSI pamphlet, 3). Between the collective consciousness of a given community or ethnic group, and the language it uses to articulate this consciousness, is situated what is described as the ‘world view’ of that community which often is the essence of the roots of one’s culture which in turn, is absolutely essential for cultural studies.

In the light of the above observations, many decades of research study by linguists have shown that the situation of many languages across the world, more so that of the indigenous peoples, marginalized and minority communities, and of the cultures that

have experienced or still continue to experience cultural domination, has become precarious to say the least. When we consider the fact that it takes centuries for a community to create a language and its cultural heritage, the tragic dimensions of losing it becomes immense and indescribable. When a team of linguists from the National Geographic Society's Enduring Voices Project visited Arunachal Pradesh in October 2010, what made international headlines was the discovery of a language called Koro spoken by about 1000 people only, and the fact that it so far was a previously undocumented language. Again, with less than 5000 remaining speakers, Remo, an Austro-Asiatic language spoken by Orissa's Bonda tribals, is classified as 'endangered.' Most Bondas now speak either Oriya or a pidgin that has evolved from it. Boa Senior from the Andamans died in January 2010 aged 80. She was the last remaining speaker of the Bo language, one of the ten Great Andamanese languages believed to be at least 65,000 years old. We are told that, as a survivor of the December 2004 tsunami, she was immortalized online in a video, "singing in Bo of the thundering earth before the great waves swept in. Boa's brief, haunting drone conveys much more than its subtitles – almost as if her song were a dirge for an ancient world, for people waiting for an imminent end." (GEO 39).

The above findings also provoke counter questions about the need of preserving languages spoken only by a few, when resources could well be spent on teaching marginalized communities some of the major languages to help them progress in an increasingly homogenized world. Such a view ignores the fact that languages are not just a means of communication. "They are emblematic of the way a community perceives the world and, thereby, offer a unique insight into those who speak them and the cultures they represent." (GEO 40). The nation and society has much to gain

from promoting linguistic diversity and conservation of endangered languages. It protects the unique identity of their speakers who are the socially marginalized, their sense of dignity and self-respect besides providing greater access to indigenous knowledge systems. It has been stated often enough that if we really want to stem the feeling of dispossession and exploitation among the tribals and marginalized classes, the state has to invest generously in their culture and their languages.

The great divide between major and minor languages and the official sidelining of the latter enshrined in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution, has set off power struggles among linguistic communities, to the disadvantage of the weak. The VIII Schedule currently has on its list 22 scheduled languages. Assamese, Meitei and Bodo are the 3 languages from Northeast India which have been entered into this privileged list. The argument of languages versus dialects is one manifestation of this struggle, as the state promotes major linguistic identities rather than encouraging local ones. According to Gregory Anderson, “This ideology has proven to be especially alluring to young people, who often make the decision to reject their local languages, as not only do these languages represent access to the advancement through education, but also access to the global culture that is so desirable for this demographic group.” (GEO 44). He goes on to give the warning that local linguistic identities in India are subject to the same devaluing that caused the widespread abandonment of Native American and Australian Aboriginal languages in the last century that eventually resulted in the total loss of a great number of their languages. According to G.N Devy, “Ironically, where literacy has gone up, the local languages have dwindled because of the imposition of the state’s official language.” (GEO 44). India’s states according to him, ought to be made multilingual, with more than one official

language. This of course implies a more multilingual education system.

We have so far been discussing vital issues pertaining to marginalized languages and what their loss could entail for society on the whole. Diversity of language also helps preserve local identities and cultures. But though there is fundamental value in the different perspectives and insights of the nature of the human mind and spirit offered by multilingualism, there is also fundamental value of a common language as a vast world resource which presents one with unprecedented possibilities for mutual understanding and progress. This in turn, apart from other factors, offers fresh opportunities for international cooperation in all arenas.

Why a language becomes a global language / common shared language has very little to do with the number of people who speak it. It has more to do with who the speakers are. For example, when Latin became an international language throughout the Roman Empire centuries ago, it was not because the Romans were more numerous than the peoples they subjugated. It was because they were the ruling class and therefore, more powerful. Later, when the Roman Empire declined, Latin continued to remain the international language of education for a millennium, thanks to a different kind of power structure – the ecclesiastical power of Roman Catholicism. In like manner, taking this into the Mizo language context, Duhlian which was a Lushai dialect in common use amongst the chieftain clans at the time of encounter with British colonialism during the 19th century, continued to be privileged as the dominant language used by the rulers. With the passing of time it got firmly established as the lingua franca of the different tribes of Zo descent, to the extent wherein all other dialects got subjugated and sidelined without any real resistance. Today, having the Mizo language, previously Duhlian dialect, as the lingua franca / official language in

Mizoram, has no doubt provided many advantages and privileges for its speakers. It continues to also have a strong bonding and integrating effect and widespread acceptance. But this of late, is not without its detractors from some groups of Zo descent like the Hmars and Paihtes for example, and several other minor ethnic communities as well, all located in the state of Manipur and who, due to their own historical, geographical and cultural considerations, have had to maintain their linguistic and cultural diversity for the survival of their identity in a predominantly Meitei Hindu culture. While they identify with Mizoram and consider its capital Aizawl as their Jerusalem, they are yet to overcome their own feelings of alienation and perceived fear that in accepting to be called ‘Mizo’ and in accepting the Mizo language as their lingua franca, they would be in danger of being assimilated by the more dominant mainstream Mizo group from Mizoram. Whether such fears are justified or not, the ground realities of realizing integration through language in this regional context still appears to be a distant dream, though efforts are on by student bodies and NGOs to promote the idea of language diversity within the framework of Mizo identity. While on the subject of possible fears and dangers pertaining to a dominant language, or even of a global language, it is quite possible that such a reality “will cultivate an elite monolingual linguistic class, more complacent and dismissive in attitudes towards other languages... . Perhaps the presence of a global language will hasten the disappearance of minority languages, or – the ultimate threat – make all other languages unnecessary.” (Crystal 15).

That various movements exist in support of linguistic minorities once again reveals an important truth about the very nature of language in general. The need for mutual intelligibility, which is an argument that favours a global or a common language, is one side of the story. The other side is the need for identity as already dilated

upon earlier. Language is a major means of showing where we belong, and of distinguishing one social group from another, and we have evidence of linguistic divergence rather than convergence across the world. We know that for several decades, many people in the countries of former Yugoslavia made use of a common language known as Serbo-Croatian. But after the civil wars of the early 1990s, there has been a move towards differentiation – the Serbs have referred to their language as Serbian, the Bosnians to theirs as Bosnian, and the Croats to theirs as Croatian, with each community drawing attention to the linguistic features which are distinctive. A similar situation exists in Scandinavia, where Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish are largely mutually intelligible, but are none the less considered to be different languages. Likewise, Switzerland has three major linguistic divisions based on the three countries that border it – France, Germany and Italy. So in effect there are three languages, that is Swiss-French, Swiss-German, and Swiss-Italian language which are largely mutually intelligible, but which one uses depending on the region one is located in, within Switzerland. There is witnessed here an adjustment of divergence, recognition of national identities, within a holistic unified entity. Can we not cite this as a model example of ‘integration through language’?

Debates on the need for national or cultural identity often see an opposition in the need for mutual intelligibility but this need not be so. As already shown above, it is indeed possible to develop or help create a situation in which both intelligibility and identity can happily co-exist. According to David Crystal,

This situation is the familiar one of bilingualism – but a bilingualism where one of the languages within a speaker is the global language, providing access to the world community, and the other is a well-resourced regional language, providing

access to a local community. The two functions can be seen as complementary, responding to different needs. And it is because the functions are so different that a world of linguistic diversity can in principle continue to exist in a world united by a common language. (22)

In the first half of this paper we had drawn attention to two emerging trends seen by linguists in the contemporary language scenario, one, the diminishing usage, prestige and dominance of English and two, the rising importance of languages other than English in all domains of language use driven particularly by economic compulsions. And yet, World English as a global language exists today as a political and cultural reality. It has sometimes been disparagingly referred to by some as ‘globish’ or ‘englishes’ because it has influenced the structure of other languages as well and provided a fresh source of loan-words for use by these other languages. “Such influences are sometimes welcomed (in which case, people talk about their language being ‘varied’ and ‘enriched’) or opposed (in which case, the metaphors are those of ‘injury’ and ‘death’).” (Crystal 22).

Without going into the debates of the 1990s about the relationship between the global spread of English and its impact on other languages, it should also be recalled that the English language in several ways, has itself been impacted and influenced by other languages and therefore considered just as ‘impure’. It has borrowed words from over 350 other languages, and over three-quarters of the English lexicon is actually Classical (Greek, Latin) or Romance (French, Italian) in origin. Plainly, the view that to borrow words leads to a language’s decline is absurd, given that English has borrowed more words than most. It is true that languages change their character, as a result of such borrowing, and which is disturbing to many language purists who do not appreciate the

expressive gains which come from having the option of choosing between lexical alternatives eg. (Anglo-Saxon) *kingly*, (French) *royal* and (Latin) *regal*.

The purpose of roping in and referring to English as World Language here in this article is to give a different and perhaps new perspective to what we mean by integration through language. Since the opposing tensions brought about by issues of identity at different levels on the one hand, and integration or a coming together on the other, is irreconcilable if the approach is exclusive and inflexible, there is hope for bringing in integration through language from the inclusive approach. Just as the success of a global language rests largely on the extent of its inclusivity, so also must speakers of the Mizo language today develop a new and broader mindset. This mindset must seek to enrich the existing Mizo language by garnering many of the more common words used by other Zo groups. Since language is a growing and flexible entity, such efforts can only serve to enrich the current Mizo vocabulary, as well as give meaning to various nuances of cultural practices and traditions of the communities under Zo common descent. Given the fact that there are similar models already existing in other parts of the world, this is not an impossible task. The most obvious example to cite is World or Global English as a link language as well as language of information with nations across the globe.

Since mutual give and take for co-existence of any kind, at any level, is essential, I conclude on the note that that there should be no fear of diluting a growing and developing language like Mizo when it is suggested that it can indeed become the link language, the language of communication and information for all Zo tribes. Keywords and terms in common usage by other Zo dialects may be incorporated more and more with the passing of time, into the Mizo language. Similarly, the speakers of minority languages must

develop an equally inclusive approach and not resist such a move, but rather facilitate and develop an attitude of ownership about the whole project. Such moves will not adversely affect the minor languages as they will continue to be nursed and taught to the younger generations, to avoid stagnation and death of their language.

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Mapping the Literary Contours of North-East India

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Literature from the North-East India is presently published at a large scale with a simultaneous increase in a wide readership among scholars and critics who studies and examines the distinct narrative structures and its wide thematic range present in the works of fiction. However, the distinct narratives invite various challenges for scholars to look into questions of “literary” credence of this body of work that naturally involves narratives of deep ethnic undertones, tribal mores and political anxiety. It also brings into discussion the problem of canonicity in literature studies, extensively discussed by scholars such as John Guillory in his book *Cultural Capital* (1994), that speaks to limited texts or authors which, invites debates on its failure to represent particular social groups and simultaneously raises larger question of why the canon debate represents a crisis in literary study. What it similarly informs is a certain amount of denial for an acceptance of the aesthetic theories that then does not include topics of larger national narrative. Such denial eventually places writers from the margins (North-East India, in the context of our study) into categories with specific titles or what Easterine Kire terms as “definable box”, which in extension means “the need [of publishers] to put writers, actors, artists in neat boxes” (“Writing Nagaland – A Conversation with Easterine Kire” 2016).

The problem of canonicity in the context of Indian English literature trails to a larger discourse on the problem of postcolonial studies that invites challenging ground of discourse and inclusion, especially of literary works produced from smaller regions'. The problematic of postcolonial scholarship begins from trying to define the literal meaning of the term, to challenging questions on which national literatures or authors can / should be justifiably included in the postcolonial canon. This uncertainty carries forward conversation in postcolonial scholarship on the problem of the colonial language that constitutes a strong imperialist notion, which reduces other language as unsuitable for carrying out literary dialogue. All of these problems, eventually, demotes and reduces the smaller narratives of North-East literature.

The distinct narrative structures in the literary works, produced from the region, that archives the social, cultural, historical and political narrative of the region unfortunately gets constantly defined and redefined, tailored to fit into the narrative pattern of the existing “standard” narrative. Such practice of perfecting a “standard” narrative approach could be reductive as it leads to an oversimplification of a much more varied range of works. However, there is a consciousness that is taking over such limited definitions as more and more writers from the region assert the basic right and need of the writer’s choice of expression in their attempt to find a literary space for articulation that will allow their writings to be produced, irrespective of the kinds of material that they engages with. The importance of writing from one’s regional space that defines cultural individuality is essential for various reasons, 1) to create an archive of indigenous material that is often overlooked in a complex history of migration, colonialization, integration, border issues, and unrest 2) to examine the multiple layers of expression and new narrative definition that creates a distinct literary

representation and, 3) to allow the new narrative with a freedom to converse unreservedly on topics of oral and indigenous narrative, political violence, culture and traditional lifestyle.

This essay, in view of the indigenous narrative structure in the literary works, seeks to understand the multicultural aesthetics in the literary works of the region with the abundant narratives of “indigeneity” and “ethnicity” in the contemporary texts. In an attempt towards expansion of the scholarship of Indian English literature and in permitting a holistic inclusion of regional works, having the characteristics of a well-defined literary work, the above problematic aspects is re-defined in this essay to drive home a vital point of “re-mapping” the literature from North-East. This essay uses a graphical representation of scholarly articles on North-East literature available in some well known database to give a visual analysis on the materials that are present at the academic platform for scholars. This analysis is an important representation that shows the need for accelerating the growth of regional literature.

Literature from North-East results in a need for a continuous reminder for its inclusion within the context of the larger discourse of Indian English literature. If the remote geographical location is not enough to map its region within the cartography of the Indian nation, the literary texts from this region rarely finds its mention among conversations carried out in Indian English literature. The purpose of this essay is not only to identify literary works of the region and bring to light a rich body of regional work, but also to engage in the varied parameters of these works that includescultural dynamics, oral narratives, indigeneity, topics of regional violence and the narratives of communistic expression.

Indigenous literature includes narratives of the community social life that tends to accommodate readers who are familiar with

the narrative set-up, which often comes as a challenge for the writers in terms of reaching out to readers outside the region. H. Ghonglah, a writer from the North-East, states a reason for the limited readership by implying that, “This literature does have a role, but a limited one because it fails to appeal to different communities. The use of myths and legends as well as cultural references specific to a particular region make it difficult for it to be universally understood” (“Regional Language Literature” 2012). This statement of Ghonglah is in response to Khushwant Singh’s critical remark over his diatribe against Indian literature and the “dismal” state of writing in regional languages in particular that raises problematic questions from a host of authors writing in Indian languages. However, Ghonglah’s statement can be true in terms of the expressive verbal compounds in the native language used in most of the literary works from the region that is new for our mainstream readers. While this kind of literary narrative is new to the mainstream readers, indigenous writings across the world has always had a rich literary tradition of which can be seen in the writings of Native Americans, Australian aborigines, part of African-American writings. In the literary works of North-East, the aspect of orality in the form of narrative comes through the cultural history evolved from a distinct account of myth and folklore. For example, Temsula Ao’s poem “Stone-people from Lungerok [meaning six stones]” talks of the genesis of the Ao Naga tribe of Nagaland from the mythical six stones, a community of tribal people who believe themselves to have emerged out of the earth. Similarly, Mamang Dai’s continuity and engagement in oral tradition is maintained with a strong notion of believe that there is always history in our words, the jungle is not just a patch of greens there are voices, the rivers is not just a flow of water and that all these and everything has a landscape (“Keynote Address by Mamang Dai” 2015). Janice Pariat’s oral narrative is also worth mentioning here in whose stories we read of souls turning

into trees alongside the deeply entrenched oral practices of mantras that serve as a weapon for destruction, the description of which is read in the beautiful evocative opening story “A Waterfall of Horses” of her debut fiction *Boats on Land* (2012).

The inclusion of indigenous content in works of fiction for North-East writers is not a recent engagement. Writers from the region look at their embedded culture as a process of preservation and continuity of the community, and this concept of continuity is essential given that the works, which can be placed under the category of “realistic” fiction, re-defines permanence of culture and tradition. In an academic lecture titled “The Peripheral Imagination: Writing the Invisible India” Aruni Kashyap concisely tells about the narrative representation of literary texts from the region that is often more than just an imaginative story. He refers to texts such as Lummer Dai’s *The Laughter of the Earth* (1963), Indira Goswami’s *The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* (1988), Temsula Ao’s *These Hills Called Home* (2006) to allow readers to understand that discourse on literary scholarship from the region is not fixed to a restrictive narrative space of violence alone, but exudes a certain sense of community cultural authenticity in its oral narrative expression, that come from a deep blending of history and fiction. These texts, mentioned by Aruni, that tells stories about the *Adi*¹ tribes complex entry into modernity, the three high caste widows in a religious monastery set in Southern Assam, or the human side of the bloody Naga insurgency, weaves intricate narratives alongside a distinct linguistic style that defines the aesthetic characteristics that are often sidelined under overwhelming political narratives. On the idea of locating North-East literature as representation of “realistic” fiction, Kashyap states:

One of the most important mediums connecting different cultures is realist fiction. More we read about a certain people,

community and the nation through their fiction, closer they become for us. (“The Peripheral Imagination: Writing the Invisible India” 2012)

Given the multi-lingual diversity of the region, contemporary writers from the North-East engages in the use of English and its global capital as the language of expression, except for some earlier published works on local folktales that are presently recognised and documented. The use of a global language does not minimise the writers use of social and cultural narratives as the writers are cognizant of preserving the rich oral tradition of story-telling technique that have visibly declined with the forces of modernization and globalization. We read of such challenges in scholarly articles where writers express a deep cultural consciousness and emphasizes on the need to understand the force of globalization that is beginning to mutate and reduce the cultural identity of ethnic communities. In an essay titled “Identity and Globalization: A Naga Perspective” Temsula Ao puts forth a similar expression where she talks about the contemporary challenges of North-East cultures that are beginning to evolve “stripped of all human significance” (7) due to the global market. In the same lines, Easterine Kire remarks the need for an authentic preservation and presentation of the ethnic elements that is gradually being washed away with the forces of urbanization. She points out in one of her essay of the “cultural theft” in Nagaland by stressing the ignorance of the indigenous people who “readily part with their handicrafts and information on their culture because they do not realize that it is being traded for money in an economically global world” (“Barkweaving: Cultural theft in Nagaland” 2012). The act of “cultural theft”, as Easterine states, leads to the rebirth of cultural objects by giving legitimacy and new status and identity. However, while this allows one to realize and look at his/her own culture with new eyes, it

simultaneously questions the value of the cultural objects that is viewed by the “other” eyes. This, besides putting back value into what was devalued immediately, arrests the cultural dynamics of the community allowing the ethnic identities to release a sense of museumisation of the community in closed frames. It also leads to objectification and creation of labels, which within any parameter subjects the victim to remain mute.

In a review for Pratibha Mandal’s *An Approach to Cultural Mapping in North-East India in Respect to Tribal Tales* Mark Bender expresses the exciting period of growth of folk narrative by stressing the maintenance of folklorists narrative as a channel for carrying out various “cutting-edge works that involve performance theory, ethnic and gender studies, and eco-theory” (149). The literary narrative of the region’s works includes an interdisciplinary focus that inclusively discusses social, political, economic, cultural, historical, and ideological facets of the indigenous experiences. The oral history of the region is an interesting narrative feature that gives ample amount of choice to the writer to create space for creative expression. Works such as Mamang Dai’s *Legends of Pensam* (2006), *The Black Hill* (2014) and Easterine Kire’s *When the River Sleeps* (2015), to mention a few, lets us understand the juxtapositioning of history and imagination and their return to tradition in the material they engage with. The ability to identify such markers from one’s culture and make it applicable, in the extant of literary scholarship, is a reminder to reflect and re-examine the anxiety of defined narrative and accompaniment. The narrative of history in the literary works also leads to a re-fashioning of history that finds its expression through the collective memory of the communities’ experience. This method of recreating and reinventing history allow creative writers to be cultural historians who present a fascinating alternate history² of the region. This writing

of an alternate small “h” history allows writers to offer a counter history given the fact that there is an absence of authentic histories of most communities in the North-East.

In our attempt to acknowledge the oral aesthetics in the literary works from the North-East, we look at Native American literature that similarly includes a wide range of oral narrative techniques. Native American literature covers a range of oral and written narrative techniques that often follow an identifiably different literary aesthetic from what is categorized as American literature. In the context of India, the literature from the North-East occupies a similar position vis-a-vis mainstream Indian literature. Indigenous literature from the North-East shares many features of what is Indian literature but also has its own singular aesthetic. This uncertain space and ambiguity to a larger nationalist literary culture not only calls for an exciting prospect to look at such framework from an alternate perspective but makes it an important field of study in order to understand that orality, as an influence and impact, is increasingly an area of emerging scholarship both in India and elsewhere. As Temsula Ao expresses the challenging but yet creative processes as a participation that is, “shaped by oral tradition, and myths, the creative intersection between folk narratives, poetry and fiction and the future of North East Indian literature” (“The Thumb Print” 2013). Although this form of narrative is a challenge, the need for discourse is essential given the responsibility the writers take upon themselves as repositories of traditional cultural knowledge that is free from all kind of romantic bias about the “pioneering spirit” of the imperialist process. Along with this responsibility is the need to understand the conversations that are carried out by contemporary aboriginal scholars on “literary colonialization” of their homegrown materials that often creates an adverse effect on the literary images.

In the introduction to *Yellow Woman* (1993) edited by Melody Graulich, LaVonne Ruoff mentions the work of a Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko and her emphasis, in her writings, on the need to “return to rituals and oral traditions of the past in order to rediscover the basis for one’s cultural identity” (20). Silko’s statement is important for us to understand that the ignorance of the native oral tradition is a limitation on our understanding of the literary aesthetics in contemporary literature. The oral aspect in Native American literature comes from the continuity of traditional narratives and mythic perception in the form of storytelling similar to which is the literary works from the North-East that is representative of a group of people whose belief lies in the deeply rooted knowledge of communities myths and legends. The literary material for both these communities that are, in terms of geographical areas, so far from each other yet culturally so in tune comes from the shared histories of a colonial past and the great tradition of story-telling. Some observations in the scholarships of both the literature shows identical narrative structures in recounting oral stories where, 1) a story is formed through multiple telling 2) the oral histories are closely connected to lived experiences and, 3) the validation of the oral histories is confirmed through collective enterprise thereby affirming that the narrator does not hold singular authority over a story. An important aspect of documenting oral histories which is sometimes referred to as “oral footnoting” (19) a term used by Wendy C. Wickwire in her essay “To See Ourselves as the Other’s Other: Nlaka’pamux Contact Narratives”, explains clearly on one of the characteristics which is the absence of a singular narrator. “Oral footnoting” states that while oral histories are documented the narrator is also required to document their telling by citing the source of their knowledge, such as a great grandparent or an elder. This documentation is an important aspect for Easterine Kire too as she talks of the development of her novel such as

When the River Sleeps through the oral narrative of her hunter friends. She states, “I have a set of hunter friends...I use to move with them, listen to their stories. So many of the stories come from them and of course the oral narrators tell me their stories” (“Audio Recording”).

The shift from the oral to the print literature for the indigenous communities of the North-East India community involves more reasons and issues besides the fact that the shift comes from a larger colonial project of educating the indigenous people. The print culture in the region has always been an uneasy and suspicious arrival for the communities who continue to exist in the oral knowledge. While the “infinite, indestructible and fluid characteristic” (Misra 16) of spoken word have long been appreciated and associated to classical Indian culture, orality continues to be dismissed as a subject that often stands in oppositional binaries with the written history as “civilized” and “modern” (Misra 24). Oral form of narrative has often been viewed as the “other” form of expression that signifies the one who uses it as “barbaric and uncivilized” (Misra 24). While such responses should not limit the literary production of oral literature, contemporary scholars and writers need to look at the oral discourse through which alternate arrangement can be carried out in an otherwise heterogeneous discipline of critical thinking. Such agencies of alternate thinking should help revert the stringent policy of binaries that distinguishes, good versus bad and suggests a more inclusive approach. The argument can be understood through the following statement that:

the concept of modernity [print culture] need not always be linked with colonial ideology which depicts all traditional cultures [oral] and social institutions as barbaric and uncivilized. (Misra 24)

Contemporary writings of North-East India include stories that are born out of the oral narrative and therefore, orality serves as the primary narrative structure through which the written texts follow. Scholars Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod states that the, “Oral traditions form the foundation of Aboriginal societies, connecting speaker and listener in communal experience and uniting past and present in memory” (qtd. in “Indigenous Foundations”). The dominance of the written word comes from the western discourse that dismisses oral societies to be people without history and hence framing discussions on oral history in binaries: oral/writing, uncivilized/civilized. The creation of binaries by the Western counterparts who tend to place authorities on the written document is dismantled by Erin Hanson in an essay “Oral Traditions” where she states that, “such assumptions ignore the fact that authors of written documents bring their own experiences, agendas and biases to their work—that is, they are subjective” (“Indigenous Foundations”). Agreeably so, the divide is a misconception as oral and written are not separate entities but works in complementary to each other. As Stó:lō historian Naxaxahtls’i puts it, “The academic world and the oral history process both share an important common principle: They contribute to knowledge by building upon what is known and remembering that learning is a life-long quest” (qtd. in “Indigenous Foundations”).

To re-define the concept of canon in the context of North-East literature it is important to look into the scholarship of postcolonial studies. First, the definition of postcolonial studies is in itself problematic in the sense that the definition, still, in many ways acknowledge colonial practices. With its highly ambiguous terminology “postcolonial”, Iva Polak pose question of “whether the “postcolonial” is too universalist a category which tends to swallow starkly different histories and places of utterance” (135).

Second, this complexity has created a blurred literary space in Indian literature that debates on which national literature or authors can be justifiably included in the postcolonial canon. An example being R. K. Narayan's remarkable "indifference" to the historical experience of colonialism that is entirely ignored by postcolonial scholars. Third, this marginalization eventually leads to an ignorance of smaller narratives that are indigenous in nature, such as literature from the North-East. The limited categorization of postcolonial studies that refuses to identify indigenous thematic structure in literary works is largely affected by the earliest theories of postcolonial studies. Postcolonial theories often exclude traditional indigenous teachings as well as contemporary community realities from discussion thereby, erasing the indigenous voices. Indigenous scholars and critics have arrived to an understanding that the concept of "identity" and "self-expression" is, to a large extend, manipulated and defined by the "other". As Linda Tuhiwai-Smith states:

there is...the sneaking suspicion that...post-colonialism has become a strategy for reinscribing or reauthorizing the privileges of non-indigenous academics because the field of "post-colonial" discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out indigenous peoples, our ways of knowing and our current concerns. (qtd. in "Reading Native Literature" 25)

Postcolonial scholars such as Vijay Mishra, Bob Hodge, Elleke Boehmer, Gareth Griffiths and Stephen Slemon define the text of the "other" in the context of postcolonialism. With the denial of theories that defines the indigenous literary works, writers begins to question themselves on whether the "other", the indigenous literary works, needs to be studied in its exclusivity or, if at all, the stories needs to be told. Postcolonialism, indeed, requires answering to if it can rightfully carry the load of the postcolonial hierarchy.

With the problem that is not limited to the need of a theoretical framework for indigenous texts, Nirmala Menon in her essay “Rerouting the postcolonial canon through linguistic remapping: why remap?” remaps the postcolonial canon in Indian languages. Menon states two problems of “uncritical” and “un-selfconscious” postcolonial perspective:

...whether ‘postcolonial canon’ is a self-contradictory term or not, the field as currently formulated is dominated by select writers and literary works to the exclusion of other writers, works and languages... Such a circular movement results in (1) an emerging postcolonial ‘canon’, whether we acknowledge it or not and (2) theoretical conclusions based on that narrow selection of literatures that are then extrapolated to the larger field. (220)

John Lye in his essay “Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory” states, “the way in which literature by the colonizing culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority, of the colonized people on literature by colonized peoples which attempts to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past’s inevitable otherness” (Lye). While this to a large extent deals with the way in which postcolonial scholarship refuses indigenous texts and demands a narrative structure that fits within the narratives of larger discourse, it also talks about writings from the North-East that is totalized and essentialized under a singular framework. The singular projection of a multi-faceted space that homogenizes the geographical landscape, cultural diversity, the individual tribal mores and customs, and linguistic patterns assigns a negative labelling that denies one to look beyond these confined definitions. Such failure is indicative of the academic ignorance to achieve an inclusive study of the nation by negating the stories of smaller communities, as Sanjib Baruah points out in his book *Durable*

Disorder(2007), of the “uneasy coexistence” (102) of the history of North-East India within the larger context of a rich Indian history. This not only calls for an uncomfortable postcolonial history of North-East India, but also at the same time demystifies the multicultural identity that is visible in the literary works of the region.

To further understand the literary representation and production of the scholarship of North-East literature we conduct a graphical representation using two database that are most accessed by literature scholars. The databases used are Jstor and ProQuest. Under ProQuest we use the MLA International Bibliography, Literature Online and Dissertation & Theses. For the analysis we looked at the scholarship of five contemporary women writers from the North-East, Mamang Dai, Anjum Hasan, Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire and Mitra Phukan. The graph is created using a random search by applying individual names of authors as keyword. We did not use any time period and have instead used percentage for studying the number of works available, as seen in the vertical (value) axis in Figure 1 and Figure 2. The results given below the individual graphs are self-explanatory as it shows the very minimal scholarship of the regional works that are published and cited.

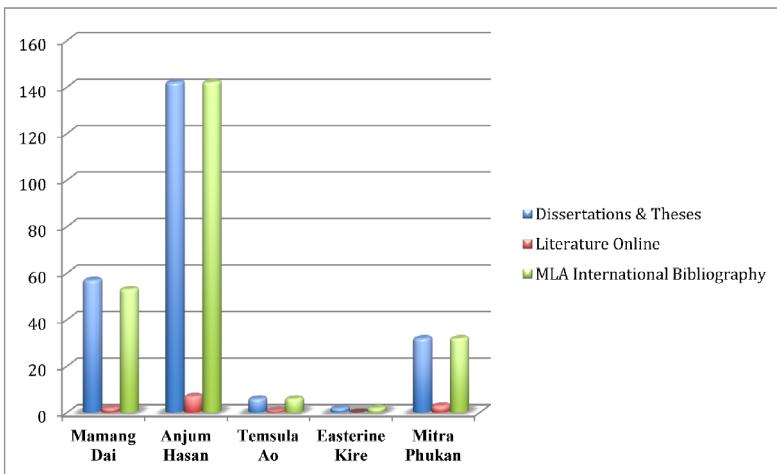


Figure 1: Result of **ProQuest** Database as on 11th May 2017 shown for Citations and Reviews

Authors	Dissertations & Theses	Literature Online	MLA International Bibliography
Mamang Dai	57	2	53
Anjum Hasan	142	7	142
Temsula Ao	6	1	6
Easterine Kire	2	0	2
Mitra Phukan	32	3	32
Total	239	13	235

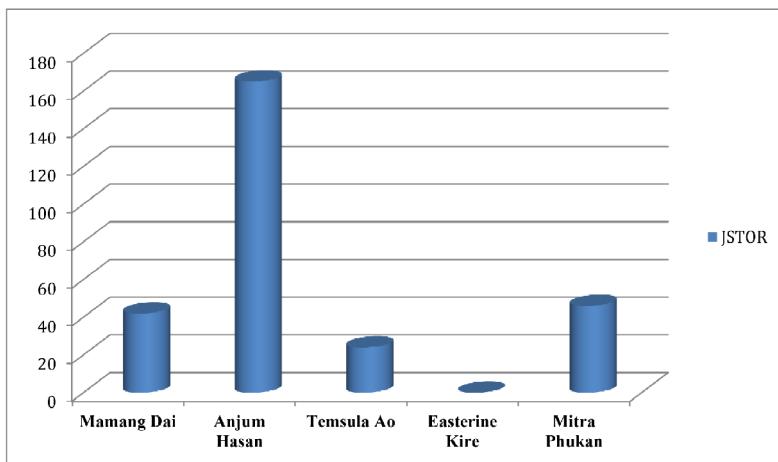


Figure 2: Result of JSTOR Database as on 11th May 2017 shown for Citations and Reviews

Authors	JSTOR
Mamang Dai	42
Anjum Hasan	165
Temsula Ao	24
Easterine Kire	0
Mitra Phukan	46
Total	277

Notes

1. The *Adi* tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, belong to an ethnic group that lives by the Siang valley, geographically connected only through limited road links. The literal meaning of *Adi* is "hill" or "mountain top".
2. The term is used for understanding the creative credibility and freedom that is exercised by writers from the North-East. This creative credibility can be associated to the historical narrative that is visible in works of fiction of writers such as Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Easterine Kire etc. With the region's history often excluded from the grand narrative of modern historiography the oral history calls for a definitive change. Literary works such as *Laburnum for my Head* (2009), *Legends of Pensam* (2006), *A Bitter Wormwood* (2012), *The Black Hill* (2014), *When the River Sleeps*(2014), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016)etc. is a history of the fine juxtaposition of ancient and modern where we see a union of the mythical and the real world and how the real world fits into an imaginary realm through writing. Such activity of the writers leads to a certain re-fashioning and articulation of peoples' history in a region, where many of the literary works represent collective memory as opposed to individual experience. This aspect of re-creating and re-inventing of history allow creative writers to be cultural historians, the intersection of which presents a fascinating alternate history of the region.

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Rearticulating Bollywood: Through the Indigenous Lens of the North East

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The North East of India today is a profound paradox which simultaneously represents the frontiers of globalization as well as a heritage of Indigenous traditions and cultures. The North East explores issues of globalization, marginality, ecology, knowledge systems and offers powerful narratives which depict a deep understanding of the changing human condition. The ‘Northeast’ is not simply an abstract political concept or idea but through the diverse forms of culture and art emerging from the region, it is an evolving and lived reality.

In post- Independence India, the cultural policy vis-à-vis the North East emphasized upon the category of the ‘folk’, implying thereby that the Indigenous cultures from the region were to be seen as archaic, stagnant and needed to be preserved as such in their pristine purity. Further, such an approach fed upon nationalist perceptions of Indigenous cultures as backward and often at odds with the rhetoric of Indian nationalism. On the other hand, given government policies granting political privileges on the basis of ethnic identity in the North East, the Indigenous elite strove to uphold the ‘tribal identity’ to the rest of the nation, setting the stage for a unique political and cultural identity. According to Daisy Hasan, “By being alternately denigrated and romanticized, the indigenous cultures of North – East India lost much of their dynamism and political

potential.”¹ With the perpetuation of reductive stereotypical categories of ‘backward’, ‘violent’, ‘underdeveloped’ in national media and films, the loss has been aggravated. Consequently, there has been an acute sense of cultural distance between the North East and mainland India. Prasun Sonwalker writes: “Below the normative discourses of democracy, multiculturalism and nationalism, lies a discursive web of relations reified in the binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’. It is based on material as well as psychological factors. The binary can be a key tool to explore and identify group perceptions and consciousness, and, in turn, help unravel banal journalism and explain the coverage and non-coverage of a society’s ‘other’.”² Mainstream Indian cinema, popular media, news posit the North East as the ‘other’ more than often from patronizing, or limited perspectives. Bollywood movies such as *Ek Pal* (1986 – Shillong and Jorhat), *Kurban* (1991- Shillong), *Koyla* (1997 – Arunachal Pradesh), *Daman* (2001 – Guwahati) did not deal with the North East beyond the idea of a serene and unknown landscape. Starring the biggest names in cinema at that point (Shahrukh Khan and Madhuri Dixit), the promotions for *Koyla* had harped upon the film’s USP in exploring a hitherto remote and almost inaccessible landscape within India. Directed by Kalpana Lajmi, *Daman* revolves around the life of a lower-caste woman (Raveena Tandon) who is tortured by her rapacious husband, a debauch landlord and her eventual evolution as ‘Durga’ who is able to overcome ‘evil’ as in her husband. While Tandon went on to win a National Award for her performance with songs such as “Gum Sum Nisha Aayi” by Bhupen Hazarika and Kavita Krishnamurthy receiving much attention, the North East received only token representation in the intricate designs of Tandon’s *mehkala –chador* and a *bihu* dance sequence in the climax of the movie. However, three years prior to *Daman*, Bollywood had showcased the ‘North East’ problem

through Mani Ratnam's blockbuster movie *Dil Se* with superstars Shahrukh Khan and Manisha Koirala in lead roles.

The clear-cut binary between Us/ Them was invested in a nationalist gaze which sought to 'understand' or dismiss 'the north east problem' in the 1998 movie. The increase of insurgencies, bomb blasts, kidnappings and hijackings in the region in the late 1990s form the plot. The hero, Amar, is an honest, upright journalist and the son of an army officer who falls inadvertently in love with a suicide bomber, Meghna. *Dil Se* articulated a nationalist position, a 'counter-insurgent-gaze' at the north east. Sanjib Baruah writes: "Films like *Dil Se* and pictures in newspapers and magazines enable people to put together a mental picture of the Northeast and its people. The gaze of the Indian army patrol, reinforced by films like *Dil Se*, gives meaning to what is fast becoming a racial divide."³ Indeed, *Dil Se* projects the North East as a volatile place of unrest, with life engaged in a relentless combat with death. The unknown, furtive encounters in the North East are juxtaposed to the vibrancy of a metropolis like Delhi which epitomizes stability and security. The tension is played out in the contrasting characters of Preeti (Amar's happy-go-lucky fiancé played by Preity Zinta) and the dark, passionate, unfathomable presence embodied in Amar's love interest, Meghna. Amar is representative of the robust and kind north Indian male, who triumphs in love for the beloved and the nation with the final sacrifice of his life.

A similar image of the powerful and patriotic Indian male was portrayed in the 2005 Bollywood film *Tango Charlie*. Tarun Chauhan aka Tango Charlie (Bobby Deol) is a paramilitary man who transforms into a hardened man of war through his experiences of war and terror in the North East, in Andhra Pradesh, in Gujarat and also in Kashmir. Deol plays the role of a Border Security Force

trooper who has been engaged to eradicate Bodo militants from Manipur. The reviews of the film harped on the ‘boldness’ of the theme without acknowledging the perspective emerging within the North East or the misrepresentations therein. A review in *The Hindu* ascertained: “Two Cheers to Bollywood. It dares to enter where the national media shies away. It talks of the Northeast. It talks of Manipur. It talks of the Naxalites in Andhra Pradesh - parts of the country where a grenade attack or a mine blast killing a dozen is dismissed in a single paragraph by the print media, and almost completely ignored by the electronic media. Director Mani Shankar dares to embrace themes we thought Bollywood was incapable of even touching.”⁴ However, Pramila Rani Brahma, a Bodo woman legislator, had pointed out the misrepresentations since Bodos have not set up any bases in Manipur in their agitation for a separate state. Further, the projection of Bodos as inexorable arbitrators of bloodshed and violence was severely criticized and the movie was banned in Assam.⁵

The struggle for an autonomous state for Bodos is a crucial issue within the political framework of Assam. In 2003, a Bodoland Territorial Council was created with forty-six elected members. Constituting of an autonomous administrative unit under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) comprises contiguous districts of Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udaguri, and Chirang and non-contiguous areas across Dhubri, Barpeta, Kamrup and Sonitpur. The struggle for an independent state is not a recent one but begin in the 1930s when Bodo delegates met the Simon Commission demanding an identity exclusive to them and beyond the perceived neo-imperial presence of Assamese culture. *Tango Charlie* does not take cognizance of these issues which demand a nuanced understanding of Indigenous struggles and politics. Instead the movie perpetuates a two-dimensional image

of the ‘tribal’ – savage and cruel who is brought to task by the virile, civilized, male from mainstream India. Therefore, such misrepresentations of Indigenous communities from the North East have led to an alienation from Bollywood.

In 2005, Bollywood made another attempt to foreground the ‘North East problem’ with *Dansh*. Set in Mizoram, the film traces the evolution of the Mizo National Front. *Mautam* in Mizo denotes ‘bamboo death’. It refers to the flowering of a species of bamboo in an ecological cycle of forty-eight years or so across a wide area. The flowering of this tree is followed by a plague of black rats which inevitably lead to famine. Mizo folklore abounds with references to the event and in 1958–59, this was predicted once again but the apathy of the then Assam government led to the loss of hundreds of lives. In order to provide relief across far-flung areas, the Mizo National Famine Front was formed and it later developed into the Mizo National Front. The Mizo National Front was embroiled in a bitter separatist struggle with the Indian government until a peace accord was signed as early as in 1986 which gave Mizoram its independent and autonomous statehood. *Dansh* begins at the threshold of the peace accord. While peace has been signed on paper, the rape of Mizo women and the burning of villages by the Indian army, the tensions with the underground army are still fresh in the minds of the people. Film critic, Subhash K. Jha notes: “As must be evident, *Dansh*’s story is to Bollywood what a bicycle is to a fish, and it’s annoying to see attempts at sprinkling some *masala* on it.”⁶ Despite this allegation, the movie comes closer in negotiating with the angst of the North East. The Mizo leader, Matthew (Kay Kay Menon) is hopeful for a brighter and happier future. In the course of events, he invites an army doctor to his house for dinner where Matthew’s wife (and a fellow rebel), Maria (Sonali Kulkarni) realizes that she recognizes the voice of the

doctor as the man who had repeatedly raped her when she had been captured by the army. Interestingly, she does not have a face to remember since she had been blindfolded during the interrogation. Maria demands vengeance – an eye for an eye – despite the doctor’s denials and the peace accord. What follows is a night of torment and confrontation, which attempts to portray the potential possibilities of the region but more so that of the three protagonists.

More than often, the cultural vision of the North East is jeopardized in the fractured relation with the rest of India. This relationship which dictates the visual regime of Bollywood has often been described as “a cultural gap, an economic gap, a psychological gap and an emotional gap.”⁷ Bollywood films on the North East, which are far and apart, exemplify the imagined space of the region as articulated by the ‘rest of India.’ The political and cultural agency of the North East itself is denied in the process.

Therefore, it is crucial to shift the focus on how the cultural self of the North East has been formed in cinema from within region itself and fathom the drama of transition therein.

Cinema from the North East foregrounds discursive gaps between lived Indigenous practices and non-Indigenous reception of the same, as well as direct our attention to the growth and development of new ways of understanding the world from the perspective of Indigenous discourses. Jyotiprasad Aggarwala’s *Joymoti*, the story of the Ahom princess who sacrifices her life for democracy, was released in 1935. Combating the neoimperial presence of institutionalized studios in Bombay and Kolkata, Aggarwala wrote: ‘In India, Indian films must be made...otherwise it would be impossible to put an end to the suction of money by foreign films...For some time, the Assamese people, instead of comparing an Assamese production with Bengali, Hindi or

American films, must take an Assamese film eagerly and endearingly as one belonging to the first grade despite its lack of quality if there be any.” (cited in Mazid 2007: 37-8)⁸. Aggarwala would return to Assam after training in Germany’s UFA studios to establish the Chitralekha Moviestone Company at Bholaguri Tea Estate in Assam. People involved for the movie production belonged to village communities in the region. However, despite the long and complex multilingual history of cinema from the North East, one seems to remember only a Pramathesh Barua, S.D. Burman, Bhupen Hazarika, or a Seema Biswas as scattered names from the North East pantheon. What is forgotten is the conscious, continual process of ‘de-territorialising diversities’, closely connected to the concept of bringing to the centre the fluid cultural borders and boundaries and ‘closed’ spaces”⁹ Mishing, Karbi, Kokborok, Bodo, Manipuri, Assamese are just some of the languages in which North East cinema has been made. Complex cinematic texts connect the political and the public, moving beyond the mainstream media discourse on insurgency and military intervention.

For instance, *AFSPA, 1958* written and directed by Haobam Pebam Kumar in 2006, is a documentary movie which focuses on the plight of women from Manipur in the aftermath of the Manorama Devi AFSPA episode. On 10 July 2004, Th Manorama had been picked up from her home in Bamon Kampu Village in Imphal East District by the 17th Assam Rifles on the basis of her alleged connections with the People’s Liberation Army. The next morning, her bullet ridden corpse was found along with semen marks on her skirt suggesting rape and murder. It led to widespread protests and a group of women belonging to the “Meira Paibi” or “Torchbearers” demonstrated in front of the 17th Assam Rifles, by stripping naked and calling on the army to rape them as Manorama

had been raped. *AFSPA, 1958* offers a sustained and poignant diary of the events of 10 July 2004 and its consequences which highlight failure of justice and the controversies around AFSPA.

The deprivation of land, forced migration and the eradication of Indigenous ways of life have been integral to narratives from the region. Joseph Pulinthanath, with his origins in Kerala, has spent much of his time in the North East. In 2008, he made his second feature film in the Kokborok language entitled *Yarwng or Roots*. Located in the idyllic banks of the Raima and the Saima, the movie revolves around a Hydel Project in Tripura in the 1970s which led to a large scale displacement of Indigenous peoples. While the film is emphatic on the erasure of Indigenous identity, Soumitra Debbarma, a researcher in History from Tripura University, feels “Sadly, there is hardly any audience for such films as Indigenous youth seem to be increasingly assimilated within so called main stream cultures, ignoring our sense of history and culture. Such films need to be watched within Tripura in order to initiate the process of healing and also beyond Tripura in order to overcome stereotypes and rethink epistemological assumptions.”

