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Contours of Memory, Identity, and Marginality: A Relative Study of Mon Aru Mon, Makam, and the Selected Works of Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi

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A B S T R A C T
This paper offers a sustained comparative inquiry into Mon Aru Mon by Lummer Dai, Makam by Rita Chowdhury, and a corpus of selected works by Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi, including Mauna Outh Mukhar Hriday, Sonam, Lingjhik, Bih Kanyar Deshat, Saw Kata Manuh, Mishing, and Moi Akou Janam Lom. The study situates these texts within the evolving canon of Assamese literature, foregrounding their engagement with marginality, identity formation, cultural memory, and socio-historical transitions in Northeast India. While Dai's work embodies an indigenous epistemology rooted in the Adi worldview, Chowdhury's narrative reconstructs diasporic trauma and the politics of exclusion, and Thongchi's writings extend Assamese literary space by representing ethnically diverse tribal experiences. Through a critical framework, this paper argues that these writers collectively reshape Assamese literature into a dynamic, inclusive, and ethically responsive discourse. Their works not only document lived realities but also interrogate the ideological frameworks of centre and periphery, thereby contributing significantly to the reconfiguration of Indian literary modernity.

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Introduction

The evolution of Assamese literature has been intrinsically linked with its ability to accommodate plurality—of language, ethnicity, geography, and cultural memory (Baruah 2008). While early Assamese literary traditions were largely shaped by Vaishnavite devotional movements under the influence of Srimanta Sankardeva (Neog 1980), modern Assamese literature has increasingly turned towards its margins to redefine its scope and relevance. In this shifting landscape, writers such as Lummer Dai, Rita Chowdhury, and Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi emerge as pivotal figures who reshape Assamese literary discourse by foregrounding marginalised identities and suppressed histories. The Northeast region of India, often perceived as peripheral in mainstream Indian narratives, presents a complex mosaic of cultures, languages, and ethnic identities. Assamese literature, as a dominant literary tradition within this region, has historically been both inclusive and selective—absorbing influences from various communities while simultaneously privileging certain narratives over others (Goswami 1991). It is within this context that the intervention of Dai, Chowdhury, and Thongchi becomes particularly significant. Their works challenge the homogenising tendencies of literary nationalism by introducing voices that complicate the idea of a singular Assamese identity (Misra 2011).

Lummer Dai's contribution can be understood as foundational in bringing tribal consciousness into Assamese literary modernity. Writing from the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh, Dai does not merely depict tribal life as an ethnographic subject; rather, he articulates it as a lived philosophical system. His work resists the exoticisation of indigenous cultures, instead presenting them as coherent and self-sufficient modes of existence. This shift is crucial, as it disrupts the hierarchical relationship between

the "centre" and the "margin," positioning tribal narratives not as peripheral but as integral to the literary imagination of Assam (Bhattacharyya 2001). Rita Chowdhury, on the other hand, approaches marginality through the lens of history and displacement. Her novel *Makam* represents a significant departure from conventional Assamese narratives by focusing on the Chinese diaspora in Assam—a community that has often been rendered invisible in both literary and historical accounts. Chowdhury's work underscores the fragility of belonging, revealing how political circumstances can transform citizens into outsiders (Sharma 2011). By reconstructing these histories, she not only recovers lost narratives but also interrogates the ideological frameworks that produce exclusion (Saikia 2004). Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi extends this trajectory further by offering a panoramic view of tribal life across Northeast India. His works encompass multiple communities, each with its distinct cultural practices and social structures. What distinguishes Thongchi's writing is its ability to navigate the complexities of identity without resorting to simplification. His characters inhabit spaces of transition, negotiating between tradition and modernity, community and individuality, belonging and alienation. In doing so, Thongchi transforms Assamese literature into a site of dialogue, where diverse voices coexist and interact (Misra 2011). The study of these writers reveals a shared commitment to expanding the boundaries of Assamese literature. Yet, their approaches differ significantly, reflecting the multiplicity of experiences within the region. Dai's work is deeply rooted in indigenous epistemologies, emphasising harmony and relationality. Chowdhury's narrative is shaped by historical consciousness, foregrounding trauma and resilience. Thongchi's writing, meanwhile, occupies a middle ground, blending ethnographic detail with psychological realism. This diversity of approaches underscores the richness of Assamese literature as a dynamic and evolving tradition. It challenges the notion of literature as a static repository of cultural values, instead presenting it as a living, adaptive form that responds to changing social realities (Baruah 2008). In this sense, the works of Dai, Chowdhury, and Thongchi can be seen as interventions that reconfigure the literary field, making it more inclusive and representative. Furthermore, these texts invite a re-examination of key concepts such as identity, memory, and marginality. Identity, in these works, is not a fixed category but a fluid and contested space. Memory functions not merely as recollection but as a means of preserving and negotiating cultural heritage. Marginality, rather than being a position of absence, becomes a site of resistance and creativity (Devy 2010). The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bring these dimensions into a comparative framework, highlighting both the convergences and divergences in the works of these authors. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of Assamese literature as a pluralistic and dialogic tradition. In the larger context of Indian literature, the inclusion of Northeast narratives represents an important shift towards recognising regional diversity. The works under consideration challenge the dominance of metropolitan perspectives, offering alternative ways of understanding culture and society (Hazarika 1994). They remind us that literature is not merely a reflection of dominant ideologies but a space where alternative voices can emerge and be heard. Thus, this study positions *Mon Aru Mon*, *Makam*, and the selected works of Thongchi as significant texts that not only enrich Assamese literature but also contribute to the ongoing redefinition of Indian literary modernity.

