

Contextualizing Identity Crisis and Insurgency in Select Nigerian and Northeast Indian Texts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the link between identity crisis and insurgency in Nigeria and Northeast India, two postcolonial regions shaped by ethnic diversity and historical grievances. Drawing on postcolonial and conflict theory, it analyzes how colonial legacies, marginalization, and state neglect have fractured identities and fueled insurgent movements. In both cases, politicized ethnic and regional identities sustain resistance to perceived state domination. Using a qualitative approach, the study shows how identity-based exclusion drives violence and underscores the need for culturally sensitive, inclusive governance, offering insights into insurgency as a product of unresolved identity conflicts in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: *Identity crisis, Insurgency, Nigeria, Northeast India, Postcolonialism, Ethnic conflict*



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INTRODUCTION

An insurgency is an organized uprising against established authority that affects social norms, governance, and cultural continuity. Insurgencies often originate from some form of socio-political marginalization, ethnic conflict, or perceived injustice. Identity, personal and collective, is therefore central to insurgency, as conflict encourages individuals and communities to reinterpret their roles, allegiances, and cultural belonging. Within Nigeria and Northeast India, insurgency serves both as a challenge and a catalyst for identity negotiation. In

Nigeria, the residual effects of colonialism, ethnic diversity, and systemic neglect have provided a fertile ground for insurgent movements. Texts such as *The Chibok Girls* by Helon Habila (2016) and *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* by Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani reflect how groups like Boko Haram exploit socio-economic disparities and religious tensions to propagate violence and disrupt cultural stability (Nwaubani, 2020). The themes of abduction and violence clearly demonstrate how terrorism has eroded collective identity and led to cultural displacement. At the same time, such crises create

resilience and reassertion of cultural and community identities within the victims and survivors.

In the same manner, the insurgencies in Northeast India are deeply intertwined with ethnic marginalization and a fight for self-determination in the Indian nation-state. Through texts like *Love in the Time of Insurgency* (Bhattacharyya, 2005) by Dr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya and *These Hills Called Home* by Temsula Ao (2011), how insurgencies splintered native identities are illustrated. The works express a form of tug-of-war between traditional cultures and modern governmental influences in their attempt to homogenize. As an example the way Temsula Ao (2011) projects Naga characters shows that insurgencies touch not just the lives of individuals but intergenerational passage of culture and, by proxy, compelling communities to change and redefine identities in the midst of conflict.

Both Nigerian and Northeast Indian texts show the two directional relationships between insurgency and identity. Insurgency exaggerates identity crises by disrupting cultural practices and community cohesion. Conversely, identity becomes a rallying point in insurgencies when groups mobilize and stake legitimacy through cultural, ethnic or religious affiliations. According to the theory of Stuart Hall that describes cultural identity as fluid and shaped by historical and social contexts, these stories speak about how negotiation of identity is portrayed. This aspect of hybridity further suggests how people in the region of conflict must go beyond tradition and imposed modernity to create new identity practices.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study tries to analyze the representation of identity and culture in select Nigerian and Northeast Indian texts, with a focus on the intersections of insurgency, personal identity, and collective identity in conflict-affected societies. It would also examine the influence of memory and trauma on shaping cultural and individual identities in narratives of insurgency, displacement, and resilience within the selected texts. In addition to it, the study shall explore the similarities and differences in the depiction of insurgency and identity in Nigerian and Northeast Indian writings, highlighting universal and region-

specific elements of identity formation in response to conflict. Moreover, the paper shall try to determine the shared root causes of insurgency in both the regions, such as economic disparities, political marginalization, or social inequality, to name a few. The various unique factors contributing to insurgency in each region, like Nigeria's Boko Haram or Northeast India's United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) shall also be examined in the study.

ARGUMENT

The paper argues especially over Nigerian and Northeastern Indian texts which provide rich ground on investigating how identity and culture may be negotiated in a conflict-ridden society as the one which finds expression in the stated texts. There comes evidence of how these insurrections break through their cultural coherence and social fabrics through insurgence compels people or peoples in communities to configure them for new identities through both traumatic experiences and societal power configurations.