Manju Borah has directed eight movies in Assamese, Mishing and Bodo and has also received several international and national awards. However, for her last film entitled *Dau Huduni Methai (Song of the Horned Owl, 2015)* based on the effect of Bodo insurgencies on villagers, Borah expressed her apprehensions: “I don’t think it will ever have a theatrical release. With most theatres favouring mainstream cinema and even audiences, it’s impossible for films from other languages to make it to cinemas....It’s really sad that only Hindi and English films manage to enjoy theatrical release. What about other language films? We produce films in so many languages but why the focus is always on Bollywood?”¹⁰ Borah’s 2012 film *Ko: Yad (A Silent Way)* in Mishing revolves

around the life of Pokkam from the Mishing community. Based on Anil Panging’s novel *Ko: Yad* which was published in installments in the weekly Assamese daily *Xadin*, the movie won the Best Assamese Mishing Film Award along with the Best Cinematographer award for Sudheer Palsane at the 60th National Film Festival in 2012. The story of a driftwood collector and the betrayal that he faces from his family, creditors and the river itself is emblematic of the human condition.

Orong directed by Suraj Kumar Duwarah won the Best Feature Film Award in Rabha at the 62nd National Film Festival. The story of the teenager Rasong and his struggle to live life in his own terms may be juxtaposed with that of the elderly Apu, a former ‘head hunter’ and his travails in the dense forests of Nagaland, in Nilanjan Dutta’s *The Head Hunter* (2015) in the Wancho language.

“Returning home” is a significant trope of much of contemporary films from the North East, given pains of alienation, exile and a diminishing sense of ‘homeland.’ It becomes crucial to be able to return to the geographical space of the homeland, before one can enter the process of reclaiming identities and attempt a completion of performance. *Crossing Bridges* (2013) directed by Sange Dorjee Thondok is the first feature film in Shertukpen, one of the languages of Arunachal Pradesh. The movie tells the story of middle aged Tashi, who returns to his village after losing his job as a web designer in Mumbai. In the long wait for new openings in the city, Tashi experiences the world views of his people which changes his perception of life and aspirations. In an interview, Thondok, a graduate from the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata, asserts that to make a film in Shertukpen was a conscious decision and he also divulges “but I didn’t have the fear of it not reaching the audience as the basic idea of making the film in my language was to preserve it in whatever small way and at the

same time show rest of the world, which knows very little about our culture and way of living.”¹¹ Tashi, the protagonist, would like to ‘get out’ of home, which he feels does not have anything to offer. Yet, through his days of unemployment, he connects, albeit unwillingly with his ageing parents, friends, and children at a school where he decides to teach for a while. He realizes that for them, Mumbai is ‘foreign land’, while for him, his village and its people have become ‘foreign’. Yet, he is haunted by remarks and questions like “You seemed to have lost our taste for butter tea”, or “Why don’t the outside world know about us?” The movie is a beautiful kaleidoscope of little surprises in the pristine valleys of Arunachal Pradesh, yet rooted in real questions on how important it is to “stay back”.

Films from the North East involve going back in history and also engage in a continuous negotiation with contemporary forces, such as globalization, neoimperialism, and power politics within Indigenous communities. Directors from the North East are establishing a new path of Indian film production. Through a lyrical use of nature and locations, and a discussion of hard-hitting issues pertinent to the region, they weave tales of wonder and woe, producing profound art which ‘returns’ the gaze.

End Notes

- ¹ Hasan, Daisy. “Talking back to ‘Bollywood’: Hindi Commercial Cinema in North-East India” in Shakuntala Banaji Ed. *South Asian Media Cultures:Audiences, Representations, Contexts* , 29- 50, (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 32

- ² Sonwalkar, Prasun. “Banal Journalism” in S. Allan Ed. *Journalism: Critical Issues* (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2005), 261-273, 271
- ³ Baruah, Sanjib. “A new politics of race: India and Its North East” in *IIC Quarterly*(New Delhi: India International Centre)Vol. 32 (2& 3) Winter, 2005, pp. 165-76), 167
- ⁴<http://www.thehindu.com/fr/2005/04/01/stories/2005040102180200.htm>Accessed 14 January, 2017
- ⁵<http://www.indiaglitz.com/tango-charlie-banned-in-assam-hindi-news-14152.html>Accessed 14 January, 2017
- ⁶<http://www.rediff.com/movies/2005/sep/02dansh.htm>
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- ⁷ Baruah, Sanjib. “A new politics of race: India and Its North East” in *IIC Quarterly*(New Delhi: India International Centre)Vol. 32 (2& 3) Winter, 2005, pp. 165-76), 166
- ⁸Mazid. A. “Jyotiprasad and Joymoti:The Pioneer and the First Assamese Film” in Barpujari M. and Kalita G. Eds. *Perspectives on Cinema of Assam*. 2007. Guwahati: Gauhati Cine Club, 29-50
- ⁹. Prem Kumari Srivastava and Gitanjali Chawla. Eds. *De-territorialising Diversities: Literatures of the Indigenous and Marginalised*. 2014. New Delhi: Authorspress, 21.
- ¹⁰<http://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/regional/dont-think-my-film-will-make-it-to-theatres-manju-borah/>
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- ¹¹<https://montymajeed2.wordpress.com/2014/09/30/121-interview-sange-dorjee-thongdok/> Accessed on 22 January, 2017.

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The Adventures of Chhura

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Mizos have a lot of lores that are both interesting and reflective of the ethos of the community. Amidst these lores the adventures of Chhura are regarded to be one of the most fascinating and celebrated. In fact Mizos consider the adventures of Chhura in high regard and his adventures , are amongst the first to be told to children, and in fact it has been said that babies listen to his adventures while yet in their mother's womb. Mizos continue to narrate the tales to children of all ages and even after they have matured into adulthood. Thus Chhura and his anecdotes have a following of people from all ages; from babies to adults. Chhura was regarded to be a fool and a trickster in the Mizo community. There are many tales that are filled with wit and humour regarding his ways. His full name was Chhurbura, and folklorists state that there are several aspects that are to be considered with regards to his adventures. Some folklorists feel that Chhura actually existed and that Nahaia was his elder brother. Chhura was remarkably clever even though he was often portrayed as a fool by many. His adventures are regarded to be amongst the oldest in terms of Mizo folklore and in fact an adage goes that when Mizos refer to anything of antiquity they often refer to it in terms of being "as old as Chhura". Also

Chhura was regarded to be of Mizo origin and to this day there are clans that claim to have originated from Chhura's family.

Chhura and Nahaia were siblings and most folklorists regard this to be an undisputable fact, even though there are no chronological aspects that could verify the same. Nahaia was regarded to be a very lazy person. In fact, so lazy was he that he was regarded to be second only to Samdala, the man who was regarded to be the laziest person in the Mizo community. Chhura and Nahaia lived in the same house but after his marriage he lived separately with his wife and family. As he was very lazy Nahaia did not build a house for himself and the house had a roof that was in need of repair most of the time. So after a time he started to live with Chhura once again. As Chhura was greatly respectful of Nahaia who was his older brother he was reluctant to cross swords with him, even though Nahaia was proved wrong on many occasions. In fact a time came when Nahaia wanted to exchange houses and Chhura obediently agreed to the same. Thus there was a great difference in the two brothers. In like manner the two brothers exchanged many things, all at Nahaia's behest. Sometimes it was the jhum, at times they shared a gayal, and dug wild yams together but Chhura was always the more meticulous and hard working at all times. However so crafty was Nahaia that he would often tell others that he was the one to fool Chhura and in the process the younger brother was projected as the fool. And because of this Chhura has been regarded to be a fool by the Mizo community even till today. However many Mizo folklorists feel that this was not true and that Chhura was actually very clever and an unsung hero in many dimensions.

Chhura and Ai Um¹

One day when Chhura was out on a trip he was served *ai um* for dinner. *Ai um* was a traditional Mizo dish that was made of potted crab. Chhura had never eaten this dish before and he was greatly enthralled by its taste. So much so that he exclaimed,

“How delicious this dish is! When I reach home I shall ask my wife to make some.”

He then asked his host,

“What is the name of this dish?”

And his host replied,

“It is *ai um*.”

Satisfied with the reply Chhura made his way home. So afraid was he of forgetting the name of the precious dish which he so relished that he kept repeating the name to himself, and he muttered, “*ai um ... ai um ...*” all the way back home.

However on the way back home he fell atop a white ant hill mound and he forgot the name of the dish. At that time however, a traveller of the *Pawi* tribe came along and so Chhura called out to him for help,

“*Pawia*, help me to search for something that I have lost.”

The man asked,

“What is it that you have lost?”

Chhura replied,

“If I had known what I had lost ,then I would not have required your help.”

The man was secretly afraid of Chhura and even as he attempted to search for what Chhura had lost he muttered,

“What on earth could it be that you have lost? And as it is, you are reeking of the smell of *ai um*.”

Immediately Chhura was overjoyed and he jumped up and exclaimed,

“That is it.. that is exactly what I have lost...”

And in fear of ‘losing’ the same yet again he muttered “*Ai um... Ai um...*” until he eventually reached home.

1. Potted Crab

Chhura’s Attempt at Whistling

Chhura and his antics were numerous. One day it so happened that he learnt how to whistle. So enthralled was he with his new talent that he began to whistle every now and then for no rhyme or reason. Now one day, as he was rather clumsy he fell atop a white ant hill mound yet again and suddenly in the melee he forgot how to whistle. He felt that his talent for whistling could be ‘recovered’ and so he began to search for it in earnest. Once again a *Pawi* traveller arrived on the scene and Chhura said ,

“*Pawite*, I have lost something please help me recover it.”

The man said,

“What is it that you have lost?”

Chhura replied.

“Had I known what it was that I had lost, I would not have required your help.”

The perplexed man then tried to help him and he began to look all around the place for what Chhura had ostensibly lost. Finally he was exhausted and so in despair he sat down upon the ground and began to whistle softly. Immediately, Chhura exclaimed,

“ Now that is exactly what I have lost...you were hiding it inside your mouth all the time. Out with it.”

And saying this the foolish Chhura grabbed the *Pawi* traveller’s tongue and he pulled it out of his mouth.

Chhura and his Mother in Law

One day Chhura and his mother in law went out to catch crabs by the river. Chhura reached out for the crabs and as he did so he exclaimed,

“The crabs are biting me and I cannot retrieve my hand anymore. You must go and ask that spirit on the mountain as to what to do in order that the crabs can let go of my hand.”

His mother in law went and did as she was told. As soon as she was out of sight Chhura ran and hid behind a rock. All this while he was unseen by his mother in law.

His mother in law then posed the question to (what she believed to be) the spirit of the mountain,

“O spirit of the mountain, Chhura’s hand has been bitten by crabs and they will not let go. What do I do?”

From behind the rock, Chhura said,

“The crabs will release Chhura’s hand only if you sleep with him.”

And saying this he ran away quickly to where the crabs were. His mother in law then went back to Chhura and he asked her,

“What did the spirit of the mountain suggest as a remedy?”

She refused to tell him the truth and merely said,

“Ah... I do not really know what it advised me to do.”

Then he suggested,

“Go back once more and ask the spirit of the mountain one more time.”

The woman then went back most reluctantly. And Chhura once again ran ahead of her, as he had done earlier and hid behind the mountain. Once more she queried to the spirit on the mountain and Chhura repeated once again the same advice that he had given her earlier.

Then he ran back once more and put his hand down the crab hole and when his mother in law came back he asked her yet again, as to the remedy that had been suggested by the spirit on the mountain. The mother in law was embarrassed and so she refused to denote what had been suggested. Chhura sent his mother in law for the third time in a row and even at this time the mother in law was reluctant to disclose what had been told to her. However, when she came back yet again, without disclosing anything to him, Chhura said,

“I know what the spirit of the mountain has said. It said that you must go to bed with your son in law.”

And saying thus, Chhura eventually went to bed with his mother in law.

Chhura and Nahaia Exchange Houses

One day Chhura and his crafty brother Nahaia were building a house for themselves. Chhura worked hard and was painstakingly constructing his portion of the house. At the same time however ,his crafty brother Nahaia who was very lazy was also constructing his portion of the house. However, Nahaia was very lazy and so his portion of the house was very badly constructed.

The roof of Nahaia's house was soon torn and because it was so poorly built it was soon in want of repair. One day, the rains came down and it filled the entire house and so the house was wet. Nahaia then slyly urged Chhura to exchange houses with him. Chhura then said,

“I do not want your house with the broken roof.”

But Nahaia urged,

“The broken roof is very useful. It allows you to gaze out at the stars as you lie in bed at night.”

Chhura was fascinated by the idea and so eventually the crafty Nahaia managed to convince his foolish brother Chhura to exchange houses with him.

Chhura Gathers Chengkek^l

One day Chhura saw ripe *chengkek* , and because he could not climb atop the tree he could not gather the fruit. So he mumbled to himself

“Ah... if only I were Nahaia. He is so clever he would have known what to do. I am sure if he were here he would the fruit in this manner.”

And saying this he caught hold of the branches and lovingly stroked them, and let go of them without even plucking them off the tree.

1.A sour edible fruit

Chhura Sells Pots

One day Chhura was out on the streets selling pots. He had gathered a lot of pots together for sale and he carried the pots on his shoulders. Before he had gone far he said,

“My shoulder is aching, I think I shall carry the pots on my other shoulder.”

And as he did so, he reversed the direction in which he was going. Now when he did this the steps that had been initially to the right of him right were now to the left of him. So he traced his steps back all the way , only to reenter his village that he had just left behind. And eventually in this manner he entered his village, and did not recognize that it was his own. So he went into his neighbour’s house and his own children were playing in the house and they immediately recognized their father. Delighted ,at his appearance they cried.

“Here comes our father.”

And Chhura remarked ,

“How nice these children are,they seem to be very fond of me...they even think I am their father.”

After a time his wife called out to him,

“Why are you staying in our neighbour’s house? You should come home”

Chhura was oblivious to the fact that she was his wife and he merely muttered,

“Does that women have a penchant for me, that she is calling out thus?”

And so he continued to stay in his neighbour’s house, in like manner for a long, long time to come.

Chhura and his Horn of Plenty

Chhura would often be caught in an altercation with an ogress. She was thus, very scared of him and Chhura was in fact seeking for a way in which he could capture the ogress, and so he fixed a swing beneath the jhum and swung away by himself. The ogress would observe this and she would often tremble in fear. After a while, Chhura pretended to leave for home knowing all the while that the ogress was observing him. He quickly went inside the hut without her knowledge. The ogress thought that he was away and so she clambered atop the swing and chanted,

“Chhura is no longer here.”

As soon as he heard her , Chhura reached out from inside the jhum and he grabbed the ogress by the hair and dragged her inside the jhum. After that he bound her securely with ropes and taunted her by saying,

“I shall take you home and the children in the village will mock you and torture you in any manner that they so desire and they shall make the wild roosters peck you all over your body.”

The ogress was alarmed and she said,

“Chhura, why don’t I give you something so that I may be released in return?

Chhura replied,

“What would you give me?”

The ogress replied,

“An axe that can till the soil.”

Chhura said,

“Can it till the soil by itself?”

The ogress replied,

“No, you have to work at it.”

Then Chhura replied,

“I have an axe that can perform the same function.”

Again the ogress said,

“Chhura, can I suggest something else in exchange?”

Chhura said,

“What would you give me?”

The ogress said,

“A hoe that can weed the grass.”

He replied,

“I have that as well”

Finally the ogress said,

“Why don’t I give you my horn of plenty.”

He said,

“And what can that do?”

The ogress replied,

“You shall chant, o horn of plenty, horn of plenty

From whence shall plenty flow...

From top

Or bottom

Shall it flow?”

And as soon as you finish chanting these verses , cooked meat and rice will flow in abundance from the horn.”

Chhura said,

“Allright, so be it, why don’t you bring it here?”

The ogress however was very cunning and so she tried to give him a fake horn of plenty but Chhura tested it immediately and because it was only a fake , only the excreta of swine came out from the horn.Chhura had no desire to be in possession of such a horn and after much altercation ,he eventually succeeded in getting the promised horn of plenty from the ogress.

Nahaia and Chhura’s Horn of Plenty

Nahaia, the crafty brother of Chhura wanted to possess the horn of plenty.So he thought of a way in which he could get the horn of plenty.He said,

“When you hear me cry out that your house is on fire you must get out as fast as you can and take your horn of plenty with you.”

Then Nahaia set a basket containing cotton, on fire and in this manner he set Chhura’s house on fire. As soon as he did this, he cried out,

“Chhura, your house is on fire, run away as fast as you can and take your horn of plenty with you as you get out.”

Saying this he began screaming in front of Chhura’s house and Chhura ran out and he fell down on the platform in front of his house .As he did this, the horn of plenty fell from his hands and it fell on Nahaia’s feet who grabbed it immediately. Nahaia then cried triumphantly,

“That which Chhura does not want, Nahaia does”

Chhura did not dare to make any claims for the horn of plenty and so he had to do without it for a long while to come .

Chhura and Nahaia Dig for Yams

One day Chhura and Nahaia were digging for yams and Nahaia being very lazy as usual, did not dig for them in earnest. So he only dug the upper part of the yam which was not edible but Chhura on the other hand, dug deep into the ground and so he managed to procure fresh yams that were ripe and succulent. On the way home, Nahaia suggested,

“Chhura , why don’t we clean the yams?”

Chhura replied,

“Allright let us do so.”

Nahaia washed his pile of yams upstream and Chhura washed his mound of yams downstream .Nahaia was cunning and sly and he as he began cleaning the yams he called out,

“Chhura the yams which I have gathered being washed down the stream.”

In this manner he exchanged a lot of his own puny yams with that of Chhura’s fresh white yams. The crafty Nahaia thus fooled his brother in this manner and very soon they set off for home. Several weeks later, Nahaia again invited Chhura to dig for yams with him but Chhura was much wiser by then and he said,

“Ah … I do not want to dig for yams with you. If I do so, they may all turn red and puny like they did the last time, on being washed in the stream .”

And saying thus, he turned away and left an astonished Nahaia all by himself.

Chhura goes to Mawngping¹ village

One day Chhura decided to visit *Mawngping* village , and when he reached the village he began defecating in the outskirts of the village. The villagers were astounded by this act and they asked,

“How can he do such a thing?”

Chhura replied,

“It is easy, when I was a baby my parents made an opening in my behind with the help of a heated iron rod .After that they

kept me inside a large basket and on the third day they took me out and this is how I came to be and that is why I can defecate.”

The villagers said.

“If this is so, could you do the same for us, so that our babies can defecate too?”

Chhura then agreed to do so and the villagers gathered their children together so that Chhura could make the incision on the children’s behinds ,all in order that they could defecate. Chhura then took a huge rod of hot iron and made the required incisions and then he bound them inside the basket. After three days when they looked at the basket they realized that all the children were dead, save one who was weak and gasping for breath. The villagers then were desperate and so they all began to fight for the weak little baby.

“This is my child.” they all cried.

In the melee , they realized their folly and they cried,

“Chhura has tricked us. Let us kill him.”

As soon as Chhura realized that they were after him he hid in the hollow of a huge tree. After hunting for him for a long while the villagers reached the spot where Chhura was hiding and they sat upon the very tree where he was hiding. One of them said.

“If this log of wood were Chhura I would treat him thus.” and saying this he struck the log of wood with all his might.

Chhura , who was hiding inside the hollow of the said,

“Hey... be careful ... you may hit me and I shall be hurt.”

As soon as they heard him, they caught hold of him but Chhura was far more clever than they were, so he suggested,

“Why don’t you grab hold of my elbow so that you can have a better grip of me?”

They did so and he wriggled about and he flexed his arms around and in doing so, he hit his captors on their faces and very soon he escaped once again from their clutches.

1. A village where the inhabitants could not defecate as there was a blind end in their intestines.

Chhura and his Enemies

Chhura’s enemies were determined to catch hold of him and so they conspired together,

“Let us wait for him in his jhum and as soon as he comes back from the fields we shall catch hold of him”

But unknown to them, however Chhura had heard all that they had said .His enemies however were , oblivious to the fact that Chhura had heard their plans and so they were hiding in his jhum. Early in the morning Chhura went out as usual to till the fields and he came back in the evening and he called out.

“O jhum...”

His enemies did not dare to respond and so they remained quiet. Chhura called out loudly,

“Why are you so quiet? You used to respond everytime I called out to you.I shall call out once more and if you are quiet it

means that my enemies are at hand and you do not dare to respond.”

So once again he called out,

“O jhum...”

And his enemies felt that if they kept quiet Chhura would know of their presence so they cried out in answer,

At once Chhura cried out,

“My enemies are at hand”

And saying this, he ran away for home, and his enemies thus could not capture him.”

Chhura is Cast Atop a Deep Lake

One fine day, Chhura was finally captured by his enemies and they tied him up and put him inside a huge basket. And they fastened the basket so that he would not be able to escape. They cast the basket atop the deep end of a lake. The area was very isolated and nobody passed that way for a very long while. Finally a Pawi merchant passed by and Chhura called out to him,

“Could you untie me? If you dare to refuse I shall knife you to death”

Saying this, he flashed his knife about from the basket where he was tied up. The Pawi merchant was very scared of him and he eventually untied him. Chhura then told him,

“You know, it is very pleasant to stay inside the basket. Why don’t you take my place?”

Saying this he eventually enticed the *Pawi* merchant to take his place in the basket. After a time he cut away the rope that tied the basket to the tree and the hapless *Pawi* merchant fell in the water and he died. Chhura then gathered the merchant's worldly possessions and took them home. Thus he entered the village of the men who had tied him in the basket. When they saw him and the wealth that he had amassed, they were greatly astounded,

“How did you get all these possessions? Did we not tie you atop the lake in a basket?”

And he replied,

“Well, I tied a small beer pot to my waist and jumped in to the lake and as soon as it sensed my presence it chanted *bi birh bi birh*, at that I responded, I spy wealth, I spy wealth and in this manner I gathered as much wealth as I wanted from the bottom of the lake.”

They were fascinated and they said,

“Come on, let us do as he has done.”

All the men of the village then prepared themselves to do as Chhura claimed he had done but initially there was no one who dared to jump down in the manner that Chhura had done. Chhura however had accompanied them and so he pushed one of the men into the lake and at that the rest of the men cried,

“I spy wealth, I spy wealth...”

And they all jumped inside with the beer pot tied to their waist.

All the men died in the process and Chhura then returned to the village by himself. The wives of the deceased men then asked

him as to whether their husbands too would return soon and he replied,

“Your husbands are weary and heavily burdened with all the wealth that they have accumulated, and so you must go and help them.”

The women then rushed out of their houses in order to help their husbands. A short while later on the way they heard the cry of a pig and so encouraged were they by the thought of their wealthy husbands that they cried,

“Surely it is them.”

Saying this they hastened all the more.

After they had gone away, Chhura in the meantime put out the fires in their hearths and left only his hearth lit by fire. A poor widow who had been left to tend to the village then went and requested him for a firebrand, but he demanded that he sleep with her and only then would he give her a firebrand. In the meantime, thunder and lightning abounded in the village and very soon the rains came pouring down. All the women were all drenched even as they searched for their husbands. Disheartened by the search they decided to return home, only to find that their hearths were not lit. So they requested the widow for a firebrand and she said,

“Well, you must do as I have done in order to procure the firebrand.”

And eventually all the women had to do as she had done. In this manner, Chhura went to bed with all the women in the village, all in return for a firebrand!!

On the Road with Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*: An Exploration into the Heart of America.

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American Gods is a novel, written by Neil Gaiman, about a surrealistic version of modern America that is secretly inhabited by the weakened and old spirits of every god of every religion that had ever been brought to the country's shores. As people migrated to America from all corners of the Earth, they carried their stories and myths with them. The legends and religions of the immigrants are represented here in the form of ancient gods and goddesses. Gaiman's novel *American Gods* examines what it means to be American by looking at the cultural legacy of America through its mythical origins and how traditional values have evolved into contemporary ideals. It came out in 2001, and in 2002 it was awarded the Best Novel award from five separate scifi/fantasy awards slates, including the Hugos, the Nebulas and the Locus Awards.

Broadly, *American Gods* might be called a work of the urban fantasy genre, although it takes place primarily in the outskirts of cities, on places best reached by a long car trip, in diners and roadside attractions and in towns that used to be someplace but aren't really there anymore. A lot of its settings are liminal, heightening the surrealism, taking place at rest stops, hotels, tourist traps and abandoned spaces, in airplanes, trains, cars and temporary apartments, weaving backwards and forward in time. Its basic

concept teases an urgency and a storm on the horizon from the start, but its plot meanders where it chooses, often taking significant detours. The narrative is also frequently broken up by short stories that build out the fantastical world that the characters inhabit. (Polo, np)

Fantasy literature is a conscious creation, where authors choose the form that suits them best for their particular purposes—be it religious, philosophical, social, satirical, or entertaining. Fantasy is an eclectic genre, since it borrows traits not just from fairy tales, but from myth, romance, the novel of chivalry, the picaresque, the gothic novel, mysteries, science fiction, and other genres, blending seemingly incompatible elements within one and the same narrative, such as, for instance, pagan and Christian images, magic wands and laser guns. Maria Nicolajeva, in her study of the Fantasy, contends that fantasy literature was affected by the tremendous changes that the modern world had undergone in terms of the development of science and technology, especially the theory of relativity and quantum physics, achievements in space explorations, alternative theories in mathematics and geometry, new hypotheses about the origins of the universe - all of which changed the very attitude toward natural laws. Therefore, since the basic narrative patterns of contemporary fantasy, such as the multitude of material worlds or nonlinear time, are dependent on the ideas developed within quantum physics, she regards fantasy as a twentieth-century phenomenon, and that it seems to reflect the postmodern human being's split and ambivalent picture of the universe. (139-140)

Gaiman's *American Gods* inverts the traditional idea that people believe in a God because he exists. Instead, he posits, people believe in God; therefore, he exists. Belief creates the thing believed in and the degree of power that the created gods are able to wield is exponentially related to the amount of belief they are

able to generate. Gaiman has said of his fascination for myths that he often asks, “Why we have them. Why we need them. Whether they need us.” (Gaiman, Reflections 79) In the novel, the main protagonist Shadow, a convicted felon, is released from prison a few days early due to his wife’s accidental death. He is approached by the mysterious Mr. Wednesday who claims to be in need of a bodyguard and driver. Shadow quickly realises that Wednesday is a conman, and not only that, he’s not really a man at all. An incarnation of the Norse god Odin, brought to America by immigrants years ago, Wednesday seeks to enlist others of his kind in a final confrontation with the new deities of America - gods of credit card and television and Internet. From migratory prehistoric tribes of humans to Viking settlers, African captives to Irish and German and Middle Eastern immigrants and even some traders and settlers whose visits to America were lost to history, like the ancient Egyptians — all of them had brought their local belief in supernatural spirits, demigods and legends. These gods and legends have been vastly weakened as belief in them has waned and they eke out existences as con men, drifters, funeral home owners, sex workers, and retirees, but these are Wednesday’s allies. They include a pantheon of gods such as Mr. Nancy (Anansi from African mythology), Chernobog (a Slavic deity), Mad Sweeney (a leprechaun), Easter (the pagan goddess), Thoth, Anubis and Bast (from Egyptian mythology) and Kali (the Hindu goddess), among others.

On the surface, the novel seems to be a straightforward battle between the old and the new- the old gods giving way to material culture in a country that has abandoned its old gods and values. The novel however, offers much more; it is an exploration of the heart of American culture through the narrative style that Gaiman employs. The main story-line is interspersed with interludes, which tell us,

... this older story of settlement and displacement and diaspora, sometimes as biography, sometimes as mythic history, but most engagingly through the cultured pen of Mr Ibis, chronicler, funeral director, briefly Shadow's employer-by-proxy, and subsistence-level Egyptian deity now settled in Cairo, Illinois. (Cook np)

Nicolajeva talks about how fantasy novels employ heterotopia to portray the ambivalence and dissonance of their creations. Heterotopia is a concept in human geography elaborated by philosopher Michel Foucault to describe places and spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than immediately meet the eye. In general, a heterotopia is a physical representation or approximation of a utopia, or a parallel space. The “hetero” of the term “heterotopia” emphasizes dissimilarity, dissonance, and ambiguity of the worlds (Nicolajeva 144). As Wednesday and Shadow journey across the continental USA, the novel’s landscape slides back and forth between reality and fantasy. Like all road-trip stories, this is about a search for the heart of a country.

An example of heterotopia is seen in The House on the Rock, the meeting place of the old gods. Located somewhere in Madison County, Illinois, the House is a roadside attraction that features a huge carousel. According to Wednesday, the House was a site of power:

In other countries, over the years, people recognized the places of power. Sometimes it would be a natural formation, sometimes, it would just be a place, that was, somehow, special. ... and so they would build temples, or cathedrals, or erect stone circles... in the USA, people ... respond to it by erecting a gigantic bat-house in some part of the country that

bats have traditionally declined to visit: Roadside attractions. (129-30)

The House on the Rock was visited by many people, but the gods, and Shadow entered through a circuitous route to the carousel, and it is here that the old gods showed their true faces. To Shadow, and the outside world, they had looked like any normal, slightly weathered middle-aged men and women. But inside the carousel, under the power of the House on the Rock, the gods assumed their true faces. Mr. Nancy, for example, looked all at once like an old Black man, and yet he was simultaneously a jewelled spider, a majestic giant with six hands, a young black boy and a tiny spider. Wednesday too revealed himself in all his splendour, revealing his many names and his many avatars. They entered a huge primitive hall which could not geographically have been accommodated by the House, where the gods held their conference. This hall was also revealed to be Valaskjalf, Odin's Hall. As the gods finished their conference, they left the Hall and the Carousel, re-entering the normal world as wizenedmen and women.

After this meeting, the war between the old and the new gods slowly escalate. The new gods, sensing the trust that Wednesday placed in Shadow, shifted their attention to him, as a result of which Wednesday decides to place him in the quiet town of Lakeside. Enroute to Lakeside, as they were driving across North Dakota, Shadow and Wednesday find themselves being pursued by Mr.Town- an incarnation of American's obsessions with government security forces – and his associates. Wednesday instructed Shadow to turn off the roads at a particular spot, and there, they went ‘behind the scenes’, “Like in a theatre or something. I just pulled us out of the audience and now we’re walking about backstage.

It's a shortcut" (374) In this alternate world, Wednesday and Shadow meet Whiskey Jack and Apple Johny, again, incarnations of American obsession with the Wild West and Native Americans. Shadow reveals that he has dreams of being transported into a place in the middle of the desert on a hill made of skulls, inhabited by thunder-birds where he receives cryptic counsel from a half man, half buffalo deity. Whiskey Jack tells Shadow that the thunder-birds are called the Wakinyu, and the buffalo represents the gods of the Native Americans. He adds that not everyone receives counsel from the buffalo, implying that Shadow was unlike 'normal' human beings.

Arriving eventually in Lakeside, Shadow meets many colourful locals including Hinzelmann, an old-timer who spins tall tales, and Chad Mulligan, the workaday local chief of police. Lakeside is tranquil and idyllic but Shadow suspects something is not quite right about the town. While neighbouring communities turn into ghost towns, Lakeside is mysteriously resilient. Disappearances of children occur with unusual frequency. Shadow gradually realizes that the missing children have been abducted by Hinzelmann, who is a kobold. The kobold is a tribal deity of Germanic origin. A baby boy from the tribe is brought up in isolation and in darkness, fed better than anyone in the tribe. Then at the age of five years, the boy is brought out and sacrificed, his remains smoked and dried. It is then wrapped in furs and becomes an icon, representing the luck of the tribe. Hinzelmann had been such an icon, brought into America through the belief of one of those tribals (613) Hinzelmann blessed and protected the town, making it prosper despite the hardships plaguing the rest of the region, in exchange for the town's unwitting sacrifice of their young. He is eventually killed by Chad Mulligan, the town's police chief.

As mentioned before, the novel's narrative spins between Shadow's journey, and the journeys that immigrants from the past have undertaken. Viking explorers had brought Odin and his gods to America long before it was 'discovered', and while the original explorers had all been killed by native dwellers, the gods had remained there, waiting for the arrival of people who would believe in them and bring them back to life. Mr. Ibis had also chronicled in his journals the story of Essie Tregowan, originally from Cornwall, England, who had arrived heavily pregnant in a gallows ship to America, holding in her mind her native belief in 'piksies' and leprechauns. She was taught as a child to put out milk and bread for them during harvest and, in turn, they would bring her good health and strong harvests. Her belief in the piskies is so strong, they come with her to America and she keeps putting out the traditional foods for them. As it turns out, Essie stays well when everyone else gets sick, and her crops stay strong and her farm is prosperous. The novel also touches on the histories of Bilquis, the Queen of Sheba, who now resorts to prostitution to feed off the lusts of men in place of worship, and Easter, the pagan goddess of rebirth, whose name and rituals have been appropriated by Christianity. Interestingly, while Christianity is the predominant religion of Americans, Gaiman did not include the religion in the novel, aside from a remark that Mr. Ibis made that Jesus was doing very well in the country. Gaiman has said that, with regards to Christianity, he felt like he was alluding to something that he could not simply mention in passing and then move on from. It was too big. (Gaiman, "How Dare You")

The novel, however, focuses most heavily on Norse mythology. Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods, is enacted in the final battle between the gods. In Norse mythology, Odin sacrifices himself on the world tree to gain wisdom and knowledge and is

resurrected after three days. When Wednesday is killed by the new gods, Shadow, who had signed a covenant with Wednesday, takes his place on this world tree which is located somewhere near Detroit. Shadow dies and visits the land of the dead, where he is guided by Thoth and judged by Anubis. Easter later brings him back to life. During his time between life and death, Shadow learns that he is Wednesday's son, conceived as part of the deity's plans. In Norse mythology, Ragnarok takes place after the death of Baldur, the son of Odin. Shadow, therefore, as Whiskey Jack had implied, is also a god; only he does not realize it. In the final battle, which takes place in Rock City, Detroit, Shadow arrives and convinces the gods, both old and new, to cease their fighting, because it would only bring about their destruction, with Odin, who had materialized as a ghost, as the only winner. This is symbolic of what America stands for, ultimately- a melting pot of cultures, a vantage point in which the old meets the new, discordantly, sometimes, but nevertheless, a land of diversity.

In the rambling, Keroaucian exploration of small communities and big cities, roadside attractions, diners, banks, Indian reservations, hotels and motels, and long, long stretches of US highway, the interweaving of the past and the present, the heterotopic locations, Gaiman has produced a novel that feels quintessentially American. One can easily see that *American Gods* is a deeply complex novel that considers how all of the diversity present in America has shaped its culture and informed its values.

Retelling myths is important. The act of inspecting them is important. It is not a matter of holding a myth up as a dead thing, desiccated and empty, nor is it a matter of creating New Age self help tomes. Instead we have to understand that even lost and forgotten myths are compost, in which

stories grow. What is important is to tell the stories anew, and to retell the old stories. They are our stories, and they should be told. (Gaiman, Reflections 80)

The novel stresses on the importance of individual stories, and how these stories contribute to the story of a society or a culture. This novel also examines how culture evolves and changes in response to the shift in values from stories, legends, and myths to modern ideals like social media, technology, and money. Gaiman's circuitous plot line weaves us around a story that captures and investigates the soul of America as a country of people who are as diverse as the landscapes of the far corners of Earth from which they come.

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The Voice of a Contemporary Poet from the Abode of the Clouds: Decoding the Mosaic

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The North Eastern Region of India comprises seven states known as the seven sisters namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. It was only recently that Sikkim was included as part of North East India. This region with its special geographical conditions and distinct identity in the midst of cultural diversity has led to the growth of a literature which is unique in character. This body of literature, termed as “North East Writing in English” is an emerging literature in the contemporary scenario of Indian writing in English which, though in the process of growth and development, has been generating great critical interest.

In this context it can be said that the North East poets of India who belong to diverse spaces, cultures, languages and religions have through their writings (though individualistic in approach and style) collectively represented the ethos of the region. Their poems share a common bond of a deep sense of rootedness with the land; the presence of nature in their writing; the predominance of myths, legends and tribal folk stories; and the search for an identity. All this gives a unique flavour to their poetry. Further, much of the distinctiveness of the works of contemporary poets is also the consequence of contemporary events apart from creative insights into the problems that plague the society of today.

This article is a brief reflection on the contemporaneity and reality as found in *The Mosaic*, a collection of poems penned by Iadalang Pygrose. It is an attempt to look at poetry as an expression of life through the medium of the English language by a contemporary poet for whom “the abode of the clouds” is not the Meghalaya that has existed for centuries through its legends, myths, stories, dances, festivals, arts and craft but rather it is the Meghalaya of the ‘now’. It is for this reason that Iadalang prepares her readers on what to expect in this collection of poems whereby she distinctly states her reason for writing in these words:

*Why do I write?
To give my ideas, words
And words-wings,
I want my words to grasp you by the throat,
To make you jump out of your skin,
To shake you out of your slumber
(On being a poet)*

These lines of the poet indicate that her intention is not to write of the overarching presence of nature, myths, legends and folklore but to reflect on the reality of the present day society that will shake us from our so called slumber.

Even while she is writing history her creative energy is seen to fluctuate and oscillate between the ‘then’ and ‘now’. This is evident in her ‘*Tribute to Thomas Jones*’ the ‘Pioneer, Forerunner, Father of the Khasi Alphabet’. This poem is based on a visit to the Scottish Church Cemetery in Kolkata, the burial place of Thomas Jones wherein she brings out the historical facts but relates it to the attitude of the people of contemporary society. In this poem she describes the present day festival madness of Shillong during Christmas season, which is resplendent with cakes, choirs, and

concerts, including the frantic shoppers, who for the latest fashion do not mind to pay more and sets this in parallel contrast with the ‘then’- the past, the Khasi Hills in the memories of Thomas Jones which echoes the overwhelming presence of pristine nature-

*The verdant Khasi Hills, the fresh air of the mountains,
The unforgiving, relentless rain,
Or the wafting of hymns in the countryside
Of your beloved Wales*

This paradox of the contradicting worlds of the ‘then’ and ‘now’ is presented to us not only to reflect on the changes that have taken place as a result of the globalisation process but it also is the reason why this particular Christmas day the poet chooses to make this trip with her children to the cemetery of Thomas Jones. However in doing so, she also makes us ponder on the more important lines in this very same poem which echoes the attitude of the contemporary Khasi society towards Thomas Jones evident from the fact that, ‘*Occasionally a few Khasis visit Pastor Jones’ attitude.*’

This attitude prevalent amongst the Khasi folk of the present day has sifted down to the future generation symbolically represented by her ‘bewildered children’ who wondered about the necessity of this Kolkata visit for there was nothing of their interest:

*No malls to look at, no fancy cars,
Nothing particularly interesting,*

The poet’s aim in describing this personal experience is to make the present generation revisit history, one which has already gathered the dust of years, perhaps forgotten, to remain worthy of remembrance only in the so called memory of once upon a time.

What is worth mentioning here is that the poet's retelling of this history is not merely to narrate the past but to actually reflect on the importance of this past and to realize the value of this past in the present context.

Historically, the advent of Christianity is also an important event, for the missionaries like Thomas Jones in Meghalaya have been instrumental in giving the Hill tribes their script as well as educating them. In fact Christianity is the most enduring feature of British Colonization in the region and particularly Meghalaya. Therefore in many of her poems Iadalang examines Christianity and shows how in contemporary society, even Christianity could not withstand the disabling effects of corruption as evident from her poem *Reminiscence I* where she states:

*Life is complicated now
Even Christianity has not been spared
Choose your denomination from the hundred available
locally.
Or better still, start your own
There's room for everyone.*

These lines are a satire on the contemporary Khasi Christian society where different denominations of Christianity now flourish like business houses. Here, the poet makes use of the element of humour to attack the Christians who have turned religion and God into a profitable business.

In her poems, Iadalang, like the other North east poets also portrays how the various forces have corrupted the innocence that has been a feature of the people in the region. These hills and the people of the abode of the clouds have never remained the same in the face of modernity and it is for this reason that in the poem *My City* she exclaims:

*I am haunted by a people incorrigible
Bartering their identity for thirty pieces of silver.*

This corruption of innocence of the people is a result of materialism and it is this very greed that has transformed the city of Shillong to what it is now- a grotesque and monstrous concrete jungle.

In her quest for identity (the common strain found in literature of the North East) the poet Iadalang refers to the nature of colonialism experienced by the indigenous community of Meghalaya. At the very outset in her poem entitled “*They said long ago*”, she explains the concept of ‘Exploitative Colonialism’ , where she points to the historical colonial exploitation of the British as evident in the lines:

*They said long ago ’ this is the place ’
And planted neat bungalows with prim hedges
Over which dusky faces peered
At the Mem and Sahib
Sipping their evening tea*

Except for this one mention, she does not delve into the issue of the colonial exploitation suggestive that her intention is to merely record the historical event which throws light on why she and many writers of the North East write in the English language. Poignantly voiced here by Iadalang is the description of the ‘Settler Colonialism’ fear that is present amongst the locals of the ‘now’ -post-independent India where the ‘barbed wires and high walls’ have replaced the ‘prim hedges’. Through the following lines in this same poem, she echoes the motto of the hill tribe -one fearful of extinction against the backdrop of a nation of one billion- which state:

They said long ago ’ let us settle and do business here,

*Warm hospitable' people and
Endless avenues to lead to prosperity
Today, they say apprehensive stares have replaced the
smiles
And they claim to have diagnosed the disease
Fear Psychosis alas!
But wouldn't you suffer from this malady
If you belonged to a people who comprise
A grain of rice
In a bagful of India
A grain that could simply slither away
And be forgotten
Because they did not know it existed in the first place.*

These lines in fact reflect on the formation of the complex and dynamic nature of post-colonial identity. The present contemporary society and the issues most often raised by the pressure groups of the state such as the issues of influx are a resultant factor of this settler colonialism fear. This issue is prevalent only Meghalaya but it is an issue of many indigenous communities of the region who position themselves against the dominant cultures which they attempt to counter. It also is a subtle expression of the feelings of the indigenous people of Meghalaya and the North Eastern region in general, who feel that they are not given due importance by 'mainland India' and hence most often forgotten and misinterpreted. It is issues such as these that writers like Iadalang voice out, seek to understand and counter through their works.

As a poet and a woman, Iadalang in this collection of poems, seeks to understand the female psyche which forms the very basis of the female identity. Therefore in many of her poems and in her reference to women she has explored the issues of femininity but

with a difference as she stresses on the idea of individualism. In her poem “*The Rape of the Lock*” she alludes to the Biblical story of Samson and Delilah questioning the historical type casting of Delilah (the woman) as a ‘temptress’. In this poem she accepts the woman as one who is a bearer of life and in Delilah’s case a temptress one who entrapped the great Samson in her love to ultimately betray him and be the reason for his downfall. However in doing so the poet does not agree with this typecasting as while referring to Delilah, she also reflects on her individuality, her inner feelings as a woman for the man she claims to have loved evident in the lines which say:

*Did she regret the rape of the lock?
Some residue of affection spoke silently perhaps
Or was she simply being Patriotic?*

This individuality of the woman is something that she points out to and it depicts her refusal to typecast Delilah. The question here that may arise is whether the poet is questioning what the Bible states? The answer to this question is ‘No’, the poet does not negate what the Bible states but is simply exploring the silence of the Bible- the personal feelings of Delilah for Samson, for it is the personal feelings that make her an individual.

Her understanding of the matrilineal woman and the complexities and conflicting situations prevalent in the matrilineal Khasi contemporary society also finds expression in the poem “*They said long ago*” which reads:

*They said long ago 'these are the people
Shall we study their matrilineal system' they said.
And scholars smelling fresh hunting grounds came
To churn out PhD's and scholastic reputation
And we were astounded at our own difference*

*Today, a few good men cry ‘Men’s lib;
And women busy themselves
With a new branch of Women’s Commission
To raise the status of Women, They say;
And the sociologist is confounded,
As he pretends to understand
Nevertheless
To impress
He adds a new chapter ‘Emerging new trends’*

Here, while pointing to the matrilineal set up of the Khasis which had attracted many an expert to study the status of women she reveals that the Khasi women themselves are quite oblivious of this unique position that they enjoy in comparison to the other women. However, using the element of humour she poignantly reveals the throes of transition of the Khasi society in the urban context of social change wherein new concepts of gender identity and social roles are emerging not just for women but men also. This deep seated reality throws light on the new dimensions of the present Khasi matrilineal society wherein control and power have shifted from the maternal to the paternal males with the increase in so called nuclear family set ups of today’s modern society. This change is perhaps the reason why the few perhaps traditional men cry out for ‘*Men’s lib*’. On the other hand and on a more serious note her mention of the setting up of a ‘*Women’s Commission*’ for empowerment of the women in matrilineal Meghalaya voices out the truth which is that in spite of the significant changes in women’s involvement and participation in the larger social life the condition and position of women has not essentially changed till date. There are ‘*emerging new trends*’ as the poet herself claims but the truth is women’s empowerment especially in the political arena needs to be taken into account.