Lummer Dai's *Mon Aru Mon*: Indigenous Humanism and Emotional Ecology

Lummer Dai's *Mon Aru Mon* occupies a seminal position in the evolution of Assamese literature, particularly in its engagement with indigenous epistemologies and emotional landscapes (Baruah 2008). Written at a time when tribal voices were largely absent from mainstream literary discourse, the novel emerges as a quiet yet powerful assertion of the Adi worldview. Dai does not simply narrate a story; he reconstructs an entire lifeworld—one that is governed by ethical reciprocity, ecological balance, and a deeply embedded sense of relationality (Bhattacharyya 2001). At the heart of *Mon Aru Mon* lies the idea of indigenous humanism—a form of humanism that does not privilege human beings as separate from or superior to nature, but rather situates them within an interconnected web of existence. This perspective is crucial in understanding the philosophical underpinnings of the novel. Unlike Western humanism, which often centres on individual autonomy and rationality, Dai's narrative emphasises collective existence and emotional interdependence. The human subject, in this context, is not an isolated entity but a participant in a broader ecological and social system (Devy 2010). The emotional core of the novel is marked by a profound sensitivity to loneliness, companionship, and empathy. Dai's characters often inhabit spaces of emotional vulnerability, yet their experiences are not framed in terms of despair. Instead, these moments

