

Constructing India's Northeast: A Study of Violence, Conflict, and Insurgency in the Region

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Abstract:

*Although India's Northeast is a land of diverse cultures, certain issues have paralyzed the land for decades. A lot of turmoil and violence has disturbed the amicable air of the Northeast. As a region afflicted by affairs like militancy and insurgency, the violence inherent in the land is often expressed in the writings. So the question arises, how do the literary constructions of the region represent violence? Do they go beyond violence? Since most of the writers from Northeast India have faced violence, how is this experience of violence reflected in their writings? The aim of this paper is to study how violence is portrayed in the anthologies and how this problem of violence is expressed in the works of writers who face it in their daily lives. The primary argument here is to examine the violence as portrayed in the anthologies. For this study four anthologies have been selected, including *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* (2011), *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-East India* (2009), *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast* (2003), and *The Heart of the Matter* (2004). This paper attempts to look at the issue of insurgency through textual as well as content analysis and literary interpretations. It will also involve a study of conflict and resolution.*

Keywords: *Conflict, Ethnicity, Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, Violence, Resolution*

The belts of conflicts and violence are broadening as harmony is threatened across the globe. India's Northeast has also felt the ever-present menace of institutionalized terror and loathing generated by insurgency and other cases of socio-political violence. The conflicts and cases produced by insurgency and counter-insurgency assaults are widely known and Northeast India has been deemed as a breeding ground for such struggles and turbulence. Tenuously linked historically and geographically to the rest of India, the Northeast is little known and often called 'the insurgent heartland' of India. Unfortunately, any reference of the Northeast to the people from mainstream India brings conceptualizations of insurgencies and tribal conflicts.

Ever since the British withdrawal from South Asia in the year 1947, India's Northeast has been blemished by sustained separatist insurgencies, extensive turbulences, ethnic disturbances, and

heavy-handed state response ensuing persistent bloodletting. Since the inception of the Indian republic in the mid-twentieth century, the Northeastern terrain has been beset by armed insurrections and political violence. Northeast India is a location of protracted conflict implicating numerous contestants. It is a belt of conflict involving innumerable armed groups, established chiefly on claims of indigeneity or nationhood. Most of the political developments in the Northeast, from reorganization to protracted violence, are intrinsically linked to the question of ethnicity.

The history of insurgency is seldom recounted in the context of an equally long history of peace, social cooperation, political reunion, democratic involvement, revolutions in institution-building, and sustenance. The remoteness of the region can be an obstacle, as can the unwillingness to travel to areas where insurgent groups ply.

It is a truism to say that India's Northeast is a radial point of conflict and violence. The Northeastern part is known to the other parts of the country and world as the hotpot of ethnic violence. For a terrain damaged by violence for years, its literature is not only a social and historical map of events but also a form of revealing its narrative to the world. In the narratives of such regions, one continually observes annoyance, terror, and suffering, but also tolerance, restraint, and expectation intricately contrived. The literature of Northeast India is no different. As a region afflicted by militancy and insurgency, the violence inherent in the land is often expressed in the writings. So the question arises, how do the literary constructions of the region represent violence? Do they go beyond violence? Since most of the writers from Northeast India have faced violence, how is this experience of violence reflected in their writings? The peril of guns and terrorism and the surge of militant nationalism is found in most of the writings from the Northeast.

The broad area under which the problem falls is the study of literature and culture of the Northeastern region of India. The aim of this paper is to study how violence is portrayed in the literary constructions of the region and how this problem of violence is expressed in the works of writers who face it in their daily lives. The primary argument here is to examine the violence as portrayed in the anthologies. Violence is a habitual theme in the anthologies from the Northeastern part of India. The story of violence is a never-ending one in this part of the nation.

In terms of primary texts, four anthologies have been selected, including *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* (2011), *Dancing Earth: An Anthology of Poetry from North-East India* (2009), *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast* (2003), and *The Heart of the Matter* (2004). These anthologies consist of poetries, short stories as well as essays.

This paper attempts to look at the issue of insurgency through textual analysis, content analysis as well as literary interpretations. It will also involve a study of conflict and resolution. It further attempts to critically analyze relevant national treaties and remedies introduced for the people of India's Northeast as a tool to stop the insurgency.

