

Literary Representations of Violence and Trauma of Women in the Assamese Novels of *Camouflage* and *Xehat*

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Abstract

*This paper examines the trajectories of the Bodo and ULFA movements in Assam through the twin lenses of violence and vulnerability, highlighting their implications for everyday survival, human rights, and cultural expression. While both movements initially emerged as radical assertions of ethnic identity and political autonomy, they also precipitated cycles of counter-insurgency violence, leading to widespread human rights violations including rape, custodial deaths, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary arrests. The state's militarized response often deepened civilian mistrust and perpetuated trauma, particularly among women, who were disproportionately targeted. These experiences found early documentation in local newspapers before entering Assamese and Bodo literatures, where women writers in particular articulated narratives of pain, survival, and resistance. By reading these literatures as testimonial interventions, the study foregrounds the gendered dimensions of conflict in Assam and argues that women's writings not only bear witness to atrocities but also challenge the marginalisation of women in conflict resolution discourses. The paper thus, discusses two contemporary Assamese novels of *Camouflage* and *Xehat* by Juri Bora Borgohain within a broader framework of trauma studies and postcolonial conflict analysis, underscoring their role as critical archives of memory and resistance.*

Introduction

Women, violence and vulnerability are deeply intertwined with each other especially in the conflict zones of Northeast India. As a frontier region of India, Northeastern states are politically and historically, have been witnessing several forms of violence on the demands for autonomy and identity movements. Northeast India is not only a geographical expression rather it is a frontier of the Indian state with not so friendly neighbours along with borders Baruah (2019). Assam as a door of India's Northeast is strategically prioritised as a domain of control to resist the sentiments of sub-nationalism of various ethnic groups. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) emerged with the demands for *Swadhin Axom* (sovereign Assam) in 1979. The radical

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sentiments for self-determination demands of ULFA were originally sourced from the Assam Movement (1979-1985). ULFA raised the question of indigenous rights over land and resources, with the slogan “unity, revolution, freedom.” ULFA’s demands for sovereignty address the violence of the capitalist state that intersects with histories of capital, extraction, and politics (Kikon 2020).

The Bodos became increasingly conscious and assertive as their socio-economic conditions declined and the government continued to neglect their language and cultural identity. Recognising the need for unity to safeguard their rights and ensure progress, they organised collectively. By the late 20th century, the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) emerged as the driving force behind the Bodoland movement, with the twin objectives of preserving their distinct identity and improving their socio-economic position.

Over time, frustration grew within sections of the community as democratic means appeared inadequate to achieve these goals. This disillusionment led some groups to embrace militancy. In 1987, the Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF), a militant organisation, was established in Kokrajhar district. The BVF quickly gained prominence, employing violent methods such as murder, kidnapping, arson, enforced bandhs, and picketing as part of its political strategy. Negotiations with the government during this period failed to produce meaningful results, further intensifying the movement.

In response to these setbacks, the ABSU became more deeply involved in the struggle. Under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, the Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC) emerged as ABSU’s armed wing, adopting militant strategies and arming cadres to press their demands. This phase of the movement was marked by repeated violent incidents, underscoring both the desperation and determination of the Bodo struggle for recognition and rights.³ The Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was established on February 20, 1993, following the signing of the Bodo Accord. The Accord was welcomed by many Bodo political and non-political organisations, who regarded it as a step toward peace and development. However, several factions expressed dissatisfaction, particularly over the territorial boundaries proposed for the BAC. This discontent soon fuelled violent conflicts between Bodos and non-Bodos, as well as renewed rebellion against the Accord.

Amid this instability, the Bodo Security Force (BSF) founded on October 3, 1986, by Ranjan Daimary in Odlā Khasibari village re-emerged in a more radical form. On November 25, 1994, it was renamed the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), declaring itself a militant organisation committed to liberating the Bodo people from what it viewed as Indian post-colonial domination. Since its inception, the NDFB advocated for an independent Bodoland. The group formalised its ideology in a constitution adopted on March 10, 1998, which emphasised armed revolution and the creation of a socialist democratic system Baruah, (2005).