In another poem, “Ode to Malala” Iadalang reverts to history yet again when refers to the seventeen-year-old Malala Yousafzai but not with the intention of advocating feminism. In this poem she states that Malalas’ heroic struggle captured the worlds’ attention as she was “fighting for all of us”. It may be interpreted in a broader context, that this was not a struggle of women’s right to education or the struggle of a woman for her kind. This is clearly made evident by the poet in this very poem when she terms this entire struggle of Malala as a ‘tragedy’. The poet further explains that this heroic struggle is classed a tragedy as we (implying both men and women) “do not know it” or rather to be more explicit do not understand it as we live in our secure world concerned with our own selves and unaware of the issues that affect society at large. It seems that Iadalang in this poem tries to inspire her readers that all of us, male and female whether children, young or old, can contribute to improving our own situations like Malala, but to do so, “we would have to live again a hundred times”. In other words the poet here is stating that if we look at Malala only as a feminist then we would be viewing her as a small person because this young seventeen year old girl stood up, spoke for and struggled for much more than just the mere issue of womens’ rights. The role that the poet persona adopts in this poem, is that of a ‘gynocritic’ one who is (re)valuing women’s experience, (re)reading the (re)presentations of the conscious and the unconscious and more importantly (re)cognising the socio-cultural, economic and political conditions in the contemporary society.

Troubled and tormented by the contemporary scene, the sensitive heart of Iadalang also expresses the pain and the anguish by articulating what happens around her. In the poem ‘*Change*’, she describe the effects of the rush of globalisation which has transformed her hills, the Scotland of the East with all its pine and

‘cool, clear sparkling waters’ into a concrete jungle with the ‘drone of machinery’ which leaves her longing for that past causing her to ‘shut her eyes and savour every bit of it’ while the bitter picture of reality makes her ‘turn sadly away’. This juxtaposition of the ‘then’ and ‘now’ is a recurrent theme in her poetry. The two poems *Reminiscence I* which depicts the present contemporary time echoes the complications of life ‘now’ which is set in contrast to *Reminiscence II* where the poet continually makes us recall the past and “the simplicity of it all”. These two poems beautifully and clearly describe these two paradoxical worlds of the ‘then’ and ‘now’.

In her reflection of the ‘now’ she also draws attention to the contemporary issues pertaining to education where she says:

*School children totter under over-sized school bags
Training to be porters on the side
Back then we learnt more with a lot less*

These lines clearly reflect the rat race that the contemporary society has forced us to join but where we do not seem to learn anything at all. She also refers to the ‘signboards’ the emblem of the globalised economy of today which depict the so called ‘creativity’ herein implying to the distortion of the English language as a result of technological development especially in the context of the social media. The fact that this is noticed by the poet is because this ‘creativity’ is an eye sore to many who like Iadalang teach English Literature. This is the reason why in this poem entitled ‘*Can We Walk A Straight Line*’ the poet cum teacher painfully states:

*I love the creativity of the signboards above the shops
Not after four anthologies of poetry*

*Could I ever come up with words of import
Such as these*

She goes a step further and even ridicules the sophisticated modern Buffet of the contemporary society in the poem “*The Buffet*”, where she compares the waiting in line, which is the normal phenomenon witnessed in many social gatherings in Meghalaya to waiting ‘*for alms*’. Her suggestions to stack our plates with a ‘*bewildering assortment*’, and the reference to the guests who continue ‘*chewing mindlessly*’ fully conscious of the people around while the ‘*appetite dies somewhere along the way*’ is a shared experience often heard in indistinct whispers of the people of this generation.

Iadalang’s poems are not merely a reflection of the changing times or her yearning for the past- the good old days of yore but they express her deep concern of the future of what will her abode of the clouds be when she is old. This is a distinctive trait that sets her apart from many of the contemporary poets. This concern for the future is voiced in the poem ‘*My City*’, where she says:

*I am haunted by a thousand terrors
Of what my City will be-when I am old,
When my children inherit it, or what's left of it.*

In conclusion, it can be stated that it becomes pertinent to consider the socio-historical-cultural conditions within which Iadalang lives and writes to understand the personal-cultural experiences and sensibility which she brings in her writing making her a contemporary poet. However what sets Iadalang and this collection apart from other contemporary poets of Meghalaya is that while setting the two paradoxical worlds of the ‘then’ and ‘now’, she shows her haunting concern for the future. This collection is the

voice of a contemporary poet from the abode of the clouds where the public and private voices of these hills mingle into rhapsody to voice out on subject matters that can be identified with and situations that form a part of our modern existence.

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Everyday Life in an Old Age Home in Assam

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The so called urban society in modern times has thrown open a plethora of socio-psychological problems. One emerging aspect of this is the need to have Old Age Homes which was not a familiar practice in Assam until recent times. Nuclear families, working couples, lack of security and also the lack of trustworthy domestic help, busy schedules have all accentuated the problem of the old and aged rendering them vulnerable to insecurity, lack of adequate and proper care in their homes as well as outside. Man is a social being and therefore is influenced by the nature of his social ties. A person's definition of self and everyday life emerges from the history of his experiences with various others. 'Symbolic Interactionism', a term coined by Herbert Blumer, is essentially a study of the interaction between the individual's internal thoughts and emotions and his or her social behaviour. He also views people as being active and striving adjusting themselves to their situations. During old age a person tends to feel isolated and deserted either due to the death of the spouse and non participation in his daily life by his offspring either due to lack of time or due to migration to other places due to professional and personal reasons. According to Ben Highmore, 'this everyday life' is haunted by implicit 'others', who supposedly live outside the ordinary, the everyday. Since everyday life stands for the activities, practices, rituals which become part of our routine bound life and is therefore never questioned.

The everydayness in the everyday life is the reflection of the belief or ideology, in a broader sense, of the dominant section of the society. In that structure of everyday life the voices of the ‘other’ or from the periphery cannot identify themselves in the quotidian practices of the everyday life. The terms ageing and old age are often used synonymously. According to Birren and Renner, “Ageing refers to the regular changes that occur in mature and genetically representative organisms living under representative environmental conditions as they advance in chronological age” (1977)¹. Butler and Lewis view old age as a “multiple, determined experience that depends on an intricate balance of the physical, emotional and the social forces anyone of which can upset or involve others” (1977).² Strehler (1976) proposes four criteria of ageing that it is universal, progressive, intrinsic to the organism and it is degenerative. Thus the aged have to cope with physical, psychological as well as social changes that transform their lives. It is subjective since it largely depends on an individual’s personality and socio-economic background, life events etc (Birren 1960). Herbert Blumer believes that social interaction takes place between people and not between social roles. According to him “the needs of the participants are to interpret and handle what confronts them-such as a topic of conversation or a problem-andnot give expression to their roles.”³ In order to understand how everyday life is arranged for particular people one needs to understand how the society in which they live is itself structured and organized.

In India the National Policy for Older Persons, 1999, has adopted the age of 60 years for the purpose of classifying a person as old. Thus this paper attempts to trace the everyday life of such a group of people who have been classified as old and who reside in an Old Age Home in Guwahati, Assam and their interactions with the outside world. The present study extends previous research

that has shown that since the ancient times there has been a shifting of roles within the family when the head of the household who is an aged member renounces all worldly affairs and hands over the responsibilities of the household to younger members of the household who are capable of shouldering the responsibility. Though the head of the household is still the old patriarch, his responsibilities lessen and he basically is the one who receives care and service within the household. The “Disengagement Theory” given by Cumming and Henry (1961) proposes that ageing involves mutual withdrawal or disengagement between the elderly and the society.⁴ The ageing patriarch usually transfers familial responsibilities to the younger members and social interaction also reduces to a great extent. But the displacement of the elderly from their own homes to the Old Age Home is not a natural transition. They are compelled by unfavorable circumstances to shift from their position of power and authority in the household to a life at the Home under the care of the in charge of the Home, a power vested by the authorities. The study aims to find whether this transition was fraught with difficulties and gauge the level of tolerance and adaptability of the individuals to the new situation. By virtue of living in a Home for the aged they have already been marginalised and segregated from the rest of the society. Desolation and loneliness along with advancing age and increasing vulnerability compounds the problematic everyday life of these senior citizens. The phenomena of the old age home is a recent one in Assam and the Home in which this study was conducted was established only eleven years back. Homes for the destitute have also been catering to the needs of people who have been abandoned or ill treated by their own family members but the scene there can be dismal and depressing. In contrast, the old age homes are better equipped to give a life of dignity and respect to the residents and they have to bear their own maintenance or their sons and daughters have to pay for their maintenance.

A visit to an Old Age Home, hereinafter called Home, was carried out with the aim to conduct a focus group interview in an informal setting. The Home has 45 residents in the age group of sixty and eighty-nine. Only people above the age of sixty can reside in the Home and those who were not drawing pension were maintained by their offspring mostly the daughters. Here it is pertinent to mention that the provision introduced in Sec.125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in 1973 has helped a few of the elderly citizens residing there to claim maintenance who otherwise were incapable of looking after themselves. The Act cast a duty upon children to maintain their parents. Notwithstanding this provision, the Government of India enacted another law, specifically for parents and senior citizens, wherein children as well as heirs to property of a parent or senior citizen are duty bound to provide for their maintenance. This new Act is titled The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007. Most of them were drawing pension since they were in service and the women were drawing family pension and so did not have to depend on anyone for their upkeep. Keeping in view the age of the participants and their health factor, utmost care was taken to ensure that they do not feel awkward while facing questions and the researcher's aim of merely studying their everyday life was mentioned at the outset. The interview relied more on group discussion than on directed questions to generate data. Since the respondents were a bit apprehensive and at first reluctant to share private information a discussion was thought to be more appropriate to break the "spiral of silence". It is explained thus: "It refers to publicly visible and audible expressions of opinion as well as public behaviour regarding value laden issues. Its power derives from our social nature, from the willingness of society to threaten isolation in reaction to forbidden opinions and behaviours, and from the individual's fear of isolation.

This fear causes individuals to register continually any changes in society's approval by means of a "quasi-statistical sense and to voice agreement upon increase in approval and to remain silent upon decrease, thus contributing to further decline in the popularity of the originally held opinion".

Krueger (1994) suggested that focus groups are more likely to uncover major themes than subtle differences⁵. Two homogeneous groups, one comprising of seven women and the other comprising of six men aged roughly between sixty to eighty years, participated in the discussion once a comfortable climate was created. Attempt was made at first to build a rapport with the participants, allaying all apprehensions, and helping the group to get acquainted with the researcher. The communication expected from the participants was spelled out and they were encouraged to disclose on conditions of anonymity. The primary focus was on the issues regarding their wellness and the activities or chores expected from them at the Home. The group participated in the questions and answers, though one or two men were not articulate enough during certain period. As a whole the women were much more participative than the men. The men seemed a bit distant and aloof at times. To explore their way of life they were encouraged to speak about their daily routine and how is it different from the one they were accustomed to earlier. The cultural expectations of the residents after the transition from a home of their own to this Old Age Home were discussed. The topics were broad based and discussions varied from religion and social interactions to their food habits. The recreational facilities provided to them and their participation in the daily affairs threw light on some interesting insight. Since the topic of research was very sensitive as well as traumatic, especially for those who were still not being able to adjust to the new environment, the researcher had to ease the situation many

times. Some people were not accurate reporters about their own experiences and their reports were selected perceptively and sifted. Direct observation method had to be opted for in such cases.

A few discursive themes emerged in the participants' constructions of their everyday life. The participants were asked the cause of leaving their homesand the responses varied from person to person. The female respondents were literate with majority of them having completed their high school leaving certificate examinations. None of the respondents was a working woman.

- Death of a spouse and subsequent neglect: It was seen that four participants were widowsand were lonely and neglected after the death of the spouse.Discord among the family members especially between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law was another main cause. One respondent narrated how her only child migrated to the United States after leaving her in the Home. All of them receive Family Pension and do not depend on their offspring for maintenance.
- Widowed and childless: There was a widow in the group who had inherited a piece of eksonia patta land but being single and prone to illness due to advancing age felt insecureand was compelled to seek shelter at the Home. She came to the Home on her own accord.
- Spinster: There were two spinsters who had transferred their property to a kin and due to lack of security and inadequate help in living their daily life had to seek refuge in the Home. Access to technology eludes them and carrying out mundane chores like paying bills, fetching the grocery became cumbersome for them.

Almost all the male respondents had been in service though the highest level of education for most was up to Graduation level with one or two exceptions.

- Unmarried males: The male respondents faced loneliness and lacked adequate care. advancing age and debility, insecurity of life and property have made them take shelter in the Home. They received pension and three respondents were maintained by their daughters.
- Death of a spouse and subsequent neglect: As in the case of the female respondents, the male respondents too faced loneliness and lack of responsibilities and were put in the Home to spend the rest of their lives.
- Childless widower: Loneliness, lack of proper and adequate care and vulnerability to threats are some of the reasons a respondent has preferred the sanctuary of the Home.

According to David Inglis, each person works within cultural conditions which are, multiple and overlap each other. At another level, he examines how being part of a social and other sorts of social belonging and affiliation can have an effect on how people carry on their everyday affairs. Max Weber (cited in Turner, 1996:5) had defined culture as ‘a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance’. Inglis further says that humans can be seen as having no direct access to ‘reality’. To borrow the term ‘life-world’ coined by the phenomenological philosopher Edmund Husserl, the everyday circumstances in which we live may be called the ‘life-world’. “By it Husserl (1970:380–381) meant ‘the always taken-for-granted...the world that is constantly pre-given...the world of which we are all conscious in life as the world of us all’.⁶

The residents of the Home are displaced from their homes and they strive to adjust to their new surroundings and new life. But according to Husserl, the individual in order to function properly has to have a certain sense of stability and certainty as to the world around them. The residents, it was observed, welcomed the routine life that they led in the Home. Their morning began with a cup of tea at 8.00am which was followed by breakfast. After breakfast the residents usually relaxed in the open with the daily newspaper and exchanged views. This was also the time when visitors could meet them between 10am and 12pm. This is followed by lunch and a period of rest. Between 3pm and 5pm the residents had their afternoon tea and went for evening walks. The routine life devoid of ‘surprises’ and unprecedented happenings and most importantly any kind of emotional and physical distress, also afforded them a certain sense of psychological security, to the effect that the world around him or her is relatively predictable and understandable and is not just totally chaotic (Giddens, 1991)⁷.

As stated earlier, the displacement of the elderly from their own homes to the Old Age Home is not a natural transition. They had been forced out of their life-world, where all one’s routine expectations about life crumble. Their routine and everyday life were upset and challenged and their way of thinking too was disrupted and they found it extremely traumatic and harrowing. The next topic discussed was living as a community in the Home. They were asked about their everyday life in the Home. From living in a home built by them, most of the respondents had adjusted to the sheltered life they were leading in a room at the Home. The space that they enjoyed earlier had shrunken several folds. Here at the home, they were entitled to a bed in a room shared by usually three residents. They can take a whole room with a refrigerator and television but it was expensive. There was a prayer hall called

the naamghar where the residents performed naamprasanga every evening. It was observed that the participants looked forward to this activity, especially the women, when they discussed animatedly about their role in carrying out their religious duties every evening.

Social constructionism derives from influential currents of sociological thought stemming from the work of theorists like Weber, Simmel and Meade. Constructionist approaches treat human beings as active, more or less conscious, agents engaged in the creation of a shared social reality. ‘Community’ can be regarded as such a fact, having no independent existence outside the capacity of human beings to conceptualize it.). When interpreting their social world, and their position within it, people are compelled to engage in various kinds of theorizing, and to create a range of explanatory social categories; constructionism undermines the tendency to regard such categories as part of nature.⁸ Their social interaction was limited to the visitors who interacted with them and came to meet them, mostly media persons and people who invited them for religious programmes. Accordingly, conveyance is arranged for them to ferry them to and fro. During Bihu and Puja, the two major festivals, the residents would be taken to the pandals in and around the city. The reading room with almost 500 books provided another facility for entertainment as well as serious reading. Though there were some widows among the focus group who followed the vegetarian food habits, they shared the same dining table with others and did not strictly follow rituals like cooking in separate utensils or eating on the floor which otherwise would have been expected of them in the society. It was especially observed that for the female respondents though the customs and rituals formed an integral part of their lives it did not actually rule them. Rigidity gave way to flexibility as they became a member of the Home. This was a very important change in their lives. The shift from a family life has also

marked a significant change in their beliefs and customs. The participants expressed their happiness in their present position, in fact, many of them claimed to be happier than they were earlier. Discord at home and property disputes emerged as one of the primary reasons for their unhappiness. Another major reason was the lack of adequate home care givers and the need for company. With both spouses working and children at school there was hardly any support for the single elderly. Among the focus group were spinsters and bachelors who found everyday life daunting with increasing age. Among the male respondents was an eighty-nine year old man who preferred to live in the Home after the death of his spouse rather than live with his daughters who were all working in responsible positions outside their homes.

The results of the present study suggest that the participants were deeply traumatized by the actions of their loved ones. A sense of abandonment haunted them. Their everyday life was limited to their interactions with the care takers, other residents and visitors who cared to talk and spend some moments with them. But the Home provided them with security and company and mention may be made about the Article of the European Senior Citizens' Union on "Senior citizens in society" and about the European Commission's campaign "2003 – European Year of People with Disabilities" which draws close connections between the quality of life being elderly and "the feeling of being important and needed". People – especially when they are getting older – need a challenge which should be neither overstraining nor unchallenging⁹. The findings of the present study reflect on this very need of the participants to be occupied in some activity or the other. Activities such as watching television or reading the newspaper are passive which can lead to discussions only. It was observed that the focus group comprising of the male respondents were mostly

silent and distant. The researcher has observed that the main reason is the sudden feeling of facing a life devoid of any role. From a position as the head of the family they have been reduced to a ‘role-less’ status¹⁰. The disappearance of the joint family system, a steady decline in traditional economic activities, change in value systems, increasing use of technology in everyday life have greatly reduced the role of the elderly in the society. This status can be connected to the overwhelming feeling of desolation and a sense of ennui.

It is in recognition of this Role Theory¹¹ that people are more and more concerned with the idea of providing a better quality life to its senior citizens. The study shows that the focus group comprising of women seemed to have reconciled to the idea of living in the Home. All the women in the group had been homemakers except for one lady who had been a school teacher. Thus it can be seen from observation that the women were traditionally under the care of their spouse or a male relative all their lives and then at the death of the spouse they were cared for by their sons and daughters till they were shifted to the Home. Thus, the women had to keep on adjusting to a different set of relations every time and so adjusting to life in a Home came easily to them in comparison to the male participants. A very important role played by the male and female participants, that of nurturing their grandchildren, was missed by them. They had found greater social acceptance while playing the role of a grandparent. Age or health factors did not hinder them in performing their duties towards their grandchildren. But now since those children can look after themselves or stay alone after coming back from school the need of the grandfather or grandmother was no longer felt. After coming to the Home, they have been cut off from all relations and it has significantly contributed to the generation of unhappiness and discontent among the people. The everyday

life of the residents being restricted to interacting with only people of their age group constricts their life to a great extent.

Erving Goffman in the *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* analyses the role of human behaviour in a theatrical setting. He looks at the ways in which individuals in their lives present themselves and their activities to others; in particular, he focuses on impression management, the ways in which the individual guides and controls the impressions others form of him or her.¹² The participants are similarly playing their roles as members of the home, following the rules laid down by the Home. Michel de Certeau writes in *The Annals of Everyday Life*: "Everyday life is what we are given every day (or what is willed to us), what presses us, even oppresses us, because there does exist an oppression of the present". He talks about childhood memories, pleasures and other senses but here the researcher felt that memories were a key cause of unhappiness of the participants. They perform all the tasks in their Spartan surroundings. They have forged amicable relations with each other yet the ties of family where they had to play multiple roles of a spouse, father or mother, grandparent, uncle or aunt were missed. In terms of conventional economic theory formation of economic households is the only step that matters, since households rather than individuals are the units of analysis. Some people set up a household on their own, others move out of the parental home to move in with partners (whether through marriage or not) while others move into various forms of communal household. The last group consists not only of the idealistic communes that received much attention in the 1960s and 1970s, but also such arrangements as groups of unrelated students sharing a house and paying a significant proportion of costs in common.¹³ Another significant aspect which can be assumed to be a cause of unhappiness is the fact that almost all the male participants

are retired persons. They had been working in government, semi-government or public sector undertakings and it was an integral part of their identity. According to the *Economic Psychology of Everyday Life*: "To retire is to lose a large part of that identity". It is also to lose what is often one's most significant social group. In other words, retirement is likely to have many of the same deleterious psychological effects as other kinds of job loss, such as redundancy or bankruptcy.

Jahoda (1982) and others have argued that job loss through redundancy can give rise to a sequence of stages that mimic those following a bereavement, and in the worst case, like bereavement, can trigger off severe depression.¹⁴ The present study extends our understanding that loss of identity which follows the loss of job due to superannuation may be one of the major causes of a feeling of being redundant. As discussed earlier, the participants felt socially accepted while playing the role of a grandparent involved in such tasks as caring for them, spending time with them, performing tasks like fetching them from school, taking them for tutorials and listening to music, playing games, interacting with them and becoming their confidantes. Thus it was observed from the discussion that they felt a sense of fulfillment when they were talking about their earlier role of being a physical and emotional support for their grandchildren. Therefore it is not at all surprising that they feel forlorn and isolated in their present given circumstances. Another factor that emerged in the discussion was what can be described as bereavement due to death of a spouse. Experiencing discontinuity in social engagement, as far as one's marital status over the life cycle, brings with it rather severe changes in everyday life. Becoming widowed or divorced means that the everyday routines previously supported by a spouse's efforts are disrupted. The psychological impact of becoming widowed is likely to be more negative than

divorce, however, since changes in the quality of the supportive relationship that is disrupted are probably more drastic. Desolation is more nearly a “chosen” status for the divorced than it is for the widowed. Because of this, the socio-psychological effects of desolation should be more pronounced among the widowed than the divorced.¹⁵ The sense of security in old age was also discussed and it was observed that they seemed aware of the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956, which lays down obligations on a person to maintain his or her aged or infirm parents as well as the Criminal Code of Procedure, Section 125 which makes it obligatory on the part of the son or daughter to maintain their parents without any means. The National Policy on Older Persons, 1999, too recognises the need to provide financial security in old age on priority basis. Thus, the findings reflect a troubling aspect that of the feeling of being abandoned which is all pervasive in the discussions with both the groups.

While the male respondents appeared frail and dispirited and reacted quietly, resigning themselves to their fate having reconciled to their sense of loss of status, role in society, loss of contact with friends and neighbours, they however were still not bitter about life though they appeared listless at times. The female respondents were more interactive and poured out their grief and pent up emotions during the course of the interview. However, it was observed that they still did not lose hope of seeing their near and dear ones as was amply clear when this researcher walked into the sitting room and all of them looked on eagerly to see some semblance of their kin. They were not at all filled with negativity as was hypothesised having adjusted well to their surroundings. The reasons may be the home fulfilled the need of companionship, security and above all freed them of the hurt and abuse, both physical and mental, that they had received at the hands of their adult offspring. The study

found that almost all the residents were keen to be engaged in some activity to keep themselves busy. The United Nations, in 1991, has outlined a set of five principles of- independence, participation, care, fulfilment and dignity as guidelines for ushering in an aged society. These principles stresses on the fact that the old persons should be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter home. They should have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of the society. They should also be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical and mental abuse. They should also be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, disability or other status and be valued independently of their economic contribution. This implies that merely adding life to years is not the main concern but “adding life to years” should be the aim.

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Contestations of Neoliberalism in *One Night @ The Call Center.*

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Many of the popular Indian fiction in English and postcolonial literary texts that have achieved worldwide fame have registered the damaging social and political effects of globalization. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* have represented India's globalizing economic transformation. A contemporary of Bhagat, such as Adiga have expressed suitably provocative reflections on post liberalization India through his novels such as *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*. These novels critique a range of socio-economic problems of twenty-first century urban India and the spread of neoliberal values amongst the rising middle class of urban India. The novels function both as a critique of pervasive neoliberal ethic whilst also highlighting the capacity of the novel as an emergent site of socio-political resistance.

In a similar manner, Alex Tickell's review of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* as a post-liberalization fiction reflects the impact of economic reform and the impact of global corporate forces on her rural South Indian setting. He views the novel as a social critique of economic reforms through its presentation of the account of the before and after arrival of satellite television and package tourism in the Kerala backwaters. Tickell acutely observes that *The God of Small Things* registers the changes such as environmental degradation of Kerala's rivers as the local economy

changes with increasing tourism in the region refashioning the local culture as commodity. Thus, Roy's novel can be viewed as an early critique of liberalization's local effects.

Vikas Swarup is another contemporary of Bhagat's whose first book *Q&A* was published in the year 2005. The success of his book skyrocketed when it was made into a British film by Danny Boyle with the title *Slumdog Millionaire* in the year 2008. Swarup confronts the horrors of modern India seeking status as a global economic power with indignation or comic satire. Swarup presents in his novel many scenes from the life of the poor and the particular hard lives they lead amidst enormous wealth.

While these contemporary texts have critiqued the homogenization or the perceived vulgarities of post-liberalization commercialism in the society, Bhagat's novels are not as confrontational as they may appear on the surface although his novels have been read as social satire by few scholars. His novels are situated in the aspirational spaces of India's middle class such as the elite IIT colleges and management schools, call-centres, BPO industries and corporate offices. Much of his success as a writer lies in his ability to tap directly into the concerns and cultural expectations of a post-liberalization generation and his writing caters to the interest of the rising middle class, for whom liberalization has brought benefits and opportunities.

In Bhagat's novels, the fictional representation of contemporary Indian youths under the impact of globalization can be mapped through a critique of some of the neoliberal ideology and consumerist culture that has become prevalent amongst the new generation Indian while at the same time it celebrates and portrays the opportunity that neoliberal globalization brings for them.

The term ‘neoliberalism’ has become a significant theoretical concept in academics to discuss the social, political and cultural developments of our times especially in social sciences and globalization studies. ‘Neoliberalism’ is a political and economic philosophy specifically associated with the processes of economic liberalization and globalization of the free market, witnessed in our contemporary world. It is within these contexts that Bhagat’s novels depict the local realities of a new, changing, and globalized India under the forces of economic globalization.

According to David Harvey, the age of contemporary globalization, also known as neoliberal globalization, can be said to have roughly begun around the 1978-80 when several nations adopted new monetary policy of free market and open trade. Deng Xiaoping’s liberalization of a communist-ruled economy in China in 1978 was an important step that brought about a huge economic transformation in the country. Similarly Margaret Thatcher’s economic policies for Britain in 1979 that curbed trade union power and promoted privatization, free trade and fewer regulations on businesses and Ronald Reagan’s economic reforms for United States in the 1980s that promoted free market were important events that propelled the spread of “a particular doctrine that went under the name of ‘neoliberalism’”(Harvey 2). Harvey goes on to explain that the impact of neoliberalism since the 1970s has spread all over the globe and have been embraced by different countries and financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) that regulate global finance and trade. “Neoliberalism, in short, has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse.” (Harvey 3)

India too introduced economic liberalization in 1991 under the then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh following a more neoliberal policy of reform. This new policy opened new vistas

and India began to be looked up as a place of fertile market. Foreign goods flooded the market and with the close of the twentieth century, the IT boom took over and in early twentieth century the call centre culture mushroomed across different metropolitan cities. Bhagat's *One Night @ The Call Center* captures this call centre culture and portray the material effects of neoliberal globalization on the lives of the new generation Indian youth.

One of the more noticeable impacts of globalization has been the outsourcing of jobs to low-wage countries such as India. *One Night @ The Call Center* portrays such a capitalist workplace like the call centres which has provided employment to a large number of Indian youths in metropolitan cities. Multinational companies started setting up call centres in India in the late 1990s and these call centres are established mainly for cost savings. From the late 1990s to 2001 the call centre industry had shown tremendous growth. Furthermore the United States is the largest export market for the IT-BPO industry according to a report by *The Hindu*. The call centre industry in India came about in large part because of the infrastructure changes that reduced the charges of making/receiving international phone calls through the use of information technology and satellite communication.

Commenting on the rise of call centres and Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) in the early nineties, Shashi Tharoor writes,

To many, the call center has become the symbol of India's rapidly globalizing economy. While traditional India sleeps, a dynamic population of highly skilled, articulate professionals works through the night, functioning on U.S. time under made-up American aliases. They feign familiarity with a culture and climate they've never experienced, earn salaries that their elders couldn't have imagined (but still a

fraction of what an American would make), and enjoy a lifestyle that's a cocktail of premature affluence and ersatz Westernization. (Tharoor 78)

According to Bhagat, it appears that transnational workplaces such as these call centres have contributed to the proliferation of neoliberal ideology consisting of materialistic and consumerist culture propagated by western countries. The narrative of *One Night* unfolds over the course of one particular night at work using flashbacks to reveal the background stories of the protagonists. This novel explores the lives of six call centre employees in Gurgaon, Haryana who encounters various challenges in their personal as well as professional lives. Through the characters of Shyam, Priyanka, Esha, Vroom, Radhika and Military Uncle, Bhagat paints a realistic picture of the working conditions and atmosphere of call centres in India which has become one of the biggest employment organization in the metropolitan cities of India today.

The changes that globalization has brought about in the lives of the emerging youth is evident in this novel. These changes are reflected in food habits, dress, cosmetics and ornaments, dance and music, modes of communication, leisure and recreation. The lifestyle of these call centre employees in this novel includes drinking, dancing and partying at 32 milestone, dating in places like Mocha Café with its coloured Arabian lights and in Pizza Hut at Sahara Mall, going to the night club Bed for a break from work dressed in western clothes and are also well versed with technology. Ellen Turner in her analysis of the novel observes that “The characters in these novels hold the West up as an ideal, the symbol of a lifestyle to aspire to, demonstrated by the fact that they adopt the outward accoutrements of what they perceive Western culture to be, namely clothing, partying, consumption, pre-marital sex, etc.” (Turner 3)

Through the voice of Varun better known as Vroom, Bhagat appears to critique the call centres that have attracted thousands of Indian youths and the kind of consumerist culture and imitation of the western culture that it has given rise to. In one of the episodes in the novel when he gives vent to his feelings, he says,

... I am angry. Because every day, I see some of the world's strongest and smartest people in my country. I see all the potential, yet it is all getting wasted. An entire generation up all night, providing crutches for the white morons to run their lives. And then big companies come and convince us with their advertising to value crap we don't need, do jobs we hate so that we can buy stuff – junk food, coloured fizzy water, dumbass credit cards and overpriced shoes. They call it youth culture. (226)

The character of Varun Malhotra is commonly known as “Vroom” by his friends and is described by Priyanka as living only for jeans, phones, pizzas, bikes and a new girlfriend every three months. He is nicknamed ‘Vroom’ due to his love for fast cars and bikes. He is bitter about having to work in a call centre catering to the queries and demands of the American clients over the phones yet feels unable to leave it because of the money it provides him to enjoy the lifestyle that he has become accustomed to. Inspite of his resentment at having to work at night “while the world snores away”, he says, “... I need the money. My friends have a lifestyle I have to keep up with. Money lets me come to places like this” (186) and this lifestyle he aspires to keep up with ironically is greatly influenced by the western/American culture. He confesses, “I like pizza. Damn well I do. I like jeans, mobiles and pizzas. I earn, I eat, I buy shit and I die. That is all the fuck there is to Vroom. It is all bullshit man,” (191). Through the character of Vroom, we see a severe critique of materialistic culture that is plaguing modern India.

The major cities in the country catering to the IT boom have become an attraction for the new generation Indian youths as it gives them the opportunity to earn money which has increased the purchasing power and the country has become a dumping ground of foreign goods. This has given birth to materialism in the society which in turn also creates an enormous pressure on the emerging youth to secure a good paying job. Also, since neoliberalism promotes the growth of capital through global trade, some scholars believe that it results in mercantile economic exploitation thus identifying it to be a new form of colonialism termed as “neocolonialism”. Tyson explains, “This neocolonialism, as it’s called, exploits the cheap labour available in developing countries, often at the expense of those countries’ own struggling businesses, cultural traditions, and ecological well-being” (Tyson 425). This in turn has resulted in cultural imperialism. Tyson explains,

Cultural imperialism, a direct result of economic domination, consists of the “takeover” of one culture by another: the food, clothing, customs, recreation, and values of the economically dominant culture increasingly replace those of the economically vulnerable culture until the latter appears to be a kind of imitation of the former. American cultural imperialism has been one of the most pervasive forms of this phenomenon, as we see American fashions, movies, music, sports, fast food, and consumerism squeeze out indigenous cultural traditions all over the world. (Tyson 423)

This cultural imperialism which births mimicry of American culture and consumerist lifestyle amongst the call centre workers as highlighted in the novel is seen to be the material effects of neoliberal globalization. Sociologists like Jonathan Murphy also see the call-centre work as fostering a homogenous middle-class value system that echoes “western consumption-oriented lifestyles”

(qtd. in Southmayd 11). Indeed, Murphy's interviews and surveys with Indian call-centre workers reveal that they have substantially more consumer goods than the wider Indian youth population. In his book titled *Globalization and Identity*, another sociologist Yogendra Singh comments,

The globalization of economy and the decentralization of production of goods and services by the multinational corporations, have totally altered for these youth the project of their future and the perception of their 'life-world'. The 'success theme' has become universal and the successful performers are the youth who are perceived to have imbibed the western lifestyle to the maximum extent. (Singh 119)

It has been affirmed by many scholars that consumerism and the consumption of global commodities are becoming extremely important in defining the cultural identity of the new generation urban Indian youth and that status distinctions based on ascribed characteristics like caste are giving way to those based on education, occupation, and income. SalimLakha points out,

Consumerism and the consumption of global commodities are important in defining the cultural identity of the middle class... contemporary Indian middle-class identity, particularly that of the influential new-rich elements, is largely constructed through lifestyle practices and media representations centred on the consumption of expensive global commodities. (Lakha 264)

The narrative of *One Night* is replete with references that conjure up images of contemporary consumerist culture. Few examples are "The words 'my wife' sizzled my insides the way they fry French fries at McDonald's" (155), "He clicked his pen

shut with a swagger, as proud as da Vinci finishing the Mona Lisa” (48), “‘Show us the picture!’ Esha screamed, as if Priyanka was going to show her Brad Pitt naked or something.” (56), “We had gone to Pizza Hut, and pizzas have never tasted as good ever since” (159). Besides, the characters themselves are conspicuous consumers as Esha likes to wear expensive designer ‘Calvin Klein’ perfume, Shyam and Priyanka enjoy dating in fancy cafes and malls and Vroom is portrayed as addicted to bikes, phones, pizzas and the internet.

However, despite the criticism directed against call centres and the kind of consumerism it is seen to breed, it can be argued that Bhagat’s novels with their images of plush coffee shops, malls, call centres, pubs, fast food joints, internet cafes, cell phones, discos, jeans, rock/pop music, and soft drink etc not only reflect the abundance of global consumer goods amongst the contemporary youth culture but also create a desire for them. In the words of noted cultural studies scholar Pramod Nayar, “Consumer culture’s aim is to use images, signs and symbolic goods which summon up dreams, desires and fantasies,” (Nayar xii). In a similar vein, Theodor Adorno and Horkheimer in *The Culture Industry: Entertainment as Mass Deception*, argued that the content of popular culture is produced by processes that are similar to factory production. The cultural goods found in magazines, radio, records, and films effectively lull the masses into passive docile acceptance of a system that could be oppressing them economically. They suggest that popular culture more than just being a tool of false consciousness creates false ‘needs’ that can be fulfilled by mass produced commodities, that contributes to modern man’s alienation. Within this context, Bhagat’s novel can be seen as promoting such kind of consumer culture while criticizing it at the same time. Anindita Chatterjee in her review of Bhagat’s novels writes,

The image of modern India that gets advertised and showcased through Bhagat's novel is one that is globalised, connected by social networks, one that believes in cultivating a metro sexual image of flat abs, fair face and anorexic bodies. Bhagat deftly plays with language, creating a sense of collective consciousness and we enter a world of consumerism where personality means hardly anything more than a dazzling white teeth and freedom from body odour and emotions. (Chatterjee 74)

New urban spaces of work and consumption such as coffee shops, cafes and malls are to be seen featured heavily in the novel. These images as well as the desire for upward class mobility through jobs in the modern corporate economy can trigger within the young people the need to become well versed in manners and mores of an urban, affluent social stratum. It can be argued that the novels upholds certain behavioural markers suited to the city and its new culture, effacing the traces of rural, regional and class origin when young people are required to work in "global" workplaces such as call centres thereby contributing to the dissemination of neoliberal ideology driven by markets.

Accent training and renaming of Indian names to western ones are other interesting practices followed in the call centre industries which the novel highlights and critiques. Call centres teach their workers "accent neutralization" before employees begin their work. They are given pronunciation classes and are taught to eliminate the regional influence so that the trainees become more comprehensible to native speakers of English. In the novel Shyam is asked by his manager Bakshi to assist in accent training due to shortage of teachers to which he claims, "I hate accent training anyway. The American accent is so confusing" (37), which reveals

that such training, are not very pleasant for the workers. Since neoliberalism hinges strongly on disciplining of populations into ideal subjects for the market regime, processes such as accent training and renaming process that call centre workers go takes on a new meaning and can be seen as modes of mass control. In the novel Shyam Mehra is known as Sam Marcy at the workplace, Varun Malhotra as Victor Mel, Radhika as Regina and Esha Singh as Eliza Singer.

Foucault points out in *The Birth of Biopolitics* that neoliberal ideology “has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market” (Foucault 133). By training the workers to sound more western and by changing their names to that of western ones, they are made to be ideal subjects or resources for the outsourcing market. The practice of renaming and accent neutralization is seen by scholars such as Stephanie Southmayd as leading to erosion of national identity of the workers and a form of “*political neutralization*” (Stonemayd 10).

Amidst such interpretation that can be inferred from the novel, we see that the call centre is projected in the novel as an important place for the characters as it enables them to be financially independent and provides an opportunity for upward mobility. Before joining the call centre, Shyam used to work in an advertising agency but quit because of low salary. He decided to join the call centre job to avoid being labeled as a black sheep amidst cousins who were on their way to becoming doctors or engineers. He admits, “I saved myself by joining Connexions, as with money in your wallet the world gives you some respect and lets you breathe” (15). This

emphasis on the importance of being financially independent also makes the “individual compliant to solely concentrate on earning money, since to lose one’s job, to be without income is to lose one’s identity” (Davies 9). Military Uncle worked in the call centre to supplement his meager pension as army personnel. Radhika juggles her call centre job and household duties in order to help her husband save some money and towards the end of the novel being financially independent allows her to eventually leave her cheating husband. The call centre job also enables Esha to earn a stable income while looking for modeling assignments and it helps Priyanka save some money so that she can start a nursery school which is her dream. As Esha states in the novel,

Call Centers are useful to us too . . . You know how hard it is to make fifteen grand a month outside. And here we are, sitting in an air-conditioned office, talking on the phone, collecting our pay and going home. And it is the same for hundreds and thousands of young people. (186)

The importance of being able to earn sufficient income is evident in the lives of these characters. With the ability to make money comes a sense of independence which is very important for the modern Indian youth. It leaves them free to make choices and not be tied down by the traditional ways and means of living handed down to them by their parents. Therefore call centers provide them the means to achieve financial independence for these upcoming urban youth and gives them the opportunity for upward mobility in life. Stephanie Stonehewer Southmayd in her assessment of the novel comments that,

With its themes of upward mobility and the achievement of the “American dream,” capitalism inevitably informs the contents of the pulp novel, offering the reader a sense of

optimism that he or she may rise from his or her current economic situation and a utopian happy ending ... (Southmayd 6)

The achievement of this upward mobility becomes possible for the characters in the novel through call centres which enables them to earn an income not easily matched by other services. While call centre jobs might not be seen as the most prestigious sectors of the software industry, it still enables someone with modestly low educational capital to earn a well paid job and enjoy the benefits and status of working within the outsourcing sector. From this perspective, the story showcases the possibility of social mobility through access to the new forms of labour enabled by neoliberal economic policy. It is no wonder then that the workers in the novel are shown to be anxious and worried when they hear rumours of the call centre closing down. It eventually becomes clear that if the call centre closes, more than one third of the workers at Connexion will lose their job and thus becomes imperative for Varun and his friends to step in to save the call centre. By the end of the novel when the six friends have analyzed their personal problems and gained a new understanding and perspective with a bit of help from 'God', the call centre no longer appears to be such a bad place to work afterall and it is only the bad bosses like Bakshi that are critiqued as Varun admits to his coworkers, "Idiots have managed this place, because of which we have to suffer tonight." (225) Infact earlier in the novel when Vroom makes a complaint for the call centre, Shyam admonishes him and says, "It's just Bakshi. You are worked up about him and now you are blaming it on the call center," (186)

Thus, set against the context of neoliberal India, Bhagat's target of criticism is not so much global capitalism itself, but rather bad bosses represented by Bakshi who are running the call centres

and in extension those that are running the government as Vroom states, “Screw Bakshi, he is not the only bad boss around. C’mon the whole world is being run by a bad, stupid-evil boss” (186) and then goes on to critique the Indian government commenting upon how “the government doesn’t believe in doing any real work, so they allow these BPOs to be opened and think they have taken care of the youth” (187). Through this statement Bhagat continues his critique against the state and its failure to provide opportunities for the youths and therefore leaves it to the globalized market to do so.

What is also interesting to note is how the Connexion call centre is saved from being closed down by Varun and friends by an underhanded means called “Operation Yankee Fear” (227). Varun advises the call centre workers that if they are able to invoke fear amongst their Americans clients by making them believe that their country is being attacked by terrorists through a computer virus and convince them that the only way out for them was to keep calling the Connexion call centre with their status, they would be able to increase the call volumes and save the call centre from being closed down which they followed through successfully. It no longer matters that an underhanded method is employed to save the call centre as long as the purpose is served and also as Southmayd acutely observes

At the end of the novel Bhagat no longer seems to have qualms about globalized labour; he merely wants India to dominate the global markets. When we last see Shyam and Vroom in the novel, they are trying to find international clients for their web design company, and it is only a matter of time, Bhagat hints, before they will reign over their own multinational firm, striking a blow for Indian nationalism and market domination. (Southmayd 15)

As Shyam regains his lost confidence and Vroom his lost convictions, they become ready to participate in the globalized market rather than forge any kind of resistance to it and even displaying the required skills to play in the neoliberal market. One of the most significant skills of the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject is the ingenuity and the ability to exploit adverse situations. The unique manipulative and survival skills of the entrepreneur whom Carla Freeman calls “neoliberalism’s quintessential actor” involve “ingenuity”, “self-invention” and most importantly, “adaptation” (Freeman 261). This points to a culture where the market determines the norms of existence and success, and a subject’s decision is constructed in and by the market. It can be assumed that adorned with such survival skills, Shyam and Vroom will soon find success in their new business venture. The novel thus can be read as a subtle framing of the political ethics of neoliberalism, beyond either celebratory acceptance or direct critique.

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Comics From North-East India: A Select Study

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A majority of tribal communities in North-Eastern India, especially in the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, were an oral community. Community knowledge, social rules and laws, indigenous faith and rituals were all handed by the elders of the community by word of mouth through songs, rituals, prayers, folktales and myths. The coming of the British, especially the Christian missionaries had a profound impact not only on the politics of the region but also on the social and cultural life of the people. The movement towards a religious conversion of the tribal communities saw the emergence of a written script that was used by the Missionaries to propagate religion, education and literacy. Thus, the tribal communities moved from an oral to a written form of communication.

While this was and still is seen as a progressive step towards the preservation of the tribal identity, knowledge and traditions in the face of a globalized world, yet it was and still is fraught with many complications. The complications occur when one considers the voice of the written word; the perspective of the text and the hidden or blatant agenda that the written word tended to have in context of the religious aim that it sought to achieve.

In the past, the word remained spoken for the tribal communities. The visual also had a significant place in tribal community. In many tribal communities, the visual is a representation, a symbol rather than an independent work of colours, texture and form. The visuals had a purpose. These visual symbols appear in the attire, totems, tattoos, weapons, tools, religious implements and monoliths. At times, they are complex and intricate and at other times, they are simple and straightforward. Yet the main element of ‘tribal’ visual carries with it an inherent meaning that is embedded in the unconscious of the member of the tribe.

Thus, the visual carries a meaning to the member of the tribe which is connected to the tribe that the tribal belongs to. It is to be understood in context of the community from which it arises and cannot stand independent of the knowledge that it carries. This burden of meaning that the visual carries allows for a critical expression of the visual and at the same time limits its interpretations to one bound by the beliefs, customs, society and knowledge from which it originates. This significance of the symbol has found its way to the present consciousness of art, the comic book and illustrations in the North-East.

