



Contours of Belonging: Indigenous Narratives of Place and Identity from India's Northeast

PF John Bosco

PhD Research Scholar at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India

Abstract:

The article highlights that indigenous articulations of home are deeply tied to their unique ontologies and epistemologies. They view home as an interconnected space of emotional, spiritual, and social well-being rather than just a physical structure. This contrasts with the Western perspective, which often separates these aspects. Indigenous narratives emphasise the relational and cultural significance of home. These narratives challenge colonial stereotypes that portray tribal societies as primitive, chaotic, and lacking structure. Instead, they reveal a spiritually rich worldview centred on harmonious coexistence with both physical and spiritual realms. This paper analyses Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill* and *Legends of Pensam*, Easterine Kire's *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* and Siddhartha Deb's *Surface*. The analysis uses a qualitative and historical approach, focusing on how colonial encounters and postcolonial governance shaped identity and place in Northeast India. This approach calls for an analysis of how indigenous communities have been pushed to the margins through historical processes rather than seeing them as inherently belonging to a liminal space.

Keywords: Home, Identity, Ethno-Spirituality, Indigenous Narratives, Northeast India.

Introduction

Northeast India's in-between or liminal status laid the groundwork for its conceptualisation as a "frontier" during the colonial era and later as a "borderland" in postcolonial India (Bhaumik, 2009; Misra, 2011). While colonial rule branded the region a "frontier zone" and postcolonial governance has treated it as a "necropolitical zone", writers from the Northeast have actively resisted and redefined these distorted portrayals of their land, people, and culture. Contemporary literature from the region highlights the continuities between colonial frontier governance and postcolonial borderland control, using storytelling as a way to insert marginal voices into history and to challenge dominant historical narratives and power structures (Bhattacharya and Pachuau, 2019, p. 1). In the context of Northeast India, "decentring" means shifting the focus away from fitting the region's history into the dominant national narrative and instead highlighting its rich diversity and complexity that resist uniformity. This shift directs attention from central areas to the margins. The region's liminal narratives embrace their "otherness" and assert difference as a core part of their identity, thereby challenging the overarching metanarrative. The concept of authenticity often fuels conflict that arises when these peripheral narratives confront the dominant national discourse.

Homi Bhabha's (1990) idea of the tension between the pedagogical and the performative highlights how counter-narratives within a nation challenge the ideological strategies that construct imagined communities with fixed identities (p. 213). Therefore, the

voices from Northeast Indian communities should be understood through the performative expressions of those living at the margins. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) prompts us to explore how national identity is fractured and how cultural differences surface within evolving ideological frameworks:

How do we conceive of the splitting of the national subject? How do we articulate cultural differences within vacillation of ideology in which national discourse also participates, sliding ambivalently from one enunciatory position to another. What are the forms of life struggling to be represented in that unruly time of national culture? (p. 211)

Bhabha's questions explore how national identity is fractured and how cultural differences emerge within shifting ideologies. In resisting both nationalist uniformity and rigid ethnic essentialism, these questions highlight the struggle of diverse groups to gain representation within a fluid and contested national culture.

The status of indigenous people as being in a constant state of transition—shaped by colonial experiences and the postcolonial redrawing of boundaries—can be explained using Victor Turner's anthropological idea of "liminality." According to Turner (1967), liminality describes those in-between stages of cultural transition, where individuals, known as "threshold people," occupy an uncertain space, no longer fully part of their former identity but not yet accepted into a new one. Liminal figures, such as those undergoing rites of passage, are typically portrayed without clear social identities or possessions, highlighting their transitional nature. Although this phase involves "undoing, dissolution, [and] decomposition," it is equally marked by transformation, renewal, and the reconfiguration of older elements into new forms (Turner, 1967, p. 99). Turner's concept of liminality, commonly applied to diasporic experiences, is also relevant to the erosion of indigenous cultural identity under the "colonial gaze." It is the fluid and ambiguous nature of liminal space that enables the negotiation of cultural change through various adaptive strategies and resources.

The Construction of Northeast India as a Liminal Space: Transition from Colonial Frontier to Postcolonial Borderland

Historically, Northeast India did not exist as a single political or administrative unit before British colonial rule following the Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826). As Samrat Choudhury (2023) notes in *Northeast India: A Political History*, no ancient Indian empire ever governed this densely forested and geographically isolated region that lies between peninsular India, Southeast Asia, and China. The area remained largely distinct and detached from the Indian subcontinent. Sandhya Goswami (2015), in *Troubled Diversity: The Political Process in Northeast India*, points out that, unlike the rest of India—united by shared cultural practices and the caste system—the Northeast developed independently, maintaining closer historical ties with Southeast and Central Asia. British colonisation ended this isolation by introducing political links with the Indian mainland. However, these ties were largely administrative and did not result in genuine cultural or social integration.

Before British colonisation, the area now referred to as Northeast India consisted of a variety of ethnic communities governed by indigenous monarchs and tribal leaders. The Ahom kingdom held sway over the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam, while regions such as the Cachar plains, Jaintia plains, Khasi, Garo, Mizo, North Cachar, Karbi Anglong/Mikir, and Naga Hills were under the authority of local chiefs. Manipur and Tripura functioned as independent kingdoms ruled by the Meitei and Tripuri/Twipra dynasties, respectively. Gradually, the British expanded their dominance over these diverse territories, ultimately integrating them into the colonial Assam Province following key annexations like that of the Ahom kingdom in 1826. The term "North-East Frontier" was first coined by British colonial officer Alexander Mackenzie in his 1884 account to describe Assam, its adjacent hill regions, and princely states such as Manipur and Tripura. Mackenzie proposed merging Assam with Eastern Bengal in the 1890s, labelling the region the "North-East Frontier of Bengal" to frame it as a frontier area within the Bengal administration (Mackenzie 1). Subir Bhaumik (2009), in *Troubled*

Periphery: Crisis of India's Northeast, argues that consolidating these diverse communities and regions into a single administrative unit was a strategic “colonial construct” intended to establish political and bureaucratic control (1). Hence, the designation “Northeast” emerged not from indigenous cultural understandings but as a colonial tool for territorial governance.