The central argument, whether it's ethnic marginalization in Northeast India or religious extremism and colonial legacies in Nigeria, is that insurgencies are challenges as well as catalysts of identity negotiation. These are universal themes about cultural survival and transformation and region-specific nuances-such as indigenous identity assertiveness in Northeast India and tension between ethnic and religious diversity in Nigeria. By framing identity as a dynamic process influenced by memory, trauma, and socio-political upheaval, the paper underlines the critical role that literature plays in recording and resisting systemic oppression in such contexts.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

The study uses a qualitative methodology, studying selected Nigerian and Northeastern Indian literary texts in extensive detail. This enables delving into the subtle ways identities and cultures are represented, negotiated, and even reconstructed in the narratives studied. The research draws both on descriptive and explanatory designs aimed at a more complete

exploration of the thematic and contextual elements relevant to the selected texts.

The study involves a critical analysis of the relevant primary texts by well known Nigerian authors and few relevant texts from Northeastern Indian writers. *Born on a Tuesday* (John, 2017), *The Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria* by Helon Habila (2016) and *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* (Nwaubani, 2020 and Nwaubani and Mazza, 2018) from Nigeria, while *The Collector's Wife* by Mitra Phukan (2005), *Love in the Time of Insurgency* by Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya (1979), *These Hills Called Home: Stories From a War Zone* by Temsula Ao (2011) from Northeast India.

The paper draws on an array of interdisciplinary theories to substantiate the authors' depictions of identity and culture. Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity and Diaspora Theory provides a foundation for understanding identity as fluid and shaped by socio-political and historical forces. This is particularly relevant in analyzing how characters in the texts navigate external and internal pressures. Homi K. Bhabha's Hybridity and Third Space Theory is used to analyze cultural negotiation and hybridity, showing how characters mediate between tradition and modernity. Cathy Caruth's (1991) Trauma Theory helps to analyze the ways in which traumatic experiences of displacement and violence, for instance, are processed to form identity and collective identity.

ANALYSIS

The whole paper shall be divided into the following three types. Firstly, a reading of select Nigerian texts. Secondly, a reading of select Northeastern Indian texts. Thirdly, it will analyze the common themes found across the two regions.

A Reading of Select Nigerian Texts:

In Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday* (2017), the negotiation of identity is starkly portrayed through the life of Dantala, a young boy from the Almajiri system in Northern Nigeria. The story follows Dantala as he navigates a harsh world shaped by the failure of society to care for vulnerable children. The novel brings forth the process through which Dantala

and other street children negotiate their identities in a world where they are invisible, vulnerable, and powerless. Self-definition struggle becomes a survival mechanism, which resonates with Cathy Caruth's (1991) Trauma Theory: trauma does not merely affect memory; it actually changes the sense of one's identity (Nathan, 2018: 339-355). This theme of survival amidst systemic failure makes the paper's discussion of identity negotiation in a society where individuals are caught between external pressures and their efforts to maintain their sense of self justifiable. The novel depicts a very stringent portrayal of reality, as it exposes the life of Dantala-a young Almajiri boy from northern Nigeria. The novel traces the incubation and birth of religious extremism, violence and insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria. The story offers an incredibly personal look at the Almajiri system, an ancient Islamic model of education that has degenerated into a deprivation process for most children. Almajiri system of education is the system which involves sending children away from home to Quranic schools to learn under Malams and Sheikhs. According to Asogwa Sebastine and Asogwa Dominic, "the word Almajiri was derived from Arabic 'Almuhajiri' meaning an emigrant. It usually refers to a person who migrates from the luxury of his home to other places or to a popular teacher in the quest of Islamic knowledge" (Habla, 2016). One of the major issues raised in the novel is that these Almajiri boys are exploited by those Malams and Sheikhs and are now ready to fight the society that produced them. It begins with a statement that instigates fear and anxiety in the mind of the readers: "The boys who sleep under the kuka tree in Bayan Layi like to boast about the people they have killed. I never join in because I have never killed a man" (Agwani, 1963). Dantala's journey points to experiences of marginalized children who have been forced to live a life of begging and political thuggery on the streets. Such children suffer trauma and emotional scars as they struggle with neglect in parental care and social protection. Their coping mechanism has often been drugs, crime, or violence. Furthermore, these religious teachers or Malams or Sheikhs and even few politicians use these wandering boys for their personal gain under the guise of proving their love for Allah. According to the narrator, Malam Abdul-Nur, the headmaster of

