Abstract: Umakanta Sarma and Mamang Dai, both insiders from erstwhile North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), expose the internal oppression of the Bodos and the Adis (These marginalized communities would be referred as ‘marginal man’) that eventually led to internal colonization, cultural schizophrenia, and homophobic societal attitude in addition to their socio-political aspirations. Initially, the new settlers from other countries were not a problem for the older generation of both the communities but the younger generation began to view this multi-ethnic society as a threat to their ethnicity. The cultural segregation in both Assam and Siang Valley (Pasighat) was construed as political apathy to which the Bodos and the Adis sought retaliation, initially the Bodos accumulated Bodo songs and ballads but later resorted to resurgence while Mamang Dai lends her voice to the Adis and dwells on an intricate stories, images and the history of the tribe.

Key Words: Natural assimilation, structural discrimination, spatial marginalized, in situ marginalization, ethnic marginalization, emergence of ethnic consciousness

Work
An empirical investigation of the Fourth World paradigm has created a space for marginalized subjects especially ethnic identities – an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation. North-east also regarded as the frontier region is one of the most conflict-ridden regions of India, and remains more or less aloof from mainstream India. Various ethnic groups quite incompatible with each other vie for their rights here.

Umakanta Sarma (Bodo) and Mamang Dai (Adi), the insiders portray the socio-political aspirations of the Bodos - an ethnic group in the state of Assam in The Bharandas (TB) and Adis in The Legends of Pensam (LOP) and Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land (ALT) respectively. These writers attempt to study their roots and retrieve the cultural ethos of marginalized Bodo or an Adi identity based on their oral history, myth, songs and ballads, rituals and festivals.

An investigation on the two communities shows that the Bodos and the Adis are connected to Tibeto-Burmese and the Bodos and the Adis are connected to Tibeto-Burmese and the other communities whereas The Legends of Pensam and Arunachal Pradesh: The Hidden Land, Adi perception. Both have different stories to narrate about their origins, oral history, ballads and songs, festivals and rituals.

The Bharandas portrays Seshakuli, a village comprising five small localities – Perrickchuk, Hajoapara, Ragapara, Mussalmanpara and Hindupara with a conglomeration of several communities. Bodo kachari is one among them. This natural ethnic assimilation among different groups earlier though not impulsive, became imperative and quite natural for peaceful co-existence. Ranen (Bachiram’s younger son), Ranjila (Ranen’s friend) and the older generation of Bodos prefer harmony. It is a known fact that ethnic group refers to larger, culturally distinct groups that compete with other culturally distinct groups for control of a share of the benefits that accrue from government; but it is clear in The Bharandas that this distinction is invisible from the words of Ranen, a young student, “in most places there is a mingling of the Bodos and non-Bodos.” So, rationally viewed, the interests of both are inter-related. Similarly, in the early 1800s, almost two hundred years ago the first white priests, surveyors, and soldiers arrived in Arunachal and many more came and went away. The Adis accepted them without clamor so much that except for the stories retold by the older generation, there are no records of their expedition (37).

The disappearance of congeniality that prevailed earlier among these communities became conspicuous. The household of Bodo kacharis in Seshakuli could be identified as a small cottage surrounded by Patakabahars (ornamental plant or croton). Ragapara the fifth locality has Kachari households too but are ill-kempt. These people live in such pitiable conditions and even after thirty years of settlement, they are still known as refugees. Bachiram, (Bodo Kachari) a resident of Ragapara, meets Tikaram, a Nepalese at Seshakuli market. He complains to Tikaram that the police beat them and set their houses on fire and drove them out for no reason (10-11). Just then Rupanath and Dhaniram, well to do people in the village listen to Bachiram’s complaint. Rupanath who is also the village elder assures Bachiram that he would do everything to protect the victims of societal marginalization.