Conflicts are neither new nor unusual in the Northeast terrain of India. In recent years, India's Northeast has been labeled as a minefield of militant ventures and a theatre of an inferno.

Although the Naga militancy was the first to rise, subsequently other movements in Assam and Manipur developed. From the 1980s onwards, effectively the whole of the Northeast has been afflicted by militant ventures with a substantial portion of ethnic groups in the terrain developing militant outfits of their own. The discourse of the Northeast is, like all discourses, self-confirming. Newspapers, for instance, often report bomb blasts and other acts of terrorist violence in the terrain, and a visitor would notice at once that there is indeed little or no industrial development in most of the eight states. Most of the time, the terrain is in the news for its violence, insurgency, bandhs, and protest rallies.

Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura are facing ethnic-related violence and militancy posing a serious threat to peace and security, development, and even to the nation-building process of India. Today, militancy in Northeast India is strongly interlinked around one's ethnic identity for a cause or no cause at all. Thereby, this phenomenon has become a subject of serious concern in Northeast India.

Militancy in the region has become the most popular means for ethnic assertion and bargaining. Militancy may also occur across the political spectrum including white separatists, secessionists, feminists, environmentalists, religious fundamentalists, left-right activists, and other groups. As Kuhoi K. Zhimomi writes in *Politics and Militancy in Nagaland* (2004):

Militants can be defined as a discontent group which uses violence to achieve its desired goal. Militancy is not the same as an association of armed robbers or dacoits. It is born out of some committed ideologies of a particular group, a sect, a tribe, or a community, religious or secular. (Zhimoni 2004: 22)

People in the Northeastern region have almost become accustomed to conflict and official unaccountability. There are numerous ethnic militant agencies in Northeast India. Manipur and Assam top the number of militant agencies in the terrain. The militant groups of this terrain are mostly ethnically based claiming to be working for the protection of their respective communities or ethnic identities.

There are more than thirty militant organizations in Manipur demanding various forms of autonomy for the protection and preservation of their ethnic identity. The hilly regions of Manipur, containing five districts, have been overblown by various sorts of militancy. The Naga and Meitei militancy had their birth in the colonial epoch and were a part of an all-India political operation.

Territorial demands by various ethnic militants which are often intersecting have been the core of ethnic contestations and hostilities in Manipur. These attempts by different separatist movements headed by different militant outfits from different ethnic groups have been a profound provocation to the prevailing boundary line of Manipur. The Naga militant outfits are posing the most serious threat to the territorial integrity of Manipur. In recent times, the Kuki-Naga conflict has flared up again and again due to the claim over an enclave as one's own absolute homeland by the ethnic armies and opposition to it.

The problem of separatism and militancy has been incessantly increasing in Manipur which has ferociously hindered every domain of activity. Ethnic differences and enormous identity mobilization have ensured that the only development or growth in Manipur is that of ethnic militancy. These ethnic militants apart from being advocators of ethnic causes have become the favoured means for ethnic assertion and bargaining and even to the extent of achieving economic and political power. Fragmentation and division within the group have forced the increasing expansion of militant groups whereby it appears that militant movements are ideologically directionless and goalless. Nevertheless, competing ethnic militancy appears to be one of the most serious threats to peace, security, and development in Manipur.

Bombings are not a new phenomenon in the conflict in Northeast India. Bombs suffice to depoliticize the instant fallout of the events and insert the violence within a greater course of warfare.

The Third World states are most vulnerable to ethnic violence posing serious implications for their security and stability. India is not alone in this. Ethnicity has become the key source of conflicts in the present-day world. The ethnic conflicts occur among the entities to dominate each other in the form of separatist movements and insurgent activities going against the state, weakening its strength, unity, and integrity. If the state is not internally strong and the linkage among the people is weak, it leads to the various internal and external threats jeopardizing its security in which states are inclined to succumb to great havoc. Such states fail in coping with the unprecedented outcomes of conflicts.