³In 1989, as tensions in Assam escalated, the Central Government invited the Bodo Peoples’ Action Committee (BPAC) and the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) to Assam Bhavan for further talks. Despite multiple rounds of meetings, they originally produced no tangible outcomes (ABSU, 2001, p. ix).

Meanwhile, in 1996, a separate faction of disillusioned Bodo youths under the leadership of Prem Singh Brahma founded the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). Like the NDFB, the BLT sought a separate Bodoland, but it pursued its aims through violent tactics such as sabotage, abductions, and targeted attacks. Tensions between the BLT and the NDFB escalated into brutal inter-group clashes, further complicating the conflict.

This period was marked by widespread human rights violations committed both by militant groups and state forces. Initially peaceful protests were met with repression, including massacres, torture, and custodial deaths of both Bodos and non-Bodos, leaving many permanently disabled. Reports also emerged of molestation, gang rape, and abuse by Assam police personnel during and after operations (Baruah, 2005). During the trajectories of the ULFA and Bodo movements, violence and the vulnerability of trauma can be understood as *spatial acts*—shaping both everyday survival and political interventions. While these insurgencies appeared radical in their early phases, they also intensified multiple forms of violence against women, particularly during counter-insurgency operations by the Indian state.

Across different stages of both movements, atrocities such as rape, arson, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary arrests became widespread (Baruah, 1999; Human Rights Watch, 1993). The violence claimed numerous innocent lives, while security forces, often accused of indiscriminate targeting, and failed to ensure civilian protection (Amnesty International, 1996). Many individuals were harassed or detained solely on suspicion of militant affiliations, thereby deepening mistrust and perpetuating the cycle of violence (Talukdar et al., 2009; Human Rights Watch, 1993). The documentation of these human rights violations began with reports in local newspapers and gradually entered literary narratives. Women writers, in particular, were vocal in raising such issues through both Assamese and Bodo literatures. These works serve as powerful testimonials, exposing how women were systematically used as weapons within conflict topographies rather than being recognised as potential agents of conflict resolution.

Framework and Methodology

Literature functions as a powerful site for revisiting and re-narrativising traumatic histories that are embedded in layers of violence, silence, and vulnerability. Feminist literature, in particular, foregrounds how women's bodies and subjectivities become marked by trauma within structures of patriarchy and state power. In the context of Northeast India, literary productions are often described as 'literature of terror,' 'conflict-ridden literature,' or "literature that portrays aggression and anger" (Longkumar, 2014). A comparative study of postcolonial Assamese literature demonstrates that violence is profoundly gendered, operating at the intersections of memory, trauma, and the socio-political realities of marginalised women. Through their nuanced representations of suffering, the legacies of separatist struggles, and the silences imposed upon women, these writings transform private pain into a collective testimony. In doing so, they resist erasure and reclaim agency for those who are otherwise rendered invisible. Tilottama Misra (2013) noted that

violence features as a recurrent theme because the story of violence seems to be a never ending one in this region and yet people have not learn 'to live with it', as they are expected to do by the distant centres of powers. Writers across the state of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura are deeply concern about the brutalisation of their societies by the daily experience of human rights violation and the maiming of the psyche of a whole people by the trauma caused by violence (ibid, p.xxi).

Authors such as Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Arupa Patangia Kalita emerge as pioneering voices that expose the systemic domination of women, revealing how patriarchal structures and the state perpetuate cycles of violence and subjugation.

Flung into the throes of militant violence, *Camouflage* portrays the burden carried by its woman protagonist who survives the insurgency operations against ULFA in the Tinsukia district of Upper Assam. Similarly, the brutal rape of eleven Bodo women in January 1988 at Bhumka village, during the peak of the Bodo movement, becomes the central turning point of *Xehat* (They). In a region where multiple forms of violence and oppression against women are legitimised by state power, these novels capture the traumatic backdrop of counter-insurgency operations in the conflicted terrains of Upper Assam and Bodoland.