This paper attempts a brief thematic and stylistic study of a few selected visual narratives/ comics that have been found by the authors in hard copy as well as in soft copy which have made their presence felt on social media and the internet too. The paper has been divided into three sections- two parts on the theme relating to comics and folktales and the other comics and social commentary with the styles used in the mentioned comics as the last section of the study.

COMIC BOOKS AND FOLKTALES

Folktales and folklore along with folksongs and traditional rites and rituals among the many communities of the country and of

North East India remain an essential medium through which the communities' cultural identity, traditions and beliefs are propagated and preserved. These elements of the communities social life are also a means through which the moral teachings and social do and don't are handed down to the next generation. In the age of globalization the folktales remain both moral guides to the members of the community and also a symbol of their identity, culture and tradition. Hence the depiction of folktales through comic books is one of many endeavors to impart the communities' knowledge to the future generation and to present important social and moral values to them.

Folktales are a medium through which a community's knowledge, cultural identity, traditions, customs, and moral code are propagated and handed down to the future generations. Before the coming of the written word, folktales were handed down by word of mouth, they were based on an oral tradition which entrusted the narrator to disseminate the communities knowledge and moral codes through word of mouth. This took place in the form of stories, songs and chants. The written word replaced the voice of the narrator. However the narrator was not replaced and the voice of the narrator remained in the written word. This means that the folktales were and are still told in the third person perspective with the narrator as an omniscient presence throughout the story. As with most folktales the story starts with various forms of the generic introduction "A long time ago..", "When the earth was young, "In the beginning..." and so on.

With the role of the narrator as being essential to the oral foundation of the folktale, this role is reintroduced in the written word and in this context the comic book format. The role of the narrator is very important as it adheres to the role of the storyteller in the indigenous communities especially those with a tradition of

oral literature. Hence in the comics mentioned above the story is told through the voice and perspective of the narrator as would have been done by the storyteller in times immemorial.

In Meghalaya, the comic book art form is very young; starting approximately around the 1980s and from that period until the present date, very few works have emerged. A number of folktales from Meghalaya have been rendered into the comic book format. One of the most prominent folktales from Meghalaya centered on a stag referred to as ‘U SierLapalang’ (the stag from Lapalang) has been presented into the comic book form. *U SierLapalang*, a Khasi folktale retold by Kynpham Sing Nongynrih with art by Maya Ramasay and published Katha was brought out in 2011. Another important folktale from Meghalaya centered around a mythical snake known as ‘Thlen’ was brought out by Kynpham Sing Nongynrih in his adaptation “The Legend of U Thlen” which was presented into a graphic story that was published in ‘The Obliterary Journal’ Vol 2 in 2014. “The Legend of U SierLapalang”, another adaptation the Khasi folktale by Joshua Rynjah and Alienleaf Studio was brought out in 2014.

In Manipur, comic books on folktales include *KabuiKeioibai*, *Moramba* and many other published by NE Brother Entertainment as part of the Nanao’s Series of Folktales, Children’s Lore, Game Sons and Lullabies from the state. Mizoram has a rich and vibrant comic book culture which has produced many note worthy books on folklore such as *Rairahtea*, *Khualtungamtawna*, *Lalruanga*, etc.,

The folktale “U SierLapalang” from Meghalaya has a message about the dangers of pride, the downfall of those who disobey their elders and the love of a mother for her child. The folktale “KabuiKeioibai”, from Manipur also has a moral about the dangers of pride and the downfall of those who become drunk with power.

The folktale in the comic books thus provides an essential moral lesson to its reader's, making them aware of the moral and social code of the community portrayed in the comic book.

Apart from the dissemination of community morals and social codes, comic books on folktales also serve as a documentation of the indigenous culture and tradition. The comic book format for folktales also provides a visual representation of the community which is not possible in the written word format. This representation is seen in terms of the attire of the members of the community, the design and architecture of huts and villages, various tools and implements and even the flora and fauna of the area inhabited by the community; all of which is visually represented in the comic book.

The comic book retelling of the folktale “*KabuiKeioibai*” of the same name, from Manipur contains important chants and prayers, which are used by traditional healers of the community and also the various implements and processes and plants used in traditional healing practices. “*U SierLapalang*” from Meghalaya has a reference to ‘Mei Ramew’ or Mother Earth, which essentially reflects how members of the community look upon their environment.

Most comic books from Mizoram are in the Mizo language while a few are published in English for educational purposes. While the comic books on folktales from Meghalaya and Manipur are in English, yet they retain elements of the indigenous language in the exclamations, onomatopoeias, chants, local terms and names. In the *KabuiKeioiba*, while the narration is in English, the chants and exclamations are in the indigenous Meitei language while using the Roman or Latin script. Joshua Rynjah and Alienleaf Studio also adopt the same method in the comic book *The Legend of U SierLapalang*, where the narration and dialogue are in English while

important terms such as “Mei Ramew”, exclamations and onomatopoeias are in the Khasi language using the Roman script.

While some representation is authentic and true to reality other visual representations are not and they focus more on the story rather than the authentic setting. This discrepancy in visual representation can be seen in *U SierLapalang*, published by Katha books where the attire and even physical features of the people represented in the comic book does not match with the community represented, in this case the Khasi community. This same discrepancy in representation and reality is seen in “The Legend of U Thlen” published in ‘The Obliterary Journal’ Vol 2 in 2014. The realism expected from comic books on folktales is in keeping with the relation that such folktales have with the communities’ culture and tradition. Through its association with the folktales of the North East the comic book form is revered because of its bond with the communities’ identity, culture and tradition.

COMICS AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Comic books have adapted themselves harmoniously to the rendering of ancient tales and lores from the North-East and they have maintained the important elements of traditional story telling in terms of the narration and the moral lesson contained in the folktale. However, comics have also adapted themselves to the contemporary society and the various complex issues that are present in society.

In Meghalaya cartoons, sketches and illustrations which commented on social and political issues in the country, the state and among the Khasi community had emerged a long time back in the Khasi vernacular media and the most prominent of these is the section “U ThylliejKhlemShyeng” in the Khasi newspaper *Rupang*

established in 1988. It may be noted that the cartoons in “U ThylliejKhlemShyieng” first emerged as hand drawn caricatures which accentuated the prominent features of the characters drawn in the cartoons. This was unique because around the same time the hand drawn comics were producing more realistic characters and settings. However, in the current editions of *Rupang* there is a shift to a more digital presentation of the characters and the characters have become more generic.

Social Media has also provided a platform for Khasi writers and artists alike and one example is that of the popular Facebook page “U Mawsawa” (<https://www.facebook.com/UMawsawa/>) by TreiborMawlong that features his art, illustrations and graphic narratives. TreiborMawlong’s graphic narratives reflect on the tradition and culture of the Khasi community and also on the conflict between modernity and tradition in the Khasi society; the impact that ‘development’, ‘urbanisation’ has on the Khasi community. Some of his prominent works include “Hungry in Mawphlang” and “U NongdieDur/ The Image Seller – A graphic essay”. Another presence on Facebook is the page managed by “Mangkara Comics”(<https://www.facebook.com/mangkaracomics/>) an upcoming comic book publishing house based in Shillong. It features illustrations both as form of social commentary and humour.

Comics in particular and the press in general face a very delicate and sometimes hazardous role when reporting and commenting on issues in conflict zones such as North-East India. There have been many cases of threats to the freedom of the press and the freedom of art in conflict zones and this has been observed especially in the state of Manipur. Never the less it has not dampedened the spirit of the artists and journalist who are based in these conflict zones. Prominent Manipuri cartoonists include Stay Hijam and

ManasMaisnam. Their works are featured in newspapers in Manipur both in print and online. Prominent newspapers which have featured their works are kanglaonline, e-pao and Manipur Times. All of the comics, illustrations by Manipuri cartoonists are in English except for names of places, festivals and so on.

It is significant that in conflict zones like North-East India the place of art through the medium of comics and cartoons enables the artists and the people in general to articulate their views and opinions on what is going on around them. Issues are as complex and sensitive as influx and immigration both within and without, diverse ethnic and regional conflicts, insurgency, extortion, and controversial like AFSPA, police atrocities and many others. While it may be said that the written word enables a thorough discussion of complex issues prevalent in society yet it is the visual art, the comic, the cartoon and the illustration that is able to sensitively summarize the sentiments of the people and also inculcate in people a unique perspective and understanding of a complex issue which may have not been given to them.

STYLE IN COMICS

As stated in the previous sections the attention to authentic representation of various aspects of a communities life allows for a differentiation of art and style when it comes to comic books that are based on folktales and folklore. It maybe controversial to allot a certain type of style to an entire group of artists simply because they come from a particular state and region. However, what can be attempted is to observe and describe certain qualities that have emerged with the works that have been selected. The connection of comics to the cultural and traditions of a community gives it a significance and a somber effect which in turn influences the type of style that is adopted to depict the folktales. In the comics based

on folktales that have emerged from Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram one can observe an attempt at realism in form and structure and an attempt at realistically and authentically portraying the community, the location, attire of the people and so on.

While the works maintain a realistic representation when it comes to portraying the different elements of the community, there are differences in the works in terms of paneling and structuring. *The Legend of U SierLapalang* uses a four panel page with panels being sub divided into more sub sections. Furthermore there is a manipulation of panels to give more focus to the illustrations within.

A popular format in the Mizo and Khasi comics, which emerged during this era, is the *Commando Comics* format, i.e. the distinctive $7 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inch page with each page divided horizontally into two panels. The *Commando Comics* were black and white with only the cover in colour. All of the Khasi Comics were hand drawn and in black and white and most of them follow the $7 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inch page format with two panels in each page. Realist art and story was an important factor in the Khasi Comics of the time and that is relevant even to this day. It can be assumed that the realist art of the *Commando Comics* influenced the writers and artists of the time. However with the comics from Mizoram such as *Rairahtea*, the size of the comic book is the 7x5 inch book but the paneling within follows the more intricate and complex Japanese Manga style panelling adopted with the western left to right reading pattern.

The study has limited itself only to the three states of Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram. The limitation is a result of there being no possible way for the authors to obtain comics from the other states of the North-East whilst still being aware that particularly in the states of Tripura, Sikkim and Assam the practice

of producing comic books is an ongoing process especially in the vernaculars. A joint effort is foreseen in the future to further make this brief study more elaborate and inclusive with the intention of having a few works translated into English. The sections that the paper has limited itself to are the thematic and stylistic practices that have been a common adaptation of the different artists from the region. The style being imitative in nature is re-invented in the different states to suit the necessity of their own culture and identity which makes the visual art more prominent in such regions where the oral story telling tradition has been an ongoing process for ages.

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Awakening the Moral Implications Through Heroes in Mizo folktales

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As our world has become considerably smaller through faster network travels, cultural juxtaposing, meeting and mixing are also increased to a higher level. This, in turn, enables a broader analysis and comprehension of narratives across different literatures of the world. The Mizo community, for instance, has a rich culture with abundant tales which, with the new prospects, invite closer scrutiny in parallel with distinct contemporary discourses. Knowledge about one's ethnic roots contributes to the shaping of an individual and his affiliation to the rest of the world or rather the global culture in which there is a blend of different cultures and mutual respect for one another. With roots in the oral tradition, folktales have constantly been evolving. Over the centuries, folk and fairy tales continue to carry their basic storyline as they evolve while also incorporating specific cultural elements. They are impressions of reality and therefore, they provide a vehicle for sharing caution, fears, and values, while also entertaining with fantasy. Jack Zipes opines:

In essence, the meaning of the fairy tales can only be fully grasped if the magic spell is broken and if the politics and utopian impulse of the narratives are related to the socio-historical forces which distinguished them. (Zipes, *The Great Fairy*, 17)

Often shadowed by their undisruptive exterior, folk and fairy tales' darkness behind the shadows are often overlooked or not

realized because of the predominance of entertaining and appealingly fantastic elements. They provide more amusement and delight rather than instill fear. Therefore, the intrinsic values they carry beneath their seemingly innocent layers tend to be treated as perhaps implausible. In accordance to this, this paper attempts to study the significance of the heroes and the significant cultural values they imbibe, in selected Mizo folktales. It shall also attempt to indicate the cultural values imparted through the projection of the darker elements.

An important function of folk and fairy tale is to preserve and promote cultural and personal values, to impart both placid as well as violent societal aspects, but they are done so entertainingly so that they would endure. “Like the sugar coating on a bitter pill, the fictitious plot of a moral story guarantees its delivery.” (Ashliman, 4) Lisa Hunt opines that the dark settings in folk and fairy tales are the very essence of moral instructions:

Fairy tales often employ these settings as metaphors of the shadow. They are the wild, untamed symbols of our own landscapes, where creative thinking and intrinsic energies reside and beg to be released. It is here where we meet frog princes, wise old men, a golden goose, a ravenous wolf, imposing giants, spirit messengers and all manner of creatures that help us shed the constraints of a rational mind. It is here where we let go and become self-aware. It is under the dappling light that we recognize our full potentials and find our way through the tangle of brush. Through the darkness of paths unknown, we have the possibility of seeing the light. (Hunt, 1)

Folk and fairy tales capture the meaning of morality through vivid depictions of the struggles between good and evil where characters must make difficult choices between right and wrong, or where heroes and villains contest the very fate of imaginary

worlds. These stories supply the imagination with important symbolic information about the world and appropriate responses to its inhabitants. Alasdair MacIntyre sums this up comprehensively:

It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance..., that children learn or mislearn what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stammerers in their actions as in their words (MacIntyre, 4)

Mizo tales also appealingly depict character and virtue while also depicting the wits and craftiness of the characters as they fight for their very own assertion. In these tales, virtue glimmers even as wickedness and deception are exposed. These stories enable readers to face the undistorted truth about themselves while compelling them to consider what kind of people they yearn to be. In the same manner, the collectors' deliberate moral insertion into these tales points to an attempt to promote these tales as paths to valuable lessons. Nuchhungi, claims, in a preface to her collection *Serkawn Graded Reader* that this book has served to mould better men in the Mizo society:

Kumkha leh chen kha Mizoram naupangten zirlaibu pakhatah an lo hmang tawh a, kha lehkhabu lo zirve tawhte tan kan rama mi pawimawhte leh kohhrana mi pawimawh chherchhuahna hmanraw te takte a lo ni ve reng a ni. (Nuchhungi, iii)

(For many years, children in Mizoram have used this as a textbook in the curriculum; for them, this book has served to mould great agents as well as church leaders in the society)

Thus, these Mizo folktales function as cautionary tales which make an example of their protagonists, the very figures with which children identify, rather than of their adult villains, and thus they become true horror stories that teach values.⁵

Some Mizo folktales strive to stimulate self-discipline in the face of the more mysterious and unwholesome aspects of maturity. The core of many of these tales is their sharp-edged examination of the eternal conflict between children who must inevitably grow up and establish their independence and their parental caretakers who often appear to lack the capacity for recognizing the line between giving their children too much independence and not giving them enough. *Ngaiteii*" is a Mizo story that cautions one to be obedient and patient. The tale depicts the story of a young girl who is abducted by her father's spirit because she does not heed the warnings of her grandmother. The story denotes that *Ngaiteii* lives alone with her grandmother and one day, while looking for yams in the jungle, she grows thirsty. Her grandmother goes down to a gorge several times to fetch water for her. Finally, when she grows tired she asks her to go on her own with a warning that she must not say "*E Khai*" (Oh!) when she sees the gorge. But as *Ngaiteii* looks down into the gorge, she is fascinated by its depth and dark ambiance. She forgets the caution and exclaims "*E Khai*". The creek is not only dark and mysterious, but more importantly it is teeming with temptation. It so happened that in this very gorge resides her dead father's spirit and immediately, on hearing *Ngaiteii*'s voice, seizes her. This illustrates the consequences of disregarding caution when one faces adversity. Often, parents and grandparents are depicted to be full of wisdom. They signify awareness accrued with better experiences to detect and avert dangers. In this tale, the dark creek feature as symbolic representation of the frightening world of adulthood and the father's

spirit as vicious men in society who are ready to exploit and pounce upon the innocence of children. When the grandmother learns of the misfortune, she begs the spirit to return her and he did, with the condition that he would come back for her in a few days. When both grandmother and daughter resists, Ngaiteii's father counteracts by flooding their villages. In the end, Ngaiteii has to be sacrificed much to the grief of the villagers. This tale is, thus, intent on sending a moral message and it does so by making the heroine responsible for the violence to which she is subjected.

Marina Warner spoke a simple but profound truth when she said that “a story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way.... You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate.”(Warner, 3) Mizo tales capture the meaning of morality through vivid depictions of struggles between good and evil where characters must make difficult choices between right and wrong, or heroes and villains contest the very fate of imaginary worlds. The tales provide didacticism and supply the imagination with important symbolic information about the shape of our world and appropriate responses to its inhabitants.”Mauruangi” is yet another striking Mizo tale embodying the element of unjust oppression as well as triumphant reward. It delivers the basic theme of the persecuted heroine who emerges victorious, regardless of the circumstances. The story focuses upon a girl whose attributes are unrecognized and she unexpectedly achieves recognition or success after a period of obscurity and neglect.

Despite being constantly mistreated by a heartless father and a wicked stepmother, Mauruangi still grows up into a woman who possesses virtue and a sense of intrinsic worth. Some readers and listeners might regard such tales as gruesome because there is blatant depiction of cruelty meted out to

orphans. However, such a depiction is apt since it essentializes a closer drawing of the correlation between the imaginary world and the real world. The moral imagination is roused through a depiction of violence in the form of parent-child conflict, murder, abuse both in physical and verbal as well condemnation and disregard by society. Mauruangi's adulterous father pushes her mother into a river and kills her and then, marries another woman. Her stepmother assigns her to a number of heavy chore while her very own daughter, Bingtaii, rests and sleeps and eats as she pleases.

Her stepmother admonished Mauruangi and beat her up severely. However, Mauruangi made no response and would tend to the jhum meticulously every day.(Pachuau, 74)

Mauruangi silently suffers these abuses and has to oblige for she has no other alternatives. She must somehow learn to fit in and adjust in a world that viciously mistreats her:

Fairy tales begin with conflict because we all begin our lives with conflict. We are all misfit for the world, and somehow we must fit in, fit in with other people, and thus we must invent or find the means through communication to satisfy as well as resolve conflicting desires and instincts. (Zipes, *The Irresistible*, 2)

The extreme despair that Mauruangi endures drives her to seek solace in her mother's magical transformations, first into a tree and then into a catfish. However, folktales subvert the normal execution of life by turning the impossible to possible. Extraordinarily, animals talk and inanimate objects are rendered alive. Help comes in the most atypical ways and yet these are never conveyed as far-fetched. They are the very means that suggest that providence appears to the reticent and subjugated.

A journey through the dark of the woods is a motif common to fairy tales: young heroes set off through the perilous forest in order to reach their destiny, or they find themselves abandoned there, cast off and left for dead. The road is long and treacherous, prowled by wolves, ghosts, and wizards — but helpers also appear along the way, good fairies and animal guides, often cloaked in unlikely disguises. The hero's task is to tell friend from foe, and to keep walking steadily onward. (Windling, 1)

Mauruangi too, must leave home and go to the river that flows in the forest to find her support. When Mauruangi goes to the river that drowns her mother to grieve, her mother who has turned into a giant catfish comes up to her and asks her about her condition. On hearing her plight, her mother feeds her with rice and meat and tells her to return whenever she is hungry.

Mauruangi's journey is a metaphoric journey of life that initially does not seem to treat her right but ultimately mends the path that leads her to a happy ending. Though ill treated and starved, Mauruangi defies all odds and grows up alongside Bingtaii. She works diligently as ordered by her stepmother, while Bingtaii sits idle all day. When her labour in the jhum impresses *vailalpa*, a Rajah from a foreign land, both the stepmother and Bingtaii thwarts her impending happiness. The chief decides to marry Mauruangi but Bingtaii, with the help of her mother, takes her place. Mauruangi is left once again dejected and alone even as the chief takes off with Bingtaii to his land. In the end, Mauruangi must struggle for her rightful place and her very own survival when she has to fight with Bingtaii in a duel. The theme of a lovely, sweet natured, virtuous girl harassed by a wicked step mother seems to be of universal interest. Bingtaii and the wicked stepmother embody brutality but despite their eagerness to disrupt Mauruangi's life, their attempts

prove futile. By putting her to endless tasks and replacing her as a bride to the king, they expect to foil her fortune but justice prevails and their ultimate downfall in the end reveals the fact that good triumphs over evil. Mauruangi may be seen as representing her western counterparts, the fairy tale heroines like Cinderella and Snow White. Like them, she also finds escape from her harsh life in marriage to a “prince” because this elevates her status and rescues her from the clutches of her cruel family. These instances introduce moral principles and virtues as instruments to achieving victory in life. Thus, it focuses upon the struggle between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. As the tale unfolds, there are important insights that can be noted. Misfortunes and complicated circumstances can befall upon good-natured people, in spite of their unquestioning virtue as is seen in the case of Mauruangi’s plight. She is an orphan and her stepfamily is unloving. Instead of returning evil for evil, Mauruangi chooses to remain kind and hardworking. Her work ethics teaches one that tasks, while unpleasant, can be approached in a constructive manner. She is forced to live in poverty while those around her enjoy comforts. Thus, this tale teaches about enjoying simple pleasures, about endurance, and about the importance of maintaining an optimistic attitude and holding onto hope.

In both the oral and the written form, folktales have always assumed the status of didactic tales. According to Zipes, “Fairy tales were first told by gifted storytellers and were based on rituals intended to endow meaning to the daily lives of members of a tribe” (Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth*, 10). Folktales project fantastic other worlds, but they also pay close attention to real moral “laws” of character and virtue. By portraying wonderful and frightening worlds in which ugly beasts are transformed into princes and evil persons are turned to stones and good persons back to flesh, Mizo tales

remind readers and listeners of moral truths. The notion that folk and fairy tales stimulate and instruct the moral imagination of the young is, of course, not new. The Victorians certainly held to that notion when they brought the fairy tale into the nursery. Bruno Bettelheim gives this an important impetus when he states:

It hardly requires emphasis at this moment in our history that children need a moral education... that teaches not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful.... The child finds this kind of meaning through fairy tales. (Bettelheim, 1)

“Kawrdumbela” is another folktale that depicts the outcome of covetousness, conceit and greed. Kawrdumbela is a hideous man who is resented by all in his village. When he secures the chief’s daughter as his wife with the help of a witch, Vazunteii, his new bride detests him outright. However, fortune smiles on him as he catches a magical fish that tells him the secret to becoming handsome if he frees it. The fish suggests that he should scrub himself with the smoothest stone in the river and as he does, he becomes a fair, attractive and handsome figure much to the delight of his wife. When the chief learns of this news, he immediately is filled with a sense of envy. He decides that he would also do the same in order to be better than Kawrdumbela. He goes down to the river, catches the fish and demands that he be given the same secret. The fish, however, is a different magical fish that offers secrets to becoming ugly rather than handsome. It advises him to choose the roughest stone from the river banks and to bathe and scrub using this stone. When he does as directed, he turns utterly loathsome.

After a while the fish said, “Go and bathe and scrub yourself with a rough stone. After he had done as he was instructed, he realized that his body was bruised and battered. He rushed home

in great consternation and everyone who saw him fled in fear.
(Pachuau, 20)

Everyone who comes across him scampers away in fright and abhorrence. This story reveals the ultimate truth, that misfortunes can also befall upon those who are consumed by greed in all forms, including, jealousy over the beauty of others. This consistent conflict between the “good” and “evil” characters in the tales indicate that the central concern of all the tales selected for study is the conflict between two competing impulses that exist within all human beings: the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully, follow moral commands, and value the good of the group against the instinct to gratify one’s immediate desires, act violently to obtain supremacy over others, and enforce one’s will. This conflict might be expressed in a number of ways: civilization against savagery, order against chaos, reason against impulse, law against anarchy, or the broader heading of good against evil.

Extraordinary heroes, as has been discussed, are the embodiments of their culture, they are larger than typical figures in ordinary life because they are exemplars of their society’s aspirations and sociopolitical conflicts. When a hero dies, he illustrates not just his own personal weakness but the failings of a society at large. As a result, these heroes serve as social guidelines for behavior and are regarded as having a certain historical and cultural truth embodied in them. The protagonists also remind readers and listeners of themselves, and the quests and questions of these protagonists are on the same personal level as them. As a result, folktales can be regarded as personal entertainment, as engaging fictions reflecting one’s ability to laugh at oneself as well as to overcome one’s deepest dreams and fears. The use of fantasy, magic, both good and evil, the confronting of a problem, the

successful resolution of that problem, the use of a sympathetic protagonist and his or her triumphs, all contribute to making these folk and fairy tales vehicles of moral teachings in a society that is constantly strived with conflicts and issues. To conclude in the words of Adam Gidwitz:

Every child has cut himself. Every child has been bruised and bled. And so, every child knows that the blood stops eventually, the wound scabs over, the bruise yellows and heals. Fairy tale violence teaches a child that every emotional wound heals. That salty tears dry. That no matter the pain, victory is possible. (Gidwitz, 78)

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Adoption of Khuang: A triumph of Mizo Traditional Music

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When Christianity was introduced to the Mizo, it was more or less a complete detachment from the traditional culture. Hymns composed or translated were to be sung without any harmonizing instruments; the traditional instrument *Khuang*, drum was rejected and condemned as a pagan symbol. Nevertheless, singing was a very important activity for the Mizo Christians, the incidents of upheavals called revival or *Harhna* which jolted the Christian population were rather a gathering where they sang together without any harmonizing instrument or a humming together. The second wave of revival brought *khuang* into the Mizo Christian fold to become its most important symbol.

Mizo Christians experienced a revival in 1913 while in depressive situation after facing challenges from *Puma Zai* movement and *Mautam* famines as well as witnessing confidence boosting movement of abolition of *Bawi*. It was known as *Harhna |um hnihna* or the second wave of revival in the history of Mizo Christianity. In this wave of revival *khuang*, for the first time, had its appearance among the Christian revivalists at Hmunulh and its nearby villages. According to Tirhkoh Muka,¹ there was a man named Hmara affected by the revival at Hmunulh. He used to beat his small drum to keep time with his singing. Men liked to listen to his singing and drum beating; the church there, perceiving the

convenience of using the drum in singing took Hmara's and used the drum in their meetings. At that time Muka was a boy who lived at Lungdai village which is near Hmunulh. The revivalists in his village used to visit the surrounding villages such as Zanlawn, Nisapui, etc. Muka used to join the team in helping them carry the *khuang* which he dated as 1913 or early part of 1914.² The practice was not adopted widely and seemed to be discontinued soon after due to disapproval from church leadership in the centre. It may however be noted that Christians in revival at Durtlang used to sing while working at jhum and beat wooden logs to harmonise³ which may be taken as an incipient to the adoption of, and a sign for the need of *khuang*.

There were other instances of the adoption of *khuang* by Mizo Christians though difficult to be certain with the order of dates. A village Bahrabawk was one of such places where Christians used to sing with *khuang* but they soon gave up following instruction from church leaders.⁴ It was also said that when the revival receded from its zenith some Christians still continued to get together and sing with *khuang* undermining the wishes of the Church leadership; the founder of the Salvation Army in Mizoram Kawlk huma was one of the participants in such meetings.⁵ An instance of disapproval of *khuang* by the church is that at Chawrahmun (Ngopa) where Christians were observing Christmas with singing in the open space as early as in 1915. The church leaders instructed the youths to stop their singing if non-Christians harmonized with sounds imitating the beating of *khuang*.⁶ This instruction highlighted how the church rejected *khuang* as well as the attitude towards it.

However, the Chawrahmun Church was one of the earliest to sing with *khuang*.⁷ According to Lalruali in her book, *Zoram Hmarchhak Harhna Chanchin*, the church there used *khuang*

as early as in 1916 following the visit of Laibata of Durtlang who was a mission school teacher and an enthusiast of the revival of 1913. Laibata who is well equipped with the knowledge of tonic solfa and a good singer visited Chawrahmun- the youths there used to get together and sing but without *khuang*. He suggested *khuang* should be used to harmonize hymns. Thereafter, the church used *khuang* in their singing. If the date is not mistaken, Chawrahmun seemed to be the earliest church to adopt *khuang*, at least with definite record.

The Salvation Army, though not preceding Chawrahmun, adopted *khuang* from its inception in Mizoram. Kawlkhuma, the founder of the Salvation Army in Mizoram was once a close associate of a Welsh missionary Dr Peter Fraser, working along with him at the mission hospital as a compounder. He was one of the active members in the second wave of revival. He was said to follow the first movement of deviation from the church started by Tlira, an enthusiast figure in the second wave of revival but refuted⁸. Tlira, when excommunicated by the church moved to Aizawl from Champhai, used to participate in the meetings of Kawlkhuma and other revivalists. In spite of the differences with regard to the second coming of Jesus they did not know how to counter Tlira while he enjoyed being with them. The church even examined Kawlkhuma for the alleged acceptance of Tlira's teachings. Contemporary to Kawlkhuma, another revivalist and allegedly following Tlira was Chalchhuna⁹ of Durtlang-Melriat. The two revivalists had heard about each other and were anxious to meet. Later, the duo formed an extreme Christian group with strict discipline and can be easily differentiated even by dress. In an effort to stabilize their group, one day, Kawlkhuma and his colleagues met HK Dohnuna, farm manager of Lushai Hills Superintendent. The discussion was joined by RD Leta, the first Mizo matriculate

who told the group resembles Salvation Army. Again in the later 1915 the group met HK Dohnuna in which he gave some books on Salvation Army like *Doctrines, Orders and Regulations for Soldiers*. The group was impressed and sent letters to Booth Tucker (Fakir Singha), the then chief of Salvation Army in India. Fakir Singha replied and invited them for discussion. They requested Vanhlira of Sairang to donate the expenses for traveling to meet Fakir Singha. Vanhlira was said to be a follower of Tlira and presumably well acquainted with Kawlkhana.¹⁰ He gave them Rupees 60. Kawlkhana, alongwith Chalchhuna went to Simla in 1916 with the mission of meeting Salvation Army leaders. Chalchhuna died in Simla while Kawlkhana undertook Salvation Army Officer training in Bombay. After the training Kawlkhana was posted at a Criminal Settlement in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. He, however, made a request to send him back to Mizoram which was accorded. On his way home Kawlkhana sojourned with his group at Durtlang where he spent few days before reaching his house at Mission Veng on April 26, 1917, the day observed as Salvation Army Day in Mizoram.¹¹ Kawlkhana, when he was back in Aizawl, soon initiated service in the style of Salvation Army at his locality Mission Veng and the services used to be held at the houses of Kawlkhana, Chiangdailova and Zakunga as well as in the streets.¹²He also used to have meetings with his followers at Durtlang.In these meetings a black small *khuang* used to be beaten.¹³ In the meetings, he used to say that they should not hesitate to beat *khuang* because the Salvation Army where he underwent training used to do so too.¹⁴

Kawlkhana and his associates, who used to sing with *khuang*, organized themselves as Salvation Army but they were ordered to leave Mission Veng. Simultaneously with this, they expelled his followers at Durtlang who were also asked to leave

the village. Eight families comprising of six families from Durtlang and the families of Kawlk huma and Chiangdailova of Mission Veng then moved in search of a village to settle in at the beginning of 1918.¹⁵ After the chiefs of Sihphir, Khawruhlian and Phaileng refused they were accepted by Lalphuama of Sawleng. They were given an option whether to mingle with the villagers or to form a new street. The latter was opted.¹⁶ When the settlement process like building house was completed they used to meet at the house of their dead leader Chalchhuna's family.¹⁷ Feeling secure and accepted, a big *khuang* was their project in mind that they used to talk about in their gatherings. Kawlk huma went to Sairang and met Vanhlira who sponsored his meeting with Salvation Army leaders. When he explained their desire to have a large *khuang*, Vanhlira gave him Rupees 80.¹⁸ *Khuang* was ordered in India. When the ordered *khuang* was sent to Aizawl they went to collect it and Kawlk huma brought the *khuang* near the Mission Veng church where joyful singing was going on. He tried to harmonise and join in from outside but the leader there Rev Chhuahkhama stepped out from the church and objected.¹⁹

Proceeding with the *khuang* to Sawleng, they halted at Khawruhlian where Salvation Army had a church. There, the *khuang* was used in the service and after the worship service a street service was held near the chief's house. Everybody in the village, including those who had gathered to drink, joined in.²⁰

The *khuang* was an important part of worship service at Sawleng where they used to hold the service at the house of Pawilama, younger brother of their deceased leader Chalchhuna for the church building was not completed. Members of a team, *Kraws Sipai* (Soldier of the Cross) Laipawnga of Thingkhuang and his associates Tebawnga, Khuanga and Kapa visited them.²¹ Appreciating their service with *khuang*, Laipawnga made *khuang*

when he was back home.²² Not only did he make *khuang* but he even imitated the Salvation Army's flag which was soon given up on the objection of his church leaders.²³ *Kraws Sipai* was a team founded by Dr Peter Fraser at around 1909. They were about 60 self-supporting youngsters dedicated to the propagation of Christianity. It is likely due to their association with Kawlk huma under the leadership of Dr Peter Fraser that the team paid a visit to him at Sawleng.

The Church of Hmunulh where *khuang* made its apparently first appearance among Mizo Christians was one of the earliest to accept *khuang*. According to Lalzama in his "Mizo hla kalhmang,"²⁴ a *thlahual* feast²⁵ was given at Hmunulh in June 1918 by the family of a Mizo youth named Khama on his safe return from labour corps during the World War I. Damsavunga father of Khama killed a mithun and *khuang* was made from that hide. One man, Kapphunga proposed that *khuang* be used in the church which was accepted.

When the third Mizo Christian revival broke out in 1919, Nisapui was one of the earliest to experience it. The enthusiastic revivalists under the leadership of evangelist Paranga started out to have shake-up²⁶ visits to the nearby villages with a conviction that the revival be shared and spread all over the land of Mizo. They successfully shook up Lungdai and further proceeded to Thingkhuang which is also close to Hmunulh. There the village headman Euva was having *thlanvawng khuang*²⁷ which they borrowed for their singing; thus, *khuang* became part of the movement in third wave of revival. In their shake-up movement the revivalists of Thingkhuang and Sehlawh²⁸ jointly thronged Durtlang church on August 21, 1919 under the leadership of evangelist Selkhuma of Thingkhuang. The initial response was not positive and on the next day the revivalists were returning via Selesih, a nearby village. But they were called back in the afternoon and a

church service was held at night in which the revival happened. On August 25, 1919 which was Sunday, the revivalists numbering about 200 marched to Aizawl singing along on their way with *khuang*. They were received at Sikulpuikawn by a missionary Rev FJ Sandy and a worship service at Mission Veng church called *Biak Inpui* (the main church) followed. Again the response was rather lukewarm. The revivalists were returning on August 27, 1919; church members of about 50-80 accompanied them till Dawrpui. While on their way back to Mission Veng some of them were caught by the spirit of revival and they gathered at the church, the revival thus started. They hired a *khuang* from Makthanga of Venglui who is an employee in the colonial administration.²⁹ The incident was very significant for Mizo music history that *khuang* was used in the church of mission headquarters working in the northern Mizoram – the Welsh Calvinistic Foreign Mission.

The southern Mizoram Christians where Baptist Mission Society was working also adopted *khuang* during the third wave of revival. According to Rev HS Luaia, a prominent church leader in the south, during the revival at Lungrang village *khuang* was used at a *zaikhawm* (a gathering for singing) in the house of a widow Awkthangi where the earliest pastor in the south, Chuautera was also present. A *Kraws Sipai* member Khumhnawlha was enraged by the use of *khuang*, he went to the house crying, “Are you going to praise my Lord in this way?”³⁰ This was soon followed by the Lungrang Presbytery which was known for its promoting role of *khuang* in the south. Two Christian missions working in northern and southern Mizoram had a very good cooperation, even sent delegates to each other in the conventions. When the third wave of revival swept Mizo Christians, the southern members held a presbytery at Lungrang where Liangkhaia, a delegate from the north with M Suaka, delivered the highly appreciated sermon. The

delegates were accompanied by a number of revivalists from Nisapui.

The adoption of *khuang* by Mizo Christians had important consequences in the music history of Mizo that it was followed by the coming of *Lengkhawm Zai*, a song genre of Mizo Christians, a set of two *khuangs* in which a bigger one was added to the existing and shifting from the Mizo traditional style of *khuang* beating. In the traditional Mizo style *khuang* beating is three strokes together in a regular sequence followed by a suspension at every other off-beat, i.e. three beatings off-three beatings off or *bing-bing-bing... bing-bing-bing* and so on.³¹ To the accompaniment of the new Christian hymns the small *khuang* was beaten to the regular rhythm without any suspension in the middle. Therefore, beside the strokes which fall on every accent of the tune there comes an extra regular stroke in between every accent, i.e. *bing-bing-bing* and so on.³² There is no regular rule for beating the bigger *khuang*. It is generally beaten to accompany the smaller. The bigger *khuang* is struck to the rhythm of the smaller *khuang* for some few continuous strokes at appropriate intervals – appropriate in terms either of the meaning of a line/verse or accents – giving an added accentuation to the gusto of singing by making music go *boong-bing-boong-bing-boong-boong-boong-boong-boong-bing-boong-bing* and on. As a rule the smaller *khuang* was used to create the tempo of singing, and the bigger *khuang* has to be carefully controlled not to go out of the measure.³³ With the introduction of bigger *khuang* a very big one was made at Theiriat and one church leader Upa Selpawnga named his son as Khuangliana which literally means ‘big drum’.³⁴ With the adoption of *khuang* by Mizo Christians there is yet another modification that a drum stick made of a knot of cloth or the like tied to its end was used and the traditional style of beating with fingers was given up.

Even after *khuang* was adopted by the Mizo Christians, some churches especially the mission headquarters in the north Mission Veng and in the south Serkawn did not used *khuang* in worship service in the church until 1976 and 1982 respectively³⁵ while the Kulikawn Church in Aizawl used only one *khuang* in the worship service till 1947. In fact, the missionaries did not change their attitude towards *khuang* though it was beyond their control. The attitude was transpired in the letter of DE Jones to Williams on January 10, 1921 in which he was keen to mention that Mizo Christians of Aizawl rejected *khuang*. Besides the missionaries attitude towards *khuang*, some non-Christian Mizo chiefs of Champhai and its surrounding area conspired to stop them making an excuse that they were too noisy. However, Dokhama, chief of Tualte alone stepped out that he hacked open the Christian *khuang* and dismantled the church. He further complained to the Superintendent that Christians were too noisy becoming a public nuisance and their church be shifted outside village. The superintendent WL Scott ruled in opposite but ordered him to allot church site at the prime location in the village.³⁶

The adoption of *khuang* by Mizo Christians can be taken as a means of indigenization of Christianity as well a triumph of Mizo traditional music. *Khuang* which was considered belongs to evil spirits and unsuitable for Christian worship service became an indispensable instrument of Mizo Christian music. It was likely, in spite of disapproval from church leadership, *khuang* already took its hold among the Mizo Christians from the second wave of revival but not openly. The advice to the church of Chawrahmun to use *khuang* by a mission school teacher may be taken as the presence of conflicting views on *khuang* among the early Mizo Christians and the incidents of meetings outside the church with *khuang* in their singing also indicated the inability to easily subscribe to the

church leadership's view on *khuang*. The deviation of Kawlkhumha from the church and the inception of Salvation Army in Mizoram under his leadership also encouraged acceptance of *khuang* in the congregations larger than the Salvation Army. Incidents of the use of *khuang* in the church of Hmunulh and the third wave of revival showed the impossibility to do away with *khuang* from the minds of the Mizo. Once accepted, *khuang* became a symbol of Mizo Christian music.

End Notes

- ¹ Full time church worker, employed by Mizoram Presbyterian Church for administrative matters. One of the early Mizo, employed by church.
- ² Lalsawma, *Four Decades of Revivals – The Mizo Way (Forty Years of Revival Movement in Mizoram)* (Aizawl: Author, 1994)77-78
- ³ Upa Zokunga, “Durtlang Kohhran Chanchin” in *Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Durtlang, Mizoram - Centenary (1908-2008) Souvenir* (Durtlang, 2008), 11.
- ⁴ Brig Ngurliana Sailo, Aizawl: Venghnuai referred Vanlalchhuanga in *Mizo leh Khuang* (Aizawl, 1996) 30
- ⁵*Ibid.*, 30
- ⁶ Lalruali, *Zoram Hmarchhak Harhna Chanchin* (Aizawl: Synod Literature & Publication Board, 1997), 10-11
- ⁷*Ibid.*, 11
- ⁸ Brig. Ngurliana (R), *Chhandamna Sipai Pawl Chanchin (India Eastern Command)* (Aizawl: The Salvation Army Central Division, Headquarters, Gosen Press, 1991), 10.
- ⁹ C Lalawmpuia Vanchiau “Tlira leh A zirtirna” in *Zoram Today*, Vol. VI, No . 8 (March 1-14, 2016), 29.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Ngurliana, *Chhandamna Sipai Pawl Chanchin*17

¹²*Ibid.* 18

¹³ Vanlalchhuanga 31

¹⁴Sailo, referred in Vanlalchhuanga 31

¹⁵Ngurliana, *Chhandamna Sipai Pawl Chanchin*22

¹⁶*Ibid.*23

¹⁷*Ibid.*,24-25

¹⁸*Ibid.*25

¹⁹*Ibid.*24-25

²⁰*Ibid.*25

²¹*Ibid.*, 25

²²*Ibid.* 25

²³*Ibid.*25-26.

²⁴ A paper presented on a seminar organized by Synod Literature and Publication Board quoted by Rev Vanlalzuata, “Harhna leh Khuang,” in Upa Dr RL Thanmawia (Ed), *Harhna – Mizoram Revival Centenary Souvenir (1906-2006)* (Aizawl: Synod Revival Committee, 2006), p 571.

²⁵ A feast given in celebration for the safely returned from life a threatening situation. The pre-colonial practice of thlahual was apparently modified.

²⁶ Lalsawma 89

²⁷ The khuang/drum was made of a tree with scientific name *Gmelina arborea* and it thus called by the name of that tree in Mizo.

²⁸ A village no longer existing. Reference of Sehlawh with regard to the revival was found in Upa Zokunga 12 and Durtlang Presbyterian Kohhran Kum 100 Chanchin (Durtlang: Presbyterian Church, Durtlang, Revised & Enlarged 2008) 28 which were apparently the same author. Other works usually silent on Sehlawh.

- ²⁹Upa Chawngzika (Ed-in-C), *Mission Veng Kohhran Chanchin* (Aizawl: Mission Veng Kohhran Centenary Committee, 1994), 35. Durtlang Presbyterian Kohhran Kum 100 Chanchin 29.
- ³⁰HS Luaia, “Lungrang Presbytery 1919” in Upa Dr RL Thanmawia (Ed) *Harhna Harhna – Mizoram Revival Centenary Souvenir (1906-2006)* (Aizawl: Synod Revival Committee, 2006), 344-345
- ³¹Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture: Revival Movement as a Cultural Response to Westernisation in Mizoram* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006), 291
- ³²*Ibid.*, 291
- ³³*Ibid.*, 291. The whole description on khuang beating is taken from him.
- ³⁴Rev HS Luaia, *Mizorama Harhna Lo Thlen Dan* (Serkawn: Communication Department, Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1998) 27-28
- ³⁵The Author’s Conversation with F Vanlalrochana on May 16, 2017; see the following discussion on “Chanchintha Dak” at <http://www.misual.com/2011/05/20/chanchintha-dak/>. Accessed on May 16, 2017.
- ³⁶Rev Liangkhaia, *Mizorama Harhna Thu* (Aizawl: LTL Publications, 2006), p46

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Locating Print in Mizo Culture

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We should note the force, effect, and consequence of inventions which are nowhere more conspicuous than in those three which were unknown to the ancients namely, printing, gun-powder, and the compass. For these have changed the appearance and the state of the whole world...

(Bacon, Novum Organum, Aphorism, Pg. 129)

Print culture can be best understood as the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society as shaped by the emergence of the printing press. It is a reflection of a culture which could be documented, imbibed and distributed. For centuries, print has been a consequential part of culture, be it sociological, political or religious. Not only that, but through the years, it has taken one of the biggest part in society and is through print that a culture is changed or even identified.

Prior to the coming of the missionaries, the Mizos had neither printed records of their history nor any documentation to supplement their culture. Accordingly, historians are often baffled and confused as to the authentic origin of the people. Their past is abundantly ambiguous

...it depends largely on the historicization of myths creates inconsistencies in the formal templates of those included as

chhinlungchuak, ...despite confusions over who constitute the Mizos, the Mizos rely on ‘cultural practice’ as the chief determinant of identity and as the boundary marker of identity. (Pachuau, L.K, 2014. Pg 11)

The main cultural practice of the Mizos is attending church and eighty percent of the population identified themselves as Christians, and this makes Mizoram one of the few states in India that can claim to be predominantly Christian. The church takes a precedent role in their culture and it has both a symbolic and physical presence to the people. Religion has a history of promoting itself through media and before any other technologies arrived, there was print and it is through this media that the Mizos identified themselves in Christianity.

