MIGRANT MUSE

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The Third Space in Assamese Literature

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Abstract

Steven Kellman in his seminal work, Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on their Craft, defined translingual authors as those "who write in more than one language or in a language other than their primary one." According to Kellman, "by expressing themselves in multiple verbal systems, [translingual writers] flaunt their freedom from the constraints of the culture into which they happen to be born." Translingualism as a subject is certainly worthy of theorization and study, and by presenting a variety of past and present authors who could be considered "translingual" Kellman advances this topic. Thisstudy presents the story of the immigrant communities in the Northeastern state of Assam who voluntarily adopted, learned the Assamese language and actively contributed to its literature. Over the years, a large number of writers of migrant origin have started writing in Assamese, and a few of them like Ismail Hussain, Khobir Ahmed, Khairul Alam, Dr Ahijuddin Sheikh and Hafiz Ahmed have earned a place of recognition of their own.

This initial chapters of this study introduce the theoretical postulates of translingualism and posit contemporary social, economic, and political issues against a Bakhtinian dialogic tension between the cultural traditions of 'indigenous' (*Khilonjia* in Assamese), the writers' past and the present situation against the backdrop of ongoing anti-migrant agitations. It shows a new

worldview of translingual writers from Assam that encompasses the tensions of the family, religion, citizenship, culture, and community. An attempt has been made to examine the texts and contexts of the Assamese translingual writers of migrant origin underling "the importance of narrative" as a visible expression of the new identities assumed by these writers. A brief content analysis of a few illustrative short stories highlights the melting boundaries of essentialism in areas of nationality, ethnicity, and culture and bring forth the emerging multiculturalism of the 'third space' to the forefront of postmodernist literary criticism. This idea of 'third space' created by 'imagined communities' of Neo-Assamese writers provides a platform for their negotiating a new identity through the appropriation of a new language. An attempt was made to examine the texts and contexts of the Assamese translingual writers of migrant origin underlining "the importance of narrative" as a visible expression of the new identities assumed by these writers.

Later chapters of this study look into the poetry written by translingual poets with distant roots in migrant population from erstwhile 'East Bengal' districts that were part of the same administrative region with Assam in pre-Independence India. In 1824, Assam was occupied by British forces following the First Anglo-Burmese War and on 24 February 1826, it was ceded to Britain by Burma. Between 1826 and 1832, Assam was made part of Bengal under the Bengal Presidency. From 1832 to October 1838, the Assam princely state was restored in Upper Assam while the British ruled in Lower Assam. Purandar Singha was allowed to rule as king of Upper Assam in 1833, but after that brief period, Assam was annexed to Bengal by the British. Eastern Bengal and Assam were made a single administrative subdivision (province) under British rule between 1905 and 1912. With headquarter in Dacca, the province covered the vast areas that are now in Bangladesh, North-East India and Northern West Bengal.

The migrant population, who are termed as *Na'Asomiya*,

are the inhabitants of *Chars or Char Chaporis*[1] (riverine areas) of Assam. A few poems written by translingual writers from Assam were analysed to discuss the idea of 'third space' created by the *Na'Asomiya* [Neo-Assamese] writers as a platform for negotiating their 'dialogic' identity adding a new theoretical perspective to Kellman's translingualism and Anderson's idea of *Imagined Communities.*

Translingual writings discussed in this study highlighted the melting boundaries of essentialism in areas of nationality, ethnicity, and culture and bring forth the emerging multiculturalism of the 'third space' to the forefront of postmodernist literary criticism. This idea of 'third space' created by 'imagined communities' of Neo-Assamese writers provides a platform for them to negotiate a new identity through the appropriation of a new language.

[1] Char Chapori (Assamese: চৰ চাপৰ) is an area of Brahmaputra river and its tributaries in the Indian state Assam constitute flood plain sediments. According to the Assam Government record, the Char Chapori covers 3,608km^2 of the Brahmaputra basin, or 4.6 per cent of Assam's area. The people of Char Chapori face a certain number of problems including soil erosion, over flooding, illiteracy, high population growth and organized anti-migrant hatecrime against them.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Most celebrated translingual novelists—writers who write in more than one language or in a language other than their primary one, as a broad definition—are Samuel Beckett, Joseph Conrad and Vladimir Nabokov, but the category is bulging with many, many more. Each of those three has had his own motives for switching languages. Born in Ireland, Beckett began his literary career writing in English but jumped to French because of an affinity with French literature and because he soughtto discipline his prodigal prose; he claimed that: "en français c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style" ("in French it is easier to write without style"; Gessner 32n). After a life at sea, Conrad, who spoke Polish and French long before English, settled in England and became an English novelist. Nabokov grew up trilingual and varied his linguistic medium from country to country during his lifelong exile from Russia.

Haruki Murakami aspired to be translingual, to write in a language other than his native Japanese. "When I was a teenager," he told interviewer Jay McInerney, "I thought how great it would be if only I could write novels in English. I had the feeling that I would be able to express my emotions so much more directly than if I wrote in Japanese. But with my limited proficiency in English, that was impossible" (3). Instead, though he devours and translates American fiction, Murakami has written all his novels in Japanese. However, his youthful impulse to adopt another language as a literary medium is not uncommon.

Immigration has been a common motivation for many translinguals— Ha Jin from China to the United States, Aharon Appelfeld from Romania to Israel, Amara Lakhous from Algeria to Italy, Emine Sevgi Özdamar from Turkey to Germany, Irène Némirovsky from Ukraine to France. In colonized societies, writers often adopt the language of the imperial power rather than an indigenous tongue; thus did Raja Rao write in English rather than Kannada, Rachid Boudjedra in French, not Arabic.

Of particular interest are those translingual authors who switched languages for stubborn reasons of their own: Frederick Philip Grove, who was born Felix Paul Greve in Prussia and published in German until, facing serious financial trouble, he feigned suicide and resurfaced in Canada, where he took on a new identity as Anglophone writer Grove; Hideo Levy, an American gaijin who writes all of his novels in Japanese; Jhumpa Lahiri, whose 2015 memoir *In Other Words* recounts her passion for Italian and her aversion to English.

Translingualism in the novel has an ancient pedigree. The Golden Ass, the only Latin proto-novel that survives in its entirety, begins with an apology for its linguistic infelicities. Its author, Apuleius, was born in Numidia, North Africa, in about 124 CE and studied Greek in Corinth and Athens. "Later in Rome, as a stranger to the literary pursuits of the citizens there," he recalls at the start of his story, "I tackled and cultivated the native language without the guidance of a teacher, and with excruciating difficulty. So at the outset, I beg your indulgence for any mistakes which I make as a novice in the foreign language in use at the Roman bar" (1). By the early sixteenth century, Latin was no longer a native language, even in Rome, but the English clergyman Thomas More employed it to compose his Utopia (1516). More even uses Latin to conceive of the language spoken by the inhabitants of his imaginary ideal society: "They learn the various branches of knowledge in their own language, which has no lack of vocabulary, is not unpleasant to the ear and is not surpassed by any other in the expression of thought" (79). Other narratives written in Latin

by non-native speakers include John Barclay's Argenis (1621) and Ludvig Holberg's Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum (1741). Holberg's contemporary, English aristocrat William Beckford, wrote his Gothic novel *Vathek* (1786) in French.

Increased mobility and global communication have produced a bounty of translingual fiction in recent decades. Scores of notable contemporary novelists in English, French, German, Hebrew, Spanish, and other languages are writing in an adopted tongue. Monographs, articles, dissertations, conferences, and university seminars on several continents have begun to subject the phenomenon to scholarly investigation. Reflecting the global zeitgeist, literary translingualism has emerged as an umbrella for multidisciplinary, crossing continents, languages, cultures, and approaches, contributing to the understanding of some of the modern world's essential issues, such as cultural identity, cosmopolitanism, nationhood, linguistic diversity, and creativity.

This study, while to look into the writings of translingual writes from Assam, is a testament to these diverse voices, yet unsurprisingly features Language as a common protagonist. It is not coincidental that several illustrative texts discussed here rather have a psychological rather than the aesthetic effect at the first instance and talks about the authors' bilingualism as a complex idiosyncratic expression of the relationship between their adopted and native tongues, entangled cultural scripts, and emotional attachment and detachment, defining their literary creativity.

Although James Joyce wrote in English, his bilingualism and the specific role of Italian in his life may have provided emotional distance from his native English, thus allowing him more freedom to use obscenities in his novels. Milan Kundera's translingualism for instance, Michelle Woods says, provides a close reading of the novels he wrote in French to demonstrate how the writer uses the language as a disruptive mechanism, both as content and form, and how he creates transgressions between his Czech and his French to "make it strange".

Interestingly, at the fieldwork stage the study also started to

explore translingual and transcultural techniques (employed by Israeli writer Shani Boianjiu in her novel The Peopleof Forever Are Not Afraid) and thus amplifies the issue of language, homeland, and diaspora, of how we conceive nationhood—of major importance today, especially in places of conflict. The theme of "distressing the word" by creating the "third language" to deal with identity-trauma is examined in a few short stories from the contemporary Assamese translingual writer's work.

1.1. History of Migration in Assam

Negative stereotypes dehumanizing the inhabitants of the riverine areas ('Char-Chaporis') of Assam has been a fair game for quite some time now. Cast as the 'other', invariably dubbed 'Bangladeshi' and incessantly victimized, the Bengal-origin Muslims in Assam are established in the popular imagination by media, biased academics and the sectarian politicians as the repulsive 'other' of the 'Son-of-the-soil Assamese' or ('Khilonjia'). They have been pushed beyond the boundary of what Professor Thomas Homer-Dixon called 'moral community' and thus fall outside the territory of 'responsibility and care' (Azad, 2016). The terms 'Bangladeshi', 'Miyah', "Illegal Immigrants" or even "Suspected Bangladeshi" effectively erases more than a century-old history of government policy-induced migration as well as internal displacement due to the large-scale erosion of the river Brahmaputra in the popular psyche.

An estimated seven per cent of Assam's land has been eroded by the river Brahmaputra during 1950-2000, displacing lakhs of people, most of whom are Bengal-origin Muslims, because they constitute the bulk of the population settled in the Char and riverine areas (Hussain, 2006). Many of the erosion-induced internally displaced persons (IDP) take shelter on embankments and government land i.e. khas land, grazing land, and forest land and a large number of them migrate to urban areas in search of livelihood (Azad, 2016).

This blurring of the socio-cultural identity of the people of Char-Chapori in Assam is the “most serious problem” that these people face today and rest of the population rarely cared to understand the “differences between old settlers and illegal migrants” (Bezbaruah, 2016). It will be therefore worthwhile to discuss the history of migration in the state before we move forward to the focus of today’s presentation – translingual literature emerging from Assam.

Migration of Muslim peasants from erstwhile East Bengal into Assam since the early twentieth century was an inevitable result of a series of government policies introduced by the British in the two adjacent provinces of pre-independence India - Bengal and Assam.These policies, which were aimed at a very normal practice of resource-maximization in two contiguous provinces led to the migration of a large number of East Bengal peasants to Assam. It impacted both land use and demographic spectrum of the region. With the backing of successive governments an ethnically, culturally, linguistically different set people were transplanted into a new land. Besides the push given by the imperial interests, migration was also used strategically by the rural landless farmers of East Bengal to ensuretheir survival.

Since the early twentieth century, it was the imperial policy to encourage settlement of the landless peasantry from East Bengal to settle in the sparsely populated province of Assam where there was enormous land lying uncultivated. In keeping with the colonial plan of maximization of land revenue, it was decided to settle these mostly unseeded lands with the hardworking peasants from East Bengal to maximize the output of these lands. Not only were the fallow land settled, but also the wastelands and the chars, with this expanding population. The instruments through which this was done were The Line System of 1920, the Colonization Scheme and 'The Grow More Food' Programme of Sir Saadullah, five times Premier of Assam between 1937 and 1947. Thus, the two provinces ofEast Bengal and Assam were both victims of a careful constructed colonial plan and industrial mode of resource use

which pushed out peasants from East Bengal and accommodated them in Assam.

The economic demands of the metropolis squeezed the peasants out of East Bengal. As aresult of the de-industrialization of the province most of the urban workers from Dhaka, Murshidabad etc., were forced to take up cultivation due to an artificial process of 're- peasantization'. This created tremendous pressure on the already shrinking landholdings in East Bengal. The substitution by indigo and jute of staple foodcrops like rice, in many cases its forced cultivation, and the hazards of a plantation culture led a number of peasants to migrate first to the Sunderbans and then to the Meghna Depression, areas which were out of the purview of the exploitative *Zamindari* system[1] of the rest of Bengal. Add to this the socio-economic impact of the new land tenure system introduced by the British in Bengal— the Permanent Settlement of 1703— the inevitable growth of several tiers of local landlords, namely the Jotedars, and the rapid growth of rural indebtedness, the situation was ripe for migration into the brand new province of the colony. Also, the colonial government needed the surplus Bengal population to work on the empty fields ofAssam, even on the marginalized lands like wastelands and the char lands which had traditionally remained uncultivated and thereby had no revenue value.

The peasant/subaltern himself played a dominant role in the decision-making process of out-migration. It was not only the conducive policies of the governments of that time but that the peasants themselves opted for migration as a survival strategy in the face of adverse circumstances. Thus, the subaltern, in this study, is resurrected from a passive object swept away by the winds of history into circumstances that were not of his own

[1] Zamindar was the name of landlords in colonial India. The Zamindari system was a way of collecting taxes from peasants. The zamindar was considered a lord, and would collect all taxes on his lands and then hand over the collected taxes to the British authorities (keeping a portion for himself).

making, to a rational, conscious and decision-making active subject taking charge over his destiny. But in seeking a solution within the economy and the territory of the Raj itself, thesubaltern continued to be victims of a carefully constructed colonial design of environmental domination of Assam and Bengal and the settlement of the surplus population in the newly conquered provinces.

The migration story can be traced from as early as 1765 in Bengal and 1826 in Assam. The British right to the Diwani of Bengal in 1765, the conquest of Assam in 1826 and the subsequent Malevolent Policies aimed at resource-capture of the two provinces of Bengaland Assam led to an opening up of Assam to the interest and enterprise of an imperial order. The malevolent policies introduced by the British in Bengal, we suggest, like the destruction of Indian indigenous industries, the Permanent Settlement, the introduction of cash-crop cultivation etc. set in motion a series of chain reactions that ultimately led to an out-migration of the landless Bengal peasants, most of them Muslims. The immoderately high pitch of assessment (which continued to be steadily enhanced at each recurring settlement without any definite or specific rules) the rigidity of the land settlement, the recurrence of famines, short settlements, uncertainties about grounds of enhancement, the replacement of foodcrops by cash crops and the uncertainties of the cash-crop market, the triple burden of the new class colonial compradors, the progressive ruralization and pauperization and disruption of the traditional balance between industryand agriculture - all led to a the creation of a new and unfamiliar socio-economic reality forthe East Bengal peasants who constituted almost 80% of the Bengal population in 1872. The peasants dealt with the limiting and confining space available to them, physically and ideologically, by enduring them, claiming them to be natural and destined, and/or finally, by breaking out of and rejecting them and moving into the wider space of the world.

1.2. Migration and Literature

The popular Punthi literature of that time reflected the peasant-subaltern's active role in that decision-making process of migration. These cheap, badly printed pamphlets popularamong the Muslim peasants of East Bengal contain a number of poems and articles whichprojected migration as a 'silent protest' against the changes let loose in the Bengalcountry-side by the policies of the Raj. But the paradox was that, in seeking a solution within the territory and economy of the colony, the peasant-subaltern continued to be thevictims of carefully planned colonial designs in Bengal and Assam.

The East Bengal peasant migrated step by step. First, he moved within his own province to those areas which were not yet under the Permanent Settlement. The seasonal and settler migration started simultaneously to the Sunderbans of Khulna during the second half of the nineteenth century. Settler migration involving a large number of people in theMeghna Depression of Sylhet started in the early twentieth century but intensified in the 1930s-1950s, while seasonal migration to Sylhet started much earlier. The Indian border ofAssam was only seven to eight miles from the Meghna Depression. The Karimganj subdivision of Assam was a province of Sylhet district before the partition. From the latter part of the nineteenth century, when tea plantations were booming in this area, many Muslim labourers and peasants settled in the Karimganj area as well as in other neighbouring districts such as Nowgong, Cachar, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar.

