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**MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies**  
**(A Refereed Journal)**  
**UGC Approved Journal No. 64788**

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The Journal is published by the Department of English, Mizoram University which has been awarded Departmental Research Support under UGC Special Assistance Programme (UGC-SAP/DRS II). The objective of the Journal is to provide an informed scholarly dialogue on topics that are pertinent to literature and culture studies. The focus is both theoretical and interdisciplinary and endeavours to explore new perspectives in order to create a discourse of learning.

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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## **FOREWORD**

*MZU Journal of Literature & Cultural Studies (MZUJLCS) has consistently focused upon facets that are integral to the study of literature and culture. It has always aimed for excellence and a sense of resolute distinction and at this point in time, it is my proud privilege to announce that since June 2017, the journal has been accepted as an UGC approved journal, and furthermore, that our readers can now access the journal at <http://mzujlcs.wixsite.com/mzujlcs>.*

*The present volume focuses upon concepts that are related to the disciplines of literature and culture, with a distinct thrust upon cross cultural perspectives. Our contributors have written well researched and thought provoking articles that have dwelt upon trends from the northeast and beyond and these have made the present issue of the journal unique and well worthy in terms of reading pleasure. The intermingling of various literary traditions have been reflected in the journal and the representations of literature from the 'east' and the 'west' both in terms of the canonical as well as the more contemporary have been amply elucidated by the contributors. While doing so, the much debated issues of identity and the concepts of stereotypes that accompany the same have found much needed space within the realms of its pages. Deliberations that have bordered upon the oft debated nuances of the 'colonial' and 'territories', and the 'subaltern' ; which have continued to loom large even after decades of studies on*

*the colonial and the postcolonial, find coherent representation in this issue.*

*Accompanying these very relevant dialogues are perceptions on narratives and narration; concepts that have remained inherently central to the study of literature. Eloquent arguments on gender, as well as cultural and social interplay, along with negotiations on nations and tribes amidst other interrelated issues have been encapsulated within the journal. Poetry too has carved its own special niche within the journal. Ideologies that are interlinked to reinterpreting literary and cultural identity in terms of food habits, notions of sex and sexuality, courtship language and the distinct association of all these with the all pervading notion of 'power' have been significantly portrayed in the journal. Rewriting and reinterpreting the stereotypical beliefs that are associated with 'traditional values' has always been an exigent task, and the present issue of MZUJLCS has well met these literary challenges with enhanced proficiency and ardour.*

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

## **EDITORIAL**

*I am very pleased to present our readers the December 2017 issue of the MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies. Contributors have sent these excellent articles and poems which have been a reflection of different areas pertaining to concerns of literature and culture in their varied perspectives.*

*The issue contains a short essay, three poems and sixteen articles. An essay from Frederic Will is reflective and lets us explore the landscape of his great creative mind. Eight articles centre round various cultural experiences and practices of the North East of India while others represent past histories of Europe. Two articles explore the current trends of social media and their effects on sexuality and the youth in general. All the articles, however, share a common theme of identity, especially the cultural one. The poetry section includes one from the renowned Robin Ngangom who is simultaneously reflective and deliberate in his poem Imphal .*

*It is also with great pride that I announce to our readers that our journal has been given a UGC approval as it is of immense importance to the contributors from the academia. The journal website will also reflect all contributions and can be read from anywhere in the world. Such an achievement is heartening as it has been long coming.*

*I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the contributors for their excellent articles which has given our journal a boost. Also special thanks to the Head of Department, Prof. Margaret L.Pachau to whom I owe greatly for her constant guidance and support.*

*It is our hope that this journal and future issues to come will facilitate a strong base for intellectual and thought provoking conversations that we so often silence or wilfully ignore.*

*Dr. Kristina Z. Zama,  
Editor  
Department of English,  
Mizoram University.*



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*Kristina Z.Zama*

## Nyquil for Anubis

*Frederic Will  
Writer and Poet  
Vice President for Research  
Humanities University, USA*

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### 1

Everyday life can be seen as a series of problems to overcome. As with all problems, these problems of everyday life need to be overcome with tools. Say we get a cold. We want to make ourselves feel better. We want to solve the problem of having a cold. We can make several moves. We can buy and take Nyquill. We can breathe in steaming hot water from the stove. We can cream the inside of the nose with Mentholum. Or of course we can do nothing, we can avoid these tools for solving a problem, can sniffle and overcome naturally. That method too is a tool. A method can be a tool.

In ordinary parlance, tools usually concern us for their capacity to solve material problems like fixing parts of a car, or of a kitchen sink, or raising a heavy weight with a relatively small pulley. These are smart aids to doing things which become difficult situationally. That is, opening a jar of olives can be difficult for some people in some situations. It happens that my wife finds this job difficult, while I (ta da!) still have stronger wrists than she, and can twist off the cap. If it comes to something harder than that, though, like unscrewing the plastic pipes that carry water from the kitchen sink to the sewer, it is probable that neither my wife nor I can do the job. We need either a

plumber or a wrench. With luck the wrench can become the tool with which we unscrew the pipes under the kitchen sink.

Tools fit a situation, and at the same time fit our needs-if they are good and useful tools. Gloves that fit my hand are potentially good gloves; and yet they must do more than fit my hand, they must fit the world they protect me from. That world may be icy weather. My gloves may be there to reduce the icy effects of weather on my knuckles. I know this is an unfamiliar sense of the kind of fitting of a tool to the world. But in fact a tool is like that. It fits the user of the tool, the hand that moves it, the person that chooses it for a certain purpose, and at the same time it fits the weather it protects from, and the virus it warms you against. How can we go about characterizing that second instance of being part of a thing's being a tool, the world that you use the tool to deal with?

Nothing becomes a tool unless somebody want to use it as a tool. This study is full of things that can be used as tools. This laptop can be used as a tool for writing about tools-and that is what is happening. Can be used as that. But if this laptop is not being used as a tool for writing this or that, it is, while still a laptop, not a tool. It is an object on a table. The same way with the books on my bookcases. They can be used as ways of finding things out, like what kind of imagination Dante had, or the basic elements of Sufism. Or they can just be objects on shelves, collecting dust. Well, when those objects are in their tool mode, and somebody is using them, they interface with the world out there. That's what I mean by the fitting of a tool to the world. The book on Sufism has become my tool to finding out about Sufism, and the book on Dante has become my tool for finding out about Dante's imagination. In order for either of these books or for this laptop to serve as a tool, however, it must be part not only of the use I am making of it, but of a world beyond the tool itself, in which the book or laptop is

counterparted by an environing toward which the tool is. That doesn't sound good, I know. It's the word is stuck on there. You see, the thing that has been constituted a tool is a gateway to something-to learn, to eat, to shelter from-which is your environment, or maybe we should say your horizon. It, that environment, is a necessary part of the equation when something becomes a tool, because a tool has to be a component in achieving something, and what it is achieving has to be there for that component to be toolish.

This is the end of part one of this essay. I have to feel it has opened very wide doors too rapidly. My head already starts to swim with the magnitude of the descriptive landscape I have opened. I will have to slow down, if I want to make this essay useful, even to myself. I know there's some kind of hyper ambitious utilitarianism being sketched here. But I hope I am up to its challenge. It will be best if I concentrate on that last part, the environing, first. I need to characterize it better.

## 2

See there's the large world. Sometimes, when everything falls in place, things in that large world agree to impact me, or you, or our society, or a rabbit in my hedge. What's that look like? I've got this body and it doesn't always function without drawing attention to itself. An arm of it may get broken, a tooth get knocked out. That could be because in making a turn on my bike I was unable to notice a slippery gravel patch, that spilled me off my bike. That event, made out of that slippery gravel and the laws of physics, which are also out there, landed me on the ground at a real wrong angle. That was the large world. Impacted by it, I needed to do something to keep me from hurting so much. I needed a tool to protect me. Mom gave me aspirin. That was my tool. And that tool acted against the large world that had impacted me, by making me

hurt less. That tool didn't change the large world, except in the sense that the large world was partly its capacity to break my arm. Similarly large scale events will have been available to impact a little rabbit, whom a cat got, and the North Korean ballistic missile program is already impacting behavior and attitudes in a world confused by it. You see that large world on the other side of our readying tools assumes infinitely many forms. I, the rabbit, and the civilized world all contact the large world at the point where we try to assemble tool kits to ward off or mitigate or just control the large world. Those tool kits are what we are talking about here.

### 3

So the tool goes up to the edge where the large world begins. Let's go back to the cold and the Nyquil. You've got this cold. It happened to you. There was a germ out there with your name on it. You began sneezing and you got the Nyquil out of the closet and you took two teaspoonsful. Just like that. You lived at the line where the tool separates the big world from the you world. That line is not visible. You can't even diagram it. But you live it like all the time. You live it so consistently that being a live human being is all about generating that tool line that leaves an I on this side and an other out there on that side. So important is guarding and protecting and defining yourself, from the other that is the other side, that you always going to your own tool edge, taking your Nyquil-or putting on your gloves, or looking in your date book to check the date of your annual physical, or, because this other world is not at all only about issues of anxiety, running like a madman through the early snow on Jones Beach, and making it over a hundred yards because you had kept yourself in shape, and were thus able to keep going and in fact, as you noticed later, you had built up an immune reaction to the cold which prevented the sniffles even from starting. Being in shape was your Nyquil.

4

All this is about the everyday mapping of the play out of daily life. The mapping of course is done from the you at this keyboard surveying you, the border, and the far, but doing so, cause that's the way it plays, with an inwardliness to the you in that triad, your proxy, your other, your judge, which is all about guarding its self. In the course of that mapping you find a constantly changing series of moves to establish borders at which to encamp your machinery of self-protection. You know that your brother, who means trouble, is sooner or later going to show up on your doorstep. You know the rotten moves you laid down against your second wife meant trouble, eventually, and you've squunching around for a good twenty years, now, trying to figure out how you will meet the consequences of that misbehavior. Fact is, you chopped a little terror of god into your salad after that one, and decided to pray for help, and set up a diocese of self-defences just where you felt the portal of retribution most likely to intervene. Mapping therefore has become a kind of geography of survival.

5

When it comes to the large reign of terror, the dark incognitum of death which lies unmappable on the far side of the line, on the side we like to approach with our tools ready to hand, we tend to gather all our resources. (At this point tools become resources, and regional conflict gives way to full scale battle.) The Nyquill of yore may now morph into unexpected forms: prayer, defiance, self-abuse, indifference and obesity. There is no AMA guideline, no historical precedent-though there are plenty of formerly tried approaches-and you are increasingly aware that you are on your own. Where do you turn?

One honors the old mood of 'La Mort du Loup,' Alfred de Vigny's bitter poem of praise to the wolf who dies alone on the taiga, snarling and frozen, no god in him. (You read that one in graduate school, put it along with Stoic stuff like Seneca you'd fed yourself on in your parental home, when you were still short of life as a stormwind.) Stand at the Nyquill border and glare over the DMZ toward the darkening sky! Is it worth it, though, for a gesture? Should one not hang out inside himself feeling for a more studious compromise? And what would that be?

You go to the other side of the room and look out. The mountains are as they were when you drove past them every few days at Deep Springs, Cal. The road narrowed as you climbed up from Bishop, and on either side you found yourself squeezed by sharply defined strata of rock, the older layers, rougher, chipped and gray, pounded against the surface of the road, the newer of the layer cake shinier and closer to the top of the tightening canyon you were passing through. You feel squeezed by geological history, the true history which links to the cosmic center. Infinitely small and yet conscious, you ride on until the tightened womb of the passage frees you once more into the upper plateau world, where you find a home on the ranch, dine, and sleep into the less challenging world of dream.

When you wake, at midnight, you are all about the challenge that had been posed by that passage through the rocks. Have you some tool, protection, weaponry to hold back those menacing strata? (They are menacing, those strata, not because they care about you, but because you are feeling menaced by them. It's you who's mobilizing the sense of menace, yet that need not mean that the menace is not in the things themselves, the strata of rock. It's also in the rock.) So you go to the tool box. Nyquill is obviously not going to do it. Neither are warm gloves. Neither, probably, is



simply thinking about the threat out there. We're after tools, remember?

6

Tools, you remember, have in this discussion come into existence at the point where the I runs into the beyond. A line of demarcation is formed there. Here I am there it is beyond-mountain, bad cold, assemblyline, uncongenial colleague-or for that matter, because the other can be good as well as bad, the hot date, the windswept meadow thrumming with monarchs. Tools are needed for relating to that beyond, whether it is on the side of crushing you or whether it is luring you outward to it. In either case, you cannot simply walk outward into the far world. Be that world a call to pleasure, you will want to walk armed into its cloven wombs; you will want to eye the siren, finger the amethyst, stroke the pussy, all with the presence to self which derives from being-here. You will in all events want to kiss, mount, or chew under the license of a Sir Francis Baconian fastidiousness of dissection. Be that world beyond the tool line as inimical as the strata of rock you have just now cloven, you will want either to tame that other or tame yourself through whom that other becomes an other. Let's see how you would do that taming of yourself, as you sit in your Deep Springs ranch house, on the far side of the Permian pile up.

7

Is prayer a tool? Can you hold off the night with prayer? Can it take the place of Nyquill or of a good strong pick axe? You sit on your bed. You think about prayer. You think about meditation. You wonder what kinds of dialogues internal voices like these are. Prayer can apparently be your own, or given to you by a tradition. But in either case it's prayer. It's your voice inside and unheard-

except by you and whatever interlocutor it creates. So there's another person there inside you, but a person you create? Do I create another person when I pray? Do I create God, the master other, when I pray? I create an echo chamber inside myself which I am. If I am God then I am creating God in this chamber, and he is creating me. Does this doubling of my voice compose a phalanx-like mutual protection system à deux, with which I can advance into the dark? It opens the general form of faith, meaning conviction that what you have been dowered with, lessons from the elders who have heard the breakthrough voice, is answering itself You go up to this DMZ of being, empowered by this double edged prayer, and peer over the edge into a canyon, or is it simply a piece of glass that reflects you back, teetering like a drunk toward it? What you had hoped to tame, by willing it away, seems almost embittered by your efforts. The wall of shales grows denser and deeper, the head cold worsens, the djinn, whistling deep in the Jones Beach wind, beg you to turn back. Are you not a Pilgrim redivivus, irrepressible, far past the Slough of Despond, still yet trapped in your own commitment to yourself?

## 8

Within prayer you move mountains. You are to the max baby steps baby steps, but you return, from each assault on the far, stronger. How is that possible? You try out an asking for directions into the land beyond the DMZ. You of course see no results. Results is not what you are after. You see the confirmation of your intention. You see the beginning of a habit, or movement in spirit. OK you start again. Have you a savior? Someone who led the way for you? Buddha, the Christ? A friend? You make a diversion of spirit toward him. That diversion of spirit is a tool. With it you try to pry open ways of looking farther, of bringing more ingenious finitude to

the attempt-the attempt to colonize the far. You return from the effort. You feel strong enough to try again.

9

From the other side, the far side, there must be an angle onto what you are doing, and it must be very different from your own angle. Your own angle itself, in fact, is not so obvious. We need to go back to our tripartite scheme, and think freshly about my angle and about the angle of the far. We started out with a loose I, a big world problem needing attention, perhaps impinging hard on the I, and a borderline encounter at which the I put down stakes and did battle against the big world, whether through Mentholatum, Nyquill or prayer. It was a loose I because I treated it both like a participant in the triad in question, and like I was that I too at the same time. Didn't I commit a familiar and unacceptable error by actually being what I talked about, and making as though that what I talked about was out there instead of in here. Where was it, anyhow?

I wanted to tell you a little story about myself, and I did so as if I were not part of the story I was telling. Who was I, hovering over me and this triad of relations? Who was doing that bold stuff about going up to the far and training in putting up with it, living it? Shall I say I was an adventurous fictive representative of myself, whom I was sending out to do battle with the whole dangerous world? Am I then playing games with myself, like a juvenile monarch disposing a world around him?

I was doing something more planful, something apotropaic, which did indeed involve psychodrama, but at the same time was the world we live. I was trying to forestall-that's the apotropaic bit-the chiaroscuro days when this life renders its account, the dies irae if such it is, and I was doing so by feeling my way-it's called

baby steps-out to the country where stakes are down and accounts are paid. I was sending out a prayer, and attempting to pre-empt that Beulah land out there to which I was imagining movement and in which I was imagining my farthest efforts at imprecation.

## 10

I did a story and I did an account of it, a kind of confession. It was a dance around the schoolyard of the concept of faith, and it must have looked pretty funny from outside. That story was in fact the tool I freed, in my effort to find a plateau of comfort and effectiveness in the slipping universe of the body. All kinds of report come back from there. But they all came in the door with the rider that faith was the key to going where it goes and going there well. I was in the process of reading Francis Bacon's Essays, as I walked into this door of faith chatter, and I got that same glowing feeling the guy gave me when I read him in high school. There was such an axis of subtly identified norms, common sense of the sort Montaigne too was concocting at the same time, faith to be sure in the churchd versions of his time in Anglican England, but a 'deeper' faith, the faith that thinking and feeling, to the extent they allow of themselves, are elements of what is in that very process being the substance of a going beyond. I had that warm Renaissance Humanism feeling, and I guess it was from a time that had earned such glow, having (in our little west) put Catholicism's feet to the fire, maturing it, having given an airing to the Protestant, sniffing (more than that in Bacon) the regulatory sciences of an order to come, and ready, I've always sensed, to turn the credible into credence, in a new fashion.

That faith was the rider attached, to the above story, to the proposed nostrums, from Nyquill and Mentholatum to prayer, and that the cliff dropping off at the end of patience, and vanishing into

the night, was a discovery cliff in time, that faith rode on the steed of all this was the last thing I expected to discover, as I put my cursor to this *essai*. Could it be that just telling the story made me enough older that I felt able to withdraw some of the interest on my investment? Could it be that the attention I had given for decades, to the issues of significant survival, survival into the substantive and noetic energies of time itself, was part of a gradual credit earning, and that I was reaching a condition in which I could believe what I said I believed?

## 11

Faith, I think I was brought up to believe, is vastly inferior to doubt, or querying. Dad was not for nothing a follower of Montaigne and Rabelais-'*que sais je?*' and '*fais ce que voudra*' partnered on the front of his chariot-and neither of my parents believed in anything except the unknowability of ultimate truth. In this, I suppose, they followed the culture trend of the educated in their time, patched together a reasonably effective humanist platform for living, and sidestepped the pressures of Pascal's *pari*, as though the alternatives of faith or disbelief were only compelling if you decided to look their way. I grew up doing what I wanted, pretty much, and got away with it, on an everyday basis, by confining my varieties of thought and feeling to the inside of my head, acting out only rarely, and earning a living by playing with the thoughts of others who had played with the thoughts of others. The stakes were really never down, except when they were really down, and when that happened I moved on to other and fresher human subjects.

Faith, however, was not as absent as it may sound, from this grazing and field-hopping existenz. I had faith all along, although professing other creeds, spin offs of modernity at the point where it left its root in archaic survival tactics, the Church, the polis; I had

in fact faith in the orders of reason, justice, love, and though I permitted myself to trample each of those orders, in its time, I did so as one trampling orders, and not free fielding it. Reason told me repeatedly that following the body's desires, where they went, was sure to wreck a ship. Reason was right. I trampled it down, though, making womanhood, of which I understood nada, into the ultimate need for me. I burned, sure, nearly burned up. Yet reason it was that I scorned, not irrationality, for reason was the norm there to violate. (I often wondered why I have never felt guilt, for my scandals of behavior; I think it is because reason so showily bullied me, even in the midst of folly. Reason was ever my ally, in the conversation of choice.) Justice preserved the same conquering reticence, allowing me free rein to intrude where I did not belong, yet never letting me forget that I was intruding; that I was unjust rose to hurt me with every cry I raised against political or social injustice. Love slashed me in the face, as I took loving for love, and wiped the paste of generation over empty deserts I could have set to blossoming with a simple smile. Love, justice, and reason surely haunted me, through the hard cash of maturing, with a fierceness their presence as adhered to norms could never have assumed.

The personal years in question, of course, were the cash-in years for my Catholicism, which had seduced me during my year and a half of prolonged loneliness at Harvard. I have told myself this story so often that only wringing its detail from it can arouse it to life. I was, as I am made, sensuous-Walter Pater was my lodestar in my teens; I have been a sucker for Clive Bell and Roger Fry, and my first book, *Intelligible Beauty in Aesthetic Thought* is about just that, the reflections of a treasure of thinker/feelers, like Winckelman, Herder, Moerike-for whom aesthetic experience was cognitively powerful; acolytes, in a way, of the Plato of the

Symposium. The flickering candles of the Vedanta Chapel, in Harvard Square, were at least peace zones, in which my difficult accommodation to high octane life in Wigglesworth could rest its weary legs. Among the intensities were classroom buzzes like this: I was to hear, in my Homer class, that a charismatic Catholic priest was sweeping away last semester seniors, whose ardor to graduate was less than their ardor to enroll for the priesthood. It spoke to me, as Dionysus, in Euripides' *Bacchae*, 'spoke' to the wildening women of Thebes.

Faith, or the taste for faith, was flooding my nervous veins, those years, for in it, I suspected, would be ultimate anti-toxins which would rescue me from a shaky boat ride through life. That 'I suspected' is talk talk, of course, and means only that when I read the present against the past I sense I'm coming from the call of that reason-justice-love triad I named, and that feels like grounded in the eminent useability of the Renaissance Humanist perspective. May I not, though, trust those echoes of time? Aren't we all echo chambers to ourselves, against the walls of which we hear the vibrations of a unique personhood we have entitled within us?

## 12

The faith is this, that the norms we have long worked around, abandoned, then returned to are precisely the tools we require to work the undefined territory that lies on the far side of the nostrums. We took the Nyquill and the Mentholatum, we prayed on the border between self and the out there, we reached, within us, for tools of control and protection. We found a nexus of postures comfortable still, after many a year, and ready to hand as a private ritual with public overtones. Reason, justice, and love had every reason to feel themselves housed, when the worrisome provocation of embedded religion knocked on the door. One wanted to answer,

for sure. But one heard inside that knock an earlier one, that of my Montaignian dad calling on precisely the old Renaissance Humanism bit, to doubt carefully, to admit only what was verifiable. I tried to face off my Francis Baconian reading, with its urbane fideism, against the rich skepticism of Montaigne, and the amalgam of this private brawl came as close as I could get to support, from history, for the Catholic perspective. I refight this battle from my pew, every Sunday.

### 13

Is the Catholic mass a tool? Can we work from within it to pry open places of refuge and discovery, realms available in the darkness for working out into light?

Today was the feast day of the Transfiguration. Jesus and two disciples and his brother go up a mountain, where they see a vision of Moses, Elijah, and then hear the voice of God saying of Jesus that he is God's dearly beloved child, 'in whom I am well pleased.' Later in the mass, after having been refreshed on some meanings this passage can have, we consume the wafer and wine that are the body and blood of this Jesus who climbed the mountain. We know we are awash in tale telling, earliest Christian kerugmas woven in with later Gospel polish. We ask ourselves how this implication full-tale can be taken on into a life restoring its own launchpad of values, its triad of postures?

The take on will-to judge from my snails pace learning-take time. What does 'take time' mean? Reading, rereading, the passage of mood, the passage of life-values, the sense of the options life presents, for allowing an understanding of it: above all the confidence, in the cultural depression of modern times, to pocket skepticism, to affirm quia absurdum est, and to ratify two millennia of a hanging in there, against reason, which has as its master voice



the singular wounded leader, whose Easter walk was acceptance on behalf of us. The taking time means, then, rescuing reason from reason, until we can act out without fear, for the darkness afar is penetrable and we have the kind of road map we deserve. We sure won't have the AAA emergency road service to help, but we have the archives of the Fathers and our own need.

## 14

Do we feel possessive about the company in which we travel? We share the universal human burden, but we choose to carry it up a distinctive slope. What can we say to those who carry the weight up the slopes of Islam or Judaism or a Christian team formed before the cleansing schism of that Renaissance already highlighted here? We Romans travel with pride, of course, under the banners of a noble and battered community of pilgrims. We permit a once a week meal, salvation eaten and drunk straight out of history, to enable our version of making light. We prepare as well as we can, to tell the story to those who follow; to pass on the night tools.

Within us, of course, we host every kind of repetitive uncertainty. We must get it up each time, for the discomfort even of relearning what we are doing. There are uncomfortably many factors at play in communion. There's the thin wrecked bearer of salvation, asking his disciples to remember him through the taste of him. There's the priest, copying an action of his foregoers, and replanting, in the midst of the middle class daily, the miracle of trans substantiation. Finally there's the person on the street, still panting, perhaps, from getting the kids ready or downing a coffee. These three players must co ordinate actions around a single assault on temporality, the time that divides what each of them dares, from the doing of the others. The communion event, a shot in the dark, is the plateau on which the church-tool rests. The fruit of the event,

that triad of love-justice-and-reason, spills from it like pomegranate seeds, or dries in it until it has no more energy than the Salton Sea.

## 15

The fruit of the event? I wrote that, ahead of myself. I wrote it because I wanted to connect two crucial parts of this essay: the tool importance of the mass, and the unfolding of the normative in the course of daily life. I also wanted to assure myself, at the end of the line, that faith would prove itself in the action of thinking.

In communion you are asked to share, at both the beastly and the rarified level. A bloodless sacrifice is still a sacrifice, and a sacrifice of a life no less. Jesus had only one live to give, and he gave it. What do I feel, when others sacrifice for me—hold the door for me or give me a kidney? I feel enriched. I feel I am harvesting without having sown. I feel I have come on a lucky penny. And here I am, offered this sharing sacrifice for no merit of my own. I should be able to whistle to this tune all day. I do, in merit of action. Love, reason, justice have homes in this merit. That is the home building process we track here, on the sill of the dark.

Love plainly dovetails with another's sacrifice for me. It's agape, not eros, not philia, and it goes over the top, into the unconditional. I used to deride unconditional love, like my mother's. It seemed to charge a price so low that it lost its value. I still understand that objection. I still value a cutting and closely tailored love, that carves away your fat as it loves you. I think that was before death decided to let me into its voice. I begin to hear it. I begin to value benefiting from the coupon maximum, the sale on grace. Feeling that grace at my neck, I open the heart under my shirt. Ain't easy for a narcissist. So much for love. It's enough, even as is, to make the falling victim ease into promise.

Reason and justice as by products of communion? Justice seems the easier to grasp. What is justice except the reign of equality under which we all exist, and on which we count for the balance of community? If any act can be said to have been done for all, it will have been the crucifixion which opened understanding, joy, and even wisdom for all. There is no prince, no pauper, no genius, no fool in the community of mortals. Just being in that community is testifying to justice, social balance from within. Love and justice walk together, and walk my walk as I feel my way across the DMZ between life and existence.

Reason spills from any high act of sharing, for reason is itself nothing but the walking in the order of things. Right reason is reason, period, for the dignities of logic, order in processing, and even responsible imagination all foster in reason, taking the mind to places where an ontic welcoming committee attends. To come out on the other side of reason is to have been what you are, without prior admission of it.

## 16

Tools of everyday life, sure. These tools get ghostlier as we talk them out into the open. We seem almost perversely to be downtalking what superstars of death theory have long been telling us, that death does not hurt, that death is a peaceful passage. I think we knew that. We knew that passage numero uno is not what it is croaked up to be, not the loud cackle of a horror movie. What we may have forgotten, as we reach for Nyquill, Mentholatum, and the stent that keeps blood flowing to the atrium, as we pack our anti-pain tool kit, is that death smears a dark stain over our affection. Where, we ask ourselves after having diaper trained for a walk through the dark, where will be the other I I thought I would never be parted from? Will there be a community

to which my soul flutters, friending me? Will he be there? She? The noetics I washed in?

Creatures we are, created we remain. The reason, love, and justice, which begged us to walk with them through the valley of the created, road map the journey ahead. What our body has tried to impersonate, failing, that is our soul, will parade across the sky like a figure in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, homing through obstacles, long awaited by the sources.

17

There, done it again. Reenacted the apotropaic. Attenuated it to a thin flame of adoration. Are these words prayer, which for so long I have asked to understand? They are a fretting breath inside my breath, alcove lurers, fragments of a talk with an old friend who made me. Did I say that? Did I reduce theology to the shirtsleeves the little guy rolled up, as he crouched at the border, an Archie Bunker ready for arm wrestling? Was it me muttering something about hey big guy, and stalking like Anubis across the empty graveyards? I only know that I woke, that I am dreaming this, as though it wrote me, and donning the sign available. Not much doubt where to find me, hidden though I may seem to be in the medicine closet. You see the band aids? You see the Milk of Magnesia? See the zuhandensein fit, and the old guy sliding with a smile, into the jovial columbarium?

**Northeast Indian Literature:  
Contemporary Trends**

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Most of the authors and readers present here know what is Northeast India and where it is located. But the majority of them don't have a clear idea of what does Northeast Indian literature means. It is also not well presented in the knowledge sites of the modern media. This is due to the lack of available printed sources, i.e. printed books and journals on North East Indian writings. The term 'North east 'and Northeast India ' became widely used when it was first used in the late nineties of the last century as political geographical location , situated in the Northeast corner of India. Although, a colonial construct, the term Northeast India is now very widely and commonly used in political, cultural, diplomatic and other discourses concerning the region vis-a-vis the Indian nation state. Now that North east India is being construed and recognised as separate geographical political territory, there is the idea emerging that it is a distinct identity distinguishable from what we call 'mainstream '. No doubt, Northeast is unique linguistically, ethnically and culturally. The geographical location and the distance from the main land India had created problems like backwardness, political negligence and the angst and discontent in the minds of the native people from this region. This is clearly manifest in the political situation of the region for the last few decades or even more. Whatever literary outputs come out in such a turbulent time, cannot escape the true realities. Hence, the literature produced in the North

east is perceived as a piece of writing with terrorism, death, disaster, anger, hatred, rebellion as the main themes. This is only partially true, but not even negligible. There are large mass of literature in other genres that speak about humanism, universal brotherhood, spiritualism and human liberation.

To me, Northeast Indian literature covers a wide range of emergent writings in the languages of Northeast India. Of these languages Assamese (except Bengali, spoken widely in Tripura and Barak valley of Assam) is the only Indo Aryan language . The rest of the languages are mostly from the Tibeto Barman group of languages of the Sino Tibetan family. Manipuri, Bodo, Kok Borok, Garo, Mizo, Naga, Karbi, Mising, Rabha, Dimas all belong to this group . Khasi is related to Mon-Khmer group of Austrik languages. There are languages of the Indo Aryan languages like Hindi, Nepali in the region. So the Northeast Indian writings from the region will mean the literature written in the local / indigenous languages of the region. Literatures in those languages are not even hundred years old. Of course Manipuri and Assamese literature have more than eight hundred years of written history of their own. But what makes North east literature known to the outside world is the North east literature written in English (and even translated into English). As Satchidanadan says as , “Only in the last one decade or so has the vibrant contemporary writing from the North-eastern region written in many languages including English – Assamese perhaps is the only exception –really began to reach the rest of India and the world through translations and anthologies. The reason may be many: the marginalization of the region in general in the mainstream discourse on culture and literature , the difficulty in comprehending the many contradictory worlds - the folk and the modern , the rural and urban, the native and the western....” ( Satchidanadan: 2015)

We the authors in Assam have no idea what his counterpart in a Tribal language like Bodo or Khasi, Mizo is writing today. Language and cultural difference within the region, apart from spatial distance are the reasons. It is only through translation that the void can be filled. Lack of translation literary journals in the region is being widely felt today. North East India is a region which is geographically and strategically very significant from the point of view of its marginal location and 'remoteness' since the colonial days. The literature in North East Indian languages is lesser known to the mainland for the reason stated above. Now that many of our writers are writing in English, their publications can be readily available for the readers outside the region. Otherwise, whatever is written in the mother tongue or regional language remain confined to the community only or the boundary of the state only. Whatever is written in Khasi, Garo, Mizo, Bodo, Kokborok, Manipuri, Assamese or any North-eastern language is almost inaccessible to the outside readers. We, the authors, who write in our mother tongue, have this limitation. This is the dilemma of authors writing in Northeast Indian languages. But the fact is, whatever they write contribute to the corpus and domain of Indian literature.

### **Indigenous languages of Northeast and their writings:**

As mentioned above, the Indigenous Languages of North east India have literature of their own which are not even hundred years old now. The Bodo, Garo, Khasi, Mizo, KokBorok languages have literary outputs in all the genres - poetry, drama , short fiction, novel, biography ,travelogue ,literary criticism, journalistic writing, essay and so on. As a representative of these Indigenous languages, I speak a few words on the contemporary trends in the literature written in the language I write.

Bodo literature is the literature of the aboriginal people of Assam and North Eastern India. The Bodos are the aboriginal people whom S. K. Chatterjee called Indo Mongoloids or Indo Tibetan. The rich past of these Mongoloid people is well recognized by the historians and linguists. But these aboriginal people could not preserve their script and writing since the distant past. Proper written literature in the Bodo language developed since the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first book in the language was published in 1915. The *Bibar*, the first magazine in the language was published in 1924.

The poets, authors writing in the Bodo language have drawn sustenance from the ideals of nationalism, patriotism and love for the fellow countrymen. Many authors and dramatists of the early phase (*Bibar Alongbar* era) wrote *Jatra* plays under the influence of the Nationalist movement. Anirban Basumatary, Anando Mochahary, Umesh Mochahary, Satish Basumatary wrote plays that were staged in the Bodo villages with the objective in view of educating the illiterate masses and enlightening them with the spirit of nationalism.

Some of the poets wrote patriotic poems for creating mass awareness among people and instilled the ideals of patriotism and nationalism among them. Playwrights like Moda Ram Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Rupnath Brahma gave a clarion call through their poems/verses to get rid of despondence and be inspired by the spirit of nationalism.

Poets/authors were influenced by the Indian literature (Bengali, Assamese and Hindi). Many modern poets in the 70's and 80's were influenced by the Bodo people's movement of ethnic identity. Still the poetry of many of them drew heavily on the themes, images and symbols drawn from Indian epics, *Puranas* and myths.



Major Bodo poets like Brajendra Kumar Brahma, Monoranjan Lahary, Suratah Narzary and Ramdas Boro wrote poems with the lofty and high ideals that inspired the poets and authors in the rest of India. Brajendra Kumar Brahma is still active in poetry writing being a source of living inspiration for the contemporary poets. Poets like Aurobindo, Anju, Anil Boro and Bijoy Baglary are writing poems with apt imagery and symbol on the delicate feelings and sensibilities of individual beings, the ethnic strife and turmoil that the community has undergone in the last few decade. Some are inclined towards romantic longing, nostalgia while some are driven towards the harsh language of scorn, irony and satire. New generation poets like Sunil Phuka, Prafulla Hajoary, Phukan Basumatary became attracted to writing anti poetry and post modern poetry. Few women poets like Anju, Dhirjyoti, Dhanshri writing in Bodo are creating poems on women sensibilities, their sad plight and dilemma.

In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Bodo poets and authors are focussing more on translation from Indian literature. Through translation they are trying to fill the void and vacuum in their language. It is through translation that the Bodo readers can bridge the gap between the language and cultures.

We know that Indian literature is written in many languages. The languages are many but the basic spirit and soul that shape all the literatures is one. Radhakrishnan rightly commented-

“Indian literature is one but is written in many languages.”