The important point about media as extensions of human senses is that the introduction and development of such media will alter what McLuhan terms the “ratios” between the senses. In other words, a medium such as print, which favors the eye, will shift the ratios in favor of the visual sense, thus producing in human beings a perception of the world which is visually oriented, perhaps to the point of distortion. McLuhan sums up the process early in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*:

If a technology is introduced either from within or from without a culture...the ratio among all of our senses is altered.... The concept of space was in turn affected, taking on the inclosed and orderly arrangement of the printed page. (McLuhan, 1997, pg. 154)

It was this very shift of the senses from the oral to the visual is what made a great impact to the Mizo people at the turn of the twentieth century. As McLuhan pointed out that technologies are not simply inventions which people employ but are the means by

which people are re-invented, the Mizos in the Lushai Hills were one such peoples who underwent major changes and re-inventions.

Before Gutenberg reformed print as it is known in the modern world print had already reached China in 593 AD and was already used for religious propaganda. Chinese Buddhism, one of the oldest dogmas in the world and it is here that print took a life of its own as it thrived under the demand for the promotion and spread of Buddhism. Through woodblock printing, Buddhism became the very first creed which took advantage of the vast distribution of printed items to propagate a definite set of belief. The continuation of this technology was prompted by the demand of printing and distributing doctrine to the Buddhists who, very early on found the significance and uncomplicated way of dedication to their faith. Though the first recorded knowledge of the printing press was used as a weapon of religious propaganda, it was definitely not the last. (Moran, 1971. Pg. 281 - 290).

In her Seminal book, Professor Eisenstein had markedly spoken of how printing was benefitted by religious prognosticators the most. According to her, the evolution of printing would never have had as much progress as it did if it had not been for its involvement with religion and politics. Just as there was a demand for Buddhist dharma centuries before, what heralded the success of the printing press in Europe was the urgent demand for religious propaganda which could be read and seen like never before. It also brought with it a profitable market for the printers since religion was a subject that many, if not all could take part in. At a time when science and belief were the only options for print, religion and politics had more audience target than science, which only very selected few could understand. (Eisenstein 1980, pg. 453).

For the people, standardized texts which were never for the masses became more obtainable, even cheaper with time. What this brought about was a very easy way for propaganda to the masses in a single print. The missionaries understood this early on and even though print could only be done in selected areas around the state and most of it in Sylhet, they continued to brave the difficult roads and time consuming effort to provide the Mizos with their Sunday School books. D. E Jones took great effort to provide the Mizos with quality books:

It was necessary to feed their minds with new and interesting books if literacy was to be maintained. Experience shows that a man needs interesting literature to keep him literate. Certainly, there was never enough to satisfy the growing appetite for reading and it may be criticized for being largely religious. (Lloyd, 1991. Pg. 136)

As Meirion Lloyd states, it was the mission's goal to educate the people not only in language and literacy, but mostly about the Gospel. Although the technology was not used as far as a business transaction as it was during the Renaissance, the experience solidified the main purpose of the press in Mizoram, which was for spreading religious propaganda:

Rarely has one invention had more decisive influence than that of printing on the Reformation. It was an invention which seemed engineered for propaganda...the advent of printing was an important precondition for the Protestant Reformation taken as a whole; for without it one could not implement a priesthood of all believers (Eisenstein, 1980.Pg 309 - 310).

The printing press, with its main functions of dissemination, standardization and preservation has been known to aid the progress and change of religious reformation, namely that of

Protestantism, the Renaissance and the scientific revolution, all within the 16th century. In 1911, the Mizo culture too changed drastically from oral to visual, their culture documented. What was most important for the Mizos with regards to Eisenstein's argument is that printing greatly contributed to the fragmentation that existed in Christianity. With the advent of print religious divisions become more permanent. Heresy, and its condemnation, she writes, becomes more fixed in the minds of followers; religious edits became more "visible" and "irrevocable" (Eisenstein, Pg. 118-119). For the Mizos, when the alphabets were printed and distributed, it was 'visible' and 'irrevocable'. This cemented a change in their cultural paradigm.

Early in 1911 Dr. Fraser brought to Aizawl a small hand-press. It was the first press ever seen within those hills. One particular use that he made of it was to print appropriate Scripture verses on labels. These were stuck on bottles of medicine alone with the dosage instructions (Saiaithanga, Pg. 121). The little hand-press was used effectively for many things, but most importantly, it was notable for being the machine that printed the first publication of Mizo magazine known as 'Krista Tlangau' which translates as 'The Herald of Christ' and later changed to "*KristianTlangau*." (Lloyd, 137). When the small press could not longer cater to the growing demand for print, G E Loch provided a better, bigger press which later was known as the Synod Press. Most of the articles and materials printed from this press are of devotional nature and are written by ministers and lay persons. Suaka was the first Mizo writer to be published in the magazine and the content of his article was about Wales, the heaven on earth, a place he had not even visited. (*Kristian Tlangau*, 1911, Pg. 13-14). For more than a decade the content in many Mizo articles praised and idolized the white men for 'saving' them from their past godless lives. The 1912,

August publication editorial boasts of how lucky the Mizos were to be graced by such god-fearing white men, how education had advanced their knowledge of the world around them which they could get only through the Christian missionaries. Religion had been used for decades as a weapon of colonization and the Mizos too fell prey to the tradition.

The Mizos comprehend their identity as inextricably linked to the religion and the collective consciousness of the Mizos actively propagates a ‘Mizo Christianity.’ (L.K. Pachuau, 2014. Pg 16). The Mizos felt they have much to be thankful for since it was them who first propagated, along with Christianity, the medium of print. The missionaries understood that the only way to assimilation was to enlighten themselves with the language for them to really speak the ‘truth’ of the Gospel to them.

The historical moment where the colonized were educated and made to study cultures outside of their own produced the nineteenth century form of imperialism. Gauri Viswanathan has presented strong arguments for relating the “institutionalization and subsequent valorization of English literary study to a shape and an ideological content developed in the colonial context,” and specifically as it developed in India, where she said that British colonisers, “discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education.” (Ashcroft, et al, 2002.Pg 2).

So with education flourishing in Mizoram, the people were being taught in a chapel. It was a single ideology which lead to the naturalizing of constructed values such as civilization and humanity which, conversely established ‘savagery,’ ‘native,’ and the ‘primitive.’ All these were words which were associated with the Mizos as their antithesis and as the object of a reforming zeal.

Their native land was regarded to be much more inferior to the white man's land and their way of life was labeled primitive and unacceptable. Education from the missionaries with Christianity as its base was going to mould the ideas and culture of a people and as an effect for such cause, *Kristian Tlangau* was published solely for the purpose of continuing what the colonizers had started, which was to propagate the religion of Christianity to themselves and to anyone they could.

On this note, the advent of print culture as seen in Mizoram too became a dubious case in point in the sense that it did not only serve as means to propel the development of Mizoram itself, but was also used as a weapon to sway the people with religious tracts. *Kristian Tlangau*, a predominantly Christian periodical was the first to be published and for years, secular publications did not follow. It was only in the beginning of the 1960s that a secular magazine began to thrive. For more than fifty years after the inception of *Kristian Tlangau*, the magazine was uncontested, primarily the only magazine secular or otherwise in the Mizo culture. The Synod Press itself was uncontested and even though private printing press had started to develop, the strain of the Church and imposition it had on the people could not be challenged. However, the different outlook arrived when the two World Wars arrived and Mizo men were forced to take part in the British Army. With A. Playfair leading the party, 2100 Mizo men to France to take their part in the War in May 1917. (Siama, 1991, Pg. 124 – 127).

The most significant role that the two wars had on the Mizos was that it broadened their environment and expanded their mindset. By the Second World War, many Mizo men could read English and when exposed to a different culture, there were reading materials that were not solely Christian in content. The Mizos were no longer confined to a specific domain. A note of inherent secularism seemed

to have prevailed gradually. The turn of the millennium has continued to provide the people with specific cultural ideas that began to take root and demand outlet. Marshall McLuhan has coined the term ‘global village’ which is the consequence of the dominance of electrical medium. He has argued that the printing press has led to the creation of democracy, capitalism, individualism, nationalism, dualism, rationalism, Protestantism, and a culture of scientific research. He said, “it is through print that technology is enhanced, and media became a part of man....It is by media that the world is contracted...through print and then television later, man is global. The world becomes a village.” (McLuhan, 1962. Pg. 83).

It is on this level that the effects of the printing press have been felt in the search for identity in different spectrum. Once the Mizos realized that their thoughts and ideas could be read and understood by others around them, it became a two way process. Having been exposed to a culture that was not their own, there arose a demand in the Mizos to be part of this global village. This was why they were no longer satisfied with Eucharistic magazines and periodicals. Their domain expanded to outside their own lived experience, and with contributions from the effects of colonisation too, this extension of culture and identity led to various needs in order to find a definite meaning to one’s culture.

To meet these demands, several secular magazines began to appear and the beginning of 1960, the printing press was no longer confined to the ownership of the Synod Press. Some ingenious entrepreneur had seen the demand of a press that could cater to more than Eucharistic reading material and thus, many journals and magazines appeared. One of the oldest and most notable journal is, ‘a monthly Literary Journal of the ‘Mizo Academy of Letters’. This journal is especially significant in that, this was the first journal that could put together a group of Mizo men who wanted to write

purely for the sake of writing. The content of this journal is starkly different from that of *KristianTlangau*. The Mizo Academy of Letters was first established in 1964, purely aimed to hone the writing skills for Mizo writers who wished to write on a topic that was not wholly religious in nature. What started as a playground for Mizo writers turned into a serious literary venture as the need to embrace one's culture arose among the Mizo people. Even after the Britishers had left, what was left behind was a language that had been formed for the Mizos which the people continued to use. As beneficial as this was for the Mizos, it left a lasting colonial experience in their mind that the white man were of the superior race. They had been taught this for decades that it was difficult to shake off.

Language in itself has made its importance felt amongst the colonized for centuries during the colonial rule, under the umbrella of imperialism. It is what divides and unites the colonized and the colonizers in ways which had made many theorists struggle for finding a deeper truth regarding the same. It certainly proved beneficial for the missionaries to continue their work since at the time the Mizos were so dubious of any foreign rule and it is understandable that Lorrain and Savidge had tried hard to learn the language of the people so that they might perhaps win their trust at such a time. For Frantz Fanon had said, "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture," (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Pg 78.), in reference to the Blacks and the colonized who want to adopt the language of their white masters. For the Mizos, however, it was more or less the opposite, in that the Welsh missionaries, as has been mentioned before, tried hard to learn the Mizo language to comprehend the Mizo culture and to receive the confidence of the Mizos in any way they could in order that their sermons could be instilled in the hearts of the Mizo people:

Language becomes the medium through which a hierachal structure of power is perpetuated and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order’ and reality become established. (Ashcroft, et al, 2002.Pg 7).

It was this language that the Mizos inherited and will continue to do so for as long as the culture existed. Even years after the colonizers had left, the language stayed on and even respected journals like *Thu LehHla*, with its contents that varied from analysis of folk narratives to comedic adventures that seemed nothing to do with politics, the language itself was an area for contest. A Mizo man could not denounce nor try to be divorced from the colonial experience as long as the language he spoke and read and write came from the said experience. Therefore, it was confusing to the people, the culture continued to be divided between being grateful to the missionaries for the language that had been given to them and being angry that it promoted cultural identity issues within the society. *Thu LehHla* was one of the first known journal that tackled this issues with identity. For it was in identity that the people had trouble in. The stark change that the print culture provided for the Mizos confused them as to how they should react in a post-colonial mind-set for how could a culture denounce another culture which had given them their alphabets? If a Mizo man was to denounce the colonisers’ culture, he would have to do it in Mizo language which ironically was given to them by said culture.

With differing viewpoints, the Mizos developed into what HomiBhabha calls a ‘hybrid.’ Bhabha argues that hybridity results from various forms of colonization, which had sprung from cultural collisions and social interchanges which do not necessarily work together. In the attempt to assert colonial power in order to create anglicized subjects, “The trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a

hybrid" (Bhabha, 2004. Pg. 111). So to this day, the people live in a somewhat disoriented group who felt they had more in common with the white man than they ever did with the other states of India. The implicit impossibility of being a part of that culture which gave the thought more texture and the fascination with the white man still continues. In Wilson Harris' formulation:

...hybridity in the present is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry, and which valued the 'pure' over its threatening opposite, the 'composite.' It replaces a temporal lineality with a spatial plurality. (Ashcroft, et al, 2002.Pg 2).

The confusion in identity heralded a handful of magazines that was purely made for celebrating the Western culture that the Mizos had been hungry for. They had heard of the Beatles through radio, read about them in magazines that managed to reach the Hills. Like McLuhan argued, the 'Gutenberg man' who took advantage of the fast paced media that inventions of technologies provided emerged even in the Mizo culture.

Magazines like *Lei Hringnun* which first appeared in 1995 had a content list that purely catered to the Mizo people who wanted to know more about the Western entertainment world. It had puzzles, black and white pictures of musicians and actors that the Mizos could not see if not from such magazines. The magazine was 16 pages long and it said next to nothing about the Mizo culture but the significance was exactly that. As Bhabha denoted, the hybrid nature of their culture was seen through Print magazines like *Lei Hringnun*, *Diktawn* and *Real Life*. These magazine try to celebrate Mizo culture with its main stories about the Mizo people, their lives and struggles with whatever glamorous side was seen in them. However the treatment of these Mizo culture was done in such a

way that it was mere reflections of the Western glamour magazines with little authenticity as expected by a culture.

So then, although it had taken many years, the Mizos soon realized that their worth and values lay in the life which had been confiscated from them by the need to. As Harris says, the present sees a dawn in which the people are awakening to realize how valuable their own indigenous culture and beliefs are and how important it is to try to remain ‘pure’ of their nativism even though the idea which seemed impossible with everything which had happened in their lives. Harris further explains that “cultures must be liberated from the destructive dialectic of history, and imagination is the key to this. He sees imaginative escape as the ancient and only refuge of oppressed peoples, but the imagination also offers possibilities of escape from the politics of dominance and subversion. Harris deliberately strives after a new language and a new way of seeing the world.” (Ashcroft, et al, 2002.Pg 34).

Reviewing the several magazines that came out since the beginning of print in 1911, perhaps for the Mizo, the press did bring change to the culture. The press was used in Mizoram, like any other places at the beginning of printing press for religious purposes. This shaped the peoples’ ideologies more than it could be conveyed. For Elizaebth Eisenstein, the coming of printing press was the biggest change that a culture could undergo wherever it was placed. Not only did the press allow for the shift from script to print, it revolutionized Western culture by creating an entirely new symbolic environment that would fill Renaissance Europe with new information and abstract ideas. It effected a revival of learning, which would require new skills, attitudes and a new kind of consciousness. In addition, the printing press would inspire individualism while at the same time undermining the authority of the Catholic Church. Finally, the printing press enriched a capacity for scientific and conceptual thought, as well as stressing

the need for clarity, sequence and reason. All of these would move into the forefront of European society as the medieval and oral environment receded in favor of the creation of a new literate society. (Eisenstein, 1979. Pg. 331).

The new Mizo literate society at the turn of the twentieth century saw signs of flourish with varying magazines and periodicals that emerged. The content and themes of the magazines are divided into purely Christian centric, and entertainment as well as literary by 2011. In any way a person viewed this culture that print had changed through the years, there is no easy way to identify them. The chapter conclude with the words of L. K. Pachuau with regards to Mizo identity:

In real terms, identity making in the Mizo case has meant several things. The Mizos have had to deal with modernity, first coming in the form of colonial state and the missionaries and, following that, the Indian State, its laws of governance as well as the discourses arising from it, official, academic, or otherwise. The context has, in a sense, created the Mizos and has acted as the ‘other’ that has inscribed them. I therefore follow from what has already been said of identity studies that identities are not only about the self, but also about how a people are understood and represented by an ‘other.’ The ‘other’ has not been static, nor does it have equal significance at all times, and yet, it constituted the Mizos in differing ways. (L. K. Pachuau, 2014. Pg. 229)

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Folk Religious and Cultural Beliefs, Practices and Festivals among the Chain Community of West Bengal

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The Chains of West Bengal are living largely in Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, South and North Dinajpur districts. Apart from West Bengal they also live in Bihar, Nepal and some areas of Bangladesh. They are mainly agriculturists, hard worker and very much orthodox. They worshipped almost all the Hindu deities, goddess Kali with preference besides of their indigenous deities. The socio-religious beliefs, practices and festivals of the Chains are mostly concerned with the traditional ethnic beliefs and worship of a number of popular folk deities and divinities. The antiquity of these folk deities may be traced back to remote past; these folk deities originated primarily outside the scope of the Brahmanical Hinduism and worshiped with the rural importance. Besides worshiping the folk deities of their own, the Chain community had a greater influence of the Brahmanism in Bengal; hence there are the great difference between the socio-religious beliefs, practices and festivals of the Chains of West Bengal and Bihar or other states. For example the Chains of Ayodhya and adjacent areas worshiped the Mahabeer, Satyanarayan and Debi Pataon with great devotion and the Chains of Bihar worshiped the Panchpir mostly while the Chains of West Bengal worshiped the Panchpir, Banhi Parameswari mostly.¹ Nagendra Nath Basu also made differences in cultural and beliefs among the Chains of West Bengal and other states² but he determine the worship of the *Koila Baba* by the Chains of west

Bengal which is not existed at all among the Chain society of West Bengal.³ However an attempt is made here to trace the origin, nature and purpose of the worship of few popular deities of the Chain community who are being worshiped through the ages mostly by the village folks.

Home deities:

They worshiped the home deities including Lore Singh, Panch Pir, Hanuman, Banhi Parmeswari, Hartal kartal, Goraiya, Bagh Sasan etc. Besides worshiping all the Vedic deities; the every house contained a room for the house deity, commonly known as the ‘*gosain ghar*’ in the Chain language. The south-western corner of the room consist the place of the house deity. This place is called a *debasi* or *siragu*. The word *debasi* came from *debasis* (god bless) and the word *siragu* came from the tradition of forwarding head first to the house deity. The *Siragu* or *debasi* marked with the five horizontal lines (three of black collyries and two of the vermillion) consisting the size of 3`` long and 1 `` weight. Some of them also portrayed the fives rounding mark to the five lines. The *Siragu* is the only deity of the Chain community because they have only one *gotra* i.e. *Kashyap gotra* and follower of the amorphous Supreme Being. The so mentioned god and goddess that incorporated with the Chain society were no doubt created by the Brahmana for their professional prospect. The *panch piria* or the five deities included the Bramha, Bishnu, Siva, Banhi devi, and Ganesh.⁴ Some of the guardian deity also contained the shape like sun or half moon of soil and contained the five round marks of vermillion or collyrium. There also kept a thin stick of bamboo consisted the size of three hands which is known as the *Bisra*; derived from the word *Bisahara*.

Especially in the time of their marriage the house deities are worshiped. No priests are required during the performance of the worship of these deities; rather the mother of the bride or groom’s

presented herself as the worshiper. She was assisted highly by the aunts and grandmother. The sunned rice, incense sticks, vermillion, betel nut, betel leaf, thickened milk, *puri* (a kind of small and thin saucer shaped brown bread fried in clarified butter) etc. were used in the worship of the home deities. During the performance of the marriage the women sung several folk songs related to the marriage together; some of the songs entertained them with humorous expressions.⁵

We found various guardian deities among the Chain society but their system of the worship is more or less the same. Only there is difference of the Kali worship. In this worship there used the *meroli* made by the gardener. They dedicated the goat to the goddess Kali in the marriage of the eldest son and it is compulsory. There was also a tradition to dedicate the ship to the goddess Kali when the son arrived in home with the bride. The house wife performed these worships without any kind of sacred hymns, though they used conch shells in the worships. What remaining significant is that the room of the guardian deity is situated in the west direction of the house and they worshiped the deity in the west direction proved the influence of the Muslim mosque. The Chain society also worshiped some other deities such *Satyanaayana*, which provoked the communal harmony between the Chains and Muslims.

Other God, Goddess and Vows:

The chains worshiped Shiva, Durga, Laxmi, Kali, Swaraswati, Kartik, Ganesh, Manasa, Satyanarayan etc. deities. Most of them worshiped the kali goddess. The every Chain village contained the *than* (temple) of Kali. They also performed many festivals namely *Sona Rayer Puja*, *Rathjatra*, *Snan Jatra*, *Dol jatra* and observed many vows namely *gota brata*, *Jitastami brata*, *Againi puja*. The Chain in West Bengal also worshiped the Gambhira Puja, Ulka puja and much other worship including the worship of their guardian deity such as Lore Singh, Panch Pir, Hanuman, Banhi Parmeswari,

Hartal kartal, Goraiya, bagh Sasan etc. mentioned earlier. All these worship of the gods and goddess performed jointly by the men and the women of the Chain society. Though the Chains worshiped some Brahmanical ditties and divinities but there are much local influences of their own which will also discussed here.

During the worship of the deities like, Durga, laxmi, Kali, they also worshiped the guardian deity. They dedicated a green pumpkin to the guardian deity during the auspicious day of *astami* during the worship of Durga. Some prepare a goat by using the knead dough and dedicated it to the house deities. In many houses they dedicated the goat to the guardian deities during the day of the worship of the goddess Kali. Some of the family regarded the goddess Durga as their guardian deity and prepare the figure to worship her. Many of them also worshiped only with the small pitcher due to economic poverty. The family whose guardian deity is not the Durga also participated in the universal Durga puja.⁶

Manasa

Manasa is one of the important folk deities of the rural Chain communities. *Manasa* is a late Puranic snake goddess; whose origin may be traced in the non- Aryan and pre- Aryan Austric and Dravidian religious culture in India.⁷ The Chains worshiped the goddess *Manasa* with much devotion. They organized the folk *Manasa* song on the occasion of the worship; the song based on the narrative of Behula and Lakhindar; in some places it continued for one to two months. The sculpture of the goddess *Manasa* is not worshiped here by the Chain community but her portrait images (*Pot*) on the clothes or sponge woods are worshiped.

Satyanarayan/ Satyapir Puja:

The worship of *Satyanarayan/ Satyapir* as the popular divinities is widely prevalent among the Chains in West Bengal.

The deity is the product of the synthesis of lord Vishnu. The worshiped of this deity originated from the sultanate period in Bengal as an attempt to establish the communal harmony between the Hindu and Muslims. While the Muslim called him *Satyapir*; the Hindus changed the word *pir* and introduced *narayan* though there hardly any difference between the *Satyapir* of the Muslims and *Satyanarayan* of the Hindus.⁸ Whole the Bengali month *Chaitra* is regarded as the sacred to the chain community. During this month all the Chain family worshiped the god *Satyanarayan*. They worshiped the *Satyanarayan* on the eve of the marriage ceremony also. The worshiped conducted by the priest and there was a tradition of distribution of offerings to the villagers.⁹

Sonarayer Puja: (Valvuli)

Sona Rai is regarded as the god of tiger.¹⁰ The agriculturist Chain community started to worship the god *Sonarai* to protect their cows from the tiger. But basically the god *Sonarai* is worshiped largely by the cow-boy of the community. This worshiped performed in the day of Bengali *Poush sankranti* in the field. They visited all the house of the village through whole the month *Poush* and collected the money and materials by praising the activities of the god. During the collection of the money and other materials they performed the song of *Sona rai* which were very much sweet to hear.¹¹ The song of *Sona rai* is known as ‘*Valavuli*’ in the Chain language. The women did not participate in the worship of the god *Sona rai*. We find very few song dedicated to *Sonarai* in the Chain language and remarks that the Chains affected by the other communities to worship *Sonarai*.

Jangal Thasa:

Another worship of the Chain community conducted by the women is *Jangal Thasa*. This worship performed in the Bengali

month of *Agrayan* through five days. The Chain women go to the field repeatedly three evening and worshiped the Laxmi devi there. It is to be noted that in the month of *Agrayan* the paddy stayed in the field so the Chain women jointly go to the field and worshiped her there. The fourth days the Chain women stop the song. The fifth day was the day of the final worship. There is no need of Brahman and musical instruments in this worship. After the end of the worship all the women prepared *pitha* (a kind of cake) and eat it.¹² The song prevailed in the Jangal thasa festival was, *ke nibire vala, pujar dala.*¹³

Kalubabur Puja:

Basically the Chain women of the Murshidabad district performed the worship of *Kalu Babu*. This worship performed in the evening of *Chaitra Sankranti* (last days of the Bengali month) and in the agricultural field. Before the two days of its beginning they organized themselves for the worship and gathered in the field. The unmarried girls performed several songs there and worshiped the god *Kalu Babu*. In this festival the women prepared the dolls counting similar with their male members in the house. They arranged all that in a line and worship them with a dry grass. No flowers, no priest, no offerings are needed in this worship.¹⁴

Broto or vows: Got parba:

This vow performed every year in the first Sunday of Bengali month *Magh*. In Friday there was the act of shaving and they remain religious fast. They remain fast whole the Saturday and eat sunned rice, boiled with ghee in the evening. The fast again started from the early morning of the Sunday and practiced the worship of the god Surya. An occasion also organized there which was known as the *Dhunuchi* festival. The worship of the god Surya vigorously performed in the Krishna nagar village of Manikchak police station, Kotwali village of English Bazar police station, Sukpara village of

Kaliachak police station, Simla village of Ratua police station of Malda district. The Chain men and women gathered in the place of worship and made a pavilion with the banana tree, flowers etc. they circumambulate around the pavilion with taking incense sticks in the hand. At the end there was the distribution of the offerings.¹⁵ The Chain community called this ritual as *got parba*.

Karam dharma brata:

In the *sukla ekadasi titthi* (Parsoi ekadasii the Chain language) of the Bengali month *Vadra* there is the vow *karam dharam* performed by the women among the chain society.¹⁶ The women remained fast; even they do not touch the water whole that day for wishing the well for their brother. The Oraon, Munda, Bhumij Mahato and many Santals also performed worship called *Karam Puja* through the dancing and singing. But the *Karam Dharam Brata* of Chain community is different from the *Karam puja* of the Santals because there is no organize of the dance or song in the *karam dharam brata* of the Chain.

Jitastami Broto:

In an auspicious day of Bengali month *Aswin* the men and women of the Chain society performed the *Jitastami broto* (vow). They beliefs that by performing the vow their goal of the life possibly found fulfill. The mothers vigorously performed this vow for the better of the son and remained fast in the day of the vow. Besides performing the *jitastami* vow they also worshiped the god *Jimut Bahan* in some places. Because they believed that, the worship of the god *Jimutbahana* facilitated the long life of the sons and daughter. There is no doubt that they affected by the Puranic tradition of Jimutbahana.¹⁷

Putul kane vasano utsab:

During the vow of *Jiastami* a funny ritual like ‘*putul kane vasano*’ performed among the Chains. Though this ritual started

in the day of *Jitastami* vow but came to an end next day. The little children participated in this ritual. The girl Childs made beautifully curved bride dolls with the mud and gathered in a place with the sunned rice, sugarcane, fruits, molasses etc. in a dish. The boys wait for them in that place with the boat made of the decorated banana trees with flowers. The dolls kept in the boat and together journeyed to a nearby pond or river. The boys float the boat in the pond or river and played the '*baich*' with dolls. The girls played sweet song '*kane vasanor geet*' on the land. After the end of the day they floated the dolls in the water and eat the offerings together. Today there are not such ritual existed.

Dol jatra or Holy Festival:

The *Dol Jatra* or *holy* festival is very popular in the Chain society. Everyone participated in this festival and enjoyed with coloured powder, songs etc. Some of them take the alcohol in the day of this festival which is socially allowed during this festival.

Agaji Puja:

Before the rising of the sun on the day of the moon light day of the *Dol*; the Chain performed the *Agaji* or the worship of the fire god. In some areas there is the tradition of worship the god without the Brahmana and in some places by the Brahmana. An ordinary temple of the straw made up in the village; the women gathered there with the offerings such as *malpoa*, incense sticks, vermillion, betel-nut and betel-leaf. The Chain began to perform several *holi* songs and circumambulate the temple for seven times and burn it. The worshiped finished thus and there is a competition for the gaining of the offerings of the worship. The priest obtained the new clothes and some money as gifts by the villagers.

Dora Badha:

The *Dora Badha* is a ritual performed following the day of *Dol* festival. This ritual is performed in the house of the village chief. The wife of the village chief presided over the festival. All the participants in this festival are women and there is no need of the priest and men. All the house wife of the village gathered in the house of the village chief with the offerings to the god. They clean the courtyard of the house and decorated in lightening. In this ritual the women of the Chain family mark thrice in the land to ask the earth divided into three parts with the toe. Then they wipe out the marks given by them to promise live together. After that all the women participants tie up the *dora* in each other hand. The *dora* is similar to the *Rakhi* festival. This festival occurred again in the first Sunday of the three months later.¹⁸

Gambhira utsab:

The Chains also practiced the festival of *gambhira* worship. Through the whole Bengali month *Chaitra* the Chains men begged from village to village by the acting and dancing like Siva, in the last day of the month there was the arrangement for the worship of the god Siva with many rules. This worship is known as the *gambhira puja* and the song performed known as the *gambhira* song. In this festival the Chain men enjoyed much with their self authored *Alkap* songs.¹⁹

Ulka utsab:

The festival of *ulka* is very popular among the chains of West Bengal. They worshiped their guardian deities on the day of the worship of the goddess Kali and taking the sacred fire from the sacred light dedicated to the guardian deity to give the light in the courtyard and in the several lands of the crops with a stick, commonly known as the *ulka puja*. They pronounced ‘*hukare!*

Hukire! Poka makore Sarrge Ja' (the insects, go to the heaven).²⁰
The festival aimed at to protect the crops by fearing them majestic
goddess Kali.²¹

Machdhara utsab:

They Chain men gathered and performed the '*Machdhara*' festivals in the *Poush Sankranti* every year. They gathered in the several ponds, rivers and catch fishes together there. After completed the catching fish the fishes were cooked and eat together. This ritual now disappeared.²²

Agricultural Festivals:

In an agricultural society the Chains are closely associated with many agricultural deities and ritual. Some of the notable agricultural rituals were *haljatra*, *muth neoya*, and *gaichumani*.

Haljatra: This ritual practiced in the early morning of the day of *Bijaya Dashami*. All the agricultural equipments e.g. ploughshare, yoke, ladder etc. were cleaned by the villagers. The bullocks also bathe and their horns were smear with the oil. After the bathing the farmers wear new cloths and careered the agricultural equipments with the bullocks in a nearby land and cultivated only two and half furrows roundly. They organized the meal in this day only fruits.²³

During the sown of the paddy: There was a tradition of worship among the Chain society before the sowing of the paddy seed in the field. This worship is purely very simple. There is no need of the Brahmins. By fixing the mouth in the east direction the peasants sit in the land and began to worship with the five handfuls of rice, vermillion and incense sticks. After the offering of some paddy seeds to the bullocks for eat, the farmer started to cultivate the land. There was an arrangement of tiffin for the neighbors and vegetarian food in the home.²⁴

During the cutting of the paddy: During the cutting of the paddy they also performed the rituals of *muth neoya*. After the bathing or purify one male member form the house went to the land and lying in the east direction he began to worship the five bulbs of the five paddy trees without pronouncing any kind of hymns. After completed the worship he cut up the five paddy trees and return to the home with the paddy trees which were worshiped; he was not permitted to talk with any person during the return to home. While he arrived in home the house wife again worshiped the paddy trees with the incense stick. This day was very much holly to them and according to themselves the goddess Laxmi arrived in their home in that day. They cleaned and decorated the home in this day. After completed the two phases of worship they began to cut the paddy from the next day. Needless to say that they never performed this kind of rituals for the other crops expect the paddy.²⁵

Gaichumani:

The agriculturist communities made valuable respect to the cows; because without the cows there agricultural productions were not possible. They regarded the cows as their property, wealth and also regarded the cows as a valuable part of their social and cultural life. The Rajbanshis of north Bengal practiced a ritual called ‘*goru chumani puja*’ which was performed during the day of the worship of the goddess kali in the Bengali month of Kartik. Like the Rajbanshis the Chain also practiced the ritual of ‘*gai chumani*’ in the same day²⁶ The cows were bathed; their horns were decorated with the vermillion by the householders. The house wife arranged the paddy, mustard oil, vermillion, betel-leafs, betel nuts, bananas in a dish and began to worship with touched the dish in the head of the cows, no hymns were pronounced.

Traditional Cultural practices:

Marriage Customs:

Agua:

This was a ritual conducted earlier of the Chain marriage. *Agua* is the ritual in which the bride and groom meet first time for the purpose of choosing together. The guardians also participated and performed their role by searching the merits and demerits of the bride and vice versa.²⁷ Earlier several questions were asked by both the parties during this period of *agua*. One common question that was raised to the bride by the groom's party was: there is only the *mug* pulse in the room, the guest came and no way to go to market or anywhere, now how she influence the guest? The answer was also generally known to all and this was that she had to prepare the *mug dal, bora* of *mug* and also juice with that. When the guardians arranged for the marriage there emerged some traditional system to meet with the bride. The bridegroom comes with the guardians to the house of the bride, she made peculiar type of questions and she is to ask to walk, to keep out the teeth, hair.

Panchati Chukano:

After the *agua* there practiced the ritual of *panchati chukano*, in the Chain marriage. In this ritual the groom had to pay some money to the bride party for the arrangement of food of the bride's relatives. The villagers decided the amount of the money to be provided. The ritual based food was commonly known in the Chain language as '*panchati*'.²⁸

Baran:

They received the bride and groom in an auspicious day. The bride party visited first to the house of groom and later the groom party visited to the house of bride to receive. Both they donate clothes, ornaments and utensils to each other during this time. They

organized the food for each other. The priest was needed in this ritual. The women performed several songs. After the completed of the stage of *baran*, there was the preparation for the next stage ‘*sagunar bari*’.²⁹

‘Sagunar bari:

The preparation of *Sagunar bari* was an essential part of their marriage ceremony. The five married women prepared this *sagunar bari* in the courtyard of the house with the threshing of *maskalai* (a kind of dal or pulse). The unmarried girls are not permitted to attend the ritual. Each *bari* consist of one and half inch, which were decorated by oil, vermillion and *durba* grass. They completed the preparation of at least five *sagunar bari* carefully and next to five generally. The others women sit on the courtyard and performed the sweet songs. This tradition also may see among the Nagor, Bind, Dhanuk and Tiyor. Santals like Oraon also practiced the ritual. The Chains used these *Sagunar bori* in the vegetables of the marriage which marked the sign of an auspicious moment because the meaning of the word *Saguna* is auspicious. The *Sagunar bari* were not prepared in the day of Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.³⁰ This tradition not prevailed among all the chains in West Bengal for instance in Murshidabad we did not find any indication of this tradition.

Daimach:

The principal attraction of the marriage was the ritual of *daimach*. In the day of *Daimach* there was a tradition of sending the fishes and curd to the house of bride by the groom’s party. The seven or five *haris* (one kind of pot made of soil) of curd had to send with similar quantity of covering pot. The seven or five pieces of *puti* fishes had also to be sending to the house of the bride. The fishes and the curds which had been sent to the house of the bride kept in the courtyard with care and touched with the paddy and

durba grass. When the groom came with his associates the fishes and the curds must be eaten by them. In the very morning of the day the bride and groom eat *thubra* or thickened milk in their respective house. The dinner paved the end of the ritual of *daimach*.³¹

Gaye Halud O Thubra:

The smear of the turmeric in the body of bride and groom practiced in the morning of the day of then the bride and groom eat *thubra* or thickened milk in their respective houses. The unmarried and widow did not permit to attend this ritual. The oldest touched the turmeric in the forehead of the bride and groom. Next to that the married women smear the turmeric in body of the bride and groom in their houses. Several humorous song played by the women during these ritual.³²

Lagan:

1. *Laganer tatta (theory of lagan)*

The next ritual that prevailed is the lagan. The members of the bride party carried a *changari* (a wooden platform) from the house of dome and decorated it. This consisted of sunned rice, bananas, betel leafs, betel nuts, turmeric, vermillion, white thread, wooden comb, red tape, molasses, *cow dang*, *myrobalan* fruit and two *keiptas* of earthen clay with two garlands of sponge wood. They also brought a half kg of rice in a *gamcha* (napkin). This *Changari* kept in the courtyard of the house of the bride and waiting for the priest. While priest came the ritual of the lagan started.

2. *Lagan badha*

A place in the courtyard of the bride's house selected to sit in a *piri* (a low wooden seat) in the east direction. The father of the groom placed closely in front of the bride with the paddy in the napkin also in the east direction. The priest placed between them

in the north direction and the Barbour placed near to him. The Barbour unite the paddy of both the party, the priest picked up some paddy and give to the father of the groom then the father of the groom gave some paddy to the father of the bride. The Barbour also performed the same and continued for seven times. Then both the napkin united and tied up by the Barbour, the priest started to recite the hymns. After completing the hymns they were directed by the priest and tied hardly. This ritual is known as *lagan badha*.

3. *Lagan Tipano:*

The bride contained a bunch of banana in this ritual performed after lagan badha. The father of the groom stands up and kept the paddy on the bunch of banana in the hand of bride to touch her and return. Then her father touches her in the same way. The mother kept the paddy in the room of the house deity. Then all the relatives touched the bride with paddy and *durba* grass to bless her and marked a tip (round shape mark) in the forehead. Various song played by the women.³³

Marua gara:

Next to *lagan tipano* there is a ritual *marua gara*. They called the canopied space for marriage as *marua* in their language. Needless to say that, the Oraon, Nagor, Bind Dhanuk, Tiyor etc. communities also called the canopied space for the marriage as *marua*. It is prepared by the sister-in-law of the bride who is called *bidhikarta* and *lokania* in Malda or *lakunia* in Murshidabad.

The four bamboos implanted in the courtyard with the straw cover. It is decorated with the colorful papers and flowers. Two banana trees placed in the east near to it. The *Purel* and *Varel* also placed under the banana tree these are nothing but two auspicious pitchers of mud. There is the tradition of preparing the *marua* before the worship of Debasi, the guardian deity. At least one pillar

should be implanted before that worship. The pitchers (*Purel and varel*) were decorated with lightening and arts which also grazed the courtyard. In some areas of Mushidabad, there was also the tradition of keeping of ladder in place of banana trees.

Purel o varel:

The two auspicious pitchers mentioned earlier called as '*Purel*' and '*Varel*'; '*Varel*' was also pronounced as '*Ghyarel*' in some areas. The word '*Varel*' derived from the word '*Var*'. The word *Ghyarel* derived from '*ghara*'. In the other pitcher they placed the soil of seven sacred places and called '*Purel*'. There were many rituals for keeping the '*purel*' and '*varel*' under the banana trees. The two pitchers kept in a neighbor's house and must be brought it in the house of the bride with music and songs. There it got decorated with artistic style. When the preparation of canopied space completed the '*purel*' and '*varel*' brought from there.

Debasi Puja:

One of the chief features of the Chains marriage is the worship of guardian deity. They described the guardian deity as *Debasi*, which derived from the word *deb ashis* (god blessings). No priest required and the women with the house wife are the worshipers. They worshiped the deity with seven songs. All the song composed in the Chain language and not only sweet to hear but also cultured and meaningful. They worshiped the deity with the thickened milk, betel nut, betel leaf, banana, incense sticks, vermillion and new cloths. The house wife remains fast until the complete of the worship.

Chatti Puja: The *Chatti puja* started just after the complete of the *Debasi* worship. Inside the left of the room of guardian deity a wall cleaned with the cow dung, the five or seven cowries kept there with the vermilions. Then the worship of the deity started

with the vegetables, pulses, rice etc. by the mother of the bride and groom respectively in their own house. There was a tradition of lightning the five lamps made of cow dung. There was also a tradition of run away with the apparatus of the worship by someone. Thus the worship came to an end. Some areas though may differ.

Math kheroa:

Math kheroa is an important ritual in the Chain marriage. The soil of the field was regarded as the pure and sacred to them; the mother of the bride and groom with seven married women visited to a nearby field and brought the soil from there. As the soil was collected by digging the field so it was called as *math kheroya* (digging of the field). During the time of digging the soil they performed several rituals; the mother of the bride or groom kept a bunch of banana, betel nut, betel leafs on the place to dig and touched that's with the paddy and *durba* grass. Then they sprinkle the water around the place from a pitcher of brass. Thus the soil purified and the son-in-law (the legal remembrance) picked up some soil to keep in the lap of the mother-in-law's loincloth. Many songs played by the women as earlier. They then return to the canopied space. The soil brought by mother kept in the *than* (temple) of the guardian deity; the soil brought by the others kept under the *purel* and *varel* in the canopied space. Some of the soil used in the preparing of the furnace to fry the *laba* (parched rice).

Marua Bihan:

Just after the worships of *Debasi* and *Chatti*, there started the ritual of *marua bihan*, which was full of funny and also important. In this ritual there was an arrangement to feed the boys and they invited to sit around the canopied space. They were distributed by thickened milk, *puri* (bread fried in clarified butter), rice, pulse and vegetables which were partake of the food offered to the deity *Debasi* and *Chatti*. At the same time there started the ritual of

marua bihan, in which the son-in-law (the legal remembrance), with the bride and groom, four elder sisters or sisters-in-law participated. The son-in-law with an arrow and shores in one hand and the *nirani* (weapons) sit in the east direction outside the canopied space. The five women stand serially behind the son-in-law, with the dishes full of thickened milk, *puri* (bread fried in clarified butter), rice, pulse, water and vegetables. The bride and groom stand at the last of them. The son-in-law (the legal remembrance) with his arrow and shores touched the soil of the canopied space and move forward. The women placed the food in the canopied space and follow the son-in-law. The bride and groom touched them with the little finger of the left hands. They continued it for seven times. In the last stage the bride and groom covered the crack with the left hands. The son-in-law throws the shores to the east direction in the sky. The arrow kept in the terrace of the canopied space. Lastly the boys declared to eat. The significance of this ritual is a misery. The word *bihan* signifies the morning. This ritual is centered on the *marua* (canopied space) in the morning, so it is called as *marua bihan*.

Keipta Pata:

The two dishes of the *lagan* consisted of two Keipta, one of them tied up with the vermillion, two *myrobalan* fruits, and two betel nuts and other tied up with a rupee of copper. The bride and groom with five married women together enclosed these together in the north-eastern direction of the canopied space. It picked up in the day of second coming. This ritual is called *keipta pota*. This ritual did not perform everywhere for instance we did not find any mention of this ritual in Murshidabad.

Chula Chuman (touching of the oven)

Chula chuman or touching the oven is another ritual performed during the marriage of the Chain community. The

oven that will be used for cooking the foodstuffs in marriage became purified on the eve of marriage ceremony. In this ritual they shaped the fives round shapes of vermillion in the oven; and the five married women touched the oven with the paddy and the *durba* grass. Several humorous songs played during this period by the women.

Hamar:

Husking of the paddy is known as the *hamar* and husking machine as the *okhri* among the chain community. There are two sticks of the *okhri*, known as *samat*. There was the tradition of husking some paddy in the husking machine, with the hit of five or seven times by the elder sister or sister-in-law. They made a completion after that who will be the first to keep the husking rice in the room of the guardian deity. This rice kept there for a future need in the ritual of *Khir-Palton*.³⁴

Halud Charano:

Halud Charano is another important ritual to perform in the Chain marriage. In this ritual the bride and groom sit in a *piri* (a low wooden seat) under the canopied space. A *ghot* (a small earthen or metal pitcher) placed in front of them; besides the *ghot* there were the turmeric, paddy, paddy of the *lagan*, *durba* grass and a *nora* (a rounded stone for breaking) on a dish. The five married men and women together touched the *nora* first with the turmeric and then serially with the *ghot*, the foreheads, the arms, knees of the bride and groom. Lastly the *nora* kept in the dish after touching with the paddy of the *lagan*. Everybody touched the bride and groom with the paddy and *durba* grass. Thus the ritual came to end.

We did not find any relation in the naming of the ritual and the behaviors played during the ritual. Here in place of turmeric the

nora played the chief role. Most probably they wanted to incorporate the *narayan sila* with *sastanga* in the sacred ceremony like marriage. There was the paucity of the *narayan sila*, and the *nora* replaced that.

Uptan Vuja (Vaja)

This was another ritual to perform in the Chain marriage. The *bidhikarti*(elder sister or brother-in-law) fried the turmeric, barley, *myrobalan* fruits, *emblic myrobalan* fruits etc. on a cooking utensil in a newly prepared oven under the canopied space. The fried of the corns was known in the Chain language as the *vaja* or *vuja*. The fried corns cleaned after that and smeared in the body and face of the bride and groom to increase the beauty which may be used as an *ayurvedic* medicine.

Pani Kata or jal Sodha:

After the smear of the *uptan* in the face and body of the bride and groom there started the ritual of *pani Kata*. There was a need of the water of seven or five sacred place in the Chain marriage. The water of Ganga, Swaraswati, Tribeni, Yamuna regarded as the water of the sacred place, really the collection of which remain impossible; hence they introduced the ritual of *Pani kata* as an alternate. This ritual also performed in the several Hindu marriages. The six elder sisters or the sister-in-laws visited with the band party and singers to a nearby pond, river, or well to bring water. The elder sister poured the water in the pitcher and the sister-in-law cut it into seven or five pieces with a knife consisted a betel nut in the façade, this water were regarded as the water of seven or five sacred places. *The Purel* also poured with this water. Some of the water kept in the *Varel* under the canopied space. The water of tube well is not allowed in this ritual.