Societal marginalization eventually leads to in situ marginalization [unequal development within a small geographical unit] (Gurung, 13) where some communities are pushed away by the dominant communities as in the case of Bachiram, the Bodo Kachari. Despite Rupanath’s friendly gesture, Bachiram is unable to forget his marginal status. Bachiram narrates his woe that they are living on the fringe of the forest for generations and earn their wages by felling trees for contractors. But now a group of men accompanied by the police is threatening them to vacate. He argues that since the zamindari system no longer exists, the question of vacating the area does not arise. Furthermore, it is an injustice to snatch the land from them. To this Dhaniram retorts, “Since the land belongs to the government, how can you refuse when you’re asked to relinquish possession? You have to shift even if the zamindar asked you to leave the land. Presently, the zamindar
has been replaced by the government: that’s all the difference (Sarma, 14).” The in situ marginalization with respect to Adi is quite contrasting to that of Bodos. The immigrants (minority) from neighbouring countries began to make their livelihood at the expense of Adis, who are the majority. An old man in the *The Legends of Pensam* narrates the hardships he and his mother face when he was young. He walks barefooted to school and sometimes uses slipper of wood and bicycle tyres. (139-40). He often thinks that if men from distant cities can come so far to live and serve in these remote outposts, why should not they do better, being natives of this land?” (142) At this juncture, it becomes imperative to cite Park’s ethnicity to elucidate societal marginalization that gains its legitimacy from the social system (892).

Another pertinent form of marginalization observed in the novels is distance of certain territories from developmental zones (spatial marginalization) as observed in *The Bharandas*. Dhaniram grieves for a pregnant woman prooted... at Seshakuli because there is no hope of employability, that grips youth and saps their... all this could not save the child (58-9). The child who apparently could have been saved by medical aid died of ignorance. Thus the spatial marginalization from developed zones keeps 98 percent of the rural Bodo population away from accessing health or other benefits even now. Similarly, Adi young men and women attend school, a mile away from their homes in Duyang crossing small streams, hurrying through a forest of tall trees and dense undergrowth that could hide tigers and leopards (*LOP*, 130).

The access to a quality life is lost through spatial marginalization. Spatial marginalization or spatial alienation, unemployment, exploitation, economic degradation, poverty, indebtedness, cultural displacement eventually leads to inequality which is also termed as structural marginalization. Exploitation of resources by the state machinery in the pretence of development is an ugly face of marginalization. Alit, a young student and another friend of Ranen is also of the opinion that it is no use establishing colleges at Seshakuli because there is no hope of employability, that grips youth and saps their vitality (72-3). Though Seshakuli has plenty of resources, it is still poor, surrounded by a host of problems. In *The Legend of Pensam*, Rakut tells Mona about a couple, Nenem and Kao. Nenem is the only child of Sogong, the senior headman of the village of Yelen. Kao is from the village of Molon, and the eldest son of Poro family. Nenem is known for her beauty and her love for David, a British officer. Their love fails and finally, Nenem marries Kao. They have a daughter, Losi. One day Nenem goes to a water point and suddenly falls dead near it. Kao is so grief-stricken that he decides never to leave the village. Recently, he observes the land under siege, a host of forces slowly nibbling away its land, destroying forests, flattening the hills, and even their ethos (*LOP*, 88-125).

Cultural segregation initiated by the government for sanctioning funds to the ethnic communities could be understood as a subtle strategy of structural marginalization. Inefficient political system, developmental programs internally displace these communities further (Chatterjee, et al. 17). All these discriminations make the marginalized politically apathetic. The marginalized cannot voice their demands or participate in policy discussions except in some specific cases when it is in favour of the government. The young radical group led by Alit and Urmila vociferously defends the Bodo nation and take necessary steps to safeguard the interest of the Bodos. The natives are suspicious of those who talk about structural development. Urmilla, knows very well that it is very difficult to build up rural infrastructure like roads and communication links, power grid, irrigation arrangements, construct and administer schools, hospitals because the more the plans are envisaged for Bodo advancement; the more they are exploited and suppressed. The writer assumes that several greedy eyes fell upon the land that is reserved for Bodos. Measures that were adopted to serve the Bodo peasants help the contractors, and the schools started for Bodos to non-Bodos who are employed in them (TB, 75).

Likewise, the villagers of Arunachal Pradesh know that the hills are an awesome sight when viewed from the highest point, the river appears shimmering like a coiled snake in the still, green jungle, beyond which lies a forbidding knot of mountains compared to a landscape in a dream, across the river the white banks stretch and narrow makes it impenetrable but Duan, the youngest elected member of the state assembly, mesmerizes the villagers by images of a road, vehicles, long rows of electric poles, new schools sowing seeds of hope in them (*LOP*, 149). The villagers could see the road transforming the villages that grew for centuries, with old certainties and beliefs. The road runs in loops and bends, plunging into the far mountains to reach the scattered villages that lie buried in the land of mist and wild chestnut. The river beds are scraped for sand, rocks were blown up, big boulders lie strewn as the roads stretch (148-50).