Colonial rule introduced abstract spatial and conceptual frameworks that disrupted indigenous tribal systems, resulting in enduring identity fragmentation. In *Multiculturalism and Intercultural Dialogue in North-East Region (NER) of India*, Hausing (2016) explains that the colonial enterprise, shaped by an “orientalist episteme,” gave administrative officers and ethnographers exclusive interpretive authority over tribal lives, thereby marginalising indigenous voices (404). This top-down, paternalistic approach suppressed native perspectives and redefined dynamic cultural landscapes into rigid classifications, which later informed identity-based claims. Labelling Northeast India as a distinct “frontier” zone significantly affected its diverse communities by imposing external spatial definitions and administrative control. Prior to the 1870s, the region lacked clear territorial boundaries, with only loosely drawn district lines. The British began asserting control through measures like the Inner Line Permit system, introduced in 1873, which was officially meant to protect hill tribes but primarily aimed to shield British plantations and extractive ventures from tribal interference (Kundra xviii). This inner line created a strict technological and administrative divide, transforming the previously fluid interaction between the hills and plains into rigid legal distinctions. Colonial governance thus became a powerful cultural force in shaping identities and continues to play a vital role in the way tribal communities perceive themselves.

Historian Joy L.K. Pachuau (2014) identifies three primary ways the Northeast is represented: through popular culture and local interactions, state-driven narratives, and academic discourse on tribal communities. She stresses the importance of critically examining Western portrayals of so-called “primitive” societies and the underlying epistemological frameworks that shaped these interpretations—particularly for evaluating anthropology in the postcolonial context. Given the close relationship between knowledge and power, anthropology is seen as a “colonial tool” that not only objectifies its subjects but also denies them equal temporal existence, labelling them as the “primitive other” (Uberoi et al., 2007, p. 14). Pachuau points out that post-independence Indian anthropologists and sociologists such as S.C. Roy, G.S. Ghurye, and N.K. Bose, even when opposing colonial perspectives, were still influenced by the imperatives of nation-building. Their works often echoed or built upon colonial figures like J.H. Hutton and Verrier Elwin. As a result, nationalist anthropology tended to suppress local voices by framing tribal identities within a singular, homogenising national narrative. This led to the tribes being absorbed into a “greater tradition,” with their distinct social systems being relegated to the status of “little traditions” (Sinha, 1958).

Thus, while postcolonial studies critique Western constructions of the “other,” they must also interrogate how postcolonial nation-states exercise dominance over their own marginalised communities. The Northeast has long been associated with unfamiliarity and a sense of “unknowability.” The central government’s perception has often stemmed from the belief that the region’s “tribal” populations inhabited an untouched, “pure” space requiring protection because of its geographic and cultural distinctiveness. Alongside this view was the assumption that these communities needed guidance to transition into modern systems of governance and ways of life. Tilottoma Misra (2011), in her introduction to *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from Northeast India*, says that the indigenous communities from Northeast India

have been seen as living in ‘enchanted spaces’ bearing unpronounceable names. Significantly, for mainland India, the region known as the ‘North-East’ has never had the privilege of being at the centre of epistemic enunciation, except perhaps at some ancient time when Assam was recognized as the centre of occult knowledge associated with tantric worship, magic, and astrology, and strangely enough, the imagination of the ‘mainland’ has even today not outgrown those constructs of the mysterious ‘other.’ (p. xviii)

What becomes evident is that the idea of “enchanted spaces” is just as much a fabricated concept as the depiction of the “mysterious ‘other.’” The understanding that place is not only constructed but also plays a crucial role in shaping personal identities is especially significant when analysing colonial narratives that exoticised Northeast India and depicted its people as primitive or uncivilised.

Essentially, portraying Northeast India as a cartographic creation and a frontier zone reflects the layered historical and political processes that have shaped its identity and relationship with the broader Indian nation. This conceptual framing significantly impacts how the region is viewed, administered, and integrated within the national imagination. Sanjib Baruah emphasises that colonial-era stereotypes—marked by exoticism and racial assumptions—still linger in modern representations of the Northeast. He points out that labels like “Northeasterner” are not just geographical identifiers but are also loaded with implications of racial hierarchy and power imbalance. As Gupta and Ferguson (1992) note,

...by always foregrounding the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations, we can better understand the process whereby a space achieves a distinctive *identity* as a place. Keeping in mind that notions of locality or community refer both to a demarcated physical space *and* to clusters of interaction of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchical organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality. (p. 8)

Therefore, it is important to view the indigenous communities of Northeast India not simply as inherently tied to their marginalised status or location, but to understand how historical forces and processes have actively pushed them into this peripheral condition.

“The Assault on the Hills”: Narratives of Colonial Intrusion and Indigenous Resistance

Indigenous identity is closely tied to land and place. Samson and Gigoux (2016) in *Indigenous Identity and Colonialism: A Global Perspective*, define indigenous people by examining their colonial experiences worldwide. They describe colonialism as a political, social, economic, and cultural structure fuelled by “powerful drives for land and authority” (p. iii). Colonial powers legitimised their control over indigenous territories by labelling them as *terra nullius*, as in the case of the Australian Aborigines, or by implementing land tenure systems that undermined traditional ownership, as occurred with the Maoris in New Zealand. The erasure of indigenous land, history, and culture stems from the colonial narrative of “white mythology,” which promotes the notion of an “empty land” or “empty country.” This concept implies that the land was open for colonisation and suggests an absence of existing local histories or civilisations (Eeden, 2004, p. 32). Consequently, indigenous communities have often faced disruptions to the idea of “home” as a fixed or secure space due to the border-drawing actions of dominant powers, from colonial regimes to post-independence nation-states. These geopolitical transformations have altered the physical and social landscapes, reshaping connections with people and places that form the core of their identity and humanity.