of solitude become opportunities for deeper connection—with other beings, with nature, and with oneself. The relationship between humans and animals in the novel is particularly significant in this regard. It transcends utilitarian considerations and enters the realm of emotional reciprocity, suggesting that companionship is not limited by species boundaries (Bhattacharyya 2001). This emphasis on emotional ecology—where feelings are shaped by and in turn shape the environment—offers a compelling critique of modern alienation. In contemporary urban contexts, relationships are often mediated by social structures that prioritise efficiency over empathy. Dai's narrative, by contrast, presents a world where emotional bonds are direct, unmediated, and deeply meaningful. This is not to suggest that the tribal world is devoid of conflict or complexity; rather, it highlights an alternative mode of being where relationships are grounded in mutual respect and understanding (Baruah 2008). Language plays a pivotal role in conveying this worldview. Dai's prose is characterised by its simplicity, yet it carries a richness that stems from its rootedness in oral traditions. The narrative voice often mirrors the cadence of storytelling found in indigenous communities, where stories are not merely recounted but performed and experienced collectively. This stylistic choice is not incidental; it reflects Dai's commitment to preserving the integrity of the Adi cultural ethos (Goswami 1991). By incorporating idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and narrative rhythms specific to the community, he creates a text that is both authentic and accessible. The integration of folklore into the narrative further enhances this authenticity. Folklore, in *Mon Aru Mon*, is not treated as decorative embellishment but as an integral part of the narrative structure. It provides context, meaning, and continuity, linking individual experiences to collective memory (Baruah 2008). Through these elements, Dai situates his characters within a broader cultural framework, emphasising that personal identity is inseparable from communal heritage. Another significant aspect of the novel is its portrayal of social institutions, particularly the *kebang*—the traditional village council. The *kebang* represents a form of governance that is participatory and consensus-based, reflecting the democratic ethos of the community. Decisions are not imposed from above but emerge through dialogue and collective deliberation. This model stands in stark contrast to hierarchical systems of authority, offering an alternative vision of social organisation that is both ethical and inclusive (Bhattacharyya 2001). Gender dynamics in the novel, though not overtly foregrounded, reveal subtle complexities. Female characters are portrayed with a quiet strength, their roles extending beyond domestic spheres into the emotional and cultural fabric of the community. While the narrative does not explicitly challenge patriarchal norms, it nonetheless acknowledges the agency of women in sustaining social and emotional bonds. This nuanced representation invites further critical exploration, particularly in relation to indigenous conceptions of gender (Misra 2011). Dai's engagement with nature is another defining feature of the novel. The natural environment is not merely a backdrop but an active presence that shapes and is shaped by human actions. Rivers, forests, and animals are imbued with symbolic and practical significance, reflecting the ecological consciousness of the Adi community. This perspective aligns with broader discussions in environmental and cultural studies, where indigenous knowledge systems are increasingly recognised for their sustainable approaches to living (Devy 2010). Importantly, *Mon Aru Mon* resists the temptation to romanticise tribal life. While it highlights the strengths of the community, it does not ignore its challenges. Conflicts, misunderstandings, and moments of tension are integral to the narrative, reminding readers that no society is without its complexities. However, these challenges are addressed within a framework of dialogue and reconciliation, reinforcing the ethical principles that underpin the community (Baruah 2008). In a broader literary context, Dai's work can be seen as a counter-narrative to dominant representations of tribal communities. Rather than depicting them as primitive or backward, he presents them as sophisticated systems of knowledge and practice. This shift is crucial in challenging stereotypes and fostering a more nuanced understanding of indigenous cultures (Bhattacharyya 2001). Furthermore, *Mon Aru Mon* contributes to the expansion of Assamese literature by introducing new themes, perspectives, and narrative techniques. It opens up a space for other writers from marginal communities to articulate their experiences, thereby enriching the literary tradition. Dai's influence can be traced in subsequent works that engage with similar themes, indicating his role as a pioneer in this field (Goswami 1991). Ultimately, the significance of *Mon Aru Mon* lies in its ability to bridge the gap between the local and the universal. While the narrative is deeply rooted in the specific context of the Adi community, its themes of love, loneliness, and coexistence resonate across cultural boundaries. This universality does not dilute its cultural specificity; rather, it enhances its relevance, demonstrating that indigenous narratives have much to offer to global literary discourse (Devy 2010).

Lummer Dai's *Mon Aru Mon* stands as a testament to the richness of indigenous thought and its potential to reshape literary paradigms. Through its exploration of emotional ecology, social structures, and cultural memory, the novel offers a profound reflection on what it means to be human in a world that is increasingly fragmented. It is not merely a literary work but a philosophical statement—one that continues to inspire and challenge readers.

