

**BEING AT PERIPHERY: LITERATURE AS A TOOL IN BRINGING THE  
'FRINGE' TO 'CENTER'****Aneesa Mushtaq**

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There is an imperative need to understand the geo-political and ethno-political contexts in order to study the marginalized sections of a country and the necessity to bring them to the centre. The multiple cultures and traditions have amalgamated composite cultures. With the diversity of cultures and traditions there has been a tendency where the problem of identity crisis erupts. There is no exaggeration of facts if it is stated that almost all the countries of the world have issues related to identity crisis. But the main decisive point at issue is if there is no move to bring the peripheral to the centre.

The term "Northeast" of India "reflects an external and not a local point of view. ... in none of the local languages does any word exist that has this effect of lumping together seven or eight very disparate states, each individual in its cultures, ethnicities, physical contours etc., and certainly very distinct in the nature of its problems" (Gill 3). The "Northeast" states of India club together eight different states and they are; Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, and Sikkim. The disconnection of the states of "Northeast" with mainland India has largely misconstrued the region in many ways. Although there is a void between the mainland India with the numerous tribes and overall region, the literature that is coming out from the region, presents a different historical and emotional picture of the collective project.

The states of Northeast have an age old oral-tradition but because of the prejudices and disconnection with the states, the focus has never been the long traditions of writings and as such they have never been given a space.

Literature plays an important role in connecting the people from different regions, in peace building and therefore it also helps in bringing the marginalized community to the centre as well. The purpose of this paper is to bring out the importance of literature as a tool in bringing the communities at periphery to the centre.

The many aspects of literature are reflected in the literary narratives of and from the Northeast states that bring forth the need to understand the diversity of the region and shun away all prejudices. The literature that comes out of the lived experiences of people from the Northeast states lends voice to voiceless; which remain unheard and silenced in mainland narratives. The writings and narratives can be seen as new approaches and perspectives to discuss people at periphery. Tilottoma Misra states that, "Violence features as a recurrent theme because the story of violence seems to be a never ending one in this region and yet people have not learnt 'to live with it', as they are expected to do by the distant centers of power" (Misra xxi). Therefore writing in such conflict zones can be seen as an inescapable process, an act that brings forth the people and their experiences to centre. The writers have always grasped a special attention because the narratives are about the real people, their struggles, and the lived experiences of people and life situations on the ground. Although the writers belong to diverse ethnic groups, their narratives express the feeling of home and belonging. The different discourses speak about people, culture; traditions, myths, folktales, head-hunting, land and nature. The crisis of identity have been aggrieved by political divergences have resulted in furthering the gap between people of mainland India with the states of Northeast.

The writers from the states of Northeast despite the ever present shadow of gun have a strong inclination towards their origin and they write about it in order to present information about them and their people. "The roots of the beloved land; the roots of the people's culture; the roots of the times; most of all, the roots of the past, have sunken deep into their poetry and has given it a unique savor" (Ngangom xii). The interest of the paper lies in studying the two writers, Temsula Ao and Indira Goswami from Nagaland and Assam respectively who use literature as a means to bring the marginalized people to the forefront. The current paper will study how the narratives from the states of Northeast have highlighted the under-represented issues of the region which in a way helps mainland India to understand the diversity of region.

In the poem, "Stone-people from Lungterok" she attempts to ascertain the identity of her people. Past is not simply a memory; here past is the retrospection of her existence of identity. The 'Six Stones' that are at Lungterok speak legacy of Naga people:

Lungterok, The six stones  
Where the progenitors  
And forebears  
Of the stone-people  
Were born  
Out of the womb  
of the earth.  
...  
Stone- people,  
The polyglots,  
Knowledgeable  
In birds' language  
and animal discourse.  
The students,  
Who learned from ants  
The art of carving

Heads of enemies  
 As trophies  
 of war.  
 Stone-people,  
 Savage and sage  
 Who sprang out of lungterok,  
 Was the birth adult when the stone broke?  
 Or are the Stone-people yet to come of age? (Ao 1-3).

Temsula Ao depicts an incredibly realistic picture of the Naga history with the conglomeration of people, languages and their way of life.

Another author in focus is Indira Goswami who in novel *The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Tehsildar* attempts to bring a marginalized section to the forefront by writing about the role of a woman namely Thengphakhri. The novel is based on Indira Goswami's extensive research and collection of facts from the old Bodo people. There are memories of living witnesses on which the author has heavily relied upon. As I mentioned earlier the novel covers only a particular phase of Thengphakhri's life, the disputed date of her death (1879 or 1895) in the *Introduction* of novel by Aruni Kashyap is also mentioned but there is no detailed description of Thengphakhri's life after her joining the rebel group. The history finds mention of elite class people, leaders, kings, powerful kingdoms, majority communities and men. Bodos, an indigenous Assamese tribe has been rarely documented. Due to the nullifying of Bodo history in Assam chronicles, the uprising of Bodo movement in late 1980's took place. The official records called as Buranjis in Assamese mostly speak about Assam kings and the powerful kingdoms. In the struggle for independence Bodo people participated as well. The memories of the revolt are still alive in the minds of the old people which are being passed from one generation to another by songs and stories. The deliberate attempts which failed the representation of lower or weaker communities toward the materialization of national histories have been well incorporated in Goswami's novel. Therefore the novel *The Bronze Sword of Thengphakhri Tehsildar* brings the forgotten heroine to the centre of Assam literature and thus it finds its way into the national discourse as well because it is bound to be researched again and again. Indira Goswami herself belongs to the majority community that is she is from Assam but her writing about a Bodo woman; she is conscious of the privileges her community has from time to time enjoyed and she thus occupies the position of critical insider who sends a message to the majority community that they need to pay attention to the stories, to the life and over all discourses of the neglected and marginalized communities. In one way we can say that the marginalized people need to rely on the "centre" in order to get them recognized. The subject who is basically the object of Indira Goswami's study helps her to bring Thengphakhri to the center, which indirectly reckons the fact that Thengphakhri belongs to the margin and she needs someone who has advantage over her to change her position. Therefore it is basically the privileged class, community and voice that locate or dislocate an unheard voice. Thengphakhri is able to enter the official discourse through the narration of someone who is prominent writer as well as part of the larger discourses. The novel is thus rewriting subaltern history and represents subaltern life experiences but at the same time criticizes the center or the privileged class, society.

The writings coming from the periphery explore people and their lived experience; the reader can identify them with himself as they are contemporary society's representation. There is a need to document the lives and lived experiences of people from the states of Northeast; so that there is an understanding of ravages of battered lives lived as fringe identity.

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