the new school to be constructed, tried to test Dantala's manipulative strength on him as the later begins to prepare him for the task assigned to him. He asked him, "If Allah asks you to do something, will you refuse? 'No,' I said confused. Are you just saying it, or do you understand it, what it means to do what Allah wants when He wants it, without asking why?" (82). Thus, it becomes evident from his questions how he is trying to sow the seeds of 'Allah's Will' in the boy's subconscious psyche. On another instance when a group of five men paid a courtesy visit to Sheikh and establish the Muslims as faithful while at the same time convincing the whole world that Islam is a religion of peace, Malam Abdul-Nur corrected by saying that, "Islam does not mean peace...Islam mean submission. Submission to the will of Allah. And the will of Allah is not the will of the infidel or the will of America. Islam means that we do not submit to anything or anyone but Allah" (84). It is, thus, obvious that Malam Abdul-Nur is slowly instigating these young minds with the radical ideas which he will, in the later course, teach his students in the Almajiri as 'Allah's Will'. Finally, it culminates in the decapitation of Sheikh Jamal by Malam Abdul-Nur, who has become very violent with his group as he begins to terrorize the people. According to the narrator, "They drag Sheikh out and make him kneel by the taps. They take off his turban. One of the men is taking photos with a small camera...as they slap him across the cheek...Then one of the men brings out a short knife...The man steps on Sheikh's back and pulls his hair to expose his throat. As two others pin Sheikh down, the man begins to cut"(222).

Psychoanalysis and Trauma theories would be important lenses through which one would understand their effects on the identities and behaviors of street children. Drawing on the work of Cathy Caruth, trauma theory focuses on ways in which unprocessed traumatic events continue to shape an individual's worldview, memory, and relationships (Caruth, 1991). In *Born on a Tuesday* (John, 2017), the cyclical nature of poverty, societal neglect, and exploitation of street children is vividly portrayed by reflecting deeply systemic failures in addressing the plight of vulnerable populations.

Therefore, the novel becomes a denunciation of societal negligence, in particular, the failure on the part of African governments and communities to uphold the rights and welfare of children. By featuring the lives of street children such as Dantala, Elnathan John (2017) encourages readers to grapple with the price paid for systemic injustice and envision a society that values and protects its most vulnerable members.

Helon Habila's (2016) *The Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria* narrates the traumatic experiences of the Chibok girls kidnapped by Boko Haram. Mass abduction symbolizes forceful redefinition through violence and terror. Girls are compelled to learn a new identity imposed upon them as captives in a brutal and oppressive environment. Through losing personal agency, they represent the cultural and religious conflicts Nigeria has within herself to deal with in this extreme and terrorist scenario. It shows how violence in itself, especially terrorism, kills personal and collective identity as the identity takes new shapes and forms for survival purposes. The story of the Chibok girls speaks to the devastating nature of political and religious extremism in shaping personal identity, depicting a larger fight for the cultural and religious preservation in a politically unstable society. In the Habila investigation of the survivors and their families, it has been demonstrated how memory and resilience come to play important roles in negotiating identity in the face of such trauma (Habila, 2016: 30). The story reflects Nigeria's larger struggles with insurgency and cultural survival, with the paper title well justified, showing how personal identities can be reshaped by violent forces outside themselves and those of societal neglect.

The novel looks into the devastating implications that terrorism has brought on issues of identity and culture in the Nigerian context. The 2014 mass kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls by Boko Haram provides a useful lens through which to view broader socio-political, cultural, and identity crises in Nigeria (Sylvester, 167-172). This work goes into the lives of the victims and their families, describing their personal and collective struggles through an unstable political system, violence, and marginalization.

Habila's (2016) investigation underscores the strength of the Chibok community while critically analyzing failures in governance and the global apathy that contributed to the tragedy (Yeku, 2021: 209-223).

Based on interviews and historical context, Habila (2016) brings out how, for example, such traumatic events wreck continuity in culture and erode identities - even for marginalized groups such as women and children. The narrative powerfully illustrates how the experiences of the abducted girls end up representing the intersection of cultural displacement with broader societal challenges within contemporary Nigeria. Because it often leads to empowerment, education is not only a field of weakness and loss but continues to add to the complexity of negotiation of identity for individuals and communities (Nwaolikpe, 2013: 63-71).