Rita Chowdhury's *Makam*: History, Trauma, and the Politics of Belonging

Rita Chowdhury's *Makam* represents one of the most significant interventions in contemporary Assamese literature, particularly in its engagement with history, displacement, and the fragile politics of belonging (Misra 2011). Unlike narratives that derive their strength from myth, folklore, or internal community structures, *Makam* situates itself within a sharply defined historical moment—the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict—and examines its repercussions on a marginalised community whose identity becomes a site of suspicion and exclusion (Sharma 2011). Through this novel, Chowdhury not only reconstructs a largely forgotten chapter of regional history but also interrogates the ethical and emotional consequences of state-imposed nationalism (Hazarika 1994). At the centre of *Makam* lies the experience of the Chinese-origin Assamese community, many of whom had lived in Assam for generations, contributing to its socio-economic and cultural fabric. The war, however, abruptly transforms these individuals into "outsiders," subjecting them to surveillance, detention, and forced displacement. Chowdhury's narrative captures this sudden rupture with remarkable sensitivity, foregrounding the precariousness of identity in a politically volatile environment. The notion of belonging, which had once seemed secure, is rendered unstable, revealing its dependence on external validation rather than intrinsic connection (Saikia 2004). One of the most striking aspects of *Makam* is its meticulous engagement with historical detail. Chowdhury reconstructs the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that pervaded Assam during this period, illustrating how political decisions at the national level reverberated through local communities (Sharma 2011). Yet, the novel does not remain confined to a documentary mode. Instead, it transforms historical facts into lived experiences, allowing readers to perceive history not as an abstract sequence of events but as an intimate and often traumatic reality. This blending of historiography and narrative imagination is central to the novel's impact (Hazarika 1994). The theme of trauma is intricately woven into the fabric of *Makam*. The displacement experienced by the characters is not merely physical but deeply psychological. The loss of home, community, and identity leaves an indelible mark on their consciousness, shaping their sense of self and their relationship with the world. Chowdhury's portrayal of trauma is neither sensational nor reductive; it is characterised by a quiet intensity that reflects the enduring nature of suffering. The characters' struggles to reconcile their past with their present highlight the complexity of healing, suggesting that trauma cannot be easily resolved or forgotten (Saikia 2004). Memory plays a crucial role in this process. For the displaced individuals in *Makam*, memory becomes both a burden and a source of strength. It preserves the remnants of a lost world, allowing them to retain a sense of continuity even as their external circumstances change. At the same time, memory can be painful, constantly reminding them of what has been taken away. Chowdhury navigates this duality with remarkable finesse, presenting memory as a dynamic force that shapes identity and resistance (Saikia 2004). The novel also engages critically with the concept of nationalism. By depicting the marginalisation of a community that had previously been integrated into Assamese society, *Makam* exposes the exclusionary tendencies inherent in certain forms of national identity. Chowdhury does not reject the idea of nationhood altogether; rather, she questions its implementation, particularly when it leads to the erasure of minority voices. This critique is especially relevant in the context of postcolonial India, where the process of nation-building has often involved the negotiation—and sometimes suppression—of diverse identities (Sharma 2011). Chowdhury's narrative technique further enhances the novel's thematic depth. She employs a multi-layered structure that moves between different temporal and emotional registers, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the characters' experiences. The interplay between past and present creates a sense of continuity, emphasising that the effects of historical events are not confined to a specific moment but extend into the future. This temporal fluidity also mirrors the characters' internal states, as they navigate the complexities of memory and identity (Hazarika 1994). Language, once again, emerges as a significant element. Chowdhury's use of Assamese as the medium of narration is particularly noteworthy, given that the story revolves around a community whose linguistic identity is different. This choice underscores the inclusive potential of Assamese literature, demonstrating its

capacity to accommodate diverse voices (Goswami 1991). At the same time, it raises important questions about translation and representation—how does one convey the experiences of a community without appropriating or diluting its cultural specificity? Chowdhury addresses this challenge by maintaining a careful balance between accessibility and authenticity (Misra 2011).In this work, the Female characters often bear the brunt of displacement and social instability, yet they also emerge as figures of resilience and continuity. Their experiences highlight the intersection of gender and marginality, revealing how women navigate multiple layers of oppression. Chowdhury's portrayal of these characters is marked by empathy and complexity, avoiding simplistic representations (Misra 2011). In a broader literary context, *Makam* can be seen as part of a larger movement within Assamese literature that seeks to engage with issues of history, identity, and marginality. However, its focus on the Chinese diaspora sets it apart, introducing a dimension that has rarely been explored in regional narratives. By doing so, Chowdhury expands the scope of Assamese literature, aligning it with global discussions on diaspora, displacement, and cultural hybridity (Saikia 2004). Moreover, the novel contributes to the preservation of cultural memory. By documenting the experiences of a marginalised community, it ensures that their stories are not lost to history. This act of documentation is itself a form of resistance, challenging the erasure of minority narratives and asserting their significance within the broader cultural landscape (Hazarika 1994). It is also important to recognise the ethical dimension of Chowdhury's work. *Makam* does not merely represent suffering; it invites readers to engage with it, to reflect on their own positions within structures of power and privilege. The novel thus functions as a moral text, encouraging a more compassionate and inclusive understanding of society (Sharma 2011). Rita Chowdhury's *Makam* stands as a powerful exploration of history, trauma, and belonging within Assamese literature. Through its nuanced portrayal of displacement and identity, it challenges dominant narratives and foregrounds the experiences of those who have been marginalised. The novel's ability to combine historical accuracy with emotional depth makes it a significant contribution not only to Assamese literature but also to the broader field of postcolonial studies. It reminds us that literature has the capacity to recover lost histories, to give voice to the silenced, and to foster a deeper understanding of the human condition.

