

SOCIOLOGUE

आओ बात करें

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MARGINS SPEAK: DISEMPowering THE MAINSTREAM

SUNDORI

Beloved Sundori,

Yesterday one of my people

Killed one of your people

And one of your people

Killed one of my people.

Today they have both sworn

To kill on sight.

But this is neither you nor I,

Shall we meet by the Umkhrab
River

And empty this madness

Into its angry summer floods?

I send this message

Through a fearful night breeze,

Please leave your window open

Kynpham. S. Nongkynrih

(Source) Internet

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Cultural Page	2
Recommendations	2
My small eye, a big witness	3
Department Updates	3
Chicken's Neck	3
Editors' Choice	4
In the News	4

From the editors' desk...

We at Sociologue: 'Aao Baat Karein' began our journey of exploring the margins and listening to their voices with our running theme "Voices from the Margins". Margins include various groups of people, usually minorities, who, in many instances, are not aware that they have a voice. Those who are aware of their voice do speak out, but are not heard - their voice is drowned by the louder voice of dominant groups. Our previous issue attempted to make the voices of the Dalits and the lower castes heard. This issue turns its gaze upon the Northeast.

When most people talk about the Northeast, they tend to first see it from the perspective of the mainstream discourse, either as an exotic region hidden amidst mountains and greenery, or as a "disturbed area" characterised by violent conflicts between the government and ethnic groups striving for secession from the Indian nation.

Consequently, most discussions on the Northeast tend to look at it as the 'untamed periphery' that needs to be harnessed by the 'centre'. Some of these states want sovereignty and their demand for the same interferes with the nation-building project of the 'centre'. However, the communities in Northeast India have many accounts of oppression and atrocities by the arms of the 'centre' in response to their demand for sovereignty. To them, the latter is located within their distinct social, historical, cultural and political context. They feel that they have not been given their due. Of the many accounts of oppression, one of the most talked about is the Naga Nationalist Movement. 'Naga' is an umbrella term comprising different tribes that were brought together by British colonialism, conversions to Christianity and the Naga demand for sovereignty. The Naga Nationalist Movement is a movement of the Naga people to take back the rightful homeland of the Nagas, called 'Nagalim'.

As we see it, the disturbances that exist in the Northeast are partly an outcome of the government's inability to deal with issues like demographic changes in Assam caused by refugee immigrants from Bangladesh, and famines

that gave rise to the Mizo Nationalist Movement. In Mizoram, the neglect by the government during the famine led to an armed insurrection that sparked two decades of violent conflict, and it is the only time a bomb was dropped by the government on its own soil. However, a peace accord in 1986 has proved to be an example of successful conflict resolution.

The perception of the Northeast as a conflict-ridden region led the government to enact AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) which, in a layman's terms, gives the government the power to declare any area as 'disturbed' and allows the Army to use force as and when deemed necessary by it, without being questioned. As a consequence of this, the armed forces became the face of India to the people of the Northeast. They began to look at people from the rest of India as outsiders, and hence developed an attitude of hostility and distrust towards them.

These are only some of the many issues prevalent in the region that have been swept under the rug and overpowered by mainstream discourse. There are still many unaddressed issues of cultural conflict, corruption, unemployment, labour, infrastructure, development and ecology that need to be looked into. Not only this, even the cultural richness and heritage of the Northeast are often overlooked. The common assumption is that the Northeast is a homogeneous unit - one whole society existing outside of the Indian mainframe. Whereas, one of the most distinct features of the region is its ethnic diversity - it is home to a plethora of cultures, cuisines, tribes, languages and dresses. It has over 220 ethnic groups and an equal number of languages and dialects. There is, in fact, a degree of diversity even within the ethnic groups. Each of them has a story to tell about its origin and traditions, and how the latter have been passed on from generation to generation through folk songs, stories, etc. that are not only about the formation of identity but also about the hardships faced in the process of that formation.

This issue of the newsletter sheds light on some of those aspects of the Northeast that often remain unseen and unheard. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg. We hope we are able to inspire our readers to delve deeper, to look beyond the mainstream and to listen to the voices from the margins - in this case, the Northeast.

