



Indian north eastern identity formation in the fictional Indian English writing

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Abstract

There are some problems of psychological existence in the minds of North-East Indian English literature. Indian North East does not only provide us the mountainous hilly circumstances and living, but also the aspirations and inspirations they are thinking of. Violence, humanitarian concerns, racial grounds and economic depravity---all make a combined whole to provide a situation that is not a simple phenomena to explain. This paper is to explore and analyze the whole situation with some new perspectives and backdrops.

Keywords: violence, humanitarian, racial, economic depravity

Introduction

Pratilipi (North-East English literary Journal) shows the true concern of North East Indian writers as we have the opinion that the long running unrest, violence and terrorism in the North-East have remained a mere digression in the mainstream of the Indian nation-state. Ironically even in the mainstream arts that otherwise come across as very charged and political.

Wikipedia observes that North East India was a colonial construct and continues to be one by virtue of having a historically difficult relationship with the Indian nation-state. This geographical concept of 'North-Easterner' tends to homogenize and extremely heterogeneous cluster of people as there exists no common history and heritage of the people.

The entire region comprising of eight states - Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim--- a region poorly connected to the Indian mainland by a small corridor (chicken-neck Siliguri), and surrounded by many countries such as Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and China. It is the setting of multitude of conflict that undermines the idea of India as a prosperous and functioning democracy.

Naga insurgency known as the mother of the North-East insurgencies is one of the oldest unresolved armed conflicts in the world. The multidimensional conflict in the region has a all-pervasive phenomenon, and in its violent form, it has not only affected the political and territorial sovereignty of the Indian state, but also the life of various people living in the region in incomprehensible and inexplicable terms. This scenario is grounded by various reasons ...

- a) The historical connection of the traditional tribes in the North east is largely of Tibetan-Burma / Mongoloid stock and closer to the south-east Asia than to the south Asia. It is ethnically, linguistically and culturally very distinct from other states of India.
- b) The Indian government's past and ongoing process of national integration, state building and democratic

consolidation have further aggravated the conflict scenario in the region.

- c) The AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act) shows the inability and reluctance of the government to solve the conflict with adequate political measures. This law became a powerful measure for the centre and the state government to act against actors challenging the political and territorial integrity of India. The regular violations of human rights has led to a radicalization and militarization of the region and weakened also the supporters of political situation.
- d) India's "Look East Policy" is as per with regions' diverse natural resources, rich bio-diversity and enormous hydro-electricity potential, among others, could also help to overcome the widespread feeling of backwardness among the inhabitants of the North-East.

The major conflict raised here is based on ethnic identity crisis. Membership of an ethnic group tends to be defined by a shared cultural heritage, ancestry, origin, myth, history, homeland, language or dialect, symbolic systems such as religion, mythology or ritual, cuisine, dressing style, art and physical appearance. In this regard there are mainly two approaches:

- i) **Emily Durkheim's Functionalism Approach:** It said that when the social institutions that provides stability and meaning for people (especially family and religion) have a weak hold in a given society; people become confused, weak and disorganized.
- ii) **Karl Marx's Conflict theory:** Marx argued that the basis of all society is conflict over access to the means of production. He contends that when people are shuffled into social groups (he used two things- owners and workers) based on their group membership, they are either oppressors or oppressed. Behind this racial conflict there are mainly few points:
 - a) A critique of liberalism: It favoured a race conscious approach to transformation rather than liberalism's

embrace of colour blindness, and favours an approach that relies more on political organizing, in contrast to liberalism's reliance on right-based remedies.

- b) story-telling/counter (storytelling approach: here we see using narrative to illuminate and explore experiences of racial oppression.
- c) Third point is about *revisionist* interpretations of civil rights law and progress regarding anti-discrimination law.
- d) Applying insights from *social sciences* writing in race and racism to legal problems.
- e) *The intersection theory* is examination of race, sex, class, national origin and sexual orientation, how their combination plays out in various settings.
- f) *Essentialism philosophy* shows that all oppressed people share the commonality of oppression. However that oppression varies by gender, class, race etc., so the aim strategies will differ for each of these groups.
- g) *White privilege* refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race.
- h) Cheryl Harris adds the theoretical element of *whiteness as property*.
- i) Karen Pyke documents the theoretical element of *internalized racism* or internalized racial oppression. The victims of racism begin to believe that ideology that they are inferior and white people and white culture is superior.
- j) Camara Phyllis Jones *defines institutionalized racism* as the structures, politics, practices, and norms resulting in differential access to the goods, services and opportunities of society by race.

