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Re-defining Terror in Contemporary Short Fictional Works from Assam

Dharmendra Baruah

Abstract

Despite the recent upsurge of academic interest in examining the conditions and consequences of conflict and violence in northeast India, the issue continues to be viewed from perspectives most of which are predominantly policy-centric in approach. Too much reliance on state or policy centric positions in this kind of writings also finish with designating the entire reality of violence in the region as 'terrorism'. The present paper seeks to contest this excessive reliance, within mainstream academia, to make 'terrorism' as a master-trope to approach the reality of northeast violence. The unseemliness of 'terrorism' as an adequate referent of the layered realities of violence in the northeast is highlighted by critically exploring two contemporary Assamese short stories- 'Surrender' originally written in Assamese by Anuradha Sharma Pujari and translated into English by Aruni Kashyap and 'What Lies Over Here?' written originally in Assamese by Sanjib Pol Deka. The paper argues that emerging Assamese short fiction offer a more nuanced view of issue at hand, interrogate the epistemic efficacy of established master-tropes such as 'terrorism' and offers itself as the much-needed discursive space for self-reflectivity and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Assamese; Conflict resolution; Short fiction; Terror; Violence.

The postcolonial history of Assam has been marked by a persistent shadow of violence and conflict. The upsurge of scholarly interest in themes related to the northeast as a whole, is both a condition and consequence of the growing visibility of the region in scholarly circles. Interestingly majority of the scholarly discussions on the issue of violence in the region continue to approach the issue from predominantly policy-making positions and also to stereotype all forms of ethnic identity related violence in the region as 'terrorism'. The present paper argues that there is

an urgent need to move away from this tendency to pigeonhole forms of politically-ideologically driven forms of violence as 'terrorism'. The scholarly imperative to look for alternative and fuller critical approaches to understand the reality of violence in northeast India is illustrated by critically exploring two contemporary Assamese short stories by two of the noted Assamese writers. These short stories are- 'Surrender', originally written in Assamese by Anuradha Sharma Pujari and translated into English by Aruni Kashyap and 'What Lies Over Here?' written originally in Assamese by Sanjib Pol Deka.

Literature is one of the crucial sites to explore the conditions, consequences and character of violence and conflict. As pointed out by Angelica R. Martinez, and Richard E. Rubenstein in 'The Truth of Fiction: Literature as a Source of Insight into Social Conflict and Its Resolution' (2016), literary texts could function as an effective space to negotiate the complexities of human conflicts and their resolution. Literature helps in conflict resolution by offering "thick" descriptions of the human experience in place of those "thin" modes of writing conflicts (209), offered by their non-literary counterparts such as official reports, newspaper writings, historical documents etc. Martinez and Rubenstein terms these writings that focus on the theme of conflict 'Literature of conflict' (209). Most literature of conflict offer a more nuanced view of conflict and lights up shades of violence that remain undermined in non-literary constructions of violence and conflict. This includes scars and trauma which are not always obvious and definable but are more powerful and appalling. Literature of conflict also depart from the flat and unidirectional constructions of non-literary narratives on violence/conflict by giving space to those moments of dilemmas and ambiguities that are felt by victims and perpetrators of violence in situations of politically-ideologically generated violence. It is these dimensions of this body of writings that transform it into a useful site or window to re-explore the reality of violence and conflict in India's northeast.

Martinez and Rubenstein term narratives/rhetoric that share direct affinities with agendas of conflicts and thereby are central to the generation and proliferation of conflict/violence 'conflict narratives' (209). Conflict narratives are simplified in structure, unidirectional in approach and singular in perspective and hence, easily fit into projects of perpetuating mutual de-legitimation, radicalization, and polarization. The determinativeness of conflict narratives reinforces certainty while precluding reflection and dialogue (Cobb, 2013:38). Conflict narratives are stories that often drive parties to violence, and are marked by 'thin' plotlines and binary moral frameworks (88). Over time, dominant groups tend to gain control of

the narrative landscape silencing the dominated. Works of imaginative literature can destabilize these dominant narratives and can thereby grant readers access to better-formed stories (234-235). By evoking transformative encounters with the 'other', literature of conflict can create an enabling condition for conflict resolution (Martinez and Rubenstein, 209). Cobb rightly highlights the way sensible writings can "complexify" (217) narratives on violence by incorporating multiple perspectives to create a more nuanced, multifarious discourse. Thus, literature can actually help in countering forms of violence by offering a certain kind of self-critical and dialogic discourse in place of the simplified, intense dualities perpetuated by conflict narratives.