The issues and concerns that instigate the writers in Bodo language are the same in other languages of the region. There are poems in Bodo written in the mystic strain and poems on religious philosophy. In Bodo there are specimens of Gandhian writings, progressive writing, biographical writings on important national

leaders like Gandhi, Vivekananda, Ambedkar, Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnu Prasad Rabha.

The literature written/ published in Northeast Indian languages are rooted to the soil and social cultural contexts of the region, the social concerns of the people of these region. Invariably they touch upon the burning issues and concerns like social backwardness, lack of development, superstition and political uncertainties caused by ethnic movements and terrorism.

Fiction writing in Bodo language has touched upon some of these issues and concerns in the fictional framework. Nilkamal Brahma, Janil Kumar Brahma, Gobindo Basumatary, Haribhusan Brahma are among the few short story writers in Bodo language to deal with these issues and concerns through their fictional writing. Novelists like Monoranjan Lahary, Bidyasagar Narzary, Nandeswar Daimary, Nabin Malla Moro, Tiren Boro are among the few novelists who have touched upon these concerns. Monoranjan Lahary has gifted the Bodo fiction readers with strong social novels like *Kharlung*, *Alaishree*, *Hainamuli*, *Daini*, *Rebeca* which reflect on the burning social issues in a tribal society in Northeast India. *Kharlung* deals with the theme of migration and displacement of the indigenous people and their hazards. *Hainamuli* and *Daini* deal with social problems like superstition and black magic and their impact on the innocent tribal people. *Daini* is a social novel which deals with the problems of witch hunting that is still rampant in Bodo and other tribal groups of Assam and Eastern Indian societies. *Mwihur*, a social novel by Dharanidhar Wary deals with the simple life of the tribal people who lead a life full of struggle in the vicinity of a reserve forest or a national park. There the tribal characters are drawn from the traditional society who live a life in close proximity to nature and claim to have a free hand in the use of forest resources like firewood, timber, water, fish, small animals

for their day to day use. Here arises a conflict with the forest authorities and the local tribal people. These and many other concerns are reflected in the Bodo novels and fiction written in the last few decades.

Anybody who has some knowledge of the indigenous languages of Assam and Northeast India knows that they are very rich in oral literature. Those indigenous languages that have developed their written literatures are very few in number and many are still struggling to have script and writing of their own.

Bodo language, the language in which I write my creative writings is one of the indigenous languages of Assam. Although an ancient language, it did not have written literature till the first decade of the last century.

It is a language that has reached the present stage of literary development through long drawn out struggles by the Bodo literary organisation Bodo Sahitya Sabha and Other social/ethnic organizations. Many people had to sacrifice their lives for the recognition of Roman script for the Bodo language. Many had to court arrest and many were injured by bullet during police firing. The *Bibar* magazine, the first ever magazine published in 1924 in Bodo language contained articles, poems, essays in Bodo, Assamese and Bangla. Still many magazines and journals are bilingual or trilingual reflecting the bilingual and multilingual social situation in which the Bodos live.

After *Bibar* many literary journals were published. These are *Olongbar*, *Okhaphwr*, *Hathorkhihala*, *Nayak*, *The Bodo*, *Laithun*, *Onzima* and so on. These journals have played a significant role in the development of Bodo literature. They have played a role in the creation of new poets, authors, essayists, story writers.

In 1952, Bodo Sahitya Sabha was formed and in 1963 Bodo was introduced as the medium of instruction in the primary schools. With this came a boom in the publication of Bodo books.

Modern period in Bodo literature came after 1952's. Ethnicity and search for the ethnic roots became the dominant theme of the poets of this era. Other genres like the essay, short story, novel became popular among the readers. Some authors took to writing full length drama and one act plays. Like other genres, critical writing in Bodo is well developed now. Other genres like travel writing, biography, children literature are coming up with new vigour and enthusiasm. Some authors have taken serious interest in translating the best books in other languages like Bengali, Assamese and Hindi and English. But the translation from Bodo to other languages is still not up to the mark. That's why the readers of the neighbouring languages are still unaware about the literary trends and even the pace of development of Bodo literature. After the inclusion of Bodo language in the Eighth Schedule Of the Indian Constitution, the responsibility of the authors has increased manifold. Sahitya Akademi and other organizations have come up with new projects of publication; but there is dearth of readers and book lovers. This is the reason why publication houses are not interested in investing money in the publication of Bodo books. Social unrest, ethnic movement and lack of lasting peace are other factors that have stood in the way of steady development of Bodo literature. As a writer writing in an indigenous language, we are constantly reminded of the harsh reality that we are writing for a community that has a limited number of readers and that we can never earn money through writing. We are happy still because, we know we are at least doing something for the language we speak. Some become happier when they get honours and accolades and awards. But a true writer is one who lives in the heart of the readers.

He outshines others not because of the accolades and awards, but because of the outstanding quality of his writing.

### **Northeast English writing:**

For the reasons shown above, many young generation writers from the region are drawn towards Northeast English writing. Writers writing in English have the privileged position of getting wider range of readers than the writers writing in their mother tongue. They have access to wide range of readership crossing the linguistic, cultural and political geographical boundary of Northeast. An author and poet from Nagaland and Arunachal feels more at home if she writes in English because her language (native tongue) is not mutually comprehensible among the various sub tribes of his community. There are bilingual poets and authors, of course, who are in an advantageous position of self translating their own creations. Some Poets writing in Khasi, Bodo, Mizo and Manipuri have this advantage. Of course a large majority of them prefer to write in their mother tongue. However, there is lack of literary journals in Translation that can promote these. There is also the lack of competent translators who can translate their works. Northeast English writing in the recent years have become known to the literary world outside Northeast because of the vibrant poetry written by a group of Northeast English poets. They include poets like Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Robin Singh Nanggom, Kympham S Nongkynryh, Desmond Kharmawphlang, Ananaya S Guha, Tarun Bharatiya, etc. Some of these poets have individual poetry collections, while some have their poems published in anthologies and collections made available for the outside readers by the publishers. Some of the anthologies are: *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from Northeast* jointly edited by Robin S Ngangom and Kympham Singh Nongkynryh (published by North East Hill University, Shillong, 2003 ), *Writings from Northeast*

*India* edited by Tilottama Mishra (Oxford University Press, 2011). The joint editors of *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from Northeast* have incorporated selected poems from Arunachal, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Manipur. They claim and try to explain why the poetry from Northeast is different from the poetry of the rest of India. As they claim in the editorial foreword, “Living with the menace of the gun, he (read she) cannot merely indulge in the verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics but must perforce master the art of witness.” (Robin S Ngangom and Kynpham S Nongkynrih: 2003). The poems in the collection reveal the paradox of existence in the Northeastern region, double challenge of truth and liberty, identity and unity, loss of culture and revival of interest in ethnic past, the state and the armed terrorist. In their poems nature bears the imprint of myth, legend and magico- religious spell. The poetry of the region reveals the multilayered contracts and encounters of cultures and racial elements since the days of Bhakti movement or even before that. The poems reveal the unique situation of being located in region where the western modernity has led to gradual loss of traditional culture towards the creation of new culture of integration and absorption of the old and the new, the realm of heterogeneity and complexity.

The contemporary fictional writing from the region is not at par with the Indian English fiction writing produced today. Even then, we see a number of books of short fiction, novel and other genres published. Of these Temsula Ao’s *The Hills Called Home* (2006), Mamang Dai’s *The Legends of Pensam* (2006), Mitra Phukan’s *The Collector’s Wife* (2006), Siddhartha Dev’s *The Point of No Return* (2002), *Surface* (2005), Dhruba Hazarika’s *A Bowstring Winter* (2006) are worth mentioning. Temsula Ao’s work is set in the hilly region of Nagaland and Northeast where the

author belongs to and whose pristine tale she narrates in the fictional mode. Mamang Dai presents the life of Adis with their traditional beliefs and institutions with an insight of an onlooker bringing together their voice and perplexities in a collage. Mitra Phukan's novel depict the eventful years of Assam movement in the eighties of the last century through the representative character of the Deputy collector and his lecturer wife.

Arup kr Dutta from Assam has written Adventure stories and fiction for children like *The Kaziranga Trail* ( 1979 ), *Troubles at Kalangijan* ( 1982 ), *The Blind Witness* ( 1984), *The Footprints in the sand* ( 1999) and *The Counterfeit Treasure* ( 2001).

### **North- eastern Indian Literature in translation:**

Now the readers outside Northeast India may have the taste of what an Assamese poet is writing or a Manipuri poet is writing through the Anthologies and collections of the their translated works. This has been possible because of a group of able translators from theregion. Only Assamese and Manipuri are the two languages from the region that have more than eight hundred year old literature with strong poetic tradition . Assamese literature is known to the rest of India through the novels of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Mamoni Roisom Goswami, Syed Abdul Malik, Bhabendranath Saikia and so on. Poets like Nilmoni Phookan, Navakanta Baruah, Hiren Bhattaraya with their modern imagery, lyricism and poetic idiom have added a new dimension to modern Assamese poetry. Contemporary poets like Nilim Kumar, Sameer Tanti, Anubhav Tusli, Jivan Narah, Aupama Basumatary and many more who have enriched the new poetic trends. Some of the poets like Nilim Kumar, with his “unique lyrical imagination alternates between romance and nostalgia, mystery and melancholy” (Satchidanadan : 2015).

Sameer Tanti is a strong poet who sees ashes in the eyes of the dead across the dreams and unfinished poems and butterflies. Feel the sadness of his sad poetry:

*I wanted to know all and one day  
I forgot her identity  
My awakening seems to be  
Close as death yet heartless as night.  
Nothing was said to me  
Nothing at all (As the night thickens the stars nod off)*

Anubhav Tulsi reminisces his lost village home and the vanishing rural landscape with a rare intensity. He feels with rare intensity when he comes to the city,

*Where the day began  
With colourful butterflies  
Impaled in the barbed wire  
Of trains' shrieks  
Long tailed kites  
On blue skies  
The hump camel  
Among thorny desert shrubs.*

Jivan Narah and Anupma are two poets who come from the tribal ethnic background, but deeply embellished the nuances of modern Assamese poetic idiom with a rare capacity to blend words with colour and smell. They have the knack for creaking in familiar personal emotion and longing through fresh new imageries. Long lists of new poems of the contemporary poets in Assamese are being added. It is heartening to note that coteremporary Assamese poetry is on the lookout for a new poetic idiom with fresh new touch of local language and culture.



Manipur has gifted us a host of strong train of rebel poets who prefer to write in an anti poetic style of writing. The new anti romantic style of Manipuri poetry as Satchidanandan says, “reflects the disillusionment of the writers with the accession of Manipur to the Indian union and the subsequent militant resistance movement...” (Satchidanandan : 2015). In the same anti poetic, anti romantic style, RK Bhuabansa writes,

*Thus according to the wish of the masses  
Light is put out  
And mind is kept in dark  
In Manipur, the land of jewels (Should light be put out or mind  
be kept in the dark )*

Another poet Kunjarani reveals the grim and alarming situation as if she writes from the battle ground,

*The hunters will surely stand in front of you  
Carrying poison arrows  
Then the doors you’ve carefully locked  
Will be opened by one.*

Yumlembam Ibomcha and his fellow poets in Manipur speak about the nightmare in day to day life in Manipur –merciless killing, looting, charred bodies of women and children, gun barrels and firing, bullet shot in to mouth. In this backdrop some poets reaffirm their endless love for Manipur. Thangjam Ibopisak says, “Manipur why shouldn’t I love your hills, marshes, rivers, fields and open spaces ”. There is much of irony when he says he loves India so much so that he wants to be killed by an Indian bullet. There is also irreverent irony in the poem Gandhi and Robot.

Saratchand Thiyam’s poems too reveal the same nightmarish vision when he writes about Africa, Shillong and Pokhran, Kargil

and Gaisal. Robin S. Ngongam speaks about the devastated land where babies are shot down from their mother's breasts. While in Manipur, he feels himself 'banished to the last outpost of a dying empire'. The landlocked misery of the land becomes more mystifying when he says,

*Can poetry be smuggled like guns and drugs  
We've drawn our border with blood  
Even to write in our mother tongues  
We cut open veins and our tongues  
Lick parchment with blood.*

Still the poet loves his own land, as any other patriotic poet would do. So he proclaims,

*Everywhere I go  
I carry my homeland with me.*

### **Summing up :**

From the above, it is seen that it is difficult to generalize and find a common ground of understanding for what we call Northeastern Indian literature. It is the literature from Northeast India, the landlocked region of unrest and turmoil. It is full of diversity and complexity and heterogeneity. The poetry from the region has been able to catch the attention of the reading public from the rest of India as it reflects the diverse cultural encounters, political unrest, turmoil, military aggression and peoples' protest. But it is only in the last few years that the poetry (and other writings) from the region have been able to reach out the region outside north east India. It has been possible only because of the able translators and the anthologies and journals of translation dedicated to the promotion of literature from the region. Sahitya Akademi organizes poets and authors meet of Northeast writers and poets where the author and

poets from other regions can have an opportunity to interact with them and know about their works. It is a positive step, but it would be better if more concrete steps are taken for supporting able translators from the languages from the region. The literary organizations and local authors can play a great role in this.

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**The Queen of Sheba: An exotic figure in  
the Western imagination  
Her representation in European music and literature**

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The Queen of Sheba - an exotic and mysterious woman of power - is immortalized in the world's great religious works, among them the Hebrew Bible and the Muslim Koran. She also appears in Turkish and Persian painting, [...], and in medieval Christian mystical works, where she is viewed as the embodiment of Divine Wisdom and a foreteller of the cult of the Holy Cross. In Africa and Arabia, her tale is still told this day, and her tale has been told and retold in many lands for nearly 3,000 years. [...] The sources and history of the legend, however, are elusive. No other popular heroine is so celebrated but so puzzling. (Wood, 2005)

According to the first tale in the Old Testament about the mysterious Queen of Sheba, she arrives in Jerusalem in a great camel caravan carried with incense, precious stones, and gold. Queen of Sheba came to the wise King Solomon with questions to test his knowledge.

The biblical version of the first book of kings, chapter 10, describes an encounter between King Solomon and his host Queen of Sheba:

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the LORD, she came to test Solomon

with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed. [...] And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

Generally, the Queen of Sheba is the only female character mentioned in Islamic, Christian, and Judaic sacred texts. Yet, many see in Queen of Sheba a legendary figure that never existed except in people's imagination. However, historical studies confirmed many ancient civilizations were established at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen in present-day) and controlled the important spice trade. While discoveries in archeology (mid nineteenth century) demonstrated, through inscriptions on stones, the existence of one of the oldest and most important of these civilizations known as "Kingdom of Saba", from which the name of "Sheba" was derived. These stone's inscriptions speculated the existence of the kingdom from at least the 8<sup>th</sup> century B. C. to A.D. 275. (Breton, 1999)

By all means, Queen of Sheba remains one of the most famous legendary figures that reflect the western representation of the

Orient. The mere allusion to the Queen of Sheba evokes images of beauty, wisdom, power, leadership, mystery, and exotic riches. Western European artists of the Renaissance presented in their paintings the splendor of Solomon's Court and the fabulous riches brought by the queen. However, her exotic image of a seductive and voluptuous female is stressed, starting with the mid- eighteenth/ nineteenth century (due to the occidental growing interest in the Orient) to the present time, where she continues to inspire creators of different cultural and artistic aspects. Otherwise, it was with the rise of Romanticism and the Western new fascination of the unknown East that Queen of Sheba, with Delilah and Cleopatra, became 'an artistic icon' of Oriental exoticism and sensuality. Plus, European literary and musical works have always had a major role in depicting Queen of Sheba's exotic and erotic oriental beauty. Hollywood has also produced its own takes of the biblical story, where Sheba represents a mysterious 'Other' (1). In his article, "Out of Sheba came a Queen (Maybe Not)" (2002), Alan Riding notices:

The legend continued to prosper in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Kipling included a fable of her in his "Just So Stories;" Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey offered extravagant spectacles around the story; J. Gordon Edwards's 1921 movie, "Queen of Sheba" was typically racy; Respighi's 1931 opera, "Belkis, Queen of Sheba" had the queen dancing like Salome; King Vidor's steamy 1959 movie with Gina Lollobrigida showed the queen as every bit the courtesan; and Robert Young's 1995 television film, "Solomon and Sheba" starring Halle Berry, reminded that, if the queen of Sheba had existed, she would probably not have been white.

**Queen of Sheba's exotic image in European music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

**The example of Respighi's Ballet-Suite '*Belkis, Queen of Sheba*'.**

Biographical references highlight that Respighi's orchestral works were based on Western Europe's traditional fantasy about the exoticism of the mysterious Orient.

It becomes clear how the colorful orchestral vocabulary derives from his experience in Russia between 1900 and 1903, when he worked as principal violist in the Saint Petersburg orchestra. Many critics argue Respighi's orchestras were inspired by the influence of the "exotic" sensational effects in the Russian composers' works, especially the Rimsky-Korsakov's most famous works, such as *Scheherazade*, *Sadko*, and *Le coq d'or*. Also, many imply that Respighi was considered a representative of the non-French impressionists; he was known for his lyricism, rich orchestral sonorities, brilliant colors, and touches of exoticism (Barrow, 2004).

The ballet *Belkis, Queen of Sheba* was amongst Respighi's last works. It was a full-length ballet that used a large orchestra, an offstage band, and numerous Eastern instruments, a chorus, and narrator. At the premiere at La Scala in 1932, an estimated 1000 performers were involved. The Suite was prepared by Respighi and published in 1934. The music is tuneful and in places very boisterous and noisy, as critics confirm.

The distribution of the ballet-suite is as follows:

- *Solomon's Dream*: The first movement in the ballet-suite, marked by its mystical music, builds on soft sounds with the use of instruments like brass and the flute.

- *Dance of Belkis at Dawn*: It starts as if it were a continuation of the preceding. Music reflects a lot of sensuality because of its softness and fluidity. Trying to imitate an oriental style of music, imagined and invented sounds expressed the exotic touch. Exotic instruments were included, such as the flute, the oboe, the castanets, and sustained strings. Also, the melody is presented in a circular movement (using the flute and an impression like we are watching a demonstration of a cobra rising from a basket and sway to the rhythms); the music in this part seems unfinished as if it reaches no ending point.
- *War Dance*: It starts much more extroverted than the previous sections of *Solomon's Dream* and *Dance of Belkis*. Just as the previous part, it also adds instruments with exotic and oriental impressions. Music reflects war and violence by powerful and impressive military sounds with brass and drums. Starting with a loud note, the melody is appearing to get more frenzied, implying savageness and barbarism.
- *Orgiastic Dance* is the final movement of the suite. If we compare the *Orgiastic dance* in Respighi's orchestral suite with Saint-Saens' *Danse Bacchannale* from his opera *Samson and Delila* (1877), we can see similarities in the musical representation of attractive, yet barbarian others celebrating in an insistent rhythm that started with repetitive, heavy down beats. Raymond Hall (cited by Clapp, 2002) remarks:

The final orgy of the thousand-odd people on the stage at La Scala works up into a deafening tumult of sound and a paroxysm of rhythm that finds a par only in the Dionysian climaxes of the *Sacre du Printemps*. Respighi has pounded out this uproar with an insistence little short of sardonic fury... At the Scala premier it brought the audience to its feet in a frenzy of excitement that burst into an interminable ovation. (p. 321)



In the same way, in the Saint-Saens' *Dance Bacchannale*, the composer's intention seems to portray the Philistines as licentious, and he did this by casting the dance as a bacchanal. Celebrating their victory over Samson and the Hebrew, the music reflects their monstrous and mysterious aspects, as Locke(1991) underlines:

The music of the even more famous Bacchanale (Act III) gestures More plainly towards local color, in a quasi-ethnographic sense [...]

Like the 'Dance of Priestesses', the Bacchanale is sensuously (and, at its close, powerfully) orchestrated, and features many other surprising touches that, however fantastic their origin, add further strangeness- clear instance of the 'distant other' as at once 'monstrous' (or 'frightful') and 'attractive'. (p. 266)

Thus, it becomes obvious the influence that emerges in Respighi's *Balkis, Queen of Sheba*, inherited from the eighteenth century's works on Western representations of the Orient that include images of mystery, violence, barbarism, and savageness with attraction, sensuality, and eroticism.

### **Queen of Sheba's influence in French literature of the nineteenth century.**

#### **The example of Gustave Flaubert's character of Sheba in his *Tentation de saint***

##### ***Antoine.***

Equally in literature, the romantic East had become a popular destination, partly influenced by the publications of Denon and other members of Napoleon's expedition at the beginning of the century. Of

the European travelers to the Orient at mid century, the account of Gustave Flaubert provides one of the most vivid records of the male European in pursuit of a preconceived romantic notion of the exotic Orient. Flaubert's descriptions echo the work of "Orientalist" painters, such as Vernet, Delacroix, and Gerome, with an equal conception of exotic romanticism.

Saint Anthony the Great(2) was an Egyptian monk born in the year 251. One of the most important Christian figures, Saint Anthony, is seen as the founder of "Christian Monasticism". He was known as the Father of monasticism. In his isolation from human society, Saint Anthony was visited by hallucinations painfully irrelevant to his occupation of praying. His visions and his stout resistance to them have long been famous. Hence, the relation of the saint's struggle with temptations was a famous topic to be represented by authors and painters. Among the multiple artistic and literary representations of the Egyptian monk's story, the French novelist Gustave Flaubert's *Tentation de Saint Antoine* (*Temptation of Saint Anthony*) in 1874 was one of the most famous versions, where fifteen hundred years afterwards, a large octavo about the monk's temptations was published. However, the interesting part of Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* is, as many critics affirm, his undertaking to describe the temptations in a particular way (Reff, 1962).

Flaubert describes, from beginning to end, the series of the poor hermit's torments: Saint Anthony is shown as a solitary monk living in a mountain hut, removed from civilization. Aiming prayer and the holy life, he is under constant attack by temptations (3), which come in visions or hallucinations. These hallucinatory scenes often involve Saint Anthony in dialogues with various figures. One of them is the Devil, who makes an early appearance (in the second chapter) and brings with him the seven deadly sins (4). It is in this

same chapter that Saint Anthony is confronted with sexuality and lust, embodied by the Queen of Sheba. Otherwise, the temptation that tests Anthony's lust comes to him through the image of Queen of Sheba. In an Oriental/exotic image, Queen of Sheba appears to the saint on the back of a 'White elephant'; moreover, Flaubert enforces the image of the erotic visitor's elephant with the description of it as:

"Caparisoned with a fillet of gold, runs along, shaking the bouquet of ostrich feathers attached to his head-band." (p. 31)

Interestingly, the description of the queen prepares the lecturer to the suggested temptation:

Lying on cushions of blue wool, cross-legged, with eyelids half-closed and well-poised head, is a woman so magnificently attired that she emits rays around her. The attendants prostrate themselves; the elephant bends his knees, and the Queen of Sheba, gliding down by his shoulder, steps lightly on the carpet and advance towards Anthony." (p. 32)

Nevertheless, what makes the descriptions of the seductress queen significant is that all these descriptions are mainly associated with sensuality, dangerous mysteries, magic (implied by the Zodiac's signs), ferocity (implied by the pointed nails like needles), and richness. We can imagine all the following precisions:

Her robe of gold brocade, regularly divided by furbelows of pearl, jet and sapphires, is drawn tightly round her waist by a close-fitting corsage, set off with a Varity of colors representing the twelve signs of zodiac. [...] She wears very high patterns, one of them black with a sprinkling of silver stars, and a crescent moon - while the other, which is white, is covered in golden droplets with a sun in the midst. [...] Her loose sleeves, garnished with emeralds and

birds' plumes, exposes to view her little, rounded arms, adorned at the wrists with bracelets of ebony; and her hands, covered with rings, are terminated by nails so pointed that the ends of her fingers are almost like needles.

Little after, she starts her various tentative to seduce the "handsome hermit" as she keeps calling him:

All night I shed tears with my face turned to the wall. My tears, in the long run, made two little holes in the mosaic-work – Like pools of water in rocks—for I love you! Oh! Yes; very much! (p. 38)

Sheba tells the tormented saint that, when her clothes are off, she will be revealed as 'one continuous mystery', and she offers him "All the imaginings of desire." (p. 38)

However, Saint Anthony ultimately rejects Sheba with the sign of the cross; the struggle to overcome the temptation is difficult for him. However, the strong determination of Saint Anthony's reactions to refuse the temptations that Sheba offers him shows the strength of the seduction and sensuality that reside in Sheba's image.

When tempted by Sheba, Saint Anthony remains resistant until she tempts him with the fact "and you shall discover upon my person a succession of mysteries!" (p.38) at which point his teeth chatter. This small but critically important fact suggests that, while "neither the rich, nor the coquettish, nor the amorous women can charm [him]" (p. 37), he is strongly tempted by her offer to reveal to him mysteries of the world. Besides this philosophical observation, this part prepares the lecturer for a later step on the scale of the Saint's temptations, when the Devil, disguised as Hilarion, becomes Science and takes Anthony on a journey through the universe.

Despite her incredible beauty and charm, the ‘poor hermit’ resists all kind of temptations she offers him. Interestingly, the charming and seductive queen is described as evil; her sensuality threatens the saint’s virtue. Queen of Sheba recognizes her unimaginable exotic force when she states to the hermit:

All the women you ever have met, from the daughter of the cross-roads singing beneath her lantern to the fair patrician scattering leaves from the top of her litter, all the forms you have caught a glimpse of, all the imaginings of your desire, ask for them! I am not a woman—I am a world.(p. 38)

We can imply, over centuries, the sacred account of the visit of a queen from the land of Saba to the kingdom of King Solomon has been a source of inspiration for countless works of art and literature. But it is not only in relation to her journey in Solomon’s court that Queen of Sheba is represented as “Oriental”, but this Queen is a figure that always haunted the literature, arts, and more generally, the imaginary Westerner in all other contexts different than the biblical context. In the Ballet-suite by the Italian composer *Respighi*, Sheba was musically voluptuous and strange. However, in Gustave Flaubert’s novel, living as a hermit to test his faith, the saint was gravely tempted by the charm of Queen of Sheba. She is the perfect model for the *femme fatale* of the *fin de siècle* (the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The seductiveness and exoticism related to the character of the Queen of Sheba can be an implication of the dangerous attraction that resides in a Mysterious ‘Other’.

### **End Notes:**

- 1) For instance, incarnating the erotic queen of Sheba, Gina Lollobrigida in “*Solomon and Sheba*” (1959).

- 2) He was also known in the Christian tradition as: Saint Anthony of Egypt, Saint Anthony of the Desert, Saint Anthony the Anchorite, and The Father of All Monks.
- 3) The temptations as appear in Flaubert work are: Frailty, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Heresiarchs, the Martyrs, the Magicians, the Gods, Science, Lust and Death, the Monsters, Metamorphosis.
- 4) Also known as the *capital vices* or *cardinal sins*, which are: Lust, Gluttony, Sadness, Avarice, Anger, Envy and Pride.

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**'Walking Morts and Upright Men':  
Anxieties of Early Modern Travel**

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And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

-- T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding'

**I**

From 1547 English Poor Laws came in pairs, one providing relief for the settled deserving poor, the other laying down penalties for the vagrant undeserving poor. Government-sponsored relief schemes operated on the assumption that persecution of the vagabond was a necessary pre-requisite for benefiting the domesticized poor. Early modern social policy qualified medieval concepts of indiscriminate charity by urging people to be more circumspect in their act of alms-giving, warning them of the dangers posed by the mobile poor, unanimously referred to as rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars – apparently idle loiterers who shirked work, suffered from an inbred desire to roam and who feigned sickness and physical disability to siphon rightful charity from the immobile (and therefore deserving) poor.

The possession or lack of place was the decisive factor in determining the slippery segregation between deserving and undeserving categories of the poor. The etymological origins of the



word 'placeless' go back to the sixteenth century to suggest not only the lack of an abode or physical space, but equally emphatically to the lack of a respectable social position. 'Place' conversely meant both geographic location and social rank and in the synecdochic thinking of the age, those who had no permanent residence and preferred voluntary roaming as a way of life represented anti-hierarchical disruptions causing deep fissures in the socio-cultural status quo (Woodbridge 2001: 26).

Want of place would automatically imply movement and deliberate motion seems to have been inextricably tied up with the early modern notion of vagrancy. Such an association is strengthened by looking at the way in which the sixteenth-century word 'vagrant' (ultimately going back to the Latin *vagari* implying 'to wander' or 'err' from Latin *errare*, the latter term closely related to French *errance* meaning to deviate and go the wrong way) emphasizes the idea of mobility, to the effect that other negative ethical qualities which were attributed to him such as idleness, irresponsibility, sexual profligacy, histrionic prowess, ingenuous deceit or seditiousness seemed to be a direct function of his uprooted and mobile state.

Yet vagrant mobility was hardly a pleasurable diversion or 'idle' activity given the precarious nature of travel and the material condition of early modern roads. Travel's etymological association with 'travail' or hard labour would reinforce such an assumption. Travel was a necessity and presumably the most rational response to a series of socio-economic transitions that swept England in the Tudor era and produced a large group of the migrant homeless poor. That the true essence of travel is displacement whether in terms of geography or social hierarchy is nowhere more poignantly and ironically felt than in the lives of these destitutes moving nomadically in search of subsistence and shelter. Pressured by a

variety of inhibiting factors such as population growth, rising food prices, declining real wages, land enclosures, dispossession, ensuing poverty, unstable master-servant relationships and economic slumps, tramping became a permanent way of life for most of them.

As the most visible icons of a changing society premised on mobility, vagrants tended to be defined primarily in terms of their territorial/spatial movement. The clergyman and geographer William Harrison in his *Description of England* (1587) wrote that the vagrant 'will abide nowhere but runneth up and down from place to place. . .to and fro over all the realm' (122). In his diatribe against vagrants in *A Treatise of Vocations, or Callings of Men* (1603), the Puritan theologian William Perkins states that,

to wander vp and downe from yeare to yeare to this ende, to seeke and procure bodily maintenance, is no calling, but the life of a beast: and consequently a condition or state of life flatte against the rule; That euery one should haue a particular calling. (qtd. in Pugliatti, 58)

Contemporaries often assumed that vagrants typically travelled great distances to areas with which they had no connections. However, belying such popular beliefs, A.L. Beier in his enlightening account of the social history of Tudor vagabondage points out that vagrant movements were seldom arbitrary or volitional by nature but guided by identifiable economic factors. For instance, towns were popular itineraries on account of the subsistence opportunities offered by its weekly markets and seasonal fairs. Yet again summer months saw a spurt in vagrant activity owing to favourable conditions of travel and the increased demand for casual labour at the time of corn harvesting. Likewise south-eastern England along with the Midlands exerted a greater pull upon vagrants than other parts of the country due to their relative economic prosperity (Beier, 1974).

Nonetheless, early modern literary and political discourses reveal a remarkable persistence in misrepresenting migratory journeys of the transient poor as purposeless wandering. Such cultural representations, be it rogue literature or vagrancy statutes, can be credited with metamorphosing the history of vagabondage and impoverishment into the enduring fiction of criminal sub-cultures. As scapegoats of a system that looked upon poverty as a socio-moral failing rather than a financial condition, vagrants became culpable only because the law made mobility and unemployment illegal activities. The early modern distrust of spatial movement brought wandering marginal figures such as ballad singers, minstrels, theatrical players, gypsies, jugglers, peddlers, tinkers and beast-tamers under the purview of vagrancy laws, just as it concocted the menacing figures of the peripatetic Catholic friar, the Wandering Jew, and the air-borne witch in popular/folkloric imagination. Literary representations of this drifting diaspora of the homeless indigent became a powerful trope for expressing early modern scepticism about travel in an era that was also ironically an age of global voyaging.

The peculiar blend of euphoria and terror that characterizes the Renaissance outlook on travel is articulated in a seminal work like Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1487) where the fixity of the Great Chain of Being is unsettled by man's fluid and mobile nature:

In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hands I have placed thee, Thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself (in Cassirer et.al, 224).

Despite the exhilaration about the latent possibilities inherent in open spaces an implicit anxiety appears in the way in which Pico qualifies the nature of travel. Man has the freedom to wander but

only in the right direction; if he errs and takes the wrong route he forfeits his human identity and metamorphoses into the sub-human or the insensate (Woodbridge 2001: 249). The English humanist, Roger Ascham gives vent to a similar edginess about travel and its corrupting influence on the self, when in *The Scholemaster* (1913) he assured having known many of his countrymen

that went out of England, men of innocent life, men of excellent learnyng, who returned out of Italie, not onely with worse manners, but also with lesse learnyng: neither so willing to liue orderly, nor yet so hable to speake learnedlie, as they were at home, before they went abroad (75).

The moral opposition to travel espoused in such anti-travel polemics was a product of a mind-set that was deeply permeated with the ideology of settled domesticity. When most people's workplaces were still their homes and hearth and individual identity were closely linked, anxieties about seemingly purposeless wandering as an instance of 'errance', seemed quite justifiable (Woodbridge, 2002). Vagrancy represented an alternative (illicit) economy of travel; unregulated and unsanctioned movement was associated with criminality. Vagrant mobility created distance and enabled change, permitting the possibility of anonymous and morally unstable subject positions in a theoretically static society.

In part, such unease may also have been a continuing symptom of medieval Christianity's ethical stance towards secular travel which was perceived to have no fixed purpose. The only socially and by implication spiritually condoned form of travel in this age was the pilgrimage. Aimless itinerancy called to mind how God had forced Cain to abandon home and embark on a life of perpetual vagrancy. The Book of Genesis (4: 16-17) states that, 'Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod' (the Hebrew

name incidentally connoting wandering, exile and vagrancy). The early Church Fathers upheld the monastic ideal of *stabilitas* in contrast to the vice of purposeless loitering, restlessness or *pervagatio* (associated with the cardinal sin of *acedia* or sloth) which was stimulated by vain and morally culpable curiosity; condemning man's need to find diversion in incessant movement.

Travel thus implied a disparagement about the existing order of things and seemed to suggest that the place one inhabited was not the best of possible worlds. In addition, the Pauline metaphor which implied that all men are mere earthly visitors (Hebrews 11:13-16) coupled with the notion of a geo-spiritual core toward which all mankind gravitates, imparted special significance to the act of journeying inwards, symbolically equivalent to the Christian traveller's progress toward his spiritual homeland. In post-Reformation England such a spiritual centre was displaced by the notion of the domestic hearth. All such factors combined to approve of the ideational over phenomenological aspects of travel and visualize journeys more as an interiorized experience than as a means of acquiring experiential data.

In keeping with medieval Christian thought which imparted to 'good' travel a definite teleological sense, Renaissance thinkers too approved of 'controlled structured movement along fixed lines of power; of premeditated forays from a centre to a periphery and back again' (Woodbridge 2001: 252). Such idealized journeys symbolic of purposeful travel were also visually emblemized through royal pageants and civic processions that acted as a means of inscribing social order into civic space. Hence, early modern travel remained largely governed by practical and utilitarian incentives and explicitly detached from the so-called pleasures of travel. Ben Jonson's tribute to William Roe charts the paradoxical ambivalence of early modern travel:

There, may all thy ends,  
As the beginnings here, proue purely sweet,  
And perfect in a circle alwayes meet.  
So, when we, blest with thy returne, shall see  
Thy selfe, with thy first thoughts, brought home by thee,  
We each to other may this voyce enspire;  
This is that good AENEAS, past through fire,  
Through seas, stormes, tempests: and imbarqu'd for hell,

Came back vntouch'd. This man hath trauail'd well  
(*Epigrammes*, 128).