Laba Vuja or vaja:

Parched rice needed for the chain marriage during the time of seven rounds. *Laba* meant the parched rice which derived from the word *laja* through the corruption of the word. The *bidhikarti* (sister-in-law) fried the rice under the canopied space around her the others women performed several songs. Generally there was the tradition of frying the rice of 1kg and 250g, which may be varied in place to place. The sister-in-law occupied some ornaments as the honor for fried the rice. In some cases she became sensitiveness which fulfilled her desire.

Gal Seka:

The ritual of reception was known as the *gal seka* in the *Chain* language. When the groom arrived in the house of the bride for marry. He gets reception from the house of the bride by the women with the paddy, *durba* grass, betel nuts, betel leafs, and auspicious lamp in a dish. The motherly seniors touched the cheek with the betel leafs; several songs performed in the inner portion of the house. The environs get crowded during this time with the songs, *uludhani* (a sound by the Hindu women by moving their tongue within the mouths on any festivals) and the blow of conch shells.

In the same period some persons from the lines of bride arranged for the reception of the associates of the groom. In the scarcity of heartiest reception there may emerged the disagreeable events in some marriages.

Astamangola:

Every issue related to the ritual of *astomangola* covered with the figure eight. In this ritual the eight married men with the groom stand roundly. A husking machine stuck between them. The priest circumambulates around them and tied up them with the thread reciting the hymns for eight times. The husking machine got hit in

the end of every round. The priest taken the branch of mango from the hand of the groom and wrote the name of his ancestors. The priest picked eight rice corns from the husking machine and kept the rice on the mango branches and tied to the right hands of the groom. No women participated in this ritual though they performed song in the inner house. The groom is not permitted to enter in the inner house before the performance of the ritual *astamangola*. He stayed outside with his associates.

Lachay: (Lachua)

At the same time with the ritual of *astamangola* there performed the *lachua* ritual of the bride in the inner house. In this ritual the barber cut the finger's nail and she sit on the roof of the room of the guardian deity, where she was bathed with the water of the seven sacred places and the *lachua* water of the groom while she was on a yoke. The brother-in-law bathed her by moving his mouth in the opposite direction because he is not permitted to see her during the period of bathing. Through this ritual the bride purified. In the same way the groom purified before his journey to marriage. In this ritual after the cut of the nail nobody touch the bride and groom, for that reason the ritual came to be known as the *lachay*. Their clothes also discarded for their impervious. The bride and groom thus purified after the bath.

Marua ghurano:

After the end of the *Lachay* the groom and his associates entered into the house of the bride. Then the main ritual of marriage started. The brother or brotherly relatives of the bride attached the hand of the groom and circumambulate around the canopied space, which was known as the *marua ghorano* ritual. The women performed the songs related to circumambulation. The ritual implies the honor to the canopied space, flexibility of the groom, responses

to the groom by the brother of the bride. This ritual only performed in the Malda district, not elsewhere.

Bibah/ Biha:

The Chain practiced the Vedic hymns in their marriage. While the rituals of Marua Ghora get completed the priest took the preparation for the marriage. The ritual performed during the time of marriage were *lajanjali* (seven round), *kanya sampradan* (bestow of the bride), *pani grahan* (acceptation of the hand), *sidur dan* (giving of the vermillion), *ashirbad* (blessings) etc. The ritual of *lajanjali* or round of seven is an amusing occurrence. In the west direction of the canopied space on the courtyard kept a *nora* (a rounded stone for breaking) which consisted of paddy, *durba* grass, betel nuts, betel leafs etc. in a seven separate parts. The groom and bride stand before and after their. The groom kept the roots of the brides hand and ready to moving round the *nora* for seven times; during this time the brother of the bride disperse the fried rice from the tray on the lap the bride. Thus the ritual finished. Most probably they wanted to incorporate the *narayan sila* with *sastanga* in the sacred ceremony like *sat pak*. There was the paucity of the *narayan sila*, and the *nora* replaced that.

Next to *lajabandhan* was the ritual of *sidur dan* or giving the vermillion in the forehead of the bride. No man during this period is permitted to inclined position. In presence of only the priest and being enclosed with the cloths the ritual performed.

Asirbad:

Next is the *Asirbad*; men and women blessed the new couple but not together. First the barber gave the paddy and *durba* grass to the aged person and the priest recite the hymns. The part of blessings conducted under the direction of the priest. While the blessings of the elder person get finished the remaining women and

men blessed the couple but separately. The *hom* introduced just after it. Various songs played during this time of marriage by the women.

Regarding the Chain marriage Sakti nath Jha in ‘*Gana kantha*’ state that, During the marriage the groom climbed on a roof, his father-in-law, mother-in-law and all the members of the family of father-in-law requested him to descend from the roof but he did not move down. Lastly the bride come and articulates that, ‘Oh! Chain *mandal* come down and don’t worry. My father will give me the 10 rupees by which I will make your subsistence through the business of vegetables.’³⁵ But his view is not acceptable because the Chains did not practice such type of tradition. The voices of the bride are also beyond the support; she can’t say her own caste groom as Chain *mandal*. As the Chains were illiterate so this is matter of shame to taking freely between the bride and groom. Further there was no tradition that the wife should take the responsibility of the family.

This tradition is practiced among the Dhangar society. Sonini Sinha in her essay ‘*Dhangar Samaje Ajo Narir prodhanya*’ state that, ‘In generally the men take the responsibility of the family but in case of Dhangar society it is opposed. In this society the women take the responsibility of her husband. They had to promise before the marriage for that.’ The rituals of marriage are also simple; there are no hymns or Brahmanas. The bride and groom met in the canopied space under a tree near to home; the marriage is completed by the old women of the society. After giving the vermillion in the forehead of the bride; the groom climb on a tree, and the bride requested him to descend by saying,

*Gach theke namo tumi/ mati kete khaoyabo ami’*³⁶

(Come down from the tree/I will food you by cultivating the soil.). While she completed this promise for three times, the groom came down.

Duar Chekani:

After the marriage the bride and the groom carried to the room of the guardian deity. In this time the women opposed for that with performing some song to demand money. After donate the money they are get permitted to enter into the room.³⁷ This ritual is known as *duar chekani*.

Khir Palton:

Two separate plates with *payes* (sweet rice) given to the bride and groom while they coexisted in the room of guardian deity. They interchanged some of the *payes* which known as the ritual of *khir paltan*.

After the marriage the new couple started their new life with changing the foods, which mark the sign of lovely existence. They wanted to share their love, sorrow and joy with one another on the presence of the guardian deity. Though the Chains are non-Aryan; but these activities of them showed their high approach of mind.

Marjadi:

There was the arrangement of feasting for the relatives by the bride's line; and they collected money from the guardian of the groom for that. This money was known as *marjadi* (honor). Basically the money was collected for the cost of the meat. To increase their honor everybody donate much money for that. On the other hand it is also a tradition to help the father economically who survived after the marriage.

Kane Biday o Samyadhi (beyai) Milon:

After the feasting they send the bride to the house of the father-in-law. During this time the farewell ceremony organized and

everybody embrace mutually to each other. The two *bihai* (fathers of the bride and groom) also embraced each other, which is known as the *samyadhi Milan*. These scenes were very distress, because all the relatives of the bride with her father, mother, brother and sister began to cry. Thus a ritual like marriage which was happy completed with sorrow.

Laroja:

After the marriage though the bride came to the house of father-in-law, but not stays long days. She had to return within one day after completing some rituals there. During this time the couple had to carry out a simple ritual called *duari nangha*. There kept a new cloth in the door of the guardian deity's room. They had to walk on the cloth for five times and obeisance the guardian deity. The groom returned in the next day leaving his wife, because the bride is not permitted to go to the house of father-in-law before the second coming.

The groom and his sister-in-law then returned to the house of bride after spending nine days with the sweets, new cloths, and fishes. This ritual is known as the *beber* in the Chain language. This is also known as *lyaroja* because it performed after the nine days of the marriage.

Bou Pathano:

Bou Pathano is prominent among the rituals performed before the second coming of the bride. After the marriage the father-in-law brought the new cloths, coconut, ripe banana, sugar cane, molasses, sunned rice in the first *jitastami tithi*. A sit was prepared by the *kush* grass. She sits there wearing the new cloths. The affairs brought by the father-in-law kept in front of him there also kept the paddy, *durba* grass etc. The wife of the village chief touched the back head of the bride for five times, which is known as *bau pathano*. The five married women also touché the bride in a same

way. They gave instruction to guide the family to the bride during this time. No song performed in these rituals.³⁸

Dwiragaman: (Second Coming)

The second coming of the bride from the father's house to father-in-law's house is known as the ritual of *dwiragaman*; the chain also practiced it. The bride stays most of the days in the father's house because of the prevalence of the child marriage. While she came there were also many rituals. Now the child marriage demolished but the ritual of *dwiragaman* practiced. In an auspicious day the son-in-law and his sister-in-law visited the bride's house with new cloths and sweets. They spend one day there with joy. After one day they return home with the bride. The newly married couple thus started their new family life.

Dosiani:

The word *dosiani* indicates the bathing for two times. Here *dosiani* indicates the second time bath only. The ritual of *dosani* practiced when the bride gets pregnant. At time of *dosiani* ritual the members of the bride's family invited. The neighbors came and feasting; they also blessed for a healthy son and daughter.

Sorighar:

Another notable ritual among the Chains was centered the *Sorighar*. Their Childs were born in a hut commonly known as *Atur ghar*, and in the Chain language *Sorighar*. The mother with his baby stay there for twelve days, they also spend twenty one days without touch anybody. The *Dhaima* take care of them during this time. The mother eats the black spice as a compulsory food. At the winter time they light the fire of the *ghute* to condition the cold. After completed of twenty one or twelve days (which may differ on the area basis) they called the barber and purified the mother and son. The priest gives the name of the child in this time.

Jhal protha:

This was a family based ritual. If the birth of the child take placed at the house of his father then there was the tradition of sending the round shape sweet consist the taste of chili (*jhaler naru*) to the house of her father-in-law. This is prepared with the rice, molasses and black pepper. This tradition is still in practice in some areas of Murshidabad.³⁹

Sradhanustan: (Obsequies)

There has been the tradition of burning the death bodies in the burning *ghats*, but if the death body is of an immature person, it should be buried. There is a tradition of offering the sweet among the associates who went to the funeral pyre. The relatives began to collect the money in that purpose which is commonly known as ‘*gang chalai*’. After the burning of the body while all the associates in the funeral pyre returned to the house, there was a ritual of ‘*buke pathar deoya*’. They gathered in the courtyard where there were a dish of water with the leafs of *tulsi*, black peppers and a *nora* (rounded stone for breaking). Besides this there was a burning fire which was touched by all the associates in the funeral pyre, they also touched their breast into the *nora* for five times and masticated the black pepper. This facilitated to forget the relatives easily who has been died.

During the period of untouchable they were directed to eat vegetables food and not to take fish, meat etc. Regarding the obsequies they practiced the *khourakarma* offerings of *daspinda* within ten days, in the eleventh day they practiced *agradani* and finally in the twelfth day they practiced the *Sradhanustan* i.e. obsequies. They practiced the act of singeing the mouth of the dead at cremation and the elder son advocated this in case of father and in case of mother it is done by the younger son. The person, who participated in the singeing of the mouth, played the chief role

in the ritual of *sraddha*. There was a social rule for the arrangements of two days foods for the relatives after the *sraddha*. In case of poor it was one day. There was a tradition or sacrament to offering foods to the dead in the end of the year in the Goya and Kashi. They also organized the food for the Brahmana. This ritual was known as Kiria in the Chain language which means to be free from the *ashoch*, (Untouchable) to become *shouch* (touchable).⁴⁰

The above study found a large number of folk tradition practiced by the Chain community in West Bengal. Some of them though currently demolished; but large numbers are still performing in the Chain villages of Malda and Murshidabad. Some of the practices proved its solidarity with the tribal way of life while some with the Brahmanical and Vaishnavism. However, above all these is the fact that they are living with this traditions and feel pride with their mighty and prestigious folk cultural and religious way of life and history. Thus, they remind me the quote from Rabindra Nath Tagore, according to him, '*desher kabye, gane, chharay, prachin mandirer vagnabshese, kitdrasta puthir jirna patre, gramya parbone, brotokathay, pallir kuthire, protyakshya bastobe sadhin chinta o gavesanar dara janibar janya, sikshar bisayke kebol puthir madhya haite mukhasta na karia bishwer sange tahake sandhan karibar janya tomadigke ahaban karitech...’* (You are invited here to explore the world practically in the verses, songs, rhymes, in the ruin of the temples, old pages of the manuscripts, in the rural festivals, in the rural hatches, in the holly religious stories in spite of limited you only in reciting the texts.).

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Memory, Identity and Politics of (dis) location: Loss of Cultural Memory in the Poems of two Bodo Poets

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The present paper is an attempt to explore the phenomenon of amnesia and loss of cultural memories of identity in the poems of Samar Brahma Choudhury and Vikram (pen name of Nil Kamal Brahma). The selected poems of the two representative Bodo poets present the phenomenon of loss of cultural memory under colonialism. The two poet's perception of fear of loss of cultural memory is significant in the context of the Bodo people's identity movements since the late 60's of the last century. We have selected one poem each from the two poets and tried to explore the poetic images and symbols that focus on the cultural anxiety and crisis resulting from loss of cultural memory.

Introduction: The Bodos are the aboriginal inhabitants of Assam with their distinctive cultural and linguistic traits. In the scholarly literature one can find three different ways of looking at the causes behind the outbreak of the Bodo identity movement. In the first, the Bodo upsurge is seen to be the outcome of centre-state relations, while the second school of scholars argues that the Bodo movement took place due to the deprivation of the community through the identity politics of the state machinery in Assam. The last category

of scholars tries to look at the Bodo movement issue from the perspective of the development of a middle class among the Bodo community (Baruah: 2001). The cultural assimilation went hand in hand with a large amount of racial fusion of people of the different races. The feeling of marginalization frightened them in a big way. Marginalization can take place not only in the context of globalization, perhaps less conspicuous, but equally damaging can be the marginalization that take place as a result of internal colonialism, without any external or extra-national force acting as a catalyst. The tribal people, the first nations, the aborigines are subtly bypassed, sidelined, and made marginal not only in the political sphere, but in the economic and cultural sphere too.

In post-colonial discourse, the simultaneous co-existence of place and language as a means of identity is at two levels; first it becomes a “presence” in the writer’s mind in creating the mood and guiding the narrative destiny of his writings; second, it becomes a means of internalizing the self and place for personal satisfaction (Jameson : 1998). But the relationship of an ethnic tribe to the state of Assam has been a problematic one for the Bodos because of the surpassing importance in the ideology of the values of freedom, equality and the autonomy of the tribe. In these circumstances the question like ‘who?’ and where?’ (Self and belongingness) become inevitable. Set in the backdrop of the Bodo society, poems of Samar Brahma Choudhury’s “Sijwu Geremsa” and Nil Kamal Brahma’s “Ward No. 5” respectively deal with these questions and reflect the aspects of nationalistic strife undertaken by the Bodo people to assert their ethnic identity. Our attempt in this paper is to critically engage with the poetic compositions of the two poems of the two poets and see how in both the poems Bodo people seek to stabilize their ethnic identity.

SamarBrahma Choudhury and NilkamalBrahma'spoems :

Samar Brahma Choudhury's *SijwuGeremsa* and Nilkamal Brahma's "WardNo. 5" respectively reflect the Bodo people's consciousness of their origin, history and culture. In both the poem it becomes evident that the Bodos regard Assam as their homeland with historical affirmation as the original inhabitants of Assam. They are two representative poets who have strongly expressed the voice of the ethnic identity of the Bodos against the politics of displacement and dislocation. Samar brahma Choudhury, besides being poet was also a leader of the Bodo political front, called the PTCA that started first movement for a separate homeland for the Bodos. A gifted poet as he was, Samar Brahma wrote romantic poems in his early life. He has left behind modern poems with strong voice of protest against all sorts of injustice meted out to his tribes' man. In comparison to Samar Brahma Choudhury, Nilkamal Brahma is more of a fiction writer than a poet;but he also wrote some of the excellent poems under the pseudonym Vikram. Another thing to be noted here is, Nilkamal is not a contemporary of Samar Brahma Chodhury. However, both the poets use traditional and cultural symbols that make their poetic language and idiom fragrant with the sense of Bodo cultural identity.

Samar Brahma Choudhury's *Sijwugeremsa*: Memory, Images and cultural symbols as identity:

It is explicit and clear in the poem *Sijwu Geremsa* written by Samar Brahma Choudhury that the *sijwu*, the living symbol of Bathou brai. has a telling effect on the existence and historical period of the Bodos for centuries. Ancient Heritage, Pre History, folk tradition, life-style, belief, taste and behaviour of Bodos get into every cell and membrane of *SijwuGeremsa*. It is noteworthy that the Bodos have rich tradition of oral narratives consisting of myth, legend, ballads, hymns and oral narrative songs and folk

tales. The Bodo authors and poets have drawn heavily on these elements of oral poetry and narratives and re-fashioned those as creative writings and in many cases have presented the elements of oral poetry and narrative prose through their creative writings. These trends can be traced since the inception of Bodo modern poetry that is 1952. The first generation of Bodo modern poets – Prasenjit, Samar Brahma and Jagadish Brahma initiated the first wave of modernism in Bodo poetry. As history of Bodo literature claims, “the harsh reality of life and the politics of domination that obstructed the development of their language and culture inspired the new poets to write poetry on ethnic liberation and salvation . Young poets like Jagadish Brahma, Samar Brahma Choudhury and Prasenjit Brahma paved the way for modern Bodo poetry by ushering in a new wave of ethnic poetry at a time when many of their fellow brethren could not liberate themselves from the hangover of romanticism.”(Boro: 2010:42)

Alluding to the old narratives extant among the Bodos, the poet draws the reader’s attention to the loss of culture and heritage. However the poets re assures, there are heroes like Maoriyasrwn, (a hero in Bodo oral narratives), among them and hence no cause for worry. The poet says,

*bida phongbai satjonkhwu dao hegemsriya
monodwng? Satjwn bijaujaliya alai silai jadwng.
Dagi dagi maoriyasrwn jwhwlao dong.*

The sphinx has swallowed the seven brothers?

The seven wives will be in trouble;

Don’t worry, *Maoriyasrwn* is there.)

(*Sijwu Geremsa*, Samar Brahma Choudhury ; trans. by the
authors)

The poem has a number of allusions and references to the myth and folk tale of the Bodos. The *hegemrsri* is a bird with mythical character. In the above cited lines the bird *Hegemsri* is used as symbol to denote the meaning of imminent danger to spread among the Bodos. Another element from prose narrative is also seen in the above given lines. The *Maoriyasrwn Jwhwlao* is a popular character prevalent in the Bodo folk tales. He has the power to go across the universe and he could bring the demised soul also. In the poem he has been shown as the protector of the community. The poet's profound concern is with the community; the society to which he belongs is basic to the poet's quest. This sense of past is further clear when he says "still we are following the path of ancestors" This search for roots and the relationship with the past and present is at the core of the above mentioned poem.

Through the recurring memory and images of the living and ancient heritages, the poet brings back to the collective memory and sensitivity of the Bodo community to work progressively for affirming their Bodo identity.

The term *sijwugeremsa* is culturally significant as it denotes the *sijwu* plant as the living symbol of Bathou brai, the custodian of the traditional religion of the Bodos which is current among them since time immemorial is invariably linked up with the worship of Bathou brai or Sibrai, the supreme God of the Bodos. After the name of supreme god Bathou brai, their religion is known as Bathou religion. Bathou means five principles of creation which must be followed by every devout member of the race. They worship Bathou brai and other gods and goddesses during their religious functions and festivities known as Kherai and Garza. The Bodos have no fixed place meant for the purpose of worshipping like the temple or the church or the mosque. But in every Bodo household one

can see a Sijwu plant (*euphorbia splendens*) on the Bathou altar. The sijwu plant has been presented as a symbol of unity and prosperity in the poem. The poet also reveals that though Bodos practice other religion also they are united by heart. So there is no reason to be scared of the conversion to other religion.

This poem *Sijwu Geremsa* looks back to the traditional culture and heritage of the Bodos. The poet revisits the past glory of the Bodos and welcome the new awakening among them. For the poet *Sijwugeremsa* is dominant symbol Bodo cultural identity that can provide them respite from the fear of loss of cultural memory and identity. Thus the re affirms his position as the representative and indomitable spirit of the Bodo self awakening that became strong in the 60-70s of the 20th century. The poet claims,

We are the conquering race
Gaze at them with pride
We are the people of this land
Dimapur , our Dimapur
Golden city of ours
You are the son of Maibang
Dobka , phurja didsa
A bid g sijwu tree
Strong and indomitable as ever.

(Boro: 2010: 44)

Along with the Sijwu, the poet refers to the cultural symbols of the Bodos like *kham* (Bodo drum) *zotha* (cymbal) and *siphung* (long flute with five holes), which are played in the context of the Kherai performance ,

As the tender paddy grain come out
Of the green paddy stalks
We play *zotha*,
We play *siphung*
We play *kham*

And we dance like the free birds

(Basumatary : 2005:78 ; trans by the authors)

A good number of mythical or folk tale characters besides the ones mentioned above find special mention in the poem. The poet also refers to the age old tradition of dramatic performance and story telling with the help of Serja . These cultural symbols are vehicles with which the poet tries to reclaim and re assert the ethnic identity of the Bodos at a time when a large section of them had lost their language and culture.

Nilkamal Brahma's *Ward No 5: Dislocation and loss of memory and traditional culture:*

Nilkamal Brahma's is basically a gifted short story writer in Bodo. But he used to write poems under the pseudonym 'Vikram'. Of his poems the best known are – Amen, Ward No 5. The poem Ward No. 5 reflects a sense of uncertainty regarding their future identity and existence that came in the wake of urbanization and resultant displacement. Like any tribal people the illiterate and poor section of the Bodos find it difficult to cope with the living conditions in an urban locale. Rather they prefer to sell their land and shift to a remote village near the forest or hill. This was a fact of the Bodo settlement and replacement in the 60s and 70s of the last century. The poem reflects upon the social reality based on the sad plight of the Bodo people of a small village near the present township of Kokrakhar that became converted to ward no 5.

Like a story teller, the poet begins his poem as if he wants to tell a story. He says,

Listen, reverend author, listen

I have plot of a tale to unfold

A sad tale to unfurl.

Once there was a village here.

Where you can see now

Newly raised concrete structures

Thousand new buildings.

A new habitat.

Now called ward no 5

(Basumatary 2005: 128 ‘; trans by the authors)

With the replacement and dislocation are lost the traditional institutions like the village headman, the *halmaji* and all the familiar images of a typical Bodo village – the *sijwu* plant, *thulunsi*, *bakhri* (*granary*), *Goli* no (cow shed), *soura* no (guest room), *ising* (*kitchen*), the areca nut and jack fruit garden and the everything that is Bodo flavour. The physical displacement is disastrous as it gradually leads to loss of memory leading to the loss of linguistic and cultural identity.

New urbanization brought about lots of changes among all sections of people. Even the domestic assistants/ maid servants used to look smart by wearing cowboy, drain pipe, Chinese pen, and vanity bag. Hollywood rock n roll become their craze; breakfast and dinner became the new habit. The new wave of civilization called urbanization came like a flood and washed them away resulting in their displacement. They had to sell out their land to the

outsiders, the new guests who came to fill in the gap. This is the sad story the poet has to unfold. This is the sad plight of the people who were once he offsprings of

*Dwimalu, Tularam Zaolia
Gambariam bariarw Dhwnsri*

Who have now given way to gambling and drinking. The allusion to the past heroes and heroines bring to prominence the sense of loss of cultural memory. The poet laments the loss of culture resulting from displacement. The people unable, to cope with the new economy and ways of deceptions lost their land to the greedy money lenders , left for new plots of land in Mimang ,chilapathar - their ‘ultimate resort ‘ as the poet calls it.

Thus the two poems by two Bodo poets reveal the loss of memory and loss of cultural identity of the Bodos who are one of the ethnic groups in Assam trying to assert their distinct linguistic and cultural identity in the last few decades. Confused by the prevalent nationalist discourses of the mainstream Assamese people and frightened by the prospect of being submerged in the politics of hegemony, the Bodos in Assam had a fear of identity crisis and hence they initiated socio political movements to establish their ethnic identity. Indeed, for them it is a political as well as cultural necessity. The Bodo poems by two representative poets affirm these beliefs and ideologies of the Bodo identity movement. As set in the backdrop of the Bodo society, poems of Samar Brahma Choudhury’s “Sijwu Geremsaa” and Nil Kamal Brahma’s “Ward No. 5” respectively really deal with these questions and reflect the aspects of nationalistic strife undertaken by the Bodo people to assert their ethnic identity.

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Puanchei as an Art Form: A brief Introduction

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Art is a diverse range of human activities and the products of those activities; this article focuses primarily on the handiworks of the *Mizo* people through textual and a few visual images. The images are shown to enhance the characteristics of their arts in terms of the techniques and subject matter of art and literature, expression, communication of emotion, or other qualities. An art form is the specific shape or quality an artistic expression takes.

Art in its literal form fundamentally refers to the artistic works of a person or persons, singularly or as group or community. In the classical meaning of the term art literally refer to paintings and sculptures. However, art in its eclectic aspect, particularly in traditional tribal societies cannot be confined to just paintings and sculptures. The art of the tribal people represents their material culture and what they see around them. Hence, it always has a religious or ritualistic connotation. Typically originating in rural areas; tribal art refers to the subject and craftsmanship of artefacts from tribal cultures. Tribal art is also known as ethnographic art, or, controversially, Primitive Art (Dutton, 1990, p.1). During the colonial period, tribal arts have been hoarded and collected by western anthropologists, private collectors and museums, particularly ethnographic and natural history museums. Apparently, the collection of tribal arts was mainly due to curiosity and the

interest in exotic quality and tag that they possessed and because of their primitive tag. The lack of cultural context has been a challenge with the western mainstream public's perception of tribal arts (Howard et al, 2006, p.136). There was no respond to tribal art regarding the historical context, symbolism or the artists' intention. In the 19th century, non-western art was not seen by mainstream Western art professional as being as art at all (p. 131). By the 1960's, with the emergence of post modernism, there was a process of acceptance of tribal art in a more objective light but art critics still approached tribal arts from a purely formalist approach (Robert, 1995, p.3). However, the term "primitive" is now been highly criticized as being Eurocentric and pejorative (Howard, p. 132).

Nonetheless, what might be referred to as unpolished and crude form of art by the ostensible advanced societies can often be found amongst the remnants of these tribal societies, forming a huge part of the source for reconstructing the history of such cultures as they tell the stories of the people who produced them. Art comes with a great number of different functions throughout its history, making its purpose difficult to abstract or quantify to any single concept. This does not imply that the purpose of art is vague, but that it has many unique, different reasons for being created in the past till date.

Art therefore is also inclusive of the huge numbers of inscriptions and crude forms of drawings available in tribal habitations. When deciphered, most of these inscriptions and drawings or paintings tell us about the cultures, beliefs and traditions of the people who made the art. But there are also some inscriptions which are not yet deciphered even in the case of the material remains found at Vangchhia, Mizoram. We should also keep in mind that all tribal societies do not leave such trails. Thus what might be described and defined as art cannot be literally use to define art in

its literal form when it comes to tribal societies. Thus, when we look into the art forms of tribal societies, we often look at the basic art forms, if there are any and then we enlarge our circle of the art ring by prying into their day to day lives and the kind of artistic skills that are shown and developed by these cultures. Motivated purposes of art refer to intentional and conscious actions on the part of the artists or creator. These may be to bring about political change, to comment on an aspect of society, to convey a specific emotion or mood, to address personal psychology, to illustrate other discipline, sell a product as commercial venture, for household needs, to produce economical tools or simply as a form of communication. The non-motivated purposes of art are those that are integral to being human, transcend the individual, or do not fulfil a specific external purpose. In this sense, art, as creativity, is something humans must do by their very nature but early societies hardly created art beyond utility.

There are several categories of art and design objects. Artefacts and objects created by indigenous peoples living in tribal communities are referred to as tribal art. Tribal art is sometimes called primitive native art and generally refers to artefacts created in the past. But this generalization contradicts itself in the plethora of tribal art and its continuum. In that, tribal art agreeably is a term covering the art products and performances of tribes. Tribes of different places and cultures have made their own place in the contemporary world of art. The art gives the tribes a power and responsibility to control and guide them through it. The symbols portray the imaginations of men and these imaginations are the representative emotions of the people of a particular period and society. In India, tribal art have been thriving since time immemorial and have been prominent in multiple vibrant forms which include paper art, pottery, crafts, metal crafts, toys, weaving and jewellery crafts.

In the case of the *Mizo* tribe, one of the most vivid forms of art can be seen in the creation of their basic mode of clothing called *puan*. Like any other, the creation of the *puan* is for the purpose of the fundamental human need for clothing oneself and at the later period, also necessitated by the need to invent an identity and build a cultural feature based on what they clothe themselves with. However, the method and skills involved in the process of cloth making needs expertise and artistry. According to Chip Walter “The greatest innovations in the history of humankind was neither the stone tools nor the steel sword, but the invention of symbolic expression by the first artists.”(Walter, 2016, p.1). The *Mizo* did craft a symbolic expressions into their clothing by incorporating motifs and designs from nature, using what they see or encountered around them mainly in the form of plants and animals. This paper henceforth, in its gist content, tries to highlight in brief one clothing item of the *Mizo* which is the most popular piece of dress among the women. It is also the most common sample for dress as an identity for the *Mizo*, their tradition and culture.

The term *puan* in *Mizo* means cloth in general and denotes, in particular, the traditional dress of *Mizo* women and men. However, each piece of dress has a specific name with an affix of the word *puan* signifying its basic utility which is to cover or clothe. Each *puan* was then named generally after the motif or colour applied or based on its significance or common utilization. Hence it is hardly strenuous to find out the connotation of a particular piece from its name. And again, like most early societies; it was the job of women to make clothes for their families and other clothing items for household utility. It was required of every woman to know the art of weaving. In fact, the weaving knowledge and skill of a woman highly determines her social status to the point that besides being from a noble family, one of the most important criteria to become a

chief's wife was to be a good weaver. So, when it came to weaving, women of all statuses were exposed to equal levels of expectation and each of them was responsible for the making of cloth. Miniature looms were made for little girls so that they would learn and practice the art. Since the older female members of all families weaved, most girls grew up around looms and slowly gather the knowledge of weaving. As they grow older, girls instinctively set to help the older women and by the age of about thirteen, most girls are confident enough to weave and create a dress on their own. In an interview, avid weavers like Renhchin Chinzah, who has a royal lineage and Hrangthliaii a commoner, both claimed to have started weaving on their own at the age of thirteen (Chinzah, Hrangthliai, Interview). Thankhumi¹ mentioned that she learnt to weave at a very young age and that she produced her first *puanchei* at the age of 13 in the year 1942.

The diverse colours, the process of dyeing and the assortment of motifs and designs shown in their creations leave no doubt to the mind the artistic skills of the *Mizo* women in general and in making the coveted pieces of clothing with their intricate designs in particular. Of these pieces made by the *Mizo* women, the ones with the most significant and complicated patterns were for the men such as *Chawngnak* for *Lai* men, *Dua kalapa* and *Chylao poh* for the *Mara* men and *Puanchei* of the *Lusei* which was a man's cloth at the very beginning (Boichhingpuii, 2016, p.104). However, it eventually became a woman's dress and the design evolved into similar but slightly different pattern from weaver to weaver. Over the last few years, trivial innovations were added but there is a resolved method of warping and weft with common motifs and colours used by all. *Puan* in the earliest times was worn on the chest which was wrapped around under the arms, each end overlapping the other on the front, covering the breast. The outer

end would be tucked tightly where it ends into the other side lining the body, over the bosom. This style of wearing a *puan* was called *hnutebih*, *hnubih* or *thinbih* (Boichhingpuii, p.44). Besides this, early records states that the female wore “*cloth of their own manufacture, which falls down from the loins to the middle of the thigh; and both sexes occasionally throw a loose sheet of cloth over their bodies to defend themselves from the cold*” (Macrae, 1805, p.184-185). So they were pretty much naked above the waist except for when they wear cloth in a *hnubih* fashion and when they were cold they would put on another cloth as blanket of shawl over their *puan*. Later when blouses were introduced, they would bring one end of the shawl over one shoulder from the back. They would then bring the other end under the arm to the front and throw it back over the shoulder. Men simply wear the *puan* on their waist which falls below the knee, mostly till the shin and they remain naked above the waist most of the time. This style of wearing the cloth was known as *puanven* or *puanveng*. When it was chilly, they would throw another blanket over their body to keep themselves warm. The style of wearing *puan* at the waist with blouses was later applied by women as well but it retained the word *bih* and is called *puanbih*.

Puanlaisen in literal terms means a cloth with a red middle or centre, *lai* means middle or centre and *sen* means red. The vital surface of this *puan* is mainly white with red threads of about 10 – 12 inches wide running horizontally in the middle without the intricate design of the modern *puanchei*. *Chei* means to decorate. Earlier, both the terms were used interchangeably to refer to the same *puan*. Today *Puanlaisen* is a name use mainly to denote the older and lighter version of the *puan* with red colour running through the middle horizontally, with *thaighruih*. This is a technique of weaving where the weft yarns form a ribbed structure in such a manner that

the warp yarns were imbedded by the weft to produce a raised ribbed effect (Ralte, 2016, p.25). This line runs perpendicular to the selvedge at two ends of the cloth in such a way that the cloth is divided into three equal parts. Also, the pattern of *Mangpuan* was retained by many in their *Puanchei*. This has lines of about an inch crossing each other creating small block of rectangles on the whole surface and the decorative patterns of *Puanchei* are woven on top of that. This was called *Mangpuanchei* or *Puanlaisenmangpuantial*. On the other hand, *Puanchei* now mainly refers to the modern version of the cloth. True to its name, *Puanchei* or the decorated cloth is heavily patterned with motifs not found in *Puanlaisen* though the primary pattern of the old version remains. Thus, *Puanchei* essentially is an improved and more decorated version of *PuanlaiSen*.

In the pre colonial *Mizo* society, every woman possessed a *Puanlaisen* and it was considered to be the most decorative and beautiful of their designs. So every woman thrived to make at least one *Puanlaisen* for themselves and it was shameful to not have one made by them. It was used as wedding costumes for the bride and close families alike and for special occasions such as festivals and dances (Chatterji, 1978, p.36) particularly by the *Lusei* and *Lai* community, who share this particular *puan* as part of their traditional attire. As a matter of fact, during those days, *Puanlaisen* was worn on every festive or important occasion and whenever they were required to dress themselves up. One significant occasion where the women were specifically expected to wear *Puanlaisen* was at ceremonies when they were to perform the *Cheraw* dance. *Cheraw* which is the traditional dance of the *Mizo* is believed to have existed in the 1st century A.D, while they were still somewhere in the *Yunan* province of China, before their migration into the *Chin Hills* in the 13th century A.D (*Dances of Mizoram*, 2017). It is a

dance where bamboos are used as an instrument, placing them upon another set of bamboos in a crisscross position. They are held by men at each end who rhythmically move the bamboo up and down and side wise, opening and closing them making pulsating beat all the while as the dancers moves on their feet in between them at the sound and rhythm of small gongs and the bamboo itself. As *Puanlaisen*, with the basic colour of red, white and black was worn in this dance; it is likely that the art of dyeing was already known to the *Mizo* in the 1st century AD.

This bamboo dance is known as *Rawkhatlak* by the *Lai* while the *Lusei* call it *cheraw*. When they formally perform the *Cheraw*, the dancers in both clans wear *Puanlaisen* and *Kawrchei* which evidently reveals the intermixing of dresses between clans. Along with *Puanlaisen* and *Kawrchei* girls would wear a head gear called *Vakiria* and their most valued jewellery called ‘*Thi Hna*’ which was a necklace made of valuable red amber bead. As much as *Puanlaisen* was cherished in the pre colonial period, the modern *Puanchei* continue to be an important part of a lady’s wardrobe. In fact it was the very core of a *Mizo* lady’s wardrobe. This *puan* is by far the most popular, colourful and perhaps the most significant and prized possession of every *Mizo* lady. As the modern version of this *puan* is quite different from the early *Puanlaisen* and because of the cultural value, art of work like this can define the elusive values, practices of a community and the collective experience of a particular society; a thorough explanation is a prerequisite.

The significance that a *Puanchei* hold for the *Mizo* as a whole and *Mizo* women in particular can hardly be comprehended. Even after Christianity was fully absorbed after the colonial intervention and Christian weddings became a part of the social-cultural rituals of the *Mizo*, *Puanchei* continued to be an eminent bridal costume

till date. Again due to the intricate design, it cannot be made by every woman and this makes it all the more worthy. It is also reasonable to say that it has evolved in the course of time as the most artistic expression of the *Mizo* natural talent for weaving. The surfacing of a number of old photographs in recent times through research evidently point towards the fact that the modern *Puanchei* is a recent creation. In fact the design of the modern *Puanchei* with all its intricacies and colours seems to have become a trend only in the early 1900's. According to Boichhingpuii, it was only after 1945 that the name *Puanchei* in its present version became popular (Boichhingpuii, p.106). In spite of this, as is widely seen and accepted, the traditional dress for *Mizo* women is identified as *Puanchei* and *Kawrchei* which is blouse, with *Thi Hna*, a necklace and *Vakiria* which is a headdress, as the complementary accessories. Nonetheless, there is no official declaration or cultural assertion to this particular set of clothing. But it is edifyingly affirmed as the traditional dress of the *Mizo*, especially of the *Lusei* and not just in Mizoram but all over the world. Though this is highly debatable, from a cultural or academic point of view, it is this contentious nature and the continuous evolution of this *puan* that makes it all the more interesting and worthy of study.

By the eighteen century, the changes in the administrative politics brought about changes in the cultural and economic life of the *Mizo* people. With the easier availability of yarns and dye through trade and their capacity as an artist, it was only a matter of time that they created new motifs and modify the existing designs. The trend to modify *Puanlaisen* was seen all over Mizoram as a number of photographs are available for that period where women wear *Puanchei* with slight differences in the modifications and use of motifs.

As Chatterji rightly said, it is interesting to find that many of the designs of the traditional *puan* make their appearance in *Puanchei* in some way or other (Chatterji, p.36). There are varieties of designs based on *Puanlaisen* which are all called *Puanchei* but using different colours. Its design is still evolving till date. But the accepted design of *Puanchei*, which is now known as the traditional dress of the *Mizo*, still has the design of *Puanlaisen* as its base. But the existing two ends of the *Puanchei* contain profuse embroidered work on both the edges in the same pattern. Sometimes the central section created by the black band called *hruih* is also covered with the same design but this is optional. The black band is still prominent and not covered with any kind of embroidery. The intricate design is highlighted by the vivid colours with which they have been woven and sometimes, the prominent red lines are exchanged with green, yellow, blue, deep pink and brown. They would be called *Puancheihring*(green) or *Puancheipawl*(blue) and so on, depending on the colour of the thread used in place of the red, changing the whole look of the cloth. Since most *Mizopuan* are woven in two pieces, the placement of the *hruih* and the motifs on each panel had to be carefully calculated so that when stitched together, they fall on straight line (Ralte, p.27). Apart from the black band, red bands of *hruih* of various widths flanked the rows of motifs running through the width of the *puan*. On the horizontal red band, either *disul* or *lenbuangthuam* are added. Sometimes *semit* or *halkha* motif is also used. *Sakeizangzia* which comes with several varieties, *disulhruikhatnei*, *disulhruui hnih nei*, *lenbuangthuam*, *lenbuangthuamphel*, *semit*, *halkha*, *halkhade* and *halkhaphel* are the designs which are incorporated in the *Puanlaisen* which transform it into a modern *Puanchei*. This transformation was not accomplished overnight but it was not slow either. Like all fashion

trends in the world, the evolution caught on differently in different places with different styles using the motifs mentioned creating a work of art, *Puanchei*.

Thankhumi claimed that the design of her *Puanchei* was developed by her and she claimed that it was the first of its kind. She said that she integrated the patterns that she has already known into *Puanlaisen*. She did agree that there were designs by this time that has evolved into a more obscure and elaborated version than the original *Puanlaisen*. Though inspired, she maintained that she created her first *Puanchei*, at age thirteen without copying anyone. In the dearth of time and space, I believe it would not be too subjective to explain and understand the evolution of *Puanlaisen* through the narrations of Thankhumi. Born in 1939, she said that even as a child she remembers that her mother, who was educated and creative in the art of weaving had only *puanlaisen* and that she would wear them on formal occasions. Thankhumi's mother, Kaithuami belonged to a well to do family. She was the first trained nurse of Mizoram and went on to marry the first veterinary doctor P.S Dahrawk. Thus, if the modern *Puanchei* had then been around, popular or in trend, it was only natural that she would own one or would have learned to weave it. This may throw some light on the fact that modern *Puanchei* was not fully evolved by the early 1900's but in the process. This can also be corroborated by the few photographs, available for that period, where women are seen wearing *Puanlaisen* with hardly any embroidery in it. The progression was however vivid as by 1942, we can see a full version of contemporary pieces such as the one made by Thankhumi as well as others in different part of Mizoram.

Another interesting development in the historical evaluation was in the process of the development in the coloured yarns. In the course of time, the prominent red colour employed in *Puanchei*, both sourced from traders and dyed by them, started fading due to

the quality of its dye. Because of this the red thread which was used at the edge and within the *puan*, would turn pink, instead of red. Due to this, may people today thinks that, a pink checked and hemmed *Puanchei* is authentic and deliberate while it is only due to the quality of the dye. But due to the same reason, people did used pink deliberately and it culminated into the use of other colour as well. Thus, *Puanchei* as we know today was not known as part of the early *Mizo* woman's wardrobe. However, it has evolved into one of the most beautiful creation of the *Mizo* woman today and is still considered a must have in every closet. Since the earlier design of *Puanlaisen* has evolved into a more intricate design of *Puanchei*, *Puanlaisen* with its original design and pattern was hardly seen for decades. But today, the older design is being revived by a number of loom owners and weavers, enriching the tradition and art of the *Mizo*.

Apart from these informations, the commercial and economic worth of a *Puanchei* cannot be ignored. Today it is made in the mechanical loom in different part of Mizoram and is priced between rupees 2000 to 3000 thousand. There are also versions of *Puanchei* woven with silk which can cost around rupees 5000 and more. The ones made with hand in the loin loom costs the most and are also valued highly. The art of making *puan* in general has become a very lucrative business in Mizoram and has contributed in the economic empowerment of women. Moreover, large number of families in villages like Thenzawl depends on handloom as their main source of income and livelihood. Taking note of this trend in development, sericulture has also been given a boost by the government and also by individuals. The village of Sabual is now being adopted as a model village for rearing silk worms and making silk. Villagers are educated to rear and procure silk. The women are also trained to weave silk fabrics. This innovation is being done

under the supervision of *Zozia*, a handloom industry owned by Laltanpui, from Kulikawn, Aizawl. In an interview (Laltanpuii, Interview), she claimed that their '*experiment with muga silk is quite successful*' and she is hopeful that '*it will soon turn into a productive trade and that Mizoram will soon be able to compete with the silk industries of Assam.*' Handloom itself has branched out in different directions as fabrics with *Mizo* designs and motifs have become popular among the people outside Mizoram as well. They are made into household items such as throw pillow covers, as curtains, mats and wall hangings, etc. *Mizo* fabrics are also stitched into beautiful fashion clothing and accessories for men and women alike, shown and exported in different parts of the country and the world. Different motifs are utilized as appliqués in fashion clothing in which motifs like *sakeizangzia*, which is an integral part of *Puanchei* is highly popular. Whenever a *Puanchei* is displayed as a part of a fashion piece or in its full glory, it always evokes a sense of excitement and owe because of its beauty, illustrating its artistic value. This is indicated by the fact that *Puanchei* is a part of an exhibition held in museums not just here in the state of Mizoram but in places like Philadelphia Museum (Gordon, 2015, p.1) in the United states of America, where it is appreciated as a piece of art.

Notes

¹ Thankhumi, is the owner of the first mechanical loom in Mizoram and daughter of the first Mizo veterinary doctor P.S Dahrawk. Interviewed on 3rd August 2013, Chhinga Veng, Aizawl.



**Fig.1: Men wearing *Puanlaisen*, wrapped around their body and necklaces around the neck.
L-R (in picture): Thahluana,
Thahluana's sister and
Lalthangkhuma, Chief of Lailak
Village.**

Picture Courtesy: Boichhingpuii,
Chaltlang, Aizawl.



Fig. 2: Male student outside the missionary quarters, Serkawn and group of students wearing Puanlaisen. Picture taken from the slides of Missionary,1910, courtesy Baptist Mission Archive, Serkawn.