The most armed insurgencies against the government of India have taken place in remote tribal areas whose inhabitants are genetically least related to the Indo-Aryan population of North India. The tribes of the terrain have been yielded to insurgencies in comparison to other tribes in the nation. The region is incessantly experiencing insurgency due to multi-ethnicity, inter-ethnic clashes, and pathetic socio-economic conditions. Nagaland is referred to as the epicenter of insurgencies as it was conceived first in Nagaland and later bloomed in the whole terrain. The insurgency has not only disturbed the government in the center but has also hampered the developmental process. The conflicts are not only between the insurgents and government but also even amongst the ethnic groups. The whole spectrum of insurgencies is for independent nationalism.

The militancy with trans-border linkages has been the bane of the region. They have always been affected and stimulated by the devastating creeds prevailing out of India and getting refuge in neighbouring states. As far as the militant groups in the region are concerned, Manipur tops around 40, Assam has around 35, Tripura has around 30, and Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh vary from 5 to 15 groups.

Ethnic conflict is an immensely complex socio-political phenomenon, made so by the common tendency of conflicts, to have many causes, some of which appear to be other than what they are, or that are intentionally manipulated by various actors. Ethnic conflicts have remained a key source of violence for decades. The inter-ethnic conflicts are the regularly prevailing practices in

the Northeast for a very long time. The primary cause behind the inter-ethnic conflicts is the socio-eco-political encroachment by various ethnic groups on each other. Groups such as Naga, Mizo, Bodo, and Khasi have always indulged in inter-ethnic conflicts.

The inter-mixing of the ethnic population in the Northeast has remained the instrumental factor for the conflicts to take place. The conflict between Meiteis and non-Meiteis is another case. The insurgency in Manipur is classified into the insurgency in the hills which is connected with the insurgency in Nagaland, and the valley where the insurgency is linked with the Meitei separatist movement. Moreover, there are several militant factions indulged in inter-ethnic conflicts. In Manipur, it is very easy to instigate a militant outfit. Militancy and insurgency have become the professions to take home easy and immense wages.

The ethnic conflict in Nagaland is an ongoing conflict since the 1993 fight between the Nagas and the Kukis. The frequent violence between these tribal groups has been leading to killings, arsons, and riots disturbing and affecting the entire life of around one hundred villages.

Ethnic conflict and ethnic loyalties hinder the development of institutionalization and often attract the attention of other nations. As Michael Walzer in his *Just and Unjust Wars* (2015) notes:

It isn't too much of an exaggeration to say that the greatest danger most people face in the world today comes from their own states, and the chief dilemma of international politics is whether people in danger should be rescued by military forces the outside. (Walzer 2015: xi)

Sanjib Barua argues that the proliferation of militant groups in Northeast India is a symptom of state failure. The insurgency movements are often labeled by the Government of India as trifling law and order issues.

The ethno-nationalistic conflicts have occurred especially in the development-failed states and India is one of the very prominent cases because of its very complex multi-ethnic nature. In fact, the socio-economic problems and lack of security for the general populace caused by ethnic conflict are more serious than encouraged separatist-militancy movements. There seems a lack of will among the politicians to resolve ethnic conflict issues. The situation of socio-ethnic conflict is the worst in its nature. The government appeared feeble in administering the state political expansions as the administrators, leadership, and power holders are involved in corruption, and offer active or passive aid to the insurgency.

The Government of India and the Naga armed forces headed by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Issak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) signed on 3rd August 2015 the Nagaland Peace Accord in order to end the insurgency prevailing in the state. This accord is yet to be made public and much is to be known as to what this agreement actually holds. The Naga peace accord is a welcome move to put a full stop to one of the oldest insurgencies in India. NSCN calls for a joint military grouping, which is to be underpinned by the Indian Army and the NSCN(IM)'s military wing,

the Naga Army. As soon as the accord is organized, the Naga armed groups will be scattered. The accord also has provision for the expulsion of AFSPA from Nagaland.

The Mizoram Accord was inscribed on 30th June 1986 between the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Government of India. After a major rebellion followed by years of struggle in underground affairs, but to no avail, the MNF yielded to work within the Indian Constitution and repudiate violence and chaos that had its influence throughout Mizoram. The accord ushered in an era of peace after twenty years of violence and disturbance that hampered Mizoram. As per the accord, the MNF acceded to abandoning all associations with other insurgent groups in the Northeast. Mizo Accord is contemplated to be the most triumphant correspondence with insurgents.