Ideal travel in this sense corresponds to not having travelled at all, a circling back to the place from where one had started out. In *The Book Named the Governor Part I*, Thomas Elyot similarly expresses a wishful yearning for a vicarious journey within the safety of his warm study. Revelling in the simulatory comfort of 'mind-travel' Elyot wonders,

(w)hat pleasure is it, in one hour, to behold those realms, cities, seas, rivers, and mountains. . . incredible delight is taken in beholding the diversities of people, beasts, fowls, fishes, trees, fruits, and herbs; to know the sundry manners and conditions of people, . . . in a warm study or parlour, without peril of the sea, or danger of long and painful journeys (qtd. in Woodbridge 2001: 173).

Even the nature of penal measures against vagrants implied that their principal crime was freedom of movement. Be it forced labour in workhouses, torture in the stocks, death in the gallows, stigmatization through branding, whipping, ear-boring or dispatching to home parishes – all such devices were meant to 'fix' or 'map' the mobile figure, reduce him to a life of immobility and thus artificially impart a comforting sense of forced *telos* to his wanderings. The

demonization of the roaming vagrant as less than human, seemed logical to a society still ideologically committed to pre-modern notions of travel and spatiality. Neither a quest nor a pilgrimage, not a home-coming or home-founding journey – unexplainable under the older rubric of travel – vagrant wandering was akin to spatial and social transgression. It represented a labyrinthine fluctuation without order, contradicting the regimented principles of an ideal, ordered and classified social world.

In such a model society every individual had his place, his use and his master. There was no space for the vagrant though, for he was masterless and had broken away from the established patriarchal order. Cut off from a stable community – from the affective ties of family or the social disciplining of a guild system – they formed a society unified (if at all) by their commitment to the road. They owed no allegiance or obedience to any territorial lord or bureaucratic officer, moving with abandon through ungoverned nomadic space, escaping nearly all attempts at social regulation. Such itinerant groups threatened to undermine official channels of control – demarcating sharp difference between a geography responsive to state control (state space) and a geography resistant to such monitoring (non-state space).

However, such territorializing capabilities paradoxically became a means of embodying a new politics of mobility in the early modern era. By defining a new topographical consciousness, such journeys became a vicarious enactment of the emerging cultural fantasy of spatial expansion and imperial conquest. Thus, if the vagabond's geographic mobility caused anxieties, it also prompted idealization of his topographic freedom to traverse vast spaces, free from the cares of a sedentary life (Woodbridge, 2002). Such geographic license was similarly extended to encompass the vagrant's mental freedom and unrestrained spirit, mapping new

spaces and constructing new social networks. These rootless figures flouted fixed notions of space and spatial order only to create new and alternative conceptions of spatiality.

The discovery and mastery of physical space through exploratory voyages has been of crucial importance in the making of the modern mind. The transition from the medieval concept of a closed and knowable world that was fixed and circumscribed to one whose boundary was ever expanding had profound repercussions in all areas of human experience. In accordance with this new pragmatic outlook, journeys were demystified as travel became regularized as a (beneficial) means of man's acquisition of power over material and spiritual realities (whether for trade, colonial settlement, education or exploration that sustained travellers' vocational functions as merchants, explorers, emissaries, or students). Mobility also became a mode of carnivalesque release, even of clever humour in a wide selection of texts such as Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1600), John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Beggar's Bush* (1615), Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623), William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1598) and Richard Brome's *A Jovial Crew* (1641) that added sparkle to the vagrant's freedom of travel and fuelled the imagination in this great age of global exploration.

## II

Rogue narratives and travel literature may not seem to have much in common; yet can well have constituted analogous discourses in the early modern period. Frequent correspondences were drawn between newly discovered cultures in the New Worlds and older existent sub-cultures in England. When Elizabethans encountered nomads in the New Worlds, they likened them to English vagrants



and attributed to them similar negative qualities such as treachery, thievery, laziness, sexual promiscuity and mobility. Reflecting the same anxieties about wandering, Columbus had ascribed less than human status to Indians on account of their nomadism and lack of a proper abode (Greenblatt, 1991: 66). Conversely, vagrants were often demonized as non-English, and the usual solution to combat the ever-growing problem of vagrancy involved sending of vagabonds and beggars to the colonies.

Foreign voyages to new lands and sub-cultural expeditions into an apparent criminal underworld back home fell under the same unifying paradigm for both rogue literature and exploration narratives used a similar rhetoric of discovery and exhibition of things unseen by human eyes. The steady development of a rational, scientific approach to travel in the Renaissance led to a tendency to see journeys not in isolation but rather as part of a corporate experience to master space. Systematic gathering of information about unknown lands led to the creation from the mid-sixteenth century onwards of great collections of travel tales typified among others by Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Traffics and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589-1600) along with its continuation by Purchas in *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (1625)

A series of sub-generic works of popular fiction also appear from the mid-sixteenth century onward where curious and fearless crime-busters, displaying the same kind of intrepidity as discoverers in foreign lands, infiltrate dangerous criminal country to find authentic information about secret cultures. From early examples of rogue-pamphlets such as Robert Copland's *Highway to the Spital-House* (1536?), Gilbert Walker's *Manifest Detection of the Most Vile and Detestable Use of Dice-Play* (1555), Thomas Harman's *Caveat for Common Cursetors, Vulgarly called Vagabonds* (1566-67), through the cony-catching pamphlets of the 1590's

such as Robert Greene's *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage* (1591), Thomas Dekker's *Lantern and Candlelight* (1608) to the comparatively late examples such as Samuel Rid's *Martin Markall, Beadle of Bridewell* (1610) these constitute a collection of non-canonical literature commonly referred to as 'rogue literature'. The problem of sorting fact from fiction plagues both kinds of narratives whether rogue or travel and the language of empirical observation in each case appears to have been rhetorical strategies to advertise one's own account as more accurate and truthful in comparison to those of other writers.

In keeping with the age's proclivity for exploring hidden spaces (whether of deviant bodies or unexplored lands) many rogue pamphlets invoked the spatial conceit of a geographical journey into a mysterious, forbidden terrain, exposing to the readers' gaze an alien sub-culture, in a language evocative of accounts of New World marvels. In Harman's *Caveat for Common Cursetors* (henceforth *Caveat*) the journey is metaphorical and internalized with the entire narrative resembling a frame-tale genre, taking place inside the comfortable warmth of his home. His account of encounters with vagrants exploits the conventional trope of contrasting the security of domestic space against the dangerous outdoors, but also offers curious readers the comfort of a safe and mediated journey, free from the dangers and rigours of actual physical travel.

Harman states that the work was composed during a period of involuntary confinement at home brought about by sickness followed by convalescence. On hindsight this seems to have been a deliberate narrative strategy for the work seems to recommend immobilized domesticity as a normative ideal in contrast to the 'lewd loitering of wily wanderers'.

For I, having more occasion through sickness to tarry and remain at home than I have been accustomed, do, by my there abiding, talk and confer daily with many of these wily wanderers of both sorts...by whom I have gathered and understand their deep dissimulation and detestable dealing, being marvellous crafty in their kind, for not one amongst twenty will discover, either declare their scelerous secrets (Kinney 1990: 109-10).

Harman stresses on domesticity to articulate new forms of sedentarism in reaction to the unsettling changes afflicting society. The *Caveat* seems to hark back to an earlier ideal of a settled community held together by enduring rustic images of ‘horses in our pastures’, ‘linen clothes...on our hedges’, ‘pigs and poultry’ or ‘highways leading to markets and fairs’ (110). The *Caveat* also marks a response to the growing ideological linkage between domesticity and nationhood in the Tudor age. Commenting on the late sixteenth-century English trend of using the word ‘home’ to refer to both one’s dwelling place as well as one’s country, Woodbridge sees it as the outcome of the institutionalization of domestic values as part of the developing discourse of nationhood (2001: 149-75).

Domesticity emerged as a political concern in post-Reformation England – lack of domicile meant evasion of public welfare policy and by implication exclusion from the emerging idea of the nation (which traces its etymological roots to Latin *nasci/natio* meaning to be born). Harman emphasizes his own housed-in status in comparison with the placeless vagrant, whom he sees loitering on the road from Crayford to London, thereby underscoring their status as internal ‘others’ – referring to them as ‘wild’ rogues and reflecting cultural stereotypes that were later to be transferred to external (non-English) ‘others’. By defining

vagrants as ‘outsiders’ living in England and who constituted a ‘nation’ of rogues, fuelled anxieties about the threat of infiltration in an age intensely concerned over maintaining the inviolability of social and geographical border demarcations.

The *Caveat* offers the assurance of control as Harman resists the intrusion into his house and by inference his nation (‘But faithfully for the profit and benefit of my country I have done it, that the whole body of the realm may see and understand their lewd life and pernicious practices’, 114), from terrifying strangers whom he goes on to punish and torture, thus deflating their potential danger for the anxious reader. Harman’s anti-vagrant agenda locates the work as an imaginative extension of the Poor Laws and reflects stereotypical attitudes embodied in contemporary social legislation. In his sharp distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor, he thus predictably equates the former with the

rowsey, ragged rabblement of rakehells, that under pretence of great misery, diseases, and other innumerable calamities which they feign through great hypocrisy do win and gain great alms in all places where they wilily wander, to the utter deluding of the good givers...whereas the latter are the poor householders, both sick and sore, as neither can nor may walk abroad for relief and comfort (Kinney 1990: 109).

Harman underscores the mindless meandering of the vagrants implied in the title of his work, by defining ‘cursetors’ as ‘runners...about the country’ suggesting a ‘frenetic, disorganized, aimless rushing about’. Elsewhere in the text he calls them ‘wickedest walkers’, typically seeing them as vigorous runners, dashing to and fro doing nothing more than mischief. He sees such loafing without legitimate license as a ground for offence, recalling that many vagrants were arrested simply on the grounds of loitering (Woodbridge 2001: 56).

In the attempt to arrest their alarming mobility and transgression of social borders, Harman resorts to reducing the wanderers to neat and tidy socio-formal categories (though he maintains that such categorization is not of his choosing but based on the 'reality' of vagabond customs), recalling the enumerative social lists and prolific categories of Tudor complaint literature. He offers twenty-four categories of vagabonds divided into the following five groups:

Group I – comprising six able-bodied sturdy vagabonds such as the ruffler (thieving beggar), uprightman (leader of roguish gangs), hooker or angler (clothes-thief), rogue (common vagabond), wild rogue (of rogue parentage) and prigger of prancers (horse-thief).

Group II – Six members who use fake begging licenses or pretend to be disabled in order to garner pity such as the palliard (male and female beggar), frater (false proctor), Abraham man (feigned madman), counterfeit crank (fake epileptic), dummerer (feigned dumb-man), and freshwater mariner or whipjack (pretends to have been ship-wrecked).

Group III – Includes traveling tradesmen such as tinkers, peddlers, jarkmen (selling forged begging licences) and patricos (wandering priests conducting marriages for money).

Group IV – Six types of women vagrants such as the demander for glimmer (who pretends that her house has been destroyed by fire), bawdy-basket (female peddler), autem-mort (married thief/prostitute), walking-mort (unmarried thief/prostitute), doxy (prostitutes commencing their 'career' with uprightmen) and the dell (young would-be prostitutes).

Group V – Comprising two categories of beggar children – kinchin mort (girl) and kinchin co (boy).

Yet the attempt to re-organize the socio-geographical terrain (through tidy classification) and reclaim it in the quest for stasis ultimately proves to be problematic. For the neat groups suffer from considerable interpenetration – some listed as rufflers (the highest in the rogue hierarchy) are shown to be disabled, the sub-list of rogues also contains counterfeit epileptics (Abraham men) and itinerant tradesmen (tinker/swadder/peddler). Additionally, water-tight boundaries are shown to disintegrate in the final collapse of his twenty-four categories into three broad groups – uprightmen, rogues and palliards – claiming further that the first two are umbrella categories including all the others (Woodbridge 2001: 68). Further, the failure to keep proliferating vagabond categories in their proper place corresponds to the erasure of ideological margins between the vagrant and the author as well, the latter becoming implicated in the very mobility that he despises in the former. In an ironic reversal Harman appropriates the tricksters' *modus operandi* through his feigned disability and his deceitful betrayal of the vagrants' trust in him – 'with fair flattering words, money, and good cheer...and not without faithful promise made unto them never to discover their names or anything they shewed me' (110). Also, his frantic rushing from Crayford to London and back again to oversee the printing of his pamphlet breaks down the careful moral distinctions he has been maintaining between his own 'respectable' life and that of the lewd vagrants.

The responsibility for the crime of destroying the time-honoured linkage between social and topographical order was often borne by vagrants. Whereas the fixity of subjects in space corresponded to stability of social ranks, loss of geographical mooring exposed one to a radical disorientation in terms of identity. As unmappable and liminal figures, vagrants resisted systematic structuration by slipping through the interstices of the social fabric

or living in cracks between social categories. Social mobility represented the danger of misrepresentation – the possibility of visualising social identity as an effect of malleable role-playing rather than a divinely fixed entity. Yet societal mobility was increasingly seen as a symptom of a new open-ended economic network characterized by multiple jobs, frequent job-switching and above all, geographic mobility. This money market made extensive travel a necessity for vagrants and itinerant labourers but also implicated wealthy merchants, yeomen and the gentry alike who participated in this ‘mobility of improvement’ leading to a sense of instability and displacement of earlier notions of closed hierarchical systems such as estates, professions and degrees.

Disintegrating class barriers were becoming a distinct reality in Europe right from the middle of the sixteenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth due to the downward mobility of the aristocracy and the upward (social and geographical) mobility of the middling classes. Wealthy international traders, city and town shopkeepers often defended their own freedom of travel by projecting ‘bad’ mobility onto petty travelling salesmen and tradesmen. Similarly, the anxieties of the waning elite who were wary of inferiors invading their social space or the ambitious middle classes who tried to justify their social indiscretion combined to project ‘bad’ social mobility onto the vagabond (Woodbridge 2002: 450-51). Fantastic tales of rogue impersonation or the imputation of impressive histrionic qualities onto vagrants may finally have been a displaced anxiety about the futility of material and social signifiers in locating spatial and class identity.

As a defender of the older land-based economy where social and spatial stability were intimately linked, Harman advocates greater surveillance on the part of local authorities to control the menace of vagrancy. Yet he displays some amount of ‘wayward’

mobility himself despite being part of the respectable gentry and possibly even holding the office of the commissioner of the peace. In his new found vocation as an author, he had been lured into the burgeoning commercial world of print culture and the anxiety over genteel, cultivated folk soiling their hands in the lowly medium of print has been well documented throughout the period. Print promoted a new mobility of the mind just as its availability to readers at all social levels had the potential to undermine the social hierarchy. Medieval manuscripts were confined at one place but like vagrants on the move printed texts swelled prolifically and swept across the land with alarming rapidity. Print was one of the most important cultural innovations that sparked anxieties about change in the early modern age (Woodbridge 2001: 251).

Harman's unease over mobility was part of a cultural response to a society in the throes of complex transitions. Such disquieting changes make their presence felt in the opening of the pamphlet where Harman expresses regret at his earlier unqualified charitable assistance to wandering beggars, and signals a hard-minded toughness towards them.

And...I...have kept a house these twenty years whereupon poverty daily hath and doth repair, not without some relief, as my poor calling and ability may and doth extend, I have of late years gathered a great suspicion that all should not be well, and, as the proverb saith, "Something lurk and lay hid that did not plainly appear" (109).

His repentance over his earlier injudicious Christian behaviour that stipulated unconditional assistance to the poor and its replacement by a new secular outlook that emphasized charity as a deliberate commercial agreement where meals are bartered for secret information to ensure the profitable success of the *Caveat*



signals a society suffering from a schism between earlier religious world-views and a new sceptical rationalism characterizing post-Reformation England.

Harman's literary dedication of his work to Bess of Hardwick, one of the richest women in contemporary England, warning her of the dangers of arbitrary charity, indicates a new notion of prioritising individual material interests over communal relations. By appropriating vagabondage as a cultural trope, the *Caveat* feeds into the intellectual debate about early modern travel. At such uncertain times, bad mobility was likened to purposeless drifting whereas good travel had a pre-set goal and a pre-determined route. The *Caveat* is thus Janus-faced, superficially clinging on to assumptions of a strong tie between social and spatial coordinates prevalent in an earlier hierarchical society yet revealing disturbing perceptions of (and deliberate partaking in) a new socio-economic structure premised on mobility. This ambivalence may well explain why England's greatest age of international travel was also noted for the emergence of the discourse of settled domesticity.

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**Defining Identity, Defying Stereotypes  
In Suki Kim's *The Interpreter* and  
Patti Kim's *A Cab Called Reliable***

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**I**

The aim of this paper is to understand the complexities of identity formation as revealed in literatures of migration in the Korean American community. The Korean American community had its origin as a labour class people; initially engaged as farm workers in sugar plantations or in mining and railroad industries, over time they have successfully transformed into a model minority mostly visible in white collar jobs. In the present times, being Korean-American implies a favourable socioeconomic and educational background. But this homogenising perspective of the Korean American people is as much of a myth as the idea of their achieving the American dream. The presence of these people in prestigious institutes and jobs does not take away the underlying hardships and the bitterness of survival in their lives.

The two texts, Suki Kim's *The Interpreter* (2003) and Patti Kim's *A Cab called Reliable* (1997), challenge the stereotypes of being a Korean-American. In these texts, we definitely see elements of assimilation and alienation, the staples of all migration/diasporic literature, but we also see that these texts engage with the old themes in a new way and destabilize the very idea of an immigrant identity by stripping away all assumptions linking one to a communal past. Migration literature often deals with the hardships of eking out a

living in a new land, the hostility of the receiving population, the confusion arising from negotiating with alien customs, the generation gap between the first generation immigrants and their America born children. These concerns are very much present in the selected texts but what is interesting is the way these texts choose to give a new spin on the old tale.

Community plays an important role in the life of an immigrant. Far away from their native land, it is the community that becomes a safeguard for the individual. Hence the early prevalence of Chinatown, Koreatown, Indian pockets, Mexican neighbourhoods, etc. The community becomes an extension of the family, coming to play a role in every aspect of one's life. The cultural practices of food, religion, marriages, births and deaths acquire significance because of one's location within a community. It is interesting to examine how in these two texts, community life is adhered to but also rejected, in one case because of convenience, in the other, because of power; instead of being a support system, the community becomes a medium to be exploited.

The Korean-American community has long been extolled as entrepreneurs. In the 1970s, a typical newly-arrived family would start a small business as soon as possible after a few years of work on assembly lines or with maintenance companies. The post-1965 wave of immigrants were mostly educated and had held jobs back home. In the US, language often acted as a barrier on their way to finding a satisfactory job. Therefore, they would opt to engage in small business, wherein they could exercise some amount of agency. Within the racial hierarchy of American business structure, Korean-Americans held a position lower than non-Hispanic whites and higher than other minority groups (Blacks and Hispanics). Staying in the competition often implied mobilizing family labour and backbreaking hard work for long hours. The church too played a

significant role in holding the Korean population together. Christianity is the preferred religion of the younger people, with only a few first generation old timers holding on to the faith of their old country. But food habits remain consistently traditional at home. The second generation's attraction to American food is a direct revolt against this practice.

The modern day immigrant's life has very little to celebrate. Multiculturalism, instead of adding to one's identity, strips one of all fixed sense of identity. Talking of the transcultural hybrid novel, Roy Sommers says that it entails "visions of the dissolution of fixed cultural identities". Cosmopolitan hybridisation and ethnic fragmentation are asserted as counter-models to exclusive ethnic identities. Like Bhabha's notion of hybridity, these novels aim for a constant "in-betweenness" and assert "transnational" and "transitional" identities.

Soren Frank's idea about the rewriting of identities as impure, characterised by semantic instability and restlessness is clearly seen in the context of these transcultural hybrid novels. Identities are no longer a stable given but are always in the process of becoming; something so fluid that it can shape into something very different at a moment's notice. According to Moslund, such novels "intentionally produce hybrid discourses that radically destabilise meaning and identity". Critical of the celebratory readings of migration literature that seek to celebrate the migrant hero as having a "special, inclusive vision and sensibility, a double vision that is particularly conducive for the heterogeneous complexity and perspectival uncertainty of the novelistic modes of representation", Moslund instead considers the migrant identity as struggling with the "uncertainty of a liminal position in between two or several cultures". Drawing a fine distinction between a hybrid and hybridity, he says that a hybrid "is"; "is" as opposed to hybridity which is a continuing process.

## II

The Interpreter and A Cab called Reliable focus on the predicament of growing up Korean-American. Both texts have a central character in search of answers that will help them make sense of their lives. The themes of alienation, of dysfunctional family life, of struggles for survival are present in both books. But these books also make an attempt to break the stereotypical image of the new Korean-American as the model minority figure. In the process, these two texts end up broadening the scope of migration literature not simply by its very individual stories but also by the fact that issues that are a direct outcome of migration are often sidelined by human issues or the complications of lived life in these texts. What is interesting is that these books acknowledge the stereotypes while trying to break it. By trying to highlight their own uniqueness/difference, they bring constant attention to the stereotypes regarding immigrants.

In Suki Kim's *The Interpreter*, we meet Suzy Parks, a twenty-nine year old interpreter for an agency that entails her interpreting at depositions. A child of parents who did not speak much English, for her "interpreting is almost a habit". She is trapped into a life of isolation, having been cut off by her family for having an affair with a married Caucasian man, a relationship that did not work out. Her parents are shot dead by unknown assailants. Her elder sister refuses to speak to her.

There are three key theories regarding Korean-Americans engaged in small businesses: the disadvantage theory, the ethnic resources theory and the opportunity structure theory (Hurh, 58). All these theories come to factor in the narrative of this text. Language difficulties and cultural unfamiliarity often led to disadvantages while

pursuing a satisfactory job. Suzy's father was a man who believed himself superior to the circumstances he found himself in. His contempt for the white man, desperate clinging to the Korean way of life, his faith that as long as one speaks Korean, they would always be home, ensured that he could have no shared space with the dominant majority. Mr. Parks also ensured that his wife and children work in the family business without caring for their well-being. To him, financial success was all that counted. He exploited his class, as well as ethnic and family resources to make a dubious success of his life at the cost of his fellow beings. It was only the fierce protectiveness of Grace, the elder sister, that Suzy remained unexposed to the dangerous guilt of her family. Her legacy thus turned out to be doubt regarding her own significance, in the community as well as within her family. The father's insistence on bringing up the girls in a strictly Korean way ensured that when the time came, they were maladjusted to operate in the wider society.

*In Korea, he said, girls did not frolic like these American ones. In Korea, he said again, girls stayed clean, as girls should. Under Dad's "Korean girl" rules, nothing was allowed: no lipstick, no eye shadow, no hair dye, no perm, no perfume, no miniskirts, no cigarettes, and absolutely no boys, especially American boys. The family's frequent moving seemed to guarantee all that. The girls never stayed in one school long enough to develop a crush. No time to get attached to sinful American habits, Dad used to say. (Suki Kim, 29)*

The idea of the community being a support system is turned over its head here. The community is nothing more than a business opportunity for the Parks family. When it is revealed that Mr. Parks was an informer for the Immigration and Naturalization Services

(INS), we learn how he used this position to exploit his partners in business to get his way. Over the years, he had been responsible for deporting a lot of illegal immigrants, for breaking up a lot of families. Power becomes the motivating force of his actions. For the newly arrived non-English speaking immigrant in the States:

*Every man is guide to every other man. They don't speak English, or read English. They don't know the American laws. They might even break them without knowing. They are forever guilty before the customers, the policemen, the inspectors, the district attorneys, the IRS agents, the INS agents. Sure, America is the land of opportunity, and yet they wouldn't recognize an opportunity even if it is waved in front of them. Only another immigrant can show them, in their language, in ways they can understand. A fellow countryman who might understand America better, who might be less afraid, who might be legal. (Suki Kim, 122)*

And Suzy's father took ruthless advantage of this helpless trust. His contempt for English that makes him glorify Korean ends up scarring the young daughter, Grace, who is forced to act as interpreter between her parents and the INS. The many Koreans that we meet in this narrative are a far cry from being the success story that Korean-Americans have been celebrated as. They are mostly unskilled labours, without any safety net, their "immigrant life follows different rules—no taxes, no benefits, sometimes not even Social Security or green cards". (Suki Kim, 10)

A Cab called Reliable, on the other hand, is about a search for one's identity, and this identity once revealed subverts all assumptions of being a Korean-American. Ahn Joo's father is not the typical model minority citizen; he is instead a man whose laziness



leads his wife to run away with their son. He has a drinking problem and an addiction to “magazines of long-legged women that could have paid for his son and daughter’s school lunch tickets for an entire month”. His inability to provide for his family forces his wife to take up a lot of degrading menial jobs, something she couldn’t accept, comparing their life in America to a “dog’s life”. Ahn Joo is a scared silent witness to the brutal physical fights between her parents. Left behind by the mother with her abusive father, Ahn Joo was forced to grow up fast. She was after all:

*... the girl who had seen her mother throw a hot iron at her father because he smelled of liquor; perfume, smoke, and urine again, who had seen her father bounce her mother’s head on and off the refrigerator door calling her a begging bitch because she mentioned returning to Korea again, who had seen the dark blue print of her father’s hand around her brother’s neck, who had felt the same large hand remain seconds too long on her own bottom as he patted her for being a good girl and then on her stomach as he rubbed her indigestion away...  
(Patti Kim, 10)*

She had to balance a life at school with all the household work, thinking of what to cook at dinner at silent reading class. Gifted with words, she began to weave elaborate stories about life back in Korea, her ideas not inspired from memory but from the “World Book” in school. When she came to be acquainted with the real stories from back home, her desire to make things work out in literature that did not end well in real life made her story appear fabricated and forced. For instance, to give an alternate ending to her Aunt Han-il’s life, in her story she turned her aunt into an avenging murderer who went on to have a PhD and live happily-

ever-after in America. Lies became an easier way to deal with the truth. She instinctively learned what to say to gain the audience's sympathy. At her new school, she has difficulty adjusting. She is labelled a problem adolescent. She invented different stories about her mother's death and she wrote long letters to her mother, letters that she could not post. Yet her relationship with her mother was complicated at best with her mother openly expressing her preference for her brother.

*I was born first. The firstborn was supposed to get everything first. So why? Why did she always buy him new pants and shirts? Why did she feed him first? Why did he get the cotton quilts, while I slept with sheets? Why did he get a two-wheeler when he didn't even know how to ride? I knew the plums were hidden for him. ...*

*Why did she give me the broken pancakes? Why did she thin my milk with water, not his? Why did Min Joo get to eat some of Joon's applesauce, not me? Why did she brush his hair and not mine? Mine was longer. Why did she take Min Joo with her, and not me? (Patti Kim, 34)*

When at the end, Ahn Joo comes to know the truth about her identity – that she was adopted and that was the reason why her mother could leave her behind, she is forced to confront a bitter reality. None of her lies had prepared her for this eventuality. The elaborate myth that she had built up regarding her birthplace, Pusan in Korea, is now proved baseless. Furthermore, in more than one instance, Ahn Joo had been confused for a Chinese. The old Korean woman next door had told her, "The shape of your face, your hair, even the way you blink. It's not Korean." (Patti Kim, 71) What does one do with one's ethnic identity when that identity is unravelled and all of a sudden one becomes something different?

How these texts highlight (and criticize) stereotypes is by trying to express how they differ from other stories. For instance, in *A Cab Called Reliable*, Ahn Joo says of her father, “Unlike most of the Korean families I knew, he did not bring us to America in order to make a million dollars.” (p.44). Then again despite her doing terrible in school, they put her in a “gifted and talented trigonometry” class, because she was “quiet, looked Chinese, and wore glasses”. (p.56) In *The Interpreter*, the power game notwithstanding, the overwhelming picture that emerges is one of gruelling labour and inhuman poverty. Their food remained ethnically Korean, “always kimchi on one side of the table, and on the other, fried anchovies and salted pollack eggs.” (p.101)

### III

There has been a definite shift in literatures of migration. The two texts under discussion are a validation of such a shift. In contemporary migration fiction, the political and the legal have become as important a denominator as the psychological and the social. Issues of assimilation and alienation will always be there, but contemporary migration literature has embraced the long overlooked issues of legality as well as depicting a reality that does not run “true” to form. There is an increasing effort to showcase an identity that challenges the stereotypes of a community. Survival remains central to the immigrant experience, but it is more complicated now with issues of power struggle. Being Korean-American means more than being the model minority; at times, these are people who are abusive, lazy drunkards and at other times, they are manipulative agents of the government who does not shy away from exploiting their fellow beings. Under such circumstances, one’s identity is always in the process of becoming; more than a hybrid, one is always undergoing the process of hybridization.

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## **Representation of Subaltern Women in Literature: A Study of Selected Contemporary Indian Fiction**

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Subaltern is ‘of an inferior rank’, refers to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling class. The word subaltern specially denotes the lower classes, oppressed people at the margins of a society and social group who are struggling against hegemonic globalization. A *subaltern* is someone with a low ranking in a social, political or other hierarchy. It can also mean someone who has been marginalised or oppressed. The term “Subaltern” owes its origin to Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist writer who used the term for the proletariat as subaltern meaning a class having no voice in a power structure.

The literal meaning of the word ‘Subaltern’ as given in the “Oxford Dictionary” is any officer in the British army who is lower in rank than a captain. So the term subaltern signifies subordination and Gramsci attached a special significance to this military term by incorporating peasant workers and other groups denied access to hegemonic power.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian literary critic proposes that the subaltern is a group of people who have been excluded from the centre of the society and their voices are unheard and lost under the bondage of colonialism. Spivak used the distinction in Marx’s statement about the peasantry ‘They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented’ to examine the dynamics of

the Subaltern “Voice” and representation. The representation of the subalterns is always a controversial issue for its authenticity. The subaltern are represented by the others voice especially by the writers and the historians. Ranajit Guha has given a new significance to the world ‘Subaltern’ in the Indian cultural context as it signifies the oppressed section of the society. “And so it attributes all the major achievements in the history of the Indian nation to the elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas”. (Guha7).

Feminists raise questions about the place assigned to women in the social setup. Issues of women’s status, as well as the sexual division of labour, and the issues of family structure and responsibilities for child care are dealt with by the feminists. They focus on the institutional change and reform, appealing to the notion of justice, freedom and rights.

According to Onimhawo, feminists believe that women should have the right and freedom to choose what happen to their bodies. They should have equal rights like men in the society. For this reason, Mira in the novel *The Binding Vine*, Indu in the novel *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in the novel *The Dark Hold No Terrors* do not let their bodies become procreating systems.

Bell Hooks says that such beliefs and arguments are rooted in the notion of feminism. According to him, the feminist struggle takes place anytime anywhere when any female or male resists sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression.

The novel *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, written by Mary Wollstonecraft in 1742, is considered as the first work of feminism. Wollstonecraft is the foremost of the women whose contribution to the development of feminism is discussed. She protested against the stereotyping of women in the domestic roles

and she also raised her voice to provide education to girls. Wollstonecraft wanted to raise their moral and intellectual stature to make them rational citizens. She says, “I do not wish them to have power over men, but over themselves” (Wollstonecraft 134).

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most significant Indian women novelists in English who has made a bold attempt to raise voice against the frustrations and disappointments of women in the patriarchal society. Deshpande emerged on the Indian fictional scene in 1970s. She has even been honoured with the National Sahitya Academy Award for the novel, *The Binding Vine*, published in 1992.

Deshpande’s focus, in her fiction, is on the status of woman and her role in man - made mundane society in which:

A woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent homemaker with multifarious roles in the family. As wife and mother, service, sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance are her required attributes. The series of adjustments she makes and yet she is not equal to man. This is the predicament of woman all over the world. (Sree 1)

Deshpande, in her novels, has depicted the situation of a middle class Indian women, her efforts to understand herself and her endeavour to preserve her identity as wife, mother and above all as a human being in the tradition-bound, male dominated society. For her portrayal of the predicament of middle-class educated and uneducated Indian women, their exploitations and disillusionments and their quest for self – identity, Deshpande has been called a ‘feminist.’

On the other side, Baby Kamble’s literary works are dealing with Dalit womens social life structure. Dalit women are the victim

of harsh patriarchy. It is not surprising therefore, that women have a low position in this community which is reflected in lower life expectancy, lack of access to education, health and employment opportunities widespread practice of female neglect and abuse, such as wife beating, leading to female suicide and bride burning as the ultimate fate of the hundreds of powerless women every year. (Sinha, 44).

*The Prisons We Broke* (1984) is the first work that comes in Dalit women Literature which is written by a Dalit woman. This book deals with the two major problems of the contemporary Dalit society; firstly, the oppression and exploitation of the Dalit by the upper class; secondly, the discrimination towards women in a patriarchal society. *The Prisons We Broke*(autobiography) provides a graphic insight into the oppressive caste and patriarchal tenets of the Indian society but, nowhere does the writing descend to self-pity.

In Dalit womens literary works, authors expose the existing state of the historically deprived, disabled people and offer a vivid account of poverty and exclusion of the weaker section of our Indian society. The oppression, exploitation, marginalisation, struggle, assertion, deprivation of economic power and social welfare, benefits by reservation policy and the quest for the identity of the individuals are the recurring themes of contemporary Dalit writing style.

On the other hand, Deshpande finds it difficult to admit that everything is right with the patriarchal traditions. Deshpande's poignant portraits of women trapped in the patriarchal set up crave for freedom, space and identification as a human being. They are considered as second-rate beings and live in subordination to men.



In a similar vein, citing another example of Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things*, the protagonist Ammu, also suffers this gender discrimination. Her brother says to her: "What is yours is mine and what is mine is also mine" (57).

Deshpande's protagonists realize male chauvinism in patriarchy but they fail to cope up with its unfavourable conditions and remain submissive and marginalized.

Simone de Beauvoir says that history of humanity is a history of systematic attempts to silence the female. She states:

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature... which is described as feminine. (Beauvoir 273)

In Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* (1992), Deshpande focuses on woman: her travails and privations; pains and anguishes; tensions and irritations. She tries to expose the male domination in middle class society. The main themes on which Deshpande focuses in the novel are marital rape, marital frustration, gender discrimination, tradition and modernity, hypocrisy of cultural values, rape and significance of male child. Female quest for identity is also another theme of the novel. This novel represents the struggle of women to attain selfhood. Shashi Deshpande has developed these themes through characters like Urmila, Mira, Vanna, Kalpana, Shakutai, Bhaskar, Prabhakar etc. and she has achieved these themes through domestic or familial relations. These are the stories of three women who are dissimilar in age and time: Kalpana, who is insentient; Mira, who is lifeless and Urmila, who discerns the gist of life through the stories of Kalpana and Mira. The main plot of the story revolves round Urmila. The stories of Mira and Kalpana

are the two sub-plots that join the main plot. The total effect is of a cohesive story-the story of women's lives, their fears, problems and aspirations.

The novel portrays the suffering, disappointments and frustrations of women and this makes the novel 'a feminist text'.