The completion of Bengal-Nagpur Railway in 1891 boosted migration to the tea plantations of Assam from the northern districts of Bengal. Goalando, a neighbouring town of Madaripur, a trade and commercial centre of Faridpur district, developed as a huge transaction camp for migrant labourers of North West. From 1850 onwards a boom in thetea plantations began in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. During the initial years, one-tenth of all labourers in the sector had migrated from Bengal. Later,

the proportion or migrants to Assam from Eastern Bengal, more particularly from Mymensingh increased. Perhaps the peasants of Mymensingh across the river 'managed' to penetrate the organization and were able to migrate to Assam and elsewhere. By 1911, the landless Muslim peasants from East Bengal had filled up the char areas of Goalpara district in Assam setting in motion a series of events which were to have serious implications for the history of Assam.

Though initially welcoming, from the early part of the twentieth century, however, the local 'Asomiyas' began to articulate a demand for the containment of this migration into the province of Assam. Significantly, the demand was not for putting a stop to this migration which reaped benefits for the Asomiyas too, but simply for a regulation of their settlements which hitherto tended to be haphazard and very close to the villages of the Asomiyas. Through the 1920s and till the partition, the question that dominated the Assam legislature was if the Line System should stay or go. In the 1940s, the migrant Muslims, under the leadership of Maulana Bhashani, articulated a demand for Assam's inclusion into the newly projected state for Muslims, Pakistan. Land, once again, was at the core of this politics. This effort has failed, however, the migrant leaders dissolved the Muslim League in Assam, joined the Congress and returned themselves as 'Asamiyas' since the Census of 1951, thus giving a majority status to the Asomiyas in the Brahmaputra Valley for the first time in history. It was a fatalistic acceptance of the failure of the Muslim League cause and the reality of having to continue to live in Assam as Asomiyas. Since then this community has been trying to assimilate itself with the 'mainstream' Asamiya society and culture.

In a char village, the more land a household owns the more security it has in times of crisis and scarcity. In contrast, the landless have very little command over their lives and no security at all. Unpredictable climate, a shifting topography, limited

technical resources and a rising population contribute greatly to the immense actual and figurative value of land in the chars. Annual floods and a steady erosion by the Brahmaputra contribute to thisgrowing precariousness. An entire char in an area may easily disappear one year leaving the landowners with no land for a long time till such land re-emerges. Environmental reasons thus, greatly contribute to the growing landlessness among the migrant Muslim, settlements in the char areas.

Without land, households are without security in times of crises, especially floods, and are, consequently, a rootless people with nothing to sell but their labour. All over Assam, shortor long-term internal migration is a normal response to landlessness in the char areas.

Especially during floods which constitute the crisis period for them, a large number of people: move over from the marginalized areas to the towns and cities in search of livelihood. The main way in which these landless subsist is by selling their labour. The constant erosion and land loss since the 1950s have resulted in the creation of a large, fluidpopulation of internal displaces in *Kochmora char*. New occupations thereafter are being taken up by these homeless people to eke out a living.

The process of 'Asamiyaization' was slow and as yet almost imperceptible in remote char areas. Assamese was used initially as a link language to the neighbouring social groups in the Brahmaputra Valley. The usefulness of Assamese as a link language, backed by the state machinery also exert due influence on the on-going process. The migrants, on their part, are eager to accept and adopt it in order to simplify their problems and not remain a minority on a double count—language and religion. Many other communities have passedthrough this bi-lingual phase, for example, the Tai-Ahoms, some sections of the tribals andto some extent, the Nepalis in Assam. The Asamiya Muslims have had enough time to integrate with the Asamiya culture and thereafter, have been totally accepted by the Hindu Asamiyas as insiders. With

a well-developed intelligentia, they are far advanced than the new migrants in terms of economy, education and mental make-up. However, with thebeginnings of inter-marriages between the two social groups, are no doubt, a movement towards the creation of a broader Muslim society (no more 'societies') is also within sight. A very small middle class has originated from within the migrant Muslim community. Consisting of primary school teachers and small politicians and journalists, this class is, as yet, nascent and is yet to take a definite form. Advanced intellectuals from within this community are naturally drawn towards a middle class of the Old type (Asamiya Muslim).

The prevalent discourse on migrant literature in recent years is invariably focused on the issues of identity and multiculturalism starting with Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) that saw a Western imperialistic design in viewing "the other". Uniform national identities based on 'cultural integrity' and 'authenticity' (MacDonald, 2003; Naguib,2004a, 2004b) are now being relooked into through a constructivist approach replacing the essentialist view leading to the emergence of 'collective identities' (Mendoza-Denton, 2002). At the same time, it is also interesting to note how translingual communities negotiate their identities in a "Third space" (Bhaba, 1994) and create hybrid identities as a mutual space for co-existence where geographically and historically different communities (Clifford, 1997). Postmodernist discourses, however, try to underplay such notions of constructionist thirst space but agree to an anti-essentialist approach (Calhoun,1995; Fairclough, 1995; Halpern and Ruano-Borbalan, 2004).

History of North-East India is splattered with stories of repeated agitations, mass movements, and violent protests in support of various communities' 'own' languages. With the emergence of several states mainly based on languages in the region, these conflicts are mainly propelled by a notion of protecting one's mother-tongue, getting the opportunity to learn and practice his

or her native language as a matter of human dignity and right. Local language issues closely intermingled with local politics often decided the course of such language movements. Language becomes a strong construct of'nationalism' that Anderson (1991) defined as "Imagined Communities". Amidst these stories of rifts and hatred, the instances of conciliation, adoption, and investment in another language by a large population is seldom heard in popular discourse. Of course, the acceptance and mastery of the English language by the non-native community is a much-cultivated field globally. But a story of translingual literature within any Indian language is hardly portrayed in the mainstream media or academic circuits.

We tend to believe that however well someone learns a new language, he cannot write it in that language with the style and the correctness of a native speaker. We forget that our languages are natural phenomena and like living organisms that constantly adapt in order to express new situations. Moreover, a writer working in an adopted language brings to that language his or her whole world, their 'native' experiences of living between two cultures, two languages of bridging these languages and cultures (Orban, 2008). Immigrants facilitate a two-way flow of cultural experiences for his readers from their own to the adopted language and from the adopted language to their own. They bring in a new set of images from his culture of origin and introduces the new language and culture to their fellow community members leading a new path to mutual understanding in the host society which might not always extend a warm welcome. Opting to write in their adopted language, the migrant writer expresses his or her sense of belonging and affection for the new culture.

Immigrant writers spread across the world and in all languages have presented a number of excellent examples that illustrated their mastery and control over their adopted languages. But such literary achievements are not free from criticisms, controversies and even ridicule. Joseph Conrad, the most brilliant example of

this kind, was Polish but wrote all his fiction and even his diary in English. He is probably the best-known example of what can be achieved by grasping a new culture and language. But Virginia Woolf, one of the greatest writers of English prose of the twentieth century, recalled Conrad as "foreigner, talking broken English" (Page, 1986).

The issues of identity of Neo-Assamese writers and their writings as a value addition to both the literature of the adopted language and an assertion of a translingual text highlights a new dimension of the existing tradition of critical content analysis. It presents a unique case of an immigrant community in Assam which has not only adopted an alien language (Assamese) in statistical terms declaring it as their 'mother tongue' duringcensus exercises but also contributed to its literature. While language-centred conflicts in India are researched, studied, showcased and even eulogized as a matter of 'sub-national' pride, the complaisant acceptance or adoption of a language for more than a century by an immigrant community in India hardly received any attention. Documenting the history, sacrifice, identity crisis and the struggle of the immigrant community who came from other parts of erstwhile *Eastern Bengal and Assam* province that now mainly falls in Bangladesh and how those issues deserve a close look. They came and many were 'brought' by successive rulers and governments to help agricultural growth. They came and toiled the soils not only for food and to increase agricultural productivity, but passionately call themselves Neo-Assamese (*N'Asomia* in Assamese) in their willingness to make this new land their permanent home. Entering Assam from nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, specifically since Yandabo Treaty of 1826, theseMuslim immigrants of East Bengal origin were settled in the riverine areas of the Brahmaputra that are affected by regular floods and erosion. In the words of Homen Borgohain (2002), a prominent Assamese writer and former President of Assam Sahitya Sabha – the apex literary platform of the Assamese community – "…their voluntary acceptance

of Assamese language and culture has strengthened and increased the number of Assamese community. It is mainly because of them that Assamese couldbecome the majority community in Assam… [translation mine].”

Therefore, applying critical content analysis on representative samples of writing in Assamese by authors of migrant origin like Khobir Ahmed, Ismail Hussain, Khairul Alam and others will identify the social, economic, and political issues that forms a dialogic tension(Bakhtin, 1981) between the cultural traditions of ‘indigenous’ (*Khilonjia* in Assamese), thewriters own the past and the present situation against the backdrop of the ongoing anti-migrant agitations. It will show a new worldview of migrant writers that encompasses the tensions of the family, religion, citizenship, culture and community. By identifying how these factorsinfluence their narrative, it will also add a fresh look at ‘dialogic tensions’ as it appears in their writings.

Understanding the texts and contexts of the Assamese writers of migrant origin through critical content analysis will, therefore, throw new lights on the “the importance ofnarrative” as a visible expression of the new identities assumed by these writers. Their narratives will highlight the melting boundaries of essentialism in areas of nationality, ethnicity and culture and bring the multiculturalism of the ‘third space’ to the forefront of postmodernist literary criticism. This study will explore this idea of ‘third space’ created by ‘imagined communities’ of Neo-Assamese writers in recent years and their negotiating a new identity through the appropriation of a new language but still being close to their own identities. It will try to see how a new pluralistic society is accepting or refusing to accommodate these translingual narratives.

CHAPTER 2

Translingual Writing

According to Steven G. Kellman, the author of *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft*, translingual writers are authors who write in more than one language or in a language other than their primary one. Kellman further explained that this type of writers are authors who "flaunt their freedom from the constraints of the culture into which they happen to be born" ... "by expressing themselves in multiple verbal systems". Thus, the translingual writer is an author who has the ability to cross over into a new linguistical identity. Kellman cites the "Sapir-Whorf thesis, the principle of linguistic relativity whose premise is that language determines thought" as an insight as to why translingual writers choose to switch languages within their literary works. Linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis or Whorfianism, is a concept-paradigm in linguistics and cognitive science thatholds that the structure of a language affects its speakers' cognition or worldview. It usedto have a strong version that claims that language determines thought and that linguistic categories limit and determine cognitive categories. The more accepted weak version claims that linguistic categories and usage only influence thoughts and decisions.

The hypothesis evolved from work by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, which pointed towards the possibility that grammatical differences reflect differences in the way that speakers of different languages perceive the world. Linguistic

relativity was formulated as a testable hypothesis called the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis by Roger Brown and Eric Lenneberg, based on experiments on colour perception across language groups. Colour perception and naming have been a popular research area, producing studies that have both supported and questioned linguistic relativity's validity. In the mid-twentieth century, many linguists and psychologists had maintained that human language and cognition is universal and not subject to relativistic effects.

2.1. Translingualism

Steven Kellman's *Switching Languages: Translingual Writers Reflect on Their Craft* is a useful collection of essays for those interested in translingualism—defined by Kellman as authors "who write in more than one language or in a language other than their primary one" (2003, ix). According to Kellman, "by expressing themselves in multiple verbal systems, [translingual writers] flaunt their freedom from the constraints of the culture into which they happen to be born" (ix). Translingualism as a subject is certainly worthy of theorization and study, and by presenting a variety of past and present authors who could be considered "translingual", Kellman advances this topic.

However, the definition of translingualism used by Kellman never distinguishes translingualism from bilingualism, multilingualism, or ambilingualism ("writers fluent and accomplished in more than one language" [2003, xiii]). As critics such as Lydia Liu and Ruth Spack have emphasized recently, the term "translingualism" is employed to describe writers who cross-culturally appropriate, criticize, and reinvent a language. Spack argues in *America's Second Tongue: American Indian Education and the Ownership of English*, 1860-1900 (University of Nebraska Press, 2002) that translingualism involves not only a language choice but also "the transformation of [writers'] linguistic and cultural identities, for their worldview was now being mediated through

a new language" (112). A translingual author, then, crosses over into a new linguistical identity. Yet in her essay in Kellman's book, Esmeralda Santiago describes herself as being "in limbo between Spanish and English" (131), and to call this "translingualism" seems to undercut both Santiago's dilemma and the potentially radical power and position of the "true" translingual; in the essay Kellman selects, Santiago emphasizes the discomfort of being in the void between discursive systems—a discomfort that she might seek to preserve. An author such as Gloria Anzaldúa, on the other hand, in her famous essay "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" (reprinted here), will emphasize the radicalism of her use of many [End Page 199] languages, even simultaneously. She may refuse, then, to cross over into a new linguistic identity and instead preserve the power of her multiple linguistic locations.

This study uses the notion of imagined communities as a way to better understand the relationship between the translingual writers' second language and their identity. The study highlights the ways in which translingual writers' actual and desired memberships in "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991) affect their writing contexts and trajectories. We will start out by explaining the notion of imagined communities with reference to language and identity. Then, we will show how the process of imagining and reimagining one's multiple memberships may influence their narratives.

The theoretical framework adopted in the present study may be best viewed as poststructuralist or postmodernist. While the terms poststructuralism, postmodernism, or critical inquiry serve as an umbrella for a variety of theoretical approaches adopted by different researchers, in the present study will use the postmodernist focus on text as the locus of social organization, power, and individual consciousness, and as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Translingual literature will be seen as a situated process of participation in particular communities of practice, which may entail the negotiation of ways of being a

person in that context (Wenger, 1998). Thus, "because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity" (215), a process of becoming or avoiding becoming a certain person, rather than a simple accumulation of skills and knowledge. While the situated view of adopted language as social or political decision-making has been seen from historical perspectives in non-fictional narratives of translingual writers, the story-telling of the Assamese writers of East Bengal origin is connected to their participation in a wider world through imagination, of perceiving a connection with people beyond their immediate social networks. Their orientation toward such imagined communities might have just as much impact on their current identities and problematic issues surrounding their everyday life. We argue that the notion of imagination as a way to appropriate meanings and create new identities, developed by Anderson (1991) and Wenger (1998), allows the translingual writers to transcend the focus on their immediate environment – the stigma of being taunted as "Bangladeshi" even after more than a century of migration - and their writings reflect the desire of the writers to expand their range of identities and to reach out to wider worlds –a third space (Kinginger, in press; Kramsch, 2000; Kramsch & von Hoene, 2001; Norton, 2001).

The theoretical basis for this study is focused on the role of imagination in translingual writing draws on three complementary sources: Anderson's (1991) view of nation-states as imagined communities, Wenger's (1998) view of imagination as a form of engagement with communities of practice, and Markus and Nurius's (1986) view of possible selves as the link between motivation and behaviour. In his work on the role of language in the creation of nation-states, Anderson traces ways in which the invention of printing technology in the capitalist world gave new fixity to language and created languages of power, different from older vernaculars. The nation-states, in turn, were conceived around these languages, as imagined communities "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of

their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6). Anderson's analysis presents imagination as a social process, emphasizing the fact that those in power oftentimes do the imagining for the rest of their fellow citizens, offering them certain identity options and leaving other options "unimaginable".

Wenger's (1998) situated learning theory provides a complementary perspective to that of Anderson, presenting imagination as both an individual and social process. In his view, imagination is a distinct form of belonging to a particular community of practice and a wayin which "we can locate ourselves in the world and history, and include in our identities other meanings, other possibilities, other perspectives" (178). In this, Wenger's insights converge with the well-known psychological theory of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), which represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would liketo become, and what they are afraid of becoming, thus linking cognition, behaviour, and motivation. For both Wenger and Markus and Nurius, possible selves, linked to memberships in imagined communities, shape individuals' present and future decisions and behaviours and provide an evaluative and interpretive context for such decisions, behaviours, and their outcomes.

Translingualism, although poses a challenge in terms of linguistic choice for an author, canactually be seen as an essential component of modern cosmopolitan social formations. It highlights the various processes that an individual goes through to associate himself or herself with a community, society or a nation. Translingualism provides an avenue for identity creation whereby one essentially deconstructs the prevailing identity markers – social, cultural and linguistic – and recreates a new identity through which he or she connects to the society and the nation. In an emerging 'global society' such re-construction of individual and group, identity sits at the centre of translingual imagination, especially in literary works. The state of Assam has accommodated, over the centuries, a number of migrant communities that now

constitute major ethnic groups within the larger Assamese society. Migrant communities who were brought to work in tea gardens or to support agricultural production under "grow more food" programme now together formthe majority of Assam's population today. Therefore, the larger Assamese societal identityquestion has to negotiate with these 'migrant-origin' communities and see that a hybrid, diverse, plural and accommodative societal cohesion sustain the overall politicalaspirations, peace, and development in the state rising above the inter-ethnic tensions. Transitional writers from Assam, through their adoption of Assamese as 'declared' mother-tongue and contribution to Assamese literature, for all its practical purposes uses their translinguality to reconstruct the emerging identity not for themselves but in a way redefine what constitutes the broader Assamese society today.