Positioning the Chibok tragedy in the larger narrative of Nigerian literature, themes of displacement, cultural erosion, and the fight to survive amidst adversities repeatedly feature in such writing. By so doing, Habila (2016) both documents a historical event and employs literature as a vehicle of commentary against systemic failures and the exigency to preserve culture. His work emphasizes the need to take decisive steps in rectifying root causes like terrorism, poverty, and political instability and, at the same time, reminds one of the resilience of culture in the face of globalization.

The narrative in *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* centers on the backdrop of Boko Haram's brutal assaults on schools, villages, students and teachers in Northeastern Nigeria. Their anger against the western form of education led to the abduction of 276 school girls from government owned Chibok Secondary School on 14 April, 2014 in Borno State, Nigeria. Out of these girls a total of 103 were kept for their own soldiers whom the government of Nigeria had captured at a later period. More than one hundred and twelve girls-now young women- remain missing till date. This caught the world's attention and sparked a world-wide campaign for the release of the abducted girls. It is a poignant novel addressing the prevalent issues based on the captivity story of the teenage girls akin to the Chibok girls kept enslaved in the

notorious Sambisa forest. The dreams of those young girls have been turned to nightmares when their village was attacked by the Boko Haram militants. Their hopes of higher education through government scholarships have been up in the air. Kidnapped with other girls and women, the protagonist narrator of the gripping story-Ya Ta is forced to follow her captor's radical beliefs and watch closely as one of her best friends slowly accepts them. Through the story of these young girls the novelist attempts to humanize the stolen girls who have been the victims of the worst insurgent violence in Nigeria. The Boko Haram insurgent group tries to eradicate every trace of western ideas and civilization through their dastardly acts of violence. In this context, it is believed that:

"They use charms that make them appear and disappear," Abraham says. "Many travelers have had their journeys cut short when men with bombs and guns suddenly appeared in the middle of the highway," Elijah says. "They load goats, cows, donkeys, and camels with explosives, then send the livestock wandering into public places where they would detonate," Caleb says. "That's how they bombed the markets in Banki and Bama," Isaac says. "And the market in Damboa." They are talking about Boko Haram. (75)

In the compelling narrative, a woman's negotiation of identity and culture plays out within northern Nigeria's socio-politically and religiously turbulent context (Chen, et al. 2020: 141-153). Using the story of the young female narrator, Ya Ta, Nwaubani (2020) explores intricate ways in which societal norms, religious extremism, and patriarchal systems shape, straitjacket, and redefine individual identity-largely for women. This novel is both a strong social commentary and an intimate portrayal of resilience in the face of overwhelming oppression (Patil, 2015:143-164).

The setting is in a small Nigerian village marked by a mix of Christian and Muslim communities; the novel opens with a vibrant description of everyday life, which makes the following depiction of women and girls, including Ya Ta, in traditional roles of care giving and domestic labor, and humble submissions, even more striking (Curia, 2002:41-50). The narrator protagonist, Ya Ta, on seeing her school mate and

close friend- Aisha, marries and become pregnant, it appears to her that she too will follow a similar pathway. According to her, “That is the good thing about dreaming with my eyes wide open. It’s like molding a calabash from wet clay” (Aidoo, 1991). It also appears that her father wants her “to grow up and be like the women wearing white coats in the Maiduguri General Hospital” (Griswold, 1992) but she is not completely aware that, like the calabash, dreams can be broken, and that one cannot dream from where one has left off. Despite such constraints, Ya Ta nurtures aspirations for education, personal freedom, and a future life beyond her village’s horizon. The aspiration of going to university, working as a teacher, and seeing the world materializes as a challenge to traditional assumptions that speak of male supremacy and negate the desire of women (Griswold, 1992).

The cultural construction used in this novel underlines the systematic suffocation of feminine identity. The patriarchal structure of society emphasizes a man’s value and that of his son, while devaluing and disempowering women and girls, with the help of customs, traditions, and expectations (Tugume, 2017:91-100). Ya Ta’s reflection on her standing in the family, where brothers are able to be questioned on intellectual ideas in the houses while she and her mother are confined to domestic spaces, poignantly foreground such ingrained inequality about gender. In her words, “Back at home, Mama must keep quiet whenever Papa speaks, and I must never question anything he says,” (Nwaubani, 2020) the weight of these cultural impositions becomes evident.