Deshpande makes the readers aware that discrimination between sexes starts in the family first. In Indian families, a girl is treated differently from the boy because when a boy is born, parents are congratulated by friends and relatives because a son means insurance. They grant greater independence to boys because they consider a boy as an heir to the family whereas parents mourn the birth of a girl child. A daughter is considered as just another expense and a burden, as they have to spend a lot of money on her marriage. Bonnie Burstow aptly remarks in this context:

A girl receives less attention than her brother. While the boy is encouraged to venture out in to the world, to explore and to go about his projects, the girl is encouraged to stay at home; she is forced for household chores, in some cases adorable and in almost all cases to help mother and to be very, very obedient. She is being moulded in a body that needs care and body that exists for the pleasure of others. (Burstow 10)

The term 'Patriarchy; is used in multiple meanings in many different social discourses in contemporary society. The villagers talk about to Baby Kamble's father (Pandharinath Mistry), that he always keeps hiding his wife that even the sun's rays do not know her. This autobiography is based on Dalit women's life style, that there is no position for women in the power hierarchy.

This autobiography also echoed the ignored fact that the Dalit women suffer from the triple oppression of the caste, class, and

gender issue in our society, a little change to explore the greener pastures. In Hindu society woman's life is considered dedicated only to her husband. "My father had locked up my 'aai' [mother] in his house, like a bird in a cage". (Kamble, 5) Kate Millet says patriarchy is a relationship between men dominate on women. Marxist feminist held that the relation between women's subordination and organization of capitalist modes of production. For a renowned psychoanalysts Juliet Mitchell, patriarchy signifies that the father has a symbolic power, which is related to property or bread winner. The behaviour of her father effects her mother's behaviour.

Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* shows the adverse effects of sexism and caste as the major themes by focusing on the lives of her characters especially those within an enclosed society in which the ideal concept of Dalit women are not only caste and sexism but also class. Since Dalit females were by nature of their sex and caste, conceived of as the lower class, they could hardly approximate the norm. The vulnerable position of the Dalit women at the bottom of Indian gender, caste and class hierarchies, Dalit women experience the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations in terms endemic caste-class-gender discrimination and violence. This describes the physical and mental violence where women have to undergo and suffer in both the public and private circle.

...Appasab, could you please give this despicable Mahar woman some shikkai...the shopkeeper's children would be trickling out into the courtyard for their morning ablutions... 'Chabu, hey you can't see the dirty Mahar women standing there? Now, don't you touch her? Keep your distance... 'Take care little master! Please keep a distance. Don't come too close. You might touch me and get polluted'. (13-14)

On the other side, Deshpande's fiction deals with the issues of marital rape, marital frustration, domestic violence and sexual abuse in marital lives which are regarded by the victims as degrading, humiliating, painful and unwanted throughout life. Marital Rape, which is also known as spousal rape, is non- consensual sex in which the executor is the victim's spouse. Various steps were taken up by feminists regarding this issue for not only pressing for legislative changes but also in challenging inequitable laws. Several women's organizations in different cities were formed and launched a sustained agitation against it. The government took note of various points raised by women's organizations and activists and held discussions with them before finalizing its recommendations. One of the eminent lawyers Indrani Jaisingh proclaims:

It is assumed that by marrying a man, a woman has given her consent to sexual intercourse with her husband at anytime. Thus, even if he forces himself on her, he is not committing an offence [of rape] as her consent is assumed. (qtd. in Mohan153)

In the novel, Mira is forced by her husband to have sex even without her consent. Mira is not happy with her husband and does not like any kind of physical relationship with him because her marriage was only "a dark-clouded engulfing night" (66). She even fears the coming of the night, though she quietly surrenders herself to her husband who only wants to possess her sexually. This is revealed through this conversation between Mira and her husband:

Talk, he says to me, why don't you say something... But ... I give him the facts, nothing more, never my feelings... it makes him leave me to myself... But he comes back, he is remorseful, repentant, he holds me close, he begins to babble. And so it begins. 'please,' he says, 'please, I love you.' And

over and over again until he has done, 'I love you'. Love! How I hate the word. If this is love it is a terrible thing. I have learnt to say 'no' at last, but it makes no difference, no difference at all. (67)

With the portrayal of Mira, Deshpande wishes to show that Mira is not alone in her sufferings. It is symbolically suggested that there are many women who are doomed to silently suffer nightly assaults by their husbands.

On the other side the condition of the Dalit women are miserable as they have to perform all the house hold duties and to go for selling wood to earn their daily bread. They collect all the left over from other places to give them to their children. Most of the time women have to go on hunger unendingly. The self-definition and the peculiar position of Dalit women in the society being rendered invisible. Discrimination and oppression of Mahar women lead them to mental, physical, and emotional violence against the Dalit Patriarchal social structural:

When the Mahar women labour in the fields, the corn gets wet with their sweat. The same corn goes to make your pure, rich dishes. And you feast them with such evident relish! Your palaces are built with the soil soaked with the sweat and blood of Mahars. But does it rot your skin? You drink their blood and sleep comfortably in the bed of their misery. Doesn't it pollute you then? Just as the farmer pierces his bullock's nose and inserts a string through the nostrils to control it, you have pierced the Mahars nose with the string of ignorance. And you have been flogging us with the whip pollution. (Kamble, 56)

On the other side Shashi Deshpande literary works are realistic picture of the women. She depicts that not only the women

of rural mass, but women of middle class also, in various towns and cities of India are exploited by men. Deshpande articulates the feelings of the people belonging to different strata of society, the educated upper middle-class women and lower middle class women in the novel. Simone de Beauvoir says that a woman is required by society to make herself an erotic object. The purpose of the patriarchal mind – set, to which she is enslaved, is:

Not to reveal her as an independent individual, but rather to offer her as prey to male desires; thus society is not seeking to further her projects but to thwart them. (Beauvoir 506)

As one can say that Baby Kamble, as a writer, personifies courage who dares to speak in a world that still undervalues the voice of Dalit women. She is fully aware of the wrongs inflicted on the Dalit and elucidates upon this in her writings. Kamble, in her fictional world, depicts the actual experiences of Dalit women- silence, repression, oppression etc. Which they suffer in the patriarchal caste world. Dalit writers depict the life of those people who face the cruel reality of society because they are neglected from economic and social power. They expose the difficulties of life they face throughout the whole journey. Baby Kamble in her works tries to explore how the intersection of caste, class, and gender in the Mahar society influences the shaping of Dalit female life. She feels that the major problems of females are caused due to gender oppression. Even Kamble herself says: Dalit females have to suffer not only because of sex and colour, but because of poverty too.

Generally the purpose of feminism is to identify the inequalities and injustices in the way girls and women are treated in particular societies and the disabilities and disadvantages which result from these. Feminism also asserts the worth of women and also the

distinctive contributions that women make to their culture. Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* accordingly delineates the sufferings of women in the inhuman conditions of patriarchal mind – set. Thus women in Shashi Deshpande's novel *The Binding Vine* occupy a feministic position, but there feminism is 'victim' feminism. They have yet to embrace the 'power' feminism where they will not be merely a complaining victim. They have yet to achieve – in the words of Lynne Segal – the radical feminist movement's goal:

A world which is a better place not just for some women, but for all women. In what I still call a socialist feminist vision that would be a far better world for boys and men, as well. (qtd. in Walters 139)

### **Conclusion:**

Shashi Deshpande usually portrays middle class women, who are denied any access to power and are treated as procreating machines or objects of satisfaction for men. Baby Kamble depicts the patriarchal dominance through the character of herself. It is due to her lack of physical intimacy as well as her psychological and emotional involvement show that she possesses no feelings for other beings. Deshpande in the novel *The Binding Vine* depicts the exploitation, manipulation, pain and sorrow felt by women in all walks of life. On other hand, Baby Kamble exposes the impact of caste and gender discrimination on the dalit women in our society. The prime concern of both the novelists is to portray the constrained world of a woman where she has a very precarious existence and focus is on the personal freedom, individual choice and identity. The women characters in selected these novels long for their recognition from the male dominated society. They need their freedom and fight for their individualities. They wish mutual love from their men and not mere lust. Deshpande and Kamble, through their poignant

female characters champion the cause of drawing society's attention towards the societal roles and attitudes inflicted on women. The present work is thus an attempt at bringing to light the subversive reactions of women across different cultures, of different environments to oppression of all kinds.

Though there has been a progressive development in various fields over the years, the social system in the different states of our country is yet to see any drastic changes with regard to the status of women. In spite of enjoying the ever-increasing privileges, dalit women still continue to be largely dominated by their husbands and patriarchal mind-sets. They cannot aspire for anything more than what is allotted to them in life; that is why they continue to be insignificant, "the other". Despite various laws and constitutional rights, woman continues to be defined in terms of man and regarded as a subordinate to him. Kamble and Deshpande through their respective works depict the role of the social and cultural structures in perpetual reinforcement of gender inequalities. But they do not take the extreme stand of fighting against the patriarchal society and male domination.

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**A Dialectical Approach to *Zhosou*:  
The Poumai Naga World behind the 'Standing Stones'**

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The practice of erecting memorial stones has been one of the oldest practices of the Poumai Naga culture. Megalithic monuments or monoliths were erected to mark events of various social, cultural and historical importances. For the Poumai Nagas, the concept of stone installation is primarily associated with an event, a ritual, a feast, a belief or purpose indication. The question of why and how certain cultural practices are observed or performed is the essential enquiry in understanding any social or cultural practices of a people. The 'Standing Stones' in the title of this paper refers to the monoliths erected on account of performing a prestigious feast, i.e. the Feast of Merit. Taking *Zhousouchu* or monoliths of the Feast of Merit as an element of material culture that the community displays, the present paper titled, "A Dialectical Approach to *Zhosou*: the Poumai Naga world behind the 'Standing Stones'" is an attempt to understand and analyze the account of why and how these standing stones are erected, concomitantly, have a peep into the zeitgeist of the then Poumai Naga culture and their community life. Why one did squander one's hard-earned just wealth just to have a stone erected in his name? In one perspective, having to throw extravagant banquets in feasting and drinking, it can be seen as wasteful act of a thoughtless spendthrift. But if one looks at it in the context and perspective of the performers (insiders), a whole new interpretation to it is possible. So as a scholarly enterprise,

this paper seeks to explore the essence of the most prized feast; Feast of Merit, in both observance and participative perspectives. The paper also attempts to understand and recreate the past of the Poumai Naga social and cultural milieu through the lens of the feast and its performance. The whole concept to expound and explore the account and significances to understand the life world of the community is through the remnant of the feast, the 'Standing stones'. Thus, these monoliths are not just objectivised remnant of a grandiose event happened in the past but they are the material lore, cultural expressions and generative heritage, wherein a great deal of the social and cultural complex fabric of the community is embedded in.

### **1. The Prestigious Feast of *Zhosou***

The Poumai Naga tribe is one of the oldest and largest Naga tribes in Manipur of India. The distribution of the tribe is in 77 villages with a population of around 1.7 lakhs approximately, and the majority of the population inhabiting in Senapati District of Manipur. The language of communication among the people is called 'Poula'. The Nagas, in general, and Poumai Nagas in particular, have an inherent culture of giving lavish feasts or banquets to the fellow villagers. Performing various feasts of Merit was one of the unique characteristics of the Naga culture. These feasts are known by different names hosted mostly by wealthy generous people.<sup>1</sup> *Zhosou* is considered to be the most prestigious feast that a person could ever afford in his lifetime. In this feast, the host or a single family voluntarily would feed the villagers with abundant meat and local made rice beer. The feasting, rituals and ceremonial progression would last for several months. This achievement earned the feast-giver an honorable societal status and fame, worth and honour of a 'man'. People who arrange this feast are entitled to display their status in dress, ornaments and house, which an ordinary

people cannot think of. Having performed *Zhosou*, a stone monolith, *Zhosouchu* is erected in commemoration of the feast and the feast giver. Morphologically, these stones are mostly of menhir (standing stones), with no inscription inscribed on them, often found in clusters as well as single. Their shape and sizes vary according to the choice of the person who erected them but their functionality is the same.



**Figure 1: *Zhosouchu* (Monoliths of the Feast of Merit)**

### **Ceremonial Progression of *Zhosou*: Rituals and Performances**

Rituals and performances go hand in hand in the Performance of *Zhosou*. This feast is both religious and secular in practice and nature and comprises of series of secular and religious ceremonies that end after a half yearly long ceremonial progression. The every minute detailed of rites, rituals and performances of the feast cannot be retold in entirety because it is not a feast of one day or one week, but it is a feast whose ceremonial progression lasted for many months and detailing every single ritual performed in these many months become difficult. The trajectory of the ritualistic performances of this feast can be understood better when one looks at it as part of the practices of everyday life, as rituals and daily more or less performances merged together.

When a person has planned to undertake the feast of *Zhosou*, the village authority council is consulted in the beginning. It is noteworthy that every public status to be achieved in the community through this means is sanctioned by the village. The favor, protection and counsel of the village authority council was sought and ensured. They agree to protect and assure him of their virtual assistance. As the declaration to host the feast, meat would be distributed to the villagers.

In the month of *zalepo* (October), in the onset of the harvest season, the village men-folk whooping and singing would bring one best stalk of paddy to the feast giver's place which he would cook. Two best stalk of freshly harvested paddy would be kept on his *thoubou* (granary) symbolizing that the old has become new, a symbolic ceremony of renewal and regeneration.

In the month of *chadu khyou* (November), the ritual of *baoloutou* is performed. *Baoloutuo* is a ceremonial ritual wherein a group of four youths, two boys as torch bearers, and two young maiden, move out to collect few grain of rice from each granary in every household in the village and bring them to the feast performer's place and distribute the collected rice among them. In each granary from where rice is drawn, one or two seeds of millet are put back. The choice of millet is important, because it always yields rich harvest of all the annual cultivations. This ritual is performed in silence, at dawn with their faces and heads covered. It is performed in clandestine and masquerading manner because they symbolize a thump-size- spirit called '*lophi*'.<sup>1</sup> The two young maiden would make their morning meal with the collected rice along with some crabs. The crabs are given by the villagers as a token of gratitude for having performed the ritual of *baolotou*. The choice of crabs is significant because crabs are symbolic of perennial spring, productivity and fertility.

When the harvest season ends, the male members of the feast performer's clan and his friends once go to his paddy field to work and play. They playfully wrestle, plunge each other inside the water and throw wet mud at each other in the wet paddy field. It is significant to note that all the arrangement and works of the feast are mostly done by the clan members of the feast performer. He offers and the fellow villagers work for him.

selection of the memorial stone or *Zhosouchu* involves serious ritual observances. The monolith has to be meticulously chosen by performing solemn rituals, asking for omens in dreams; dreams and signs being paramount in their belief system. Once the stone is chosen, constant vigilance has to be given to it to make sure that no crawling creature crawled in to take shelter in it. The surrounding of the reserved stone must be kept cleaned and fire is lit up frequently to ward off creatures such as snake, lizard, etc. If a reptile such as snake, or lizard or creature as such is found by the stone after it has been chosen, it must be abandoned as ill-omened.

In the beginning of the month of February, three or four big wooden vessels called '*Siitei*' are carved out from the plank and kept ready to use on the big day of *Hrodoo*<sup>2</sup>. The monolith is then dragged in to the site where it is to be erected by all men in the village. Before the monolith hauling begins, certain rituals are performed at the spot. Sacrifice of a blameless chick is one



Figure 2: Village menfolk dragging *zhosouchu*

of the important rituals. The ritualistic sacrifice of the chick is symbolic of the sacrifice of a goat. It is sacrificed with the belief that the unblemished chick dies for the villagers if there be any unpredictable death or impending accident that could happen during the dragging procession. The *Nyapao* (priest) would invoke the stone to obey the voice of the pulling men folk and initiated the drag with a whoop after which all men join to push and drag the stone. It is obligatory for all able men in the village to participate in the stone pulling procession.

On the day of *Hrodoo*, the main day of the feast, sufficient numbers of buffaloes are slaughtered to feed the whole village.

The feast giver put on a special shawl *zhosousa*, 'hrahra' or 'hyapeiteisa'. These shawls are specially designed for those people who have to attain higher social status by performing Feast of Merit. The commoners are prohibited to wear these shawls. On the

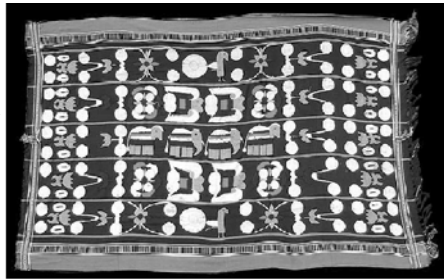


Figure 3: Hyapeiteisa

main ceremonious day of celebration, there would be a grand celebration in pomp and show at the feast giver's residence where every villager, big or small, rich and poor feast together. There are singing and dancing, exchanging and serving of food and drinks among the villagers to mark the occasion. It is also served as an occasion when young people could court each other, flirting and pouring *Pouyaoh* (rice beer) to each other. They would insist and offer all sort of eatables and rice beer to one another. Following this day, the feast giver then must fast for four days. On the fifth day, he takes his food. On the same day, the monolith is erected.

The monolith is erected in commemoration of the feast, and the fame and generosity of the feast giver. It is a taboo to destroy the erected monoliths and they stand, still unscathed forever. Various rituals are performed for few more months after which the village authority council along with the village king officially put the feast to an end. The feast giver could then start to construct and decorate his emblematic house with skull of buffaloes, *chipeikai* (house with horns on the eave) and *cyapeitye* (replica of buffalo skulls engraved on the frontal plank). Such elaborate and grandiose decorations are symbols of honour and higher social standing. Only the people who perform the *Zhosou* have the privilege and sanction to build such majestic house.



**Figure 4: Houses of *Chipeikai* and *Hyapeitye***

### **Taboos on *Zhosou***

The rituals of the feast of merit are followed with a strict code of conduct on the part of the feast giver. It is said that the “Feast of merit is not merely giving out wealth to the village as a gift, but rather builds the sum total way of personality development



with great perseverance and meticulous rituals”.<sup>1</sup> If the performer fails to uphold and observe all the required rituals, ill consequences are believed to befall not only on him alone but on the whole village. It is believed that ill observed, incomplete rituals and breaking of taboos bring early death in the performer’s family and even the village may be wrecked by natural calamities such as famine, plague, drought, defeat in battle, etc. There are certain inviolable taboos he has to observe strictly:

1. The feast giver must not lie with his wife until the entire rituals are successfully completed, they must strictly abstain themselves from any kind of physical contact. The observance of sexual taboo is a kind of battle with one’s passion, conscience and principle in the quest of a man’s honor.
2. During the whole course of *Zhosou* ritualistic progression, the feast giver is forbidden to take bath lest all the blessing be washed away. While the feast ceremony is in progress, it is believed that he has to absorb a lot of invisible blessings, therefore those blessings should be kept intact in him by not washing them away.
3. The monoliths or *Zhosouchu* must never be moved or destroyed once they are erected. Even if they are uprooted by natural calamity such as landslide, they cannot be re-erected. Monoliths erected in the past are not destroyed or moved to another place irrespective of its need for building and road constructions.

It is mandatory for a man to be married to be able to perform *Zhosou*. Many rituals are done along with or by the wife. Domestic chores like serving the drinks and food are carried out by women. Along with her husband, she is also bestowed with a female shawl prohibited to other ordinary women.

## **Observation on *Zhosou*: Pros and Cons.**

### **Merits:**

1. *Zhosou* manifested the feast giver's generosity and love for the community. The act of benevolence is exemplary and his nobility is praiseworthy.
2. Ceremonial progression of feast require many assemblies and gathering together therefore it serves as an opportunity to strengthen the unity of the people. It reinforces that sense of togetherness and belongingness to each other. It is a way of sustenance of social responsibility and strengthens the communitarian feeling.
3. Post the head hunting period of the Nagas, the various community feasts such as *Zhosou* served as the occasion of reconciliation for the warring villages. On these occasions, enemy villagers were invited to attend the celebration to make peace. It was a platform for peace settlement and strengthening the bond of alliances.

### **Demerits:**

1. Celebration of *zhosou* displays pompous and extravagant show of wealth. Its primary focus is on self-importance and materialism. The concept of hosting the feast is a vanity quest of a vainglorious fame
2. The feast subjectively creates a class division. A class of higher social status who is looked upon by the rest. It is a feast of the rich and by the rich. Only the rich and the wealthy can afford such expensive affair. The poor can never afford it therefore the opportunity to gain societal distinction is forever denied to the poor.
3. *Zhosou* ceremonial progression involves tedious and time consuming series of practices. It required lot of irrelevant *genna*

and misinformed taboo observances that demand one's abstinence from doing productivities and works. Some rituals and ceremonial performances sometimes appear even gibberish, silly and hilarious in the modern context (no bath for months for instance).

4. The achievement is contextual. It is time-bound and space-bound. The merit of the feast matter to only people who know what the feast is all about (the insiders). The splendor of the house and monolith are just a mere decoration to people who do not know about it. The importance of the feat achieved can be seen only when placed in the context of the insiders within the given period. Thekho writes "Socio-economic standard of a village was invariably to be judged by the performance of the sort of feasts during a year. When there was no one to perform the ceremony of feast in a particular year then it was considered unceremonious and dry occurred which of course, very seldom." <sup>2</sup> Among the Poumai Naga community, the trajectory of rituals and progression of *Zhosou* may differ slightly from village to village, but the major ceremonies and rituals, the concept, the goal and purpose achieved are same for every village. Christianity has brought an end to this feast. But the remnant of it is still practiced in the form of giving banquets to the villagers during auspicious occasions like marriages, house dedication, etc. though the grandeur of ceremonies is unmatched to the feast of merit of the olden times.

## **2. Poumai Naga Socio-Cultural Milieu through the lens of *Zhosou***

*Zhosou* or the Feast of Merit was not just a cultural feast but in its nature and practice, it was a way of life. Material, performative and ritualistic culture involved in the course of the performance of *zhosou* are multiple and each of this cultural materials and behavioral performances have symbolic and generative aspects that reflect an

implicit and explicit framework in the physical and ideological structure of the society and an overall cognitive worldview of the community. The consequent part of this paper is an attempt to understand the community life and recreate the zeitgeist or the social and cultural milieu of the past Poumai Naga society as seen through the prism of *Zhosou* practices.

## **2.1 A Community Culture**

Shimray reiterates that the Naga individual knows no other life except that of the “community life,” they work in groups, eat in groups and sleep in groups and further says that there is no feast of merit by individual.<sup>3</sup> The socio and cultural life of the Poumai Naga is deeply founded in communitarian existence. *Zhosou* or the feast of merit also brings to light the idea that the feast is about, ‘to the community is given and the community gives’. The ceremonial progression of *Zhosou* shows the whole community in vibrant celebration, where everyone partake the same food and drinks and work. The feast required the involvement of every individual in the village and there are many occasions when every individual’s involvement is called for. The interconnectedness of the individual and society is paramount. Carolyn reiterates the idea of the unity and oneness of the Poumai ancient community when she writes “Those were days unknown of electronics machines, all that they did was physical labour. But there was so much of unity and sympathy for the fellow villagers,”<sup>4</sup> The very fact of how those giant monoliths come to stand in their places is the outcome of the joint effort and team work of the community despite the absence of electronic machineries, advanced tools and equipments we have today.

## **2.2 *Zhosou*: A Case of Social hegemony**

Naga society is seen as casteless society, but it would be problematic to bluntly consider it a classless society because

subjective class hierarchy is covertly present. After all, the monoliths themselves are the living trophy belonging exclusively to the socially dominant. In the cultural practices of giving lavish feasts and banquets to the community, a case of social hegemony is at play. In regards to the notion of societal hierarchy, feasts of merit could be studied in two opposite perspectives:

1. It is a policy where an individual climbed an upward social mobility and gains a higher societal status.
2. It gives space for equal participation of every villager. It is in a way, a leveler wherein every villager rich or poor, high or low equally participate in the celebration doing away with societal demarcation and class discrimination.

On the surface, it was, in fact ennobling especially for the poor and the low because the feast calls for equal participation of the whole village irrespective of their societal status. Even the king and the pauper feasted together under one roof and partook the same food and drinks in the same pot and barrel. The pomp and festivity on the surface was no doubt, egalitarian. While it brought everyone together under equal platform negating societal differences, it simultaneously and subjectively created a class demarcation. Thus, two classes of people i.e. the socially distinct people and the common people were virtually created.

When the village authority council consented to have the person host the feast of merit, his status been sanctioned, his social distinction is virtually marked from that point. The very fact, that he could decorate his house the way the ordinary people cannot, which shows that his distinctive house speaks more than a shelter for him. The emblematic and elaborately constructed house indicates that the owner of such house is someone who has a distinct name in the village. Similarly, people who have performed Feasts of

Merit are entitled to wear honorable shawls and ornaments, which are denied to common people points towards their social distinction. They being looked upon, even in public decision making, their opinions are held high by the villagers and their voice automatically become influential.

One notable aspect that one would not miss to see in the context of the expensive feast of merit is the quest for the ‘individual crown’. Making a big name for being ‘a man’, by accomplishing challenging feats and envious achievements characterized the life of men of the Nagas in the recent and remote past. “When we look back the pages of Naga history, we find the core of the Naga life was full of competitions and challenges in terms of war and wealth...everybody wished to achieve a successful head hunter and an achiever of the Feast of Merit. It was the most admired deeds of honour and glory in the ancient past.”<sup>5</sup>

The desire to be accepted and be better than the others is the result of both inherent human aspiration and societal making in every human being of all cultures. Every civilization or culture has its own definition or trend of ‘virtue’ or ‘merit’ that characterized its age, specific to its own time and space. For a person to be able to attain the ‘worth’ of that ‘virtue’, one ought to prove himself better than the ordinaries.

### **3. The Deserving Honour of *Zhosou***

Throwing a lavish feast such as *Zhosou* had been a tedious and expensive affair, a challenging feat. First of all, the primitive tribal sole occupation is agricultural. Their way of production is slow, tedious and difficult. Method of modern advanced farming is not available and was totally unavailable then. The climatic condition for good harvest was unpredictable. But despite everything, they used to manifest their benevolence and generosity

by choosing to feed their people. In the ancient Naga society, performing feasts of merit and achieving the fame of a great warrior were the ways to attain a respectable and higher social status in the society. It is clearly observed that, *Zhosou* feast givers have rightly attained that 'worth' because they could prove that they were truly worthy of it. To achieve an honorable social standing, the challenge or the feat was to prove that one is not merely narcissistic craver of fame and glory but one with a different heart: a heart of love, benevolence generosity and courage. And that virtue and nobility was what the feasts givers manifested themselves. It is notable that, the 'prominence' is not coercively 'taken' but voluntarily 'given.' Their 'merit' was earned rather than being born with. The society sanctioned the acclaimed 'merit' only after one has passed the feat of proving himself different in heart and in deeds. The way of conferring power and status was considered as deserving and justified, civic and dignified in its own right.

The status and fame achieved in performing *Zhosou* was not transferable or heritable. The achievement of the father was for himself. But it is significant to note that *Zhosou* was normally performed by families who have a legacy of it. When the father performed, his son also performed it (it may not be so in every case but it happened in many cases). There was no limitation up to how many times a person can perform feasts of merit, but with each feast of merit he performed, the worth of his status and feast increased and the next higher level of feast of merit was attained.

## **Conclusion**

Monoliths or megalithic structures as objectivised cultural lore, and hence do not have memory of its own. But they trigger curiosity and folk memories, and as mnemonic material lore, they carry memories and history which have been subjectively invested into

them. On triggering the curiosity and provoking enquiry, they reiterate the cultural information and knowledge of the generations gone by. *Zhosou*, the feast, though described in present form (grammatically) considering their presence in the minds of the elderly people who stand as witness to the event and the presence of large number of monoliths as witness to the community spirit behind the observances of such events, is no more in practice today and the younger generation is completely unaware of it. But *Zhosouchu*, the feast erected stones as living heritage of the past existing till today as the link between the past and the present. As physical folklore, they are the ‘unwritten literature’ of the unwritten culture, a special genre of oral traditions wherein the past and the history is stored in multiple webs of stories and accounts. The grandiose standing monoliths that are there today in most Naga villages are the witness to a tradition and the past glory of the community that have been consumed by the passage of time. Monoliths of the Feast of Merit speak much more than the literal stories of their own. A deeper dive into their accounts unearths multiple layers of cultural practices that reflect the nature of the society that erected them.

#### **END NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Here the concept of a wealthy man is somebody who has a number of paddy filled granaries, possess many acres of land and large quantities of domesticated animals.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Lopfii’ are believed to be some kind of mysterious tiny spirits in female human form. It is said that they always stock up their possessor’s granaries by pinching morsel of rice from everywhere. They chose their lucky master and live hidden in his house who never gets to know that he hosts a *Lopfii* or group of *Lopfii*s.



<sup>3</sup> Hrodoo is the main ceremonious day of the feast of merit events, basically the collective feasting day

<sup>4</sup> D.L Salouni Pao, “Feast of Merit ( Poumai)” A paper presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> seminar of PNBA & LEADER SEMINAR, phék town Baptist church, 20<sup>th</sup> Aug.2014 , p,01

<sup>5</sup> R.K.Thekho, “Reminiscence of a Naga Feast of Merit”, *Souvenir Tunjoy Baptist Church Golden Jubilee* 1997. P. 18

<sup>6</sup> R R, Shimray, Origin and culture of Nagas ( New Delhi: somsok publication, 1985) p.121 cited by Kennedy Poumai in *The concept of êïëüüüßá in selected writings of St.Paul and its implication for Tribal community life of Nagas with special reference to Poumai Tribe*, thesis., Serampore College West Bengal, 2002

<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Pao, *Tradition and Transition: Changing Perspective Of Poumai Naga Women*. diss.,Delhi University,20014, p.18

<sup>8</sup> D. L. Salouni Pao, “Feast of Merit ( Poumai)” A paper presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> seminar of PNBA & LEADER SEMINAR, Phék town Baptist church, 20<sup>th</sup> Aug.2014

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## **Exploring Social Media in Gender Imagery and Social Movement**

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For analysis of the study, the case of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 in general and the movement led by Irom Chanu Sharmila in particular is taken into consideration. From being the *Iron Lady* of Manipur to being a subject of ridicule, crossing nearly 16 years of non-violent movement to repeal the draconian law, Irom Sharmila exhibits a symbol of perennial sacrifice for the cause of human rights. The work of Judith Butler, performative nature of identity and gender argues that people see themselves as the authors of their own inner lives, through a set of repeated gender performances. Such performances are regulated with reference to constraining cultural representations of masculinity and femininity, as well as the narrative scripts of gender that are told and retold within the culture at large. In this direction, Irom Sharmila's decision to break her fast on 9th of August 2016 came as blow to the performative nature of gender in the public front.

The movements use media as a tool to mobilize potential supporters, gain public support for the claim and finally bring a political or social change. The media coverage influences the public perception to make or break a social movement. However, the social movements that are core and effectively institutionalized within the society, are significantly less dependent on media coverage for their survival. Nevertheless, the non-institutional position of social

movements led the relationship between movements and media asymmetrical. The initial stages of movements' generally get higher media coverage, but gradually the frequencies descend with emerging contentious issues. These make the movement less newsworthy and ultimately may lead to attrition of public support. But what factors influence media attention that guides public response?

Although the inception of the movement was prior to the social media revolution, the deserving mileage was not attained. The uninformed public about the movement by the print and electronic media failed to invoke the emotion toward that movement. The occasional telecast of the face that represents the movement couldn't retain people's long time commitment for a serious cause, less debatable in politics.

## **MEDIA AS A CATALYST**

Positive media response for social movement is a crucial light for gaining people's visibility. This helps the social movement to mobilize citizens to participate in the movement. Indeed the Anti Corruption movement in 2011, media coverage played a very vital role in bringing out to be a remarkable event, and it was the media that made the movement successful. Media, there undertook large scale and unconcealed motivational framing efforts to actively break down barriers to participation. Media in such similar cases take advocacy role for social movement, which was significantly visible during another similar movement in 2012-13, Delhi Gang Rape. During this movement media coverage amplified the issue and forced the government authorities to take a fast track approach to address the claim.

The discussions on media in today's digital age bring us to the most complex yet simple phenomenon of communication: Social Media. The communication revolution brought about rapid

emergence of social media that led to many questions on the impact of social media on social movement. Social media enables citizens to connect and organize themselves with little to no cost and the world to bear witness.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other various social networking sites gave voices to unheard sections of society. Creation and adoption of social media have actually become a fact of life. Social media democratize the model of communication allowing reciprocal communication among ordinary citizens (D.Kidd, 2002). Because of the ability to encompass the key aspects of social movement: communication, organization, mobilization, validation and scope enlargement (S.M.Buechler, 2000; Clark, 2012) social media replaced old mobilization structures and became a coordinating tool for many popular movements in recent years. Social Media introduces speed and interactivity that were lacking in the traditional mobilization techniques, which generally include the use of leaflets, posters and faxes (Eltantawy *et. al.*, 2007). Reaching various section of society in fraction of seconds popularised social media. Perhaps the significant feature of social media is to bypass official sources of information and give voices to the ordinary citizens in transforming the political landscape. The interaction between social media and different political and economic aspects of life can also create a multiplying effect that stimulate the creation and formation of social movements (Leenders & Heydemann, 2012).

In order to understand gender relations in social movements and the role of media in reinforcing images the author selected the Malom Massacre of 2000 in Manipur as the contextual framework. Here, for analysis of the study, the case of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 in general and the movement led by Irom Chanu Sharmila in particular is taken into consideration. From being the

*Iron Lady* of Manipur to being a subject of ridicule, crossing nearly 16 years of non-violent movement to repeal the draconian law, Irom Sharmila exhibits a symbol of perennial sacrifice for the cause of human rights.

Movements use media as a tool to mobilize potential supporters, gain public support for the claim and finally bring a political or social change. The media coverage influences the public perception to make or break a social movement. However, the social movements that are core and effectively institutionalized within the society, are significantly less dependent on media coverage for their survival. Nevertheless, the non-institutional position of social movements led the relationship between movements and media asymmetrical. The initial stages of movements generally get higher media coverage, but gradually the frequencies descend with emerging contentious issues. These make the movement less newsworthy and ultimately may lead to attrition of public support. But what factors influence media attention that guides public response?

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## **THE MOVEMENT AGAINST AFSPA**

Writing on the crossroads of conflict in the North East of India is both challenging and sensitive and demands deep scholarly engagement. The internal disturbances in these states and the consequent state activism against the alleged anti-state elements

make the society and politics multidimensional. But the recent unfolding of events in Manipur with the *Iron Lady* Irom Chanu Sharmila breaking her almost 16 years long fast, relates the authors of this paper on three premises.

Firstly, Assam has witnessed insurgent activities since 1980s and continues to be under the ambit of AFSPA, recording many recorded and unrecorded cases of human rights violation by the armed forces, with their supreme power and immunity that comes under the purview of this Act. Secondly, while the entire North East of India enjoys the reputation for a gender sensitive society with higher social status and economic independence of its women folk, yet in practice, the women movements of the region or the presence of women in popular movements, lack both leadership and recognition, leave alone acknowledgement. Thirdly, being avid users of social media in everyday life, the authors of this paper plan to look into the social media trends aftermath Irom Chanu Sharmila's decision to break her fast which was both applauded and trolled on the social networking sites. These three premises form the rationale behind taking up this study. Thus, the communication revolution prompted various directions of research, and one such field of research is the relationship between social media, gender image and social movement.