The black identity crisis can be found in the works of *Du Bois*, *Hoyt Fuller*, *Larry Neal* in terms of Black Aesthetics and Racial Memory. But in North-east, immigration and border crossings have been integral factors. *Aihwa Ong's* work on refugees (2003) is integral to the race theory for it foregrounds racial and ethnic identities as well social policy and the role of the state. Ethnic issues and inter-ethnic relations affect state-formation and integrative process in India. In North-east India much of the confliction processes seems to originating from ethnic identity formation or ethnic consolidation and 'marginalized' nationality identity problems. In North-East India, those groups which evoke *ethnic consciousness* or shared cultural traits are not necessarily uprooted from or unattached to their ancestral homeland. Jackson makes terminological distinction between ethnic category, ethnic group and ethno-nation. Ethnic category signifies persons of the same social cultural characteristics that identify them as members of a recognizable social category. Characteristics may include race, religion, colour, customs, language and geographical origin. Ethnic group indicates an ethnic category that had acquired additional characteristic of identity and organization. Ethno-nation arises when an ethnic group aspires an interest in public authority which may be constitutional status of special rights, provincial autonomy, and not outright sovereignty. The process by which ethnic category may be awakened and transformed into ethnic group or ethno-nation, is called by Jackson '*ethnic mobilization*'. The people of North-East India may thus be said to comprise of

ethnic categories and nationalities. Here the process of ethnic mobilization and nationality mobilization are in operation simultaneously. As for example, Bengalis, who first come to Tripura, as an ethnic category soon outnumbered the original tribal Tripurians. They soon made successful claims over the territory of Tripura and became nationals. The original Tripurians, on the other hand, had been reduced to an ethnic category status by uprooting them from their homeland.

These types of identity crisis can be found in the short story collections like *These Hills Called Home: Stories from the war Zone* by Temsula Ao. Mitra Phukan's *The Collector's Wife*, which caters to the rederly expectations of its intended pan-Indian audience by adopting a title that goes against local practices. Phukan tribalizes the Assam movement, which her novel claims to depict, by her reliance on an essentialist discourse. In contrast, in *The Legends of Pensam* Mamang Dai (despite her tendency to poetize Arunachal Pradesh) creates an unusual collage of voices and genres. Siddharth Sarma *East of the Sun* being to transcend borders. *Mrityunjaya* fictionalized the large scale participation of North Eastern in the freedom struggle in India. Aruni Kashyp, who is the first author of the North-east to be represented by Godwin, whose novel *The House with a Thousand Novels* agrees this view. Jahnvi Barua is an Indian author from Assam. She is the author of *Next Door*, a critically acclaimed collection of short stories set in Assam with insurgency background. Mamang Dai is the writer of the book *Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land*. Siddhartha Dev's is based on the place of Shillong. *The Red Sun* is a book by S. Chakraborty to find out the real situation amidst Maoist extremity. There are so many other fictional writing which will further illustrate the situation.

So there are many writers who represented the North Eastern mannerism as well as the socio-cultural backdrops. These writers are actually portraying their works in terms of racial difference and ethnic understanding. Here we find how a racial identity is formed in terms of heterogeneity and difference - in culture, in attitude and in race-ethnicity. North-East peoples now in a very peculiar situation to live with -first they are the members of their particular ethnic groups, secondly there are a widespread tendency to spread Indian overwhelming national domination over race-ethnic identity, thirdly the ancestral origins of Mongoloid identity can have some touch by Chinese demands over Arunachal Pradesh. These writers are thus providing this very situation by their fictional writings.

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