Thongchi's Works: Ethnographic Realism and Cultural Plurality

The literary oeuvre of Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi represents a remarkable expansion of Assamese literature into terrains that were once marginal, both geographically and culturally (Misra 2011). His works—*Mauna Outh Mukhar Hriday*, *Sonam*, *Lingjhik*, *Bih Kanyar Deshat*, *Saw Kata Manuh*, *Mishing*, and *Moi Akou Janam Lom*—collectively construct a diverse and textured narrative universe that foregrounds the lived realities of various tribal communities of Northeast India. What distinguishes Thongchi from many of his contemporaries is his sustained commitment to ethnographic realism, not as an academic exercise but as a literary practice rooted in lived experience and empathetic observation (Bhattacharyya 2001). Thongchi's narratives are deeply embedded in the cultural specificities of the communities he portrays. His familiarity with tribal lifeworlds enables him to present rituals, customs, and belief systems with a degree of authenticity that avoids both romanticisation and reductive stereotyping. Unlike earlier representations that often-depicted tribal communities as static or primitive, Thongchi's works emphasise dynamism and internal complexity. His characters are not mere representatives of cultural types; they are individuals negotiating the intricate interplay of tradition, change, and personal aspiration (Misra 2011). One of the central concerns in Thongchi's writing is the tension between tradition and modernity. This tension manifests not as a simple opposition but as a layered process of negotiation. Characters frequently find themselves at crossroads, where adherence to ancestral customs conflicts with the demands of a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape. In *Sonam*, for instance, the titular character embodies this dilemma, caught between inherited cultural obligations and emerging individual desires. The narrative does not offer easy resolutions; instead, it reveals the emotional and ethical complexities inherent in such transitions (Goswami 1991). Similarly, *Mauna Outh Mukhar Hriday* explores the theme of silence—both as a social condition and as a psychological state. The "silent lips" of the title signify not merely an absence of speech but a suppression of emotion, shaped by social norms and expectations. Thongchi's exploration of interiority in this work marks a significant development in Assamese prose, moving beyond external description to engage with the subtleties of human consciousness. This psychological depth is a recurring feature across his works, distinguishing his narratives from purely ethnographic accounts (Misra 2011). In *Lingjhik* and *Mishing*, Thongchi turns his attention to specific communities,

offering detailed portrayals of their cultural practices and social structures. However, these texts are not confined to descriptive realism; they engage critically with issues such as marginalisation, identity, and representation. By foregrounding the voices of these communities, Thongchi challenges the hierarchical structures that have traditionally governed literary production. His writing thus functions as both representation and intervention, bringing marginal narratives into the centre of literary discourse (Bhattacharyya 2001). The question of identity occupies a central place in Thongchi's work. His characters often inhabit liminal spaces, where identity is neither fixed nor singular but fluid and contested. This fluidity reflects the broader socio-cultural context of Northeast India, where multiple identities intersect and overlap. Thongchi's refusal to essentialise identity is particularly significant, as it resists the tendency to reduce individuals to their ethnic or cultural affiliations. Instead, he presents identity as a process—one that is continually shaped by experience, memory, and interaction (Devy 2010). Language is another crucial element in Thongchi's literary practice. Writing in Assamese, he incorporates elements of tribal languages, idioms, and narrative structures, creating a hybrid linguistic space that reflects the region's diversity. This linguistic hybridity serves multiple purposes: it enhances authenticity, preserves cultural specificity, and facilitates cross-cultural communication. It also aligns with broader arguments regarding the plurality of Indian languages and the dialogic nature of literary expression (Devy 2010). Thongchi's engagement with gender is also noteworthy. Female characters in his works are often portrayed with a degree of complexity that transcends stereotypical representations. They navigate multiple layers of constraint and possibility, their experiences shaped by both cultural norms and individual agency. While Thongchi does not explicitly adopt a feminist framework, his nuanced portrayal invites critical reflection on gender relations within tribal societies (Misra 2011). The ecological dimension of Thongchi's work further enriches his narratives. Like Lummer Dai, he presents nature as an integral part of human existence. However, his treatment of ecology is more explicitly linked to contemporary concerns about environmental change and cultural loss. The transformation of landscapes—whether through development or changing livelihoods—often serves as a backdrop to the characters' struggles, highlighting the interconnectedness of ecological and cultural transformations (Devy 2010). In *Bih Kanyar Deshat* and *Saw Kata Manuh,* Thongchi explores themes of migration and social transformation. These works reflect the increasing mobility of individuals and communities, as well as the tensions that arise from such movement. Migration, in these narratives, is not merely a physical journey but a process of cultural negotiation, where individuals must adapt to new environments while attempting to retain their identity. This reflects broader regional shifts and socio-cultural transitions (Hazarika 1994). Importantly, Thongchi's works contribute to the democratisation of Assamese literature. By incorporating diverse voices and perspectives, he expands the literary canon, making it more inclusive and representative. His writing challenges the notion of a singular cultural centre, suggesting instead that literature thrives on multiplicity and dialogue (Goswami 1991). From a critical perspective, Thongchi's oeuvre can be read as an exploration of cultural plurality—not as a static condition but as a dynamic process of interaction and negotiation. His narratives reveal that diversity is not merely a characteristic of society but a fundamental principle shaping human experience. This aligns Assamese literature with broader global discourses on multiculturalism and identity (Misra 2011). At the same time, his work remains firmly rooted in the specific context of Northeast India. This rootedness ensures that his narratives do not lose their cultural specificity, even as they engage with universal themes. The balance between the local and the universal is one of the defining strengths of Thongchi's writing (Baruah 2008). The works of Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi represent a significant contribution to Assamese literature, both in terms of thematic richness and narrative innovation. Through ethnographic realism, psychological depth, and cultural plurality, Thongchi expands literary representation and brings marginal voices into the centre of discourse. His writing challenges readers to reconsider assumptions about identity, culture, and belonging, affirming literature's transformative potential.