In the context of Northeast India, the internal displacement of tribal communities resulting from colonial expansion and imperialist conflicts highlighted their ongoing struggle to claim ownership of their lands and preserve cultural identity in the face of colonisation and inter-tribal discord. Gupta and Ferguson have stated that: “it is not only the displaced who experience a displacement . . . For even people remaining in familiar ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed, and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and culture broken” (qtd. in Duyvendak, 2011, p. 14). Therefore, indigenous communities in India’s Northeast also experience a sort of “spiritual homelessness,” without a colossal spatial dislocation, referring to a loss of connection to their self and home (Mommott, 2015, p. 59). The predicament of those who find their homeland becoming unfamiliar is aptly exemplified in the early section of Mamang Dai’s novel *The Black Hill* (2014) through the collective cry of the Adi people: “‘Hai... ever since the arrival of these people our lives are changing,’ they said” (Dai, 2014, p. 191). She writes, “History had shown

them that no matter how friendly they were, in the end the migluns brought only death and destruction" (Dai, 2014, p. 192). The fear of "death and destruction" is validated by the deaths of Kajinsha and Fr. Krick towards the end of the novel.

This frontier region was portrayed as home to "tribal" and, by extension, "primitive" societies, who were labelled either "noble" or "savage" based on their cooperation or resistance to British rule. While some groups were depicted as "noble" or "subservient," others that resisted colonial authority were forcibly subdued through brutal frontier campaigns (Pels, 1999). Dai's portrayal of indigenous resistance to colonial and missionary intrusions suggests a subversive postcolonial defiance against colonial authority. For instance, the 1839 killing of Colonel Adam White and his eighty soldiers by the Mishmee people illustrates their strong sense of independence and deep mistrust of foreign forces, who, despite initial friendliness, ultimately brought devastation. In her other novel, *Legends of Pensam* (2006), Dai uses the phrase "the assault on the hills" to signify both the colonisation of the indigenous people and the exploitation of their land and natural resources. In the "Songs of the Rhapsodist" section, she references Noel Williamson, a British political officer who was killed along with his team while exploring the terrain and tracking the river's origin. This incident, known as the Massacre of 1912 or the Abor Expedition of 1912, during which the British attempted to chart the Siang River, is perceived by the Adi community as an intrusion upon their land and environment. In the novel, the shaman recounts the incident through a song, presenting the killings as a rightful act of resistance against the British expedition. The British soldiers, equipped with firearms, are portrayed as aggressors. The narrator questions the moral judgment placed on the indigenous man, stating: "Why should anybody look at a man with disgust when he was a man of the land and the other was a visitor trying to conquer the village with lies and bags of gifts?... It was only a matter of time before the migluns learned that all men were not afraid of guns and loud voices" (Dai, 2006, p. 51).

Likewise, in the preface to her novel *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* (2018), Easterine Kire highlights how, from the 1800s onwards, external forces began forcefully disrupting life in the village of Khonoma. The British first entered Nagaland in 1832 to establish a strategic route between Manipur and Assam as a defence against Burmese threats. This incursion led to conflict with the Angami people of Khonoma, who opposed the invasion of their territory. The British launched several assaults on the Naga village. In retaliation, the Angami warriors frequently conducted raids into Assam to assert their strength and signal to the British that Khonoma remained defiant and unconquered: "that there are men still living here" (Kire, 2018, p. 38). Between 1850 and 1865, they carried out 22 such raids, resulting in the death, injury, or capture of 178 British subjects. In 1879, upon learning of Khonoma's continued defiance, British political agent Mr. Damant organised a military expedition to suppress the village and prevent further resistance. However, upon his arrival, the villagers ambushed and killed Damant along with 39 of his men, boldly declaring, "We have ousted the white man's rule" (Kire, 2018, p. 89). Rather than breaking their spirit, British attempts to subjugate Khonoma only intensified local resistance (Kire, 2018, p. 76). Warriors from Khonoma and surrounding areas united to launch attacks on the Kohima garrison, culminating in the Battle of Khonoma, described by Mackenzie as "the severest fighting ever known in these hills" (Kire, 2018, p. 137). The Angamis actively resisted from the outset until 1880, when a major offensive ended in a stalemate. Despite their determined opposition, the Angami resistance was eventually defeated, as their traditional weapons were no match for British military technology.

A key theme in both *The Black Hill* and *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered* is the indigenous resistance to rigid, imposed territorial identities. Although inter-ethnic tensions existed, pre-colonial indigenous societies generally sustained flexible territorial relations grounded in mutual respect and caution. Colonial intervention disrupted these dynamics by enforcing strict borders, generating conflict between indigenous patterns of movement and the colonial state's insistence on fixed territorial definitions (Pachau, 2014, 101). These static identities were further entrenched through colonial classifications that

labelled indigenous groups as “wild tribes” and “marauding hordes.” This is clearly demonstrated in *Sky is My Father*, where Kire highlights the British Deputy Commissioner Damant's invasion of Khonoma in response to reports of “19 raids between 1850-1865” (Kire, 2018, p. 67). While the British aimed to establish a route between Manipur and Assam to guard against Burmese invasions, a major motivation was the repeated raids by Khonoma warriors on British subjects in Assam. Scholars have noted that the British often referred to indigenous attacks as “raids” due to differing concepts of territory (Guite, 2014; Pachuau, 2014). While hill communities viewed raids and headhunting as flexible practices unbound by fixed locations, the British sought to impose rigid, defensible borders to define their control (Pachuau, 2014, p. 220-21).

Similarly, in *The Black Hill*, the arrival of a French Jesuit priest, Father Krick, and the establishment of colonial trading posts near indigenous territories intensified tensions among native clans. To protect their land from southern intruders, Kajinsha's first marriage was strategically arranged as part of an alliance to uphold his father's clan's vow to defend the route into Tibet (Dai, 2014, p. 78). Gimur later reflects on the deep emotional ties to her homeland, initially questioning, “How the mere features of a landscape could ignite such love and ferocity” (Dai, 2014, p. 70). It is only upon returning to her village that she fully grasps this connection, exclaiming, “. . . All this time my heart and its longing have been tied up with these features—these hills, this sunset, this cold dawn and icy wind. The land has bred this. This is my desire. My life!” (Dai, 2014, p. 71). Gimur's passionate attachment to her birthplace, “Mebo”, is deeply intertwined with the concept of “home” as more than just a physical space. It also embodies a collective past “when brothers have lived together” (Dai, 2014, p. 26–27).