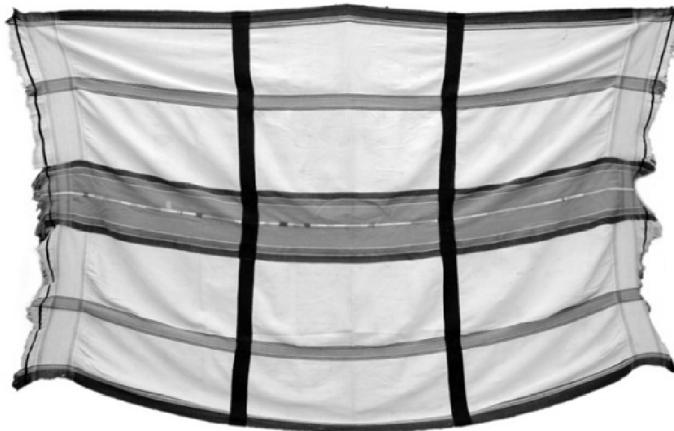


Fig.3: Puanlaisen 1926: Made by Chawnglali M/o LalhmuakaHrahsel.
Picture Courtesy: Boichhingpuii, Chaltlang, Aizawl.



Fig. 4: Kaithuami and friends wearing *Puanlaisen* (1927) Picture
courtesy Thankhumi d/o Kaithuami, Chhingga Veng, Aizawl.

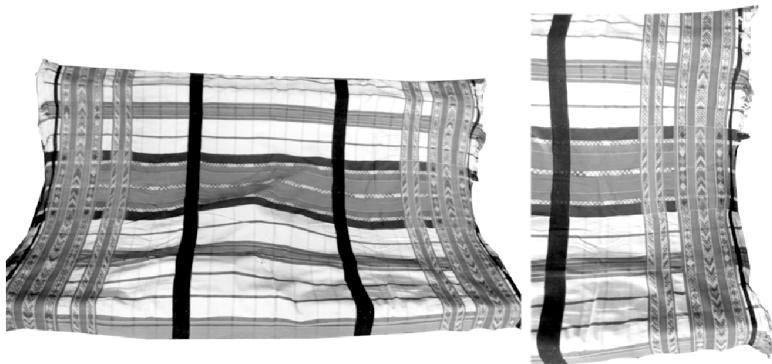


Fig 5: First *Puanchei* made by Thankhumi in 1942 at the age of thirteen.

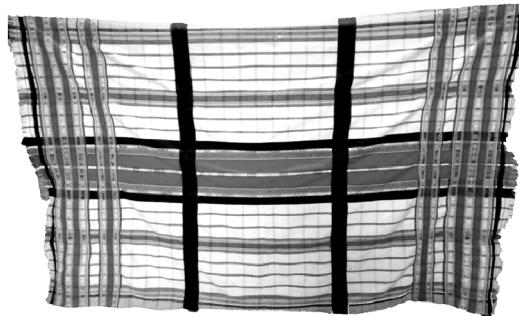


Fig. 5: *Puanlaisen Mangpuantial* made by Thuamliani w/o Lalkailuia in 1945. Picture courtesy Boichhingpuii, Chaltlang, Aizawl.

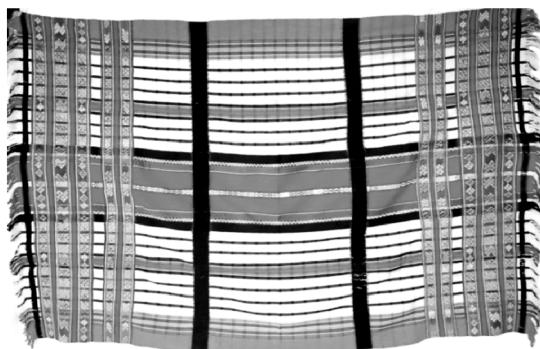


Fig. 6: *Puanlaisen Mangpuantial* made by Vani w/o R.D. Leta in 1948.
Picture courtesy Boichhingpuii, Chaltlang, Aizawl.

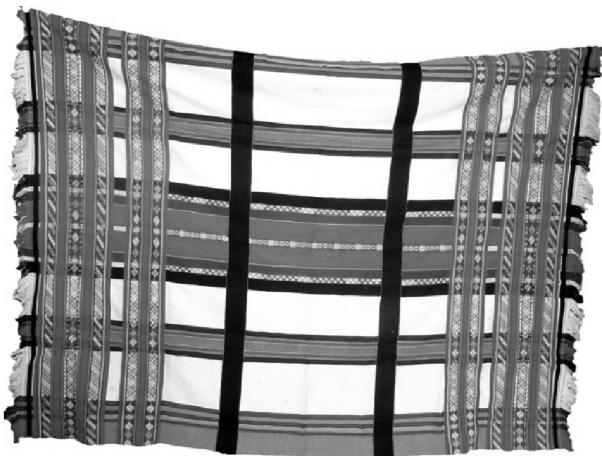
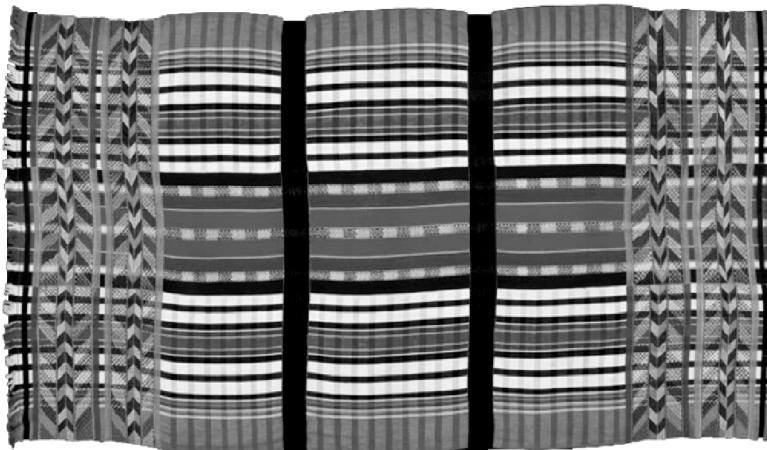


Fig.7. *Puanchei* made by Thankhumi in 1950. Courtesy Thankhumi.



Fig. 8: L-R; Darhmingthangi, Challianthangi, Suakhuami,
Suakthangpuii, Ngurtaiveli all wearing *Puanchei* (1950)
Picture courtesy Boichhingpuii, Chaltlang, Aizawl



**Fig. 9: Mizo Woman's Ceremonial Wrapped Skirt (*Puan Laisen*),
Exhibited at the Art of the Zo, Philadelphia Museum of Art**

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Spinning Tales and Weaving Memories- Mising Women as Repositories of Culture: An Ethno-Feministic perspective

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The Misings, previously identified as Miris, are an ethnic group mostly residing in the Brahmaputra plains of Assam and the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, two States in the North East part of India. Some scholars have traced the origin of the Misings to the Yangtse-Kiang and Hwang-Ho river-valleys of North-West China. They theorised that the Misings must have first migrated to Tibet and then to India through the Arunachal Hills following the origin and course of the Brahmaputra river. When the Tsangpo River flows down from Tibet, it is known as Siang (in the upper areas) and Dibang (in the lower areas) in Arunachal Pradesh. The rivers Dibang and Lohit flow into the river Dihong to take the shape and name of the Brahmaputra. Even today, the Adis (Abors) of Arunachal Pradesh and the Misings of Assam share vast linguistic and cultural similarities.

The Misings are the second largest ethnic group amongst scheduled tribes in Assam. They are mostly concentrated in eight districts namely Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Sonitpur districts. Like most ethnic groups of North-East India, the Misings too do not have their own printed literature to verify their antecedents. But despite this, their dialect is still intact. One can just marvel at the power of the spoken word that is being passed on from generation to generation and the tongue

and the idiom that is still being vociferously used by the Mising people. This is in direct opposition to some ancient preserved languages, which are on the verge of extinction due to lack of speakers/users, or are no more in use.

In the Mising society, till today, Weaving is solely the domain and prerogative of women. Men are completely at sea in this sphere. Through the act of weaving clothes, Mising women create peace and harmony within themselves. It relieves them from the stress of their grinding daily schedule of threshing the corn with bare feet, drying it in the sun before pounding it, separating the grain from the shaft, setting the hens out of their coops, cooking the first meal of the day before leaving for the rice fields, collecting firewood balanced dexterously on the head on the way back from the rice fields, and collecting drinking water for the family from the nearby river or a hand-pump. All this is done, most of the time, with an infant fastened with a woven strap (termed '*nvseg*' in Mising) at the back. Last but not the least much of their valuable time is also wasted in preparing rice beer, a traditional drink prepared differently by most ethnic communities of North-East India. Life is not easy for a Mising woman, especially in the villages. Their sturdy constitution and zeal for survival keeps them from buckling under pressure. The patriarchal set-up of the Mising society has not debilitated their artistic acumen as expert weavers. In fact, it will not be unjustified to say that it has enabled them to hone their skills of weaving to the maximum.

The Misings are basically a riparian and an agrarian community. Hence, the weaving calendar corresponds to the farming calendar. Weaving is fundamentally a winter activity and preoccupation. Mising women folk remain busy sowing seeds in the paddy fields during the rainy and sweltering summer months. In the month of December, they take a brief respite of about 20-25

days from weaving work since they too have to contribute in the process of harvesting of crops. An important feature of Mising culture is the community practice of *Rvgbo*. In *Rvgbo*, Mising ladies-young and old- come together to join a labour-shortage family in the rice field and help in harvesting the crops. The labour days in this way is drastically reduced and such occasions brought smiles and songs flowing out from their hearts. The Oi-nitoms (Love Songs) and A:nu-nitoms (Modern Songs) attest to this.

The feminine consciousness or female gaze is projected in the motifs and designs of the Mising Weavers. Attention can be drawn at this instance to the motifs woven in the shawls of the people of Nagaland. Naga oral history speaks of a race of people who loved hunting. This love for hunting is found implicit in the ‘spear’ and ‘skull’ designs of the shawls. Except for a minuscule number of races like the ‘Amazons’, hunting is a skill generally associated with man. On the other hand, Mising weavers, by and large, concentrate on the feminine aspects. There appears to be no specific male themes in the designs. Generally, identical geometrical patterns are woven in both men and women’s wear. But the ensembles that are specifically meant for women are interlaced with flowery and brighter patterns.

The Greek women weavers have with them Athena, as their Patron Goddess of Weaving: to invoke, inspire and safeguard their loom and thread. But whether the Mising women weavers in the distant past had such a guardian goddess is still shrouded in mystery. To my knowledge, research studies have yet to enlighten this aspect of weaving. Tete-a-tete with Mising women revealed that before starting a weaving task, they usually invoked a deity named ‘Bikrom Ai’ to safeguard and protect their weaves, till completion. The ages of the women, with whom a one-to-one was undertaken to study this aspect, varied from 20 to 65 years. A sixty-five year old lady

remarked that she always thought the deity to be none other than Vishwakarma (the Hindu God who presides over architects and craftsmen). The above expression reflects the effects of Sanskritization on the lives of the Misings. But then ‘Ai’ in Assamese expression symbolises a female deity or even ‘grandmother’, for example ‘Burih Ai Thaan’-a place of worship of the Hindus, situated in the highway in Kaziranga, and ‘Burih Ai-or Hadu’ or Grandmother’s Tale. But mention can be made here of the presence of a couple of female deities in Mising tradition and culture. During ‘Ali-Aye-Ligang’*, a community dance is performed to appease ‘Koje-Yanggo’, a goddess representing fertility and wealth. Again, in ‘Mibu A: bangs’ or devotional hymns, a goddess ‘Sirki Na: ne’ is sometimes evoked. Misings believe that ‘Sirki Na: ne’ is the guardian angel who guards over their folkloric birthplace-a place located somewhere in the high mountains of Tibet or Arunachal Pradesh.

In earlier times, a young Mising woman who was not adept at weaving found it difficult to get married to the man of her choice. The first question asked to her by her prospective in laws was: “E’ge sumkindang?” and not “Aapin mokindang?” i.e., “Do you know weaving?” and not “Do you know cooking?” Surobala Patir, in her article published in the volume, *Misings Through Mising Eyes* expresses thus: “A girl who did not know weaving was considered useless (ma: kaji) by the society and she would remain a spinster all her life.” (p. 229). The irony is that the term ‘spinster’ (since the late Middle Ages) referred legally to any woman “who spun yarn or thread... The jump from spinner to single lady is likely an economic one”. (www.merriam-webster.com : Retrieved on 07/5/2017).

To digress a little from the topic, the Aztec women of ancient Mexico were compelled to learn the skills of spinning, weaving and embroidery. It constituted a part of their growing up. Even

girls from royal families were not spared. ‘Aztec kings admonished their daughters to master these important skills... “apply thyself well to the really womanly task, the spindle whorl, the weaving stick...”’(Evans. 222). But few will protest the view that the social and economic world of the Aztecs was significantly different from the Misings.

Notwithstanding this, Mising women too have been nurturing their traditional craft of weaving since time immemorial. Animistic and natural elements are the designs most loved by the Mising weavers. As mentioned earlier, even the geometrical patterns that consists of lines, waves, curves, triangular and diamond shapes reflects the Mising’s love for nature. The sight of river water lapping on the shores may have inspired the ‘waves’ design. The triangular shapes may be a representation of hills. The diamond design is termed as *Kongar*. Some flora and fauna motifs incorporated in Mising attire are *Appun* (flower), *Marsang* (a type of edible flowery herb), *Punjer* (blooms), *Takar* (a star), *Dumsung* (deer), *Sitc* (elephant), *Popvr* (butterfly), *To:de* (peacock), *Pcttang* (bird), *Pc:kv* (dove), *Mokorang* (spider), *Ta:yob* (caterpillar), *Laksin* (finger nail or toe nail), *Korot* (saw), *Mcyaab* (fan), and very recently *Tasmohol* (Taj Mahal) and *Okum* (house) design. Other older designs worth mention are *Dosnoya* (a ten-paise coin), *Eeki* (a twenty-five paise coin), and *Adoli* (a fifty- paise coin).

Weaving the traditional ‘Gadu’ or ‘Miri-jim’ is a backbreaking and expensive affair. It is a type of quilt unique to the Misings and needs time, labour and experience for its preparation. Younger women in the family sit huddled together, especially in the night,to learn the ropes of its preparation from their grandmother, mother and mother-in-law. In truth, every Mising mother dreams of weaving a ‘Gadu’ for each of her children to protect them from the harsh winters. The exceptional ‘Gadu’ serves as a reminder of a beautiful

past. It projects an important cultural symbol because its intricate weaving can be made only by the Misings. Once woven, the ‘Gadu’ can last a lifetime or more. The following Mising song highlights the lasting memories, woven in the fabrics and textiles of the community.

*Onno nosor sor naamoh dcm...
Kaaycm, kaalai dungkandagnc...
Kangkanoi...Mising gamig kednamodc
Kaayummoi...kaamannolai dungkandagnc
Kaayummoi...mayokla dulamanc...

Ribi gaseng Pere gamur Sumge Ola
Gapa Gale Gadu Gasor Sumge Ola
Ribi gaseng Pere gamur Sumge Ola
Gapa Gale Gadu Gasor Sumge Ola
Ngoluk Mising dyrbc samna turmolaiyyc
Ngoluk Mising dyrbc samna turmolaiyyc
Kangkanoi...Mising gamig kednamodc
Kaayummoi...kaamannolai dungkandagnc
Kaayummoi...mayokla dulamanc. ***

The way you unwind the thread
The sight of which, leaves me rooted to the spot, eyes mesmerized.
So beautiful...is the way... Mising designs/patterns are spun
So attractive...that aeon of time can pass by for a leisurely view.
So attractive...that it cannot be erased from memory.

Let’s weave Ribi gaseng Pere gamur
Let’s weave Gapa Gale Gadu Gasor
Let’s weave Ribi gaseng Pere gamur
Let’s weave Gapa Gale Gadu Gasor
Let us keep alive our Mising culture
Let us keep alive our Mising culture
So beautiful...is the way... Mising designs/patterns are spun

So attractive...that aeon of time can pass by for a leisurely view.
So attractive...that it cannot be erased from memory.

Young Mising girls, especially those residing in the villages, love gifting their self-woven garments such as *Mibu-Galuk*, *Dumcr* and *Ribi-Dumcr*; to their lovers as well as male members of the family. As already mentioned, *Ali-Aye-Ligang* is a festival of dance and merriment. Misings, irrespective of age and gender join wholeheartedly in the festivities. Moreover, the festival symbolises the onset of Spring season, and its concomitant evocations of love, youth, hope and birth of a new life. Therefore, young girls and boys sometimes seize the moment to express themselves. The following Oi-nitom (Love Song) speaks of a young girl's heartache and longing, and her attempts to win the attention and affection of her lover:

*Ligang longc kcmo pc polo dob totungai
Oinom bipc mcla mibu galuk sumtungai,
Oino aipcmengela, ngom mitpanpc noh mcyoka.
Oino toyaal dumogela aammem lapc mcyoka...oi****

On the day of Ali-Aye-Ligang, I had waited for you
till the arrival of moon, and darkness.
Thinking of gifting you, I had woven a Mibu-Galuk.
You had professed your love for me,
I entreat you not to think of forgetting me.
After making me wait so long,
I entreat you not to think of marrying another.

Besides weaving and spinning, women of the community take pleasure in dancing and singing forgetting the hardships and worries of life. As they go about their daily chores (with babies strapped on their backs), older sisters and mothers enjoy humming lullabies (or Ko: ni:nam) and creating beautiful memories in the tender minds

of children. In this manner, Mising children learn the basic essentials of their language:

Ko:wow wa kappoyok

Pckv dc dc:ma:da

Pckv dc dc:do:dcm kablangka(J.J .Kuli. 2008)

My dear boy, do not cry now
The dove is still ensconced in its nest
You may cry when it flies away.

Oiyaaw kc babubv

Bojarpc gv:ka:nc

Bojarlog tuppi ycm bombiycku (J.J .Kuli. 2008)

My darling child's father
Has gone to visit the market
To bring back a hat for you.

Scholars have undertaken various studies to reflect on the psychological and healing benefits of traditional art and culture to mankind. Most are aware of the rejuvenating effects of Dance as a creative art. In a similar fashion, the act of weaving and spinning not only lift the spirits of Mising women but also stimulate their thinking processes to greater heights. Consequently, they are able to come up with more meaningful and intricate designs to beautify their weaves.

Assam history records the travails encountered by its people, especially those residing near the rivers such as the Misings, due to devastations caused by earthquakes and floods. The major earthquake of 1950 and the terrible floods of 1962, 1972, 1977, 1988, 1998, 2002 and 2012 are examples. During such natural calamities, want of basic necessities and financial hardships force Mising women to sell off their favourite weaves at very cheap prices.

The dreams they wove in the shape of their beautiful garments (like the Ribi Gaseng, Gadu, E‘ge Gasor, etc), and their stilt houses along with its minimal belongings, are often times destroyed by the hungry waves of the Brahmaputra. But the Misings have always gathered themselves again. In poetic terms, the origin of the Brahmaputra is the origin of the Misings. It is time to unravel the mystery. The words below say it all:

Asin Agomdcem ycglamayobong
Alumla dupckc ...lomna luteika
Alumla dupckc ...lomna luteika****

Don’t keep the feelings of your heart bottled
It will eat away your heart...so express it right away
It will eat away your heart...so express it right away

End Notes:

*‘Ali-Aye-Ligang’, the sowing and spring festival of dance and drink of the Misings, is celebrated annually on the first Wednesday of the month of ‘Ginmur’ -around 2nd /3rd Week of February.

**From the song, *Onno Nosor* by Rupa Mili.

*** From the song, *Gimur Polo* by Rupa Mili.

****From the song, *Asin Agom* by Gojen Noroh & Omik Mengu.

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Dombipâ

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In between Ganga and Jamuna flows the stream,¹

Thereat was I drowned in the delicious sport,
And the *jogini* has to ferry me playfully secure.

Wah Dombi, you great, do row ably²
The way is rough
And it's getting very late.

By the grace of the Master
I would reach the ecstatic *jinapur*,³
The abode of great liberation.

Five senses lie lazily like five oars,
Do put the sails to the prow
And unfasten the boat from its anchorage.

The water if flung up sky-high
Would not rush back in the dark niches
Of the boat, this body.⁴

Sun and moon veins are two energy packs lying sealed,⁵
On motion these could destroy the world,

Like an unpredictable shabar on midstream
Ditching the passenger on board.

Without curving to the left or right veins,
Straight ahead do you row the boat.

Taking no *kaudi* on the ferry boat⁶
The shabar here let the man aboard reach
The other bank smoothly.

Ah, who mounts the chariot but knows no skillful driving
Could mess up in rounds only at the banks peripheral.⁷

Notes:

Sourcesong in proto-Odia: “Gangâjamunâmâjhereñbahainai...” by Dombipâ, a Buddhist Achârya or master of austere knowledge who, among some first Odia monks, composed in proto-Odia (Prâkruta-Apabhramsa language). An ancient period covering the 7th- 10th century CE was a time when Odisha was entirely under the Buddhist influence.

¹stream: the suaumnâ vein, symbolizing the spinal cord, metaphorically the Saraswati River, between other two rivers as mentioned already in the song.

²wah; Dombi: literally *wow*. Dombi is a female Bajrayâni follower. *Jogini* in Odia is *yogini* in Northern Hindi. *Dombi/Dombipa* are sometimes alternative metaphors for shabari (female) / shabara (male) in the mystical language.

³jinapur: derives from *Jina* meaning the highest enlightenment. So Jinapur is the abode of liberation.

⁴the body is conceived as a boat, which facilitates the journey to the realm of highest happiness or liberation. Water flung would

suggest of the controlled breath moving in the susumnâ while engaged in the erotic act to break open curled cells of energy (*kundalini*).

⁵sun and moon: symbolically, cycles (wheels) of natural powers kept sealed as the Bajrayanis conceive, and linked to the delicate veins of the Idâ and Pingalâ, identified earlier as River Ganga and Jamuna.

⁶kaudi: (cowrie) a material object used as coins for exchange value in olden ages.

⁷bank peripheral: the banks of the river (metaphorically, the samsâr as a troubling sea/ river) are apparently shallow from the perspective of greatest enlightenment. The other shore of the samsâr is desirable, where the journeyman arrives at the perfect realm of liberation.

MâdhabiDâsi

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Srihari the wealth divine at Nilâdri!

Esteemed Nanda's son the selfsame darling¹
Who is worshipped by the entire world,
Whose body is decorated and rubbed
With the fragrant paste of sandalwood.

*The selfsame lordly sire of Braja and²
Young son Srihari, the wealth divine at Nilâdri.³(1)*

At the time he retires for night,
Tremulous in intimate love he holds same
The name of Radha close to his bosom;

And thrilled with passionate quivers
He enjoys a nap on the bed inlaid with ivories.
Srihari the wealth divine at Nilâdri! (2)

GeetagobindaC the verses to his worship⁴
Bears the name of Radha
As are woven into the silken*khanduâyarn*,⁵

This Hari clasps to his limbs,
And filling it with sweet emotion he romances
In luxuries of delicious love.
Srihari the wealth divine at Nilâdri! (3)

Might this yarn ever adorn apiece my head,
Which has inscribed Radha's lovely name,
The same clothe on which Krushna loves to dwell!

Would my life pass away
While my lips be astir and quivering
On the name of Radha and Krushna.
Srihari the wealth divine at Nilâdri! (4)

Srihari, do consider Mâdhabi your servant
A poor self into your companion friends,⁶
And come compassionate onto me.

Do let me make for my head an ornament
Out of the dropped *tulasi* leaves scattered about your feet!⁷

Notes:

Srihari, the wealth divine at Nilâdri.(5)

Source song: “ sriharinilâdrribhababibhaba, srinandanandana ...” of MâdhabiDâsi who was the first woman writer of any song ever in Odia, and she belonged to a patriarchal Odisha of the sixteenth century CE. A female devotee of Lord Jagannath and more advanced in spiritual knowledge, Madhabica came under the influence of Sri Chaitanya’s Vaishnavism, but was much marginalized by his Vaishnava cult. Sri Chaitanya lived more than sixteen years in Puri, but had taken a vow not to look at women.

¹Nanda a respectable person having wealth and influence in Braja, lovingly revered as a king almost, was father to Krushna.

²braja is the land of Krushna’s plays and Radha’s nativity.

³niladri is identified as the holy seat of Lord Jagannath. It is mythically and classically enriched with the divine blue of SriBishnu and thus SriKrushna in extension. In popular perception, Jagannath and Krushna are indivisible in essence.

⁴ the verses in Jayadeba’s*Geetagobinda*(12th century CE) are a celebration of love-plays of Radha and Krushna. Any verse of it is regularly performed in dance before Jagannath before he retires for the night.

⁵khandua is a piece of silk clothe specially made for Lord Jagannath, and which bears inscriptions of the *Gitagobinda* verses.

⁶Madhabî is the beloved female (Radha) which derives etymologically from Madhaba (the male) who is but the Non-Being in the philosophical sense, with having no Sire to him (mâ+dhaba), since he or rather IT is the Sire Alone, the Absolute Real in the world.

⁷tulasi: sacred basil leaves.

Media in Conflict Transformationand Peace Process: An Academic Inquest

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Introduction

The discourse on media in conflict transformation and peace process has received much attention in academics and policy debates. While the North-East represents heterogeneity at its extreme with high level of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversities, the ethnic conflicts in the region are a reflection of innumerable reasons. This is reflected in the patterns of conflicts which are varied in their nature and it remains divergent and ever-changing. These range from secession to autonomy, movement against illegal-immigrants, ethnic conflicts and the perceived sense of isolation from mainstream India which has resulted in violence and mass mobilization.

Ironically it has been scarcely explored in terms of how we construct opinions on what is reported in the media. Contrary to the apprehension that the media industry in our country thrives on the politics of sensationalism, it is believed that the media could actually communicate ethnic conflict with greater sensitivity and conscientiousness. It is argued that if the media could support forces that lead to conflict, it seems logical to investigate how it could contribute towards mitigating ethnic conflict. This study is an assessment on the role of media during conflict and post conflict situation.

There has been an increasing dependency on the media to understand the social world around us. We reinforce our attitudes accordingly and form opinions on what is reported in the media. Conflict as a social phenomenon is broadcast in television channels based on what the media consider it as important news. People find stories of conflict interesting and stimulating especially when it is reported in television. The trend of conflict has remained highly dynamic whereby making the media as a vibrant market for conflict reporting. As an inevitable aspect of human interaction, and an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions, conflict cannot be avoided (Okolie, 2009).

We continue to grapple with the origins of violent conflicts and explore ways to prevent their eruption and their devastating effects. Most conceptual understanding of peace explicitly or implicitly stresses the destructive nature of violence, and focus on nonviolent solutions to problems and conflicts. Current debates in the field involve the most effective ways to prevent the escalation of conflict and to successfully intervene when they erupt into violence through a critical examination of peace and conflict resolution. Media could act as a harbinger in this endeavour given its ability to mould public opinion and reinforce attitude in the right direction.

Media Reports on Conflict

Media reportage on conflict particularly in news media are based on the perspective of the reporters and editors. Owens-Ibie (2002) notes that the media play a significant role in the structuring of perception of social reality by regularly manufacturing and mirroring dissent and consent voices. Conversely Fiske (1987) notes that news can never give a full, accurate objective picture of reality.

While media reportage on social issues depends largely on the agenda-setting function, a concept that is anti-thesis to objective

reporting (whatever that means). Journalistic norms and routines, which dictate the selection of sources and construction of story lines, can have a significant effect on which interpretation appears to make the most sense. News reports provide citizens with important clues about the political climate surrounding the peace process. Is the process moving forward or back? Does the overall level of violence appear to be rising or declining?

McQuail (2010) observes that the essence of agenda-setting is “that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceive as the main issues”. The elements involved in agenda-setting, according to Folarin (2002) are the quantity or frequency of reporting, the prominence given to the news reports and the degree of conflict generated in the reports. The notion of agenda setting itself is questioned given the quantum of media coverage done on stories of conflict in television.

In the rat race of earning more Television Rating Points by the media industry the news media tend to sensationalize news reports on conflict. This is true in ethnically diverse communities where the media often serves to reinforce existing differences and thus accelerate a disintegrating effect on the minds of the people. However, the media environment is so monopolized by television that its lessons or news are continually learned and unlearned. This view stresses the cultivation theory by Gerber to the relation of social reality. According to Gerber and his colleagues, television is responsible for a major ‘cultivating’ and ‘acculturating’ process according to which people are exposed systematically to a selective view of society on almost every aspect of life, a view which tends to shape their beliefs and value accordingly (Gerber et al., 1967 cited in McQuail, 2010).

One of the most celebrated Media effects theory has been the ‘Magic Bullet Theory’ of the 1930’s which posits that the messages the media disseminates would be followed by the adoption of the communicated ideas. This has further been augmented by De Fluer and Ball-Rokeach (1988) who also believes that the mass media play a very important role in the social learning process and have enormous influence on how individuals acquire ideas from the media and orient themselves in the society. Given such an impact of the media an assessment on the current practices of media coverage of conflict reports is necessary to examine the repercussion of such media reports.

To this end television because of its versatility and being an audio-visual media could be a strong instrument for social mobilization and further peace building process. It has the ability to shape and reinforce people’s beliefs, opinions and feelings of various issues. It has rightfully been called as the harbinger of public opinion and beliefs. McQuail (2010) shows that audience attitude towards television viewing is contingent upon the degree of media dependency and exposure. As it were, heavy dependency and exposure to the media tend to shape people’s beliefs, perceptions about various issues of society.

Media that are sensitive towards the task of promoting tolerant and diverse viewpoints can be both informative as well as entertaining and have a large potential (Botes, 1996, p. 6-10). In strengthening local capacities, the media can focus on three different aspects of local media structures: creating an open media culture that permeates multiplicity of voices allowing different voices to be heard which would in a way provide an opportunity in shaping people’s opinion which would in a way mitigate conflict.

McNair (1999) suggests five functions of the communication media which would be very apt in a democratic society like India viz. i) To inform citizens of what is happening around them, ii) To educate them as to the meaning and significance of the issues being reported iii) To provide a platform for public political discourse that must include the provision of space for the expression of dissent iv) To give publicity to governmental and political institutions and v) To serve as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoints without any suppression. Further, it could create a common basis and thus enhance conditions for conflict transformation through a variety of activities by facilitating free flow of constructive information, dispelling misperceptions, identifying the interests underlying the issues and helping to build a consensus (Manoff, 1998).

Moreover, the media can further build confidence and mediate between conflicting parties by fostering communication, generating alternative options to violent conflict, reflecting the ordinary person's desire and need for peace, communicating the process of negotiations to the constituencies involved and providing a forum for on-going dialogue (Siebert 1998.). It may also act as a watchdog on leaders to help ensure long-term accountability, monitor human rights violations and, in a broader sense, provide some early warning on potential escalations of the conflict.

While such an exercise will vary not only according to the type and phase of the conflict but also on the role the media in the conflict dynamics and peace building initiatives. Since the essence of conflict transformation is the transformation of mentalities, both within the society and the individual, societies have to be involved from the top-down and the bottom-up. The media have the potential to be a gateway through which to reach the largest possible number of people (Melone 1997).

Media in Conflict Transformation and Peace Process

Media can adversely affect the thinking capability of individuals and instill negative or destructive thinking patterns in the society as a whole. Today television channels and newspapers are making fast money by cashing on the news in a wrong way. As already said before, media has the power to form and alter opinions. This means media can portray an ordinary thing so negatively that it may force people to think or act in quite the opposite way. Usually, a bad or detrimental message is packaged in a glorious way and is made accessible to the public.

Researchers have extensively critiqued the democratic deficits inherent in a corporate-dominated commercialized media system which fosters inequalities of access, representation and ideological power, and in a way to large extent have only escalated conflicts. Media could make the voice of the common man significant, impacting attitudes of the masses and democratic responsibility.

It is seen that tensions frequently escalate in situations where information is scarce and in that offering a variety of information that contains a range of facts would therefore be a de-escalating measure. While journalists may react strongly against such a claim by holding their professional objectivity above everything else, they must realize that the way in which they report on conflict drastically affect the audience's perception of the situation and thus may only deteriorate the situation. Simply by being there and reporting on conflict, the media alter the communication environment and are thus inherently involved in the conflict and non-neutral.

The media either deliberately or selectively chose not to provide a balanced analysis of the history of the conflicts. We have seen over and again how miscommunication by the mainstream media have only aggravated situations. This was quite evident in

the conflict in Assam which occurred in 2012. To the other parts of the country it was made to speculate as if it was a clash between the Hindus and the Muslims which otherwise was not true. Assam 2012 is again more complex. It is still unclear what was the real trigger for the violence since the Bodos and the illegal migrants in the region have a long history of animosity, aggravated by the formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in 2003.

Communicating conflict through the mass media has been divisive because of its nature in North-east. It becomes even more perplexing because we have our pre-conceived notions on such issues. Ethnic conflict between the Bodos and the illegal migrant has remained under-reported and it was not presented with full spectrum of facts, thus it was misleading those it is supposed to inform or educate. While media coverage of the issue has been mystified in a manner which was supposedly baffling.

The quantum of media coverage on the issue was not sufficient to keep the people meaningfully informed. Reconciliation after conflicts depends primarily on a process of transactional contrition and forgiveness between the groups at conflict. This is crucial for the establishment of a new relationship based on mutual acceptance and reasonable trust. The media's potential to reach and influence large numbers of individuals puts them in a position to become a central actor in this process of reconciliation (Montville, 1991).

Given the corporate dominated media system particularly in our country, the establishment of economically stable and a politically balanced media is perhaps a very difficult task. Media that is well organized and functions democratically has a vested interest in ensuring that the public gains an insight into the workings of government and economic players. Only then, can it develop best practices and play a positive role in conflict transformation.

It is seen that the media that is insensitive to conflict reporting presents the public with an extremely narrow and simplistic view of what is happening thereby making it difficult for the public to understand properly. Headlines which focus on threats, accusations and sensational confrontations, generate anger on both sides, with the inevitable demand for retaliation. Disagreements turn into crises, enemies become more frightening and opponents more vicious. This dynamic also raises the level of rancour in the internal debate over the peace process.

While reportage on the incidents rarely give voice to the moderate forces in each community, by highlighting the most angry and violent forces, the media make it almost impossible for leaders and civil society carry out a reasoned debate on the issue. The search for sensationalism over moderation and radical voices instead of temperate ones leads to an exacerbation of the conflict and even the radicalization of moderate voices. Ideally, mass media should serve as a platform in which both groups are encouraged to express their views. While such an ideal is far from reality in Indian media, it is important nonetheless to identify those processes that prevent constructive criticism and healthy debate on peace process.

We understand that no path or method is neutral and yet, the imperatives of journalism – accuracy, fairness, impartiality and reliability bolstered by the freedom of expression and a responsive government provide the backbone of democratic pluralism. It is an irony to note that the multiplicity of voices in the media has only become a cacophony of half-truths. The media should restrain from sensationalism given that conflict can drastically affect the audiences' perception of the situation and thus may influence further developments. Media should encompass the factors responsible for escalation of conflicts as we cannot talk of peace and a political solution and still persist with the policy of inclusivity.

Conclusion

Media has an important role to play in disseminating knowledge to promote better awareness on conflict and foster better understanding. It should be sensitive towards promoting tolerant and diverse viewpoints which in turn could mitigate conflict. The media could be an agent in the structuring of perception of conflict by regularly manufacturing and mirroring dissent and consent voices. Television news coverage of conflict should not in any way aggravate conflict or take sides with any of the parties involved. The media should equally educate people about conflict resolution processes. In other words, they should adopt the peace media initiatives. The government, through its relevant agencies, should regularly brief the public whenever the nation or any area is involved in a conflict. The ability to impart and share information in real time, 24x7 both globally and locally via multiple communication channels could expand the media's role in precipitating, ameliorating, and communicating conflict in a more meaningful way.

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Radical Feminist Discourse: Swerving Ideologies and Shifting Paradigms

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“I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat, or a prostitute.” — Rebecca West.

I

The Concepts

The term ‘feminism’ has many different uses and its meanings are often contested. While some writers use the term ‘feminism’ to refer to a historically specific political movement in the US and Europe; other writers use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices against women, though there is no consensus on the exact list of these injustices. Feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms. Motivated by the quest for social justice, feminist inquiry provides a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural, and political phenomena. Feminist political activists have been concerned with issues such as a woman’s right of contract and property, a woman’s right to bodily integrity and autonomy (especially on matters such as reproductive rights, including the right to abortion, access to contraception and quality prenatal care); for protection from domestic violence; against sexual harassment

and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; and against other forms of discrimination.

Susan James characterizes feminism as follows: Feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Under the umbrella of this general characterization there are, however, many interpretations of women and their oppression, so that it is a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine, or as implying an agreed political program (James 2000, 576). Feminists are not simply those who are committed in principle to justice for women; feminists take themselves to have reasons to bring about social change on women's behalf.

Radical feminism, a variant form of feminism, refers to the feminist movement that sprung out of the civil rights and peace movements in 1967-1968. The reason this group gets the "radical" label is that they view the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions, in fact. Radical feminism provides the bulwark of theoretical thought in feminism. Radical feminism is a "current" within feminism that focuses on patriarchy as a system of power that organizes society into a complex of relationships producing a "male supremacy" that oppresses women.

Radical feminism provides an important foundation for the rest of "feminist flavors". Radical feminism is actually the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism; ideas which get shaped and pounded out in various ways by other (but not all) branches of feminism. Radical feminism is a philosophy emphasizing

the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, social dominance of women by men. Radical feminism views patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges and power primarily by gender, and as a result oppressing women and privileging men. Prostitution, domestic work, childcare, and marriage are all seen as ways in which women are exploited by a patriarchal system which devalues women and the substantial work that they do.

Normative and Descriptive Connotations

In many of its forms, feminism seems to involve at least two/three groups of claims, one normative, descriptive and the other evaluative. The normative claims concern how women ought (or ought not) to be viewed and treated and draw on a background conception of justice or broad moral position. Men and women are entitled to equal rights and respect (Normative). The descriptive claims concern how women are, as a matter of fact, viewed and treated, alleging that they are not being treated in accordance with the standards of justice or morality invoked in the normative claims. Women are currently disadvantaged (Descriptive) with respect to rights and respect, compared with men.

Admittedly, the claim that women are disadvantaged with respect to rights and respect is not a “purely descriptive” claim since it plausibly involves an evaluative component. The point here is simply that claims of this sort concern what is the case not what ought to be the case. The descriptive component of a substantive feminist view will not be articulable in a single claim, but will involve an account of the specific social mechanisms that deprive women of, e.g., rights and respect. For example, is the primary source of women’s subordination her role in the family? (Engels 1845; Okin 1989). Or is it her role in the labor market? (Bergmann 2002) Is the problem males’ tendencies to sexual violence (and what is the

source of these tendencies?) (Brownmiller 1975; MacKinnon 1987) Or is it simply women's biological role in reproduction? (Firestone 1970)

It is to seek out patterns in women's social positions and structural explanations within and across social contexts, but in doing so we must be highly sensitive to historical and cultural variation. Together the normative and descriptive claims provide reasons for working to change the way things are; hence, feminism is not just an intellectual but also a political movement.

Thus 'feminism' is an umbrella term for range of views about injustices against women. There are disagreements among feminists about the nature of justice in general and the nature of sexism, in particular, the specific kinds of injustice or wrong women suffer; and the group who should be the primary focus of feminist efforts. Nonetheless, feminists are committed to bringing about social change to end injustice against women, in particular, injustice against women as women.

II

Origin and Historicity:

Every present is built on its history, so also is the case with feminism in general and radical feminism in particular. The term "feminism" has a history in English linked with women's activism from the late 19th century to the present (Tuana 1994). In the mid-1800s the term 'feminism' was used to refer to "the qualities of females", and it was not until after the First International Women's Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term, following the French term *féministe*, was used regularly in English for a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Although the term "feminism" in English is rooted in

the mobilization for woman suffrage in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th century, of course efforts to obtain justice for women did not begin or end with this period of activism.

The term *radical* in radical feminism (from Latin *rādīx*, *rādīc*, root) is used as an adjective meaning *of or pertaining to the root* or *going to the root*. Radical feminists locate the *root cause* of women's oppression in patriarchal gender relations, as opposed to legal systems (liberal feminism) or class conflict (socialist feminism and Marxist feminism). They also believe that the way to deal with patriarchy and oppression of all kinds is to attack the underlying causes of these problems and address the fundamental components of society that support them.

The term *militant feminism*, or the more derogatory *feminazi*, is a pejorative term which is often applied to radical feminism, but also to other currents within feminism. Radical feminism described a totalising ideology and social formation — *patriarchy* (government or rule by fathers) — that dominated women in the interests of men.

In the 1960s, radical feminism emerged simultaneously within liberal feminist and working class feminist discussions, first in the United States, then in the United Kingdom and Australia. In the United States, radical feminism developed as a response to some of the perceived failings of both New Left organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and liberal feminist organizations such as the NOW. Initially concentrated mainly in big cities like New York, Chicago, Boston, Washington, DC, and on the West Coast radical feminist groups spread across the country rapidly from 1968 to 1972. The phrase “Women’s Liberation” was first used in the United States in 1964 and first appeared in print in 1966. By 1968, although the term *Women’s Liberation*

Front appeared in the magazine *Ramparts*, it was starting to refer to the whole women's movement. Bra-burning also became associated with the movement.

In the United Kingdom, feminism developed out of discussions within community based radical women's organisations and discussions by women within the Trotskyist left. Radical feminism was brought to the UK by American radical feminists. As the 1970s progressed, British feminists split into two major schools of thought: socialist and radical. In 1977, another split occurred, with a third grouping calling itself "revolutionary feminism" breaking away from the other two.

Australian radical feminism developed slightly later. Many radical feminists in Australia participated in a series of squats to establish various women's centres, and this form of action was common in the late 1970s and early 1980s. By the mid 1980s many of the original consciousness raising groups had dissolved, and radical feminism was more and more associated with loosely organized university collectives. Since that period, radical feminism has generally been confined to activist student ghettos, inspired in part by famous intellectuals. However, occasionally, working class groups of women have formed collectives dedicated to radical feminism.

With the rise of feminism across the world, a new generation of Indian feminists has emerged in India. They started claiming independence on respect of their reproductive right. Contemporary Indian feminists are fighting for: individual autonomy, rights, freedom, independence, tolerance, cooperation, nonviolence and diversity, domestic violence, gender, stereotypes, sexuality, discrimination, sexism, non-objectification, freedom from patriarchy, the right to an abortion, reproductive rights, control of the female body, the right to a divorce, equal pay, maternity leave, breast feeding, prostitution, and education. Medha Patkar, Madhu Kishwar, and

Brinda Karat are feminist social workers and politicians who advocate women's rights in post-independent India.

Three Waves Model and the Growth of Feminism

Some have found it useful to think the growth of feminism in the US as occurring in “waves”-Three waves: First, Second and Third. On the wave model, the struggle to achieve basic political rights during the period from the mid-19th century until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 counts as “First Wave” feminism. Originally it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women’s suffrage. In the United States first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote.

In the second wave, feminists pushed beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for greater equality across the board, e.g., in education, the workplace, and at home. Second-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity beginning in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s and, as Imelda Whelehan (1995) suggests, it was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism involving the suffragettes in the UK and USA. Second-wave feminism has existed continuously since that time and coexists with what is termed third-wave feminism (1990s-present). Second-wave feminists saw cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized as well as reflective of a sexist structure of power. With her essay “The Personal is Political”, Carol Hanisch

(1969) coined a slogan that became synonymous with the second wave. If first-wave feminism focused on rights such as suffrage, second-wave feminism was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as the end to discrimination.

Further transformations of feminism have resulted in a “Third Wave”. Third Wave feminists often critique Second Wave feminism for its lack of attention to the differences among women due to race, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion (Breines 2002; Spring 2002), and emphasize “identity” as a site of gender struggle. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave’s essentialist definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasize the experiences of upper middle-class white women. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to much of the third wave’s ideology. Third-wave feminists often focus on “micro-politics” and challenge the second wave’s paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females. The third wave has its origins in the mid-1980s. Feminist leaders rooted in the second wave like Bell Hooks (1989), Cherrie Moraga (2000), and other black feminists, called for a new subjectivity in feminism. They sought to negotiate prominent space within feminist thought for consideration of race-related subjectivities. However, some feminist scholars object to identifying feminism with these particular moments of political activism, on the grounds that doing so eclipses the fact that there has been resistance to male domination that should be considered “feminist” throughout history and across cultures (Cott 1987).

III

Radical feminism: Key Features

Radical feminists in Western society believe that their society is an oppressive patriarchy that primarily oppresses women. Radical feminists seek to abolish this patriarchy. While early radical

feminists posited that the root cause of all other inequalities is the oppression of women, some radical feminists acknowledge the simultaneous and intersecting effect of other independent categories of oppression as well. These other categories of oppression may include, but are not limited to, oppression based on gender identity, race, social class, perceived attractiveness, sexuality and sexual orientation, ability.