Resistance is common in Northeast India owing to the dissatisfaction amongst various independent states for the forced annexation with the Indian Union. The attempt to assimilate the diverse populace by the Indian State attacked the very way of life, particularly of the hill people, igniting in them the fear of being dominated.

Colonial policies like the Inner Line Regulation have kept most of the hill region geographically alienated from the rest of the

country. Issues of livelihood are at threat and the region is economically deprived. To be precise, the region is socially, culturally, economically and politically exploited, first by the British and later by the Indian State. This forms the background to insurgency in the region.

Insurgency in Northeast India has been the outcome of the grievances of the people, as such over the years, thousands of young men and women have been seen mobilizing themselves around militant organizations. Attempts to negotiate with the government around demands such as autonomous councils, separate statehood and sovereignty, these local insurgent groups have grown very strong over the years.

Apart from Sikkim, all the other seven states that constitute the northeastern region, namely, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh, have been very violent since Indian independence and few of which are still vulnerable in current times. With insurgency affecting the region, threatening, kidnappings, extortions, murders, burglary, etc, defined the order of the day.

Growing discontents with the government resulted in ethnic assertions. As such, the Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958, came to the rescue of the Indian State to make ends meet.

The Special Powers that were available for the commissioned or non-commissioned officers of Armed Forces under Section 4 of this Act have been outlined as follows:

1. Power to use force, including opening fire, even to the extent of causing death if prohibitory orders banning assembly of five or more persons or carrying arms and weapons etc are in force in the disturbed area.



2. Power to destroy structures used as hide-outs, training camps or as a place from which attacks are or likely to be launched.
3. Power to arrest without warrant and to use force for the purpose.
4. Power to enter and search premises without warrant to make arrest or recovery of hostages, arms and ammunition and stolen property etc.

However, the debate revolving around Section 6 of the Act has always gained attention across the world, mostly amongst the human rights organizations. The most significant and most denounced verdict under this section is, “No prosecution, suit or other legal proceeding shall be instituted, except with the previous sanction of the Central Government, against any person in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act.”

Thus, the Section 6 of AFSPA is a direct attack on the democratic nature of the nation where armed forces are granted with immunity from crimes, they are accused of. As such AFSPA has been one of the triggering factors behind the extrajudicial killings in the northeastern part of the country.

To end numerous ethnic conflicts and wipe out insurgency from the region, continuous fights are witnessed between the militants and the Indian Army. Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 is under operation making the situation graver. The gruesome impact of the Act has been experienced much more in the state of Manipur compared to other parts mobilizing people against the draconian law. Irom Chanu Sharmila who has raised her voice against the famous Malom Massacre, started fasting in 2000 to repeal AFSPA and broke her fast in 2016, thus dominating regional and national media content in recent times. .

In 2004, the arrest, rape and murder of T.Manorama by the army personnel of Assam Rifles, saw nationwide protests. What shocked the Indian Government was a group of Manipuri women stripping off their clothes and carrying play-cards with slogans like- '*Indian Army Rape Us*'.

Women organization like *Meira Paibi* has also raised their voice against such arbitrary detention and torture committed by security personnel in Manipur.

It is often claimed by social scientists that India's conflict-resolution strategy in the North East has been one of the central causes for the proliferation of insurgency. And AFSPA is one such strategy that has hampered both democracy and development in North East India.

The naked protest by a group of elderly Manipuri women at Kangla Fort in front of the Assam Rifles headquarters against the brutal murder of Thangjam Manorama in 2004 shocked the entire country sending shivers down the spine. Immediately a committee was set up under the leadership of former Supreme Court Judge Jeevan Reddy to review the Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act. However, under no public scrutiny and under alleged pressure from the military, the provisions of the committee were never made public or implemented.

The demand to repeal AFSPA is not confined to Manipur only, but the entire country has now voiced out loud the atrocities and impunity credited to the armed forces in the name of bringing peace in the turbulent region. Various international human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and various United Nations Agencies have researched and published reports on the human rights violation against the inhabitants of the states under the rule of AFSPA. The right of every Indian citizen to

life and liberty is attacked and they are tortured in the name of ensuring security for the greater good. (McDuié-Ra, September 2009)

In India, it is seen that communalism, casteism, regionalism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism are considered to be some of the crucial areas of discussion when it came to protecting the integrity of the country. These factors have often been considered igniting tension in the country since independence. As such, protecting the territory from internal disturbances and external aggression became the priority of the country's agenda ever since.

But what is disappointing in current situation is how the democratic fervor of the nation is under threat by its own security providers and that is often overlooked.

According to the J.S.Verma Committee set up in 2013 at the aftermath of the brutal Nirbhaya Gangrape case, recommended review of the continuance of the AFSPA in the context of extending legal protection to women in conflict areas. The committee highlighted the misuse of the AFSPA by Army personnel and recommended that 'sexual violence against women by members of the armed forces or uniformed personnel be brought within the purview of the ordinary criminal law'.

Again, the lifting of the Act from Tripura in May 2015 after 18 years of its enactment in the state is a welcome move and positive message for the rest of the states in Northeast. In Tripura, many blamed the Act to be suppressing the tribal population. Hence, after reviewing the law and order situation in the country and considering the reports of the security forces, the council of ministers in Tripura decided to recommend to the Union Home ministry to issue a notification to withdraw the AFSPA.

Currently, AFSPA is operational in Manipur, Nagaland, Assam and in two districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The mobilizations against the draconian law are increasing rapidly challenging governance in the Indian state.

Being an insider in the region, the authors of this paper have always been curious to learn if the Act has opened up wider scope for the military to flourish. Is there any politics behind dictating the Northeastern region of India as disturbed? Are there vested interests behind the deployment of military in the region? Is not finding an alternative to AFSPA too political in nature?

This paper particularly concerns the image construction of non-violent activist Irom Chanu Sharmila who had tried find an alternative to peace restoration with her unique struggle and has opened up the debate relating her fight to repeal AFSPA. Through this paper, we are planning to look into the engagement of social media with the social movements of North East India in the wake of active presence of national and regional news channels on social media. However, the bigger idea is to explore the active role of social media in constructing, disseminating and sustaining the gender images in public discourse.

## **MALOM MASSACRE AND NEGOTIATING GENDER IMAGERY**

AFSPA is still alien to most of the parts of India, exempting Jammu & Kashmir and North East of India. However, of late Manipuri activist Irom Chanu Sharmila became the face of struggle against AFSPA. The infamous Malom Massacre at Malom in Imphal on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2000 compelled young Irom Sharmila to raise her voice silently against the killing of ten civilians waiting at a bus stand that unfaithful day, which included women and children

too. What followed has been an indefinite fast unto death for the demand to scrap off AFSPA from Manipur.

What has occasionally emerged in public discourse and has grabbed the headlines on frequent intervals was the portrayal of Irom Chanu Sharmila as a symbol of perennial sacrifice for the cause of human rights. She became the Icon or the Iron Lady.

Over the years, her appearance with the tube hung around her nose through which she had been forcefully fed since 2000 and the updates on her recurrent arrests and release from police custody on charges of attempt to suicide, on national and regional print and electronic media, never failed to grab public attention. But what had failed miserably was to attract a long term popular commitment to repeal AFSPA, both on the part of the people affected by this law in various states of North East, not just Manipur as well as on the part of the media that has gradually shaped the cause for the struggle making Irom Chanu Sharmila, the sole epitome of sacrifice.

The irony is the vigilant Meira Paibis in Manipur have been raising the issue since 1980 and they also formed Sharmila Kanba Lup (SAKAL) popularly known as Save Sharmila Campaign. This group of Meira Paibi women have camped and supported Sharmila's cause with relay hunger strikes since December 2008 (Samom, 2016). However, with Sharmila's new decision to contest elections, SAKAL was dissolved. Nevertheless, the demand to repeal the Act continues to gain momentum from different parts of Manipur, unlike different states in North East. Yet what has been witnessed to be common across the country is a perennial opinion building around the same constructed Icon or the Iron Lady in recent times. Here stands our research problem.

The work of Judith Butler, performative nature of identity and gender argues that people see themselves as the authors of their own inner lives, through a set of repeated gender performances. Such performances are regulated with reference to constraining cultural representations of masculinity and femininity, as well as the narrative scripts of gender that are told and retold within the culture at large (Elliott, 2014). In this direction, it can be said that Irom Sharmila's decision to break her fast on 9th of August 2016 came as blow to the performative nature of gender in the public front.

There are two ways of looking at it. Firstly, Irom Sharmila has been so far confined into a social metaphor thereby attaching an iconic status of 'Iron Lady' against her name. Secondly, the use of this metaphor has been claimed to be of community ownership. And these two perspectives can be vividly understood aftermath her decision to break her 16 years old fast, to contest elections and to lead a normal life. The irony is it was her freedom of choice to protest through fasting which was celebrated once, but later her choice to break the fast as well as to choose a professional and personal life was not respected.

Irom Chanu Sharmila had expressed her will to contest elections. She had changed her tactics from a hunger strike to political contestation. The agenda remains the same, i.e., to repeal the AFSPA. Yet her independent decision has shaken the community. It has generated turmoil rather than a celebratory feat. Is it because politics would construct a hard portfolio for the *Iron Lady* making her more strong and challenging?

Yengkhom Jilangamba has rightly pointed out that to misrecognize and misrepresent is also a form of violence, and it perpetuates the already existing militarism (Jilangamba, 2016). It is indeed worth mentioning that misrecognition is more dangerous than ignorance.

It is evident in turmoil prone North East India that, women have actively taken part in social movements and many have also gone underground for the cause of their identity and consequent safety from state forces. Women have always dominated the population in public protests against state and armed forces, yet leadership of women in the public front is neither entertained nor anticipated. Does the deeply rooted gender performances making regular comebacks?

In the age of globalization, the proliferation of media has accelerated the pace of people's voices and has created more accessible spaces, particularly online spaces through social media. While social media activism is the buzz thing in current times, do these online spaces end up mobilizing people around issues based on their popularity rating? Are these online spaces violating the right of choice of the people? Are these online spaces urge for a sense of belongingness? Or are these online spaces altogether becoming violent in nature?

Irom Chanu Sharmila failed in no ways. She has been the longest hunger striker in the history of the world till date. What has failed is her 16 years that she dedicated for the cause of humanity and peace. The failure of the 16 years old fast signifies two things. Firstly, under representation of the issue in media that has failed to disseminate information about the Act. We wonder how many people outside J & K and North East know about AFSPA. Secondly, under representation of gender sensitive content in online spaces might also contribute in the poor social media coverage of this important cause. What has favored Anna Hazare in India, might not have favored Irom Sharmila at Manipur in general and India, in particular.

## **CONCLUDING NOTE**

In this paper, social media penetration served as a representation of all social media outlets. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, in general have been part of our society roughly for a decade. Social media seems to be an integral part of social movement and mass mobilization these days.

The importance of social media in the everyday analysis of any event cannot be overlooked in current times. While in the case of Irom Chanu Sharmila, social media didn't prove to be adequate in the successful repeal of AFSPA owing to the nature and presence of the Act in India, yet what has been interesting to observe is the end of the 16 years old fast that drew immense media appeal.

Traditional tactics of the movement in Manipur failed to make its presence in media for very long. Irom Chanu Sharmila got the tag of the Iron Lady and she had been proudly recognized with this title. But the strength of the movement was not enough at right places. The shift of focus of the masses from the cause of the movement to the character of the activist is a bleak reminder of priorities and politics. While social media served as a catalyst to recognize Irom Chanu Sharmila, the non-violent activist on fast unto death, the sensitivity towards disseminating information on AFSPA was poor enough that could have strengthened her movement from other sides.

The irony of this paper is that belonging to Assam, the authors of this paper are highly concerned about social media activism over serious issues of the day that record high frequency in the variability of public opinions as well as the concern over AFSPA, a very less debatable issue in hand, both in North East and the country alike.



Social media has mobilized people around volatile issues, but the very social media is in a position to be analyzed critically due to its questionable role in the sustainability of social causes. Today social media plays as an important triggering factor in mobilizing people instantly. The same has been witnessed in the case of Irom Chanu Sharmila. However, exploring social media beyond its accessibility concerns, shows that social media has not confined its role to a digital mediator but has constructed images and has reinforced instant reactions. At such times, social media fails to mobilize people around long term social movements.

Today media has undoubtedly boosted the creation of a public sphere. It is only through media; particularly social media, the headlines across the world and the mood of the people are instantly recorded globally. One doesn't have to wait for the morning newspaper if being accessible to internet. The two way instant communication on social media guides the making and breaking of a social movement. While social media has created a space of equity to some extent, the same platform has also been used to generate not just public opinions but public decisions. Net activism has become a quicker, accessible, convenient and safe option over field activism. In the process, social media has become a decision maker in the construction and deconstruction of public issues through private convictions.

In this direction, it can be said that the growing role of social networking sites have reactivated the knowledge seeking and conscience building processes. However, what has been practically noticed is that the presence of North East in social media is very bleak. Stereotypical approach to the social issues of North East produces a stubborn representation of the mainstream problems of the region.

In the context of Irom Chanu Sharmila's movement, she has been promoted more in media in terms of gender imagery. It indicated how women in North East are strong leaders in movements and social activism. But what has failed miserably was the use of social media in focusing AFSPA and how this law has violated human rights across the region without any checks. If not the country, but the entire North Eastern region should deliberate over AFSPA, the way insurgency, identity and economic issues are discussed. Here, one can explore the potential of social media in dissemination of information. The absence of recall and follow up on social media overshadow many serious issues of the day. The ethical use of social media can be a boon towards societal change, no matter how big or small it is. And if one has to question about Irom Chanu Sharmila, one has to do the homework well to know about her first, about her cause, about the pros and cons of AFSPA and last but not the least, one has to distinguish between personal choices, public welfare and personal convictions. This distinction can be a probable alternative in judicious use of social media towards generating public opinions, shaping people's mobilizations and strengthening social movements.

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**Dynamics of Interpretation: Nation Or Tribe, with  
Reference to Bujuur Naga**

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So much has been written about *us*, fourth world nations<sup>1</sup>, yet we are still powerless when it comes to defining and reclaiming ourselves. We are identified with multiple nomenclatures like tribe, indigenous people, aborigines, ethnic group and lots; these identities had been “assigned rather than defined” (Beteille 299), remaining imprinted within us, from which we are unable to decolonise. It was not a matter of conventional concern to us if our identity was assigned, maybe because of our ignorance on the importance of such meanings because of the stereotypical nature of academic knowledge upon which we were exclusively made to learn, accumulate and express. For the Bujuur Naga, it was colonial gratitude for guiding them from darkness to light through introduction of a new religion, modern education and modern ideologies, (the same may be the case with other communities), like Derrida puts in his argument “the Western tradition that controls not only in theory but in practice (in the principle of its practice) the relationship between speech and writing” (30); development of critical thought from inside to challenge the systems of Euro-originated modern education and literature, and the legacies, was slow and inadequate.

The long silence is now slowly opening up after the younger, new generation began to explore beyond the traditional systems of knowledge; that there is a developing of the consciousness with

zeal to re-explore the self. In such attempts to discover (rediscover) the self, it is important to initially explore the existing literature on us, by them (the outsider). The exploration results in two contrasting views, (on the self, and literatures and their authors), firstly, a romantic appreciation of what they wrote about us, or, secondly, a feeling of self disgust on what they wrote about us. This self disgust feeling arises because of the content: illustrated in an interview with Rooney by Gilliam (41-42) "...some of the things she (Margaret Mead) said were outrageously wrong...Most of them (researchers) come to study a preconceived idea of what they want to find out...if what they find does not fit their hypothesis, they "make up" the community...the most annoying thing is that it is documented and read...those prejudices...are very difficult to undo". Attempts were made to re-write ourselves by some of us; however, if there was already the problem of others writing about us, there are also problems associated with what we write about us, some of which, as counter narrative, are more degrading than the previous because of the non-reflection and lack of decolonising perspective that put us into another level of relative self-romantic isolation. Of such controversy, one, which is the subject of discussion for this article, is on 'tribe' and the legacy of tribe. It is still uncertain, in spite of abundant literature from within, if the usage of 'tribe', in the case of North-East India, has taken a paradigm shift from textbook-anthropological-methodological assignment definition, or is there any alternative nomenclature used by us to assert ourselves, socially and politically (for that matter, nation and fourth world nation for our identity is something not new yet critically unexplored in this geographical region).

In this context of assigning tribe to people, which is *us*, of "anthropology's time-machine" (Fabian 39), there is a need for an inside surge to re-conquer identity by defining what, our, identity

is; there is a need to shift from the tribe of contexts, meanings and locations that is still 'stuck in time', there is a need to connect and locate the identity with the contemporary, for that, any alternative nomenclature can be experimented. This argument is made on the rationale that identity, by default, is always politics. This identity, discussed, must not be confused with the primordial legacy inherited from our forefathers (for that matter, every community has its own name by which it identifies), but the structural political identity that determines our location and space in the world. As a political dynamics of power-hegemony system, it is necessary to understand why we continue to be identified in a homogeneous assigned identity 'tribe', rendering us stuck in times of the past, whereas others claim the 'nation' as belonging to them; why is our identity denied coevalness?

For this paper, Bujuur Naga is taken as a case of exploration and comprehending the identity in tribe and nation. Although Naga, as a whole organism, is sometimes acknowledged as nation, in its national movement for independent Naga homeland, its constituents are however stuck in the anthropological identity; Bujuur is one such. Bujuur is unique in the Naga family, firstly because of its small population and secondly, its primordial existence defy the common denominator of 'to be Naga' as hypothesised by colonial anthropologists and affirmed by most contemporary Naga intellectuals. Another factor for Bujuur is the existence of contemporary identity dynamics: to be identified as Bujuur/Bujuur Naga, or to be identified as Moyon/Moyon Naga. The later being an assigned nomenclature that dominates the everyday life, to the point of a larger majority of the people officially identifying, and promoting, themselves as Moyon without questioning the meaning and history, at the same time, considering the nomenclature Bujuur as something archaic, of the past.

The study employs multiple methods and dialectical analysis for information saturation: multi-cited ethnography and in depth discussions including literature analysis and peer discussions, outside the field. The structure employs an autobiographical narrative discourse of coevalness, keeping in mind the Fabian's caution to avoid "temporal distancing between subject and object in Time and Writing About the Other" (71), along with continued engagement being an insider (Bujuur). In the following section, main body, the Bujuur phenomena and experiences with nation and tribe will be presented and discussed, and simultaneously engaging with the theoretical nation and tribe to comprehend the politics associated with Bujuur Nagas's identity and dilemma.

### **BUJUUR NAGA: ISSUES ON BEING A TRIBE**

To initiate a discussion on nation, among the Bujuur Naga, was rather difficult, lacking critical participation as the universe of nation and nationality is assumed, stereotyped, to be the domain of politics and state, Nagalim and Naga movement as such the people's perception of politics is something disinteresting and stoic. However, the basic concepts on politics (*meaning, of, or pertaining to, the polis*) otherwise, is nation. Such unaware settings made it unique and interesting to explore and deduce the psychological awareness of the social knowledge and location of identity. On the other hand, if a discussion is initiated on tribe, there were/are many things to discuss with multiple themes and sub-themes; it is participatory by default, as the people objectively adhere to the idea of being one and the subject which they are acquainted, mainly in the field of social anthropology. Thus, 'why such borderline between nation and tribe' remains a question of concern for quite some time; more so, in this case, ever since the zeal to demystify the myths from anthropology began to take shape.



Exploration of the Bujuur Naga, in the context of tribe can be traced back to personal-emotional interests initially because of academic obligation. The exact time-space field work, for this field, consisted two different phases, 2014-15 (as tribe) and 2015-2017 (as nation). In the initial phase of the study, the focus was on understanding the social and political structure, history and contemporary status as a tribe; the wave of fourth world nation had not started. Even as an insider, the field was new and informative; it was a process of seeking answers to the questions of identity and reality. At first, nothing much critical was comprehended; it was a romantic exploration with pre-conceived anthropological and sociological sets of ideas and methods. The observations made in the initial study includes few interesting themes, which were later used as foundation for critical re-study, the second phase of research, by bringing into the environment different sets of arguments and contestations, problematising the question of identity. Is Bujuur Naga a tribe? Yes it is. For the people, Bujuur, identity and space do not extend beyond the world of Bujuur; the normative assumption and acceptance of being a tribe is without question.

The Bujuur identity was unrecognised in the past and confusing for the contemporary. There is no exact mentioning of Bujuur in the colonial literature, however, a different name was used to identify them: for instance Pemberton used “Mueeyol” (15) or as “...Mueeyol tribes of Nagas” (56), whereas Dun used “Anal” (167). The nomenclature as Mueeyol by Pemberton is believed to be influenced by the Meiteis who identify Bujuur people as ‘Moiyol’; both these Mueeyol and Moiyol are the elements behind the modern nomenclature ‘Moyon’, considered as the contemporary official name by which Bujuur are identified by others. Dun’s assertion of Bujuur as ‘Anal’ was because of his misinformation and lack of

adequate knowledge on the social geography of the area because Anal is an altogether separate community. Dun's note of "Moyong Kulel as Anal village" (ibid) is what "Rooney described as "...if what they find does not fit their hypothesis, they "make up" the community..." Gilliam (ibid). Making up the community for the Bujuur can be understood as assigning them the identity 'Anal' without proper research to fit his colonial record, this assignment is a woe for the Bujuur as the Bujuur is dragged into ethnic and political contestations because of the historical error. The assignment of Mueeyol to Bujuur in the colonial record is also another made up assumption that left a long lasting effect on the people's identity. Not only is the name Bujuur unrecognised and overshadowed; there is confusion within the people over Bujuur and Moyon and lastly, the state apparatus recognised the name Moyon over Bujuur. Thus the people are assigned the new alien name without consent *de jure*.

Over this issue of nomenclature, during a field discussion, a participant said<sup>2</sup>, "*Moyon is our identity, our name. There is nothing wrong in using, and moreover, people identify us with that name, so why resists it?*" On further enquiry over the fate of the inherited identity Bujuur, the reply was, "*Bujuur is in the past. It is how we identify ourselves within ourselves; the government recognise us by the name Moyon, it will take long process to change and we don't have enough resources for that*". Similar narrations were also noted from other participants. Such assertions and acceptance of an assigned identity is of no problem for the common man, who mostly confessed of not knowing the real meanings of Bujuur or Moyon. For them, it is easy to swing to any convenient name as an assigned name is fancy and a sign of being recognised.

The celebration of being mentioned by the colonial writings is well noticed among the young intellectuals who complained that

not enough literature on them are available to study/refer to. However, they did not realise that even the minimal mention created such negative effect on the identity. It is an everyday existential nightmare of being dragged into unnecessary ethnic controversies. For instance, the Kukis claiming Moyon as part of them without consent, because colonial writings assumed Moyon is Anal, Anal is sometimes controversially assumed as a Kuki tribe/clan; apart from this link based on assumption, there is no other written evidence from colonial writings, while most widely cited colonial documents are questionably teleological. This illustration is brought to introduce the concept of identity to the Bujuur, and how they deal with it. For them, the question of identity is a romanticised state of being, a network of the historical cultures and traditions. What they failed to comprehend is the politics of identity and the associated power-dominance game; the dominant always exerting the hegemony through unconscious consent from the dominated.

This colonial constructs of identity has somewhat highlighted the nature of contemporary confusion and cold conflict of ideologies, especially in this period of decolonisation, neo-colonisation, nation affiliation, nationalism and resistance.

Furthering from the self ontology of Bujuur, the discussion moves further to the state of macro existence and interpretation. If Bujuur-Moyon confusion is an issue, another issue, which is as controversial, is the assignment of Bujuur to the world of tribe. If tribe had only meant the classical classification (rooted from Latin word *tribus*), the confusion and contestation would not have been detrimental. However, that was not the case as the meaning has taken a paradigm shift from its original. Tribe is not defined, but assigned a meaning, a meaning that comes from prejudice and assertion of domination. Pambazuka News Editors argue that “in the modern West, tribe often implies primitive savagery”. Otherwise

conventionally, tribe refers to those people who live an autonomous self sufficient life for many generations (through kinship ties) maintaining distinct unique ways of life different from mainstream society, the *other*.

To a Bujuur, tribe is uncontested identity. It means people, like in the daily usage, 'he/she belongs to this tribe'. However, this usage is limited and meant for certain groups of people, the groups that were/are classified as tribe by anthropologists, sociologists and state-institutions. This usage of the term *tribe* does not extend to the others, the people who are assumed to be more civilised and developed; thus, even in the colloquial usage, tribe denotes 'us' who are kind of primitive collection of people and 'them' who are advanced.

When a Bujuur is put up with an epistemological question, "how do you know that you are a tribe?", the reactions are rather surprising. One respondent said, "*We are tribe, and will always be tribe*". Another notes, "*If we are not a tribe, what are we then? Scheduled Caste? General?*"<sup>3</sup> Many confessed of not being aware of how they began identifying as tribe. These assertions can be put as the result of acculturation to dominant sets of knowledge, western education, and the imprint from sets of terms and terminologies to which they were exposed; for instance, using 'colgate' to mean toothpaste. The everyday use of the term *tribe* is so well accepted and normalised, it is hard to comprehend the objective meanings as assigned by *them* and subjective meaning as assumed by *us*. On the belief that 'we are always tribe', it is detrimental for the Bujuur to accept or take for the granted such terms without question.

The characteristics of tribe, even in textbooks and everyday usage, are filled with primitive stereotypes and prejudices; yet, it is

not clear why we never give a thought to such demeaning state of being assigned to *us*. Being a tribe was not a problem, it comes with excuses that the definitions and characteristics of tribe are of archaic past, our history, and, moreover, people that are considered as tribe across the world are still in primitive state as its existence and usage are not problematic. Who is primitive and who is advanced is subjective: *they* considered *us* primitive so, they assigned *us* tribe, whereas, *we* consider *us* as advanced. We still are attached to the nomenclature meant for primitives.

Regarding the Bujuur's tribe being a Scheduled Tribe which is thought to be the unchanging objective identity by many, a quick view on the characteristics to be qualified as one gives a contradictory state of identity. The criteria to be a Scheduled Tribe in India are historical background of backwardness, primitiveness, geographical isolation, shyness and social, educational and economic backwardness ("National Commission for Scheduled Tribes"). Such criteria are unheard of to the people upon whom the nomenclature is imposed, becoming default identity without question. To be critical, the state of being a scheduled tribe is institutional, *de jure*, for State's purpose which cannot be taken as an identity. On the Bujuur's dilemma 'if not tribal then what else' stems from the unconscious assumption that the state's social categories are the absolute identity. In India, social identity is so much embedded in state categories, there is no thinking beyond the state's imposed nomenclature for policy purpose. Are state policies stereotyping identities of its people?

Classical anthropologists' obsession with the past, as though to find answers of human evolution from the habits of people different from them, had put the different societies into different categories. The same is copied by the state. Of course, the people considered as tribe (in India) in the anthropological domain, and scheduled

tribe in the state-policy domain, are the same. That is why the social/political attitudes have not yet evolved to a state of contemporary acknowledgement, of social equality. For a less aware person, like the everyday Bujuur, it may be acceptable and normal to be identified by fancy homogeneous nomenclature, *tribe*, but should that be considered tautological? The assumption, from outside, that these are the people who have not evolved since time immemorial, represent people from the past, that they need to be protected, that they don't want to be contacted or changed. These are the everyday assignments hindering the further evolution of knowledge. In fact, this conditional and default state of existence and nomenclature also limits the universe of a student or researcher from this community. For example, it is expected, by default, for a person considered a tribal to be interested in doing a study/research in tribal culture or to write about tribes and the like. He is not expected to question the 'tribe', as that which can be misinterpreted as questioning the identity, as one respondent in the field put, "*So, you consider yourself a General?*"

Thus, if the assignment of tribe to Bujuur Naga is problematic in identification and coevalness of existence, is there any alternative identity that can replace the rationale in bringing and exploring another identity domain, *Nation* id discussed in the following section. Bujuur's engagement with nation is unconscious. Its usage as identity is parallel to tribe, which puts the subject in interesting spatial debate.

### **THE NATION QUESTION: ALTERNATIVE IDENTITY**

The idea of nation is colloquially associated, rather misunderstood as, with state; thus, its relationship and role in defining 'people' is limited in general; explained as methodological nationalism which "equates society with nation-state" (Schiller and

Wimmer 576). Bruce (2012) also states that the term nation is incorrectly used in most political rhetoric to identity an international state, whereas nation, in actual sense, is “a community of self-identifying people of common culture and historically common territory” (Nietschmann 220); in brief, nation is the domain of community/people. This commonality is “imagined, inherently limited and sovereign” as put by Anderson (8). The sovereign can be described as political nature of the imagined that made the people to imagine themselves as belonging to the same group, whether artificially or as inherited from primordial past. Does this qualify ‘tribe’ to be understood as nation? Not so, since there is political ontological elements in tribe and nation that made the two different and contrasting, yet related in a different way.

I had heard, since childhood, of these terms ‘Bujuur National Anthem’ and ‘Bujuur National Shawl’; the term national was alien to comprehend at that period, because of limited knowledge and lack of awareness of the politics of usage. However, the scholastic influence of the fourth world nation literatures change the perspective of the normative usage of the term ‘nation’ by the Bujuur, and seen as a contradicting to the Sproclaim identity ‘tribe’ which is consented by the people. One time, a prominent Bujuur leader, during interview<sup>4</sup>, was asked if he has any idea of the significance of the term ‘National’ in the ‘Bujuur National Anthem/Shawl’, and the rationale behind the usage: the reply, “*I have no idea, and we have never given a thought on that matter*”; another question put up was, “Why not call it Bujuur Tribal Anthem/Shawl”, based on the tribal identity affirmed by the people, which made the respondent confused and helpless. The observation: There is inadequate conceptual understanding on nation, tribe, differences between nation and tribe including their significant contextual usage, which affects the words (spoken and written), in Aristotelian

perspectives, “which are symbols of mental experience” (Derrida 30). Where to locate the process to demystify the myths of imposed identity and the politics is a concern in the case of the Bujuur Naga.

With inadequate information in the narrations of the people, whose interpretation of nation is associated with nation-state, it was necessary to deconstruct from observations (the language and social-psychology) and theoretical concepts.

To begin comprehending the politics of identity, the problem of nomenclature assigning is firstly highlighted. Nation, as already mentioned, is associated with state, such that the association is limited, excluding the majority of nations existing in the world. There are two categories of people and identity: Nation (as state identity) and others. The others are known by various terms: tribes, ethnic groups, aborigines, natives, primitives, minorities, and indigenous peoples, and lots more. The usage of these terms are problematic, as these terms are rather designed and assigned as a form of political hegemony to exercise control (the existence) over the others, the fourth world nations for the matter. Fourth world nation, in simple words, means “nation that are internationally unrecognised” (Griggs and Hocknell 49), “there are between 6000-8000 nations within 191 recognised states”, which contradicts the nation concept from methodological point of view that will argue that 191 states means 191 nation.

Assignment of nomenclature to the fourth world nation, Bujuur Naga for this paper, is problematic as the terms are inconclusive, failing to accommodate the people’s consent and denying the political coevalness, as if to assert that nation is exclusive for state, the domain of modernity and civilisation, while the *others* are too primitive to be one. Ethnicity, used as assertion to connote the other nation, is with limited space of definition concentrating only



in “common ancestry, minority membership, while ignoring the legitimacy of territory” argued Griggs and Hocknell (53), as though the people are without territory, and territory is in the domain of state. “Minority is poorly defined, categories like indigenous, tribal and aborigines limits the association of nationalism historically and geographically, while culture as used for such the entity is too broad and inconclusive” stated Griggs (3). Here, it should be noted that nationalism is misunderstood to be the process exclusive of nation-state evolution, development and formation, thus, discussing about nationalism to a Bujuur only leads to subject of discussion on the Naga nation state, Nagalim.

Bujuur Naga, when viewed and defined as a nation, remains a controversy, within and outside. From the inside, it is an insecurity of its space and location in the Naga family, it is contestation to the general definition as being a tribe of Naga. The reactions<sup>5</sup> from the people being, “*We are too small for to be identified as nation, tribe is appropriate for us*”, as though succumbing to the Nagalim political hegemony and concluding a population denominator to define a nation. The wary of being identified as nation, can be understood, because of the Naga National Movements, placing the idea of nation solely on the organic social evolution, and unaware that nation is not a homogeneous structure, in its totality. Theoretically speaking, Bujuur qualified as a nation, even in the domain of Naga nation, using the “imagined” of Anderson (6) and heterogeneity, “A Nation of Strangers”<sup>6</sup>, of Packard. Thus, Bujuurs space as a nation in Naga nation can be describe as a system of multiple nations within nation (Naga); these multiple nations inherently identify on the sole imagined political basis of an integrated nation-state Nagalim: that does not, at the same time, should be understood to dismantle the constituent identities ‘nation/nations’.

Coming back to the usage of 'National' by Bujuur; it is still unclear why the term was used, for practical sense; although theoretically speaking, the usage was appropriate as Bujuur is a nation, and the usage of *National Anthem* and *National Shawl*, unconsciously, connoted and asserts the nation identity of the people. However, the exact nature of Bujuur being nation remains challenging for the people, partly because of lack of awareness, conceptual limitations and the existence of default identity 'tribe' that has been accepted for long, such that the narrations were conditioned and powerless for discourse paradigm in identity.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

Linda Smith writes, "They Came, They Saw, They Named, They Claimed" (80), describing the representation of Maori as blood thirsty savages by the Europeans and Gord Hill also argues, "There was no "Discovery"-it was an American Indian Holocaust" (6). There two statements summed up the contemporary, rising, reactions against the colonial era atrocities (identity, physical and social), the legacy which still continues to the present day generation, of the fourth world. The attempt from the fourth world nations to claim the political space, and thus their ontological coevalness, is in nascent stage, and many times faced with hurdles over the existing inherited identity and constructions. Most of the time, reclaiming the identity and space, in the form of nation assertion, is heavily challenged both from outside and inside: the inside in its romantification of the assigned space, and the outside for its political oppression and exclusivity.

In locating the identity and space of Bujuur, whether to be a tribe or nation, becomes a confusing hurdle when the state apparatus framework (India and Nagalim) is restricting the political 'Right of self determination' on identity. For the time being, Bujuur Naga

continues to identify as tribe, in spite of all the existential controversies, because of the methodological and default conditioning, rendering the understanding, interpretation and location of identity restricted, limited and stereotyped to *primitivity*. The legacy of tribe should be challenged especially from the inside. Canada already recognised the First Nations, which is because of the stiff reclaiming and assertion of political contemporaneity by the people; can this be the case of Bujuur Naga, and *others*? The space of nation also needs to be re-looked, as a means of political assertion, decolonisation and self determination of identity: we should define ourselves, reclaiming our political space of identity; to distance our being and our self from the legacies of assigned identity.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The term coming into common usage for such submerged nations is 'Fourth World nations'. 'Nation' refers to a self-identifying people with claims to a common cultural homeland while 'Fourth World' refers to the lack of international recognition (Griggs and Hocknell 49).

<sup>2</sup> Field Discussion dated: October 30, 2015

<sup>3</sup> Field Discussion Dated: October 20, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Dated: June 10, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Default discussion

<sup>6</sup> Title of book, published 1972.