-Lalrinpuii, Tanisha Garg
BA (Hons) III Year, Sociology

ANCIENT ROCKS OF CHERRA

This land is old, too old

And withered for life to be easy.

Poverty eats into the hills and squeezes

a living from stones and caterpillars

gathered for out-of-town drunks

each market day.

Where the serpent's death throes

cut deep wounds into the land

lie deep gorges like fiendish mouths

yawning for desperate victims.

There is nothing remarkable here

only this incredible barrenness.

Men and trees have left their habitats

to a crude and lowly breed like brush,

but the sight of dark grey rocks like sages

spells home to me.

-1996, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih
(Source) Green's Magazine, 1996

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The Northeast- A Glimpse

- > Assam is India's first state where AFSPA was imposed. It is still in effect unbroken since 1950.
- > A fourth of India's oil reserves are located in the Assam-Arakan basin.
- > The first mention of Assam is found in the 4th century Allahabad pillar inscription in the text written by Samudragupta of Gupta Dynasty.
- > All states of the Northeast except Tripura and Manipur were part of Assam until 1950.
- > The world's largest riverine island, Majuli on the Brahmaputra, is located in Assam.
- > Assam can be called the Gateway to the Northeast because it is the only state connected to the Siliguri Corridor via NH51.

- > The Kaziranga National Park and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary of Assam are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- > Assam shares maximum number of borders with other states of Northeast. > No one still knows how the region came to be called 'Assam'.

- > Singshore bridge is the second highest suspension bridge in Asia.
- > Sikkim turned into an Indian state from the 'Kingdom of Sikkim' in 1975.
- > It was founded on Silk road by the Namgyal dynasty in 17th century.
- > Sikkim boasts about 1/3rd of the total angiosperm of India!
- > Sikkim has been adjudged as the cleanest state in India. (NSSO)
- > Sikkim is the first Indian state known to have implemented organic farming and is called first organic state.

- > Rantek Monastery
- > Zujuk
- > Thomba
- > Wangdue festival
- > Living root bridge
- > Khasi Cuisine
- > Garo tribe
- > The wettest place on earth
- > Meghalaya has the longest cave system, namely the Jaintia Hills. It is also known as the 'Scotland of the East'.

- > Mawlynnong was awarded the prestigious tag of 'Cleanest Village in Asia' in 2003 by Discover India Magazine.
- > Shillong Chamber Choir won nita's Got Talent Show in October, 2010. They even performed for former US President Obama.
- > Nohkalukhi falls is the highest plunge type waterfall of India.
- > It is the only Indian state which traditionally follows matrilineal system in which the lineage and inheritance is traced through women.

- > Neermahal, a Royal Palace is the only water palace of Northeast India.
- > The Bengali people form the majority in Tripura with the local ethnic tribe counting at 31 percent.
- > With 94.65% literacy rate, Tripura is the most literate state in India surpassing Kerala.
- > Only one road NH 44 connects the state to rest of India.
- > Dipa Karmakar won a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games, 2014 becoming the first Indian woman gymnast to earn an achievement. She is also the first female gymnast from India to qualify for the Olympics.
- > Tripura is noted for bamboo and cane handicrafts.

- Yaniam Chukhu, BA(Hons) III Year, Sociology Himansha Baweja BA(Hons) I Year, Sociology
Amisha Phukan BA(Hons) II Year, Sociology

In The News

Centre seeks to promote cashless economy through 'Digi Dhan Mela'	50 years since their land was acquired, Arunachal locals to be compensated
Manipur CM Nongthombam Biren Singh launches web applications to check corruption	'You All Look Alike'. Girl From North-East Mocks Stereotypes In Viral Video
Govt extends ceasefire with 2 Naga armed groups till 2018	
Odisha Governor S.C. Jamir Is RSS Candidate for Vice President, Says Top Pracharak	Kolkata: People from Northeast cry discrimination
	Assam: Chinese envoy alleged of 'spying on the Brahmaputra' by locals
Send Your Tastebuds On A Northeast Expedition From Delhi-NCR Or Bangalore	
Northeast India massacre triggers violence At least nine people killed in violence following killing of at least 62 villagers by Bodo fighters in Assam state.	Irom Sharmila and Meira Paibi reached rapprochement
Attacks on people from Africa and the North East: It's time India had a law against racism	

My Small Eyes, A Big Witness

"I am called Chinki",

For my eyes may be small; but they are eyes.