Religious extremism, as shown in the Boko Haram insurgency, brings additional burdens of oppression. When Ya Ta and other young girls are abducted by the extremist group, they lose their agency to be subjected to forced marriages, violence, and indoctrination. The group manipulates religion to justify its actions, perpetuating a distorted interpretation of Islam that uses women as instruments to reward insurgents. The dreams of the young girls are crushed in a hostile environment that erases their identities and reduces their value to servitude and compliance (Graness, 2022:215-232). The abducted girls and women are forced to learn

verses from the Quran, marry the Boko Haram terrorists as can be seen from the following lines: “Rijale, great fighters, commanders of this great army of Allah...These are the virgins that Allah has prepared for you” (176-177). To her surprise young Ya Ta finds herself that “the rest of us have been preserved for the rijale. We are their reward for being brave murderers” (177). These interpretations of Islam are what Nwaubani (2020) repeatedly points out as radical and cannot be accepted by any sane human being.

The narrator Ya Ta even thinks death to be the only way to escape from the harsh treatment given to them. They undergo hunger, sexual violence and physical abuse on a daily basis. “Night after night, I pray that it will not be my turn. I pray that Al Bakura and Malam Adamu will choose someone else” (146). Even time becomes meaningless in the Sambisa Forest. “I arise each morning with no strength to think of tomorrow morning or the morning after tomorrow. I retire at night with no courage to think of tomorrow night or the night after tomorrow” (169). Nwaubani through her deep observations exposes how the Boko Haram insurgents brain wash the female captives and make them suicide bombers. From their acts of inhuman treatment Ya Ta concludes that “Boko Haram has nothing to do with Allah” (157). She even stated that the Boko Haram condemns Western education, but ironically uses western warfare technology to fight the same Western education.

The novel further critiques the notions of society, which is favorably disposed towards male children and degrades the contributions of women in public life. In so far as Ya Ta finds a voice in this oppression, it stands symbolic of survival and resistance. Her tale points out the emotional and physical as well as intellectual costs of patriarchal and extremist ideologies on women’s lives, which also reflects their determination towards an identity in a society that looks to crush them (Asaah, 2011).

Nwaubani’s (2020) *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* transcends a mere recounting of events. It intricately weaves personal narratives with broader socio-political and cultural critiques, drawing attention to the fragile negotiation of identity and culture for

women in northern Nigeria. The novel emphasizes the urgent need for systemic changes to dismantle patriarchal structures and create spaces where women can achieve their full potential. In doing so, it contributes to the larger discourse on gender equality, resilience, and what education and self-determination can do for liberation (Nwaubani, 2020).

A Reading of Select Northeastern Indian Texts:

In Mitra Phukan's (2005) *The Collector's Wife*, the negotiation of identity takes place within a deeply patriarchal Assamese society. Rukmini, the protagonist, is trapped in the social role of "the Collector's Wife," (Phukan, 2005) which defines her worth and identity based solely on her husband's position. This imposed identity suppresses Rukmini's autonomy and isolates her from her true self. Her struggle exemplifies the greater issue for women in patriarchal societies: one where societal expectations, rather than their own desires, shape their identity. The quiet resistance of Rukmini, however, addresses the wider theme of women's negotiation over their identities in the rigidity of cultural and societal constrictions. Her situation reflects the conflict between social roles and personal ambitions, one that many women in postcolonial societies are compelled to negotiate. The novel critiques the cultural structures that limit women's agency, emphasizing the need for women to redefine themselves beyond the roles prescribed by society.

Mitra Phukan (2005), through *The Collector's Wife*, weaves a complex narrative not just against the politically charged backdrop of the Assam Agitation of the 1970s and 1980s but actually as the upheaval itself—a physically and emotionally constructed landscape that frames the journey of the protagonist Rukmini. Phukan (2005) explores how social unrest weaves itself into individual experiences, especially for women, to make for a meaningful identity, alienation, and resilience study (Pathak, 2018:62-80).

Rukmini is the wife of a District Collector who occupies a revered but isolating position. Societal expectations that are stitched onto her role define her public persona even as they alienate her from her sense of self. She is seen solely in terms of her husband's position, a kind of identity she may justifiably resent in being collapsed into "the

Collector's Wife" (Phukan, 2005) and stripped of her individual self. This duplicity—the rights of status set against the personal emptiness it fills—captures the larger pain of identity construction in the patriarchal and politically turbulent society (Trinh and Minh-ha, 1989:989). Her attempts to establish her own agency are always frustrated by societal expectations as well as personal limitations, thus depicting the subtle balance women need to carry in such contexts.