Unrest and violence have engulfed most of the states of Northeast India essentially because of a deep sense of deprivation. The issue of insurgency has been endemic to the terrain after Independence. Preeti Gill in her work 'Women in the Time of Conflict: The Case of Nagaland' (2005) writes "most states have been besieged by three to five decades of armed conflict; ranging from demands for self-determination and greater autonomy to assertion of complete secession from India" (Gill 2005: 214).

Thus, in Northeast India where violence, bloodshed, conflict, and corruption have spilled over into everyday life, poets from the region show their concern by speaking about them in their poetry. Hence, the poets have referred to their poetry as 'Poetry in the Troubled Zone' or as 'Poetry in a Time of Terror'. The poets from this region are often engrossed in the writing of poetry, as Ngangom writes in his article 'Poetry in the Time of Terror' (2005) "a friend told me of how they've been honing 'the poetry of survival' with guns pressed to both the temples: the gun of revolution and the gun of the state" (Ngangom 2005: 172).

The poets talk of their land and people in a language that is packed with concepts of guns and bullets, slaughter, and annihilation. This is what Ngangom writes in his poem 'Poem for Samir'. Ngangom's poems are often riddled with bullets. He writes this in his poem 'Last Song'. In 'The Strange Affairs of Robin S. Ngangom', he describes a visit to his native Manipur, ravaged by the conflict between Indian armed forces and the insurgents. Here the poet describes the memory of violence that he was made witness to.

While at one level, Northeast writing developed as an opposition to Indian English writing, and this tradition was perpetuated particularly through poetry, some writers and poets however feel that they need to write about conflict because the national media and the mainstream have not spoken about it with empathy. For the Northeast writers, their literature serves as a platform where they can express their trauma and sufferings, either in local languages or in English, to assert their identity and peace in the midst of violence. Many of the writers included in Tilottama Misra's *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*, Volume 1, published in the year 2011, have experienced violence. The overarching motif of this anthology can be interpreted from the editor's assertion that "most of the writers who find a place in this anthology are, in a sense, the children of violence" (Misra 2011: xxix).

She says in her introduction that many of the authors have grown up among people who have memories of the Partition of India and its after-effects in the Northeastern region. Some others have sensed violence lumped together with the insurgent movements. They are living through the traumatic combat of quotidian circumstances of violence that shake up the region and leave an unfathomable blister on delicate minds.

Set in troubled times, the works of Mitra Phukan, Dhruva Hazarika, and Aruni Kashyap raise questions about insurgency, homeland, and the Assam Movement; not to forget the dark era of 'secret killings', the fear lingering in the minds of the common man. In the literature from Northeast India, the theme of violence plays a key role, as an eye opener to the horrifying state of people and their region. While discussing the recurring use of violence, Tilottama Misra, the editor of *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* in her Introduction to the anthology opines:

...the dominant theme of the fiction writing included in this collection happens to be that of violence perpetrated by various militant outfits as well as by the armed forces in their counter-insurgency operations. Violence features as a recurrent theme because the story of violence seems to be 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 centres of power. Writers across the states of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura are deeply concerned about the brutalization of their societies by the daily experience of human rights violation and the maiming of the psyche of a whole people by the trauma caused by violence. (Misra 2011: xxi)

Easterine Kire Iralu in her poem 'Genesis' included in *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India* refers to the ideal warrior Keviselie who speaks of the utopian past until conflict and war brought about death and destruction to her land. In the form of a folktale, she takes the readers symbolically through the conflict and insurgency in Nagaland. Here the poet comments on the socio-political scenario of Nagaland. Everything was peaceful as people lived happily in the utopian world of Kelhoukevira. Her seven daughters lived with the mountain air in their breadths. They cultivated their fields and had their baskets overflowing with the yield of the land. Their life was full of songs until one day a sojourner called plague came. The plague is a symbol of invasion and warfare that brought death and decay.

The unstable political and social conditions of the states give rise to many groups of militants that fight against a common enemy at times and against one another at other times. Insurgencies and counter-insurgencies portray the conditions of the state. From outright difference to the comparative difference between one ethnic group to the other everything stimulates violence. So when realities become oppressive, the poets frequently seek refuge in absurdist irony. Yumlembam Ibomcha's poem 'Derived from a Puppy' and 'I Want to be Killed By an Indian Bullet' by Thangjam Ibopishak from *Dancing Earth* (2009), edited by Robin S Ngangom and Kynpham Sing Nonhkynrih, can be taken as examples.