Comparative Analysis: Crossing Borders, Rewriting Identities, and Literary Integration

A close reading of the works of Lummer Dai, Rita Chowdhury, and Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi reveals not merely thematic convergences but a deeper, more significant cultural phenomenon—the opening of borders between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh through literature. These texts, while grounded in specific regional experiences, transcend geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries, creating a shared literary space that challenges rigid notions of identity and belonging (Misra 2011). At the most fundamental level,

these writers destabilise the idea of borders as fixed and impermeable. In political discourse, borders often function as markers of separation, delineating territories and identities. However, in literature, these borders become porous, allowing for the movement of ideas, emotions, and cultural practices. The Assamese language itself becomes a medium through which these crossings occur, serving as a bridge that connects diverse communities without erasing their distinctiveness (Devy 2010). Lummer Dai's *Mon Aru Mon* can be seen as an early instance of this literary crossing. By writing in Assamese while representing the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh, Dai effectively brings a marginalised cultural world into the mainstream literary discourse of Assam. This act is not merely linguistic but deeply political. It challenges the assumption that Assamese literature belongs exclusively to a particular ethnic or geographical group, suggesting instead that it can function as a shared space for multiple identities (Goswami 1991). Dai's narrative thus opens a symbolic corridor between Assam and Arunachal, where cultural exchange becomes possible without the imposition of dominance (Bhattacharyya 2001). Rita Chowdhury's *Makam*, though centred on Assam, contributes to this border-crossing dynamic in a different way. Her focus on the Chinese diaspora introduces a transnational dimension, highlighting the fluidity of identity beyond regional confines. While the primary setting remains Assam, the novel's engagement with migration, displacement, and belonging resonates with the experiences of communities across Northeast India, including those in Arunachal Pradesh (Saikia 2004). Chowdhury's work thus expands the scope of Assamese literature, positioning it within a broader network of cultural and historical interactions (Sharma 2011). The works of Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi take this process further by actively constructing a literary geography that encompasses multiple tribal communities across Arunachal Pradesh while using Assamese as the medium of narration. Thongchi's writing exemplifies how literature can function as a site of integration, where diverse cultural narratives coexist and interact. His characters often move across physical and cultural boundaries, reflecting the interconnectedness of the region (Hazarika 1994). In doing so, Thongchi not only represents these communities but also facilitates their inclusion within the Assamese literary imagination (Misra 2011). A key aspect of this analytical framework is the role of language as a unifying force. Assamese, in these works, is not imposed as a dominant language but adopted as a medium of communication that enables dialogue across cultural divides. This linguistic choice reflects a pragmatic as well as an ethical stance. It acknowledges the diversity of the region while seeking to create a common platform for expression (Devy 2010). The incorporation of tribal idioms, expressions, and narrative structures within Assamese prose further enriches this linguistic space, making it more inclusive and representative (Goswami 1991). Thematically, these works converge in their exploration of marginality, identity, and cultural memory, yet they approach these themes from different perspectives. Dai's focus is inward-looking, emphasising the internal dynamics of the Adi community and its relationship with nature. Chowdhury's narrative is outward-looking, engaging with historical events and their impact on individual lives. Thongchi occupies an intermediary position, combining ethnographic detail with broader socio-political concerns. Together, these perspectives create a multifaceted understanding of marginality—not as a condition of exclusion but as a site of creative expression and resistance (Bhattacharyya 2001). The opening of borders through literature is also evident in the way these writers negotiate the relationship between tradition and modernity. In Dai's work, tradition is presented as a coherent and self-sustaining system, offering an alternative to modern alienation. Chowdhury, however, reveals how modern political structures can disrupt traditional ways of life, leading to displacement and trauma. Thongchi's narratives, meanwhile, explore the ongoing negotiation between these forces, highlighting the adaptability and resilience of cultural practices (Sharma 2011). This dynamic interplay suggests that borders are not merely geographical but temporal as well, separating past from present, tradition from change. Literature, in this context, becomes a means of bridging these temporal divides, allowing past cultural forms to interact with present realities (Baruah 2008). Another significant dimension of this examination is the ethical engagement of these texts. By foregrounding the experiences of marginalised communities, these writers challenge readers to reconsider their assumptions about identity and belonging. The act of reading itself becomes a form of crossing—a movement into unfamiliar cultural spaces that fosters empathy and understanding (Hazarika 1994). In this sense, literature does not merely represent border-crossing; it enacts it. Furthermore, these works contribute to the reconfiguration of Assamese literary identity. Traditionally, Assamese literature has been associated with certain cultural and linguistic norms. However, the inclusion of tribal narratives complicates this identity, making it more fluid and inclusive.