To return to the specific issue of thesituation of conflict in Assam and the literary response to these crises, most writings bring to the fore the incompatibility between exclusive narratives/visions that mark the conflict narratives—key to triggering conflicts— and the socio-cultural and psychological realities that are peculiar to the region. The conditions and consequences of conflicts in the region have been studied by scholars from within and outside the regions (see Hazarika 1995; Bhaumik 2009; Baruah 2006 and 2021; also see Upadhyay 2009). However, most of these studies are in the nature of policy discourses and they hardly capture the quotidian realities of terror and crisis, endured in a conflict zone. Besides, their preoccupation with finding a 'policy' to break this impasse—that is conflict—has rendered these studies blind to other usually overlooked but potential approaches to address the issue. In some of these studies, the issue of conflict is handled within generalized and generic frames making rather than grappling with the nuances and intricacies of NE's multi-layered conflict.

Contemporary writings from the Northeastern state of Assam are emerging not only as an important participant within the discourse on northeast violencebut also as an epistemic intervention.In her article, 'Writing Terror: Men of Rebellion and Contemporary Assamese Literature', Rakhee Kalita, a noted scholar of the region, offers a few useful entry points into this. The study brings to the fore not only the growing academic interest in and engagement with the issue of terrorism in the region's literature but also literature's role in interrogating the validity of established epistemic/scholarly frames to deal with the issue in an effective way. Her argument derives from her nuanced view of terror and a clearly perceived dissonance between the heterogeneous and assorted implications of violence and the scholarly frames used to view these. Quite relevantly, Kalita reiterates the urgency of approaching the issue of northeast violence in its 'lo-

cal nuances' and 'specificities' (100), rethinks the adequacy of established approaches in dealing with it, and more importantly, the imperative to develop a comprehensive understanding of violence as it is experienced, lived and negotiated by people living within the region. "Terror is not merely the bomb exploding, or the several unsuspecting dying or dead, or even the awareness of who the 'enemy' is. *Terror is the sense of being swamped, as it were, by a systemic derangement in which social structures are steeped. It is, perhaps, more significantly, our doubts about who or what is responsible for it*(101: emphasis added)."

This accentuates the exigency, for northeast scholars, to move beyond clichéd epistemic frames in favour of what could be termed as 'situated knowledge' (102) of violence in the region. As pointed out by Kalita, terror is an order that is "apparently hidden beneath layers of social and political hypocrisy and duplicity. The existing social structures are steeped in a terror-producing chain of circumstance (107)." As Assam has long been witness to a slow and lingering climate of terror, implicit and explicit, it is not unusual that literary narratives emerging out of the social and psychological transactions of these times are inherently informed by the full brunt of such symptoms of terror that confound each member of society into an incapacity to separate the result from the cause and the fear from the confusion over the way of being. It explains why literature from the region emerges as a useful site for constructing such a situated and hence, arguably, more reliable knowledge of the shaded experience of terror/violence as an inexorable attribute of everyday life. Reading these, the reader experiences "a sense of terror, of being swamped as it were, by a general and systemic derangement (109)." This literature elicits the unmistakable feeling of unease and disquiet that is no less than the attribute of terror fixed on its protagonist.

Unlike situations of conflict elsewhere, singling out an obvious identity of the perpetrator and victim of terror in the northeast is fraught with inherent challenges. As Kalita writes, " In the northeast, we are plagued by a different set of imbalances- the 'terror' is within us, the players as well- it brings to the fore the problematic of identifying the terrorist-who or what then is the terrorist? And where does the real danger lie?Real politics of terror behind the structures erected by the state (109)." One important challenge is how society deals with rebel members living on its fringes (111). The social rejection of former militants makes reconciliation and return a tricky and ambivalent process, fraught with uncertain and unsettling possibilities. A surrendered militant's life in the perpetual shadow of fear and trauma reveals a terror of a more severe kind (111), as they

are forced to give up legitimate claims to their own society. The nuanced state of the psychologies of both the rebel and victim renders any clear-cut dichotomization of the terrorizer-terrorized problematic. Furthermore, it is the multiple situations of conflict in a state such as Assam that make the otherwise 'easy-to-handle metaphors' in prevailing terror discourses further redundant. It is especially in these situations wherein the perpetrator/ terrorizer ironically morphs into the victim/ terrorizedthat the'polysemous layers' of the trope of terrorism' (117),become the most obvious.