In 'Derived from a Puppy' Ibomcha ridicules the conventional concepts of heroism in present-day India, where life is sordid; and survival itself is difficult. He writes "How could we live as whelps/ among these dogs, foxes and monkeys/ I will turn into a strong and big tiger" (124).

Thangjam Ibopishak in his 'I Want to be Killed By an Indian Bullet' talks about a host of issues that challenged the present-day Manipuri society such as violence, a capitalistic market system, and a cry for liberty from all exploitative intensities. The underlying tone of this poem is that of anger. The springing up feeling of protest and resistance observed throughout the poem was based on the present-day Manipuri society which spotted an upsurge of various political conflicts ensuing in the genesis of a number of insurgent groups. Ibopishak uses the five elements of fire, water, air, earth, and sky in the guise of which a terrorist entered his drawing room to kill him. He writes "They create men; also destroy men at whim/ They do whatever they fancy/ The very avatar of might" (132). These lines from the poem have an ironical stance attacking the omnipotent power structure. They come looking for him in his house but the poet chooses to escape death as he is fastidious about it. The poet not knowing the reason why they want to kill him asks 'Why will you kill me? What is my crime? What evil deed have I done?' I asked them again" (132). In a state like Manipur, terrorists wreak havoc according to their will. They question him "Are you a poet who pens gobbledygook and drivel/ Or do you consider yourself a seer with oracular powers/ Or are you a madman?" asked the leader" (132). These words of the terrorist leader are loaded with censorious power of the ego and antagonism which as custodian of draconian laws he thrusts upon the protagonist to silence his voice of protest. The poet is curious in which manner he will be killed. The dialogue between the narrator and the terrorist leader on the make of the gun reveals the hideous intention of the leaders, their evil desires, and their disrespect for India. The dystopian satire in this poem operates on two levels of consciousness, that of the narrator and the terrorist leader. The narrator's fearlessness and his cool surrender to the bullets of the opponent cannot be seen as an act of timidity but as signs of inner resource and strength who defies death as a protest against antagonistic forces. The bragging of protest in Ibopishak can be noticed in an exhibition of annoyance, resentment, receipt, and dismissal of a given state. The last line of the poem is important and quite dramatically attains the climax of the poem. It reads "Being fastidious about death, I escaped with my life" (133). Here one can see the irony embedded into the simplicity of words, the conversational and dramatic style of the poem in prosaic language appeals to the feelings of the readers. The discernment is evidently dark throughout the poem. Ibopishak talks about the problems in the terrain, which is monopolized by insurgency, terrorism, ethnic conflict, and state savagery.

In a land distraught with an unending conflicting political space, often the poets are in conflicting situations between the world around them and their helpless selves. Yumlembam Ibomcha's poem 'Worshipping Imoinu' depicts the unpredictability of being and the helplessness that veiled quotidian truth.

Thiyam has a knack for narrating poignancy in its monstrous-down quotidian forms, as he writes in his poem 'Gun Muzzle', "When that youth who journeyed seeking light/ Returns covered with a white cloth/ Who'd like to receive him" (285).

Robin S. Ngangom's 'To Pacha' is an ode to the poet Pacha Meetei, a Manipuri writer. Ngangom here talks of the killings of the pregnant women and children and the enormous death that take place in Pacha's land. Signs of civilized society are fast disappearing from the region turning it into an era of the assassin. Bloody encounters between the armed forces and the terrorist groups are thus the result of such protests.

Insurgency in Manipur is driven by the Manipuri 'nationalist' consciousness that predates the emergence of an independent Indian Union and other socio-economic and political forces of the post-Independence period. The violence and clashes have led to the emergence of relay economic blockade to relay bandh now and the baton of keeping the public under siege keeps on passing with no break in between. Sudha M. Rai's poem 'The Night I was Raped' presents a troubling image of the outcomes of social wickedness disturbing the land. She takes the voice of a narrator and describes the violence prevailing over. The narrator questions the humanity of men and says 'Instead of men/ Why animals as pets?' (239).