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**Something Rich and Strange:  
Exploring Food and Identity in the Diaspora**

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Sonia Mycak in her essay “The Role of Networks in Australian Multicultural Literature: Post-war ‘New Australian’ as an Empirical Case Study” talks about the importance of network for the migrant literary community. Through wide ranging studies and fieldworks involving extensive interviews with migrant writers she concludes that most first generation migrant writers are excluded from the “mainstream Australian” literary tradition. These migrant writers form their own networks through which support is garnered. They do not rely on Australian government for funds. Their readership is limited to their own community and they normally work on themes that cater to selected audiences. Most first-generation migrant writers feel that their work may not be read by the “Australians” anyway. Publishing their work within the “mainstream” literary culture is problematic due to lack of proper acknowledgement and connections. Migrant writers are still sidelined and discriminated against. Therefore, networking within the migrant community is important as it provides vibrant counter literature that is integral to the understanding of Australian multiculturalism.

Majority of the early migrants were male workers. Women migrants were usually housewives who accompanied their husbands. Living conditions for the migrant women were harsh due to lack of

basic amenities. Many women resorted to squatting at their husband's workplace (Lange, 203). As majority of the early migrants were from the economically deprived sections of the community, the women were usually uneducated. Moreover, they did not speak the local language. This inability to communicate in English made them more handicapped and helpless. Inability to communicate silenced the migrant women; they were deprived of the voice to fight for their rights. With the Migration Act which was passed in 1958, the Australian government implemented schemes to uplift these women. However, poverty and domesticity does not allow the women to move away from household duties. Also they were restricted by their husbands, who frowned upon the idea of sending their wives to schools. Citizenship for migrant women was problematic as they were subjugated on gender, language and ethnic lines. Long after white women attained citizenship and political importance as "mothers" of the nations; the roles of migrant women was not acknowledged.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of Yasmine Gooneratne lies in how she has positioned herself as a Sri Lankan in Australia. Most important is her stance as a migrant woman writer in Australia. Gooneratne's migration to Australia in the year 1972 to pursue a teaching job is fundamental to understand her works. She had migrated to Australia at a time when the White Australia Policy had just been dismantled. Change in political policy with regards to migrants was implemented. The newly implemented egalitarian multiculturalism endorsed equality and ethnic rights; it did not demand Anglo conformities. These changes in policies are reflected in her novels. They portrayed the migrant's perspective on the rapidly evolving concept of multiculturalism in Australia.

Dorothy Bramston talks about Gooneratne's stance as a migrant woman writer, who caters to the sentiments of the migrants.

She is the “voice of the subaltern” migrant in Australia. Yet, her position at the university has elevated her to the position of “honorary Whites”. Her novels are part of popular “mainstream Australian literature”. Sonia Mycak described mainstream Australian literature as “publishing outside the ethnic community”.<sup>2</sup> Gooneratne unlike majority of first generation migrant writers, does not confine her works to her ethnic community. Her works reflect a conscious attempt to move away from communalism and jingoism.

Her novels written in the early 90s reflects the change in Australian multiculturalism from its implementation during the Whitlam era (1972-75) to its evolution towards managerial multiculturalism (II) of the Hawke-Keating era. The Hawke-Keating era’s concept of multiculturalism recognizes the economic viability of multiculturalism. It works on the concept of “Citizenship and Inclusionary Pluralism”.<sup>3</sup> Gooneratne’s stance on Australian multiculturalism draws deeply from her everyday experiences. She is in a position where she can observe and witness it objectively. Gooneratne subtly criticize Australia as an Anglo-fragment society when she talks about the power of a Cambridge degree to fit into Australian literary circles. She is one of the privileged few who meet the criteria demanded by the Anglo-fragment Australian society. Yet she chose to speak for the less privileged people who are not “honorary Whites”. Her position as a globally acclaimed writer enables her to highlight the plight of the “Other”. The importance of Gooneratne as a writer lies in her conscious refusal of race or caste as a strategy for relegating migrants to a permanently inferior position.

If I were to ask myself whether there has been some single  
idea I (must have)  
wanted to convey to an audience through these different  
works, I would say



it is a belief in the worth of human beings as individuals,  
irrespective of all  
attempts to stereotype or categorize them in terms of class,  
race, caste,  
color, intellectual ability, gender, or religious belief<sup>f</sup>.

The central concern in most diasporic novels and writings focus on the concept of home and identity, “the seven elements, which are used to recognize the consciousness, diasporic consciousness: memory, return, strangeness, desire to integrate, transience, desire for permanence, a sense of belonging and embedding.”<sup>5</sup> Gooneratne’s novels show the working of diasporic consciousness at different levels. Change is the underlying theme that is central to her works. She talks about the concept of ‘racial purity’ and juxtaposes it with the concept of multiculturalism. She deconstructs the stereotypical image of Third-World immigrant women within the concepts of multiculturalism and nationalism. Gooneratne deconstructs the power structures that create subjects and objects; the power structures that works to locate an individual in a particular position (Brah, 445). The location of power is not fixed and rigid; it is an ever shifting binary and power structure. Hence, the portrayal of immigrants and women as forever fixed in a position of inferiority is challenged and debunked in her works. The shifting power structures are studied by a subjective interpretation of the lived realities of the characters in her novels.

Yasmine Gooneratne’s *A Change of Skies* is a beautiful story of migration, change and assimilation. The story revolves around Bharat and Navaranjini’s migration to Australia, due to Bharat’s appointment as professor of linguistics at the University of Southern Cross. Gooneratne’s story unfolds in the face of a rapidly multicultural Australia. The story works on and tests the limitations of a multicultural society. She present Australian Multiculturalism

from the perspective of an educated female protagonist, which is a sharp shift from the stance of most diasporic writers. Third World migrant women are usually portrayed as uneducated and mute spectators to the demands of patriarchy. The novel focuses on Navaranjini's process of assimilation in Australia. The novel is a living picture which exposes the problems faced by migrant women; the hypocrisy, ignorance and jingoism that permeate both the migrants and the hosts. Gooneratne emphasizes on the importance of change and assimilation in the face of a rapidly globalized world. Avtah Brah states that "...the identity of the imagined diasporic community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively".<sup>6</sup>

Navaranjini's (Jean) strength lies in clarity of vision and the ability to absorb the wisdom of her traditions and culture. She discerns its strengths and weaknesses and skillfully moulds it to suit her purpose. Hindu traditions and culture become a stepping stone in her evolution toward becoming a global citizen. Unlike most women characters in diasporic novels, her ability to change and assimilate stems from a strong rootedness in Hindu culture and religion. In *A Change of Skies* Navaranjini learns the local jargon in Australia by listening to the radio. Her knowledge of the local jargons empowers her; she humiliated Professor Blackstone for his racist comments, "I gave him the withering look Rukmani Devi gives the villain in that marvelous film Broken Promise 'You are a yahoo and a wrinkly, Professor Blackstone,' I said, 'a shithead and a stinker'" (*A Change of Skies*, 128). Gooneratne debunks stereotypes by showing that difference does not necessarily threaten a migrant's identity, but instead affirms one's sense of self in a foreign country.

Gooneratne shows that prejudice and stereotyping is a universal phenomena. *A Change of Skies* shows how both the West and the Asians are guilty of racism. There is a constant shift of subject and object positions. The Orient is not forever fixed in the position of an object. Navaranjini's amazement at the ways of the Australians, "when we first came to Australia, I saw every Australian, especially the men , as red-faced and yellow-haired. Or else white-faced and brown-haired..."( *A Change of Skies*,126); their food habits and dress sense and the Koyakos' revulsion to all things Australian shows that both the hosts and migrants society are guilty of racism. The Koyakos' fear of foreign cultures is echoed in the racist propaganda of Professor Ron Blackstone, where all Asians are "slit-eyed, pork eating ching-chongs" (*A Change of Skies*, 128).

Food and dietary habits constitutes an important part of a migrant life. Migrants leave home sacrificing customs, traditions and familiar social set-ups. They settle in foreign countries where their lifestyles and cultures are considerably altered. Assimilation involves change of lifestyles and movements away from traditional structures. Even though everything in the public sphere changes, food habits remain the prerogative of the migrants. Food is something a migrant hold on to as a fond reminder of home.

Traditional women's role as nurturer and home maker confines food within the realm of women. Traditionally the kitchen remains the women's territory. It is a space for female bonding. Cooking is the medium through which knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next. Gooneratne debunks the myth of all Third-World women's "domestication" within the kitchen space by portraying a female protagonist, Navaranjini, who lack cooking skills. However, her migration to Australia teaches her to appreciate the art of cooking. It is through cooking that she discovers her true

passion. The Sri Lankan migrants in Australia bond over food. She finds herself drawn into the female circle of cooking and exchanging recipes. Initially, like all migrants, she follows strict Sri Lankan dietary traditions under the guidance of the conservative Mrs.Koyako. She relies on Mr.Silva for supplies of Sri Lankan vegetables and spices.

However, this signifies a movement within a confined circle and the fear of change. The Sri Lankan migrants' strict dietary tradition is a satire on jingoism. Sharing of food implies connection at the primal level and celebration of differences. The act of sharing food shows that the seed of positive multiculturalism needs to be nurtured in the private sphere. Navaranjini's recipe changes as she becomes more assimilated into the multicultural Australian society. The change in her recipe is a reflection of her growing integration into the new country. Australia's metamorphosis from a predominantly Anglo-centric steak, pies and peas country to a multicultural country, that serves different kind of food, is reflected prominently in the change in dietary habits.

Navaranjini's fame as a chef in Australia reflects her graceful assimilation. She debunks stereotypes when she wrote ***Something Rich and Strange***. "A wholesome synthesis of East and West, that's what ***Something Rich and Strange*** is all about." (*A Change of Skies*, 293) Gooneratne shows that cooking and working in the kitchen does not necessarily imply migrant women's subjugation and domesticity. Navaranjini carves a niche for herself as a chef and as an author of a book; she beautifully merged the private and public sphere. Cooking enables her to subvert traditional gender roles; she inverts the traditional role of man and woman by becoming the bread-winner of the family. Food becomes a medium through which she connects harmoniously with the world.

*An example of Jean Mundy's distinctive approach to Australian cuisine is her scrumptious **Lemon-Coconut Surprise** (see recipe below), which combines the cream of Sri Lankan coconuts with the tangy tartness of luscious Aussie citrus.*

Gooneratne however stresses that migration is not always voluntary. Her works encompass vast scenarios and various types of migrations. In *The Pleasures of Conquests* she talks about the concept of “going troppo”, a term for Westerners who have adopted the cultures and lifestyles of the East. Meanwhile in *A Change of Skies* she gives a brief but interesting insight into the life of the Vietnamese boat people, the indentured laborers of the colonial era, the displacement of the Aborigines, the dilapidated conditions of the migrant workers in the Gulf, the political asylum seekers and the privileged migrants in Australia.

Gooneratne as a diasporic writer also questions the role of Sri Lankan diaspora. She is scathing in her portrayal of the snobbish and self-centered expatriates, whose myopic vision does not stretch beyond their luxurious hotel rooms. She is satirical in these expatriates longing for “home”; the concept of “home” is romanticized just to suit their sentiments. The “home” they longs for is a fictitious place, far removed from the real Sri Lanka. Gooneratne is careful to highlight the difference between these sorts of migrants and the poor, displaced workers who are forced to leave for survival.

The importance of Gooneratne's work is heightened in the wake of the problems in Sri Lanka and the spate of racist attack in Australia. The contemporary problems are culmination of the anxieties reflected in her works. The racist attacks in Australia shows the lived reality of the common people. It debunks the myth

of Australia's multicultural utopia, which is just another political propaganda that is still far removed from reality. Also in the Sri Lankan context, the supposedly victory over the "revolutionary" Tamils opens up greater problems and challenges. The issue of rehabilitation and multiculturalism looms visibly. It shows the urgent need for positive acceptance of difference and change; the change that Gooneratne desperately hopes for Sri Lanka.

**END NOTES:**

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<sup>2</sup> Sonia Mycak, "The role of networks in Australian multicultural literature: post-war 'New Australians' as an empirical case study." *Empirical Study of Literature*, Special Issue of *Sun Yat-sen Journal of Humanities*. ed. Steven Totosy de Zepetnek. No.17, Winter 2003. 19-30

<sup>3</sup> Laksiri Jayasuriya, "Australian Multiculturalism-Past, Present and Future". Discipline of Social Work and Social Policy, School of Social and Cultural Studies, University of Western Australia, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Yasmine Gooneratne, <http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Gooneratne.html> 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Kapil Kapoor, "Keynote Address. Theorizing Diaspora and The Indian Experience", and *Theorizing Critiquing Indian Diaspora*, eds. Kavita A. Sharma, Adesh Pal and Tapas Chakrabarti (New Delhi: Creative Books, 2004) 39.

<sup>6</sup> Avtah Brah, “Thinking Through The Concept of Diaspora”, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006) 444

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## **Re-Imagining Traditional Values: Sex, Sexuality and The Youth Culture of India**

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In a country where *The Kamasutra* originated and where nude women and obscene sexual positions carved on temples are considered art, it is strangely ironic that sex is considered and treated as a subject which is taboo. In fact, every culture and society in India seems to have advocated a certain censorship towards sex and sexuality. Yet, India is the second most populous country in the world. The repression and censorship of sex and sexuality, therefore, doesn't seem to do much in terms of abstinence from the actual act.

India is a country which is predominantly patriarchal with a very strict and an orthodox view towards sex and sexuality. The subject of sex or sexuality is hardly vocalized especially within the family network; however, the country's mainstream movies (which are the most loved past time activity for families) are filled with songs containing crude lyrics and suggestive dance moves performed by scantily clad females. In 2015, The National Crime Record Bureau stated that there were 34,000 cases of rape, 4,437 attempts to commit rape and a total of 1,30,195 sexual offences reported; these figures are a clear indicator of how sex starved the Indian society is.

Indian youths, motivated by youths of the western countries and aggravated by the authoritarian, orthodox and homophobic views of an unforgiving society, are becoming more and more open

towards sex and sexuality. The MTV generation and the *millenials* are gradually subverting the traditional narrow view upheld by a sexually repressive culture, and their plight is represented in various platforms all over the country.

This paper is not an attempt to promote or defend sex and sexuality or sexual desires inherent within a person or a society, but an attempt to re-imagine the traditional values upheld by the Indian society towards sex and sexuality through an in depth study of three novels namely *The Inscrutable American* by Anurag Mathur, *Second Thoughts* by Shobhaa Dé and *One Night @ the Call Centre* by Chetan Bhagat. This article will also delve into the influence of popular culture, such as the Indian youth culture of the 1990s, on mainstream culture.

### **Ancient Indian History**

Studies in Ancient Indian History suggest that sex was not an issue kept in the dark, nor was it reserved only for married couples. It was not a subject marred with indifference or abject negligence. Kaustav Chakraborty and Rajarshi Guha Thakurata in their paper “Indian concepts on sexuality” stated that “India played a significant role in the history of sex, from writing the first literature that treated sexual intercourse as a science...” and then pioneering “...the use of sexual education through art and literature” (1). Women could satisfy her sexual needs without condemnation. Writing on this subject Rita Banerjee in her article “The Pink Panties Campaign: The Indian Women’s Sexual Revolution” wrote that, “...in the first millennium B.C.E. women in the ancient Vedic texts were regarded as vixens, sexually promiscuous and opportunistic, who not only swindled men of their precious semen but through their menstrual blood inflicted pain, torture and even death on men, then the first millennium C.E. provided a radically different vision of women’s

sexuality and sexual freedom. Not only do the texts from this period declare that women had the same rights and freedom to enjoy sex as men did, but that they too could indulge in it for pure pleasure and not simply for reproduction” (3). Meanwhile, Rohit K Dasgupta in his paper “**Queer Sexuality: A Cultural Narrative of India’s Historical Archive**” mentioned that, “sexual practices...do not necessarily head towards procreation but rather pleasure” (654). It is, therefore, apparent that the treatment of sex in ancient India was very different and that sex wasn’t conflicting with the traditional cultural value system. The freedom to enjoy sexual acts wasn’t confined to one gender of the community alone. Dr. S. R. Sarode found out that during the Puranic period *The Mahabharata* recorded the social status of prostitutes as playing “...no insignificant part in town culture...” and that “...the institution of prostitution was taken for granted in this period”. She continued to say that, “Prostitutes could entice men of virtue, accompanied armies on the march” and that they even, “...served the king” (74). The existence of the *Kamasutra* is another important evidence that sex was calmly integrated within the fabric of the society in ancient India. However, the *Kamasutra* is not a sex manual in its entirety, only a portion of the book consists of practical advice on sexual intercourse. Polygyny and polyandry was practiced in ancient India mostly by rulers and ruling classes. Evidences of queer sexuality can also be found in Ancient India. Rohit K. Dasgupta explored this territory in his paper “Queer Sexuality: A Cultural Narrative of India’s Historical Archive” and mentioned that cases of homosexual relationships were found in many historical texts such as the *Mahabharata*, Somadatta’s *Kathasaritsagara* and *Kritivasa Ramayana*. On the Bhakti movement of the medieval period, Dasgupta wrote that the Bhakti movement “...opened up new possibilities of reframing and discarding orthodox rigidity...” (654) and he goes on to say that “Hinduism is content to

allow opposites to confront each other without resolution which provides a space for non-normative sexualities and same sex desires to exist” (656). Dasgupta continued tracing the Perso-Arabic tradition and Sufism and found traces of queer sexuality everywhere.

The colonial period brought in a drastic change in the way sex and sexuality was observed and valued in India. The British introduced the British Anti sodomy law in India as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (Dasgupta 660) which outlawed all homosexual or queer act in the country. Kaustav Chakroborty and Rajarshi Guha Thakurata wrote, “Victorian values stigmatized Indian sexual liberalism. The pluralism of Hinduism and its liberal attitudes were condemned as “barbaric” and proof of inferiority of the East.” (2)

Religion was also responsible for the change in mentality towards sex and sexuality in the country as religion has always maintained that sexual acts should be reserved for life after marriage. Mahajan et al. clearly illustrated the influence of many religions such as Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Parsi and Sikhism who have all contributed towards the repression of sex and sexuality within the country by condemning pre-marital sex, homosexuality, pornography and promoting sex as an act purely for procreation.

### **Repression and Censorship:**

Though India has the second largest population in the world and though many different cultures and traditions exist in it, interestingly one basic value remains almost the same throughout the whole country and that is towards sex. Traditional and cultural values are what most Indians feel rich about. Values such as respecting elders by touching their feet, greeting each other with Namaste and being kind and hospitable to guests are wonderful examples of the rich traditional values upheld within the country. Sexual values are but a non entity. Indian families do not talk about

sex in general. Children are afraid to mention their curiosity or even ask questions regarding sex and sexuality to their parents and parents feel it is a subject which shouldn't be discussed within the sanctimony of the home. It is a subject which is just not talked about. It has been taught and passed on to posterity and has been maintained that sex should be an act between married couples only and that homosexuality is a sin, and most cultures in India (if not all) have maintained this value. India evolved into what Michel Foucault stated regarding the sexual state of affairs during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe. Foucault wrote, "Educators and doctors combated children's onanism like an epidemic that needed to be eradicated" (42) and "...the homosexual was now a species" (43). The Central Board of Film Certification has been denying the screening of international films such as *The Danish Girl* and *Ka Bodyscapes*, because, "...it apparently glorified homosexual relationships and contained vulgarity..." (Govindarajan, *Sex and Sensibility*). Harold D Lasswell wrote, "Every censorship produces a technique of evasion..." (294); this particular statement is proven true by Bollywood with its songs heavily accentuated with sexual connotations; item songs such as "Baby Doll" from the movie *Ragini MMS 2* and "Sheila ki Jawani" from *Tees Maar Khan* are two of the best examples. This obscenity and vulgarity, however, is consumed sumptuously by the sex hungry public. "Baby Doll" has been viewed 125 million times and "Sheila Ki Jawani" 90 million times in YouTube. Gramsci's theory of 'hegemony' applies directly to the censorship of sex and sexuality in India, where the subordinate group are represented by the youths of the country.

In *Second Thoughts* when little Maya questioned her parents why they were not sharing a bed, her parents simply shrugged her off without giving her a definite answer. Maya encountered this awkward situation again after getting married to Ranjan. When

Maya wanted to know if Ranjan had slept with anyone before her, Ranjan skillfully deviated from the question. Maya's parents' and her husband's inability to openly discuss issues concerning sex clearly illustrates the Indian psyche towards it.

Gopal, the protagonist of Anurag Mathur's *The Inscrutable Americans* feels he is keeping the 'nation's flag flying' by remaining a virgin and by abstaining from sex. In his first letter to his younger brother Gopal wrote that he was, "...strictly avoiding American women..." (9) and later in a conversation with Sunil he again said, "I am promising everyone that I am not meeting girls..." (23). Gopal's claim to abstain from sex and his attempts to portray himself as an asexual is, however, betrayed by his confession of having read the *Penthouse Letters* and also his experience of watching *Deep Throat*. The contents of which are both nothing else but solely sexual.

The effects of censorship on sex and sexuality can be seen in the condition of women in India which is beyond pathetic. The figure released by the National Crime Record Bureau of a total of 1,30,195 sexual offences reported in 2015 is nothing but appalling. Though the Indian constitution boast of many laws preserving the rights of women, Indian women are subjugated, ill treated, abused, assaulted, raped and denied of their basic rights. Christopher Ryan the co-author of *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality* writes, "...if expression of sexuality is thwarted, the human psyche tends to grow twisted into grotesque, enraged perversions of desire" (*Sexual Repression*). Ian Buruma's writing about the motivational factors attributed to suicide bombers wrote, "Sexual deprivation may be a factor in the current wave of suicidal violence..." (*Can Sexual*). Both Christopher Ryan and Ian Buruma, therefore, are of the opinion that sexual deprivation can

have a debilitating effect on the human behavioral system and psyche.

### **Youth Culture and Sex:**

The youth culture of India, however, has been discreetly obsessed with sex and sexuality and many are now coming forward with their sexual fantasies and desires and even their orientation. Youths of the country are pushing the envelope towards the sacred boundary. In 2008 the first gay parade was organized in the capital which serves as a testament or an act to subvert the long held traditional apprehension towards the subject.

Maya the protagonist in *Second Thoughts* is set against this Indian background by Shobaa De. Yet, in spite of all the odds stacked against her Maya decided to be strong and relentless and didn't want to curb her natural instincts towards sex. In chapter 22 of *Second Thoughts*, Maya admitted to herself that she was "...happy enough with physical demonstration of affection" and that she enjoyed "being held, stroked, kissed" (Dé 358). Again in chapter 23 Maya described her immediate state after having sex with Nikhil as her "...newly awakened state" and being married to Ranjan required her to "...die again. To go back to being a corpse" (Dé 388). Maya is a representation of women's fights for justice on many fronts but most of all she represents the young emerging Indian culture. When told she'd be required to drop her wish to work she boldly responded, "How could they tell me not to work after marriage? Do any educated, trained girls stay at home these days?" (Dé18). This outburst reflects the youth culture's defiance and resistance to old systems, old values and beliefs. And when confined to a space where she couldn't be herself, Maya felt she needed and wanted to be, "...free and alive and reckless and mad" (Dé 105). The carefree and reckless attitude, the open and

unreserved view towards sex which is displayed and portrayed flamboyantly by Maya speaks loudly in the hearts of many youths across the country.

Priyanka, Esha and Radhika are also displayed by Chetan Bhagat as females who aren't afraid to show their feelings and emotions especially towards sex and their personal choices towards it. *One Night at the Call Center* intrepidly mentioned the pre-marital sex between Shyam and Priyanka (in the back of a car) and even gave details as to how Priyanka was the one who suggested and initiated the whole ordeal. Indian women are often objectified and personified as someone who is pure, soft, obedient and timid. However, Priyanka breaks all this personification by emerging as a strong, bold and unrestrained figure. The novel also focuses on the youth culture of India which is deeply submerged in the competitive world of corporate jobs. Apart from Military Uncle all characters in *One Night at the Call Center* represent the youth culture of India. Shyam, Priyanka, Vroom, Esha and Radhika each have different problems to which many youths in India relate to. Esha and her ambition to become a model resonates with many youths across the country who have similar aspirations but whose dreams have been crushed by assertive parents who always opted for their daughters to become either a doctor, an engineer or an IAS officer. Her decision to leave her parents and pursue her career is but a simple illustration of the youth culture of India; youths who are not afraid to follow their dreams, who are not intimidated by their parents' wish, who are ready to fight for their belief and mostly who have opted to stand on their own. Over protective parents driven by their orthodox views and traditional values often prevents youths to discover and formulate their own plans. Indira Kapoor director of the International Planned Parenthood Federation at the South Asian Regional Bureau even suggests that, "More knowledge



and sympathy are needed to help young people improve their self-confidence and understanding of their bodies and feelings” (qtd in Puri 605). In a 2016 survey held by *India Today*, one of the top news magazines of the country, 75% of the total respondents feel that sex is important to maintain a relationship and one fourth of India’s youth have been in a relationship for more than four years and are still unmarried. When asked who an ideal sexual partner is, 41% answered, one who controls the act. This survey clearly brings to light the curiosity and awareness of Indian Youths towards sex and sexuality.

Anurag Mathur’s novel *The Inscrutable Americans* is also about a young Indian who has travelled abroad to study. The whole novel circles around Gopal and his quest for love and identity in a foreign land. The protagonist Gopal though committed to remain true to his cultural values succumbed eventually on his way back to India and had sex with a married woman on a plane, shattering all the teachings of his custom and tradition bestowed upon him ceremoniously by his parents.

The three novels selected have all dealt with the issue of sex. Shobaa De while waltzing on the premise of women empowerment intricately weaved into the character of Maya the curiosity and dilemma many Indian women faced while thinking about sex and how important a role it has played in their lives. Anurag Mathur skillfully weighs the pressures faced by an Indian student and the desire to perform well in education with sexual desires and longings and Chetan Bhagat blatantly illustrates how young Indians have changed their attitude towards sex by boldly writing about pre-marital sex without any hesitation. Using the novel as a platform Shobaa De, Anurag Mathur and Chetan Bhagat have all taken great strides to break the chains binding Indian youths and the much guarded Indian values towards sexuality. They have all

invaded the space narrowly safeguarded by all Indians and have managed to evaluate and question the values we have held on to for so long.

### **Conclusion:**

As discussed within the three novels selected, it can be seen that Indian Youths are more open about sex than they were twenty years ago. All the main characters of these three novels represent the young Indian demographic. Indian Youths and many others across the globe were very much influenced by the youth culture of America. American Youths during the 1960s and 70s had already created a major stir within their country when they stood against their government creating the counter culture movement. This anti-establishment movement gained lots of supporters from all over the world, igniting flames to many youths of other nations. The youth culture of India can be properly understood under John Storey's third definition of Popular Culture wherein he defined Popular Culture as Mass culture. According to Storey, there are some critics working within the Mass culture paradigm who states that Mass Culture is an imported American culture. Storey wrote "American culture represented a force of liberation" (9). It is this very force that drives the Indian youths towards establishing a culture liberated from the clutches of the orthodox tradition in India

The youth culture of India is less and less afraid and more and more open towards sex and sexuality. YouTube channels such as *So Effin Cray*, *DSF PLAY*, *BluHope Entertainment*, *The Nerdy Gangsters*, *BangOn!*, *YTV Network* and *BhaiBhaiTV* have been posting videos of Indian youths being interviewed on various topics regarding sex. It is rather astonishing that almost all persons interviewed had no reservations discussing anything and everything about sex or their sexuality; men and women alike, all

persons willingly reveal their fantasies, experiences and expectations proving that Indian youths are in reality very comfortable with their sexual orientation and sexual fantasies. The Delhi Queer Pride Parade held in the nation's capital annually since 2008 is also a sure testament of this view. Youth Culture of India, therefore, has helped establish a broader and liberal view of sex within the country by taking a definitive and bold stand toward expressing their views on sex and their own sexuality.

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## **The Tradition of Weaving and Courting: Women's Cultural Space**

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The debates relating to 'space and spatiality' whether physical or mental space, occupied or unoccupied, gender specific, existential and cultural space - naming these few points amongst the complex spatialities that can exist brings to the outset the question of Cultural Space that women occupy or may occupy in one's Culture and History. It seems to be the prerogative of culture to prescribe specific space and role to subjects within one's culture, based on biologically differentiated gender and sex which entails with it certain performative acts which is supposed to be gender specific. Since, the creation of 'social space' is integral to human experience, history has been a reflection of such social-space-relations. It is within this relation that women have found themselves to be subjects and objects; stereotyped and classified while at the same time performing roles which sustain that very culture which subjugates them.

As human experience is expressed linguistically through language, having access to language and being able to use language as a tool through oral narratives, or literary writing empowers one to have access to representation and also provides one with a legitimate space. Feminists have taken the stance of deconstructing the gender biasness of historical recordings which seem to push women's history and present trajectory to the margins and prescribe

a peripheral existence. Therefore, the etching of women's-female-feminist space within representation and the rewriting of representation which inscribe those at the margin to the centre have been the prerogative of feminist scholarship which reminds one of the importance of having a legitimate history which Bill Ashcroft writes as, "what it means to have a history is to have legitimate existence; history and legitimation go hand in hand" (Ashcroft 83). However, one should note that the history rewritten within a feminist paradigm aims at not only intervention but at the invention of another history which Tripathy describes as, "The history imagined here is not patriarchal ideology masquerading as history, but a her-story, which interrogates, transforms and alters what we call history" (Tripathy 137-138). It is within this feminist interrogation of history that 'space' becomes a dominant element as it is the struggle for space or spatiality within representation, lived experience and societal relations which are represented.

One's cultural representations through literature may seem to record its cultural heritage from a single perspective which reveals gender biasness but one may argue that it is within this same representation that one finds a stronghold. The producer of the work of representation need not deliberately be biased to one facet of its culture or deliberately favour another facet of the same culture but may unintentionally put in the centre those facets which are intrinsically marginalised by the same culture. It is within these points of cultural representation that the marginalised may find representation.

The paper studies through the reading of *Lali* written by Biakliana, and *Chhingpuii* written by Kaphleia, the tradition of 'weaving' which is an integral part of a Mizo woman's trajectory and the tradition of 'courting' as represented in Literature. The paper analyses how these two cultural practices while dictating

the societal roles to women, at the same time served as a possible personal 'space' within a society which dictates their every role.

The novel *Chhingpuii* written by Kaphleia in 1939 is set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Mizo society. The novel is praised for its record and use of the Mizo history, the war between East and the West which took place between 1877-1880 and clearly depicts the way the Mizo tribes often waged wars against each other. Apart from this, the novel's immaculate depiction of the socio-political set up of the Mizo society from hunting to governance; from the tradition of courting to the valorisation of chivalry and most importantly its depiction of real human nature, especially that of the Mizo traditional value system and conduct under its own legitimate political and social system. The heroine of the novel by whose name it has been titled is based on a real maiden by the name of Chhingpuii who was said to have been killed and beheaded during the war mentioned. But the writer's description of the character in the novel is purely his artistic creation while at the same time depicting through her the life of Mizo women in pre-Christian culture.

At the very outset of the novel, the importance of the tradition of 'courting' by which the young men of the village pay visits at night time to the homes of the maidens they admire is depicted. This becomes their daily routine if they are not out in the deep jungle hunting for days or are out at war, and is deeply ingrained in the very core of the Mizo societal set up. It is through courting that the maidens as women living in the society assume the position of importance and gain attention. In the novel, Chhingpuii is one of the maidens known for her "dusky complexion, her rosy, oval face and lustrous hair" for which she has many suitors. On such occasions she is described as "spinning by the bedpost, close to the hearth" of the house while her suitors "lounged around a little further off"



(*Heart of the Matter*, 248) deep in conversation about a future elephant hunt. Amidst the depiction of the Mizo tradition of courting, the author in his description of what women usually do on such occasion has unintentionally drawn attention to Chhingpuii and her personal space away from the more exciting conversations of the suitors. Tradition prescribes that maidens should be courteous and polite to each suitor without the show of any personal preference to a point where all the suitors would believe that he is the one favoured most. A maiden may admire a suitor but it is not her will to choose, but the will of her parents when a marriage proposal is received which may not be from the suitor she most admires. In the novel, the act of spinning cotton thread gives Chhingpuii distance from her suitors while at the same time serves as a means of giving her a personal space away from the conversations of the suitors in which she may share no interest.

It is through this tradition of courting that women's cultural and personal significance is often measured. She is either praised or criticised based on her performance of fulfilling her suitor's expectations and her respectability also largely depend on it. The maidens might not have understood that their every action and social conduct is being controlled by social decree and power structure beyond their comprehension. They also may not have understood the importance of personal space within their community which they might have sought after unaware of exactly what they were seeking.

In the novel, the heroine is seen seeking such personal space amidst the confusion of having to entertain her many suitors. Instead of joining the conversation Chhingpuii is seen spinning distancing herself while at the same time making space for the possibility of a furtive contact with Kaptluanga, a suitor she secretly admires. In the absence of personal space which Kaptluanga also knows, he

takes the opportunity of the space that Chhingpuii has made for herself through the act of spinning and he goes near her to light his pipe from the embers of the hearth. Making use of this opportunity, Chhingpuii uses it to indirectly convey her feelings to Kaptluanga by inviting him to warm himself by the fire. As the other suitors noticed this they too wanted to light their pipes to which Chhingpuii courteously invited them by the fire side. As the novel describes, Chhingpuii knowing that her space has been invaded and understanding that she has to make use of it as stealthily as possible at regular intervals she would ask,

“Do you want some light to kindle your pipes?” and pass around glowing embers of coal. Everytime she fetched more wood and sat down again, she inched closer to Kaptluanga. She did this thrice and by then they were so close that he could have rested his head on the hem of her *puan*<sup>1</sup>. (*Heart*, 249)

In a society and culture which dictates that women's actions and manners should adhere to social expectations, women as subjects do not have the outlet to express personal choice or preference. Every moment of their daily life becomes a performance one after another in which they fulfil household chores side by side with community duties. Women served as mediums in which manifold traditional and cultural practices are maintained and propagated. However, amongst these manifold duties fulfilled by them they do not have room for personal growth and space for the fulfilment of individual desires and longings. One may argue that on account of the fact that women in the indigenous Mizo community may not have understood the value of personal space as they have internalised patriarchal expectations to such an extent as to have accepted it as a normal way of life. To measure their respectability on the fulfilment of such roles, one needs to refute such

generalisation as evidenced in the novel where Chhingpuii, the most beautiful and courteous hostess seeks and finds a moment of personal space. This is not to insist that Chhingpuii was aware of the workings of patriarchal hegemony dictating her life but that as a woman she was sub-consciously aware that she has to make space for herself at times when the circumstances which envelop her seem overwhelming. It is in such circumstance that the skill of spinning and weaving which culture seem to prescribe as a skill belonging to the female gender becomes a refuge. In the action of weaving, women fulfil the duty of preservation of their cultural heritage which depends largely on their skill while at the same time serves as a medium through which their skill and talent is celebrated.

The tradition of weaving not only serves as a medium which celebrates women's talents or celebrates it as a cultural heritage per se but have immense importance in the perpetuation and celebration of other cultural facets. As depicted in *Chhingpuii*, when young men pay court to her home Chhingpuii is either spinning or weaving. When Lalnawta, an unfavourable suitor visits her she is seen weaving a *puan* which serves as a medium of distancing and protecting herself from the advances of Lalnawta while at the same time makes Chhingpuii admirable for her skill and helps her fulfil what is expected of her. Here, again it becomes a personal space for her within her home and her community at large.