The short story 'Surrender' deals with a vital but relatively underexplored aspect of the embattled collective and private landscapes in Assam. It not only fictionalizes the precariousness that is immanent and obvious in every sphere of life in this conflict-zone, but more importantly, brings to the fore usually unimagined manifestations of this. Apart from highlighting the shaded realities of terror/ conflict, the story, in interesting ways, upsets the binaries—so to say, the perceptual pigeonholing— that continues to hegemonize the existing discourse on the conflict situation in Assam.

'Surrender' is the story of Dipok Saikia, a surrendered cadre of ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam), the foremost rebel group in Assam. The story opens with a scene of death in his neighbourhood. Neelkantha Baruah, the deceased was dear not only to Dipok's wife Sondhya but also to his four- year old daughter Moumon. "Moumon used to address him as 'Koka', for grandfather, though he was not her grandfather. She considered him as her own grandparent (1)." The news of his death leaves Sondhya upset and she prepares to leave to pay her respect to the deceased. Moumon, who has not seen a dead-body is told by her mother that her grandfather has flown away to the sky like a bird. As Moumon wonders if she could also be a bird and flew away with her beloved 'koka', Dipok plants a tight slap on his daughter's cheek. A dumbstruck Sondhya snatches Moumon away from Dipok's arms and says "I thought you had become a human, but it seems you are still an animal (2)". Extremely troubled by these words, Dipok beats up Sondhya like an aggrieved animal, rapes her in front of her own child, and leaves on his motorbike to a roadside hotel. However, the sense of hurt is aggravated by the feeling of being ignored in the hotel by the hotel-owner, when Dipok orders some food. To regain his lost authority and image, Dipok "crushed a glass tumbler on the table in his anger" (9). "Then he stood up and reached for his belt. Suddenly, the owner seemed to understand what was happening… Dipok started to receive royal treatment. A self-satisfied smile played on his lips as he realized that he still had some power. The other customers looked at him with fear (9-10)." However, the lingering words of Sondhya and his

brother-in-law Shantonu that he was nothing more than an 'opportunist', transform his sense of achievement into that of repentance at being an opportunist and surprisingly, the dreaded ex-militant Dipok Saikia returns the cost of the broken tumbler to the hotel-owner. As he travels home with a renewed meaning of life, he is intercepted by the local policemenand is informed of the murder of the two military officers by two gunmen in the neighbourhood by two gunmen on a motorcycle. He is also summoned to the local police station the next day. As Dipok heads along, he is again stopped by a friend from his past life who tells him of the bike used in the ambush and kept hidden in his home. His ex-comrade asks him to change the number plate and abandon it somewhere. "His old friend said nothing and left without giving Dipok a chance to speak. Dipok just stood there, as if struck by lightning. Then he slowly walked towards his house. He was as thirsty as a man in the middle of a desert, and swallowed hard (13)."

The once-dreaded rebel reaches home only to tell his wife that he has already disclosed all the relevant inputs to the police. As a dumbfounded Sondhya awaits the unimaginable, the sound of heavy boots reverberates throughout the household, becoming louder and moving toward the room where Dipok is sleeping. The next morning, Dipok's confession is published in huge letters in the newspapers. Based on his confession, four militants are arrested red-handed from the house of a respected man in the town. Three days later, another piece of news is published. "This time in small font, tucked away somewhere within the folds of the newspaper. 'Former militant Dipok Saikia was killed by two unknown assassins (14).'" As the autopsied body returns home, a bewildered Moumonasks her mother, "Ma, was Deta [father] a good person? Should I join my hands for him? (14)."

'Surrender' brings to the fore the ambivalence immanent in the experience of and reactions to terror/ violence and thereby problematizes established binaries of victims and assailants that underline prevailing views of violence in Assam. Anuradha Sharma Pujari subverts the very basis of this epistemic binary of the terroriser and the terrorised. As the story suggests, in the given context, the clear cut singling out of the perpetrator-victim becomes a problematic task. It is five years since Dipok Saikia has broken off from the underground and returned to the so-called 'mainstream'. However, his past image as 'a militant' continues not only to occasionally unsettle but to haunt his quotidian existence. A full homecoming/ return remains a distantpossibility. The purported return is also fraught with inherent problems. Dipok's life shrouded in perpetual unease points to the troubled life that rebels on the social fringe are forced to live. To this ex-

tent, the story is loaded with both a 'subconscious and conscious baggage of subversion (Kalita, 104).'