A critique of one's own society while being a part of it shows the 'outer politics' of the poets. Raghu Leishangthem's poem 'Politician and the White Dove' is a satire on the politicians of the land. He juxtaposes a politician and a white dove and a story of them caught in an incident. They argue often because the dove desires to glide openly in the sky, but the politician answers that 'To allow you to fly or not fly/ Is my politics.' (165).

This is a portrayal of the tyrannical thoughts of the democratic officials in a gun culture showing the dominance of coercing political power over the helpless people. The inquiry of freedom could be addressed in a situation as such. The poet's metaphorical story presents the politics of protest against such anarchic governance.

The poets display elements of the political through 'inner politics' and 'outer politics'. They venture into the emotional, the body, and social realities to produce an effect and a shared space between the reader and the writer that goes off at times from the coherent. The poets, vis a vis the 'outer politics' forays into the same by arranging their motifs around queries of violence, by foregrounding its unacceptability and the immediacy of the need for its prevention.

In Mona Zote's 'What Poetry means to Ernestina in Peril' we observe the substantial technique of introducing another named woman as she sits contemplating "What should poetry mean to a woman in the hills" (318). In this poem, Mona Zote depicts how preposterous institutions like the Church have made "drunks of us all". Zote's strong poetry speaks of the body, of women entrapped, of bloodshed, and the desire to re-imagine the conflict her state has faced long. Towards the end of the poem, Zote writes "We have been bombed silly out of our minds" (320).

Anthology of Contemporary Poetry in the Northeast (2003) offers a view of the hills, rivers, myths, vibrant traditions, and also the violence which has the terrain in its grip. Ngangom and Nongkynrih, the editors of the anthology state:

The writer from the Northeast differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way. While it may not make him a better writer, living with the menace of

the gun he cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics but must perform master the art of witness. (Ngangom and Nonkynrih 2003: ix)

In the poem 'Native Land' Ngangom recalls an ethnic clash between the Kukis and the Nagas called the 'Joupi Massacre', where the people were locked inside a church with their hands tied up. Ngangom writes about the pain of that insurrection. He connects his numbed reaction to an act of terrorist violence where six people were shot dead, twenty-five houses were destroyed and sixteen were decapitated. Further, the poet recounts how victors and victims grow in number. His heart becomes frozen till he loses his tenuous humanity. He does not care whether the women wore wildflowers, as he writes "if they wore wildflowers in their hair/ while they waited for their men/ I didn't care anymore" (154).

Aware of their distinct cultural and ethnic identities, militants from different parts of the region are demanding autonomy and independence. Nongkynrih in his poem 'Play of the Absurd' alludes to Camus's Sisyphus. The poet considers the sufferings and the depletion of hills' tribes as a kind of ecological erosion. As such he justifies the insurgency reared by the tribes as a protest against their movement towards extinction, which is a way of their quest for revival. Nongkynrih poses his question with ringing clarity.

Ngangom, Kharmawphlang, and Nongkynrih have an obligation to write about the crucial contemporary problems of the region. In his poem 'The Conquest' Kharmawphlang gives voice to the anger felt by the Khasis at the impact of colonialism on their life and land. The poet here talks about his hometown. Earlier the people of Meghalaya used to live peacefully with no worries. But with the arrival of the British in the state of Meghalaya violence, insurgency and conflict started. The British brought with them bullets and thus the peaceful aura of Meghalaya was destroyed by the sounds of guns. They also tried to impose their religion and culture upon the Khasis.

The state of Meghalaya was formed in the year 1972 out of Assam to emancipate the tribal populace and give them some control over their fate, but Kharmawphlang's poem expresses resentment and frustration at another kind of "conquest". He writes "Quite suddenly, the British left/ There was peace, the sweet/ smell of wet leaves again" (134).

That colonial legacy continues even today. After the British left, there was tranquility, but then came those from the tropical lowland. This poem is intended as a wake-up call for the indigenous population. This is undoubtedly disturbing to the 'outsiders' who consider Shillong home. However, Siddhartha Deb's fine novel *The Point of Return* (2002) portrays the other side of the story: the version of the interlopers in Kharmawphlang's poem.