The identity question has, for long, been at the centre of discussion around areas like translation studies, multiculturalism, multilingualism, pluralism but the process of identity creation of social identity formation has not perhaps been seen through a deeper analysis of written texts of translingual writers or of the larger narrative of a translingual community that includes oral, written and cultural items. This study, therefore, focuses on a different theoretical paradigm that envisages that translingualism is basically an identity re-construction process through which the writers carry forward their idea of being a partof a larger community (Assamese) though not necessarily abandoning their cultural, social and traditional roots. Translingualism is a manifestation of such a process and there is a method to it. The process and the methods are far too evident in their writing as we will see in later discussion of their writings – short stories and poems.

2.2. Migrant Narratives

Questions of identity are invariably interwoven with trans-lingualism. The issue of identity has been at the forefront of the

postcolonial studies and often seen through binaries of indigenous and migrant, insider and outsider or native and non-native. In case of Assam, these binaries become more prominent in the light of the history of anti-migrant, anti- infiltration or to be more precise, anti-Bangladeshi agitations since the 1970s. This situation can perhaps find a parallel in Edward Said's (1978) understanding of the Western world's construction of "the other" in a cultural hegemony. Literary works have been studied for long through this identity lens as space where formation, negotiation and creation of identities take place through the narratives built by the authors through their characters. Underlying these writings are the attempts to highlight the linguistic and cultural diversities that modern societies have embraced over the years replacing the earlier essentialist approaches in defining national identities. The so-called originality and authenticity of cultural identity that are uniform and homogeneous in nature and adhere to rigid national boundaries are now much diluted through reconstructive approaches (MacDonald 2003) giving way to what is called a collective identity (Mendoza-Denton 2002).

Translingual writers from Assam are aware of this tension between the self and the other and constantly remind us of the controversies and the attacks on the collective identity as 'Assamese' in their writings. Khobir Ahmed talks about this identity question and the threats to the collective Assamese identity in his poem *"Enajori"* [Bond]:

Enajori

Fading away, gradually
Images of beautiful mother AsomBecoming thin
Once the healthy and strong motherland.

Geographies are questionedHistories are distorted
Citizens are divided Making narrower, slowly Lands and skies of Assam.

Eroding the foundations of AssamAll joints are getting unhinged
Nose, ear, hands, feet
All getting shattered –All dresses stripped
Bonds of relationships can't hold.

Fire everywhere
Burning all bridges of ties,All connections of love One by one
Breaking the linksOf all relations
Of all bonds of love.

People growing livid Changing fast Voices, behaviours Lands falling apart Sky falling down.

Flood of fear and anxiety Removing love and trust Contagious fear and suspicionsMaking people wild
Suffering madness.

My own land falling apart Spread on a pool of blood
Like a headless body on the sandO my own homeland
O my beautiful land.
(Khobir Ahmed, in *Nodialor Atmakotha, 11)*

Ahmed has torn himself apart as geographical markers are imposed on migrant origin people (from erstwhile East Bengal) and he voices the fear and apprehension that overshadows his own idea of Assam. As if the 'centre cannot hold' anymore as questions of boundaries and histories are raised to distort the collective identity of a strong, united, beautiful motherland called Assam. This collective identity question is intermingled with the issue of the individual identity of the people of riverine areas – the char-chapori population. Translingual writings in Assamese incessantly draws us back to this tension of'questioned identity' as a reflection of the atmosphere of fear, suspicion and hate that engulf the society against the backdrop of a cacophony that migrants overpowering the indigenous people.

Translingual writings from Assamese literature and

their underlying migrant narratives abound in symbols of their *Na'Asomiya* identity prepare the ground for an identity negotiation. Such "negotiation" reflects a creative imagination process that constructs and displays identities in specific social-cultural contexts (Auer, 1998). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) also talk about such a "negotiation" but only in the contexts where it is challenged. Assamese translingual writers face this challenge at various levels such as: indigenous-migrant, local-foreigners, refugee-infiltrator and Indian-Bangladeshi. Their writings portray these identity-negotiations through a variety of socio-cultural settings against which their characters assert their Assamese identity and reiterate what many scholars have termed as language choice (Schiffrin 1996, De Fina 2003).

An analysis of any translingual texts from Assamese literature would also show how their narratives, images, metaphors and figurative expressions all lead towards emphasizing their social happenstances with the mainstream Assamese society. In Ahijuddin Sheikh's short story, aptly titled "Bangladeshi", the main character Nur Banu is detained by police suspecting her to be an illegal immigrant. Though the fact is that she along with many others have left their ancestral homes in Assam due to river erosion and reached neighbouring states like Arunachal Pradesh in search of work. After days of detention and verification of their antecedents, all the detained persons are released except Nur Banu as papers from her village didn't reach the police. She doesn't have a relative who can send those identity documents to the police station. At the end, Nur Banu, waiting for her release resigns to her fate and starts to show signs of madness and suicidal tendency. In describing her condition, at the end of the story, Sheikh depicts the incarceration of Nur Banu as suspension of all freedom and democratic values. While the world outside goes on in its nonchalant ways, Nur Banu's world has virtually come to an end. In the words of the writer:

> "In this vibrant world, she doesn't have any desire to live. Her freedom, her democratic rights, all are now imprisoned in the police station" ("Bangladeshi", Ahijuddin Sheikh, in *Kechkaal,* 2014, pp. 224)

Such tragic tales from translingual writers of Assam provide an alternative context, a different voice and obviously a different perspective to the popular migrant-Bangladeshi-infiltrator discourses that proliferate local media and political debates. Moreover, these writings pose a different set of questions as to the identity crisis faced by people like Nur Banu, citizens without 'proper papers' as to their inclusion in the Assamese society and right to a life of dignity. Working through these characters the translingual writers reflect upon the citizenship-related issues through a humane prism and asserts their *Na'Asomiya* identity. The identity formation processes in the translingual literature of Assam avail them membership of an Andersonian "imagined community" and their narratives show how theEast Bengal origin migrant and their successive generations are the emerging as integral components of the larger Assamese society today. The notion of indigenous (*khilonjia)* in Assamese writing and the local-foreigner binaries are being challenged by translingualism of a large section of the population in Lower Assam that brings in a diversity to the societyin terms of cultural and social aspects. In other words, through their translingual imagination, the writers contest, assume, appropriate, synthesize, assimilate and redefinethe 'Assamese' identity. The emerging assumed an identity, as being rewritten by 'migrants' globally (Bhabha, 1994), is a question of an ideal, desired, assumed and perhapsthe most important stream of thought they instill among the reader. The "imagined" identity continues to trouble the translingual writers as reflected in these lines of Sakina Khatun (2006, 121-123):

What did I gain or lose in this birth?
How much pain and joy?

How much love and hurt?
Along came a big question too –
How much more an Assamese am I?
How much less an Assamese am I?

The novels and short stories of translingual writers in Assamese thus bring forth a specificanalytical perspective in line with postcolonial theoretical approaches (Said, 1978) and closer to Homi Bhabha's deconstruction of national identities (1994). The dualconcepts of "the other" and the national identity are well explored by the translingual writers in their narratives as both contest and negotiate their identities. At the same time elements of social class, dialect and gender are evident in Assamese translingual writing that reflects a postcolonial feminist way of looking at the texts (Spivak, 1985). These translingual texts bring in new themes, symbols and cultural references as they choose towrite in Assamese, a mainstream language, abandoning their mother tongues. Their writings present a different discourse that is different from the mainstream Assamese ideaof indigenousness. In reading these stories and poems, we see them redefining the popular imagination of who is a genuine Assamese as bicultural writers are often found tobe doing (Bhabha, 1994; Muller, 1999). In their search for assuming, negotiating and sustaining a new identity, the translingual authors of a migrant past, however distant, try to redefine social and cultural identities.

The identity question emerges from time to time in the context of a translingual writer andoften it is seen as a stream of consciousness that reflect the writers' socio-cultural interaction with his host community, culture and space. While the writers' ancestors might have migrated decades ago and they have no 'first hand' experiences or memories of the land of his ancestral origin, they are constantly struggling to position themselves between the cultural roots in the past and the present social surroundings. Choosing a new 'mothertongue' and a language of literary expression involves a lot of negotiations with the culture

of the 'host' society leading to the urge to create their own 'third space'. Thoroughly appropriating another language for their writing and at the same time retaining their image as genuine representatives of a specific ethnicity (*Char Chapori)* makes them members of a multicultural translingual community. Linguistic and cultural puritans who sentimentalize language as the ultimate manifestation of indigenousness or an overvalued sub-national identity, this intercession in literary texts between the 'native' and the 'migrant' offers the "third space" as a construction of more inclusive identity in line with the idea of a global society.

CHAPTER 3

Short Stories

Assamese short story was born in the hands of Lakshminath Bezbaruah (1868- 1938) in the pages of Jonaki (1889). The thinking of Western literature made its way into Assamese literature through this magazine. Even though Assamese short story was first published *Jonaki*, some stories from the *Bible* did get published in the first Assamese journal or magazine *Arunoday* (1846). But the main purpose of publishing the journal was to propagate the teachings of Christianity in Assam. Hence the stories published in this journal could in no way be regarded as modern short stories. It was in the pages of *Jonaki* that modern Assamese short story was born. Lakshminath Bezbaruah made a mark for himself as a story-teller in the pages of *Jonaki*. Bezbaruah's Pandit Mahashay set the trend of the short story in Assamese literature from the eighth issue of *Jonaki* in its fourth year. From this point of view, Bezbaruah can be regarded as the father of Assamese short story. However, even though he started writing stories in *Jonaki*, it was in the magazine *Banhi* which he edited, that most of his stories were published.

On the one hand, Bezbaruah created his own short stories and on the other, he edited and brought out the ancient stories in a new format. Bezbaruah has six collections of tales and stories to his credit. These are – Sadhukathar Kunki, Jonbiri, Surabhi, Kokadeuta-Natilora, Burhi Air Sadhu and Junuka. The first three collections contain modern short stories and the other three have

ancient tales. After his death, his stories that were published in magazines were compiled and brought out in a collection titled Kehukoli. This collection has been edited by Atul Chandra Hazarika. In all, Bezbaruah had written 66 short stories. The entire history from the ancient fables to the modern short story has been mentioned in Bezbaruah's writings (Borgohain, 1975). Most of Bezbaruah's stories are replete with wit and satire.

After Lakshminath Bezbaruah, it was Sarat Chandra Goswami (1887- 1944) who made an immense contribution in the field of Assamese short story. Bezbaroa's story collection Surabhi was published in 1909, whereas Goswami's first story collection Galpanjali was published in 1914 (Goswami, 1965). Goswami's other story collections include Mayna, Bazeekar and Paridarshan. Paridarshan was published after his death. Apart from these four collections, his stories published in different magazines and those that had remainedin his notebooks, were compiled and brought out as another collection named Galpamalaand included in Sarat Chandra Goswami Rachanawali.

In the pre-Awahan period, apart from Lakshminath Bezbaroa and Sarat Chandra Goswami, some other writers had made noteworthy contributions to Assamese short story. They included Dandinath Kalita, Suryakumar Bhuyan, Nakul Chandra Bhuyan, Mitradev Mahantaand others. These storytellers got their stories published in Jonaki and other magazines like Banhi, Alochoni and Milan. Despite being bereft of the artistry of subject matters and lethargy in conveying any message and other shortcomings, their stories will alwaysoccupy a special place in the development of Assamese short story.

The second stage of Assamese story is the Awahan Age. *Awahan*, a quality monthly magazine was launched in Kolkata in the month of Kati in 1929. Progress and variety madetheir way into Assamese story through this quality magazine. With the launch of *Awahan*, Assamese short story also stepped into a new level. For the first time in the history of Assamese short story, *Awahan*

played a stellar role in introducing a new wave of thinking and newer expressions. Even though Assamese short story was born in the Jonaki Age, it attained maturity only in the Awahan Age. Like the full monsoon shower, it was the Awahan Age that lent completeness to the noteworthy beginning of Assamese story in the Jonaki Age. In the pages of *Awahan*, stories of the popular veteran storytellers began to be published. The old subject matters based on the rural and agrarian lifestyle got replaced by subject matters based on the luxury and liberation of urban life as tasted by the new educated writers of the Awahan Age. The ecstatic thoughts of romanticism, free flow of imagination, minute treatment of language, psychological analysis and progressivestyle found a place in the writings of the Awahan Age writers. In the stories of some of these writers, the psychological influence of Freud could be seen. The old barriers of conservatism were broken and open culture and the open analysis of the human mind came to be taken up as the main ingredients of a short story. Maupassant's influence too could not be avoided. The free wanderings of the characters in a natural environment are Maupassant's style of writing. The new writers set aside the conservatism that was present in the writing styles of the pre-Awahan Age and made efforts to evolve a new style of story-telling fit for a story. The attempts might not have succeeded all the time, but as a result of the efforts to evolve a new narration style, the form of the story got a better opportunity to become much more attractive in the Awahan Age.

After *Jonaki*, even though a fair number of magazines like *Banhi*, *Usha*, *Bijulee* and *Chetana* were launched, these could not lend a permanent status so far as short story was concerned. The only reason for this was the untimely closure of these magazines. The birth of *Awahan* in such a situation and from the key role it played, this magazine can be regarded as a milestone in respect of Assamese short story. On the one hand, just as it caused the further development of Assamese romantic literature that took birth in *Jonaki*, on the other hand, it created a bunch of powerful new

writers and launched a glorious age like *Jonaki* in the history of Assamese short story.

Among the writers of the Awahan Age are – Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, Rajani Kanta Bordoloi, Mohichandra Bora, Lakshmidhar Sarma, Lakshmi Nath Phookan, Haliram Deka, Roma Das, Nalini Kanta Baruah, Radhika Mohan Goswami, Krishna Bhuyan, Reena Baruah, Troilokyanath Goswami, Dinanath Sarma, Umakanta Sarma and Munin Barkataky. Nagendra Narayan Choudhury, the founder of *Awahan* (1929), will always occupy a place of pride as an important story writer in the history of Assamese short story. The collections of his stories that appeared in *Awahan* included Nagendra Narayan Choudhury's 'Galpa' (1963) and 'Binar Jhankar' (1964).

A few years before the Second World War, apart from *Awahan*, two other magazines, *Jayanti* and *Surabhi* had become popular. Notable writers who wrote in Jayanti and Surabhi were Syed Abdul Malik, Kumar Kishore, Tirthanath Sarma, Gobinda Poira, Hariprasad Gorkharay, Mohanlal Choudhury and others. Assamese short story that was born in the hands of Lakshminath Bezbaroa, blossomed fully with new subject matters and styles in the hands of writers of the Awahan Age. The stories of the Awahan Age took a new shape in later times and elevated Assamese story to new heights of progress.

The third layer or stage of Assamese short story is the Ramdhenu Age (1945-67). At the root of the birth of the magazine, *Ramdhenu*, was the Second World War. The overwhelming influence of the war had in the meantime fallen on Assamese lifestyle and Assamese literature. The war had unsettled all the thinking, ideology etc. of the times of *Jonaki*, *Banhi*, *Usha*, *Chetana* and *Awahan*. At the same time, India's struggle for independence also gained momentum. As a result of the influence of the Second World War, the people's way of thinking underwent change. During this historically important period, a new angle of thinking of a new genre of writers gained prominence. As has already been

mentioned, during the war there was a dearth of printing material like paperfor publishing magazines and newspapers. This brought about varied constraints in the cultural life of the country. Even *Awahan*, which was running during the war, had to be closed down due to various reasons. Gradually, as its influence on the cultural life of Assam waned, a new magazine *Ramdhenu* was launched in 1951 by Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya in order to get rid of the lack of an Assamese magazine. After *Awahan*, the contributions of *Ramdhenu* in Assamese literature are noteworthy.

Even though Syed Abdul Malik (1919), who has the largest number of stories to his credit among Assamese short story writers, began to write in the pre-World War *Awahan*, his stories waded through the Jayanti Age and attained full form in the Ramdhenu Age. A majority of his stories were published in *Ramdhenu*. His story collections include – 'Parasmani', 'Rangagora', 'Maraha Papori', 'Ejoni Natun Suwali', 'Shikhare Shikhare', etc. With a unique webbing of wonderful words, Malik created an extraordinarily wonderful language and natural characters and thus succeeded in easily catching the attention of the readers. Moral education and picturization of a society bogged down in scarcity, are attractive subject matters of his stories. These traits of Malik are clearly shown in stories included in collections like 'Rangagora', 'Maram Maram Laage' and 'Sheel aru Shikha'.