They see what you see.

Hey YOU! Yes, you with the big eye. Do you see me? I think not, for the eyes you claim wide and big see so small.

The eyes you say small are but wide open and bright.

The eyes you say small are but witnessing your cruelty act.

The eyes you say small are but mine and owned by me alone.

The eyes you say small see things happening all around.

The eyes you say small choose to and respect equality.

The eyes you say big are but wide yet confused.

The eyes you say big see no equality, rather looks down and down and down.

What use is the big eye to you if its sees no good in others.

To screw me by calling 'CHINKI' is but cheap and preposterous.

That dreams exacts to throwing stones at the moon to destroy its height.

It lays beyond the bound of possibilities. Shouldn't you be more careful the way your big eyes see?

Shouldn't you, with a big eye, show the better side?

Hear 'ye! Hear all! My eyes are small but they can see.

The eyes you say small are but yes, a strong witness to your cruelty.

-Ikngaira Shimray, BA(Hons)

III Year, Sociology

The Chicken's Neck

A narrow strip of Indian Territory that connects the Northeast with the rest of the country – is at once violent, backward, politically unstable and exotic.

The Indian military and paramilitary forces as well as numerous armed insurgent groups are all active in this region. Simultaneously, the centre's isolationist policies for this region has only led it to being more neglected.

Inspired by the region's diversity, rich cultural heritage, distinct socio-political identity and legal exceptionalism – in the form of the

Armed Forces Special Powers Act, AFSPA.

The work of the artist - Temsuyanger Longkumar reflects a complex, dynamic contemporary Northeast, imbued with a history that implies political awareness rather than a collective, barbaric lack of political consciousness.

Longkumar's practice draws from the various tribal cultures of the people of Nagaland and their

relationship with various bodies associated with the Naga national movement and the Indian state.



(Source) Temsuyanger Longkumar, 'Tattooed Memory', 2012, detail. © Temsuyanger Longkumar. Image courtesy the artist and Nelson Ferreira.

Department Updates

- A Talk by Bezwada Wilson on Manual Scavenging was held on 3 November 2016.
- A Talk on "Voices from the margins: placing northeast in the debate" by Dr. Rashi Bhargava followed by screening and discussion of the film "Dil Se" on 9 February 2017.
- IMAGINE - Annual Academic Meet organized on the theme "Voices from the margins". Inaugural lecture given by Dr. Satish Deshpande on 6 March 2017.
- A Workshop on Labour and Employment in Northeast India: Issues, Concerns and Challenges was jointly organized with Centre for North East India, V.V. Giri National Labour Institute on 12 April 2017.
- Farewell for the Batch of 2014-2017 was organized on 21 April 2017.
- A talk by Prof. Tiplut Nongbri on "Voices from the Margins: North East India" was held on 26 April 2017.

Recommendations

Must Watch:

- Rambuai: A film on Mizoram's 'Trouble Years'
- AFSPA: 1958
- World War II and North East India: A film on futility of Fighting
- Kaal Sandhya – Dr. Bhabendrag Nath Saikia
- Wosobipo: Cuckoo's call
- Khawnglung Run in Mizoram
- Ko Yad- A Silent Way
- Leipaklei
- Songs of Mashangva (2010)

Must Read:

- Temsula Ao: These hills called home
- Easterine Iralu: A Naga village remembered
- Nandita Haksar: Across the chicken neck
- Sanjoy Hazarika: Writings on the Wall: Reflections on the North East India
- Moirangthem Rajen: Cheptharaba Eshingphun

'THE LAST SONG'

BY TEMSULA AO

(Source) *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone.*

"...Thus on a cold December night in a remote village an old storyteller gathers the young of the land around the leaping flames of a hearth and squats on the bare earth among them to pass on the story of that Black Sunday when a young and beautiful singer sang her last song even as one more Naga village began weeping for her ravaged and ruined children..."