Government welfare policies; grass root strategies for forest management, intersection of indigenous culture and modernity between people from distant villages across the river, modern education, inland roads, Bogibeel bridge over the mighty Brahmaputra connecting Assam and Arunachal, conversion of Pasighat as a potential smart city all in the veil of modernization may be to promote specific interests but are rarely debated. Therefore, Kao in *The Legends of Pensam* says the land is under siege... plainsmen and their co-conspirators from the hills come to bring down the old trees and flatten the hills. The roots of trees, clumps of bamboo, the hidden life forms in the ancient body of earth everything being uprooted... (130). Many boatmen lost their livelihood after the construction of the Bogibeel bridge, the ferry – boat owners are making sharp business; one has to part with four annas each time for crossing the river. Natural calamities such as heavy downpour, massive earthquakes eventually leading to landslides, marooning of villages from swollen Brahmaputra river in Assam with the Siang in Arunachal Pradesh cut off all communication and links of both the places from the rest of the world. Several bridges are built and torn away by the floods. The saddest part is the river, Siang changes its course several times causing territorially displacement to both the Adis and the Bodos. The Bodo peasants are becoming landless (economic marginalization) and are in debt.

Different types of marginalization discussed above brought systematic ethnic degradation in the ethnic communities in both the novels. This brought cultural erosion in both Bodos and the Adis. Some people like Gaurinath, a temple priest in...
The Bharandas decide to discard some Adi old rules and practices for social welfare (25). A similar deviation is observed by Kao in The Legends of Pensam where youngsters cast away their tradition; children are changing and learning new things. Kao smiles when he hears them speak in a new tongue while writing words in new scripts that no one in the village could read (130). Hixo, Rakut’s friend reveals that once upon a time the green and virgin land (Arunachal) was under a gracious and just rule. The old chieftains received obeisance because they were akin to the gods. No one stole or killed. A man who could find his way into the compound of a chief’s dwelling was automatically protected from all danger. In a dispute, the chiefs would look up to the sky, consult the sacred fire, speak to the spirits and there would be justice. Food was sown, harvested, stored and dispensed fairly. It was a clan. Fathers and sons followed in the footsteps of their ancestors. But because the big trees are brought down, the spirits of their ancestors who dwell in these high and secret places fall with the trees. They are homeless, and so they went away. And everything changed since then. The canopy of shelter and tradition disappeared since then (42).

The segregation of these ethnic communities by the state, inflow of people from neighboring state for employment has lessened opportunities. This infiltration, from within and without brings ‘uneasy marginality’ in these ethnic communities. Therefore, some young Bodos in the novel display vehemence against both economic and cultural domination by the majority and by the immigrants also. A noteworthy phenomenon is, marginalization is multifaceted. These ethnic identities developed ethnic consciousness, a crucial trait to sustain. So, Ranjila says, “When the external forces smash our bastion we shall become all uprooted. What shall we then do? What means of self-preservation can we expect to find?” (TB, 46) In the same way, Adi youth remarks, “Yes, the bridge was swaying and slowly tearing away. The land was being stolen. Forests were being cut and logs floated away down the river. New fences marked old territory and it seemed a curtain had fallen over the old villages. What was once sacred, the old sense of joy was being lost (LOP, 163).”

The oppression that begins from a societal or cultural level moves on to the institutional or structural level later ends at a personal or individual level. Construction, legitimation, and assertion become vital for a community’s identity and to gain verve. Initially, the younger generation of the Bodos or the Adis did not conceive the Ethnogenesis perspective (“Sonowal, C.J intro. 38”) concerning their marginalized status. When a section of the Assamese chauvinistic middle class took steps to protect their Assamese identity, this turbulence created emergence of ethnic consciousness in Bodos also. In retaliation to this, a group of Bodo youth, Binoy, Alit and Urmila collected Bodo songs and ballads from distant villages. This was a venture that aimed at countering the belief that though the dominant cultures consider them inferior, theirs is a rich culture. To overcome societal or cultural segregation, they started protecting their culture which includes: puja to their deity, Bathou, dheodhani dance, belief in spirits, ojhas and bez (wizards) and other superstitions which are vital as puja to Domi-poly, belief in spirits, shaman (wizards), rhapsodists and superstitions for Adis. In The Bharandas young Bodos and the writer, Mamang Dai in The Legends of Pensam collected oral literature from the villagers. Apart from these, cultural shows are organized for preserving the fragmented Adi root in the form of dances and old ballad songs (114-15).