3.1. Assamese Short Stories from Translingual Writers

It is largely accepted by the scholars that 'Seuti' written by Lakshminath Bezbaruah and published in the fourth issue of the fourth volume of the magazine *Jonaki* in 1892 was the first Assamese short story (Thakur, 1997). More than a half-century after the publication of that first Assamese short story, the first short story by any translingual writer appeared in the first issue of the magazine *Aazan* in the month of April 1965. The riverine areas of lower Assam on the banks of the Brahmaputra are some

of the most socio-economically backward areas of the state. Poor communication infrastructure, lack of educational institutions and mostly inhabited by peasants, these char areas were really on the periphery of development and human existence for many decades. Books, magazines, journals, access to libraries and other knowledge resources did not reach those remote areas for many decades. In such circumstances, it is natural that the translingual population of Assam fell far behind in their literary endeavours when compared to their mainstream Assamese counterparts. It is only in the 1960s that a new generation of people who could overcome the physical, social and economic barriers of the char chapori life and get modern education started to write and publish literary works in Assamese. Educational institutions were established in interior char areas and as if in an attempt to escape the painful realities of their existence on the river banks, newly educated young minds were attracted to literature as a window to interact with the world. Bus and motorboat services from Guwahati started to reach the interior char areas and it also provided an impetus to the growth of literary interest among the people of char areas (Sheikh, 2013).

An organized attempt at literary creation among the char chapori people started with thepublication of the magazine *Aazan* in 1965. It was edited by M Ilim Uddin Dewan and a number of translingual writers started their literary journeys from the pages of this magazine (Sheikh, 2013). Some of the prominent translingual short story writers in Assamese are: M Ilim Uddin Dewan, Sakina Khatun, Shahjamal Sheikh, Ahijuddin Sheikh, Hafiz Ahmed, Khobir Ahmed, M Fazlul Haque, Abdur Rahim Mustafi, Ismail Hussain (Sr), Ismail Hussain (Jr), M Kayem Talukdar, Ramisa Begum and Shahidul Islam. Some other translingual short story writers who also contributed to Assamese Literature, like Keramat Ali Sheikh, Tasim Uddin Ahmed, Sultan Ali Ahmed, Raushanara Akhtar, Abdus Samad, Talebor Rahman, Shamsul Haque, M Akbar Hussain, Taj Uddin Ahmed, M Habibar Rahman, Anjum

Anwara Begum, Nobir Hussain, Asma Ara Khatun, Joynal Abedin Ahmed, Samej Ahmed, Majibur Rahman, DewanAbdus Sattar and Anwar Hussain.

3.2. Ilim Uddin Dewan

The pioneer of translingual writing in Assamese M Ilim Uddin Dewan who laid the foundation of literary creative movement in char areas of Assam was himself a short storywriter. His major volumes of short stories are *Amar Shaheed* [Immortal Martyr] and *Amenar Manobol* [Amena's Courage] and his stories abound in themes like feudalism, superstitions, bigotry and raise a strong voice against these social evils that were prevalent in the society. *Amar Shaheed* [Immortal Martyr] which was published in *Aazan* (Second issue, 1965) is perhaps the most illustrative short story of Dewan that presents the issue if patriotism and at the same time alluded to persecution faced by many Muslims in Assam who were oftenincarcerated as alleged Pakistani spies during the Indo-Pak war. Rahman (2012) indicated that during the period 1952-1971, around two lakh Muslims were pushed out of Assam as "East Pakistanis" and "undesirable elements". Assam government under Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha implemented the Prevention of Infiltrators (from Pakistan) programme (PIP) during the period 1964-1967 and deported 1,90,000 persons from Assam(Dutta, 2015). The history of stigmatizing the Muslims of migrant origin in Assam as 'foreigner', 'Bangladeshi', 'infiltrator' and 'illegal immigrant' starts then and it continues till date in media and popular discourse about the problem of foreigners in Assam. In this story, Arif is a soldier who is called to duty to fight against Pakistan in Kashmir. He is in a dilemma to leave his family behind but remembers the religious saying *Hubbul Watan Minal Imaan* [Love for one's country is a branch of faith]. He puts his country above his family. Arif ultimately dies in the war leaving behind his wife and three children.

The story is very simple and Arif is presented almost like one of the quintessential 'patriotic Muslim' characters that appear in Bollywood movies with the right shades of patriotism and not so subtle politically correct dialogues. Like Bollywood's caricature of Muslims that are presented as a contrast to what normally Muslims are (and that's why it called *filmy),* Arif appears to be an epitome of patriotism despite being a Muslim in a contemporary milieu when even ordinary Muslims are liable to be suspected as "undesirable elements". But the story can be read as a re-assertion of "Indian" identity by a generation of people whose ancestors might have migrated to Assam but they are equally dedicated to the motherland as any other citizen of this country. This penitential assertion of Indian identity as a self-inflicted pain and an unrequited love, as we will see later, becomes a recurring theme in translingual writing from Assam. The Bengal origin translingual writers often focus on this citizenship issue as an internalized conflict in their stories and through their characters creates a Coleridgean 'suspension of disbelief' infusing the "semblance of truth" into an otherwise hostile environment where newspaper headlines and television screens resuscitate the reality every day by counting millions of foreigners in Assam.

3.3. Ahijuddin Sheikh

The question of citizenship and a deliberate attempt by the mainstream discourse to brand any descendant of East Bengal origin as 'Bangladeshi' through a scrupulous process of otherization resurface again in the short stories of another translingual writer, Ahijuddin Sheikh. His two major anthologies of short stories are *Balichar* [Alluvial island] and Kechkaal [Worriment]. His stories are set in the char areas and revolve around the lives, struggle, poverty and exploitation of the people living in those areas. The hopes and frustrations, dreams and disappointments, poverty, injustice and an unequal fight with the eroding banks of the river

Brahmaputra are the recurring themes in his short stories. Sheikh's roots in char areas and a seemingly reverse identification with the migrant origin are expressed through his frequent use of the spoken local dialects of Goalpara in his stories (Khatoniar, 2014) which seeks to portray the battle of identities: the struggle of a torn identity. As a translingual writer with an 'official' mother-tongue which he uses with dexterity, his stories allow him to keep a window open through the 'spoken words' of his characters to look back into his origin. He is extremely at ease with both and at the same time maintains a calculated distance to observe the conflict, tensions and the interaction between the two. He seems to be occupying the two spaces simultaneously in Bakhtinian dialogical relation where his present language option is in constant conversation with his natural language at home.

The identity crisis issue is presented as a stream of consciousness in Sheikh's short story *O Mur Sikuni Desh (2014)* [O' My Enchanting Country] where the protagonist Anwar while being harassed by the police as a 'suspected Bangladeshi' continues to ask himself why is he not an Indian? Surviving a small-time goat re-seller in the city he refused to pay extortion money to some local youths. In order to teach him a lesson, those youths report to the local police that Anwar is a Bangladeshi. As a routine, he is called to the police station where he manages to hush up the case by bribing the officials. After some time, his case resurfaces through the bureaucratic process and this time for expatriation. After receiving a 'foreigner notice'[1] from the Foreigners Tribunal,

[1] Under Indian laws namely Foreigners Act, 1946 read with the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, the police authorities may allege or suspect that a particular person is a foreigner and has illegally entered into India (Assam) from the specified territory i.e., Bangladesh after 25.03.1971 and send the reference to the local Foreigners Tribunal. On receipt of such a reference, a 'Notice' is served upon the suspected person to provide sufficient evidence in support of his/her claim to be a citizen of India. Under section 9 of the Foreigners Act, 1946, the onus of proving that a person is not a foreigner shall lie upon such

he goes to a relative Lokman for advice:

> Lokman read the notice at a glance and said – 'As you are not an India andcame from Bangladesh, this notice has been issued!'
>
> Anwar shouted back in anger – 'What are you saying, am I not an Indian?
>
> …My ancestors are permanent residents of Sarkarer village…my grandfather used to play Dotara…played musical instruments with the famous folk band of the Zamindars of Gauripur…my grandfather, great-grandfather all lived and died here…how have I become a Bangladeshi now?'

It was just the beginning of the ordeal for Anwar. He goes on to present his documents before the tribunal but failed to convince the judge. Then he appeals in the High Court but the High Court rather orders for his immediate detention by police. To avoid detention and on the advice of Lokman, he goes into hiding. Then, after dismissal in the high court, when Lokman suggests that he should appeal in the Supreme Court, Anwar loses his patience. He is tired of running from police, lost all his money in fighting the case at courts and he refuses to sign an appeal petition. His worst nightmare visits him – police will take him to the border and hand him over to Bangladesh Rifles to pushing him back to Bangladesh.

Another short story of Ahijuddin Sheikh *Simantor Sipare* [On the Other side of the Border] introduces the 'third space' in tandem with Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity (Bhabha 1990; Bhabha 1994; Bhabha 1996). One of the central characters in the story Jerina and her husband Pojir are hounded by the police one night and dumped off on the other side of the border under the infamous Prevention of Infiltrators (from Pakistan)

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person. Unlike in a suit in the Civil Court where the burden of proof lies on the plaintiff in view of Section 101 of the Evidence Act, the State is not required to adduce evidence in the proceeding and burden lies on such person to prove to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that he is not a foreigner.

programme (PIP). The incident is retold by her sister Mobina to the protagonist in these words:

> At that time under the PIP law police authorities huddled together innumerable innocent persons and abandoned them overnight at the Pakistan border like dogs.There was an atmosphere of fear and terror around.

After some time, Jerina's father writes to Pojir, now in East Pakistan, asking him to send her to India. Pojir sends her to India and she gives birth to her child Mojammil. Then Bangladesh liberation war starts and Jerina is stuck here in India. One day, Mojammil goesmissing and he has been taken to Bangladesh by Jerina's brother-in-law Najir. Later Jerinabrings back her son from Bangladesh through an arrangement with a local trader. But after some days, she gets a letter from her husband Pojir asking her to go back to Bangladesh ashe is ill. Jerina finally decides to go back to her husband along with her son. This back-and-forth shuttling of Jerina runs parallel to an existential dilemma that runs deep into the livesof many immigrants universally. It seems that in her ultimate decision the future of her sonin India runs supreme and she says:

> Abbajan, I want to return to Bangladesh. Your son-in-law is not keeping well. The big question is Mujammil's future. I can allow his future to be doomed by staying inIndia.

Jerina, who was an Indian citizen with all her family members in India is thus pushed to theother side of the border. Her painful journeys, periodic physical separation from family, husband and son ultimately thrust her to the other side of the border making her a Bangladeshi at the end. Jerina is like Kadmbari in Rabindranath Tagore's short story "Dead or Alive" where "Kadambari died to prove that she had not died" (Tagore, 2011).

Assamese translingual writers of East Bengal origin in Assamese thus militate against the contemporary socio-political over-

simplified binaries of Indian-Bangladeshi / indigenous- infiltrator discourses. They resist, through their writing the offensively dichotomous categories of 'us/them', 'either/or' that has occupied the popular mindset over the years since anti-foreigners agitations of the 1970s. This dominant bicultural paradigm has given rise to extremely adversarial polarities that feed on the misplaced notions of exclusion and purity. This bifurcated worldview ignores the multiple subject-positions, desires and inclusive aspirations of the translingual population of the char-chapori areas. The continuous questioning of citizenship, nagging suspicion of being Bangladeshi and stigmatization of a community in terms of their dress, culture, dialectal accent (impurity) overshadowed by poverty and a feral existence with minimal access to human development resources forms a thematic foundation for hybridity in translingual writing. As a central postcolonial Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity thus strongly reflects in theirwritings that constricts a new culture and identity within conditions of social antagonism and inequity.

In another short story by Sheikh, aptly titled as "Bangladeshi", Nurbanu is detained in a police station in Assam while she was coming back to Assam from Arunachal Pradesh. She is uneducated, poor, suffering from tuberculosis and has a baby. She and her family members, like innumerable others from char areas migrated to the neighbouring state of Arunachal Pradesh when they were driven out of Bodoland areas. Before that, they were displaced from their ancestral villages as they lost their land to river erosion. So, displacedtwice with their own country, Nurbanu and family are now locked up in a Police Station aslocal youths are suspecting that the group of people coming back from Arunachal are all Bangladeshi. They are protesting in front of the Police Station. Later everybody is releasedby police including all other members of Nurbanu's family after checking their papers but there are no documents for Nurbanu as her husband is unable to go to her ancestral villageto collect the papers. A husband of a

fellow detainee tries to help her and reaches out to some officials to get the documents for Nurbanu. The issue is that it is time-consuming and extremely difficult to locate such interior char village. One has to take a boat from the nearest town Moirabari and cross four other chars to reach Nurbanu's home at Nupurchar! So it is even difficult for a resourceful person to get the required documents like certified copies of voter lists and other acceptable documents prior to 1966 linking a particular married woman to her family members. Nurbanu waiting for the paper and seeing no hope in the world apparently turns schizophrenic. In the last scene, we can see her suffering from a suicidal tendency and shout out these words:

> The kid is crying. Coughing up blood, Nurbanu continues to scream – 'You kill me…you butcher me here…'
>
> In this colourful world, she doesn't want to live anymore. Her freedom and democratic rights are now locked up in a police station."

Thus, like Jerina, Nurbanu also wants to escape from the present, the painful reality and escape to another space, real or constructed (Bangladesh or death). This third space is a way of articulating that the present binary constructs of culture and identity do not hold anymore, rather it opens up a new reality blurring the limitations of existing constraints, leading to an 'interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative' (Bhabha 1994) space. The construction of the third space by the translingual writer is a kind of "transgression and subversion of dualistic categories" (Law, 1997). But, at the same time, the construction of such a third space that provides an alternative to the exclusivist identity narrative, it is the overall spatial politics of adoption, acceptance and collaboration with a new language which is termed as "new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (Bhabha, 1994).

3.4. Hafiz Ahmed

Dr Hafiz Ahmed has published three major volumes of short stories: *Paar* [Riverbank] (1989), *Bipanna Odhikar* [Endangered Rights] (2014) and Bekit *Jetia Ahe Ban* [When the flood comes to Beki] (2017). Ahmed makes a bold declaration in a preface to his latest volume his stories are present the life-struggles (*jibon-jontrona)* of a much-oppressed section of the society – the people from char areas of Assam and how they are facing lack of access to propereducation, never-ending erosion and floods, exploitation by corrupt officials, ethnic cleansing by terrorist groups and persecution by the state apparatus as suspected foreigners in their own land (Ahmed, 2017). Ahmed experiments with his language keep it simple and avoids anyhighly philosophical overtones. He tries to fill in the void that the mainstream Assamese literature has created in its almost insignificant representation of lives and issues of a large number of people living in char areas of Assam (Bora, 2017).

In his short story "Fakharuddinor Chiortu" [The Scream of Fakhruddin], Hafiz Ahmed very subtly focuses on the issue of internal displacement in Assam. The story unfolds against the settingsof a Na'Paomua Village around Golaghat. The landlord Nabin Gogoi, who didn't pay any remuneration to the workers continued to protract the payment which was long overdue on some pretext or the other. Finally, to avoid the payment altogether, the landlord used the easiest weapon against a migrant worker: he got them arrested as "suspected foreigners". Thestory presents the case of "suspected foreigners" that often hogs the headlines of newspapersin Assam wherein it is reported that such and such numbers of "uspected foreigners" are arrested in such and such place. But later when these people are found to be Indians, the same newspapers fail to highlight that news and relegate the update on the indigence to a corner of inside pages. The story of Fakhruddin is no different:

> Fakhruddin and others…were shifted to Jagiroad police station by police as per their claimed addresses. They spent a night in Jagiroad Police station. Border police inquiredwhether they were really the inhabitants of Nellie or not and after ascertaining their addresses drop them at their respective homes in that village" (Ahmed, 2017).

The net result of the ordeals of people like Fakhruddin is that they did not get paid for their work and the landlord Nabin Gogoi just used the bogie of "suspected Bangladeshi" by paying some local youths and got them arrested by Police. In this story, the lives of the workers whoare internally displaced within the state due to the Nellie massacre of 1983 is presented in a realistic context and underlines the painful realities of the people who are 'different' or 'the other' and unscrupulously branded as "suspected foreigners" in popular media and reflect a contemporary mindset prevailing among the mainstream Assamese society. This is a recurring theme in Hafiz Ahmed's short stories.