This gory account of a surrendered rebel's struggle to return not only to civil society but also to regain a lost sense of belonging, brings to the fore the inescapable shadow of unease on a former rebel's life, the precarious implications of return passage. Dipok'sreturn from the jungle hideout to civilian life is by no means easy or even welcome. Despite the fact that he had severed all ties with the underground five years back does not change the way he is perceived and recognized not only by society but also by his own beloved wife Sondhya who had at one point persuaded him to give up arms and reconcile to the mainstream:

> And then, one day, he met Sondhya. She was the only person who sheltered him without a second thought and often told him to give up arms. She would advise him on the things that he could do after surrendering arms and leaving the revolutionary life. He had liked her suggestions so much that he had started to believe in her words deeply. How long ago had he left that life? And how old was *this* present life of his? Though he had returned to the mainstream, he *had never received a warm welcome from any of its members. None of his neighbours would welcome him warmly. If something went wrong in that small town, the local police station would always summon him first. His name would probably be never erased from the police register of surrendered militants* (7: emphasis added)

This illustrates the main argument made in this paper—that is, terror is a pervasive and perpetual crisis with no definite agent or victim always. Dipok's crisis at being increasingly swamped— or, alienated by his own people not only unearths this dimension of terror but while doing so, emerges as a counter-narrative to prevailing narratives. To this extent, Anuradha Sharma Pujari's short story is a subversive intervention into the existing discourse of terror in Assam. Dipok's catastrophe finds an apt metaphor in the way he visualizes himself as a fly caught in a web. "The suspicion of policemen, neighbours, and even of Sondhya made him feel like a fly caught in a web— one that was shrinking by the day (7)."It is this perpetual state of being terrorized that explains Dipok's agitated disposition. His passage from the University hostel to the underground and subsequent frustrations adds clarity to this:

> He didn't keep track of the time he spent on the bike, roaming around the town like a lunatic. *Why did he leave his comforts to go*

> *underground? And why did he eventually surrender? What went wrong with his life's decisions?* He had earned distinction marks in high school and was a bright kid. It was when he was at university that he started to suspect that everything was worthless. He wanted to *join the revolution and had committed to that on the same day he had finished reading about Mao Zedong's Long March*. A new life soon began for him, dominated by fake names and identities. He had gone to great lengths to take arms training and the boy who once *couldn't watch the killing of a pigeon or duck for meat had started to murder people without hesitation* (6: emphasis added)

The narrative construction of the protagonist defies conventional stereotypes of a rebel (militant?). Violence/terror, for Dipok, is neither a self-seeking means nor a vendetta. His homophobic past is a metaphor for his metamorphosis and also an apt reminder of his moral compunction or goodness. Hissusceptibility to being unsettled by the words of reproval from his wife and others not only reveals his moral sense but also redeems him of any potential accusation of mindless violence. His troubled conscience also manifests as nightmares. "He wasn't scared of anything in this world except the shadow of death. Yet, he hated and was also scared of death. Often, he would wake up to someone screaming. Some nights, he would throw up after sensing a strong stench of blood (9)." Dipok's unease with killing and bloodshed symbolizes his failure to fully co-opt the terror regime, despite his choice to be a rebel. He is a rebel with a conscience/heart. However, it does not free him from the imbroglio of terror. On being urged by his beloved he returns and seeks reconciliation with his former self. But unfortunately, his society is not ready for the purported reconciliation, forcing him to plunge into a psychosis. Finally, Dipok chooses to prioritize his earlier innocuous identity over anything else, despite the sinister implications of such a choice. He decides to return despite knowing that he will not be spared alive, once he goes to the police station to give his confession. In subtle ways, the writer makes Dipok a victim of terror, partly of his own choice, but largely of an unsympathetic and inconsiderate society.