Beyond individual identity issues, the novel critiques the broader structures of society that perpetuate gender inequality. This barrenness, for example, is something through which Rukmini is subjected to rigid societal judgment, which only corroborates the patriarchy of believing a woman's worth lies in her capacity for childbearing. This stigma further isolates her, emphasizing cultural and social pressures laid upon women in Assamese society. The narrative poignantly captures the struggle for meaning and autonomy for a life defined by others; it becomes a reflection of the broader problems women face in similar circumstances (Mendoza, 2015:100-121).

The Collector's Wife is also more than a personal tale; it is a vivid portrait of Assamese society at the time when its cultural and political transformation was underway. The backdrop of insurgency and unrest highlights the pervasive uncertainty and fear that influence the lives of individuals and communities. Phukan (2005) skillfully weaves this socio-political context into Rukmini's personal narrative, illustrating how external conflicts amplify internal struggles. The novel critiques the socio-political system while celebrating the resilience of individuals, particularly women, in navigating these challenges (Narayan, 1998:86-106).

The conflict perspective is brought out by the author through the story of Rukmini to explore the multifaceted effect that societal expectations, political upheavals, and individual loss have on identity. In a wider universe, however, the novel allows readers to examine the issues surrounding identity and culture in conflicted and patriarchal societies. Indeed, ultimately, *The Collector's Wife* showcases the strength of the human spirit to endure and adapt in the face of systemic and personal adversities (Murty, 2010:83).

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya's *Love in the Time of Insurgency* (Bhattacharyya, 2005) (originally titled *Iyaruingam*) is a deep and vibrant study into the give-and-take of identity and culture in the midst of socio-politico-ecological turmoil at the time and aftermath of the Second World War in Nagaland. The novel showcases tangibly the struggle of the Tangkhul Naga people as they deal with post-war trauma caused by colonial intervention, internal conflicts that sprang from their own fight for autonomy. Dr. Bhattacharya masterfully juxtaposes the destruction of Nagaland's natural landscape and the erosion of its cultural and personal identities as a means to open up the deep impact both war and insurgency has on nature and humankind (Cuomo, 2002:1-11).

The core of this story revolves around Sharengla, a rural Naga woman, whose life will never be the same again in the backdrop of the war and patriarchal norms. Her abduction and exploitation by a Japanese soldier exemplify the double subjugation experienced by women during conflicts: as victims of war and as targets of societal judgment. Sharengla's story is representative of the patriarchal bias etched within her community, reducing her identity to one of dishonor, even though she is a victim. This personal narrative is complemented by the ecological destruction of Nagaland's arable lands, marred by constant shelling and military occupation. Ruined soil and barren fields stand for the common suffering of women and nature as victims of androcentric and militaristic exploitation (Longkumer, 2014:115-128).

The novel argues that the patriarchal world perpetuates hierarchical dualisms—man over nature, men over women, colonizer over colonized—and how these systems of oppression reciprocally feed into one another. By linking the subjugation of women to the exploitation of nature, Bhattacharya's eco-interpretive lens places both as vulnerable subjects robbed of their agency by the machinations of war and colonialism. Sharengla's narrative is, in this sense, representative of the larger dilemmas confronted by Naga women, who have to negotiate roles within a culture that both venerates and ostracizes them at the same time (Prabhu, 2001:47-69).

The ideological conflicts within the Naga community as seen in the sphere of struggle against modernity and its encroachment into traditional values are something to which Bhattacharya pays attention. Conflicting images for Nagaland's future—characters promoting ethnic preservation versus those advocating education and modernity—represent some of the personal complexities of an emerging new cultural identity in the face of rapid change. Through these narratives, *Love in the Time of Insurgency* (Bhattacharyya, 2005) becomes a profound meditation on resilience and survival and their interconnected struggles with identity, culture, and ecology (King and Plant, 1989:18-28). Temsula Ao's (2011) *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* is a poignant collection of stories about the complexity of identity and culture in the context of insurgency and warfare in Nagaland, a state in Northeast India. Ao's (2011) work reflects the ongoing struggle of the region with its identity, torn between its indigenous heritage and the pressures of colonialism, postcolonial governance, and the cultural shifts imposed by modernity. *These Hills Called Home* offers a powerful portrayal of collective identity among the Naga, rooted in culture, history and connection with the land. In contrast, Ao (2011) also invites the readers to a scenario where increasingly these identities are at risk due to the continued violence and disruption caused by insurgency.