In the short story, "Bipanna Odhikar" [Endangered Rights] Hafiz Ahmed presents three contrasting charter. Here again, Muzibur Rahman is arrested by police on the pretext of "suspected Bangladeshi". But his friend Anupam Hazarika came to his rescue and tried to support his case in the police station. When he identified Muzibur as his childhood friend to police the reaction of the police officer Sharma is typical in such situation and reflects the psyche against the people of distant east Bengal origin in Assam who more than a century ago shifted from one area of the same state (Assam in pre-independence):

> Just because he is your friend, a Bangladeshi rickshaw-wala with a beard, wearing lungi and cap, doesn't become an Indian. And how come a Bangladeshi is your friend….?" Sharma said in astonishment" (Ahmed, 2017).

The story presents an irony of history. Muzibur, who is now suspected as a Bangladeshi, is descendent of Sager Ali who participated in Sepoy Mutiny against the British East India

Company in 1857 and, thus, stresses the point that people from char areas are living in Assam for centuries. The story presents the case of a prevalent tendency of the police authorities to accuse people randomly as "suspected Bangladeshi". Interestingly, the relatives of a famous indigenous Assamese short story writer and a former President of Assam Sahitya Sabha Syed Abdul Malik were also issued a notice as a "doubtful voter" or suspected Bangladeshi by Assam Police in the past (Azad, 2017). Freedom fighter Sager Ali's descendant Muzibur is facing the same fate at the hands of police but this story also highlights the fact that contrary to the behaviour of Nabin Gogoi in the other short story "Fakharuddinor Chiortu" we have people like Anupam Hazarika who comes forward to help and support the victims of such injustice. At the end of the story, Anupam shouts at the police officer Sharma and there is a closure in the apology expressed by the police officer:

> "…Muzibur Rahman is born in this Assam and he is the descendant of the onlymartyr of Sepoy Mutiny[2] from Assam Sager Ali. He is an Assamese as much as you arein life and death…but such a youth is detained by you as a foreigner…in fact, it is ultra-Assamese like you are destroying the Assamese society" - journalist Hazarika started panting in a feverish voice.
>
> "We are extremely sorry, Mr Hazarika, police officer Sharma said in an apologetic voice. (Ahmed, 2017)

Violence against such internally displaced persons in Assam, the 'Na'Asomiya' people, in recent years is aptly portrayed in another short story of Hafiz Ahmed - *Asroy Shibiroloi Nami aha Atmabur* [Souls Descending on the Relief Camps]. The story is set in the temporary rescue camp at Bansbari, Barpeta that is put

[2] Sepoy Mutiny, also known as the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the Indian Mutiny, the Great Rebellion, the Revolt of 1857, the Indian Insurrection and India's First War of Independence, as a major, but ultimately unsuccessful, uprising in India in 1857–58 against the rule of the British East India Company, which functioned as a sovereign power on behalf of the British Crown.

up by the authorities for the people fleeing from ethnic cleansing in Bodoland areas of Assam. The story presents the similar fate of the people through the wandering 'souls' of similar incidents from the past that happenedin Nellie and Gujarat:

> Tired from crying when the people in the camp were finally sleeping, souls of persons burnt alive or killed by terrorists' bullets started to come down to the earthand entered the camps. The souls were searching for their relatives. Souls of mothers searching for their sons, souls of dead daughters were searching for theirbeloved fathers. (Ahmed, 2017)

The lives and struggles of internally displaced people again form the backdrop of another short story of Hafiz Ahmed – "Fazal Miar Ek Jotil Prosnor Uttar Bichari" [In Search of an Answerto the Critical Question of Fazal Mia]. Fazal Mia is a person who is facing the legal process and police actions as he is suspected a Bangladeshi. His village was washed out by the river Beki and he was forced to migrate to a city in search of a job. When he is working inthe city the local corrupt police officer demands a bribe which he refused to pay. The officer then filed a report against him identifying him as a suspected Bangladeshi. Fazal Mia is now detained by police and his fate hangs in the hands of courts:

> …only by an order of court I can come out of this detention camp. Even if I am releasedultimately, will the government return my years of life spent in jail? Will they compensate for the money I spent to fight these legal cases and the incessantharassment I faced during these times?

Questions like these reverberate in the short stories of Assamese translingual writers like Hafiz Ahmed. It reflects the constructed binaries of present-day Assam where in the name of Bangladeshi/Foreigner a large number of people are made the 'other'. It also represents a "binary structure of contemporary bicultural relations". It is against such binary division that Bhabha (1994) proposes a redesigning of laws and institutions that militate

against any contemporary bicultural relations. The Assamese short stories by translingual writers present such an alternative design where present contentions in identities, cultures,norms and social practices and calls for a new inclusive Assamese society through creative"meaning and representation" of characters and events in their writings (Bhabha 1994).

CHAPTER 4

Translingual Poetry from Assam

Writers focused in this study belong to the migrant population who are termed as *Na'Asomiya* and are the inhabitants of *chars or char chaporis*[1] (riverine areas) of Assam. They are the Muslim peasants who migrated from the 'East Bengal' districts like Mymensingh, Pabna, Bagura, Sylhet and Rongpur from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century (Ahmed, 2010). These migrants made a conscious decision to adopt the language of their hosts – Assamese – as their mother tongue and made concerted efforts to assimilate into large Assamese society. Way back in 1899, Hussain Ali Sarkar, a migrant, set up the first Assamese medium school in Morabari in Nagaon district of Assam (Ahmed, 2011). Then in 1902 Usman Ali Saudagar established a Moktab at Alitangoni village in Nagaon district. An Assamese teacher Mahendra Chandra Mahanta was brought in from Bardowa to teach the language. This Moktab was first elevated as a Lower Primary school in 1910 and then as Middle English school in 1924 (Chetia, 2002). That small Mokatab was

[1] Char chapori (Assamese: চৰ চাপৰি) is an area of Brahmaputra river and its tributaries in the Indian state Assam constituting flood plain sediments. According to the Assam Government record, the char chapori covers 3,608 km2 of the Brahmaputra basin, or 4.6% of Assam's area. The people of char chapori face a certain number of problems including soil erosion, over flooding, illiteracy, high population growth and organized anti-migrant hate crime against them.

the second Assamese medium school establishedin a char-chapori area in Assam (Ahmed, 2002). The next major watershed year was 1951 when the leaders of the migrant population living in riverine areas of Assam announced to register themselves as Assamese speaking during the census. They decided to identify themselves as Assamese and teach the language to their children. It was a unique experiment in history when a migrant population by plan and design relinquished their mother tongue and formally adopted another language in official census. As a result of this historic decision and partly due to major part of Sylhet district going to East Pakistan, the number of Assamese speakers in Assam rose to a very substantial figure of 56.7 per cent. The then Superintendent of Census operations in Assam, R.B. Bhagaiwala, wrote in his report:

> "There is a striking increase in the percentage of people who speak Assamese in 1951 (56.7) over those of 1931, which was only 31.4 per cent; there is an equally striking decrease in the percentage of people speaking Bengali in 1951 which is only 16.5 against 26.8 per cent in 1931…The figures do not fail to reflect the aggressive linguistic nationalism now prevailing in Assam, coupled with the desire of many persons among the Muslims as well as tea garden labour immigrants to adopt Assamese as their mother tongue in the state of their adoption" (Census of India, 1951, vol. XII, Part 1-A, pp. 413-14).

Over the years, the migrant community from chor chapori in Assam has been trying to integrate itself with the mainstream Assamese society and culture. In fact, the present-daywriters from the community are the third-generation Assamese speakers. They are the newgeneration of writers who represent the "translingual imagination" described by Kellman (200) as "a genuine and rich tradition". The authors though writing in their adopted language continue to reflect "an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture and nation"(Yildiz, 2012). Azade Seyhan (2001) found that the expressions of the translingual writers are not

about the appropriation of a second language but an expression of experiences drawn from collective memory of 'migration, resettlement, and redefinition of identity'. Translingual writers from Assam reveal such a strong stream of consciousness in their poetry that invariably draws from the struggle to project a new identity as Na'Asomiya butfalls back on their frustration over the question of identity, indigenousness and a lurking accusation of being a foreigner or worse an infiltrator in their own country. We will discuss these issues of migration, identity, language, culture and social stigma that constitute a setof a recurring theme in the poems of translingual writers from Assam.

4.1. Translingual Imagination in Assamese Poetry

In this section, a few poets, some well-established in published anthologies and others who are emerging as an assertive voice creating a new set of poems now called as 'Miayah Poetry' are discussed. Among the first group are M Ilim Uddin dewan, Ismail Hussain (Sr), Khobir Ahmed, Hafiz Ahmed, Ismail Hossain (Jr), Humayun Kabir, Jamsher Ali, Fazlul Haque, Akhtarull Islam, Irafanul Haque, Jabed Ali, Ibne Sayed, Hazrat Ali, Abdul Khalek and Khairul Alam. A visible figure among these poets is Sakina Khatun of Barpeta who has published a number of anthologies like *Shilpir Sapiun* (1975), *Jibonor Pat* (1979), *Man-Nijora* (1991) and *Atmar Nishobdo Krondon* (1991).

Azan magazine edited by M Ilim Uddin Dewan and published in 1964 initiated a numberof these translingual writers into Assamese poetry. Though he himself published just one collection of poems called *Monor Akuti,* a number of his poems were published in various newspapers, journals and magazines. But, *Azan* was a torchbearer of translingual writingthat introduced many writers and poets from char chapori to the world. Some of these notable poets were: Irfanul Haque (*Hridoy Aru Mon Korobi*), Jabed Ali (*Borohini, Kune Bujibo Mor Hiyar Bedona*), Abdur

Rahman Firozi (*Kune Bhal Pay Mok?*), Ibne Sayed (*Abegor Sur*), Kamruz Zaman (*Surya Sandhan*), M Matiar Rahman (*Jibon-Juri*), M Ibrahim Ali (*Anubhutir Safura, Snmritir Darpan*), Hekim Ahmad (*Samayor Chobi*), Abdur Rahim Mustafi (*Nilogor Banhi, Jibon Jeuti, Sonali Sapun and Shantir Suravi*), and Dewan Abdul Kadir (*Marupath*).

The next group of translingual poets from Assam included Humayun Kabir (*Dhumketu*), MAkbar Hussain (*Spondon, Jonotar Kontho*), Abu Sayed (*Songram*), and Hazrat Ali Ahmed (*Sur Aru Kobita*). Islamil Hussain (Sr, 1947-2012) of Barpalli, Barpeta, Assam is one of the prominent names among the translingual writers from "Azan" group who wrote in Assamese and established himself as one of the most known voices of the community. Though he didn't publish any dedicated anthology of poems he started writing poems wayback in 1964 with his first poem *Pora Mati* which was published in the journal of Madhav Chaudhury College (Ahmed, 2002). His famous poems are "Nisprodip Guwahati: Dhormoghot", "Pora Mati", "Keitaman Sketch", "Agnisombhoba", "Protikha", "Natun Patoni", "Kene ache Mandia", "Bo'ragi", "Oporajeo", "Janambhumi", "Kobiloi", "Basanta", "Tejor Swakhor", "Nirbak Nazruloloi", "Pritibi Okonman", "Egharo Septemboror Malita", "Tomar Janmadinot" and "Antohsrot". He has also translated a number of poems of foreign writers in Assamese (Ahmed, 2002).

The last decade of the twentieth century saw the arrival of three promising translingual poets in Assamese: Khobir Ahmed, Ismail Hossain (Jr) of Koyakuchi, Barpeta and Hafiz Ahmed of Mandia. Khobir Ahmed is a well-known short story writer but he started writing poems early on and came to limelight with the publication of his first anthology *Jetialoike Jiyai Thke Surya* (1987). In his preface, well known Assamese critic Homen Borgohain praised Khobir Ahmed's poems as expressions of love for humanity, appreciation of life, and aspirations for the future. His poems are, according to Borgohain, reflections of the poet's

sincere feelings and deep emotions that ooze from his choice of words. His other anthologies are *Nagorik aru Onyanyo Kobita, Eifaley Roza Jay, Tumar Sohorot Tumi Nai, Nodiyalor Atmakotha, Uchchedir Kobita* and *Mrityur Biruddhe Prothom Protibad.* In all his poems Khobir Ahmed echoes a rebellious but hopeful voice from the ground drenched in the struggle of an unsurmountable life force against oppression and deprivation (Ahmed, 2014).

Ismail Hossain (Jr)'s noteworthy anthologies are *Jibon Aru Manuh Bishoyok* (1994), *Noiporiya, Chithi* and *Bigyapon* (2000). He has also edited a special volume of poems called *Sampordayikota Birudhi Asomiya Kobita Songkolon*. He received the prestigious Ambikagiri Roychaoudhury Award from Asom Sahitya Sabha for his volume Jibon *Aru Manuh Boshoyok* (1994). Celebrated poet and Assamese literary critic Nalinidhar Bhattacharya appreciated the honesty of expression in his poems painting images of strife, emotions as well as social and political thought processes (Ahmed, 2002). Ismail Hossain (Jr) focuses on the plight of the working class, violence against women, communalism and strong resentment against the hypocrisy of a section of the intellectuals. His poems are measured voices of protests that don't degenerate into mere sloganeering (Ahmed, 2014).

Dr Hafiz Uddin Ahmed is another strong translingual poet who has emerged as a defiant voice of protest and emotional struggle for existence and identity that a person of migrant origin faces in a politically surcharges environment. His recurrent themes are discrimination and deprivation of Na'Asomiya people from char chapori, economic imperialism, communalism and superstitions that engulf the society in general, nationalism, patriotism and above all a strong sense of disappointment against the mainstream Assamese society for not accepting the people of char chapori as a part of greater Assamese community. His remarkable volumes of poems are *Bansbarir Fazal Miya* (2002, 2007) *and Najanu Taik Kot Log Paichilu* (2017). Both the anthologies flow from painful memories of ethnic violence inflicted

upon the poor, disadvantaged, illiterate and helpless people of Assam who happen to be of migrant origin and who still face such atrocities even after living in the state for more than a century. The locations like Nellie, Kokrajhar, Bansbari and Khagrabari sets the opus of his poems with a looming shadow of memories from the past violent incidents that marks the recent history of Assam and its anti-migrant agitations.

One of the older translingual poets who wrote extensively before this prominent trio - Khobir Ahmed, Ismail Hossain (Jr) and Hafiz Ahmed – is M Akbar Hussain. He published as many as fourteen anthologies that included *Spondon, Beki Nodir Choi Ghor, Itihasor Neel Noksa, Muktr Mohana, Amit Birjo, Mor Desh Mor Jibor Kobita, Sfito Koborbor*, and *Ami*. His poems recurrently present the stories of oppression, exploitation, deprivation and injustice that is an integral part of the lives of char chapori people – the section of Assamese society with a migrant past. Taj Uddin Ahmed is another elderly poet who published just one but the very representative volume of poems entitled *Manuhor Babe Kichu Sobdo Kichu Kotha.* His poems bring in the environment, nature, flora and fauna as a backdrop to the painful existence of sub-human lives in riverine areas. The disappointment and disillusionment of the poet against a section of mainstream Assamese society who refuses to accept the translingual population as a part of the larger Assamese society even after so many years of adopting the language have a strong expression in his poems. In fact, this shattering of "imagined community" or a "translingual imagination" is a stream of consciousness that flows beneath all the translingual poems as a collective reflection of all the writers.

The next generation of young translingual poets from Assam includes a few promising names – Mazam A Ahmed, Goher Ali Mondol, Abdus Samad Ahmed, Riyazuddin Ahmed, Shahidul Islam, Jamsher Ali and late Safar Ahmed. Mazam Ahmed published two anthologies – *Sotabdir Sheshor Thiyo Hoi* (2010) and *Luitor Premot* (2011) – that were appreciated well. Mazam

Ahmed continues the saga of painful existence and sufferings of the people who live in the riverine areas of Assam whose ancestors came to this land manyyears ago in search of food, prosperity and a dignified life. He also depicts the tragic love story of these people who love, adore and accept Assamese as their mother tongue, try to learn, imitate and assimilate cultural elements but at the same time face the ironic rejectionfrom a section of the Assamese society who hates them as Bangladeshi, infiltrators, land grabbers, 'suspected' foreigners – the quintessential "other". Mazam Ahmed's poetry brings out this identity crisis and struggles for recognition as a part of Assamese society very poignantly again and again in poems like "Kornodhar", "Noukabihar" and "Asomiya Hoboloi".

Goher Ali Mondol's two anthologies – *Luitor Gaurav* and *Ekhila Paat* – present a new assertive voice that goes beyond disillusionment with the Na'Asomiya identity questions and busks in a tone of confidence demanding equity and justice for the community that they deserve. Though the shadow of disenchantment and a feeling of letdown also appearsin his poems like "Ami Chorbasi" and "Opobaad", he presents a far more optimistic picture in poems like "Shankar Azanor Desh", Parua reposing faith in unity, peace and universal brotherhood.