This sense of terror corresponds to the feeling of being swamped as it were, by a general and systemic derangement. The thematic and symbolic intricacy of the situation assumes further strength when the writer describes the perplexity of Dipok's four-year-old daughter Moumon when she asks whether her father was a good or a bad person. This question, put in the lips of the little daughter of the deceased points to the inherent contradictions in our constructions of terror (-ism), especially in situations

where the supposed terroriser emerges as the terrorised—that is, a victim of terror of a different kind, with no obvious perpetrator, but a whole social system involved. One also cannot overlook the terrorization of the immediate family of the ex-rebel— that is, Sondhya and Moumon. Despite the appearance of a decisive finality, the termination of the terroriser/terrorised Dipok, the aftershocks continue to linger in the hearts and minds of his family. A situated or comprehensive view of terror in states like Assam must take cognizance of all these nuances to offer itself as a viable epistemic frame. Unfortunately, prevailing non-literary approaches do not throw sufficient light on this ambivalence inherent in the experience of terror in Assam. Given this scenario, short stories such as 'Surrender' offer the much-needed critical space to grapple with these nuances immanent in the very notion and narrative of terror. It not only offers a counter-position to established but inadequate academic approaches to north-east violence but also an alternative and viable theoretical lens to deal with the issue in a comprehensive manner.

'Surrender' effectively reconstructs the experience of terror in Assam in its shaded forms. It not only brings to visibility, hitherto underexplored dimensions of terror but also deviates from popular narratives of terror in the northeast in that it brings the perspective of the so-called terrorist (?) to the centre, allots it adequate narrative/discursive space and eventually subverts the popular but clichéd binary of the terroriser-terrorized.

'What Lies Over Here?' written originally in Assamese by Sanjib Pol Deka and translated into English by Stuti Goswami, is another fictional intervention into the current discourse of terror (-ism ?) in the northeast. It not only challenges the idea of terror as a monolithic and unified construct but highlights the element of non-finality and fluidity inherent in the very conceptualization of terror. It is the story of Modhu Mastor, a village school teacher, Sorukon, his only son, and a returnee to the mainstream from an insurgent group and their family. The story opens with a scene of joy and happiness with villagers flocking into Modhu mastor's courtyards for the rehearsal of a *bhauria* [a folk theatrical performance], soon to be performed in the village Naamghar [the village prayer hall]."There were bhauriyas in the village for some years. But once the nearby army camp had fiercely descended on the villagers during a bhauriya Men-women, Bheem-Arjun the army batons had spared none (60)." It is after ten or twelve years that the village is rehearsing for a bhauriya. As exhilarated villagers cherish the much-awaited performance, Modhu Mastor leading the whole exercise, Sorukon is increasingly upset by the shadows of his past life as a rebel. Interestingly, the play chosen for the performance is

'Abhimanyu Bodh'. Sorukon's feeling of unease is aggravated when he meets Lahon-kai, his childhood companion who always plays the role of a jester in the village performances. As Lahon-kai, an inevitable figure in every bhauriya in the village for years does not turn up for rehearsal and somebody tells an unhappy Modhu Mastor that Lahon had taken to liquor and the reason is the tragic life of his daughter Beji, whose husband died in a bomb-blast somewhere and has returned to her home. However, it is the arrival of Lahon-kai at Modhu Mastor's premises and his sonorous rendition that strangely unsettles Sorukon. "All those thoughts that Sorukon wanted to forget, leave behind, keep chasing him. Why? Like ferocious beasts, why did they keep chasing him, baying for his blood? (66)." The sense of penitence and betrayal in Sorukon is aggravated by his knowledge that the bomb that ruined the lives of his near and dear ones such as Lahon kai was made and planted by him. "He had been suffering intolerably since last night. Ever since Lahon-kai's sonorous rendition in their courtyard, he had been strangely unsettled. He could hear Lahon-kai's voice from his bedroom (66)." It is not only Lahon-kai but his widowed daughter Beji's sight that unsettles Sorukon:

> He was unsettled when he saw her. He had felt nauseated. That day, the day he saw Beji after she was returned, the feeling had swept across him – that had he known remaining alive would entail such suffering, he would never have returned. Oh! This life was not life at all. This life that constantly brought the anguish of hell! That life shrouded in darkness had been much better. That life of uncertainties, where there was no scope for regret, no trace of childhood memory, no warmth of emotions.(68)

At this point, the persistent and layered implications of terror become evident which serve to challenge established notions of assailant and victim. Sorukon's is not a lesser crisis than Beji's or Lahon-kai's. The frequent nightmares is symptomatic of the no man's land he occupies as an ex-rebel:

> Those blood-drenched corpses he had seen on TV, did one of them belong to Beji's husband? It was such a terrible sight- one hand missing, the back of a head missing… Those men too would have had a wife, like Beji, or a daughter like Beji's daughter. That night, he could not sleep at all. All through the night, he felt as if he was floating above an abyss of blood (68).

