

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal



**Volume 7, Issue 7, July 2019**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

Anuj Kumar Bhargav

M.Phil Scholar

University of Jammu

Jammu & Kashmir, India

anujbhargav@ymail.com

### Trials and Tribulations of the Fourth World: A Study of Jahnvi Barua's *Next Door*

#### Abstract

The Literature of the Northeast India acquired attention after the rise of some eminent writers in English such as Siddharth Deb, Mitra Pukhan, Jahnvi Barua and Arup Kumar Dutta whose works were translated from Assamese into English. The *Next Door* of Jahnvi Barua is a critically regarded compilation of short stories particularly placed in Assam, a region not frequently portrayed in English in Indian Fiction. Jahnvi Barua is an Assam based Indian author. In this collection of short stories, she has represented Assam as a voice from the edge. Northeast region of India is also known as tribal region since more than 90% of the population of this region is tribal. The paper will explore the sufferings and exploitation of Fourth World People i.e. Northeast Indian which is depicted obliquely, as a part of everyday life in Assam through Jahnvi Barua's *Next Door* (Collection of short stories).

Keywords: North East, Assam, exploitation, Next Door, tribes

The North East India including Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur is likewise called seven sisters with its uncommon geological conditions and cultural diversity that has distinct identity and unique character. This is a troubled region since freedom of India and the origins of discontent have their seeds

in the British rule. The literature of this region was overlooked for many years by the rest of India since it was inaccessible and found its expression mainly in tribal languages. But after 1980's the political upheaval in Assam brought the attention of the world, and subsequently the conflicts and exploitation began to acquire prominence. The conflicts provided the subject matter for a variety of literary works.

Jahnavi Barua is one of the few authors who took the pain of documenting the life and nature of the individuals residing in Assam. In the Indian sense, Assam is an area formally referred to as "Northeast India". Her "*Next Door*" serves as a link between the North East region and the rest of India. Each story of Jahnavi Barua's *Next Door* reflects the sufferings and exploitation of natives of the Northeast region. Most of the characters in her stories are shown to be in some conflict with their own selves or families and social life in modern Assamiyan society. Barua explains the reason, in an interview:

A conflict that was fuelled by the sense of marginalization that people of the region often feel a feeling of being distant from the centre of things. The tensions of a conflict zone, where everything seems harder than anywhere else, do find their way into my writing. This is, perhaps, more pronounced in my short story collection, "Next Door". Also, the sense of being on the periphery, of being on the margins, of being alienated works its way into my fiction.

The word "Fourth World" includes sections of the earth that are most underdeveloped. It defines the racially and economically disturbed sections of third world countries that include indigenous and nomadic groups. In India the largest concentration of the Fourth World Population are found in Northeast states. The fourth world is an alternative recently to the new world, the old world and the third world. Indian tribes are to be considered fourth-world people. The fourth world appears to describe any economically, culturally and politically marginalized society. Evolution of Fourth world Literature reflects the socio-economic, literary and environmental conditions that have influenced the life of

indigenous people. The Fourth World Literature describes the Tribal people's lives and fights for their dignity and equality. It is also protesting against the unjust economic contract that has been created. It exposes the suffering, anguish and intimidation against this unfair therapy inflicted on them and their revolt.

The U.N specialists encouraged the state of the globe to approve and enforce the values and recommendations for eliminating such discrimination. Discrimination, as a term, is the practice where one individual or set of individuals is treated less relatively or less well than other individuals or groups. This discrimination is depicted in some stories of Barua. Barua intimates us with the deed of violence against north-eastern Indian students in Bangalore and other areas of India through "*Awakening*", a story in the collection. As an Assamese, she treats the situation as a severe situation to depict the suffering of the students from the North-east. The story's back and forth narrative brings us to the reunion of the mother with the murder of her son in a Bangalore University fight. It speaks for the north-eastern depiction in current India that harasses students from North-eastern India.

Approximately sixty percent of females who moved from northeast India to the four metro cities such as Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai and Bangalore recorded regular bullying and unreasonable discrimination, a latest study said. In reality, every individual from the north-eastern states who moved to other cities for higher education and better job facilities from their indigenous towns and villages, at some stage in their life was subjected to differing degree of racial discrimination.

Parbina Rashid, in an article "A Heavy Dose of Northeast", published in Spectrum of *The Tribune* says that Jahnvi's collection of stories "is a heavy dose of Assamese . . . uncomplicated desires of the people of this region that comes through her stories. She takes inspiration from everyday life and events. . ." (5).