Abdus Samad Ahmed's anthology *Kobir Thikanat Ekhon Chithi* contains a number of poemsthat are reflective of emotions and feelings of his personal life but don't fail to highlight the periodic violence that is unleashed on the people of char chapori who migrate farther to other places by losing their land to the river erosion of Brahmaputra. In poems like "Manobotar Bodhya Bhumit Ekhontek", he depicts lives of riot victims (of Bodoland violence) in shelter camps as being forced to migrate the second time from their homes and imperilled to face vigilante vehemence instead of just social stigmatization as foreigners. He deprecates the terrorists for their crimes against humanity and empathizes with the victims with a compassionate voice (Ahmed, 2014).

Episodic violence, riots and targeted attacks against the Char

Chapori population in various parts of Assam over the years have been a constant theme in the translingual writings. Riyazuddin Ahmed's poetry attains special significance as he is a victim himself – being an orphan of the infamous Nellie massacre of 1983[2] that took away his parents and relatives. Poems in his anthology *Jue Pura Kolija* are drenched in the memories of that violence but nevertheless, reveal his deepest bond with Assam and a strong sense of patriotism. His poems like "Moi Asombasi" echo the same emerging assertive tone that we discern in the new genus of translingual writers like Mazam Ahmed and Goher Mondol in saying that come what may they are not abandoning their homeland and will rather fight for their rights.

Among the other new translingual poets, Shahidul Islam is fast emerging as a promising voice from the ground with a refreshing style and tenor. His volumes of poems *Tumar Babe* and *Tumak Log Puar Porai* (2010) have a romantic touch though a number of his poems actually goes back to the life-struggles and pains of char chapori community, communalism, and looming violence in the contemporary milieu. His poems underline the loss of humanity in the face of sectarian division in the name of religion, language and race. In poems like "Firozar Chaporiloi Joa Nohol", he exposes the wounds that ethnic violence inflicts on the people of char chapori from time to time.

Late poet Safar Ahmed left behind a set of poems (*Prem aru Pritibi,* 2013) that transcends from romantic emotions to the

[2] The Nellie massacre took place in central Assam during a six-hour period in the morning of 18 February 1983. Although the involvement of members of Indigenous Assamese People in carrying out the massacre is commonly evoked, the identities of the rioters are debated by scholars. The massacre claimed the lives of 2,191 people (unofficial figures run at more than 10,000) from 14 villages. The victims were Muslims of East Bengal whose ancestors had relocated in pre-Partition British India. They were descendants of the migrants who came to Assam on the direct patronage of the then Assam Government of British India in the first decade of the 20th century. It has been described as one of the worst pogroms since World War II.

realities of present-day society and its attitude towards the people of migrant origin in Assam. While his earlier poems were talking mainly about love, the power of youth and limitless dreams on a young mind, he gradually became aware of the prevailing situation in his environment and registered a strong sense of abhorrence against the corrupt rulers-oppressors in his later poems like "Kekurir Kukurjak" and "Dispuror Kukur".

Jamsher Ali is a known face among the translingual writers of Assam. His poems are published as a volume entitled *Hasnahana Rati* (2009) that highlights his deep sense of faith on humanism. He gives voice to the issues of socio-cultural identity, exploitation, rootlessness and utter deprivation that ails his community. Against such a disconsolate atmosphere Ali imagines a peaceful and prosperous society and doesn't become disheartened. In his journey through poems, he stays close his community, the people fromriverine areas, but travels with them from their villages to the city and provides us with a holistic picture of their lives in both the spaces.

There are a number of other translingual writers who regularly publish poems in Assamesein newspapers, magazines and journal. A number of them are women like Halima Ahmed,Rashida Ahmed and Ramena Begum who are now writing from their experiences of struggling journey through the lives in riverine areas.

4.2. Miyah Poetry

The word 'Miyah' is used in Assam to disparagingly refer to a person with East Bengal origin whose ancestors migrated to this part of the country many decades ago. Though, literally, the word generally means a gentleman in Muslim social parlance (as in Bengali, Urdu, and Hindi), in Assam it is laced with an abusive intent to denigrate someone socially indicating that the person is "a Muslim illegal immigrant from Bangladesh" or worse as someone "who is neither Assamese nor Indian" (Hussain, 2018a). In April 2016, a renowned translingual writer Hafiz Ahmed wrote

a poem entitled "Write, Write Down I am a Miyah" in his social network post emulating Palestinian poet Mahmoud Derwish' famous poem "Identity Card" (1964) that starts with these lines:

Write down!
I am an Arab
And my identity card number is fifty thousand
I have eight children
And the ninth will come after a summer
Will you be angry?

The casually written poem almost as a facile parody of Dwarwish's poem, however, created a different impression among a number of young translingual writers of this generation. In response to Ahmed's poem a number of budding poets from Assam like Shalim M. Hussam, Rehna Sultana, Rejaul Hossain, Sultan Mahmud Mirdha, Aman Wadud, Shahjahan Ali Ahmed, Shamim Ahmed, and Biswajit Bora wrote similar poems creating what they termed as 'Miyah Poetry' as an attempt to re-appropriate the word 'Miyah' notwithstanding the slur attached to the word and so much as reclaiming "…their identities as Assamese as well as Indians" (Hussain, 2018a).

More than a hundred poems have been written by the 'Miyah poets' and they have drawn attention within and outside India (Ahmed, 2017). Thematically these poems also highlight the issue of river erosion in Assam and how millions of displaced persons are compelled to leave their villages and as uncared for by the governments, become floating population in cities only to be derided as "Miyah", "Bangladeshi" or "Suspected Foreigners" in mainlandAssam. Besides the re-assertion of identity, the poems air a strong desire 'to be heard' from the Char Chapori population of Assam (Hussain, 2018a). With an angry voice, sometimes with a bellicose tone, the poems try to attract the attention of the world at large to the drudgeries of life in lowland Assam from social, political and environmental perspectives.

In a way, just like Hafiz Ahmed drawing inspiration from Mahmud Darwish, the new generation of translingual poets of Assam (the 'Miyah Poets') are influenced by the famous Harlem Renaissance poet of 1920s Langston Hughes who described his community "…as having been a slave, worker, singer and victim who suffered discrimination in several different ways from several different people in several different places" (Amanda, 2007). Like Hughes, the Miyah poets of Assam talk about the extreme pain, discrimination and sufferings of a section of the society as if the word 'Miyah' reminds them of their origin and they refused to feel ashamed about it. In the poem "Negro" (1958), Langston Hughes writes:

Negro

I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

I've been a slave:
Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean.
I brushed the boots of Washington.

I've been a worker:
Under my hand the pyramids arose.
I made mortar for the Woolworth Building.

I've been a singer:
All the way from Africa to Georgia
I carried my sorrow songs.
I made ragtime.

I've been a victim:
The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo.
They lynch me still in Mississippi.

I am a Negro:
Black as the night is black,
Black like the depths of my Africa.

Akin to these lines, in a poem titled "*Nana Ami Lekhchi Go*" [Nana I Have Written] (2016), Shalim M. Hussain writes:

Nana I have written attested countersigned
And been verified by a public notary
That I am a Miyah
Now see me rise
From flood waters
Float over landslides
March through sand and marsh and snakes
Break the earth's will draw trenches with spades
Crawl through fields of rice and diarrhoea and sugarcane
And a 10% literacy rate
See me shrug my shoulders curl my hair
Read two lines of poetry one formula of math
Read confusion when the bullies call me Bangladeshi
And tell my revolutionary heart
But I am a Miyah.

–"*Nana Ami Lekhchi Go*" by Shalim M Hussain (2016)

CHAPTER 4

Theoretical Perspective of Translingual Writing

Critical approaches and theoretical discussions on translingualism generally focus on the writers' forced dislocation and the present theorizations need to be reviewed in the context of Assam where the translingual writers made the language shift not under any compulsion, force or threat but as a matter of conscious choice. There might be some covert political exigencies behind this move (Kar, 1990), but their language switch was deliberate and their attempt to adopt, use and internalize Assamese language was distinctly genuine. Moreover, as the new generation of translingual writers is born and mostly educated in Assamese medium schools, they are not old enough to experience any such sentient language switch. Therefore, it is important to note these two points of departure or challenges that will ameliorate our theoretical discussions around the translingual writings from Assam. My theoretical approach underpinning this study will obviously take into cognizance the larger socio-cultural contexts as well as the specific thematic perspectives that resonate in their writings.

Taking advantage of the previous theorizations relevant to this research, mainly Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" and Steven Kellman's idea of "translingual imagination" I would like to incorporate Homi Bhabha's post-

colonial theorisation on 'hybrid third space' (1994) in the present discussion. I would like to emphasize that while *imagined communities* are the new realities of modern societies and translingualism provides a new medium for the writer, the writer is never free from his past, histories, experiences and cultural roots. The translingual writer rather defies the existing binaries like indigenous- foreigner, local-outsider, and native-alien to create a 'third space' for negotiating new identities. In other words, I argue that the new theoretical paradigm in postmodern postcolonial contexts, all identities have become transient, dynamic and mutable. The resilience and constant interweaving of identities and cultures leading to an "in-between" identity counter any authenticity discourse in a multi-cultural and multi-linguistic environment (Nayak, 2010).

In recent times many scholars have questioned the notion of giving any inherent qualitative preference to 'native' writers using their 'mother tongue' and under-emphasized any 'national' label assigned to a particular set of texts (Kellman, 2000; Seyhan, 2001; Yildiz, 2012). Post-colonial studies have rather celebrated the literary contribution of the so-called foreign, non-native writers and paved the way for a new approach to study these writers and enrich our understanding of how these so-call 'non-native' writers have impacted on the status of any literature they have contributed to. Against the backdrop of the historical contexts of periodical migration of large population to Assam from different parts pre-independence India, one cannot perhaps ignore the role translingual literature has played in forming a new cultural identity for the Na'Asomya writers. Considering the importance of *literary creations* as a way of participating in any nation-building process, the translingual writings from Assam will allow a better understanding of the cultural contexts that these writers have brought to the canvas of contemporary Assamese literature.

Both the content and the language of these writers may be examined critically in order to revisit the prevailing theoretical

foregrounds of translingual writings. With historical contexts in mind, we will see that the questions of identity negotiation that will emerge from their poetry that will negate any essentialist idea of culture and language. It will help us to understand the subtle modification that I am proposing for the existing theoretical approaches to translingualism. During the reading and analysis of the representative texts (short stories and poems of translingual writers in Assamese), a number of recurring themes were observed and a few of them concerning citizenship, social stigma, identity, discrimination, poverty, and environmental challenges. In terms of the stylistic devices, ordinary day to day experiences is presented through the use of 'defamiliarization' where language alters our perceptions (Shklovsky, 2017). The writers attempt to estrange or defamiliarize the known socio-economic condition of the char chapori population and startles the indifference shown by the mainstream society inciting a Freudian uncanny feeling (Royle, 2003). The meanings played out by a translingual writer is seen as non- hierarchical, where the actual meaning is forever "deferred" or postponed in a Derridean way in the quest for achieving a much broader understanding of the cultural undertones of the words used. Jamsher Ali describes a familiar scene from our cities in the morning where workers gather at a particular spot and wait for someone to hire them for the day but transfigures the images of the boat, the Sun and the market to denote the sufferings, pain, poverty and the sheer uncertainty of livelihood that haunt the char chapori people of Assam who are displaced from their villages by river erosion:

Labour Market

Sail out on the boat of sorrow
The people
Every day
Impoverished faces

Penurious bodies
Moves out every day
In league with the Sun

Here starts the market for labour.

–"*Shromor Bozar*" [Labour Market] by Jamsher Ali
from the volume *Hasnhana Rati (2009)'*

<u>শ্ৰমৰ বজাৰ</u>

দুখৰ ডিঙাত উঠি ওলাই যায়
মানুহবোৰ
প্ৰতিটো পুৱা

জাৰ জহ কাতি কৰি
বিবৰ্ণ মুখৰ
বিধ্বস্ত চেহেৰাৰ মানুহবোৰ
সূৰ্যৰ স'তে ফেৰ পাতি
ওলাই যায় প্ৰতিদিন

বহে ইয়াত শ্ৰমৰ বজাৰ

Essentialist idea a single, monolithic and rigid nationalism militates against Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined community". At the same time, the term "hyphenated identity" used by Teddy Roosevelt in a negative manner, seems to emerge a new reality of the world today nations accommodate more and more people with mixed heritage and migrant origin with a different aspect of their individual identities reflecting different origins or "source cultures". As approaches to identity have significantly changed, social identity theories generally assume that individuals have more than a single group identity. However, although recent theories can accommodate more than one group identity in an individual, there is still a risk of stereotyping: branding anybody with a migrant origin as 'Bangladeshi',

'infiltrator', 'outsider' or more subtly 'suspected foreigner'. The search for an 'indigenous essence' that is supposedly shared by all '*khilonjia Asomiya*' still derives from an essentialist conception of identity. It suggests a stable, fixed group identity and is at risk of attributing certain stereotyped characteristics to all members of a given group. To avoid these shortfalls, it is not sufficient to allow for 'multiple group identities that may shift in salience' but each of the elements contributing to an individual's identity needs to be considered as non-stable and evolving. The concept of hybridity provides an extension and a better exposition of the hyphenated identities and Homi Bhabha (2006) described hybrid identities as 'cultural identities in a discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference'. This definition points to the different factors that impact on identity and emphasises its changing nature. However, there remain at least two issues with regard to the 'source' cultures. While the term 'hybrid' suggests a mixed ancestral past of a writer, it hardly fixes the originality problem with respect to a writer's migrant identity.

The decision to switch language and adopt another language for expressing one thought and emotions are said to be one of the most complex experience and translingual writers across the world negotiated this language shift in different ways. While some of them conceded to this dilemma throughout their lives with a sense of 'pain', like Nabokov, many of them used the new language with a distinct mastery of their own utilizing the new language as a tool for their craftsmanship. However, the primary impact of this language choice is often seen in their writing that oscillates between the cultural roots of their origin and the aspirations for an acceptance in the new language community. It often leads to a deeper identity question with respect to their social interaction with the primary speakers of the adopted language. Translingual writers in Assamese continue to face this challenge as to gain and sustain an acceptability whereby they are accommodated within the 'imagined community' that they so enthusiastically joined

more than a century ago. These writers whose ancestors migrated from another linguistic region within the same country and province took a conscious decision to adopt and declare Assamese as their mother tongue during the 1951 national census. They did so with utmost sincerity and persistently tried to learn, use and adopt the language along with its cultural constituents. While they increased the political weight of the language by increasing the number of speakers in official records and many of the stalwarts of Assamese literature accepted them to be a part of the larger Assamese society for all practical purposes terming them as Na'Asomiya.

Unfortunately, a lingering hesitancy persists till date to accept the translingual writers as a part of the larger Assamese society. A large section of the mainstream society still treats them as different and the "other" who has appropriated a language. Apropos of Teddy Roosevelt's pet aversion towards 'hyphenated Americans', these Assamese speakers are invariably subjected to public humiliation, social stigmatization and abused as infiltrators or foreigners. Their identity, citizenship and affiliation are always held under scrutiny in public spaces and the media. Cases of vicious attacks on these people from lynching to vigilante harassment while travelling within the state, to organizing ethnic cleansing through targeted violence against them are regularly reported in the media with a casual tag of 'suspected' Bangladeshi. They are always under 'suspect' and the members of the mainstream society are very nonchalant about it. The fact that most of these translingual Assamese writers belong to the third generation of the original migrants doesn't ease the situation or resolve their identity crisis.

In the following sections, we will discuss some representative poems of a few translingual poets of Assam to underline this tension that permeates their writing. We will argue that the Andersonian 'imagined community' is not a finality but a work in progress for the translingual writers who hinge on to their cultural and social constructs while presenting their work in their adopted language.

These constructs are akin to what Kellman called 'translingual imagination' that is a product of the continuous interplay of writer's social background, economic status, mother tongue, life experiences and a manifestation of his aspired identity. We further argue that translingual writers, though consciously adopts a new language for their written expressions, their texts are an extension of their socio- cultural contexts. In presenting their textual narratives they negotiate their identity and becomes a member of the 'imagined community' that they aspire for. However, this is not an easy process and we will see how feelings of disillusionment, disappointment and sometimes utter frustration mark their writing when this negotiation in not successful or failed to get due acceptance in the mainstream language community.

The question of identity negotiation in the poems of translingual writers from Assam can be traced back to 1939 when Maulana Bande Ali wrote a poem titled "Charuwar Ukti" [A Charuwa's[1] Word][2] that voiced the translingual aspirations of the poet who starts with a refusal to be attached to Bengal and goes on to assert a new identity as Assamese. In negotiating that journey he also discards the societal labels attached to him such as "Charuwa, Pamuwa, Mymensinghia" and declares himself as "Asomiya". This assertion of an identity is supported by both past pains in a former homeland and the gains – land, home, the 'holy sanctuary', good neighbours who are 'pure' and 'simple'.