Sorukon's struggle to negotiate the crisis is made more difficult by his

sense of the dissonance between the rhetoric and realities of the so-called revolution. Even while in the insurgent camps, Sorukon consistently struggles to find a justification for killing innocent people. "Could revolution be so cruel? So brutal? The bomb he had made with his own hands and placed with these very hands- could it be so barbaric? (68)." Every time he asks this to himself as well as his comrades, he is offered explanations which he finds illogical and unacceptable. He is further disillusioned to see how his ex-comrades have co-opted with the same exploitative system to fulfilltheir own ambitions whereas he could neither come to pay his last obeisance to his dying mother nor could join his sister's wedding as on both occasions he was hiding in a jungle camp. Not only these, but his urge to be a revolutionarymade him part from his beloved.The story ends when on the day of the bhauria, when his family watches the performance, Sorukon is picked up by some of his ex-comrades and about to be tried under the village banyan tree, for his alleged role in an encounter. As Sorukon stands there motionless, like a statue, eyes brimming with tears, the bhauriya site was virtually drowned in tears:

> Sewali [Sorukon's wife], felt sad for Uttara. How unjust life was to her! Did none of the valiant warriors ever spare a thought for her? Like other women, she too had her dreams, her hopes. How would she carry the burden of widowhood, of loneliness all her life? Sewali forgot that she was witnessing a play and broke down crying. (85)

Thus, the story not only captures the multiple disruptions that mark everyday life in a conflict zone such as Assam but also serves to upset, in interesting ways, the construction of terror (-ism) into a clichéd binary frame. What comes to the fore is the protracted or lingering shadow of conflict in both private and public lives. Despite his resolve to return to the so-called mainstream, Sorukon is not allowed to reconcile with it or to his own former self. He is trapped in the borderland between the mainstream and the underground, and also between his own past and present being. The former rebel Sorukon is engaged in a two-front war- exterior as well as within. Sorukon's crisis illustrates the larger point made in this paper—that is, any attempt to enframe terror as a cause and effect and perpetrator, victim binary is fraught with problems. The perpetual trauma of living as a stranger to his own self, and a disturbing sense of failure make Sorukon a victim of adifferent kind.Interestingly, this terror does not necessarily symptomize through immediately palpable signs, eventually magnifying its severity for the victim. Like Dipok Saikia in the story 'Surrender', Sorukon often feels the compulsion to share his anguish with

someone such as his wife Sewali. However, every time he tries to do so, he fails, adding to his duress. It is his wife's faith in his innocence that gives him a sense of being a betrayer. This forces him to resort to silence. In other words, for him, the return to a normal/ civic life is a dream deferred.

This takes us to another under-examined dimension of terror (-ism) in Assam in particular and the northeast as a whole. Unlike elsewhere, the protagonists of these narratives are not recalcitrant or arrogant and are amenable to reflection and rethinking. The other attributes which set them apart are their moral and emotional sensitivity. This moral rectitude becomes evident, not only in the choices they make but also in their susceptibility to a certain kind of soul-searching that impinges on their consciousness.

Both 'Surrender' and 'What Lies over Here' instantiates how Assamese short stories offer a more nuanced and fuller construction of the situation of conflict and the climate of terror in the state. They effectively challenge the rigidity and finality of blanket categories that continue to hegemonize the discursive politics on the theme. Both the stories, in their own ways, offer a far more extensive construction of the climate of terror prevailing in the region, by bringing the usually silenced voice of those ex-rebel cadres, who are always in a marginal space. They have no voice when they are in the rebel camp nor even when they return to the so-called mainstream. The narratives under review are best viewed not only as an attempt to give these marginalized subjects a voice but as the much-needed discursive space to create necessary enabling conditions for self-reflectivity and criticismand thereby, to the eventual resolution of an impasse that has crippled not only the state of Assam but the entire northeast as a whole.

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