In pre-colonial Northeast India, territoriality and identity were fluid, with indigenous peoples having mobile connections to the land. Viewing Northeast India as a “fluid,” interconnected space is key to understanding indigenous demands for identity recognition (Lalkulhpuia 23). In this context, it becomes important to consider the deeper meaning behind Kajinsha's words to Marpa during his visit to Sommeu:

‘We are people who belongs to these valleys and rivers. We can wander at will travelling behind a wall of mist, find shelter with a friend, and disappear with the wind like invisible men who have no regard for boundaries laid down by any authority.’ For Kajinsha and his people, and even the residents of Sommeu, empires and borders meant little. Their worlds could not be divided up, for they had lived in these lands for centuries, while empires had come and gone. (Dai, 2014, p. 106).

Therefore, without romanticising a pre-colonial time of complete borderlessness, this viewpoint moves beyond national boundaries and state authority, highlighting a liminal space shaped by kinship networks, migration patterns, and cultural relationships with regions like Tibet, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Such connections question and complicate fixed, territorial definitions of home and homeland.

“Rootedness” to Land: Indigenous Notions of Home, Self, and Belonging

Literature on identity and place offers two conflicting strands of thought: one views it as a “social construct” and the other views it as more than just a social construct, seeing it as fundamental and inseparable from the human experience (Cresswell, 2004; Malpas, 1999). When we view place as more than just a product of social processes, it involves a separation of “a sense of place” and “rootedness”, — where the former is shaped “in large part by the social, cultural and economic circumstances in which individuals find themselves” (Rose, 1996, p. 89), while the latter is “a knowing that is the result of familiarity through long residence” which comes in an “unselfconscious way” based on survival instinct (Tuan, 1980, p. 8). The cultural and symbolic relationship between people and their environment creates a “lived” reality, forming an emotional bond to a place. While the length of time spent in a location does not automatically make someone indigenous, it is the depth of connection and interaction with the land, expressed through customs and rituals, that fosters a strong sense of attachment to one's homeland.

For indigenous communities, “rootedness” better reflects their deep connection to place, shaped by relationships with family, community, ancestors, and cultural traditions (Christensen, 2013). Being at home means maintaining ties to ancestry, language, land, and spiritual practices, emphasising an interconnected relationship with all of creation. Home is not merely a physical structure—it encompasses notions of identity, safety, and belonging (Somerville, 1997). Indigenous interpretations of home are shaped by this rootedness, which is sustained through reciprocal ties with family, community, ancestors, cultural stories, and the right to self-determination (Christensen, 2013; Nabokov & Easton, 1989). Being rooted, therefore, entails a strong affiliation with one’s heritage, language, customs, land, spiritual beliefs, and community, underscoring a harmonious relationship with all aspects of the natural world. This includes a spiritual interconnectedness with plants, animals, water, land, and other people, which must be honoured and maintained with respect and intentionality (Bowra and Mashford-Pringle, 2021). For indigenous communities, then, home and belonging are inseparable from their relationship with the environment. This worldview stands in contrast to—or may enrich—the Western notion, where home is largely conceived as a physical and material space (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

To truly grasp the indigenous concept of home, one must understand that their cultural identity is grounded not in the permanence of built structures but in a deep, enduring relationship with the land (Greyeyes and Vipond, 2022). The land is not merely a resource—it represents a living connection to their ancestors, carrying spiritual and cultural significance. This is evident when Gimur recalls the shaman’s words: “The land belongs to us. It is the soul of our ancestors. Where would we be, what would we do, without this land?” (Dai, 2014, 70). Their bond with nature is also guided by principles of mutual respect and reciprocity, not control or exploitation, as shown in Kajinsha’s exchange with Father Krick:

My father also told me that everything in the earth and the sky is connected since we are born of the same mother. It is very simple. We belong to the land. The land is a good mother. I take only what I need. Animals and trees offer themselves. We help each other survive. Tell me priest what do you think of our land. (Dai, 2014, p. 141)

Dai presents the land, particularly the “black hill,” as a vital, living presence deeply connected to indigenous identity, traditions, and ancestral memory. Rather than just a backdrop, the landscape holds emotional and spiritual significance, shaping the worldview and existence of the tribal communities. This deep connection to their land and community is also reflected in *Sky is My Father*. When Levi comes back home after his long imprisonment, Kire writes:

How good it was to be back in the village, to be among his people. Impulsively he picked up a bit of soil and smelled its earthiness. He felt bonded to the village, bonded to the land, and feeling surged up in him that he’d never known before. I should feel so strongly for a mistress, he mused, smiling to himself. That was what this village did to her men, she bonded them to her so strongly that they were always striving to prove themselves men enough for her. Perhaps that was the explanation for the desire that drove out onto the battlefield, soul-thirsty for the danger and the thrill of coming so close to death. (Kire, 2018, p. 51)

The Angamis’ deep attachment to their land is so strong that they are willing to do anything to protect it: their desire to prove themselves worthy of it drives them even at the risk of death.

Rosemary Marangoly George (1999) argues that colonial texts often depict the “native subject” through their homes as either deficient or overly excessive, implying that without a Western-style concept of self or home, native identities are seen as lacking alternative forms of subjectivity (p. 23). Indigenous writers challenge such portrayals by offering more authentic representations of indigenous epistemology. In *Legends of Pensam*, for example, Dai contrasts colonial views by showing how a British officer perceives the forest as threatening and hostile, reflecting a fear-driven colonial mindset:

(One officer wrote in his notebook: ‘The forest is like an animal. It breathes all around us and we never know when it will suddenly rise up like a green snake out of the decaying vegetation or descend on us like a mantle of bats reeking of blood and venom. The trees are

enormous and sinister. They stand all around us and you can feel them looking down and waiting. One fears to move. (Dai, 2006, p. 52)

In contrast to the colonial portrayal, the Adis—voiced through the perspective of the old headman—view their land as lively, beautiful, and full of meaning. His reflections challenge the fear-driven colonial narrative, instead affirming the land's vitality and the deep cultural value it holds. Rather than seeing their home as a place of savagery or terror, he presents it as a space of pride, richness, and dignity:

'They think we are a village of horror, but it is not true! The leaves of the orange trees glisten. The hills are radiant with the light of the sun. The laughing children tramp to school down the same steps of stony earth that the soldiers marched up. These days many visitors are finding their way, the curious migluns shielding their eyes and asking for help to enter the maze of stories that the miri remembers and restores to life. . . We are not a village of shame.' (Dai, 2006, p. 55-56)

Colonial powers often dehumanised indigenous peoples by comparing them to animals, due to their preference for living in close relationship with the land rather than in permanent, structured dwellings. Reclaiming a sense of home, then, involves re-establishing their deep bond with the land and the natural environment. Oral traditions play a vital role in preserving indigenous identity and historical memory. Unlike the colonial emphasis on written documentation, Dai portrays storytelling as a vital method for affirming life and reclaiming identity. The expression "the maze of stories" reflects the depth and complexity of oral traditions that the migluns (foreigners) fail to comprehend. In *The Black Hill*, Kajinsha's final plea— "Tell them about us... Tell them we were good. Tell them we also had some things to say. But we cannot read and write. So we tell stories" (Dai, 2014, p. 288)—underscores the significance of oral storytelling in keeping indigenous voices, experiences, and cultural legacies alive.

Spirits of the Land: Reclaiming Indigenous Cosmologies through Ethno-Spirituality/Syncretism

Christianity is often mistakenly equated with colonialism due to its historical links with missionary activity and imperial expansion. Research indicates that Christian missions frequently served as tools of colonial domination rather than being solely driven by spiritual aims (Iskarna, 2018; Miah & Halim, 2024). The discourse within Christian studies has often reflected colonial attitudes, portraying indigenous cultures as backward while idealising missionary efforts. This perspective reinforces the false belief that Christianity is inherently colonial, neglecting its global cultural diversity (Volpicelli, 2009). However, Norman Etherington (2005), in *Missions and Empire*, points out the complex relationship between missionaries and colonial authorities, emphasising that missionaries were not always aligned with imperial agendas. They were sometimes viewed as disruptive, especially when their efforts to educate indigenous communities challenged colonial expectations of indigenous subservience (Etherington, 2005, p. 9). Missionary narratives, influenced by a sense of Western Christian superiority, frequently distorted indigenous spiritual practices. While missionaries focused on conversion and "civilising" efforts, European colonial powers pursued resource extraction and domination. Missionaries introduced services like healthcare and education, promoting Bible literacy to meet both spiritual and physical needs. However, these initiatives were often steeped in a patronising attitude that viewed indigenous communities as uncivilised and backward. Unlike the colonial project, which positioned native populations as politically and economically subordinate, the missionary agenda framed them as spiritually deficient and bound by superstition— people in need of enlightenment and cultural upliftment (Etherington, 2005, p. 6–8).

Spirituality is a complex and often contested concept, distinct from organised religion in that it prioritises personal empowerment over institutional control. Unlike religion, which can at times be rigid or even suppress spiritual expression, spirituality focuses on unseen forces, such as spirits and ancestral presence, providing a way to contemplate life, relationships, and

the mysteries of existence (Bigger, 2009, p. 60–64). Traditional spiritual practices, including beliefs in the supernatural and reverence for ancestors, laid the foundation for early religious systems. Rituals like taboos- marking sacred or forbidden places—also emerged from spiritual worldviews. Today, such practices are increasingly being recognised not as mere superstition, but as valuable cultural expressions. Although early societies may have misattributed natural events to supernatural causes, these interpretations were not signs of ignorance. Rather, they represented attempts to understand and respond to the human experience, offering meaningful explanations for life's uncertainties (Bigger, 2009, p. 5).

Scholars such as Walter Mignolo (2007) and Linda Smith (2021) contend that decolonising knowledge begins with rejecting the supremacy of Western epistemologies. By distancing themselves from Western modernity, indigenous peoples can reclaim their histories and express their identities, traditions, and spiritual systems on their own terms, challenging mainstream representations. Ethno-spirituality is grounded in the recognition that indigenous peoples were not ignorant or uncivilised, but instead held profound knowledge suited to their cultural and environmental contexts. This form of spirituality is intimately connected to indigenous worldviews, shaping their ways of living, social customs, and sacred traditions. It is embedded in rituals and spiritual understanding, reflecting the intellectual and cultural richness unique to each indigenous group. These communities interpreted the world through mythological narratives, drawing insights from close observation of nature and animal behaviour. They attributed agency to natural elements such as the wind, weather, and sky, viewing them as powerful and sometimes threatening forces. Events like a successful hunt or its failure were often understood through these elemental stories.

In his article “Ethno-spirituality: A Postcolonial Problematic?”, Stephen Bigger notes that communal living without personal boundaries can lead to psychological tensions among indigenous communities, such as envy, selfishness, and the misuse of authority. These negative emotions are often externalised as malevolent spirits, which are controlled or banished through ritualistic practices (Bigger, 2009, p. 8). In Dai's *The Black Hill*, this belief is illustrated when Gimur warns Awesa not to laugh loudly by the river at night, fearing that their joy might attract the attention and jealousy of evil spirits (Dai, 2014, p. 157). Kajinsha, the central character, also turns to benevolent spirits for protection, offering sacrifices to safeguard his family from death (Dai, 2014, p. 258). The novel portrays shamanic practices in several scenes, such as when Father Nicholas Krick visits the Mebo village and learns about the Miri, or shaman. Lendem explains that a deceased warrior's spirit wanders, searching for a weak host to possess, and only a powerful shaman can expel it (Dai, 2014, p. 184). These examples highlight indigenous worldviews in which the physical and spiritual realms are deeply intertwined, with shamans playing a crucial role in maintaining harmony between the two.