Who says Bengal is my birthplace
The land where we suffered,
So left our parents and many more,
Became homeless.

(*Charuwar Ukti,* 1939)

[1] Charuwa: A word used for people from the chars.

[2] I have extensively used the available translation done by Shalim M Hussain under his Miyah Poetry project (Hussain, 2016). However, a few lines were re-translated by me wherever needed.

These lines are followed by a strong refusal to listen to those who are perhaps asking the poet to revert to his language and land. The poet will rather remain in the land where his parents are buried, he built his house, cultivated for food and refuses to be perfidious to the land:

But I will not tear the plate that feeds me
My faith will not allow me.
This land that I live in
I will revel in this land's well-being.
The land which my Aai, Abbajan
Left for the heavens
This land is my own, my golden Assam
This land is my holy sanctuary.
The land I scrape to build my house Is my own land
(*Charuwar Ukti,* 1939)

The textual-thematic analysis of this early poem will show the ideological context and creation of a new dialogic space where the simplistic binaries of native-foreigner or local- outsider are broken and new relationships, attachments, symbols are being built:

I am not a charuwa, not a pamua[3]
We have also become Asomiya
Of Assam's language, land and air,
So we equally share.
If Assamese die, so will we,
But why will we let that happen?
We will fight together,
With new energy, we will build a new future.
Where will we find such love, such respect
Where will we find such a place?
Where the plough digs up gold
Where will we find such a land of grace?

[3] Pamua- Settler

…
Let us sing in unison - we are Asomiya
No more are we Mymensinghia.
Then we need no 'borders'
When we are together as brothers,
When enemies come to loot us if they dare
We will prevent them with our chests bare.

(*Charuwar Ukti,* 1939)

Postcolonialism when dealing with literary texts often found to be focusing on the concept of nation and deals with issues of hybridity and the "the other". The translingual writers from Assam embrace this post-colonial identity negotiation as Homi Bhabha (1990) argues that the ethnic identities cannot be identified with some exclusive undiluted historical markers in postcolonial context and the emerging cultural and ethnic identities are not be negotiated in terms of a continuing cultural interaction through multiple mutation processes. Such 'identity negotiation' militates against the attempts to define a culture or a nation looking through the prism of some uniform, historically established parameters to ascribe the 'indigenous' markers. On the contrary, as Bhabha suggests in his Nation and Narration (1990), multiple cultural identities and cultural differences intermingle to recognize the emerging new identities that refuse to assign any subordinate status to any particular section of the society in modern nations. Poems written by the translingual writers of Assam bear testimony to this identity negotiation processes as they construct a narrative that proclaims that Assamese 'culture' is already a product of multiple cultural interactions over the years among various languages, cultures and traditions that existed in Assam. As a result of such "hybrid" interaction between diverse cultural identities, Assamese literature cannot superimpose any exclusive markers to the language and contents of the translingual writers. The identity negotiation that perhaps started with the poem

"Charuwar Ukti" *(*1939) by Bande Ali continues to reverberate through the later translingual poets like Khobir Ahmed and Hafiz Ahmed. In fact, there is a counter-assertion of a new identity as "Miyah Kobita" (Miyah Poems) as we will see it emerging in some recent poems by young translingual writers.

In the aftermath of the Nellie massacre in Assam in 1983, Khobir Ahmed wrote the poem "Binito Nibedon Ei Je" [I Beg to State That] in which the identity negotiation is very distinctly present in the following lines:

I beg to state that

I beg to state that
I am a settler, a hated Miyah
Whatever be the case, my name is
Ismail Sheikh, Ramzan Ali or Majid
Miyah Note that I am an Asomiya from
Assam

I have many things to say
Stories older than Assam's folktales
Stories older than the blood
Flowing through your veins

After forty years of independence
I have no space in the words of beloved writers
The brush of your scriptwriters doesn't dip in my picture
My name left unpronounced in assemblies and parliaments
On no martyr's memorial, in no news report is my name printed
Even in tiny letters.
Besides, you haven't yet decided what to call me-
Am I Miyah, Asomiya or Neo-Asomiya?

And yet you talk of the river
The river is Assam's mother, you say
You talk of trees

Assam is the land of blue hills, you say
My spine is tough, steadfast as the trees

The shade of the trees my address…
You talk of farmers, workers
Assam is the land of rice and labour, you say
I bow before paddy, I bow before sweat
For I am a farmer's boy…

I beg to state that I am a
Settler, a dirty Miyah
Whatever be the case, my name Is
Khabir Ahmed or Mijanur Miyah
Subject- I am an Assamese Asomiya.
Sometime in the last century, I lost
My address in the storms of the Padma
A merchant's boat found me drifting and dropped me here
Since then I have held close to my heart this land, this earth
And began a new journey of discovery
From Sadiya to Dhubri…

Since that day
I have flattened the red hills
Chopped forests into cities, rolled-earth into bricks
From bricks built monuments
Laid stones on the earth, burnt my body black with peat
Swam rivers, stood on the bank
And dammed floods
Irrigated crops with my blood and sweat
And with the plough of my fathers, etched on the earth
A…S…S….A…M

Even I waited for freedom
Built a nest in the river reeds
Sang songs in Bhatiyali
When the Father came visiting,

I listened to the music of the Luit
In the evening stood by the Kolong, the Kopili
And saw on their banks gold.

Suddenly a rough hand brushed my face
On a burning night in ’83
My nation stood on the black earths of Nellie and screamed
The clouds caught fire at Mukalmua and Rupohi, Juria,
Saya Daka, Pakhi Daka- homes of the Miyahs
Burnt like cemeteries
The floods of ’84 carried my golden harvest
In ’85 a gang of gamblers auctioned me
On the floor of the Assembly.

Whatever be the case, my name
Is Ismail Sheikh, Ramzan Ali or Mazid
Miyah Subject- I am an Assamese Asomiya.

(*Binito Nibedon Ei Je*, 1985)
[Translation: Shalim M Hussain under
Miyah Poetry project, 2016]

বিনীত নিবেদন এই যে
(খবিৰ আহমেদ)

বিনীত নিবেদন এই যে
মই এজন পমুৱা, এজন লাঞ্চিত মিঞা
যিয়েই নহওক কিয় মোৰ নাম
ইছমাইল শ্বেখ, ৰমজান আলি কিংবা মাজিদ মিঞা
জ্ঞাতব্য বিষয় মই অসমৰেই অসমীয়া

যিবোৰ কথা অসমৰ সাধুকথাৰ দৰেই প্ৰাচীন
যিবোৰ কথা তোমালোকৰ ধমনীত প্ৰবাহিত
ৰক্ত কণিকাতকৈও আদিম…
কোনো সহৃদয লেখকৰ লেখনিত মোৰ ঠাই নহ'ল
কোনো চিত্ৰশিল্পীৰ তুলিকাত চিত্ৰিত নহ'ল মোৰ ছবি

বিধানসভা অথবা সংসদ ভৱনত এবাৰো উচ্চাৰিত নহ'ল মোৰ কথা
কোনো শ্বহীদ বেদী অথবা কোনো সংবাদ পত্ৰত
ঘুণাক্ষৰেও লিখা নহ'ল মোৰ নাম
আনকি মোৰ কোনো সংজ্ঞাও পোৱা নহ'ল
মই মিঞা নে অসমীয়া নে ন-অসমীয়া
হৃদয় মোৰ নদীৰ দৰেই গভীৰ আৰু বহল
বৃক্ষৰ কথা কোৱা হয়, অসম নীলা পাহাৰৰ দেশ
মেৰুদণ্ড মোৰ বৃক্ষৰ দৰেই কঠিন আৰু অটল
বৃক্ষৰ ছায়াই মোৰ স্বাভাৱিক ঘৰ
কৃষক শ্ৰমিকৰ কথা কোৱা হয়, অসম কৃষি প্ৰধান দেশ
কৃষি আৰু শ্ৰমৰ প্ৰতি আছে মোৰ জন্মগত মহান শ্ৰদ্ধা
মই যে কৃষকৰেই সন্তান…

মই এজন পমুৱা, এজন ঘৃণনীয় মিঞা
যিয়েই নহওক কিয় মোৰ নাম
খবিৰ আহমেদ কিংবা মিজানুৰ ভূঞা
জ্ঞাতব্য বিষয় যে মই অসমৰেই অসমীয়া
পদ্মাৰ ধুমুহাত মোৰ ঠিকনা হেৰাল যোৱা শতিকাত
বন্দৰ বিচাৰি বণিকৰ জাহাজত উজাই আহিলোঁ মই
চিৰদিনৰ বাবে আপোন বুলি সাৱটি ল'লো এই দেশ এই মাটি
তাৰ পিছত আৰম্ভ হ'ল মোৰ নতুন আৱিষ্কাৰ
শদিযাৰ পৰা ধুবুৰীলৈ…
ৰঙা মাটিৰ পাহাৰ কাটি সমতল কৰিছোঁ ভূমি
হাবি কাটি নগৰ কৰিছোঁ মাটি পিহি কৰিছোঁ ইটা
আৰু ইটাৰ পৰা অট্টালিকা
ৰাস্তাত শিল পাৰিছোঁ পিটচেৰে ক'লা কৰি দিছোঁ গা
কাৰখানাত কুলিগিৰি কৰিছোঁ পথাৰবোৰ সেউজীয়া কৰিছোঁ মই
মই নদী সাঁতুৰিছো নদীৰ পাৰত উবুৰি হৈ
বানপানী ভেটা দিছোঁ মই
এনেদৰে প্ৰতিদিন তেজ আৰু ঘামেৰে উৰ্বৰ কৰিছোঁ মাটি
বাপতিসাহোন নাঙলেৰে মাটিত লিখিছোঁ এটি নাম
অ…স…ম

চৰাইবোৰৰ দৰে চৰ-চাপৰিত নল-খাগৰিৰ বাহ সাজিছিলো
অনাবিল আনন্দত ভাটিয়ালী গান গাইছিলো
জাতিৰ পিতা যেতিয়া অসমলৈ আহিছিল
তেতিয়া মই লুইতৰ গান শুনিছিলো

সূৰ্যাস্তৰ সময়ত কপিলীৰ বোকাময় বুকু মই স্বৰ্ণোজ্জ্বল দেখিছিলোঁ
মোৰ তিৰাশীৰ জোৎস্নাপ্লুত ৰাতি
নেলীৰ বিধ্বস্ত বস্তি ভিটাত থিয় হৈ বিনালে মোৰ দেশ
মুকালমুৱাত মেঘাচ্ছন্ন হ'ল আকাশ আৰু 'ৰূপহী' 'জুৰিয়া'
মিঞাসকলৰ সেই 'ছায়া ঢাকা পখী ডাকা' গাঁওবোৰ শ্মশান হ'ল…
চৌৰাশীৰ প্ৰবল বন্যাই উটুৱাই নিলে মোৰ সোণবৰণীয়া পথাৰ
পঁচাশীত এদল বাজিকৰে নিলামত বিক্ৰী কৰিলে মোক
বিধানসভাৰ মজিয়াত
ইছমাইল শ্বেখ, ৰমজান আলী কিংবা মাজিদ মিঞা

জ্ঞাতব্য বিষয় মই অসমৰেই অসমীয়া
ক'বলগা মোৰ বহুত কথাই আছিল
স্বাধীনতাৰ দুকুৰি বছৰ পিছতো
অথচ নদীৰ কথা কোৱা হয়, অসম নদীমাতৃক দেশ
বিনীত নিবেদন এই যে
সেইদিনাৰ পৰা মই
সনাতন স্বাধীনতাৰ বাবেও এদিন আকুল আছিলোঁ
হঠাত কাৰোবাৰ কঠিন হাতৰ পৰশত উচুপি উঠিল
যিয়েই নহওক কিয় মোৰ নাম

In this poem, Khobir Ahmed, though maintaining a semblance of humble submission is not only asserting his Na'Asomoya identity but negotiating a new meaning through the words 'Asomiya from Assam' while painfully accepting that he is a 'reviled Miyah'. His assertion of this negotiated identity is through his commentary on the contribution of the char chapori people in toiling the wastelands, their struggle with river erosions and frequent floods, in building roads and buildings working as construction labour. This poem is an ongoing struggle to adopt a language and use it powerfully to sustain the hybridity of the emerging 'Assamese' identity.

The process of identity negotiation in the poems of translingual writers is an attempt in 'self-presentation' to establishing who the writers are and their legacy. It is a conscious effort to resolve their identity-related issues through the literary expressions using poetry

as a medium. The writers are not only engaging in an identity negotiation process in their poems but also trying to "promote intrapersonal harmony" (Swann and Bosson, 2008). A similar determination is seen in a recent poem by Hafiz Ahmed, "Likhi Luwa, Moi ejon Miyah*" (2016) [*Write Down 'I am a Miyah*'*]:

Write Down, I am a Miyah

Write
Write Down I am a Miya
My serial number in the NRC is 200543

I have two children
Another is coming
Next summer.
Will you hate him
As you hate me?

Write
I am a Miya
I turn waste, marshy lands
To green paddy fields
To feed you.
I carry bricks
To build your buildings
Drive your car
For your comfort
Clean your drain
To keep you healthy.
I have always been
In your service
And yet
you are dissatisfied!

Write down I am a Miya,
A citizen of a democratic, secular, Republic

Without any rights
My mother a D voter,
Though her parents are Indian.

If you wish kill me, drive me from my village,
Snatch my green fields hire bulldozers
To roll over me.
Your bullets
Can shatter my breast for no crime.

(*Likhi Luwa*, Moi ejon Miyah, 2016)[4]

লিখি লোৱা, মই এজন মিঞা

লিখা,
লিখি লোৱা
মই এজন মিঞা
এন. আৰ. চিৰ ক্ৰমিক নং ২০০৫৪৩
দুজন সন্তানৰ বাপেক মই,
অহাবাৰ গ্ৰীষ্মত জন্ম ল'ব আৰু এজনে
তাকো তুমি ঘিণ কৰিবা নেকি
যিদৰে ঘিণ কৰা মোক?

লিখি লোৱা,
মই এজন মিঞা
পতিত ভূমি, পিতনিক
মই ৰূপান্তৰিত কৰিছোঁ
শস্য-শ্যামলা সেউজী পথাৰলৈ
তোমাক খুৱাবলৈ
মই ইটা কড়িয়াইছোঁ
তোমাৰ অট্টালিকা সাজিবলৈ,
তোমাৰ গাড়ী চলাইছোঁ

[4] First published in social media on 29 April, 2016 and later included in the volume Najano Taik Kot Log Paisilo (2017) [Don't know where I met her] by Hafiz Ahmed (2017). Guwahati, Char Chapori Sahitya Parishad

তোমাক আৰাম দিবলৈ,
তোমাৰ নৰ্দমা ছাফা কৰিছোঁ
তোমাক নিৰোগী কৰি ৰাখিবলৈ,
তোমাৰে সেৱাতে মগন মই অনবৰত
তাৰ পিছতো কিয় তুমি খৰ্গহস্ত?

লিখা,
লিখি লোৱা
মই এজন মিঞা
গণতান্ত্রিক, গণৰাজ্য এখনৰ নাগৰিক এজন
যাৰ কোনো অধিকাৰ নাইকিয়া
মাতৃক মোৰ সজোৱা হৈছে সন্দেহযুক্ত ভোটাৰ
যদিও পিতৃ-মাতৃ তাইৰ নিঃসন্দেহে ভাৰতীয়

ইচ্ছা কৰিলেই তুমি মোক হত্যা কৰিব পাৰা,
জ্বলাই দিব পৰা মোৰ খেৰৰ পঁজা,
খেদি দিব পাৰা মোক মোৰেই গাঁৱৰ পৰা,
কাঢ়ি নিব পাৰা মোৰ সেউজী পথাৰ
মোৰ বুকুৰ ওপৰেৰে চলাব পাৰা
তোমাৰ বুলড্‌জাৰ
তোমাৰ বুলেটে বুকুখন মোৰ
কৰিব পাৰে থকাসৰকা
(তোমাৰ এই কাৰ্যৰ বাবে তুমি কোনো
শাস্তিও নোপোৱা)

The poem is an illustrative point of protest against any exclusivist, hegemonic or supremacist definition of Assamese identity and reflect the resentment of the translingual writers against the unpleasant stigmatization and branding of anyone with a migrant origin as '*Bohiragoto*' [outsider] or more abusively as a *Bangladeshi,* the *"other"* in popular public and media discourse.