Radical feminists tend to be more militant in their approach (radical as “getting to the root”). Radical feminism opposes existing political and social organization in general because it is inherently tied to patriarchy. Thus, radical feminists tend to be skeptical of political action within the current system, and instead support cultural change that undermines patriarchy and associated hierarchical structures.

To radical feminists, women’s oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression.” It is the model for all other kinds of oppression. A prostitute, in their view, does not act out of free choice but is a victim of coercion in both its most subtle and direct forms. Because oppression is so entrenched in people’s thinking, changes in the structuring of society alone are not sufficient to overcome it. The attitudes of men must be changed and a state of equality made manifest in the power dynamic between men and women.

According to this line of thinking, prostitution and pornography as factors in male experience only exacerbate his self-serving belief in the primacy of his sexuality. His role as the “dominant” sex is reinforced in his mind as something very real, when in fact it is not. In this sense, influences such as prostitution and pornography can be viewed as degrading to all women, as acceptance of these events reinforces and perpetuates a cruel

fantasy of women as weak and submissive. D. Kelly Weisberg (1993) describes this process in the following way: “According to the radical feminist view, men are socialized to have sexual desires and to feel entitled to have those desires met, whereas women are socialized to meet those desires and to internalize accepted definitions of femininity and sexual objectification.”

When radical feminists speak of “degradation,” they inappropriately apply the term in ethical statements setting forth right or wrong behavior. What they mainly are talking about is degradation in a social sense and not a moral sense, although they allude to their ideas as morally sound. In a social sense they seem to see degradation as existing over a broad spectrum of society in which everything that men do, from opening doors for women to sexual assault, reinforces their view of men as “dominating.” A broader analysis of the radical feminist arguments about the degrading” effects of prostitution must be made within an ethical context.

One place to begin examining the ethical aspect of prostitution is the effect it can have on the tranquillity of a woman’s home life. This is the balance point in the argument between the radical feminists and prostitutes since “love’s delicate balance” is at risk in a marriage if prostitution is easily accessible, flagrant, predatory, or medically unsafe. Marriage is a highly regarded social institution that has for centuries inspired moral beliefs which encourage and protect it. Relationships which maintain a fine social balance are treasures in all civilizations because they inspire other relationships and contribute to a positive, cooperative, and stable social environment. Radicals believe that when equality is achieved between the sexes there will be no prostitution. The presence of prostitution only mirrors the immoral nature of the contemporary society.

Radical feminism sees the capitalist sexist hierarchy as the defining feature of women's oppression. Radical feminists believe that women can free themselves only when have done away with what they consider an inherently oppressive and dominating system. Radical feminists feel that there is a male-based authority and power structure and that it is responsible for oppression and inequality, and that as long as the system and its values are in place, society will not be able to be reformed in any significant way. Radical feminists see capitalism as one of the most important barriers to ending oppression. Most radical feminists see no alternatives other than the total uprooting and reconstruction of society in order to achieve their goals. Literature on radical feminism presents the following basic tenets:

- It deals with the very foundations of social organisations (hence the word 'radical').
- It seeks to expose a fundamental flaw in the liberal strand of thought.
- The core proposition is that all institutions are dominated by males and operate to benefit men and lead to a systematic subordination of women and oppression on the basis of sex is the most fundamental source of inequality in society.
- Both in public and private sphere as well, there occurs rape and domestic violence.
- It seeks a radical transformation of the relationship between the sexes and legislative reform is not enough.
- Radical feminists protest against pornography because it is considered as a prime example of the mechanisms within society, which perpetuate patriarchal values and male dominance. Porn is

not an abstract phenomenon divorced from actual behaviour, but a real threat to women's safety. Women are used as a means to the end of male pleasure like exploiting women as sex objects by the exercise of power by those with power against the powerless.

□ Radical feminism is also construed pragmatic feminism. It is concerned with how discrimination and oppression actually occur in social and institutional practices, often from a historical perspective, rather than adopting any single theoretical position – like any form of analysis that contributes to 'fixing things'.

IV

Diversities in Radical Feminism

Several splits have occurred in feminism dividing the group into socialist, liberal and radical camps. In the same vein, there have developed over a period of time, a number of strands of thought under radical feminism. Each strand represents one variety of radical feminism as discussed below.

Separatist Feminism

Separatist feminism is one form of radical feminism. It does not support heterosexual relationships because its proponents argue that the sexual disparities between men and women are unresolvable. Separatist feminists generally do not feel that men can make positive contributions to the feminist movement and that even well-intentioned men replicate patriarchal dynamics. Marilyn Frye (1983) describes separatist feminism as "separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities that are male-defined, male-dominated, and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege — this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women".

Sex-positive Feminism

Sex-positive form of present-day feminism can trace its roots to early radical feminism. Some feminists joined the sex-positive feminist movement in response to anti-pornography feminists (MacKinnon, 1987) who argued that heterosexual pornography was a central cause of women's oppression. Sex-positive feminism, sometimes known as pro-sex feminism, sex-radical feminism, or sexually liberal feminism, is a movement that was formed in order to address issues of women's sexual pleasure, sex work, and inclusive gender identities. The initial period of intense debate and acrimony between sex-positive and anti-pornography feminists during the early 1980s is often referred to as the Feminist Sex Wars. This is in some quarters called radical-libertarian feminism. Radical-Libertarian feminists like to violate sexual norms and believe that women should control every aspect of their sexuality. They also advocate artificial means of reproduction so that less time is devoted to pregnancy and more time is devoted to worthwhile things. They are strong promoters of abortion, contraceptives and other forms of birth control. Ellen Willis's 1981 essay, "Lust Horizons: Is the Women's Movement Pro-Sex?" is the origin of the term, pro-sex feminism. In it, she argues against feminists making alliances with the political right in opposition to pornography and prostitution. Willis argues for a feminism that embraces sexual freedom, including men's sexual freedom, rather than one that condemns pornography and in some cases sexual intercourse and fellatio. This is also called radical lipstick feminism, characteristically different from sex-negative bra-burning feminism.

Anarcha-feminism

Another offshoot of radical feminism is anarcha-feminism (also called anarchist feminism or anarcho-feminism), an ideology which combines feminist and anarchist beliefs. Anarcha-feminists

view patriarchy as a manifestation of hierarchy, believing that the fight against patriarchy is an essential part of the class struggle and the anarchist struggle against the state. Anarcha-feminists such as Susanmiller Brown (1975) see the anarchist struggle as a necessary component of the feminist struggle. In Brown's words, "anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes all relationships of power, it is inherently feminist". Recently, Wendy McElroy(1999) has defined a position (she describes it as "ifeminism" or "individualist feminism") that combines feminism with anarcho-capitalism or libertarianism, arguing that a pro-capitalist, anti-state position is compatible with an emphasis on equal rights and empowerment for women. Individualist anarchist-feminism has grown from the US-based individualist anarchism movement.

Black feminism, Womanism and Intersectionality

Black feminism argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together. Forms of feminism that strive to overcome sexism and class oppression but ignore race can discriminate against many people, including women, through racial bias. Black feminists argue that the liberation of black women entails freedom for all people, since it would require the end of racism, sexism, and class oppression. One of the theories that evolved out of this movement was Alice Walker's Womanism. It emerged after the early feminist movements that were led specifically by white women who advocated social changes such as woman's suffrage. These movements were largely white middle-class movements and ignored oppression based on racism and classism. Alice Walker and other Womanists pointed out that black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression from that of white women. Angela Davis(1989) was one of the first people who articulated an argument centered around the intersection of race, gender, and class in her book, Women, Race, and Class. Similarly

Crenshaw (1991) gave the idea another name called intersectionality. In this context it is worth pointing out that some of the advocates of black feminism drifted away from the term feminism and preferred nomenclature such as Womanism or Intersectionality.

Alice Walker (1990) used the word to describe the perspective and experiences of “women of color.” Although most Womanist scholarship centers on the African American woman’s experience, other non-white theologians identify themselves with this term. The need for this term arose from the early feminist movements that were led specifically by white women who advocated social changes such as woman’s suffrage. The feminist movement focused largely on oppressions based on sexism. But this movement, largely a white middle-class movement, ignored oppression based on racism and classism. It was at this point that Womanists pointed out that black women experienced a different and more intense kind of oppression than did white women.

Intersectionality is a similar theory which seeks to examine the ways in which various socially and culturally constructed categories interact on multiple levels to manifest themselves as inequality in society. Intersectionality holds that the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability do not act independent of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the “intersection” of multiple forms of discrimination. The term “Intersectionality Theory” was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991). According to these feminists of color, experiences of class, gender, sexuality, etc., cannot be adequately understood unless the influences of racialization are carefully considered. They argue that an understanding of intersectionality is a vital element to gaining political and social equality and improving our democratic system.

The movement led by women of color disputed the idea that women were a homogeneous category sharing essentially the same life experiences. Recognizing that the forms of oppression experienced by white middle class women were different than those experienced by black, poor, or disabled women, feminists sought to understand the ways in which gender, race, and class combined to “determine the female destiny.” Leslie McCall (2007) argues that the introduction of the intersectionality theory was vital to sociology, claiming that before its development, there was little research in existence that addressed specifically the experiences of people who are subjected to multiple forms of subordination within society.

Women as a group experience many different forms of injustice, and the sexism they encounter interacts in complex ways with other systems of oppression and this oppression is wrong or unjust. Women are oppressed not just by sexism, but in many ways, e.g., by classism, racism, ageism etc., then it might seem that the goal of feminism is to end all oppression that affect women. One might even believe that in order to accomplish feminism’s goals it is necessary to combat racism and economic exploitation, but also think that there is a narrower set of specifically feminist objectives. Bell Hooks argues: Feminism, as liberation struggle, must exist apart from and as a part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression, and that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact. This knowledge should consistently inform the direction of feminist theory and practice. (Hooks 1989, 22)

One of the most vocal critics of the women’s liberation movement has been Bell Hooks, who argues that the movement’s glossing over of race and class was part of its failure to address

“the issues that divided women”. She has highlighted the lack of minority voices in the women’s movement.

Radical and Marxist Feminism

Some strains of radical feminism have been compared to Marxism in that they describe a “great struggle of history” between two opposed forces. Much like the Marxist struggle between classes (typically, with reference to the present day, the proletariat and bourgeoisie), radical feminism describes a historical struggle between “women” and “men”. Radical feminism has had a close, if sometimes hostile, relationship with Marxism since its origins. Both Marxists and radical feminists seek a total and radical change in social relations and consider themselves to be on the political left. Marxism recognizes that women are oppressed, and attributes the oppression to the capitalist/private property system. Thus they insist that the only way to end the oppression of women is to overthrow the capitalist system.

This form of feminism is relatively recent and differs from traditional Marxism in arguing that women’s oppression is historically primary, harder to transform, causes more harm and is more widespread than class oppression. Similarly it is argued that women’s oppression provides a model for understanding other forms of oppression such as racism and class domination. Some radical feminists claim that women’s oppression is rooted in biology and its elimination will require a biological revolution transforming women’s relation to reproduction. Within criminology, they focus on documenting and analyzing ways in which the content of law and practices of law enforcement have served to entrench and strengthen male dominance in society.

Radical feminism was not only a movement of ideology and theory. Radical feminists also took direct action. In 1968, they

protested against the Miss America pageant by throwing high heels and other feminine accoutrements into a freedom garbage bin. In 1970, they also staged a sit-in at the Ladies' Home Journal. In addition, they held speakouts about topics such as rape.

Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminists argue that oppression relating to the colonial experience, particularly racial, class, and ethnic oppression, has marginalized women in postcolonial societies. Postcolonial feminists can be described as feminists who have reacted against both universalizing tendencies in Western feminist thought and a lack of attention to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thought. They challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. Postcolonial feminists object to portrayals of women of non-Western societies as passive and voiceless victims and the portrayal of Western women as modern, educated and empowered. Postcolonial feminism emerged from the gendered history of colonialism: colonial powers often imposed Western norms on colonized regions. Postcolonial feminists today struggle to fight gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than through those imposed by the Western colonizers. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) criticizes Western feminism on the grounds that it is ethnocentric and does not take into account the unique experiences of women from third-world countries or the existence of feminisms indigenous to third-world countries.

V

Swerving Ideologies and Shifting Paradigm

With pluralism, split-ups and divergences in discourse growing, the number of disagreements tends to supersede the

number of agreements about feminist stance in general and radical feminism in particular. This is what for the purpose of present paper is called swerving ideologies and shifting paradigm. Disagreements within feminism occur with respect to either the descriptive or normative claims, e.g., feminists differ on what would count as justice or injustice for women (what counts as “equality,” “oppression,” “disadvantage”, (rights should everyone be accorded), and what sorts of injustice women in fact suffer (the aspects of women’s current situation as harmful or unjust). Disagreements may also lie in the explanations of the injustice: two feminists may agree that women are unjustly being denied proper rights and respect and yet substantively differ in their accounts of how or why the injustice occurs and what is required to end it.

Some non-feminists agree with feminists on the ways women ought to be viewed and treated, but don’t see any problem with the way things currently are. Others disagree about the background moral or political views. In the twenty-first century new reactions to feminist ideologies have emerged including a generation of male scholars involved in gender studies, and also men’s rights activists who promote of male equality (rights to equal treatment in family, divorce and anti-discrimination law). A number of feminist writers maintain that identifying as a feminist is the strongest stand men can take in the struggle against sexism. They have argued that men should be allowed, or even be encouraged, to participate in the feminist movement. Other female feminists argue that men cannot be feminists simply because they are not women. They maintain that men are granted inherent privileges that prevent them from identifying with feminist struggles, thus making it impossible for them to identify with feminists. Fidelma Ashe (2007) has approached the issue of male feminism by arguing that traditional feminist views of male experience and of “men doing feminism” have been

monolithic. She explores the multiple political discourses and practices of pro-feminist politics, and evaluates each strand through an interrogation based upon its effect on feminist politics.

Within the New Left, radical feminists were accused of being “bourgeois”, “antileft” or even “apolitical”, whereas they saw themselves as further “radicalizing the left by expanding the definition of radical”. Radical feminist have tended to be white and middle class. Ellen Willis hypothesized in 1984 that this was, at least in part, because “most black and working-class women could not accept the abstraction of feminist issues from race and class issues”; the resulting narrow demographic base, in turn, limited the validity of generalizations based on radical feminists’ personal experiences of gender relations. Early radical feminists broke political ties with “male-dominated left groups”, or would work with them only in ad hoc coalitions.

Betty Friedan (1963) and other liberal feminists often see precisely the radicalism of radical feminism as potentially undermining the gains of the women’s movement with polarizing rhetoric that invites backlash and hold that they overemphasize sexual politics at the expense of political reform. Other critics of radical feminism from the political left, including socialist feminists, strongly disagree with the radical feminist position that the oppression of women is fundamental to all other forms of oppression; these critics hold that issues of race and of class are as important or more important than issues about gender. Queer and postmodernist theorists often argue that the radical feminist ideas on gender are essentialist and that many forms of gender identity complicate any absolute opposition between “men” and “women”.

Some feminists, most notably Alice Echols and Ellen Willis, hold that after about 1975, most of what continued to be called

“radical feminism” represents a narrow subset of what was originally a more ideologically diverse movement. Willis saw this as an example of a “conservative retrenchment” that occurred when the “expansive prosperity and utopian optimism of the ’60s succumbed to an era of economic limits and political backlash.” They label this dominant tendency “cultural feminism”, view it as a “neo-Victorian” ideology coming out of radical feminism but ultimately antithetical to it. Willis draws the contrast that early radical feminism saw itself as part of a broad left politics, whereas much of what succeeded it in the 1970s and early 1980s (both cultural feminism and liberal feminism) took the attitude that “left politics were ‘male’ and could be safely ignored.” She further writes that whereas the original radical feminism “challenge[d] the polarization of the sexes”, cultural feminism simply embraces the “traditional feminine virtues”. Critics of cultural feminism hold that cultural feminist ideas on sexuality, exemplified by the feminist anti-pornography movement, severely polarized feminism, leading to the “Feminist Sex Wars” of the 1980s. Critics of Echols and Willis hold that they conflate several tendencies within radical feminism, not all of which are properly called “cultural feminism”, and emphasize a greater continuity between early and contemporary radical feminism.

Sexism is not only harmful to women, but is harmful to all of us. What makes a particular form of oppression sexist seems to be not just that it harms women, but that someone is subject to this form of oppression specifically because she is (or at least appears to be) a woman. Racial oppression harms women, but racial oppression (by itself) doesn’t harm them because they are women, it harms them because they are (or appear to be) members of a particular race. The suggestion that sexist oppression consists in oppression to which one is subject by virtue of being or appearing to be a woman provides us at least the beginnings of an analytical

tool for distinguishing subordinating structures. But problems and unclarities remain. As Elizabeth Spelman makes the point:

...no woman is subject to any form of oppression simply because she is a woman; which forms of oppression she is subject to depend on what “kind” of woman she is. In a world in which a woman might be subject to racism, classism, anti-Semitism, if she is not so subject it is because of her race, class, religion, sexual orientation. So it can never be the case that the treatment of a woman has only to do with her gender and nothing to do with her class or race. (Spelman 1988, 52-3)

Other accounts of oppression are designed to allow that oppression takes many forms, and refuse to identify one form as more basic or fundamental than the rest. For example, Iris Young describes five “faces” of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and systematic violence (Young 1990). Pluralist accounts of sexist oppression must also allow that there isn’t an over-arching explanation of sexist oppression that applies to all its forms. (Rubin 1975; Fraser and Nicholson 1990).

Also, Willis, although very much a part of early radical feminism and continuing to hold that it played a necessary role in placing feminism on the political agenda, later criticised its inability “to integrate a feminist perspective with an overall radical politics,” while viewing this limitation is inevitable in the historical context of the times. In part this limitation arose from the fact that consciousness raising, as “the primary method of understanding women’s condition” in the movement at this time and its “most successful organizing tool”, led to an emphasis on personal experience that concealed “prior political and philosophical assumptions”.

Willis, writing in 1984, was critical of the notion that all hierarchies are “more specialized forms of male supremacy” as preventing adequate consideration of the possibility that “the impulse to dominate... could be a universal human characteristic that women share, even if they have mostly lacked the opportunity to exercise it.” Further, the view of oppression of women as a “transhistorical phenomenon” allowed middle-class white women to minimize the benefits of their own race and class privilege and tended to exclude women from history. Further, Willis wrote that the movement never developed “a coherent analysis of either male or female psychology” and that it ultimately raised hopes that its narrow “commitment to the sex-class paradigm” could not fulfil; when those hopes were dashed, according to Willis the resulting despair was the foundation of withdrawal into counterculturalism and cultural feminism.

Radical feminists tend to muddle their ideas, producing concepts that do not make finer distinctions of reality.” The oppression of women by men is assumed to be of the same intensity among all men, yet obviously as Imelda Whelehan (1995) has pointed out, “Men have different degrees of access to [the] mechanisms of oppression.” The distinction between rape and prostitution is obscure; its logic is tied to an abstract theory of degradation distant from representing the actual sense of the word “degradation.” Radical feminism focuses on men as oppressors, yet says little about the possibility of the woman being an oppressor of other women or of men.” Radical feminists do not view prostitution as a harmless private transaction. On the contrary, they believe that it reinforces and perpetuates the objectification, subordination, and exploitation of women.” They see men as universally believing myths regarding their own sexuality. Two myths are: (1) that men need more sex than women and (2) that they are genetically the stronger sex and therefore should be dominant in

relationships with women. Feminist writer Alison Jaggar (1983) describes the radical feminist view as one in which “almost every man/woman encounter has sexual overtones and typically is designed to reinforce the sexual dominance of men.”

The primary importance attached to patriarchy downgrades the importance of concepts like social class and ethnicity. Radical Feminism tends to overlook the fact that the general position of women in society has changed over time and this can only be explained in terms of wider economic and political changes in society. Radical feminism is seen as essentialising woman – that is, they assume that there is a single or uniform female nature (stereotyping).

Not all male / female relationships are characterised by oppression and exploitation, for example. Technological “solutions” to female exploitation are also viewed with suspicion (since control over development and exploitation of technology has traditionally been a male preserve), as is the idea that a matriarchal society is somehow superior and preferable to a patriarchal society. Radical Feminists over-emphasise factors that separate women from men (their biology in particular - over-stating the significance of biological differences - and also unsubstantiated / uncritical assumptions about male and female psychology). The loss a woman feels for the love and cooperation of her husband should not be transferred unreasonably to prostitution. The presence of prostitution in society can be a contributing factor to love’s loss. But prostitution should not be used as an “out” for marital unhappiness. A man’s need for a prostitute may be only a symptom and not a cause of marital conflict. Against these controversies, researchers look for some further alternative concept, not necessarily feminism radical or otherwise but gender. A lot of further research and action need to go about the matter.

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In the Shadow of Homi Bhabha: Cultural Hybridization Within the Gorkha Community of Mizoram

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India, a land of various ethnic and tribal groups, each with their distinct culture, language, and economy, presents and preserves a set of values and norms that are self-evidently real. Strategically important and physically isolated, the North-Eastern region, evokes a spectrum of emotions among the general population of India. The need for protecting one's identity became an abiding concern of various groups of citizens in the North-East after Independence. As such, most of the identities in India's North-East assume a space of difference for realization of their own aspirations, cultural, and political, with all other economic and social ramifications. Hence the phenomenal rise and growth of various identities in North-East India presents a picture of the possibilities of multiple emergences of identities with many distinct claims. Apart from natural beauty, the area is the homeland of a large number of indigenous and immigrant tribes each with its distinct language and culture.

Mizoram, a state situated in the corner of the North-East India is flanked on the east and south by Myanmar and Chittagong; on the north by Cachar district of Assam and Manipur and on the west by Tripura and Bangladesh. The Gorkhas have been classified as one of the eighteen communities. The Gorkhas, a race who are originally the inhabitants of the Himalayan Ranges possess a distinct culture, language, customs, and traditions. The history of the Gorkha

movement in Mizoram as settlers began in the year 1891, though they had set foot on the soil much earlier.

Col. T .H. Lewin mentions that Gurkha colonies “were established on the Myani River, a northern affluent of the Karnaphuli. So if the boundary between Chittagong Hill Tracts and Lushai Hills were not framed on 12th. September 1876, the year of the settlement of the Gorkhas in Mizoram would have been 1865”.(Sunar 20) The majority of the Gorkhas were descendants of the discharged military policemen of long service who were originally recruited in Lushai Hills. They also enjoyed satisfactory socio-political status in the State right from the beginning of their settlement. Some of the personnels of the Surma Valley Military Police Battalion Frontier Police Battalion with exemplary services were awarded with considerable pieces of land, “some of them even with chieftainship with powers and priviledges at par with Mizo chiefs, with hereditary right of succession. For instance, DhojbirRai was awarded the whole area of Survey Tilla (now Dintha-II); SrimanRai, the whole area of SrimanTilla, the place that was named after him (now Zotlang); JamadarSingbirRai was awarded with holdings in Chawnchhim (Champhai) and so on”. (Sunar 20). The above statement shows that the Gorkhas have been enjoying satisfactory socio-political status in the state right from the beginning of the settlement. In *The Gorkhas of Mizoram Volume-I*, the Gorkhas “after the settlement in their adopted land never became a burden to the society but rather proved to be a cynosure and worthy sons of the land. They earned good names and laurels for themselves as well as the State”. (Sunar 21) It is historically clear that the Gorkhas of Mizoram initially came from Nepal and later from other parts of India like Darjeeling, and Sikkim. The reasons behind their movements have been varied in nature from time to time. It may be due to the lack of employment,

shortage of food, political persecution or the urge for military adventures. As a concept, migration is applicable to various forms of human movement which may be voluntary or forced, brought about either by socio-political or ecological reasons. It is therefore presumed that the main reason for their coming to the North-East states of India was the allurement of military adventure. The history of the development of the Gorkha ranks in the Indian army is the story of the avowed recognition of their worth as soldiers and of the fulfilment of the hopes which lay behind their first enlistment. Gorkhas of several tribes such as Magars, Gurungs, Chhettris, Thakur, Khas, Limbus, Rais and so on were recruited in the Indian army. Their hardihood, love of enterprise, tenacity in adversity and contempt for caste prejudices have justly earned them worldwide reputation.

The Gorkhas, like any other ethnic group in North-East India have their own unique culture which marks them off from others, for culture is a crucial component of a community's unique identity. It is their culture which binds them together as a group, a culture which is manifested through various activities, patterns of behaviour, habits, world views, language, and value system. Talking about the background of the Gorkhas of Mizoram, it is the different Gorkha Organizations, Gorkha schools, temples and cemetery, which probe into the question of what comprises Gorkha identity. There is indeed a spirit of self-sacrifice and selflessness that has been infused in the minds of the Gorkha through the intermingling and transcultural communication with the other ethnic groups. Also, hybridity occupied a central place due to the exposure and interactions with other cultures.

The history of hybridity has caused some to consider the employment of the concept as problematic, indeed, offensive. It is celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence

owing to the advantage of in-betweeness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference. This is so in HomiBhabha's discussion of cultural hybridity. Bhabha upholds an argument for thinking of things in multiplicity, in heterogeneity as developing together, of simultaneously sustaining one another. He speaks to the relationship between politics and theory, and the manner in which they depend on each other and sums up this relationship as "the difference of the same" (Bhabha 101) In urban contemporary society the identities of people are closely intertwined with the local identity of the cities they live in. The local identity of a city is shaped by its citizens, and their identities are formed by the local identity of their city, which is the framework for their everyday life. Theoretically, social formation is often a concrete combination of different modes of production organized under the dominance of one of them. When the processes of modernisation turn against each other in contemporary society, they inevitably create a new kind of local identity. Likewise, the local identity of cities performs a major role in the formation of the cultural identity of the Gorkhas, even though the Gorkhas have a rich tradition of local initiatives and institutions maintaining their language, culture, manners, and customs. The identity of the Gorkhas centers around the tradition and customs which provide a foundational structure and building materials. As such, an inquiry into the issue of identity presupposes the notion of the other. Hence one should not ignore the most important factor which is necessary for the construction of identity; that is, the notion of 'others' as differentiated from 'us' or who we are since identity is meaningful only in relation to others. It cannot be defined without reference to what stands outside of it or what is different from it. In other words, identity is formed basically on the basis of difference. In the words of Bhabha this kind of bond between different communities of one's own space, ideology, culture, language and so on, sums up this relationship as,

“the difference of the same”. (Bhabha 101) For tens of thousands of years, humans lived in isolated communities. Cultures developed largely independently and many were unaware of others’ existence. When traversing the length and breadth of India, one can notice that the transition from one culture to another and one language to another is not abrupt, but smooth and gradual. Numerous processes of change are therefore occurring. Social beings, men, express their nature by creating and re-creating organizations which guide and control their behaviour in myriad ways. Homi Bhabha in *Nation and Narration*, says, “Cultural difference must not be understood as the free play of polarities and pluralities...it addresses the jarring of meanings and values generated in between the variety and diversity associated with cultural plenitude..” (Bhabha 312)

Mizoram was a clan-lineage based politics in which the centralisation of political authority rested with the class of chiefs. Thus the acquisition of the right of chieftainship was, in fact, the main concern in the indigenous Mizo politics. Rev. V. S. Lalrinawma, in his book *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges*, describes, “In the early life of Mizo communities, the institution of chieftainship governed the appropriation of resources... the most important social institutions under the Sailo rule were those of chieftainship and Zawlruk.” (Lalrinawma 4) The Gorkhas during earlier times had the institution known as Rodhi Ghar, whose principles were same as the Mizos’ Zawlruk pattern. It was a place where young men and even young women unlike the Mizos’ were trained and educated. The importance of Zawlruk to the Mizos and Rodhi Ghar to the Gorkhas were the same. Both maintained peace and harmony within their respective societies. Prior to the British colonialism in Mizoram, the Mizo’s mode of living and the Gorkhas of Mizoram was purely traditional in character. As seen in *The Gorkhas of Mizoram Volume-I*, the traditional belief between the

Gorkhas of Mizoram and the native Mizos were found to be similar in various ways. It is said that, “RihDil was revered equally by the Gorkhas as the Mizos did. They used to visit it annually, pigeons were flown in the name of their relatives’ departed souls and god as well. They believed that some holy spirits dwelt there.” (Sunar 33)

From the very beginning both the Mizos and the Gorkhas had kinship and lineage based social systems. Though different in various spheres, there are still some traits and fields where similarity can be seen. For instance, rice beer which is called ‘Zu’ or ‘Zufang’ (in Mizo) and ‘Jaad’ (in Nepali language) was important in every offering and festival, without which no good deeds can be performed within the communities. It was valued in various merriment and offerings in both Mizo and Gorkha communities. Rev. V.S.Lalrinawma says, “Zu was claimed to be part and parcel of Mizo culture before the arrival of the Gospel. Since in all social and religious ceremonies, festivals and sacrifices Zu was an essential element...” (Lalrinawma 153)

Though having various superstitious beliefs and traditional practices in using the rice beer, a change of views and ideas generated within the society as a result of various factors. Hence, the ban of alcohol and other intoxicating substances took place because it is seen as a social evil by various communities. Before the change in people’s views and beliefs the use of such things were seen as the purifier of every ailment and suffering for the community. The prohibition of any alcoholic things among Mizo society was an influence of the missionaries within the state who taught that Christianity and alcohol were incompatible. Rev. V.S Lalrinawma says, “Christianity gave a new hope for living to the Mizo society. The missionaries had a negative attitude towards Zu.

This negative attitude after a few years brought the churches in Mizoram to prohibit the traditional Zu in 1984.” (Lalrinawma 275) Awareness against substances of intoxication within the Gorkha community are implemented by various leaders and organisations within their respective localities too. Therefore, the earlier traditions and customs among both communities have been transformed. Such changes in a small span of time thus erased the commonality and brotherhood gradually.

In the course of every great civilization the old tradition has been in various degrees and in different modes subjected to a process of differentiation. Various contrast between the old ways of living and new lifestyles in a society can be seen. The forces of modernisation is bringing about rapid changes in the social structures. Having one’s own beliefs, traditions, religion, and culture, the Gorkhas, despite the enormous advances in understanding the evolution of life, do have their own cultural identity. The extent to which their culture influences them is quite extraordinary, permeating every aspect of their lives. Everything they construct is a cultural artefact, marked with significance. For example: the temples built in every locality inside Mizoram and various Gorkha schools is not simply an institution of the present generations. It tells the story of the society that built it long ago. It has a history of its own that is tied in with the lives of the people who have lived here. It stands as a mark of the culture of society at the time it was built, and has gained resonances through the time that has elapsed since it was built. The Mizo, in every locality have their own churches, schools, cemetaries and other organizational institutions within the state gradually. Likewise, the Gorkhas have also adopted this pattern established by the Mizo. The co-dependence and interrelation among the groups have affected the Gorkha sensibility, which in turn plays a significant role in the shaping of their identity. As such,

any cultural construction is therefore, a part of the autobiography of those within it. Cultural programmes and activities like upliftment of one's own language, traditional dress, different monthly festivals, and other activities are implemented by the Gorkha Youth Association says Purna Prasad in one of his essays, *Mizoram Gorkha Yuwa Sangh: Kehi Vivechna*. He says, "The establishment of various Gorkha cultural, educational and religious institutions can be said to be the hard work of the Gorkha Youth Associations". (Prasad 53)

The Gorkhas of Mizoram have preserved traditional music, culture, and worship rituals over time through oral communication including folklore and songs, and have passed them on from generation to generation. Even after the evolution of modern amenities and gadgets, the prevalence of traditional art and culture in all its grandeur, and the importance that continues to be attached to them is evident. Various classical and traditional dances like, Maruni, Tamang Selo, Jhyaure, Sorathi, and many other forms of dances are still practiced and performed by youths and even adults in different occasions. The different dance forms being one of the major representative component of the Gorkha identity is thus the key component of culture of the Gorkhas too. L. B. Chhetri in *Prakash: Visheshank* (2005) highlights the importance of customs and traditions, which is thus a part of identity formation of the Gorkhas of Mizoram. He says:

We Gorkhas have been practicing many folk elements and narratives like rituals, songs, dance, customs, and rites from our ancestor's time just as in every corner of the world every group has its own practice. Such elements of past beliefs were the part of identity formation and the ability to negotiate difference with the other community. (Chhetri 32)

It proves that the age old bonds between their ancestors and their culture have continued to flourish among the Gorkhas. Various festivals and rituals have therefore acquired unique colours in Mizoram. Such presentations and unique practices among various ethnic groups in Mizoram unite and strengthen the gap between them. Through the collections of ideas and habits between two communities within a society, one can learn, share and transmit from one generation to another. Over the past, five to six years, the Gorkha community, as a whole has witnessed changes in various fields due to the positive link between them and other groups within the society. They have also witnessed changes in the governance of local authorities. Various people from the Gorkha community are elected and given opportunities in the local as well as national level in various areas. Some are given various titles and ranks in the society welfare while some are elected in various posts for the maintenance of their locality. According to Dhruba Thapa, the present President of Mizoram Gorkha Youth Association of Kolasib, till today, the bond between the Gorkhas of Mizoram and native Mizo brothers is strong and supportive of each other. Even in their organizational programmes and activities, he said, “We are welcomed and supported by them in various activities. Some of our senior Gorkha citizens are even elected within the Mizo organization as body members”. (11 Feb. 2017) In the community domain, neighbourhood organizations encourage their involvement and participation in such policy and decision making. In various interviews with different members and individuals of both the Gorkhas and Mizo Organizations on date 10th to 13th. February 2017 within Kolasib district, Aizawl district, and some areas of Lunglei district, positive remarks were heard and collected, in which different body members like Village Councils, Presidents and Vice Presidents, Secretaries of both Gorkhas and Mizo organizations throw light on the good relation between both groups. In one of

the interviews with Pu. H. Lalkawhluna, the Village Council of Hmar Veng, Kolasib, states that, “As unity and equality is every organization’s motto and goal, so do we, Mizos in respect with our Gorkha brothers, are proud of being their neighbours who in times help and support each other in various situations.” (12 Feb. 2017) In various localities within Aizawl district and Kolasib district the relationship between the Gorkhas and the Mizos is projected to be so strong and friendly that even the members of each community have established Joint Committees. Likewise, the senior citizens of the Gorkha community are also enlisted within the MizoUpa Pawl. (MUP) Through a telephone interview with Madhav Kumar Thapa, the present General Secretary of the Gorkha Youth Association in Lunglei, the Gorkhas residing in Lunglei are “enrolled as members of both the Gorkhas as well as the Mizos associations”. (13 Feb. 2017)

In this regard, the Gorkhas have gained increasing influence. Therefore, the Gorkha organizations have played an important role in improving services and increasing their effectiveness to their native brothers too. Hence, modernity with its agenda has brought about all kinds of changes to the community and its culture. The impact of globalisation on the culture and identity of the Gorkhas is of great concern to Gorkha writers. SangeetaJaisi in an article, *Identity Crisis?*writes:

Going down memory lane, in the 70’s various local organizations viz: Mizoram Gorkha Youth Association, NariSamaj, BhasaSamiti, NebhasPariwar to name a few did their talent hunting.. Their most commendable effort in searching hidden talents and highlighting them, and viz-a-viz the foray in preserving and keeping alive our cultural heritage by forming cultural troops and sending them to perform in the other states such as Sikkim, and Darjeeling are indeed notable and praiseworthy. (Jaisi3)

History, therefore, provides many examples of different communities and cultures living side by side within the same society, co-existing peacefully, and sometimes, even amicably. The co-presence of different communities within the same polity is, therefore, not a new occurrence. It has been a hallmark of many societies for a very long time. It is concerned with the issue of equality, asking whether the different communities, living peacefully together, co-exists as equals in the public arena. Urban areas, specially the capital city of Mizoram, Aizawl, offer avenues for the establishment of ethnic or community neighbourhoods, enabling different ethnic groups or communities to coexist. Within the framework of plurality, the major concern is peaceful co-existence and amity. As long as people have some degree of freedom to live by their own religious and cultural practices within a society, there is a positive environment in the public arena. Pluralism, in other words, indicates the presence of differences and marks a departure from policies aimed at annihilating the other. It remains silent about the public status of these communities. Instead, in most pre-modern societies, pluralism prevailed against the backdrop of a widely accepted hierarchy of cultures and communities. The Gorkhas through their mundane activities within the society projects the bonds of friendship and brotherhood with their Mizo brothers as well as with other ethnic groups.

Major attention is given to education and future careers mainly due to the rapid rise and influence of Non-Governmental Organizations among the Gorkha households; so does modernization, which accelerates the pace of change. Thus, the change is both the characteristic and goal of social change. As an intermediary between the state and the people, various Gorkha Organizations are poised to bridge the gap between the people, the state as well as with other ethnic groups. Through their effective

vertical and horizontal networking, they muster support and obtain people's support in the areas of their operation. Such is the change evaluated in terms of how it affects the culture. As a result of these changes, the shaping of the Gorkha identity occurs. Various Gorkha organizations of Mizoram, who emerged as a social force in the domain of development for the Gorkha community "follows directly or indirectly the principles of the Mizo organization", says Pu. Lalhluna, the present Village Council of Zotlang, Aizawl. (10 Feb. 2017)

Much of our lives is inextricably bound to organizations. We work in organizations, belong to numerous social organizations, attend universities and are governed by organizations. Thus, communication organizes and coordinates these activities to allow us to achieve common goals. The goals of the various Gorkha organizations and the Mizo organizations is thus, to work for the welfare of the people. Though perceived as different communities the Gorkha and the Mizo organizations complement each other says Mr. Ram Kumar Thapa, former President of Mizoram Gorkha Youth Association, Zotlang. (1Feb. 2017) It is through the development and actions taken by such organizations in every society or community, a sense of oneness and brotherhood among one another is generated.

A lot of development and changes can be traced through histories and works written by various Gorkha writers of Mizoram. Through the interaction between one or more communities, changes and developments have increased its pace considerably in the modern times which caused the shaping and development of Gorkha identity. Globalisation has therefore, reduced the distance between the Gorkhas and other ethnic groups in a number ways. Through development and various shared experiences with the other

community, the Gorkhas within the State build their identity in a very strong frame. Today, the Gorkha Youth Organization, following the Young Mizo Association (YMA) pattern is given a particular attention in almost every locality in the State. “From time to time the Gorkha associations presents and perform various cultural programmes in which the importance of traditional dress and mother tongue is highlighted for the upliftment of the community”, says Mr.Purna Prasad, a well knownGorkha writer of Mizoram in his essay, *Mizoram Gorkha YuwaSangh: KehiVivechna*. (Prasad 52) This encourages and forms the basis for the building up of the future.

Changes, leading to development or modernity can be either contradictory or conflicting experiences. There can be both positive experiences relating to the spirit of freedom, changes and development, and even an experience relating to existential and cultural anguish. As modernity itself is invariably related to freedom, a change in one’s views and ideas can also occurred, similarly, culture is also changeable. This aspect of variability makes culture distinct from one society to another; from one polity another, and from one generation to next, and so on. Thus, globalisation and modernisation led to a shift in culture, as also inventions and discoveries, which have led to variability in culture. Such development transmits culture through mass communication and intermingling of a community with the other community. No society is therefore static, it is in a state of costant flux. In a way, there is nothing called constant except the change itself. It may be understood as a universal phenomenon as there is no society whether primitive or modern that remains unaffected by the process of change. It is in this sense that, one can see modernity within the Gorkha community in spheres of education, belief systems and technological advancement. Such changes within the Gorkha community can be said to be due to the interrelation between other ethnic groups. Thus, the impact of globalisation on

the culture and identity of the Gorkhas is of great concern to Gorkha writers. In this context, the question of who a Gorkha is and what constitutes the Gorkha identity is a seminal issue. To answer such questions one has to take into account the process of identity construction. Such a construct centres around beliefs, practices, customs, traditions, socio-political conditions, and so on. Identity is contextualized to the land, artefacts, language, existential conditions, and experiences which in turn draws on history, culture, socio-economic, and political conditions. Identity therefore is formed not in isolation, but in the context of a culture where a culture provides a framework or foundational structure for its formation. In this manner the identity of the Gorkhas centres around the tradition and customs which provide a foundational structure and building materials. As such an inquiry into the issue of identity presupposes the notion of the other. Hence one should not ignore the most important factor which is necessary for the construction of identity; that is, the notion of ‘others’ as differentiated from ‘us’ since identity is meaningful only in relation to others. We are conscious of our identity because of others. It cannot be defined without reference to what stands outside of it or what is different from it. In other words, identity is formed basically on the basis of difference. In the light of this, through intermingling with other ethnic groups and the changes brought about by globalisation, the Gorkha identity has been shaped. Both communities, the Gorkhas, as well as the Mizos have bridged the gap between them. Hence, it creates socialization within a society by promoting attachment and participation process among the individuals. HomiBhabha raised a critical debate on third space in this age of globalisation, where inter and transcultural communion has become a norm rather than an exception. As Bhabha’s theory of cultural difference provides a conceptual vocabulary of hybridity and third space, he creates a

series of concepts that work to undermine the simple polarization of the world into self and other. His writing emphasizes the hybridity of cultures, which on one level simply refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena, instead, they are always in contact with one another, and this contacts leads to cultural mixedness. This is particularly so in Bhabha's discussion of cultural hybridity. Considering that fact, the Gorkhas of Mizoram, along with other ethnic groups even after various differences in their everyday life co-operate and depend on each other which affect the Gorkha image. L. B. Chhetrifurther states that due to modernization and intermingling with the other ethnic groups "our way of dressing and maintaining our customs nowadays is changed". (Chhetri33) In an article *Migration and Settlement in Mizoram*, it is seen that the Gorkhas along with their Mizo brethren during the eighteenth century had already tied the bond of friendship strongly. The Gorkhas, as spokespersons or representatives of the British in those days, were the only means through whom any other ethnic group within the state could visit or enter the surcharge areas (restricted areas). Such areas were restricted for any other ethnic groups for security reasons, and so, the Mizos from outside the surcharge areas had to seek sponsorship from the Gorkha soldiers to enter such restricted areas,similar to the Inner Line Permit (ILP) of the present times. The Gorkhas, "those days, used to have many *thians* (Mizo friends) from outside surcharge areas because they required sponsorship of their visit to Aizawl town to purchase basic necessities like salts, cloths, etc. The Gorkhas used to sponsor their *thians* while the *thians* used to bring them fowls and eggs as a token of appreciation when they visited Aizawl". (Sunar 17)From those days the bond between the Mizos and the Gorkhas were firm and rooted.

In the words of Bhabha this kind of bond between different communities of one's own space, ideology, culture, language, and

so on, sums up this relationship as, “the difference of the same”. (Bhabha 101) By interacting and bonding with others, one can simply benefit in various ways. Such co-dependence and intermingling between the Gorkhas and the Mizos not only become gainful to the Gorkhas but to the native Mizos too. Through this, both communities bridged the gap between them. Hence, this created socialization within the society by promoting attachment and interaction among the individuals.

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Your Words at My Feet

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Words
you relish
in your betel nut cigarette stained mouth
as you chew on them
over and over
like an indifferent cow
stubbornly staring
through half closed eyes
and flared Roman nostrils
Rolling them around
Like a shredder
shredding
As you revel
in their bitterness
and sharpness
and sweet dictionary meaningfulness
As you lead me
down and down
the Alice hole
images of me
in hell
and you

somewhere on an island in paradise
As spittle juices
yawn their way
to your unshaved thick chin
You spit them out
Words
As they tumble along
Like good humble children
Others
They seethe
While
some sweat
Left to dry
on the balcony of your
concrete mouth
Your words
All of them in single file
in holy
technicolour procession
on a downward spiral
suspended
in space
moving
in slow Newtonian time
down your flubberous belly
Rappelling themselves
Onto the floor
Giddy as hell
And nauseous
Technical loss of colour
I stare down

They stare up
Wondering at me
While I sift through them
With my bare feet
Some die
Some echo
While some
Just
Roll away
Indifferent
To my indifference
Disintegrating
Like old songs
Sung too many times
Pointless and mundane
Some
Stick
Like knee scars
And childhood bee stings
To the soles of
My worn out
Feet.

The next issue of MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies Issue IV Volume 2 December 2017, shall focus upon writings within the parameters of the literary paradigm. Articles for the same may be sent by October 2017. All contributors are requested to kindly refer to the prescribed format that has been denoted in the inside back cover of the journal. The themes related to the above may be pertinent to, but not solely confined to the following:

Peace, Conflict and Media	Women's Studies
Ethics and Conflict Studies	Gender and Sexuality
Death ways	Memory
Cultural Traditions	The Body and Performance
Pop Culture	Storytelling
Comparative Studies	Craft
Belief Narratives	Food ways
Religion	Trauma
Witness	Life-Writing
Testimony	Communities
Photography	Insurgency
Music	Art

Manuscripts should be duly submitted between 3000-5000 words prepared in accordance with the latest MLA Handbook in MSWord format. Articles are to be accompanied by endnotes if any, and a Works Cited list. A brief statement from the author that the article has not been submitted for publication elsewhere will be welcome, along with the author's full address, and institutional affiliation. The above may be mailed to the following address :

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