

RESEARCH ARTICLE

NORTH- EAST INDIAN NOVELS IN ENGLISH: THEMATIC INSIGHTS

S.ABUBACKER SIDDIQ¹, Assistant Professor of English,Hajee Karutha Rowther Howdia
College (Autonomous),Uthamapalayam District

A. J. SALEEMA KATHOON², Assistant Professor of English,Hajee Karutha Rowther Howdia
College ,Autonomous),Uthamapalayam – 625533, Theni District

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Abstract

North East India has been inhabited by the landscape of insulation over the decades. The geographical locations, the distinct ethnicities, and the linguistic heterogeneity echo the complex nature of the region. The North East charts eight states for the region. Though the corpus of Indian writing in English has grown majestic, it has not harbored a few quarters of creative efforts. The literary terrain of the Northeast has remained secluded from the mainland's creative oeuvre. This paper endeavors to explore the thematic aspects of the novels from the Northeast region in English.

Keywords: India, North East, culture, geography, ecology, political

North-East India, despite its fecund natural, cultural and linguistic uniqueness, has been inhabited by the landscape of insulation over the decades. The geographical locations with varied terrains, the distinct ethnicities with manifold communities, and the linguistic heterogeneity with diverse dialects echo the unity in the diverse nature of the Indian sub-continent. The North East charts eight states for the region locating Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. Due to the adjoining boundaries, these states are commonly referred to as 'Seven sisters' and Sikkim, being separated by the Siliguri corridor, is called 'the Brother' of the Seven sisters. "Though the states have a contiguous geographical location, they are distinctly diverse in ethnic composition, historical background, and cultural heritage" and "the states are also strategically located as they share a large part of the country's international land boundary" (*North-East India: People, History and Culture*, 2017).

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Though the corpus of Indian writing in English has grown majestic, it has not harbored a few quarters such as "English writings from Kashmir and the Northeast" (*A History of the Indian Novel in English*, 2015). The literary terrain of the Northeast has remained secluded from the mainland's creative oeuvre. The political insurgence, ethnic differences, and geographical obstacles have contributed to the aloofness of the mainstay. The Northeast writings, especially novels, have shown that "literature of a remote region unfolds its various challenges, struggles through indigenous culture, folklore and other regional characteristics" (Borah Jintu, 2018). The Northeast "novels workout what Kiran Desai calls the 'inheritance of loss' ... by situating their narratives on India's northeastern flank" and "this shift of geographical focus is ... on the even more elusive story of the subcontinent's north-eastern corner" (Ananya J Kabir, 130). In recent times, the literary endeavor of the aforementioned neglected region has begun to gain prominence. This paper endeavors to explore the thematic aspects of the novels from the Northeast region in English.

The sky is My Father originally published as **A Naga Village Remembered** is the first novel by Estrine Kire and it is the first Naga novel to be written in the English language. The novel, published in 2003, chronicles the moments of the final battle between the British Imperial forces and the Khonoma native tribes. Kire does paramount the substance of oral culture and the necessity to treasure house it for posterity. In an interview with *The Medley*, Kire evokes "Most cultures lend themselves to being reinvented... I was focusing on the importance of ... documenting and recording oral narratives while the narrators are still with us... the written form is not the only way to preserve oral narratives." Her fictional works include *Son of the Thundercloud*, *Don't Run*, *My Love*, *When the River Sleeps* and *The Rain – Maiden and the Bear- Man*.

The Collector's Wife is a 2005 novel written by the Assamese novelist Mitra Phukan. The novel intricately parallels the life of a District Collector's wife and political turbulence in the region. Parbatpuri, a fictional location in Assam is the setting of the novel. The place is a pictorial reality of social chaos and cross-border infiltration where violence and bloodstain tarnish the fabric of everyday life. Rukmini Bezboruah, the protagonist, displays rebellion against traditional values and longs for ardor and care. The plot deftly traverses the political and personal lives tugged together. In a conversation with *PurplePencilProject*, Phukan exclaimed "the fiction I write, novels and short stories come from a different part of my mind ... I love setting out a point of view in a nuanced manner, in real-life settings. I love to show life as I see it, through the lens of my individuality." Her notable works are *A Full Night's Thievery: Stories*, *A Monsoon Music*, *Chumki Posts a Letter*, *The Biratpur Adventure*, and *Mamani's Adventure*.

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The Legends of Pensam is written by Mamang Dai, a novelist from Arunachal Pradesh. The novel, published in 2006, explores the geopolitical and ecological contentions by representing the myth and the history of the Adis tribe living in Siang Valley. The cultural conflicts between tradition and modernity are portrayed with primitive values, legends, Shamans, animism, and supernatural beliefs. The novel thematizes the ambit of ecological balance and represents the deep-rootedness one has towards the land. Dai describes herself as a breed of a tribe of “ten thousand messengers” and “carrying the whispers of the world.” Her other novels are *The Black Hill* (2014), *Stupid Cupid* (2009), and *The Sky Queen* (2005).

Lunatic in My Head is a novel written by Anum Hasan and published in 2007. The novel subtly explores the ethnic conflicts between Khasis and Dkhar, a word attributed to non-Khasis. The plot etches the ethnic dichotomy in everyday life by weaving the intricate stories of the three protagonists Aman Moody, a Civil Service aspirant, Firdaus Ansari, a college professor, and Sophie Das, an eight-year-old girl. The novel politicizes the fragmentary nature of insider and outsider displacement. The novelist tries to characterize the beauty of plurality in society. In one of her interviews, Hasan, born in Meghalaya, said “My book is a result of my relationship with Shillong” and the “story is based on my experiences”. *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This* and *The Cosmopolitans* are the other novels written by Hasan.

Zorami: A Redemption Song by Malsawmi Jacob was published in 2015. This is the first-ever novel to be written by a Mizo writer in English. The novelist confronts the issue of Mizo Insurgency and the traumatic effect cast on the Mizos, especially women. The novel presents the years of insurgency in a postmodern historiography mode. Zoonami, the female protagonist of the novel craves freedom and peace. The wounds and trauma inflicted upon her physically and psychologically are drawn parallel with the land. The lacerating belligerency between Mizo National Front and the Indian army is brought to the foreground through the physical violence meted out by the characters in the novel. Malsawmi in one of her interviews justifies selecting the genre fiction by stating “for dealing the inner conflicts, the fiction format feels more suitable than non-fiction. Hence, the novel.” Her other works are *Eastern Muse: Poems from the East and North East of India*, *Four Gardens and Other Poems*, *Tryst with God*, and *Blind Spots*.

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