Write
I am a Miya
Of the Brahmaputra Your torture
Has burnt my body black Reddened my eyes with fire. Beware!

I have nothing but anger in stock. Keep away!
Or
Turn to Ashes.

(*Likhi Luwa, Moi ejon Miyah*, 2016)[5]
[Write Down 'I am a Miyah']

ব্ৰহ্মপুত্ৰৰ চৰত বাস কৰা
মই এজন মিঞা
মোৰ দেহা হৈ পৰিছে নিগ্ৰো কলা
মোৰ চকুযুৰি অঙঠাৰ দৰে ৰঙা
সাৱধান!
মোৰ দুচকুত জমা হৈ আছে
যুগ যুগান্তৰৰ বঞ্চনাৰ বাৰুদ
আঁতৰি যোৱা,
নতুবা
অচিৰেই পৰিণত হ'বা মূল্যহীন ছাইত!

Similar identity issues are also raised in Hafiz Ahmed's poems like "Bashbarir Fazal Miyah" [Fazal Miyah of Bashbari] that portrays the sub-human treatment of the migrant origin population in Assam. Against the backdrop of the gruesome killing of helpless people who took shelter in a relief camp at Bansbari by armed Bodo militants in July 1994,[6] the poem seems to bring in the dialogic conversation of the translingual writer with his past and the present predicaments:

[5] First published in social media on 29 April 2016 and later included in the volume *Najano Taik Kot Log Paisilo* (2017) [Don't know where I met her] by Hafiz Ahmed (2017), Guwahati, Char Chapori Sahitya Parishad.

[6] In July 1994, armed Bodo militants opened fire at Bangladeshi immigrants at the Bansbari relief camp, killing at least 71 people and leaving over 100 injured. The massacre at the Bansbari relief camp prompted more than 54,000 people to flee their villages for cities such as Guwahati and Barpeta. (Source: "Sporadic Violence in Kokarajhar", 6 September 2012. Retrieved from http://www.rosemaryinstitute.com/essayarticles/1188-essay--sporadic-violence-in-kokarajhar

Fazal Mia of Bashbari
(*With gratitude to Hindi Poet Kedar Nath Singh*)

Do you remember, Hafiz
Fazal Mia of Bashbari?
Short-statured Fazal Mia,
medium- complexioned Fazal Mia
who would sell vegetables in Barpeta Road
and would be the last man to return home?
Do you remember the green paddy fields,
the madrassa
and the shelter camp?

Calculating on the hazy slate of recollection
can you gauge
why in his native soil Fazal Mia fell prey to the monsters?

Can you tell me
why and at whose intent
the shelter camp of Bashbari turned Sabra- Shatila?
Can you say that
in your land
sheep, goats and Fazal Mia.
are not brothers?
Why are you mute Hafiz
Even after thirty-tour springs?
–"*Bashbarir Fazal Miah*" (Translated by Sadiqul Islam)

The poetry of translingual writers like Khobir Ahmed, Bande Ali and Hafiz Ahmed shatters the dream of the *imagined community* and the emerging identity of the translingual writer turns back to look at the hybridity of their existence wherein their migrant origin is never forgotten and sometimes reminded through violence. The writer is, however, breaking the silence as asked in this poem ("Why are you mute Hafiz/Even after thirty-tour springs?"). Bhabha's "contending cultural constituencies" are

in play in these poems resulting in "ambivalence in a post-colonial setting" where the constituents are negotiating their identity but at the same time resisting any socially superimposed purity of any cultural hegemony. This resistance, dialogic in nature, oscillates between the adopted identity of Na'Asomiya and the deeper urge "to bring the people back to keep their identity before they lose it by reestablishment" (Polito, 2012).

The translingual writers' dilemma, what Bhabha calls ambivalence, is emerging as a focal theme in a series of poems that started as *Miyah Poetry* (Das, 2016). Miyah Poetry can be seen as a distinct addition to the present discussions on translingual literature as it goes beyond the theorization of both Kellman's *Translingual Imagination* and Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and looks back in anger into the cultural distinctiveness of the writers as opposed to a desire to embrace the new 'mother-tongue' or a new cultural identity as Na'Asomiya. For long, words like 'Miyah' (or, 'Miya') have been used in derogatory sense to refer to Bengal-origin Muslims of Assam, a sordidly marginalized group in the society (Das, 2016). But now a section of translingual writers Shahjahan Ali Ahmed, Rezwan Hussain, Chan Miyah, Abdur Rahim, Kazi Neel, Siraj Khan, Rehna Sultana, Ashraful Hussain and M Shalim Hussain are rather using the Assamese language to express their anguish and pain at the continuous stigmatization of their communities and defiantly using the term *Miyah* as a badge of honour and this new assertion tells a lot about their "utterly painful stories" which they feel are neglected by mainstream 'storytelling friends' (Azad, 2016). This new story is told by poets like Shahjahan Ali Ahmed in these words:

I am Yet a Miyah

Mine is the story of
A burning bone-crunching sun
My manhood the cautionary tale

Of bent shoulders
And the pricking of salted thorns
Mine is the story of
'Grow more food', man-eaters
Cholera, diarrhoea
And a fragrant revolution scattered by
My fathers

In a forest of thorns Mine
is a story of heroes.
Mine is the sacrificial offering of '61
Of blood screaming through
The binds of history
Mine is the story of 83, 90-94, 2008, 2012, 2014.
Mine is the oppression, the ignominy.

The deprivation of Dravidians in Pragjyotishpur I
am the colour of a shame
Holding its ears, bending its knees
While kings and dynasties pass
I am the one under the fool's cap
Standing in line with dumb cattle.
I am a painting of heritage
Hung in a stable

Because though the bottles look different
The wine is yet the same
And judging by birth alone, I am yet a Miyah.

"*Moi'o Miyah*" (2016), by Shajahan Ali Ahmed
[Translated my Shamil M Hussain]

মইও মিঞা

হাড় ভঙা ৰ'দৰ কোলাত
নাঙ্গুইলা-জাৱৈ' দিয়া মোৰ
ঘৰ্মাক্ত ভাগৰুৱা কান্ধৰ

লুণীয়া কাইটৰ খোচেৰে ভৰা
পুৰুষত্বৰ গৌৰৱময় ইতিহাস।
'গ্ৰ'মোৰ ফুড' আৰু বাঘৰ আতঙ্কৰে
বিভীষিকাময় কলেৰা-ডায়েৰিয়া,
কাইটীয়া জঙ্গললৈ ক্ৰান্তিৰ সুবাস ছটিয়াই
সংগ্ৰাম কৰা বীৰপুৰুষৰ ইতিহাস।
ত্যাগৰ ৫১ৰ উপহাৰ
৮৩ আৰু ৯০-৯৪, ২০০৮, ১২, ১৪
ইতিহাসৰ ৰক্তাক্ত সোঁৱৰণেৰে কম্পমান মই
প্ৰাগজ্যোতিষপুৰৰ খিলঞ্জীয়া দ্ৰাবিড়ৰ
নিৰ্যাতন, লাঞ্ছনা, বঞ্চনাৰ দস্তাবেজ বুকুত লৈ
ৰাজপথত কাণত ধৰি আঠু লোৱা
নিলাজ ৰং মোৰ
লজ্জা ঢকাৰ মুখালৈ
নিলাজৰ দৰে ভকতৰ শাৰীত
অস্তিত্বৰ ছবি আঁকিও
ভকতৰ গোহালিত আশ্ৰয় মোৰ,
কাৰণ
ৰঙীণ বটলত একে মদিৰা
আৰু জন্ম সূত্ৰে মইও এজন মিঞা॥

Referring to their social and legal persecution both in terms of citizenship and socio-economic development, translingual poetry from Assam reflects both an assertion of a new identity as well as a retrogression into the origins of their cultural roots. This creates a 'third space' for a translingual encounter where identities, territories of social existence and changing worldviews continues to present a modern, post-colonial existential quandary. In another poem "Nagorik" [Citizen] by Khobir Ahmed included in his volume entitled *Nagorik O Annanya Kobita* (2002) [Citizen and Other Poems], the poet highlights his past and his people's contribution to the building of Assam's agriculture and economy but at the same time registers a strong recrimination against the prevalent call for his ouster from his motherland. It illustrates the translingual writer's response to the post-colonial hybridity where he reminds us of his arrival in this part of the land and how he

was asked to serve (as a farmer, construction worker) but at some other point of time branded as a 'foreigner'. The dialogic tension between assumed identity and citizenship is now brought to the forefront to assert that he is a 'legal citizen' of this country:

Nogorik
[Citizen]

The day I went to school
Scribbled my motherland's name on the slate Spelt nation-freedom
The day I learnt the language of protest Came to know about Delhi-Dispur
That day – They told me:
"You are a foreigner –
Or at least a suspected citizen
You leave this land"
- I refused to leave.

I refused to leave, for
This country is my country
My ancestor's land, my progeny's home, My land of dreams, my reality
That springs in my body, Flows through my veins Blood that nourished the soil This land, my land
I am, my country's Citizen condign.

–*Nagorik* [Citizen], by Khobir Ahmed (2002)

নাগৰিক

যিদিনা মই পঢ়াশালি গ'লো
ফলিত লিখিলো মাতৃভূমিৰ নাম
বানান কৰিলো স্বদেশ-স্বাধীনতা
যিদিনা মই প্ৰতিবাদৰ ভাষা শিকিলো
মই দিল্লী-দিছপুৰ চিনি পালো,

সেইদিনা তেওঁলোকে ক'লে ঃ
''তুমি বিদিশী–
নহ'লেও অন্ততঃ সন্দেহযুক্ত নাগৰিক
তুমি গুচি যোৱা''

মই নগ'লো

মই নগ'লো, কাৰণ–
এই দেশ মোৰ দেশ
মোৰ পূৰ্বপুৰুষৰ দেশ, মোৰ ভাবি পুৰুষৰ দেশ
মোৰ সপোনৰ দেশ, মোৰ দিঠকৰ দেশ
মোৰ অংগে অংগে, মোৰ ৰন্ধ্ৰে ৰন্ধ্ৰে
কল্লোলিত এই দেশ
সিঁচৰতি দেশৰ মাটি
এই দেশ মোৰ দেশ
মই মোৰ দেশৰ
বিধিবদ্ধ এক নাগৰিক।

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

A cursory look at the latest writings that are published in Assamese today reflects a wide variety of writers coming from the char chapori (riverine) areas of Assam and they reflect the deeper manifestation of translingual processes that the writers from the char chapori community go through. The stories and poems, their corresponding socio-cultural narratives, hybridity and assumed cultural identity as Na'Asomiya that emerge from the translingual writings in their translingualism is an answer to an artificial, exclusive and imagined superiority of the native or indigenous culture that has been prevalent in the region over the years under a shadow of a prolonged anti-migrant movement over the last four decades. The interaction of the mother-tongue (dialects used at homes), a 'declared' mother-tongue (Assamese), cultural roots and a newidentity as Na'Asomiya are all interweaved in these translingual writings from Assam. I have charted in this thesis. Translingualism provides a platform to negotiate and a windowto express their response and reaction to the discourses that try to negate them as the "other" and the "outsider" or for worse as "infiltrator". Living in the land for more than a century now, the writers utilize their literary creation as a strategy to establish his new found identity in an immensely heterogeneous, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and obviously a multi-lingual society. The characters portrayed in the stories or the voices heard in the poems comes forth as an assertion of their translingual imagination.

While writing in Assamese, the writers have not forgotten their past, histories, cultural icons and social traditions rather in a very subtle way reiterated their 'source culture' by introducing words, texts and contexts of their migrant lives in riverine areas of Assam. Struggling against nature's ruthless hand making them landless, homeless and in a way a rootless community in search of food and shelter in cities, the writers truthfully laments their predicaments. They frequently remind us about their ancestors toiling the land producing food for the population, making roads and constructing houses for others as the perennial unorganized workers in the urban towns, homes and factories. Assamese language and its use is literary creativity, therefore it becomes a way to create a space of their own where they could avoid the alienation faced in real life. Abandoning the natural formal extension of their dialects (Bengali) and expressing themselves in Assamese, the writers invariably a new identity and an imagined community for themselves. For these translingual writers, the Assamese language is not only a medium but also a processand a form of asserting the membership of this new space where deepest emotions, tales of sorrows and happiness, of achievements and rejections forms a deep foundation of their very existence in the society. The adopted language is also a theme for their claim to the land and its culture and in a way reconstructs the exclusivist way of looking at the questions of nationalism, nativity and the much-hyped indigenous identity. The translingual writers effectively broaden the nationality canvas to paint a much more cosmopolitan, inclusive and re-delineate a 'global' society that modern nations aspire for.

It is also evident from the reading of the Assamese translingual literary texts that the writers never abandoned their cultural traditions and social customs as they started and continued to write in this language. Socio-cultural elements of char chapori community inAssam, with its distinct nuances, is carried forward through the characters they depicted and the emotions they

expressed and in the processes enriched the Assamese literature with a new shade of the Assamese society. After all, for all practical purposes and in spiteof the politics of 'anti-migrant' movement, they form a large part of today's residents of Assam. The writers rather reach a larger readership through their works in the main language of the state and present a fresh insight into the life-struggles of these riverine communities who have lived on the margins forever. On the other hand, the translingual writers get an opportunity to present their perspectives, issues and optimistic ways of looking into the future. Translingualism, thus, provides them with a unique opening to articulate their worldviews to their fellow citizens as they continue to deconstruct and reconstruct their self-identities negotiating between their dialects at home and the formalexpressions in the Assamese language while maintaining a crucial link to both.

Translingual writers in Assamese literature mastered the art of using the new-foundlanguage not only as a medium of expression and communication but also as a theme in itself. The language used by them has a definitive touch of the vocabulary rooted in the socio-cultural backgrounds of the writers. Perhaps these markers find a name in what is called *Miyah Poetry* by many young writers who even brought in their dialects into the expressions and phrases they use. This transformative aspect of translingualism goes beyond just a blind copying of the mainstream Assamese writers and forms new signs thatare emotionally involved with the world they represent.

Translingual imagination as reflected in Assamese writings of the authors from char chapori also places them in dialogic relations with the language and the larger Assamese society. Often seen as the "other", the writers while remaining consciously aware of the various social stigmatization they face every day refuse to align with any hyper-national agenda. Their translingualism provides them with a space with a purpose to reassert theiridentity as Assamese – residents of Assam - an identity that surpasses any exclusivist

linguistic hegemony. They rather use the language to express their anguish and pains in not being seen as an integral part of the larger Assamese society by a section of the peopleand use their writings as a resistance to any such tagging as migrant, intruder or infiltrator. They rather build a narrative of belonging to Assam, a sense of community and proactive social engagement. They seek a reciprocal acceptance of their role in building a universal Assamese society while redeeming their personal linguistic choice that becomes the mostdistinct marker of their existential identity. In this, they play the role of the 'cultural mediators' between the char chapori people reflecting their social exclusion, economic exploitation and political abuse of their citizenship issues, and the Assamese reader at large.

Past and present scholarship and theorization on translingual literature revolve around mainly involuntary language switch by people in exile. This study brings to light a new dimension to the existing understanding of translingualism that rather throws light on 'voluntary' language switch. Does it lead to a different category of translingualism which is completely distinct in nature? The answer lies somewhere in the middle – while these writers switch over to a new language and don't bounce back to any other language for the expression of their creativity, they obviously represent some of the major characteristics of translingualism in retaining the traces of their socio-cultural roots.

Struggling against the prevalent hyper-national identity politics in Assamese society, they form their own space as an "imagined community" to quote Benedict Anderson. This space, termed as "the third space" in this study rise above different challenges - social, cultural and linguistic and help the readers to re-imagine this community and help them tonegotiate the hybrid identity of Na'Asomiya within the social structures that engulf them in the contemporary milieu.

As this study tried to look into the theoretical approaches to translingualism, there emerged a new perspective to our

understanding of the translingual literature. Much has been said about the loss and gains of language switch but the historical, geographical and cultural contexts of 'new' identity formation within translingual writings have been neglected so far. This study, therefore, argues that besides the existing concepts of identity as underlined in bilingualism and translation, psychology and literary studies, the translingual writings in Assamese literature allow us to chart a new approach to translingualism as to understand the negotiated identity and the creation of a unique, secure and distinct 'third space' where expressions of deepest emotions and societal realities find their place of recognition. To explore and understand these translingual writings, we have to, therefore, analyse different layers of meaning that written words present to the reader and present a completely internalized view of language as a medium and a process of identity reconstruction. Thus, it is clear from the reading of the translingual writings in Assamese that the Char-Chapori 'literature' has come of age wherethey have established a dialogic relationship with the adopted language to negotiate a new identity as Na'Asomiya but never compromising on their cultural roots and social realities.

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