In *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*, the villagers of Khonoma observe a range of spiritual rituals aimed at appeasing both benevolent and malevolent spirits. One such custom involves a father placing his saliva on his finger and touching the forehead of his newborn while declaring, “I am first,” to protect the child from being taken by spirits (Kire, 2018, p. 6). The belief is that neglecting this ritual could lead to the infant's death. All ceremonial practices are carried out with great care and seriousness, as any error is thought to risk misfortune not just for an individual, but potentially for their family or the entire community. This tradition also functions as a cultural tool that underscores the father's responsibility for his child. Kire further describes rituals such as “terhase” and “Spirit Vo-o”, which involve Thevo priests appealing to spirits to maintain harmony (Kire, 2018, p. 148-149). These ceremonies stress sincerity and mutual respect between humans and the spirit world to prevent disasters, illnesses, and other misfortunes. The Angamis of Khonoma hold a profound spiritual bond with nature, believing that all elements—animals, plants, stones, rivers, hills, forests, and streams- are inhabited by spirits. To honour these spirits and secure prosperity, especially in agriculture, they celebrate festivals like “Terhünyi” and “Sekrenyi” (Kire, 2018, p. 20). They also observe “genna days,” during which farming activities are prohibited, as any violation is thought to offend the spirits and lead to barren land. In two recorded instances of

tiger killings, the villagers perform the “tekhu kete” ritual to pacify the tiger’s spirit, which they revere as their “elder brother” (Kire, 2018, p. 15). Before conducting any ceremonies, they offer animal sacrifices, such as the slaughter of a chicken (Kire, 2018, p. 24), to ensure the event is protected from malevolent spirits and to maintain the sanctity of the rituals.

In *The Black Hill*, Father Krick’s mission does not result in the conversion of the indigenous people, reflecting their spiritual resilience. In contrast, *Sky is My Father* portrays Sato’s internal struggle as he grapples with the tension between his traditional beliefs and the influence of Christianity. Though he sees parallels between the two faiths, his guilt, personal desires, and emotional conflict lead him to reject his cultural initiation. Ultimately, Sato chooses to embrace the new religion, marking a shift in identity and illustrating the psychological and spiritual complexities of religious conversion. Sato recognises similarities between his traditional deity Ukepenoupfu and the Christian God, viewing them as different names for the same divine figure. This blending of beliefs reflects *syncretism*, which missionaries historically condemned as a threat to doctrinal purity (Stewart and Shaw, 1994). Ironically, such condemnation affirmed the legitimacy of indigenous spiritual traditions. Kire’s novel highlights how conversion to Christianity weakened indigenous identity but also empowered individuals to reinterpret the new faith on their own terms. This process led to an *ascribed* identity- one shaped by indigenous agency- rather than an *imposed* one dictated by external forces.

The critique of Christianity in Northeast India should move beyond equating it solely with colonialism and focus on how Western missionary accounts misrepresented indigenous beliefs due to their sense of superiority. Religious syncretism, where indigenous spirituality is integrated with Christianity, plays a key role in the decolonial process. While rejecting all aspects of Western thought risks creating new hierarchies, both Kire’s and Dai’s novels show how embracing hybrid identities can validate indigenous spirituality while transcending ethnic boundaries. Sato’s interpretation of Christianity through his own cultural lens and the bond between Kajinsha and Father Krick symbolise the importance of preserving cultural roots while embracing new influences.

“Wild” Frontier to “Undomesticated” Borderland Space: Reframing the Indigenous Identity in Postcolonial India

In the post-colonial era, the concept of the “frontier” evolved into a “borderland,” yet the practice of othering and limiting people to narrow epistemological categories remains. The colonial view of the region as a “wild” frontier was later reframed as a “violence-ridden” borderland in the postcolonial period, populated by rebellious and disloyal subjects (Saikia and Baishya, 2017). This shift partly explains the central government’s continued focus on security and development strategies in response to ethnonationalist movements in Northeast India. Siddhartha Deb’s novel *Surface* (also titled *An Outline of a Republic* in the U.S. edition, 2005) situates itself within the global narrative by highlighting the continuity between colonial frontier governance and post-colonial borderland management. The protagonist, Amrit, a narrator from mainland India, initially perceives the Northeast as a distant frontier: “an area of perpetual separation, a museum collection of tribal territories and princely states” (Deb, 2005, p. 31). By recognising the “Northeast” as a construct shaped during colonial rule and sustained by postcolonial India, Deb (2005) states:

Much of the region had been treated as different from the rest of India by the British, divided by an Inner Line that only colonial officials and Christian missionaries could cross freely. It was *an area of perpetual separation*, a museum collection of *tribal territories* and princely states curated by a resident commissioner, and by the time of independence the notional line had become an unbreachable wall. The politicians and administrators in Delhi who determined how the region would fare in the fledgling nation should have anticipated this barrier, but their knowledge was partial, their lack of imagination absolute. (p. 31, my italics)

According to Bodhisattva Kar (2009), these areas were seen as zones where practices like slavery, headhunting, and nomadism could be allowed to exist (p. 52). This view reflects John Locke's notion that law is relevant only within "domesticated space," or the *ius gentium* (Nelson, 2011, p. 165). Since the Northeast is perceived as an "undomesticated" zone, the protagonist Amrit encounters a landscape marked by strict policing, with numerous checkpoints and border posts reinforcing the division between the nation's interior and its margins. The novel illustrates how people living in the borderlands are subjected to constant monitoring and gradually internalise this form of control: "Most knew the routine already; the men climbed off the bus again, leaving their bags behind, their hands empty and faces blank" (Deb, 2005, p. 169). Moreover, the inability of Indian soldiers to distinguish between the Burmese rebels and members of Indian hill tribes (Deb, 2005, p. 235–236) highlights the racialised perceptions of both physical appearance and social identity (Ahmed, 2004). This convergence of racial ideology and frontier imagination reinforces the Northeast's depiction as an exotic, alien space, distinct from the Indian mainland.

The Northeast, once perceived as an unruly frontier, is now increasingly subjected to militarisation and resource exploitation under the pretext of development (Kshetrimayum, 2023). While initially seen by outsiders like Amrit as peripheral and undefined, the region is now experiencing demographic changes and disputes over land. As political order takes hold, it is reimagined as an economic frontier ripe for capitalist ventures and resource extraction, aligning with neoliberal agendas (Wouters, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2019). In *Surface*, characters such as Sarkar and Herman regard the area as an "untapped" market and a space for self-invention in the "flux" (Deb, 2005, p. 39–40). Malik, depicted as a proto-colonial figure, exercises sovereign authority, viewing the transformation of an "empty space" as a strategy for exerting power and control (Deb, 2005, p. 39–40). By the novel's conclusion, Amrit moves past his original intent to carve out a unique identity for himself and begins to appreciate the Northeast not as a monolithic entity, but as a region of diverse individuals, especially reflected in his evolving understanding of Leela.