One critic opines:

Jahnavi's stories are woven with intricate emotions and complex patterns that define human relationships. And just as the mighty Brahmaputra River, known for its flash floods, yet is the lifeline of the Assamese people, so also it flows through her stories quietly and at times, tumultuously. There's also a sprinkling of Assamese words throughout, which though hard to understand, gives it a unique flavour. (qtd. in Kumar)

Most of her plays feature the Grand River Brahmaputra. To the Brahmaputra no Assamese can remain indifferent. As a leitmotif, it stands as a symbol of the region's incredible beauty. Sometimes the Brahmaputra appears as a metaphor, sometimes as a memory, but most often as a matter of fact, such as living and breathing. "*River of Life*" deals with a mentally retarded boy's story and how a Brahmaputra related news item changes his life's course. As an Assamese, Barua has raised the serious issue of Chinese attempt to take Brahmaputra's water resources away from India, through this tale. This incident is also a sort of discrimination against the northeast tribes since they are completely dependent on the water of Brahmaputra for their irrigation, transportation and electricity generation. She has brilliantly depicted how Assam's soul, mighty Brahmaputra, is becoming the problem of severe interest for a mentally retarded boy who is highly concerned about the effort by China to divert Brahmaputra from Assam.

Dyck (1985) describes the "Fourth World as original populations who have been politically weakened, economically marginalized and stigmatized by members of the state societies that have overtaken them and their lands". The land is another important issue in the ongoing conflict in Northeast India. Many of the rebel groups are demanding separate homelands and adopt militancy to achieve them. These armed groups often attack on settler communities or rival tribes as a part of ethnic cleansing to forcibly claim nationhood. All these issues and sufferings of Northeast Indian tribes are obliquely portrayed in *Next Door*, as a part of everyday life. In "*Honeybees*", a young man namely Anupam Kalita, who becomes

a home guard so that he can buy a piece of land to make a decent living. This tale depicts the harsh reality of impoverished traditional Assamese tribal society in settlements that how Assam's unemployed youth enter insurgent organization on the home guard label to gain their living. Moreover, it also depicts the lifelong sorrow of Assamese people, as the river Pagladiya snatches life and property of the dwellers by the riverside. Each of her story has at its core, a conflict, be it the protagonist's internal conflict or versus family or society or environment. This conflict is not the reflection of modern times but is an eternal one, being around ever since man has existed. The feeling of alienation among the locals towards the government results in public outrage so that even the locals feel sympathy for the insurgents, making countering the insurgency difficult.

There are several references to the insurgency faced by Assam in the last two decades as we go on with her stories. "*The Patriot*" deals with the relationship of a retired government official, Dhiren Majumdar with an insurgent, who takes shelter in his house. One evening Majumdar observes a flicker of movement beside the house and finds a youth lying in the darkness, badly injured and then he sees the handgun that the figure is pointing at his chest. When Dhiren asks him "Who are you?" the boy replies, "Shut up, old man, Shut your mouth, if you want to live" (116). The boy is an insurgent and wants him to keep his presence a secret. Out of compassion Dhiren helps him with food and medicines. Dhiren develops a fatherly responsibility towards the insurgent and willingly allows him to escape from getting arrested by his own son, who is a civil servant. Dhiren warns his own son, "If you arrest him, I will shout out in public that I gave him shelter voluntarily. Now do what you will" (133). He does so because for the first time, he is being fulfilled as a father. Jahnvi grafts gently on the pathos and the necessity of the old man's life the bloodshed and violence of the insurgency. On being asked in an interview Barua said:

The subject of insurgency has been addressed in depth and more skilfully by many accomplished authors in other Indian and Asomiya literature; it comes into my stories only obliquely, as a part of everyday life in Asom. I have not written a story around that theme but as and when it requires the political situation collides with the lives of the characters in a story – very much like our lives today in Asom.

To conclude, Jahnavi Barua has cleverly portrayed the problems of discrimination, conflict and exploitation of North-east Indian families through her short stories that can be related to the problems of whole North-east region on larger canvass. While the universal themes ensure that the compilation despite its Assam setting can be transposed everywhere and anywhere.

## Works Cited

Barua, Jahnvi; *Next Door*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2008

Dyck, Noel (1985). *Indigenous peoples and the nation-State: 'Fourth World' politics in Canada, Australia and Norway*, Canada Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Newfound-land. *ijhssi.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Jun.2019

<[http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v3\(1\)/Version-1/A31010104.pdf](http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v3(1)/Version-1/A31010104.pdf)>.

Kumar, Somanchi Sai."The Panorma of North East Indian Life: A study of Jahnvi Barua's Next Door".*Journal of English Language and Literature, Vol.1, no.2,2014,p-44*

Rashid, Prabina. "A Heavy Dose of NorthEast". *Spectrum, The Tribune*, January 11, 2009.

Barua, Jahnvi. Interviewed by Aiyushman Dutta. *Northeast Beats*, 15Jan.2011, <<https://aiyushmandutta.wordpress.com/tag/insurgency/>>