This transformation reflects broader socio-cultural changes in the region, where interactions between different communities are becoming increasingly significant (Misra 2011). It is also important to consider the implications of this literary integration for the broader field of Indian literature. The Northeast has often been marginalised within national literary discourse, its diversity overlooked in favour of more dominant narratives. By bringing these stories into the Assamese literary framework, these writers contribute to a larger project of decentralisation, challenging the hierarchies that govern literary production in India (Hazarika 1994). The notion of "opening borders" in this context should not be understood as the erasure of differences. On the contrary, it involves recognising and respecting diversity while creating spaces for dialogue and exchange. The works under consideration achieve this balance by maintaining cultural specificity even as they engage with universal themes. This dual commitment ensures that the process of integration does not lead to homogenisation but rather to a richer and more nuanced understanding of identity (Devy 2010). The reasonable study of *Mon Aru Mon*, *Makam*, and the selected works of Thongchi reveals a transformative moment in Assamese literature, where borders—both literal and metaphorical—are reimagined. Through their narratives, these writers create a shared literary space that connects Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, fostering a sense of cultural continuity and mutual recognition. Their works demonstrate that literature has the power to transcend boundaries, not by dissolving them entirely but by rendering them permeable, allowing for the flow of ideas, emotions, and identities (Baruah 2008).