Leela symbolises the subaltern subject in *Surface*, portrayed as a silent, marginalised figure stripped of agency. Initially, Amrit views Leela's image with detachment and fails to grasp her significance, seeing her only as a curiosity. As he journeys through the Northeast, his perception evolves- he begins to recognise Leela's autonomy and the complexities of her world. Her static image transforms in his mind, reflecting his growing awareness of subaltern realities and challenging his outsider perspective. Going back to *The Black Hill*, Father Krick's character undergoes a profound spiritual transformation as he journeys through the Mishmi hills. Treated with unexpected kindness, Father Krick comes to genuinely seek understanding, resulting in a personal shift- he is no longer the same man. Dai uses his journey to highlight the power of cross-cultural encounters and the introspective change they can bring. In the same way, Amrit's transformation in *Surface* is marked by his ethical failure to publish Leela's story, highlighting the limitations of his earlier self-perception. Despite this, his journey leads to a deeper understanding of others and himself. His real growth lies in recognising the individuality and humanity of the people he once saw as peripheral. This shift becomes most evident during a protest in Imphal, where he sees the crowd not as a faceless mass but as individuals asserting their existence. Leela's influence grants him a "touch of grace," prompting his moral and perceptual awakening.

This suggests that the lack of a "self" mirroring that of Indian mainlanders does not indicate an absence of alternative forms of subjecthood, but rather a failure to acknowledge them. Both colonial and postcolonial discourses continue to marginalise subaltern subjects, excluding them from being recognised as full subjects due to factors like race, ethnicity, caste, religion, and gender. In *Surface*, Siddhartha Deb challenges this postcolonial framework by centering the subaltern's assertion of subjectivity, thereby reshaping conventional ideas of selfhood. As the narrator's illusion of personal sovereignty fades, the presence of other voices and collective identities becomes increasingly apparent within the narrative. In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt (1992) discusses how colonial narratives often depict colonisers as if they

are on a quest for something, rather than just passive observers. However, Siddhartha Deb subverts this narrative by depicting Amrit's gradual shift during his journey from mainland India to the Northeast, ultimately leading him to adopt an "anti-conquest" perspective. Initially seeking to impose his own story onto Leela's image, Amrit's assumptions are disrupted as his personal experiences in the borderland challenge his preconceived notions. His relationship with Leela's story evolves from self-serving curiosity to a deeper empathy, marking his shift from a colonising gaze to genuine recognition of the subaltern subject.

Conclusion

Using the concept of "power geometries," indigenous expressions can be seen not as the origin but as a result of their incorporation into the modern nation-state. This interpretation is consistent with Farhad Dalal's (2001) idea of the "social unconscious." As Dalal explains,

in some rudimentary way existing "we's" must be part of the forming "I's" from the start of the developmental process. To elaborate: a particular individual is born into a pre-existing social milieu; thus the "I" of the individual must of necessity be built out of the existing "we"; however a "we" can only exist in relation to something designated "not-we" the relations between "we" and "not we" is always a power relation. Thus the individual is constituted at the deepest of levels by *pre-existing power relations in the world*. Thus possibilities available to any individual are constrained by the power relations in the milieu into which the individual is born. Thus the nature of the so called true individual authentic self cannot be other than fundamentally constituted by where it is positioned in the power relational field. (p. 547 italics added)

In this context, identity and self are shaped by one's place within the communication field, which is influenced by the social unconscious. For indigenous peoples, this social unconscious has been formed through the socio-genetic effects of colonialism and the continuation of colonial governance in postcolonial India. Writers like Mamang Dai, Easterine Kire and Siddhartha Deb strive to close the divide between historical facts and their distortions by reconstructing the "pre-existing power relations" or pre-colonial indigenous life. They provide in-depth insights into traditional ways of life, ethno-spirituality, and resistance to colonialism.

The select novels challenge colonial portrayals of indigenous societies as disorganised and shallow. They emphasise indigenous concepts of home as holistic, encompassing emotional, spiritual, and social well-being, in contrast to the view of home as merely a physical space. These perspectives highlight the deep interconnectedness between people, land, and culture, showing that home is a relational space that embodies cultural significance and identity. While acknowledging the importance of "delinking" from colonial and neo-colonial epistemic dominance, there is a risk of idealising the past and demonising other ethnic groups. In response to the rise of ethnic nationalism at both the national and regional levels, the concept of the nation has radically shifted, with traditional national discourses being replaced by fragmented narratives. Counter-narratives from India's Northeast challenge dominant ideas about race, ethnicity, language, religion, and national unity by offering alternative perspectives on home, identity, and belonging. Despite these varied viewpoints, studies on place and identity shed light on the dynamics of conflicts over home spaces, suggesting that fostering respect for the emotions and experiences of different groups can help ease divisions.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Baruah, S. (2005). *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- . (1990). DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and Margins of the Modern Nation. In H. K. Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, (pp. 291- 322). London: Routledge.