The power of the poetic image in Yumlembam Ibomcha's 'Story of a Dream' is enormous because the traumatizing objects become erotic, and bullets become luscious fruits. It is interesting how the 'thanatos' is controlled by 'eros'. The poem begins with the killing of the innocents, as he writes "bodies of children lie about/ like rats run over by vehicles" (80). Ibomcha goes on to add surrealistically "How happy I am being shot/ this bullet shooting into my mouth/ is also a mellow grape" (81).

In the poem, the rivers are enormously flowing, and crude sands immerse up age-old tales while the river carries tremulous memory-shadows. The poet, and eventually the reader, on seeing through the image begin to see the way the image sees itself. David Miller suggests that this reflects “transparency of soul” and calls the policy “poetic in the extreme”. This he says, implies, certain transparency both within oneself and toward all things.

Nini Lungalang has written some powerful poems on social themes. She makes an ordinary event into a very effective socio-philosophical reflection. She analyses the situation of crime and lawlessness in the region. In her poem ‘Dust’ like a romantic poet, she takes note of a daily occurrence during the dry spell in winter. Water scarcity in Kohima is presented in the poem when people have to go queuing day and night for a few trickles of water. From nature’s fury, the poet turns our attention to the escalation of violence.

From acute water scarcity, the poet moves on to analyze the situation of crime and lawlessness in society. Like the land that is barren, the life of the people has become barren and meaningless with gruesome murders. Lungalang’s poetry does not shy from the outward. Lungalang talks about a lost homeland where people live in fear, guilt, and pain. They remain, silent spectators, even when their loved ones are killed. The poet mentions that the death of her own brother Cain is stained in a similar way. As she stumbles home through arid fields the poet weeps for the sin of Cain which continues with fratricide in her society. She contrasts nature and man in conflict and symbolically speaks of the dust of sin and hatred rendering life barren. Lungalang is perplexed by the mystery of evil. Everyone seems to be traveling on the road of destruction. She too feels that she has been stained by scarlet, the colour of death in her poem.

Tarun Bhartiya from Meghalaya in his poem ‘Rescued Pages of the War-Scene’ portrays violence. He talks about the First World War as described by Commando Comics. Throughout the poem Bhartiya goes on talking about war poetry, he describes how war poetry should be composed, and at last, he concludes “You are welcome to this century of flat truths” (118). In the poem, ‘Tourist Information for Shillong’ Bhartiya adds “My wife till yesterday has eloped/ With a Punjabi officer from Happy Valley” (113).

In his ‘The Land of the Half-Humans’ Thangjam Ibopishak profusely uses the elements of myth and fantasy to reflect on contemporary society. It is a poetic rendition of violence, fear, and political turmoil. ‘The Land of the Half-Humans’ is a desolate sketch of a vandalized society that spawns a race without being able to reconcile body and mind, as the poet writes “And the earnings of the body’s sweat of six months, the six-month-old head eats up with a vengeance” (94). The last stanza of the poem attains the subtlety and sharpness of satire against the political system; governance, rules, and modes of functioning. The poet ridicules the vanity of the democratic system and its absurd discussions in the land of half-humans.

Robert Frost once said that politics deals with grievances, poetry with grief. Jayanta Mahapatra while writing the foreword to the anthology expresses that he feels “it is important for us to have this anthology at this time, now when a lot of turmoil and violence has shaken the peaceful air of the Northeast” (xi-xii).

In *The Heart of the Matter* (2004) Arupa Patangia Kalita's story 'Someday, Sometime Numoli' places in proximity violence and the amicable life of a guilt-free, confiding country damsel who falls a victim to the atrocity of guns. This bruise of senseless violence has become a part of life in the Northeastern region. It is a casual theme in many creative works that come forth from the region.

Sebastian Zumvu's 'Son of the Soil' traces the being of a country youth in the scrum of insurgency movement in Nagaland. The story is about a young boy caught by the army pretending to be an insurgent to extort money. The protagonist tries to make it 'big' by extorting money in the false garb of an insurgent with severe repercussions. Caught by the army, no one now believes that he is not part of any insurgent group, but was merely out to get easy money, and he is tortured and crippled in custody.

Kaphleia's short story entitled 'Chhingpuii' portrays the Mizoram in the late nineteenth century. Set against the backdrop of an inter-tribal war, the story connects a miserable anecdote of love, war, and headhunting with an account of the Mizo culture and society.