As she is weaving at her loom they hear sounds of gunfire to which Chhingpuii utters excitedly, "Ah! It is indeed the hunters. We can even hear their chants" (*Heart of the Matter*; 259) and dismissing Lalnawta she agrees to her next door neighbour's call "Let's go and wait our brothers" to which hurriedly changed her attire to a "*hmaram*<sup>2</sup>, the lower garment and a *puanrin* wrap" (ibid). Here, the respect and admiration that the Mizo culture places on the hunting tradition in which valour and heroism is associated

with the man who can shoot the most animal is depicted. Apart from this element of culture, what cannot be dismissed is the importance that the *puan* occupies in the lives of the Mizo women which is intrinsically interwoven with the tradition of weaving and its significance in making spatial existence a possibility in a society where individual space for women is unheard of and if so, it exist as a thing of luxurious contemplation.

On the subject of weaving and women's space, in the short story *Lali* written by Biakliana published in 1969, which is set in the early years post-Christian Mizo society, one reads that the story opens with the protagonist Lali and her mother in the middle of weaving a *pawnpui*<sup>3</sup>. Opening the story with the depiction of the successive household chores that women have to perform day in day out, one reads Lali telling her mother "Ka nu, could you finish this portion with Thani? I have to go and fetch water. They were weaving a blanket and that day they had requested their neighbour, Thanmawii to assist them" (*Heart of the Matter*; 198) as the process of weaving a *pawnpui* is no easy task which at times in the process of weaving needed several hands to be completed. The weaving of this particular *pawnpui* which is of immense importance for the winter months have brought together three women. This depicts the central importance the tradition of weaving holds in the lives of the women. As the story ensues the shared space or the spatial consciousness that the women shares through weaving, is disrupted by the arrival of Lali's drunk father who yells at his wife "Zovi, hurry up and give me my dinner, I'm starving" (ibid 197). If one compares the reactions of the women with *Chhingpuii* one notices a slight difference from the pre-Christian setting as Lali being sensitive to her predicament in a patriarchal society angrily tells her friend Thani, "Isn't that just like him...here, I don't think we can weave any more. As it is we still have to cook

dinner and fetch water” (ibid). In *Lali* the women are sensitive about their lot while in *Chhingpuii* the reticence, obedience of the maidens and show of courteousness is celebrated and even encouraged by men and women alike. As the story develops one reads of Lali’s yearning to weave a *puanchei*<sup>4</sup> and in fact she had asked her brother Taia who had gone to the plains to sell pounded rice to buy her skeins of thread to weave a *puanchei*. But sadly one goes to read that he had instead bought a shoe for himself to which Thani’s frustration “Perhaps this is our fate” (ibid) reverberates and Lali’s urgent need “If he doesn’t then I’ll have to go without a puan” echoes.

The above reading of the stories depicts the fact that the tradition of weaving in Mizo society be it pre or post-Christian era essentially is women’s spatial realm, which bonds and gives them a possible space for expression within a culture whose patriarchal order seems to engulf every possible expression of individuality. Here, one can decipher a silent code which women seem to understand among each other that there is room for women’s space within the very dictates of patriarchy. This space as given by the tradition of weaving bestowed by patriarchy itself as the responsibility of women serves as a medium or point of resistance in which women can bond and create a world for themselves. This has a corollary to what Elaine Showalter writes as the possibility of a wild zone which stands outside the realm of patriarchy as:

We can think of the ‘wild zone’ of women’s culture spatially, experientially, or metaphysically. Spatially it stands for an area which is literally no-man’s land, a place forbidden to men...Experientially it stands for the aspects of the female lifestyle which are outside of and unlike those of men. (qtd in Tripathy 140)

The above quotation is not to claim that the tradition of weaving gives Mizo women a space extremely different or act as a counter defensive against patriarchy or suggest any ‘essentialist agenda’, but taking a cue from it one may argue that the tradition of weaving do serve as the celebration and perpetuation of Mizo women’s cultural space which has legitimacy of its own distinct techniques known mostly by Mizo women who keeps the tradition and cultural heritage alive, by passing it from mothers to daughters; woman to woman and one generation to the next.

History may not have recorded the individual plights and roles that women played in the making of Mizo society, however one may claim the existence of a legitimate history and cultural significance of women’s contribution in the preservation of culture, not only in the part played by them in the ‘procreation’ of successive generations, but in traditions like the skill of weaving whose importance as a cultural heritage belonging to the spatial existence of women is often pushed to the margins, thought of as an everyday mundane hobby. It is in the multicoloured stripes and variegated patterns of the different *puan*, its different purposes for different occasions and its cultural specific importance intrinsically ingrained in the roots of tradition that the Mizo women have woven their history with. The origin of the development of a pattern or a stripe may have its own story to tell, be it an individual story or a collective story which however translates into the collective story of women.

The two stories well known in Mizo Literature Studies is respected for its depiction and celebration of the indigenous Mizo culture and tradition of the pre-Christian era in *Chhingpuui*, and the depiction of a society in transition from pre to post Christianity with a concern for women’s plight in *Lali*. However, the present focus is on the possibility of making space for women in history

and representation through the celebration of what Mizo women have been known to have a talent for and skill worth patency through the tradition of weaving as a cultural heritage. This not only highlights the importance of the tradition of weaving as a celebration of women's skills but gives voice to women as every intricate pattern woven safeguards her-story for posterity to decipher its cultural significance.

### **END NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>*Puan* may be described as a woven traditional lower garment or clothing worn by both men and women, worn with one edge tightly fastened around the waist or under the armpits across the breast by women. One may refer to *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* by James Herbert Lorrain.

<sup>2</sup>A *hmaram* is a kind of a 'puan' - a woven lower garment of black and white pattern worn tightly wrapped around the waist, which falls above the knee.

<sup>3</sup>*Pawnpui* maybe described as a blanket woven from cotton thread into which cotton wool is stitched. Refer to *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* by James Herbert Lorrain.

<sup>4</sup>*Puanchei* is a multicoloured *puan* on a white background. Refer to *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* by James Herbert Lorrain.

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## **Traditional Institutions of the Thangkhal**

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The Thangkhal belong to the Zomi ethnic group which consists of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo group of tribes presently spreading across the Indo-Burma borders and as far as the Chittagong Hill tract in Bangladesh. They speak different dialects but originated from the same root: Indo-Tibetan. The Zomis are called 'Chin' in Burma, 'Kukis' in Manipur, Nagaland and Assam and 'Mizos' in Mizoram (Langkhanthang, 1). The Thangkhal founded a village named 'Thangkhal' in the Chin Hills of Burma and lived there for a very long period, having same customs and culture. Taking the name of the village, the people called themselves Thangkhal. Thus, the Thangkhal tribe came into existence.

their sojourn movement from the Thangkhal village to their present habitats, the Thangkhal had evolved a very stable and time-tested traditional institution which can withstand the challenges of modernization and globalization (Lal Dena, 1). In spite of the many changes that had taken place in the Thangkhal society during the last few decades in the wake of the introduction of modern education and the coming of Christianity, many of their traditional institutions have remained intact and continued to serve the present needs of the Thangkhal society.

Now let us highlight some of the Traditional Institutions of the Thangkhal in brief:

## **I. THE VILLAGE COUNCIL:**

The Village Council, headed by Hausa (Chief) was one of the prominent traditional institutions of the Thangkhal. Every person cannot become a chief. When a Thangkhal village was set up, the head of the clan lineage will become the chief. The chieftainship was hereditary and the right to inheritance went to the eldest son of the family.

The village Council normally consisted of the Chief at the head, two mantris (Secretary or right hand-man of the Chief), one messenger called Tang-aau or Tang-saam, the Siampu (Priest or witch doctor) and the Sikkheng (blacksmith) and these were called the Hausa-Upa (Langkhanthang, 44). The Chief was the supreme head of the Council. He selected the Councilors normally from wealthy and influential group of persons, kinsmen or close friends. They were rewarded with the most fertile jhum-land every year. Besides, the Chief and his Councilors enjoyed certain privileges which cannot be ignored by any household in the village. If any tribute due to the Chief was not fulfilled, a fine of Sialpi and Salam, a mithun and pig with rice beer was imposed (Lankhanthang, 46). Thus, the Chief and the councilors in a sense constituted a privileged group in a traditional Thangkhal society (Laldena, 2).

The chief presided over the village council and they discussed and decided all matters connected with the village. Civil and criminal cases were tried in the village court. The council received salam (a fine of pig) as a fee for trying cases. They ate the meat either the same day or reserved it for a more convenient day. Before they heard any dispute, the complainer would supply rice beer or tea. If he won the case, the other party reimbursed the expenses of the tea or rice beer (Pudaite, 52).

The council could discuss any matter that came to their disposal. It tried both civil and criminal cases. In case any member of the council including the chief had any connection with the impending case, he would not participate in the deliberation, nor would interfere with the findings or decisions. The council was the only court and there was no other court of appeal. (Mate, S. Haukhanlian, 32). However, the council was to administer justice and orders according to the customary laws.

With the introduction of Colonial Rule in the Hills, the chiefs and his councilors still existed as it was before but their authorities and power was greatly undermined. This is not to say that their hold over the people was relaxed. It was a Colonial strategy to recognize and use them as intermediaries between the people and the colonial government. The traditional authorities were utilized by the British as their agents for holding and administering the hill territories and the government integrated them into the colonial system by giving them some local responsibilities in the village courts (Laldena, 2). The village council became the custodian of the customary laws. The chief was assigned the task of collecting a house tax of Rs. 3/- called Panchi from each household which became a great burden for the majority of Thangkhal family. The traditional leaders were effectively used against their own people and they collaborated with the colonial authorities in exploiting the people by depriving them of the fruits of their labor and production. The moral basis of leadership was thus more or less destroyed and the leaders tended to lose sight of their obligations to society for the privileges they received from the colonial rulers (**Lal Dena, 2**). Thus, the chief or the traditional leaders became an agent or representatives of the British government.

## **II. FAMILY STRUCTURE:**

Family is the oldest institution in human society. Like any other human society, the basic unit of the Thangkhal society was the family. The family was patriarchal (**Laldena, 3**). The father, the head of the family was the sole authority in so far as the family and its relations with other families or clans were concerned. He represented the family in all public meetings, directed the family affairs and provided food for the household (Pudaite, Rochunga, 39). He was respected, revered and obeyed by all his family members and no decision was made without his consent. On the death of the father, all the power devolved usually to the eldest son who is the undisputed inheritor of his father's property. He represented the family in the absence of his father and after his death in all household responsibilities and even in the performance of ritualistic rites (Langkhanthang, 49). In case of the father not having a son or if the son is a minor, the power usually devolved to the appropriate person who, like the father exercised the same nature of power. The younger son cannot claim the property of their father. They separated from the father's house after marriage. The children belonged to the father and the mother had no share. Even the right to inheritance was reserved for paternal descent. The lineage was also traced through the line of male descendent (Sangkima, 25).

Apart from being the head of the family, the main duty of the father was to acquire the required jhum tools (Seletthanga, 6) so as to enable production. Meal time was the most appropriate time to give instructions in manner and etiquette to the family members. So, the head of the family normally gave instructions to the members what they should do and should not do during meal time (Siam, V.L. 30).

The Thangkhal families also had one 'Tulpipa' who was the lineage headman of the clan (elder siblings of the same cognate descent families). He was given the tribute of a flesh tax called 'Sasin-Salung' which consists of most of the internal parts along with the head of the wild animals killed or trapped by the younger brothers, both immediate and distant ones (Langkhanthang, 50).

The Thangkhal families also had a distinct feature in having different categories of helpers like Behpa, Zawl, Tanu. The Behpa was the most important person in the family circle who helps the family in any needed situation. He was usually appointed, based on blood relationship. Zawl was another helper which means friendship, not based on blood relationship but appointed on close friendship who would stand on behalf of the family in any matter that covered the family affairs. Another was Tanu which means daughter and consisted of both immediate and distant daughters who were married along with their husbands and children. Tanus were divided into different types: Tanupi which means eldest daughter, Tanuzom meaning next daughter, tanuthumna- third daughter and so on depending on the number of daughters they had. They were responsible for the success and failure of any function held in their in-laws' house.

Another feature of a Thangkhal family was in having Pute which means maternal Grandparents or uncles. They were highly honoured and respected and were given Sa-ngong, the whole neck part of wild animal killed or trapped (Langkhanthang, 52). Without the consent of the Pute, their grand-daughter or niece cannot marry.

### **III. Marriage Institution:**

In a traditional Thangkhal society, marriage occupies an important place. It is the backbone of their society which brings the family relationship closer. Basically, marriage among the

Thangkhal was a civil contract, dissolvable at the will of both the parties concerned. Normally, it was arranged by the parents.

Traditionally, the Thangkhal practiced monogamy. Polygamy was not common. However, as time passed on, some of the chief and few others began to have a secondary wife called 'mei' (Paite in Mizoram, 69) and practiced polygamy in spite of its condemnation by the society. Polyandry was unacceptable and was unheard among them. The first wife is called Zipi. According to their Customary Law, the eldest son of the Zipi will inherit his father's property and the mei's son had no share in it.

Marriage is an important form of institution among the Thangkhal. Free mixing of boys and girls are allowed but pre-marital sex was highly prohibited and was considered a serious breach of law. Chastity was their pride. The loss of virginity was considered the most degrading thing and was considered as great loss of prestige. A woman who became pregnant out of wedlock could seldom find a husband and usually carried the social stigma throughout her life (Langkhanthang, 54).

In a traditional Thangkhal society, marriage was not restricted to any clan. A man can marry almost any woman except his sister, aunt, mother, grandmother. They were also not allowed to marry the sisters of their brother-in-law (sisters husband). If they marry the sister of their brother-in-law, it is called Luangkikhek and it was strongly prohibited. The preference marriage, however, was matrilineal cross-cousin marriage called Neita. This kind of marriage is usually arranged by the parents. This kind of arranged marriage often takes place during the childhood of the boy and the girl. When the parents of a boy were determined that their son should marry no other than his mother's brother's daughter called Neita, the marriage negotiations is initiated by the parents of the boy during

the childhood of the boy and the girl. In some extreme cases, when a daughter is born in a family, her father's sister and her husband initiated on her birth the claim that the baby girl being the 'Neita' of their son, should not be given in marriage to anybody else. She should go to them as their son's wife. Such earmarking is called 'Ki khaukhih' meaning that the girl has been reserved for a particular boy and that no one should set his eye on her, either for marriage or for love (Gangte, T.S. 79). The girl is the most eligible and suitable for the boy to marry. The boy is expected to marry his Neita to bring the family relationship more closer. It also signifies the respect and the deep rooted love for their uncles. As marrying the Neita was the expected law of marriage among the Thangkhals, if anyone involved in the marriage process and married the Neita, he will be accused of '*Sial Khau Sattan*' (cutting of the mithun's rope) which literally means separating one's affinity and will be legally sued with a fine of "*Sialpi leh Salam*" (a fine of mithun and pig) (Langkhanthang, 52). Thus, no one was allowed to interfere in the marriage proposal of the Neita.

Another type of marriage which prevailed among the Thangkhals was elopement. This type of marriage was socially and customarily unrecognized. It takes place when both the boy and girl fall in love but their parents did not consent to the marriage or when there appears a third person in between the boy and the girl who is likely to stand in their way, because of being a serious contender to win the hand of the girl in marriage. In this type of marriage, the first duty of the boy's family was to send their mediator to the girl's parents to apologise and report the elopement of the girl and request to consent the marriage. If the girl's parents are not willing, they can take back the girl even though she has lost her virginity (Ruwndar, Kanthung, 39). After negotiations were made, the couple will come back to the boy's house. This type of marriage is also called love marriage.

The method of finding a partner for a boy was traditionally regulated by the boy's parents. The boy's parents usually sent their mediators called their 'zawl' and 'Tanupi' to the girl's parents with a jar of zu for initial negotiation when their son was marriageable age. If the girl's parents drank the zu, it was taken as they accepted the proposal and further negotiations follows (Niangdeihnuam, 77). Usually the boy's family will send their mediators three times. In the process, the girls were hardly asked anything about their opinion. If the parents were convinced about the suitor, she was bound to accept the proposal. However, in certain cases, the girls were asked about their opinion. In many cases, both the couples never know or meet each other before they marry. (Langkhanthang, 52)

After all the arrangements were ready, the bride price was fixed which was usually fixed at Sial-nga, five mithun. The bride price would usually be paid in installments but it was compulsory to pay a subsidiary bride price of rupees two called thaman, meaning the price of the soul. Payment of this thaman entitled the husband and members of his clan to bury the corpse of the wife when she dies, even if she was not yet formally married. (Langkhanthang, 52-52)

The bride's parents were to arrange a feast called 'InlamZonsa' as a token for a bride looking for a new house. In the evening, the bride will be brought to the groom's house by her relatives (Hminga, C.L. 31). The official wedding ceremony usually takes place when the bride was brought to the groom's house. For this, the priest would administer the wedding ceremony by tying a bundle of white feathers of a cock around the neck of the bride with words of blessings. This was done to introduce the bride to the 'Pusa' (house hold god) of the groom and to accept her as their own family member from that day onward (Niangdeihnuam,



78). Thus, in this way, the wedding ceremony was celebrated among the early Thangkhal.

When a Thangkhal girl married, she takes some materials to her husband's houses as dowry. Some materials are compulsory while some depends upon the capability of the bride's family. Some of the compulsory materials includes Seu 1 (a basket made of bamboo), Nam 1 (a strap made of cane meant for carrying seu), Puandum 1 (a traditional shawl), Tutang 1 (a hoe), Heitang 1 (an axe) and Zanpuan 1 (a woven rough blanket made of cotton). (History of the Thangkhal People's Organisation, 35)

Besides the above mentioned compulsory materials, a bride can also take any material in kind or in cash to her husband's house. Some of the materials, especially clothes and utensils are distributed among the near relatives of the groom. However, all these materials depend on the capability of the bride's family and are not compulsory.

In spite of its strong condemnation by the society, divorce occasionally occurred among the Thangkhal. If a man divorced his wife, he was bound to pay a fine of Sialpi Nuta, a mithun and her calf besides paying off the remaining marriage price which was still due and all the private properties of the woman. Again if it was a matter of the woman's fault such as for infidelity or her own decision to desert her husband, then the bride's parents had to refund the bride price which was already paid off and all the properties which were given on her wedding day could not be reclaimed (Langkhanthang, 55).

#### **IV. SAWM HAAM (BACHELOR'S DORMITORY):**

Like any other Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups, the Thangkhal also have Bachelor's Dormitory called Sawm Haam. The Mizo called

it Zawlbuk, the Hmar called it Buonzawl, the Kuki, Som and the Paite called it Sawm. To the Thangkhal, the Sawm Haam was the nerve-centre of their society which shaped their youths into responsible adult members. It was a very big house built in front of the chief or the Khong-Toupa's house in which all the bachelors sleep together to meet any unforeseen things. There can be more than one Haam in a village depending on the size of the village. (Mate, S. Haukhanlian, 48). Visitors from other villages were also allowed to sleep and spend the night in the Sawm Haam.

The inmates of the Sawm Haam were divided into three categories: Sawm Upa, Sawm Tangval and Sawm Naupang. Among the three inmates, the Sawm Upa was the most powerful one. The Sawm Haam was placed under his control. He was chosen among the inmates of the Haam based on seniority, courage and efficiency in hunting and organizational activities. He was accountable for the smooth administration of the dormitory and also to the chief and his councilors. He assumed the commanding post and commanded the youth in any warfare (Mate, S. Haukhanlian, 49-51).

In the Sawm Haam, the Val Upas would narrate the heroic exploits of their forefathers and folk tales thereby teaching traditional value systems like tawmngaihna, bravery and the like. In times of emergency like tribal war or natural calamities, Sawm Haam served as a mobilizing centre for joint actions and in pre-colonial Thangkhal traditional society, it can also be considered as a defense wing of village administration. It was later developed into a kind of institution where the youngsters were given rigorous training in the art of war, wrestling and village administration. In other sense, Sawm Haam was an institution where disciplines and moral codes were imparted to the youths of the village (Lal Dena, 4)

#### **IV. LAWMKAI:**

Another striking traditional institution of the Thangkhal society was Lawmkai. The word 'Lawm' in Thangkhal means an informal labour organization in a simple and corporate village life wherein all the able-bodied unmarried persons irrespective of age and sex are members. The function of Lawmkai was mainly concerned with the economic activities of the village. In Lawmkai, all the able bodied unmarried persons formed a group and work in the jhum fields by turn. The number of work attended by a Lawm member will be credited to his name and the same number of works he thus earned will be repaid to him by other members with labour. Sometimes, the Lawm members will help those who could not finish their jhum fields due to unavoidable circumstances like sickness or due to death. Thus, Lawmkai became the centre of the Thangkhal's community life and served as a training ground for young men and women to learn a sense of duty and dignity of labour. After they all completed the work by turn, they held a festival called 'Lawm Zu' where they drank zu and enjoyed merry making by singing and dancing the whole night (Mate, S. Haukhanlian, 50).

#### **V. RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION:**

Like any other tribal groups, the Thangkhal also believed in Animism. Lack of consciousness and the inability to comprehend the objective forces of nature made them develop certain superstitious ways of beliefs and worship. As such, they believed that plants, trees, rocks, rivers and the like which were peculiar in nature were inhabited by spirits and worshipped it. The mode of worship and sacrifices were determined by the objects to which sacrifices were made. There were various complicated methods of sacrifices and the person who could master all these methods eventually emerged as a priest (siampu). The priest was supposed

to to know which spirit was causing trouble and illness and what type of sacrifice was necessary. The most important duty of the priest was thus to perform sacrifices for sanctification of the village from the influence of these evil spirits (Lal Dena, 6).

The Thangkhals believed in the existence of one Supreme God. They used to address it as 'Pasian' which is omnipotent, omnipresent, holy, righteous and merciful. Next to 'Pasian', there is another god called 'Lungzai' (Niangdeihnuam, 38) who is equivalent as setan. However, they believed that both 'Pasian' and 'Lungzai' co-existed. They also believed that there are numerous evil spirits which causes illness. They can be appeased by different kinds of sacrifices.

Another interesting feature of the Thangkhal traditional religion was the belief in life after death. They believed that the soul has to pass through different stages to reach their destiny. The first stage to pass was a high mountain called Teutevum which was guarded by the wicket witch called gulsamnu, a huge mother python. Only those who performed some special traditional ceremonies during their life time were allowed by the gulsamnu to pass the gate to misikhua. The next destination is to reach Thangvaan where there is no more sorrow and pain and will spend another period of life there. The soul would die once again and be promoted to the next layer of heaven called Alvaan where another form of life existed. Again in Alvaan, the soul dies and is transfigured into another form and ascends to the last stage of heaven called Lengvaan, where another generation of life continued. After the life in Lengvaan, there was no more heaven where in to transfer the soul (Langkhanthang, 73). So, the soul turns into uili, dog lice and vanished forever.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

No human society is static and the Thangkhal society is no exception. As a result of their contact with colonial administration and the introduction of Christianity and modern education, many of their traditional practices were abolished and replaced by modern values. However, many of their old practices still continued especially their customary laws which served the present needs of the Thangkhal society.

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## **Decoding *Sichangneii* : The Winged Beauty**

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Mizo folk tales have many resemblances with different folk tales of the world and folk tales often unfold the Mizo social psychology as the tales depict the ethos, fears and fantasies. *Sichangneii* also has similarities with other folk tales of the world as the character *Sichangneii* is a beautiful winged woman quite unlike the wings of fairies; *Sichangneii*'s wings are plumed. In this Mizo folk tale, the name of the male character who captures *Sichangneii* and makes her his wife is not mentioned, but the tale revolves around their children and how *Sichangneii* outwits her youngest child to reveal where his father has hidden her wings.

The folk tale *Sichangneii* opens with the bachelor who fetches water at dawn. Yet there is always another before him who turns the water quite murky. Finally, an old woman tells the man:

“Keichu I tui chawi tur tinutu ka hria asin. *Sichangneii* te unau an ni a, van lam atang khian an lo thlawk thla a, an inbual a, an ti nu thin a ni;...” (Dahrawka 76).

“I know who makes the water murky you would fetch. It is *Sichangneii* and her sibling, they fly down from the skies, they bathe and make it murky...”

From the passage it is clear that *Sichangneii* and her sibling are other beings and not human beings. The tale shows that

Sichangneii and her sibling bathe in the early mornings for which reason the water turns murky. At the same time, the passage reflects the winged female creatures' love of water.

Sichangneii's beauty is commented by the old woman and she states:

“... I man theih chuan I nupuiah nei la, an hmel a tha si a, a tihzia khawp ang.” (Dahrawka 76).

“...if you can capture one make her your wife, they have lovely features, it will be quite pleasant.”

This passage indicates that the winged females have beautiful features and the old woman's suggestion to the man; capturing one of the winged females and making her his wife, shows the relatedness of this folk tale with other folk tales; the idea of marriage between human and deity, human and the supernatural or human and beings of the other world. The beauty of Sichangneii and her sister is mentioned in the preceding passage and stressed for the second time in the following passage:

“Amaherawh chu I man dawn pawhin an hnung lamah man tum ang che, chuti lo zawng an thatin an en ang chia, I man fuh thei lo vang, 'a ti a.” (Dahrawka 76).

“Nevertheless, if you try to capture them try to catch them from behind, otherwise their beauty will dazzle you and you won't be able to catch them properly,” she said.”

The beauty mentioned in the passage is no ordinary beauty as it is a beauty that emits brightness and one that can dazzle and temporarily blind the beholder. The old woman therefore warns the man to capture them from behind so that he can avoid looking at them in the face as he would be overwhelmed and spellbound by their beauty.



The tale further unfolds the beauty of Sichangneii and her sister as follows:

“A tuk zingah chuan khuan hmasa atangin a chang ta a. Sichangneii te unau chu an lo thlawk thla a, an han inbual dawn a, an that chu a en hian a eng phut mai a.” (Dahrawka 76).

“The next morning from the first cock’s crow he kept vigil. Sichangneii and her sister flew down, as they were about to bathe, their beauty shone bright and luminescent.”

- 0 The beauty of Sichangneii and her sister seem to be ethereal and overpowering. As he looks at them he forgets what the old woman had earlier told him and facing them he tries to capture one of them. Since their beauty is bright and luminescent he fails his aim as he lunges at one of them and they fly off toward the skies. The brightness of their beauty overpowers and dazzles the man for which he loses his aim when he lunges at the winged beauties.

As the folk tale further unfolds, the man captures Sichangneii, the elder of the winged females and the tale states:

“... a u zawk Sichangneii chu a man ta a. inah a hruai haw a, a thla leh a chang chu a pawhsak a, phulraw theiah a khung a, rapchungsangah a dah tha a daih mai a; tichuan an innei ta a.” (Dahrawka 76).

“...he caught the elder Sichangneii, took her home, plucked off her wings and plumes, slid them inside a bamboo container, and kept it safely on the floating bamboo shelf over the fire place; then they were married.

The passage indicates that Sichangneii's wings were plumed with feathers. As the man captures Sichangneii, he dismantles her power and tames her by plucking off her wings and feathers. Sichangneii is stripped of her independence and her freedom and she submits to the man's whims as she becomes his wife.

The Rengma people of Nagaland have a story; *Of Two Worlds*, similar to *Sichangneii* although the sky maiden in the Rengma story has two children; boy and girl and Sichangneii has seven male children, the theme of the two tales has a striking similarity. A South Korean tale that dates back to the Choson Dynasty (1392) in Korea; *The Heavenly Maiden and the Woodcutter* is said to be the most often told tale that is mostly included in Korean children's storybooks. The theme of this Korean tale has similarity with the Mizo folk tale *Sichangneii* and the Rengma Naga folk tale *Of Two Worlds*. In each of the three mentioned folk tales, each of the main winged female character(s) is a beauty beyond compare although Sichangneii seems to have the most overpowering beauty that dazzles the eye of the beholder. Each of the main winged female character(s) has winged sisters who accompany the main female character to the chosen water for her daily bathing ritual in the early dawn in Mizo and Naga folk tale, whereas in the Korean folk tale the bathing ritual of the winged sisters is held on a full moon night. In each of the story, the main winged female character loses her wings and is abandoned by her sisters who fly back to the skies. In each tale, the wings of the main female character are hidden and she marries the man who was present at the bathing spot.

In the Mizo folk tale, Sichangneii has seven sons while the unnamed winged females of the Naga and the Korean folk tales have two children respectively. In the Mizo and the Naga folk tale, the youngest child reveals to the mother(s) that they often play with

beautiful wings when they are left at home with their father(s). When asked by their mother(s) where the wings are hidden by the father(s), the youngest child reveals the secret and the mother(s) recovers her wings and flies off to the skies before the father(s) returns. On the other hand, in the Korean folk tale the husband pities his sad wife and returns her the “winged robe”.

From the three folk tales it may be assumed that in the three mentioned societies, female beauty plays an important role when a man seeks a wife. Early morning; dawn, seems to play an important role in the social life of the Mizo and the Naga tribes while the moon; lunar changes seem to have much influence on the Korean society. Bathing unseen, when all is quiet, either at early dawn or at night when the moon throws its light seems to be the right time for the females of the mentioned societies. The three tales also seems to suggest the fact that fathers of the mentioned societies often take care of their children while the mother is away at work contrary to assumed patriarchal notion.

The three tales reveal the close connection and love between the mother and her children. In the Mizo and Naga folk tale, the winged mothers respectively throw down strong rope and strong thread from the skies for their children to climb to the skies. In the Korean tale the mother holds her two children and flies off to the skies. The strong rope; Mizo tale, strong thread; Naga tale, and holding the two children in the Korean tale, seem to suggest the unseen link/ connection between the mother and the child. The strong rope, strong thread, and the children being held are therefore signifiers of the unseen but ever present connection between the mother and the child. Perhaps the significance of the ‘umbilical cord’ is implied here. Each winged female on regaining her wings abandons the father(s) while each mother makes her plan to ensure

that the children reach the mother's homeland; the skies. The final thrust of the three folk tales seems to be focused on female submission to the male even when the female is unwilling to submit her 'self'. Therefore, the wings are either stolen; Naga and Korean folk tales, or plucked off; *Sichangneii*. Yet, on recovery of the wings, each winged female character regains her independence and strength and each one proceeds towards her freedom and unbounded abode; the skies. Finally, each winged female character attains her height that seems to be suggested by the home in the skies where each winged female character transports her children. The elevation of the children from earth to the skies further seems to suggest aspect of the immense mother's boundless aspiration for her children.

Although *Sichangneii* has many similarities with the Naga and Korean folk tales, it may be assumed that *Sichangneii* emphasizes on aspects deeply rooted in the Mizo society. Importance of female beauty and the male acquisition of a beautiful wife are stressed at the onset of the folk tale. Early dawn is clearly stated as the time of fetching water from a chosen spot. Bathing in the stream and water spring marks the tradition of the Mizo people and at the same time suggests scarcity of water as most Mizo settlements were on top of the hills for security reasons. Since the ancient Mizo livelihood mainly depended on agriculture, the Mizo father often provided child care at home when the mother was out working in the agricultural plots. The strong rope thrown from the skies by *Sichangneii* for her children depicts the mother's love and connection with her children even from afar. *Sichangneii* therefore, provides her children the means to elevate themselves and thus her children climb to the skies with the means of the rope provided by their mother. The rope also seems to focus on the necessity of elevation of children by providing the means and at the same time

it focuses on the mother's boundless aspirations for her children. In the tale, Sichangneii is unwillingly bound to the man who plucks off her wings and plumes. This seems to suggest that marriage is an important factor of social acceptance in Mizo society and marriage often binds unwilling women to matrimony. With marriage the woman loses her independence, strength and freedom as she willingly/unwillingly submits her 'self' to her husband. Thus, it may be concluded that the ancient Mizo folk tale *Sichangneii* remarkably illustrates social issues that are still prominent within the Mizo society.

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## **Construction of Gender Identity in *The Bluest Eye***

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Identity is shaped by the multiple experiences a person has in the world. It plays an important role in the construction of the self. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary states that identity is the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others: a sense of national, cultural, personal, group identity (770.). It is 'the knowledge of who one is' and comprises knowing about one's history, culture, tradition and one's own purpose of existence. Davies suggests that "our subjectivities are experienced as if they were entirely our own because we take on the discursive practices and story-lines as if they were our own and make sense of them in terms of our own particular experiences" (230). In other words, our individual perceptions and feelings (subjectivities) of the world come from shared discourses and interpretations of texts. Throughout history, the highly contested concepts of race and gender have adversely shaped the lives of millions of people. In the United States it is most notably the Native Africans and African-Americans who have been victimized on the grounds of their skin color. Women of African descent have suffered a double jeopardy due to the intersection of race and gender. For a great many of African-Americans, literature has become an "important vehicle to represent the social context, to expose inequality, racism and social injustice" (Peach, 2).

Nobel Prize laureate, Toni Morrison has actively challenged the stereotypes that have been imposed on African-American women throughout history. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is heralded for its sensitive treatment of African-American female. Morrison's characters are beautifully portrayed in order to allow the reader to explore their journeys and the way in which they are presented. The expression of the black female voice is characteristic of her novels. Through black female characters, Morrison portrays the collective experience of black women in America which are shaped by the past experience of slavery and by the patriarchal capitalist American society. Patriarchy in America dates back to the colonial period when male authority and female submission was essential to the subsistence economy and to the social set-up. This society marginalized women and gave them meager and indirect access to power in the community.

In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Morrison examines the black community's perspective about beauty and the psychological damages it created to the black women. The setting takes place in Morrison's home town of Lorain, Ohio, where the black community is separated from the upper-class white community, also known as Lake Shore Park, a place where blacks are not permitted, unless they are employed by a white family. Morrison portrays two black families – the MacTeers who have the inner strength to face poverty and discrimination of the racist society; and the Breedloves, on other hand, lacking those strengths.

*The Bluest Eye* tells the story of an eleven year old African-American girl, Pecola Breedlove coming of age during the 1940s. She yearns for her identity among the African-Americans as well as the white community. Pecola believes that if she has blue eyes, which is the symbol of white beauty, she will be beautiful just like Shirley Temple and be loved by everyone. It is hypocrisy on the

part of the African-Americans that they borrow the Whiteman's false notion of defining beauty according to an Anglo Saxon cultural standard and believe that black skin represents inferiority and bestiality. According to Pauline, the coloured people were – "No better than whites for meanness. They could make you feel just as no-count, 'cept I didn't expect it from them" (Morrison 115).

The novel opens with the description of an ideal white family but in the near-parodic style of a school reading primer, with Dick and Jane and their lovely parents living in a nice and comfortable house with a lovely dog and a cat. The Dick and Jane text functions as

the hegemonizing force of an ideology ([focused by] the supremacy of 'the bluest eye') by which a dominant culture reproduces its hierarchical power structure (Grewal 24).

As Donald B. Gibson also demonstrates, the Dick and Jane text implies one of the primary and most insidious ways that the dominant culture exercises its hegemony, through the educational system. It reveals the role of education in both oppressing the victim and teaching the victim how to oppress her own black self by internalising the values that dictate standards of beauty. In contrast to this hegemonic identity, the main black characters are depicted as various and very different characters located in three hierarchical families: first Geraldine's, then the MacTeers and at the bottom, the Breedloves. The novel shows how these black characters respond to the dominant culture differently.