- Bhattacharya, N., and Pachuau, J. L.K. (2019). *Landscape, Culture, and Belonging: Writing the History of Northeast India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bhattacharya, R. (2019). Neoliberal Developmentalism: State Strategy in India's North-East. In R. Bhattacharya (ed), *Developmentalism as Strategy: Interrogating Post-colonial Narratives on India's Northeast*, (pp. 169-191). New Delhi: Sage.
- Bhaumik, S. (2009). *Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Bigger, S. (2009). Ethno-spirituality: A Postcolonial Problematic? *Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa*, special issue 3, 1-13. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277852751>.
- Bowra, A., and Mashford-Pringle, A. (2021). More than a Structure: Exploring the Relationship between Indigenous Homemaking Practices and Wholistic Wellbeing. *Wellbeing, Space and Society*, Jan, vol 2, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2020.100007>.
- Blunt, A., and Dowling, R. *Home*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Choudhury, S. (2023). *Northeast India: A Political History*. Gurugram: Harper Collins.
- Christensen, J. (2013). 'Our home, our way of life': spiritual homelessness and the sociocultural dimensions of Indigenous homelessness in the Northwest Territories (NWT), Canada. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 14 (7), 804-828. doi:10.1080/14649365.2013.822089.
- Cresswell, T. (2004). *Place: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dai, M. (2014). *The Black Hill*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company.
- . (2006). *Legends of Pensam*. Haryana: Penguin India.
- Dalal, F. (2001). The social unconscious — A post-Foulkesian perspective. *Group Analysis*, 34 (4), 539-555.
- Deb, S. (2005). *Surface (An Outline of a Republic)*. London: Picador.
- Duyvendak, J. W. (2011). *The Politics of Home: Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Eeden, J. v. (2004). The Colonial Gaze: Imperialism, Myths, and South African Popular Culture. *Design Issues*, Spring, 20 (2), 18-33. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1512077. Accessed 14 September 2024.
- Etherington, N. (2005). *Missions and Empire*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- George, R. M. (1999). *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fictions*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Goswami, S. (2015). Introduction. *Troubled Diversity: The Political Process in Northeast India*, (pp. xxi-xxxi). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Greyeyes, C., and Vipond, C. M. (2022). What is home? Wisdom from nêhiyawêwin. *Radical Housing Journal*, 4 (2), December, 9-24.
- Guite, J. (2014). Colonialism and Its Unruly?—The Colonial State and Kuki Raids in Nineteenth Century Northeast India. *Modern Asian Studies*, 48 (5), 1188-1232.
- Gupta, A., and Ferguson, J. (1992). Beyond 'culture': space, identity, and the politics of difference. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7 (1), 6–23.
- Hausing, K. K. S. (2016). Multiculturalism and Intercultural Dialogue in North-East Region (NER) of India. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, LII (3), July-Sept., 399-418. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556120160305>.
- Iskarna, T. (2018). The Relation between Christianity and Colonialism in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 18 (2), 184-193.
- Kar, B. (2009). When was the Postcolonial? A History of Policing Impossible Lines. In S. Baruah (ed), *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India* (pp. 49-77). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kire, E. (2018). *Sky is My Father: A Naga Village Remembered*. 2nd ed., New Delhi: Speaking Tiger.
- Kshetrimayum, J. (2023). Violence. In J. J. P. Wouters and T. B. Subba (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Northeast India*, (pp. 480-484). Abingdon: Routledge.

- Kundra, A. (2023). *A Resurgent Northeast: Narratives of Change*. Gurugram: Harper Collins.
- Lalkulhpuia, D. (2025). *Identity in Northeast Indian Literature: Rereading Select Writings from Meghalaya*. London: Routledge.
- Mackenzie, A. (2012). *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-east Frontier of Bengal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Malpas, J. (1999). *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Memmott, P. (2015). Differing relations to tradition amongst Australian Indigenous homeless people. *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 26 (2), 59–72.
- Miah, J., and Halim, Md. A. (2024). Impact of Christianity as an Ideological Instrument in the Way of Colonization: A Postcolonial Insight to Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 6 (4), 130-139.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2007). "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of de-Coloniality." *Cultural Studies*, 21 (2–3), 449–514. doi:10.1080/09502380601162647.
- Misra, S. (2011). *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Misra, T. (2011). *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from Northeast India (Volumes I and II)*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nabokov, P., and Easton, R. (1989). *Native American Architecture*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nelson, R. L. (2011). "Emptiness in the Colonial Gaze: Labor, Property, and Nature." *International labor and Working-Class History*, 79 (1), 161-174. doi:10.1017/S0147547910000335.
- Pachau, J. L.K. (2014). *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Pels, P. J. (1999). The Rise and Fall of the Indian Aborigines: Orientalism, Anglicism, and the Emergence of Ethnology in India, 1833-1869. In P. Pels and O. Salemik (eds), *Colonial Subjects: Essays on the Practical History of Anthropology* (pp. 82-116). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Pratt, M. L. (1992). *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Rose, D. B. (1996). *Nourishing Terrain: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*. Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission.
- Saikia, Y., and Baishya, A. R. (2017). *Northeast India: A Place of Relations*. Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Samson, C., and Gigoux, C. (2017). *Indigenous Peoples and Colonialism: Global Perspectives*. Cambridge; Malden: Polity Press.
- Sinha, S. (1958). Tribal Cultures of Peninsular India as a Dimension of Little Tradition in the Study of Indian Civilization: A Preliminary Statement. *Journal of American Folklore*, 71 (281), 504-18.
- Smith, L. T. (2021). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London; Dunedin: Zed Books.
- Somerville, P. (1997). The Social Construction of Home. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 14 (3), 226-245. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43030210. Accessed 12 February 2021.
- Stewart, C., and Shaw, R. (eds). (1994). *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. New York: Routledge.
- Tuan, Y. (1980). Rootedness versus Sense of Place. *Landscape*, 24 (1), 3-8.
- Turner, V. W. (1967). *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. London: Cornell University Press.

- Uberoi, P. et al. (2007). *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Volpicelli, R. (2009). Wild and Ferocious: Language and Colonialism in Christianity Studies. *Lethbridge Undergraduate Research Journal*, Jan. <https://opus.uleth.ca/handle/10133/1222>.
- Wouters, J. J. P. (2020). Neoliberal Capitalism and Ethno-Territoriality in Highland Northeast India: Resource-Extraction, Capitalist Desires and Ethnic Closure. *Geopolitics*, 28 (1), 99-121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1812581>.

Bio-note

PF John Bosco is a PhD Research Scholar at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, in the department of English, working under the supervision of Prof. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. His research interests include Northeast Indian Writings in English, Ethno-national studies, Diaspora Studies, and Border Studies. He has taught as an Assistant Professor at William Carey University (Shillong), Guest Lecturer at North-Eastern Hill University (Tura Campus), and as an Assistant Professor at Loyola College (Williamnagar). He has translated, published articles and essays on issues concerning tribal identity, insider-outsider dichotomy and ethnonationalist discourse in Northeast India. He currently serves as an Assistant Professor at Don Bosco College (Autonomous), Maram (Manipur).

Email id: ariiobosjon@gmail.com