Conclusion: Reimagining Literary Boundaries and Cultural Continuities

The study of *Mon Aru Mon*, *Makam*, and the selected works of Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi ultimately reveals not merely a thematic convergence but a fundamental shift in the epistemic foundations of Assamese literature. What is at stake in these texts is not only representation but the very redefinition of literary space as a site of negotiation between histories, identities, and modes of belonging. Assamese literature, in this context, emerges not as a bounded cultural domain but as an evolving discursive field that absorbs, rearticulates, and legitimises voices from its peripheries (Misra 2011). A critical reading of Lummer Dai's *Mon Aru Mon* foregrounds the intervention of indigenous knowledge systems into a literary tradition that had long been shaped by devotional and colonial-modern influences. Dai's work does not simply add a tribal narrative to Assamese literature; rather, it unsettles its epistemological hierarchy by introducing an alternative ontology grounded in relationality, ecological balance, and collective ethics. This shift is crucial, for it challenges the implicit privileging of modern rationality and re-centres indigenous modes of knowing as equally valid and philosophically rich (Devy 2010). In doing so, Dai's narrative compels us to reconsider the criteria by which literary value and cultural legitimacy are determined. Rita Chowdhury's *Makam*, on the other hand, introduces a different yet equally compelling axis of critique—one that is rooted in historical consciousness and political memory. By excavating the silenced experiences of the Chinese diaspora in Assam, Chowdhury exposes the fragile and often exclusionary nature of nationalist frameworks. Her narrative reveals that belonging is not a stable condition but a contingent construct, shaped by shifting political and ideological forces (Sharma 2011). The trauma depicted in *Makam* is not merely individual but structural, pointing to the ways in which state apparatuses can produce and perpetuate marginality. In this sense, the novel functions as a counter-archive, preserving histories that official narratives have sought to erase (Saikia 2004). Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi's works extend this critical trajectory by engaging with plurality not as an abstract ideal but as a lived reality. His narratives traverse multiple tribal communities, each with its distinct cultural logic, thereby resisting any attempt to homogenise the Northeast into a singular identity. What is particularly significant in Thongchi's oeuvre is his ability to represent this diversity without collapsing it into a reductive framework. His characters inhabit spaces of transition and ambiguity, reflecting the complexities of cultural negotiation in a rapidly changing world. Through this, Thongchi redefines Assamese literature as a space that is inherently dialogic—one that accommodates difference without subsuming it (Misra 2011). The convergence of these three literary trajectories suggests that Assamese literature is undergoing a process of internal decolonisation. This is not merely a matter of including marginal voices but of transforming the structures through which these voices are interpreted and valued. The movement from centre to margin is thus reversed, as the so-called peripheries begin to reshape the core of the literary tradition. In this reconfigured landscape, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are no longer seen as separate or hierarchical entities; rather, they emerge as interconnected cultural zones, linked through shared histories, linguistic

exchanges, and literary representations (Baruah 2008). Language plays a critical role in this transformation. The use of Assamese by writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds does not signify assimilation but rather a strategic appropriation of a shared medium to articulate distinct experiences. This linguistic practice creates a space of encounter, where multiple cultural registers coexist and interact. As G. N. Devy argues, Indian languages function as living systems that carry within them the histories and identities of diverse communities (Devy 2010). In the works under study, Assamese becomes precisely such a system—one that enables dialogue without erasing difference. At a deeper level, these texts compel us to rethink the relationship between literature and ethics. By foregrounding marginalised experiences, they challenge readers to engage with forms of suffering, resilience, and coexistence that lie outside dominant frameworks. This engagement is not merely emotional but intellectual, requiring a re-evaluation of one's assumptions about identity, culture, and belonging. Literature, in this sense, becomes an ethical practice—one that fosters empathy while also demanding critical reflection (Hazarika 1994). Furthermore, the notion of "opening borders" acquires a nuanced significance in this context. It is not a simple dissolution of boundaries but a reconfiguration of how boundaries are understood and experienced. The borders between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, between tribal and non-tribal identities, and between past and present are not erased but rendered permeable. They become sites of interaction rather than division, enabling the circulation of narratives and the formation of new cultural imaginaries. This permeability is what allows literature to function as a space of integration without homogenisation. It is also important to recognise that this process is neither complete nor uncontested. The inclusion of marginal voices within Assamese literature raises questions about representation, authority, and authenticity. Who speaks for whom? In what language? And under what conditions? These questions remain central to any critical engagement with regional literature. However, the works of Dai, Chowdhury, and Thongchi demonstrate that such challenges can be productively addressed through sustained literary practice and ethical commitment. In conclusion, the texts examined in this study do more than expand the thematic range of Assamese literature; they fundamentally alter its conceptual framework. By bringing indigenous epistemologies, historical trauma, and cultural plurality into dialogue, they create a literary space that is at once inclusive, critical, and transformative. Assamese literature, as reflected in these works, is no longer confined to a singular cultural narrative but emerges as a vibrant, heterogeneous field that mirrors the complexities of Northeast India itself. Through their writings, Lummer Dai, Rita Chowdhury, and Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi demonstrate that literature has the capacity not only to represent the world but to reimagine it. In opening up spaces of dialogue between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, they also open up new possibilities for understanding identity, community, and coexistence. It is in this capacity for reimagination that the enduring significance of their work lies.

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