As an identity issue, Northeast India has been long fraught with ethnic and cultural conflicts between the original dwellers and the Indian state. Influenced by this perennial conflict, Nagaland's struggle for sovereign existence and cultural survival has witnessed numerous separatist movements; most of them were often violently confronted. Ao's (2011) stories weaved in and around these aspects have offered instead, intimate vignettes into the lives of Naga individuals and families by the ongoing militant conflict. In particular, Ao (2011) focuses on the psychological wounds of war in her characters, showing how it leaves its cultural identity and personal life marred by trauma in violence (Baugh, Edward 1988).

The central concern in Ao's (2011) collection is negotiation of identity amidst the erosion of a culture.

There is a long history of Naga people's assertion of their cultural uniqueness and independence, a common perception that the Indian state had branded them as "other". Ao's (2011) stories fairly reflect that battle against loss of cultural practices, breaking up of fragmented communities, and the shift in the relationship between men and women within a war-torn society. Her characters are doomed to traverse between the past and the present, when the memories of the more harmonious life of the pre-war past coexist with the cruelties of insurgency and after-effects.

Ao also celebrates the survival power of storytelling. By following with her rich stories about the lives of Nagas and the continuing conflict, Ao (2011) emphasizes how memory and oral traditions sustain the continuity of culture. Storytelling, in the case of Ao's (2011) work, is a form of resistance against the erasure brought about by some external forces—whether it is the violence of war, the homogenizing pressures of modernization, or foreign political ideologies. The activity of remembering and the collective sharing of stories are 'acts of reclamation' of identity, where Ao (2011) suggests that identity is not necessarily 'a static reflection of the individual past but something that is continually reconstructed through memory, narrative, and collective experience' (Dev, 2000:10).

The characters in *These Hills Called Home* experience trauma that is entirely psychological and emotional, as they grapple with life within a zone of conflict. This inner layer added by Ao (2011) to her identity exploration shows that it is shaped not just by external but also by internal struggles. Her characters, particularly the women, experience a specific and exclusive form of oppression with the state and insurgent forces but also in their own surroundings. Ao (2011) throws light on the gendered aspect of identity, and how violence can alter and modify the roles and status that the women characters have against their as well as against the tendency and sense of belonging (Gaikwad, 2009:299-311).

Through storytelling, Ao's (2011) characters find agency in memory, which gives them sustenance to deal with the destructive nature of violence and war-induced cultural destruction. They use storytelling

and remembering, which are potent forms of resistance against forgetting and erasing Naga culture. This aligns with Pierre Nora's theory of 'lieux de mémoire' or 'sites of memory', which suggests that memory serves as a means of preserving identity in the face of erasure (Ao, 2011:206). The negotiation of identity in Ao's (2011) work speaks to the broader struggles of indigenous communities facing cultural extinction due to political violence and societal transformation.

Through *These Hills Called Home*, Temsula Ao (2011) offers an ambiguoistic exploration of identity, culture, and resistance so that readers are able to understand the vivid impacts of the war on personal as well as collective identity in Northeast India. Her work testifies to the resilience of the Naga people, particularly the women, and their continuing struggle for the preservation of their rich cultural heritage against the destruction and displacement caused by insurgency (Agwani, 1963:169-171).

FINDINGS

Interplay Between Personal and Collective Identity

This study of Nigerian and Northeast Indian literature selects the most complex interplays between individual and collective identity in societies in conflict. Nigerian literature reflects the difficulties that the ethnic diversity creates, together with colonial heritage and systemic neglect, making a person to often pursue their private aspirations at the expense of others' expectations. In turn, Northeast Indian narratives explore a tension between indigenous cultural preservation and assimilation pressures from a nation-state. This duality vividly brings out how personal and communal identities are constantly rewritten within the socio-political and cultural influences.