This is the story of Apenyo as written by Temsula Ao in her short story, "The Last Song". Apenyo was only nine months old when her father died and for her mother the dead body of her husband brought with him the beginning of her journey on a lonely path where she struggled to cultivate a field and raise a child alone. Years passed and the nine months old baby girl had grown to become a strong and beautiful 18 year old woman. Both the women were now working together to earn a livelihood.

On a Sunday the whole village was busy in the preparations of a congregation where Apenyo was to perform a solo number. It was a joyous day however that year wasn't as simple as the previous ones, a recent raid of an underground hideout yielded that the villagers had been encouraging "rebel causes" by paying taxes to the underground forces. That Sunday while the village was preparing for the ceremonies, the Indian Army was up to something sinister.

"...Very soon the approaching soldiers surrounded the crowd and the pastor was commanded to identify himself along with the gaonburas. Apenyo burst into her solo number, and not to be outdone by her bravery or foolishness of this young girl, and not wishing to leave her thus exposed, the entire choir burst into song. The soldiers were incensed: it was an act of open defiance and proper retaliation had to be made..."

We find ourselves amidst the village crowd being hounded by an army of soldiers, "...More people were seen running away desperately some seeking security in the old church and some even entered the new one hoping that at least the house of God would offer them safety from the soldiers..." the crowd starts to flee, hide and escape from the chaos and bullets fired by reckless soldiers but the star singer of the congregation Apenyo stood mighty on the stage. Singing on, in defiance to the soldiers. Before the reader can grasp the entire scene, the author pushes them to imagine something much more horrid - Apenyo being dragged and raped by the soldiers and her mother meeting the same fate when she tries to rescue her daughter. "...Libeni was now frantic calling out her daughter's name loudly she began to

search for her in the direction where she was last seen being dragged away by the leader. When she came upon the scene at last what she saw turned her stomach the young captain was raping Apenyo while a few other soldiers were watching the act and seemed to be waiting for their turn. The mother crazed by what she was witnessing rushed forward with an animal like growl as if to haul the man off her daughter's body but a soldier grabbed her and pinned her down on the ground. He too began to unzip his trousers and when Libeni realised what would follow next, she spat on the soldiers face and tried to twist herself free of his grasp. But this only further aroused him, he bashed her head on the hard ground several times knocking her unconscious and raped her limp body

..." The small band of soldiers took their turns on both of them beating them and mounting them one by one till they finally died.

The bodies of both the woman were buried outside the boundary of the graveyard and not inside because according to the Naga traditions their deaths were considered to be of unnatural causes and hence their bodies could not be buried alongside the rest in the village graveyard. The author shows how Naga traditions here override Apenyo and her mother's act of bravery and defiance against the soldiers. When younger inhabitants protested against this the older responded by saying "...We are still Nagas aren't we? And for us some things never change..."

Note-Temsula Ao, a poet, story writer and an ethnographer is known for her textual and sub-textual engagement with issues of homeland, nationalism, identity and violence in the context of the Nagas.

Although her story The Last Song is set against the backdrop of Naga nationalism and the Indian Nation-state's response to it through its military measures (counter-insurgency and AFSPA), it can be seen as representing the situation in most regions of the northeast. It unravels the struggles of the ordinary people at the periphery against the tough measures of Indian centre who are trying to "teach" the people, a lesson for encouraging the "rebel causes". Ao throws light on how the Nagas cope with violence, how they negotiate power and force and seek and find spaces and enjoyment in the midst of terror.

The Last Song further reveals that Northeast is a land of paradoxes and brings out the complexities faced in that region. The states are caught in a series of nationalist/insurgency movements and political disturbances which many a time are caused by a group of its own people, the "underground forces" as Ao mentions in her story. The people find themselves stuck in between a war they never started. Temsula Ao through The Last Song rethinks and re-evaluates the idea of nationalism in such disturbed regions where its people are torn between finding an identity and a sense of belonging, and surviving.

Retold by Garima Mukherjee
BA(Hons) II Year, Sociology

Do you have any narratives from the margins that you would like to share? Send them to us at imagination.edboard@gmail.com and the best one would be published and awarded in the upcoming issue.

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The completion of this newsletter would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of so many people. It gives us immense pleasure in extending our gratitude to all We wish our outgoing batch the very best for their journey ahead.

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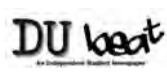
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