Pauline Breedlove, Geraldine, Maureen Peal, and Pecola are black characters who try to conform to an imposed ideal of femininity. They are absorbed and marginalized by the

cultural icons portraying physical beauty: movies, billboards, magazines, books, newspapers, window signs, dolls, and drinking cups (Gibson 20).



Pauline Breedlove, learns about physical beauty from the movies. In Morrison's words,

along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another - physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion (Morrison 95).

Therefore, in trying to conform to the ideal of white femininity, the black women characters despise their blackness which in turn leads to self-hatred. They see themselves through the eyes of white people and their worship of white beauty also has disastrous effects on their own community. Geraldine, for example, represses her black characteristics which are not 'fitted' to white femininity and she strives "to get rid of the funkiness" (Morrison 64). Being well educated and having adopted Western ways of life, Geraldine draws the line between coloured and black. She deliberately teaches her son the differences between coloured and black:

"Coloured people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison 67).

Morrison sets up a hierarchy of skin tone marking proximity and distance in relation to idealized physical attributes when describing Maureen as, "a high yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back" (Morrison 47); who claims her predominance by taunting:

"I am cute? And you ugly? Black and ugly, black emos. I am cute (Morrison 61)

Maureen is treated well at school:

She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in

the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids (Morrison 47- 48).

Despite radical distinctions, the construction of feminine gender for black women is somewhat similar to that of white women in terms of the gendered and subjected body. Pecola sees herself as ugly, as an object possessing object body. This parallels what Bartky says about the process of disciplining practices to gain the ideal body of femininity which produces

a body on which an inferior status has been inscribed. A woman's face must be made up, that is to say, made over, and so must her body (71).

As Pecola does not have the social symbol of white beauty, she cannot come anywhere near to the ideal of white beauty. In other words, though white women may lack in terms of the gendered body, due to their privilege, they are not racialised in the same way. Grewal also argues that

[I]f Irigaray's feminine subject (a universal feminine subject) is defined as lack, as absence, then the black woman is doubly lacking, for she must simulate or feign her femininity as she dissimulates or conceals her blackness (26).

The novel describes a continual variation between one thing and wanting its opposite. A black woman fails to understand her own race in terms of beauty for she believes beauty means white. They search their identity in being white because they are scared of being discriminated by their surroundings. Pecola has very little sense of self-worth. Every time she tries to live with her surroundings

she comes to a realization that she is ugly and not worthy even for touch. She segregates herself in order to earn self- respect. Whenever their brother and parents fight she shuts herself up in the room and prays to God to make her disappear:

Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (Morrison 39)

But for Pecola's mother, this fight gives her an identity. She considers herself a good Christian woman burdened by a worthless husband as punishment from God. She often speaks to Jesus about Cholly's sins. Once, during a fight, Cholly falls on the stove, and she yells out for Jesus to take him. Mrs. Breedlove needs Cholly's sins for her sense of self. Cholly Breedlove also needs her. If he hates her, he can keep his own identity free. By the end of the novel, Pecola's life is full of hatred which compels her to isolate herself. She is hated by her mother who considers her "ugly", her father rapes her, and she is not able to live a worthwhile life which lead to everlasting aggravation and drives her into madness. Above all, she is dominated by her own people, her own race. Even among her own community Pecola longs for belongingness. Morrison attacks the socially constructed Western images of beauty and the psychological damage it generated. Morrison rightly points out:

When the strength of a race depends on its beauty, when the focus is turned to how one looks as opposed to what one is, we are in trouble. (1974:89)

Thus she analyses the ways of being that are ridiculed, demonized, declared inferior and irrational, and, in some cases, eliminated and destroyed. But the community reinforces the identities of its members through belief and heritage and individuals must remain a part of the communism in order to be innately complete.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison analyses the boundaries of black society that are set and defined by the dominant white community. Black people always admire the white geographical boundary but they are not allowed to enter unless they are employed by the white people. Claudia and Frieda MacTeer go in search of Pecola at Lake Shore Park where Pecola's mother Pauline works for a white family, known as the Fishers. The girls admire the beautiful house with great furniture and gardens but their visit is short-lived as Pauline becomes furious at Pecola for tipping over a pan of blueberry cobbler,

“Crazy fool...my floor, mess...look what you...work...get on out...her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries and we backed away in dread” (Morrison 109).

This patently shows the discriminatory treatment over the black people by the white people. Morrison tries to give a clear picture of how black society yearns for their identity amidst hybridized culture. The novel reflects the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between White and Black. Thus the relationship becomes ambivalent because the black subject is never simply and completely opposed to the White.

, White people exceed a far greater degree in expressing their meanness towards the blacks. Morrison demonstrates one incident where the white society conditions her to lose her self-respect and sense of self-worth. Pecola goes to Mr. Yacobowski's

shop to buy some chocolates. Though she is a paying customer, Mr. Yacobowski treats her like she is some inhuman, vile creature. When Pecola looks into his eyes, at first she is fascinated by his blue eyes. Then she sees something more in his eyes:

The total absence of human recognition - the glazed separateness. She does not know what keeps his glance suspended... It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste. She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness... And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes (Morrison 46- 47).

Morrison has thus become a representative for African-Americans. Utilizing unique narrative styles that can be traced back to African-American storytelling tradition, her subject matter reflects her personal and cultural background. Through the theme of marginalisation and alienation of the blacks in white society, Morrison analyses how the black race is treated like an animal during that time in her novels. Fanon opines such dehumanisation in his *Black Skin, White Masks*:

The negro is animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look , a nigger, it's cold, he nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold , that cold goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama , the nigger's going to eat me. (86)

The phenomenon of slavery is responsible for immense changes in the life of African-American people. It is indeed a traumatic experience for the people who were once a slave to

witness the ravaging forces of slavery. Upheavals brought by the conflict between the white and black rupture, destroy and strain the traditional structures in society. Toni Morrison's novels have penetrated deeply into the traumatic effects of identity of African-American and its people. *The Bluest Eye* responds to the traumatic effects generated by the clash between the two cultures. It deals with the plight of black people who have been exposed to western values. As the story unfolds, the reader is made aware of the conspicuous shape of slavery. Ironically, the fruits of freedom and independence appear to be out of reach of the people as they painfully reflect on the endless sacrifices made during the struggle. Morrison reflects how Pecola's quest for identity which according to socially constructed culture is "being white with blue eyes." Subscribing to the concept of white man's beauty, she desperately wishes to have blue eyes. Blue eyes, to her, were synonymous to happiness, strength, confidence and courage. She believes if she had bluest eyes, she would have looked pretty and everyone including her teacher and all the fellow students would treat her with respect. Even her parents would not dare to fight "in front of those pretty eyes". "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed" (Morrison 44). Moreover, Morrison clearly mentions that even the black man sees white beauty as something admirable resulting in Cholly Breedlove's hatred of his daughter. Being a black and a woman is like a curse as they are often exploited by the white man as well as the black man.

Pecola is the victim of the entire race. She has undergone desertion, pain and suppression to develop a positive racial attitude. She is prone to lose her confidence, self-esteem and the sense of self-worth. She chooses to ignore her own distorted values and finds ease in escaping into the whiteness. Never receiving any

support and reinforcement neither from her society nor from her family, Pecola cannot be blamed for lacking her self-awareness and self-love. Rather the whole race strives to demean her in all the ways. She is psychologically trapped and whiplashed by the cruel world around her which ultimately deranges her and conditions her to long for an identity that is not her own. It is society's evil impact that prevents Pecola from growing to its fullest potential and developing self-love and an optimistic approach towards life. Gary Taylor and Steve Spencer writes that identity in its multidisciplinary perspective, 'is a concept which embodies our sense of uniqueness as individual beings and as members of groups sharing values and beliefs. On the other it is an intensely political field in which the expansion of critical theory has allowed the emergence of competing voices demanding space for recognition of fragile and previously often fugitive and unspoken subjectivities' (1).

Hence, it is observed that Morrison probes the mind of the reader to examine the socio-economic, political and cultural problem during the time of slavery. Focusing on how black people have been spiritually and physically victimized throughout the oppressive black history in the United States, Morrison has presented the question of identity of black community, specifically the black woman identity and how they were neglected even as a human being.

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## **Postcolonial Resistance in Regional Language: With Special Reference to Assamese Language**

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The aim of this article is to examine post colonial resistance as reflected in both the regional languages and literatures. 'Post colonialism' signifies a new situation and a moving cultural formation which is the result of the former colonial rule. It is an experience of ideology, newly gained freedom, new development, and new realization, of all the newly formed (and freed) countries from the colonial power. The main focus of my paper is on the regional languages and the natives' reaction towards the westerners' language i.e. English. Throughout the paper, my prime concern will be to study language as a weapon while fighting the anti-colonial war, in the light of Assamese language and literary realm, even though colonial rule was over many decades ago.

### **Post colonialism and Resistance**

Post Colonialism does not only denote the aftermath of colonialism, it also emphasizes the discourses of struggle, resistance, and some kind of reverse act. If we analyze the basic theme of all post colonial literature then we will see that almost all the texts deal against the colonial rule with some exception. Edward Said, Amitav Ghosh, J M Coetzee, Ben Okri, and many more are in the list of post colonial writers who writes back against the colonial rule. For instances J M Coetzee's seminal work *Disgrace* (1999) explores the post apartheid Africa where we can see the alternate of

exploitation. In this novel when Lucy, the protagonist's David's daughter was raped by black men, she did not allow her father to report to police because she truly understands that it is the outburst of the whole black community that they had been exploited by the whites for many centuries. Thus we see the counter discourse in the post colonial writings.

On the other hand the term 'resistance' gives us a framework to understand post colonialism. In the context of post colonialism resistance denotes the recognizing of the process of power, moods, various practices, circumstances of struggle etc. The meaning of resistance is different from theory to theory. For example according to post structuralism or the psychoanalytic theories resistance is a modified entity or it is hybridized which destabilizes the colonial knowledge. For them it is also the duality of colonial power. Anti colonial intellectuals argue that resistance means some kind of planned and well structured military and political troupes which fight against the colonial power both in the physical form or intellectually. Post colonial critic or thinker Frantz Fanon has contributed a lot through his book about the process of resistance. According to him liberation does not only mean the withdrawal of colonial powers from the colonies or physical form of elimination. What it means to Fanon is the removal of the inequality and the hierarchical power structure that were provided by the westerners. In the local narratives we have seen the colonial power structure, colonial values. Because their (westerners) numerous ideas motivated the local people psychologically, mentally, aesthetically and to some extent, economically. In the first essay *Concerning Violence* his monumental work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) Fanon talks about decolonization process. He goes on to say that colonization is a violent process. While he is talking about violence it is also noteworthy that violence and resistance are interlinked

with each other. When people demonstrate various movements against the existing colonial power, there emerges some violence with due conflict of the colonized and the colonizers.

Post colonial studies encompass a vast area more interestingly in the twentieth century. It is also noteworthy that post colonial studies begin with the critiquing of the politics of European English and the colonial historiography as well. Thus post colonial studies itself is a kind of resistance. In the context of the colonial period the Asian, Caribbean, African literatures were excluded from the discipline of English literature. In the meantime the emergence of the 'commonwealth literature' breaks the stereotypical thoughts regarding the canon of English literature. The commonwealth literature questions their existence in terms of cultures, literatures and belief systems as well. Thus 'commonwealth literature' can be said to be the torchbearer in the context of native English. Subaltern Studies in South Africa also explores the possibility of eliminating the western ideas and parallelly it also emphasizes the upliftment of indigenous languages.

In the book *Post-Colonial Transformation* (2001) Bill Ashcroft opines that resistance should be conceptualized as a:

form of defence by which an invader is 'kept out', the subtle and sometimes even unspoken forms of social and cultural resistance have been much more common. It is these subtle and more widespread forms of resistance, forms of saying 'no', that are most interesting because they are most difficult for imperial powers to combat. (Ashcroft. 20)

Through these lines what Ashcroft tries to show is the conflict in-between the framework of resistance. According to him sometimes resistance goes in vain while combating with the colonial powers because of their (colonizers) powers. Resistance creates

power. The definition of resistance can also be described in terms of liberation. Sometimes excessive power also creates problems. Foucault in his monumental book *Discipline and Punish* (1975) critiques the notion of the sovereign power where he takes that it is the centralized power structure in a state or any other domain where the people should obey the rules of the state. In that type of governmental system if someone violates the law; he will be punished publicly which is more terrible and monstrous.

### **Post colonialism and language**

The term 'post colonialism' embodies a vast field. It is also a product of re-claiming, re-examining the rules, ideas of the colonial period. The major highlighting factor in the post colonial era is the emergence of various movements, of which many of them are fighting for or reclaiming their past, their own values. During the colonial period the conditions of most of the third world countries were same. They were fighting against the governance of the colonizing country, for their economic exploitation as well their cultural domination. 'Post colonialism', as the name implies, itself gets started with the first voice raised against the colonial regime, and hence, 'resistance' becomes the prime motif and moving force behind post colonialism as a movement. In the later part of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century colonized people got engaged with numerous resistance programs. As a consequence, many states in Asia and Africa got political independence by the mid twentieth century.

The most powerful weapon through which the occident (the British) grabs the orient (the colonised) is the language. In the book *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson argues that colonial and post colonial policies aimed at promoting English. They take language as a device through which they control the culture, economy and

literature of the native people. English emerges as a dominant language and produces English languages in their colonies. By teaching or spreading the English language, they try to establish their linguistic imperialism and it also helps them to control the colonies through employing some native people. During the colonial period, some situations were created through which it was ascertained that all literature should be made in English. Even though some people wrote in native languages, they did not get any recognition. In fact, they did not have any impact upon the English speaking colonizers. There are two spheres in linguistic colonialism. In the Vertical sphere it was aimed at spreading the language to the 'upper classes' colonized people; and in the Horizontal sphere, the aim of spreading the language on the geographical grounds or from capitals to the villages was embodied. The missionaries also helped in spreading the language.

In the post colonial period writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe express their feelings through their writings. In his book *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), Ngugi depicts the politics of languages in African Literature. According to him language was the means of spiritual subjugation because language is very beautifully linked with culture and literature. In this book he describes an incident which happened because of using *Gikuyu*, a native language in Kenya. He said

“the culprit was given, corporal punishment – three to five stokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as *I AM STUPID* or *I AM A DONKEY*”. (Ngugi.6)

Through these lines Ngugi approaches the hegemony in terms of language. It is this hegemony because along with other discrimination, people were dominated in terms of their knowledge

in English. Ngugi also says that the students who knew the English language were given prize, prestige and applause. Ngugi, for sometime, passionately left using the language of the colonizers, i.e. English, as a way of resistance and tried to elevate his native language. But later, he realized that without getting into the gutter, one cannot clean it. There is no doubt that the post colonial writers used English language, but they colored it with native flavor. For example in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Chinua Achebe uses some proverbs which are originally African but he translates those into English language. In this way they strengthen and elevate their own cultural traits, creating a nativised version of English and try to gain attention worldwide. Along with the proverbs in the novel *Things Fall Apart* we have seen the resistance of the native people against the colonizers. Okonkwo the protagonist of this novel along with the other villagers try to resist the colonial power. They revolted against them. Achebe explores the patterns of exploitation throughout this novel. In the end of *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo's suicide can be said as a failure of resistance. Okonkwo committed suicide because of two reasons. Firstly, he was betrayed by the Englishmen because they at first came with the intention of trading but later they held their rule and even established their court. Secondly, he was also betrayed by his own son, Nwoye because he converted to Christianity and to adhered the Christian values and ideals. We also see the resistance in regards with language in Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952). Being a Nigerian author what Tutuola tries to depict is the native Nigerian language with the mixture of local folklore. In the title of Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, use of the word Drinkard was derived from the word drunkard. Tutuola not only violated the lexicon of the language, but grammatical pattern and narrative style were also challenged in his novel. Notarization of language is also a way of post colonial resistance in languages.

## **Resistance in Assam and Assamese language**

Assamese language is spoken widely in Assam. During the colonial period, English and Bengali languages spread very quickly in Assam. Assamese people were mostly illiterate. Bengali was imposed upon the official proceedings. The British had to import learned Bengali officials from West Bengal for employing at different departments. Thus the Assamese language had to undergo subjugation not because of the language of the colonizers, but because of Bengali, which was becoming the colonial agent at that time. The Christian Missionaries who came to Assam with the sole purpose of spreading Christianity felt if people speaking a certain language has to be influenced, one has to use the very language to hit them on the emotional tip. Banikanta Kakoti in his *Assamese, its Formation and Development* (1941) opines, “The missionaries made Sibsagar in Eastern Assam the centre of their activities and used the dialect of Sibsagar for their literary purposes”. They established the first printing press in Sibsagar in 1836. In 1846 they started the first Assamese monthly periodical called *Arunudoï*. Literate Assamese persons started putting their thoughts in this. The Missionaries also published the first Assamese-English dictionary compiled by M. Bronson in 1867. Assamese folks wanted to do something for their mother-tongue, but they did not have any well formulated idea about how to proceed. The missionaries and their efforts gave a new pace to the mental urge. Assamese speakers will remain indebted forever to the missionaries for reviving the dying flame of Assamese nationalism.

Those who fought for the rejuvenation of Assamese language were learned Assamese youths educated outside Assam, mostly Kolkata. They saw the language movements, freedom struggle, reform movements outside Assam and brought in those seeds to Assam, to sow in Assamese people’s psyche. Thus Assamese

people got enlightened with those ideas and started forming their own ideas regarding national freedom, culture and identity. They became aware of their dead past and tried to explore and revive the oral tradition, history and *Gurucharit Kathas*. Dharmakanta Baroa was one of those noticeable figures who worked on that track.

Using the colonizers' language as a weapon was no longer a valid idea in case of Assam, but their literature was one of those resources which inspired Assamese litterateurs to work on. The idea of world literature was well adopted in Assam and three Assamese litterateurs, for the first time, translated the English literary jewel Shakespeare, into Assamese (*Comedy of Errors*). Thus they tried to borrow a foreign flavor for enriching their native literature. By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, all foreign literary genres got introduced in Assamese too.

In Assamese Literature, the three great figures- Lakshminath Bezboruah, Hemchandra Goswami and Chandra Kumar Agarwalla- are known to be the *Trimurti*. They wanted to reform Assamese language and give it a modern shape and consequently they formed a literary organization which is known as *Axomia Bhasa Unnoti Xadhini Xobha*. The introduction of *Junaki* magazine marked the initiation of Romantic period in Assamese Literature. Not only these literary figures, but religious *gurus* also contributed towards both Assamese literature and freedom struggle. Shri Pitambar Dev Goswami, Shri Dutta Dev Goswami were some of those noticeable contributors.

The British used opium to exploit mentally and physically, the natives of not only the Indians but also in Africans. To resist this opium business, a social play was written by Hemchandra Baruah under the title of *Kaniyar Kirtton*, which shows the negative impact



of consuming opium to the local people. Besides fiction, Hemchandra Baruah compiled the first Assamese full-fledged dictionary named *Hemkosha*, to create a standard Assamese lexicon, so that Assamese too can stand by other rich languages of the world. Though the native Assamese people like Banikanta Kakati and Hemchandra Boruah use English language, it is not the pure British English but the standardized Indian English that they use. Their sole motto is to bring Assamese language to the world.

In the post independence era, Assamese literature is in its heyday. It may be called the era of the Novel. Many great Assamese litterateurs have been writing novels responding to the world literary scenario. They are not a direct response to colonization but more of an implication. Tilottoma Misra, in her novel *Swarnalata*, shows the responses of Assamese people towards the government. It also shows Gunabhiram Barooah, the leading literary and revolutionary figure of colonial period. In relation to him, we also get a glimpse of other towering figures like Rabindranath Tagore, Dharmakanta Barooah, Chandranath Sarmah, Gyanadabhiram Barooah and so on. Moreover a clear picture of social inequalities, exploitation, child-marriage and its consequences can be seen in the novel. A strong voice against colonial rule and psychic slavery is raised by the protagonist Swarnalata. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's *Mrityunjay* and *Earoingam* are two successful pictures of colonial times, exploitations, ravages and struggle.

Some novelists like Mamoni Roysom Goswami, Nabakanta Barooah, Anuradha Sarmah Pujari, Rita Chaudhury, Juri Borah Borgohain, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Juri Saikia, Jayanta Madhav Borah- have been writing novels on their own issues, our own past. Why should we continue only the fictional narrative tradition? They too have their own glorious past to be elevated, to take to the world platform. Mamoni Roysom Goswami's *Theng Fakhri*

*Tehsildaror Tamor Torual* is one of those psychic mountings of colonial era. Nabakanta Barooah writes about the Ahom customs and beliefs in his *Kokadeotar Har*. Anuradha Sarmah Pujari writes about one of those great earlier Assamese woman Administrators, Indira Miri and her struggles throughout the hills and plains of North East, in her novel *Mereng*. Rita Chaudhury writes about the Chinese-Assamese assimilation and the Chinese's plight in Assam both during and after colonial rule in her novel *Makam*. Juri Saikia, on the other hand, writes about the Chutia tribe of Assam and the sacrifice of the Tribal Queen Sadhani in her novel *Saumar Nandini*. Jayanta Madhav Borah writes about the contribution of Majuli's folk to the freedom struggle and the contribution also of the Dharmagurus to both the literary and national realms. Moreover, it shows the *Satras*, and their influence over people.

Thus, in the post-colonial era, Assamese writers have been enlivening the spirit of resistance towards the colonial rule some way or the other- some defying their strong influence, some glorifying their grand past, some showing Assamese people's strong participation in the freedom struggle and some showcasing their own cultural beauties.

## **Conclusion**

It has been a long time since the colonial rule is over. But the postcolonial spirit of resistance is still alive in the writings, the reflection of society. This shows how deep the influence of colonization over the psyche of the victims was. It was so strong that even the continuing generations are also surviving the resistant spirit. This spirit is well understood by Ashis Nandy, expressed in his *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, "the inner resistance to recognizing the ultimate violence which colonialism does to its victims, namely that it creates

a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers...”

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**Interplay of Class and Power in  
Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart***

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The profound potentiality of literature as a site to contest hegemony and arbitrary power structures has nowhere been more seen and felt than in those post colonial texts that seek to integrate, explore and investigate within the discursive space, the power relation between the moneyed imperial class and the dispossessed colonized lot. Class and power share a very unequivocal intercourse; while power can be exercised independent of class, an ideal state of unrestricted, stratified and effective command emerges when both consolidate to constitute a coherent whole. This ideal state at the same time masters potentiality to unwittingly invite reverse power. This article seeks to deconstruct how power emanates and is exercised by a small hegemonic class of white men to restrict, subvert and contain large rebellious native voices in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and the reverse power involved therein. In the theoretical framework set by Marxist, Post-Colonial and Post-modernist critics, it seeks to bring to the fore the hidden patterns and the underlying trends that inform such relations. The term class has appeared across a range of disciplines- politics, literature, culture, sociology and all of them have different meanings for it. Howsoever in this paper, class would be interpreted from the economic perspective of Marx and would be used in the context of conflict between the alien whites of European blood and the black natives of African soil.

The Berlin Conference of 1884-85, that sought division of Africa amongst the many European powers (Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium etc), saw Nigeria under the possession of English. The English mission in Nigeria, as elsewhere in other colonies, worked at two levels- at the surface, on self- claims of the superiority of European culture and the rightness of empire, it sought to civilize the uncivilized and at a deeper level worked towards its commercial control. Ode Ogede, speaking of the effect this imperial, colonial rule has on Nigeria in particular and Africa in general, says that ‘it led to the termination of the autonomy or self-rule’ and brought about ‘economic dispossessions, cultural confusion, or mental displacement, psychological disorientation, and inferiority complexes’. (Ogede) Chinua Achebe interrogates this effect that the imperial, colonial rule had over the natives of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular in his seminal work *Things Fall Apart*. Published in 1958, the novel has been celebrated as a canon in post-colonial literature and been translated in many languages, inspiring a generation of writers and critics the world over. Harping on the efficacy of art to shape and serve social designs, Achebe says, “I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past-with all its imperfections-was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them.” (Achebe 45) True to his words, Achebe’s prime concern in this novel seems not only to point out gross violence embedded in the imperial, colonial rule but also at decolonizing all aspects of African life, and in doing so shares a common vision of deep concern and commitment for the whole African continent with other African writers like Ngugi wa Thiong’O and Wole Soyinka.

Marx conceives of human society as one where economy reigns supreme- economy is the base on which rest of the superstructures of the society lean onto. Those who control the

economy, control (or rather exploit) the superstructures and which include culture, education, religion, politics and other aspects of life. This human society is also characterized by an eternal conflict between the moneyed class on one hand and the poor lot on the other because of the exploitative ways of the former. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* investigates and projects this economic and its multifaceted exploitation that came from the imperial, colonial class against the natives of Nigeria; and he realistically and convincingly brings out the conflict between the colonial haves and the colonized havenots 'from an insider's perspective through the employment of African brand of English, which is impregnated with African idioms, proverbs and cultural semiotics' (Naikar 11) While African tribal society functioned on ancestral laws and customs, the new hierarchy now saw a completely alien imperial moneyed class guide all aspects of African social, cultural, political and economic life. Cognizance was taken to it that everyone bent to the new ways of life through the employment of various mechanisms that included both ideological and repressive and those who stooped to go by the rules were welcomed into the new fold and those who dared to contest this power were met with unspeakable violence. Okonkwo (microcosm of the whole African people) and Umuofia (microcosm of macrocosmic Africa) serves to bring to light the African life under the colonial, imperial regime. They signify the great African tradition that was butchered by the imperial English class, functioning as means of exploitation not only of economy but all aspects of the African-Nigerian life. The text opens with a combat, a wrestling match in which Okonkwo overturns history by beating the reigning champion of his region, but overthrowing 'the Cat' (Achebe 1) would be one thing and overthrowing the imperial power (he would later discover) would entirely be another. While the former champion, though vanquished, never would resort to unfair means for those are the rules of the clan that have been handed down to

them from generation to generation but with the colonizers it is very different. Umuofia refrained from unjust wars, we are told, wars that were fought to subdue and rule. For them war was sacred that could not be 'without validation from the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves' (MacKenzie 128-138). It was a place where one would be tested for their courage and strength. This ran in sharp contrast to the colonizers unprincipled ways to capsize and upset the Others, using all possible means that should come their way. It is through such dubious means that the encroachment of an alien church, government and commerce upon the established patterns of life is effected in Umuofia and elsewhere. Okonkwo realizes this toward the end of the novel and therefore commits himself to suicide, but not before he had played his part in the great imperial game, a trait that serves to drive home the point how Okonkwos of the world would never stoop to the exploitative ways of the world. The many trials and tribulations that visits his life like the boxing combat, The Oracle of the Hills and Caves on Ikemefuna, the Week of Peace involving his wife test the character in him and he comes out victorious each time but the colonial, imperial regime that he notices and experiences is one that he cannot fathom in its entirety and before which he appears to be helpless. The colonizers were the moneyed class who controlled wealth. And control of wealth meant the control of all aspects of life. "Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up" (Achebe 51) but on real terms there was nothing that the natives could do. Louis Althusser speaks of apparatuses that are frequently employed by states as tools to subvert dissenting voice, which he divides into repressive and ideological. In the course of the novel, we see that, of the ISAs it is not only religion but also law, family, culture, government and education that become the target of intervention, construction and reconstruction by the colonizers to ideologically

subdue the natives. Native religion was sought to be displaced by Christianity and it was a successful enterprise because it led to major realignment of values in favor of not only the rulers but also the converted for it became a symbol of status, honor and prestige, notwithstanding the hybridity of it all. More and more money was funded to the propagation of the new religion and converting the natives for it gave the colonizers power to control the natives. Okonkwo helplessly finds his own son Nwoye drift away to the religion of the usurpers and only ruminates in vain, "How then could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate?" (Achebe 55). The new regime not only saw a new religion but also a new government. Prior to the arrival of the white class, the natives were guided by their own age old tribal rules. And just like religion, this new system of governance functioned to contain and handicap the natives. Disciplinary power that Foucault speaks of in his book *Discipline and Punish* takes the form of law and prison in this novel. Anybody who dared raise a voice against the moneyed, imperialist class was sought to be disciplined by courts of law. The absence of a central authority and absolute laws are now replaced by a disciplined body of men whose pronouncements can only be matched in God's that they brought. 'They had built a court where the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance' (Achebe 62). After Okonkwo and other elders have been arrested, the District Commissioner informs them: "We have brought a peaceful administration to you and your people so that you may be happy. But we will not allow you to ill-treat others. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen" (Achebe 68). The baton to administer justice now lay not with the village elders or the traditional laws but the new court of law introduced by the colonial class. The colonial administration now defined the parameters of peace, what best was good and suited the natives, what might bring them



happiness and how justice be served. And justice was administered by either ideologically poisoning them or throwing them into prison or through the barrel of the gun. It is this form of justice that takes the life of Okonkwo. Umuofia loses much of its autonomy with the arrival of the colonizers. So powerful is the class, that not only its tribal laws and customs and traditions are watched in suspicion and sought to be discouraged and extirpated, but its very people are not allowed to be assembled in meets. It was not only a question on its identity but a fatal blow on its very existence. However, the challenges that emanates from the class do not go unchallenged. Foucault speaks of power as one that travels in all direction, to and fro. Thus while moneyed imperialist class exercise their power, counter discourses from the colonized subjects serves as example of reverse power; the avenging motif works to fill up the vacuum of power on the other side of the story that comes from the challenges of the imperialist class. When Okonkwo and his friend shave off their hair, Okonkwo constantly seeks vengeance against the 'class' and he is not afraid of going against them all alone if the situation demands. "If Umuofia decided on war, all would be well. But if they choose to be cowards he would go out and avenge himself." (Achebe 70) His loyalty to the dictates of his clan is only matched by his fierce and unrelenting insistence on avenging the class that threatened African way of life. David Whittaker writes that *Things Fall Apart* was the "first Anglophone African novel to set out consciously to restore a sense of humanity and history to postcolonial Africa, and to document how Africans perceived the arrival of the colonizing Other" (Whittaker x-xi). An important aspect of this African perception is evinced in this novel when the author let us know how the Africans could look through the divide and rule artifice of the colonizers through the character of Obierika. He is quick to understand how a trap had been laid to divide the tribesmen: "The whiteman is very clever. He came quietly and

peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on things that held us together and we have fallen apart.” (Achebe 62) When the elders discover that a section of their society’s loyalty to the clan was fast wavering, they decide on a radical course of action to fight back: “If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansman. But we must do it. Our fathers never dreamt of such a thing, they never killed their brothers. But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our fathers would never have done.” (Achebe 72) The vital links in the network of the tribal life that held them together in the spirit of brotherhood before the arrival of the alien government now lay shattered in the face of new challenges and if the clan and its people are to survive, they must act and act with deciding clarity. They now not only have to fight the white men but even that section of their tribe that were increasingly shifting on to the enemy’s side. Counter power at its peak, is something that we witness towards the end of the novel when Okonkwo would not surrender himself to the ruling class. All his life and action was devoted to the allegiance of his tribe and to uphold its values and thus when he commits suicide, he gives a taste of reverse power to that very class that sought his subjugation through various means at their disposal. In doing so he refuses to be tried by the new court of law, by the new class of imperial powers, thereby retaining the sanctity of the tribal land and its rules.

The novel is an excellent study on the interrogation of the power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Mechanisms including law, religion, education, prison, police and others, when combined with strong economic base, can be a disastrous force to reckon with. Howsoever, it has also very often

been seen that power invites reverse power. If the colonial, imperial class exercise their power in this book, then we also see reverse exercise of power by the colonized natives. Challenges do not go unchallenged, but are matched with intense passion. Okonkwo grief and struggle against the de-tribalization, falling apart of the Umuofian society and the demand for absolute obedience in the hands of the colonial, imperial class is not one man's revolt against an exploitative system but stands for the concerted effort of whole African society.

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***Imphal***

*Robin S. Ngangom*

---

Nothing has changed in this backdrop.  
Boys with earrings  
enter hairdressing saloons and  
set their hair with dirty combs;  
the maimed women with meager leaves  
in the bazars imploring pity,  
the men lording over them;  
and the girls everywhere,  
spying from balconies,  
on display with renovated faces  
in streets, in colleges,  
happy as beauty queens and then  
the boys proud to drive their fathers' cars.  
But outdoing them all  
the drug-fiends,  
with bodies alive and  
eyes dead.

This is the ancestral grounds  
of the Meiteis.  
A lottery of souls  
is held here every day.  
Sons, daughters,

with strength of elephants,  
your homeland is on fire.

## II

I find winter each year  
when I return like a dead ritual  
to this gnarled land.  
Here, I am both native and illegal migrant.  
The minister is my shepherd,  
I shall not want.  
Yeah, though I walk  
in the valley  
in the shadow of Aids,  
I will fear no man.

## III

There is something sadly inevitable  
about this land, something inescapable,  
like a beast which stalks its own death,  
like an ominous prophecy  
of men clad in red going to war,  
like an arrow when released  
seeks the man who strung the bow.

Today, when everything seems to be  
pointing again to prospect and fortune,  
when no longer the subject race  
the fantasies of capital have come true,  
when our arts strut in the streets,  
when the entire nation recognizes us,

when our poetry is filled with paeans  
of pluck and progress,  
when our culture is put up for display,  
something sinister sours  
our fondest dreams.

#### IV

Land of my childhood  
I can no more pretend to love,  
where I heard the bicycles  
leaving in the morning and  
a kitchen warm with smells.  
I can be found hidden in a corner,  
the soft boy with a fondness for epics  
as some rowdy friends  
plan the conquest  
of a neighboring territory;  
one galloped a stolen horse  
through a crowded bazar  
cutting the throng to pieces and  
walked on to become  
the marksman  
of a subversive outfit.

I should have been there  
to keep track of hidden paths  
that lead to the jungle,  
the mazes that weave the heroic lore.  
I should have monitored  
the boys shot down and  
counted the soldiers

they ambushed.  
I should have been there  
in a deserted hamlet in Ukhurul  
when every able-bodied male  
fled to the nearest jungle and  
only naked children  
were left playing  
with stolid old women.



***Devotion***

*Malsawma*  
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---

Marvelous creature roaming the world,  
Admiring you has become a favourite pastime;  
Rattling my senses with your comely visage,  
Youth spurs me on to seek you again.

Vacuous voids now filled with your light,  
All that I see here reminds me of you;  
Never your presence should I deign to forget.  
Locating my place in the depths of your heart,  
Alas I wander aimlessly again and again.  
Lecherous thoughts tempt me ever more,  
Aghast at myself I push them back to the pits.  
Working myself to the bone I try to please you,  
Mercifully you respond to my endeavours;  
I am forever at your beck and call.

***Green Apples from China***

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*Dept. of English,*  
*Mizoram University.*

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Green apples from China  
As sour as they look  
A cartographers dream  
Smooth as newly minted paper  
Journeying across the border  
Onto my office table  
Skin of history  
dotted here, dotted there  
smooth in the inbetweens  
Only to be  
cut up  
carved out  
Into six or eight or ten unequal parts  
Like a pie chart  
To be scooped up  
Skewered  
and chewed on...  
swallowed by an indifferent belly.  
Seeds...  
binned.

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