In some of the prose writings, there is a beautiful description of the landscape of Mizoram. There are also references to Mizo myths and legends as well as traditional rites and rituals. In the short story 'Chhingpuii', quite a good number of Mizo traditional songs are used that make its reading enjoyable and enriching at the same time. In this story, there are also references to the wonderful landscape of Mizoram.

Mohon in Keisham Priyokumar's 'The Bomb' is a young man already in a no-win situation because of poverty, unemployment, and corruption. He gets seized in another vicious circle when an unknown youth gives him an explosive for safekeeping. Lamabam Viramani's 'Thabellei' deals with an alarming facet of insurgency and counterinsurgency- rape of women by army personnel, a sad reality in every conflict zone.

Exotic, colourful, and beautiful the Northeast might seem to most outsiders, but in truth, the region is also a hotbed of conflict and violence. The Northeastern states face the issue of insurgency, with more than fifty insurgent groups running in these states. However, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are exceptions in this context. Violence, conflict, and insurgency seem to prevail less in these two states. The National Liberation Council of India, on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, receives no aid from the indigenous populous of Arunachal Pradesh who are fiercely pro-India and the group is not functioning now. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Khaplang (NSCN-K) exerts influence in west Changlang and approximately five kilometers astride the international border in Tirap. It carries out extortion in these areas, but there are no militant activities. Indigenous insurgency movements have only been a snippet of the mess that Arunachal Pradesh has encountered in recent years.

Sikkim was integrated into India on 16th May 1975 and has been inducted quite recently into the North-Eastern Council (NEC). Sikkim is completely free of the insurgency while every other state in the region is at present disturbed by some form of insurgent violence. During 2007 Sikkim reported no violence at all. Sikkim may function as a remedy for the issue of insurgency

in the Northeastern region regardless of the striking contrasts in the conditions of Sikkim and other Northeastern states.

Today for the common people in the Northeastern region, life is an everyday existential crisis, caught as they are in the crossfire between the insurgents, the government's counter-insurgency operations, and the resultant dilemma of insecurity, vulnerability, hopelessness, death, and violence in addition to the ever-present problems of corruption, poverty, and unemployment. This crisis has been demonstrated by the writers in their literary works.

Robin S Ngangom during the inaugural session of North-East and Northern Writers' Meet states "but few fine poets have moved beyond merely recording events and have internalized the complex conflict between themselves and the social environment". Ngangom feels that the Northeast remains substantially confounded and is singled out as India's insurgent heartland. He states "we have a very slender historical and geographical link to the rest of India. It remains little known and perhaps largely misunderstood. It has been singled out as India's insurgent heartland". Much of the uniqueness of Northeastern poetry is the outcome of current occurrences, violence predominantly. Ngangom said the poets from Manipur frequently take the risk of writing as evidence of the political violence prevailing in the terrain. To be a very firm spectator of the grievous and habitual political violence without sensationalizing, it is also a risk the poets have to take up. He asserts "when the reality becomes oppressive poets in Manipur seek refuge in irony, parody, and satire which is often directed at themselves".

The poets from the Northeast speak of the horrifying incidents happening in their region where their poetry reflects the agonies and fears of a society. Bloodshed is not far from the thoughts of the poets. Since they write about terrorism and insurgency, their work has a distinct identity within Indian English poetry.

The images of violence are used to evoke the terror of the land threatened by moral and social dangers. The poetry from Northeast India is both a wake-up call and an accusation in opposition to the society that digests the violence and deceit, that the poets are witness to.

Reading poetry from the Northeast is but a moment of confronting such paradoxes and yet focusing on the melody that is ever-present as a conflict of the conscience pervades all great poetry of the world. Since Northeast India has been synonymous with militancy, the poets from the terrain cannot remain dumb when they are evidence of alarming occurrences.

The betrayal brought about by their very own people led to intensive ethnic conflicts. Ethnic crisis, where neighbour fights neighbour and sometimes even relatives fight relatives due to the conflict divide, understandably has destructive psycho-social consequences. Therefore, everyone involved in protracted ethnic or civil conflicts must come forward with greater trust and belief in each other. The panacea to the indigenous nature of ethnic conflicts is evidently disconcerting, excruciating, and formidable.

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