Memory and Trauma in Shaping Identity

Memory and trauma become the central concepts in identity formation and negotiation. The Nigerian literature, such as *The Chibok Girls*, reflects on collective trauma in light of systemic violence and terrorism, demonstrating that collective pain builds communal resilience. In sharp contrast, the Northeast Indian literature centers on individual and gender-

specific traumas, like in *These Hills Called Home*, in which individual loss and social change fuse to redefine identity. Across both contexts, trauma not only records the fragility of identity but also tells the story of strength and resilience by individuals and communities.

ROLE OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is depicted in both Nigerian and Northeast Indian literatures as a critical medium for reclaiming and preserving identities. In such narratives, communities bridge the gap between past and present by creating futures from memory. Nigerian texts underscore the feature of storytelling as a voice for the oppressed, such as the street children and victims of terrorism, while Northeast Indian writings maintain its tradition of talking with regard to oral traditions. In each instance, storytelling turns into a potent method of resistance and healing for people in societies dealing with displacement and conflict.

COMMON THEMES OF RESILIENCE

The texts collectively highlight resilience as a universal theme in the face of both external and internal pressures. Nigerian and Northeast Indian narratives share the strength required for addressing and confrontation of issues that are systemic oppression, cultural displacement, and socio-political instability. Most notable is the gendered experience of resilience - women grappling through patriarchal structures towards exercising control. These stories celebrate the tenacity of cultural heritage and human spirit in demanding space to adapt and thrive in adversity.

REGIONAL SPECIFICITY

Though the texts share similar themes, they reveal different regional contexts that shape the negotiation of identity and culture. Nigerian narratives often grapple with the lingering effects of colonialism and religious extremism, portraying the fragmentation and reconstruction of identities in diverse socio-political environments. Meanwhile, Northeast Indian literature focuses on the marginalization of indigenous communities within a national framework, highlighting tensions between traditional practices and modern governance. These regional

differences shed light on how particular historical and geopolitical conditions shape the tactics of identity and cultural preservation.

GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY

Gender is central to the negotiation of identity, and women's experiences are at the forefront in both literatures. Nigerian texts explore how violence, religious extremism, and systemic neglect shape women's identities, often portraying their struggles and resilience against oppression. In Northeast Indian narratives, patriarchal constraints and societal expectations define women's roles yet the stories also show agency by women in challenging and rewriting those limitations. In both the contexts, gendered narratives reflect the duality of victimhood and empowerment in the struggle for survival on both cultural and personal levels.

CULTURAL SURVIVAL THROUGH LITERATURE

Both literatures highlight the role that literature plays as a means through which to reflect, resist, and reclaim identity. Nigerian texts often portray the strength of the marginalized against socio-political and cultural oppression, while Northeast Indian narratives celebrate the preservation of indigenous traditions and resistance to cultural erasure. Documenting stories of resilience, trauma, and memory, these texts open up a space to understand the interplay between identity and culture in postcolonial and conflict-affected societies. Literature would therefore play a crucial role in maintaining cultural heritage and individual identities within the struggles of a system.

CONCLUSION

The paper thus affirms that literature remains a very important medium for reflection, resistance, and reclaiming identity in conflict-affected societies. Through the intricate web of personal and collective struggles within the narratives of the selected texts, the complex interplay between resilience, memory, and cultural preservation comes to the fore. These works depict the human condition in all its vulnerable and resilient states and invite readers to explore themes of survival, adaptation, and the transformative power of storytelling. At the same time, these texts

bring to light the universality of such issues as trauma, memory, and cultural survival, and simultaneously speak to the specificity of regional contexts. Nigerian writing wrestles with the persistence of colonial legacies and divisions from within, while Northeast Indian writings touch on the oppression of tribal communities and tensions between practices and modern state systems. Together, these literatures contribute to a complex comprehension of the ways in which identities are negotiated in complex cultural and political environments.

Ultimately, the paper underlines the crucial role of literature in documenting and resisting systemic oppression, cultural erasure, and identity fragmentation. Their nuanced portrayals of human resilience, memory, and cultural preservation make these works all the more invaluable in furthering our understanding of identity negotiation complexities in conflict-ridden societies. They celebrate the human spirit, the transformative power of storytelling as a means of reclaiming identity and safeguarding cultural heritage for future generations. Through this, they are part of a greater discussion on cultural survival, transformation, and the dynamic interplay between individual and collective identities in adversity.

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