Bodos who claim to be indigenous in Assam, Adi to Arunachal are internally displaced in Assam and Pasighat respectively by the immigrants from Bangladesh, China, Burma, and Myanmar. Ethnicity - an outcome of race contacts from exploration, immigration or occupation in both the colonies of settlement and exploitation becomes vital to define these ethnic communities who were once immigrants to India. It is quite evident that an immigrant undergoes a traumatic phase where s/he has to endure a sudden transformation in the host nation and its culture, adapt to the new environment for survival and learn new code of behaviour, communication, and culture leading to his/her bewilderment.

However, a sense of displacement, psychological anguish, and frustration is evident in the Bodo and the Adi communities as a result of a continuous encounter with varied cultures time and again. Urmila, a college student tells Rupanath that the men from Mymensingh have come to settle there, they would clear the jungle and till the land. She informs him that their community is besieged from all sides. They are like a fish in a beel. The water level is going down; the fishing nets have increased in number. Slowly they shall be trapped in the fishing nets. She further adds that that was only a beginning, they would thrust forward and one day they would enter their fields too (69-70). Also, Kao observes everything silently, everyone in the village moves away one after the other to the town in search of open land for permanent settlement. Only the older generation remains, sitting and talking to unknown men and their tribes in small villages unmarked on any map. It appears as if the hidden life forms in the ancient body of earth were uprooted. For him time moves on and to survive in one piece, the old being replaced by the new, according to him all one need is the ferocity of a lion or the heart of an angel to fight it or gulp down silently (LOP, 130). Losi’s (Kao’s daughter) possession of an old tin trunk containing tangible mementos of a vanished past seems symbolic to this cultural erosion. Workers from other places apart from the immigrants competing for space, employment and other welfare programs are a huge problem to the Adis. The distribution of welfare policies is on vested interests, assumes static social ontology - which again is domination and oppression. The overall patterns of justice or fairness are minimal, the outcome is the fragmented public life. These ethnic communities consider this multi-ethnic or multicultural society as one form of segregation, fundamentally one of the tools employed by the majority to discriminate or marginalize the ethnic identities.

These early immigrants (Bodo and Adis) though claim to be indigenous show disproportionately high levels of unemployment, so, form the lowest in the economic strata. Policymakers usually dismiss their economic marginality stating that they are inefficient disregarding the fact that social structure and policies pushed them farther from exercising their rights and utilize the resources (AWID, 5). The people of Seshakuli are caught unawares when they get the news that approximately more than a hundred families settled on the bank of the stream to the west of the forest, they come to know that there are refugees from Bengal who arrived in the valley for permanent settlement. The government itself is striving for their rehabilitation, drinking water, education, agriculture and marketing, collection of fuel wood from the forest. After settlement,
these people slowly started raising their voices for rightful demands (100). The workers from other states engaged for laying roads increased competition for space, water, and other resources. This makes Bodos think that they are exploited by the administrative machinery. Alit says they have been reminding the ruling machinery of the country that they have been neglected. It has been two decades since the government attained freedom, no plans have been executed for their progress, and step by step they see their ruin. They became landless, their culture denigrated, their language faced the threat of extinction. He questions Bodo identity and their right to preserve it (111).

Larik, son of Togla is agitated with the slow deterioration of the village elders into shrunken sick men, doing nothing but drinking rice beer and wasting away. He sees the old days of war and valour vanish, ancestral lands being surrendered to the government, the road and other developments threatening to steal their identity like a thief creeping into their villages and fields (157). Apart from the lack of electricity in the village and the dearth of potable water, the village women feel unsafe because the worker—women distill the dregs of carbide and mountain rice into a witches’ brew that turns the men of the village inebriated. Migrant workers prowl at night planning burglaries and murders. Kebang, a traditional judiciary system was losing its power and slowly giving way for the modern legal system (LOP 160). Forests were cut down indiscriminately, new fences marked old territory, the new settlements of the labour sheds hung on to the hillside (164). Frequent heavy rainfall lashing at the village, eventual landslides, floods, and earthquakes fatigue the villagers. The villagers bring all these grievances to Duan, a political representative from their community, but they know very well that nothing could be done single-handed. Earlier, all the public officers and leaders who worked hard to distinguish their home villages lay ignored and were granted no favours. Duan is the only member in the state assembly, and to represent his community’s issues seems a magnanimous task for him.

Rakut aptly remarks: ‘we are peripheral people. We are not politicians, scientists or builders of empires. Not even well-known citizens or the outrageous one. Just peripheral people, thinking out our thoughts! (LOP, 190)’

Bibliography