Both texts foreground the interconnectedness of violence, trauma, and memory of sexual violation carried by women. They testify to how the systematic use of rape became a weapon of the state to reinforce its hegemony. Moreover, the novels reveal how social codes of honour and shame, far from protecting women, exacerbate their suffering by making them bear the burden of collective trauma in their everyday lives. At the same time, these narratives also depict the female body not solely as a site of trauma and violation but also as a locus of resistance and resilience.

This article employs narrative analysis to examine how *Camouflage* and *Xehat* engage with women's suffering during counter-insurgency movements. It argues that the questions raised by their protagonists are crucial to understanding how structures of violence are organised, and how their remnants continue to amplify the marginalization of women's voices. Here, the concepts of trauma and violence are invoked in both literal and political contexts. As Cathy Caruth defines, trauma can be understood as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (1996, 91). In both novels, traumatic events and acts of violence shape the protagonists' identities and lived spaces during and after conflict. Thus, trauma and violence in these texts extend beyond individual suffering, becoming part of the political history of identity movements in Northeast India.

Memories, Trauma and *Camouflage*

Memories play a pivotal role in identifying and retrieving events from past traumatic experiences that are otherwise buried in history. They function like a broken mirror,

reflecting a distorted and fractured reality (Khoury, 1980). Literature, in this sense, becomes a medium for recalling such silenced events, offering hope for justice to those whose stories have long been excluded from dominant historical narratives. In conflict-ridden regions, memories of violence and trauma may be suppressed, but they are never completely erased. The counter-insurgency operations launched to dismantle ULFA's movement in Upper Assam marked a turning point in the brutality of militarised domination in marginalised rural communities. During *Operation Bajrang* (1990) and *Operation Rhino* (1991), the organisational structure of ULFA weakened as many of its key cadres were arrested. However, this weakening of the insurgent group came at the cost of immense suffering for ordinary villagers, who bore the brunt of state-sponsored military violence in the name of counter-insurgency.

Neera, the woman protagonist of *Camouflage*, embodies the deep entanglement between traumatic memory, insurgency, and sexual violence. Raped by multiple men on the darkest night of her life, she is unable to recall their faces, leaving her with an enduring void. The most agonizing aspect of her trauma, however, is not only the violence of rape itself but also her lifelong inability to reveal to her son the identity of his father. Thus, her suffering extends beyond personal violation to the uncertainty her son must endure regarding his life and identity. The history of conflict and peace-making in Assam rarely acknowledges such women, whose experiences are excluded from the narrative of the "greater struggle" of ULFA. Yet, the silences borne by these ordinary women are deeply embedded in the historical fabric of the region.

As Caruth(1996) argues, traumatic events must always be understood within their specific historical contexts. Neera's experiences—rape, the unknown paternity of her son, and the constant surveillance imposed on her during counter-insurgency operations—constitute not merely individual violence but a collective trauma shared by countless women whose narratives remain absent from official histories. In this sense, Neera's story becomes emblematic of the silenced voices of women who endured violence without recognition. As Caruth reminds us, "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own; history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's trauma" (1996, 24).

In the novel, trauma manifests as silence for *Neera* and as a cumulative question for her son, *Satya*. As he grew up, *Satya* gradually realised that his mother constantly urged him to remain distant from *Philobari*, a place marked by memories of violence and trauma. *Neera* articulates her silence toward her son in the narrative as an act of both protection and concealment, revealing how unspoken pain shapes their relationship. Her inability to narrate the violence of her past reflects not only her personal struggle but also the broader cultural silence surrounding women's suffering in conflict zones. She narrates her feeling towards *Satya*,

Satya will not continue his studies. He moved to the village forever.

Satya left, shattering all the care, hard work and dreams of Neera. Neera knows that Satya does not go back. She cannot force him. It was difficult to send him

to Lahowal to study at ITI. He left college and stayed at home in his room for two years. Occasionally he would go out in the evening. He associated with some people whom Neera did not like. His (Satya's) words had changed. He was speaking in a very old, familiar tone, which Neera did not want to hear. He's a sharp guy. You could have tried a job in OIL. There are two oil fields near the village. Oil focuses on the people of the village as the affected area. Several boys passed ITI and got jobs. Their lives have changed (pp. 12).

In the novel, detailed motifs such as Satya's withdrawal from education and Neera's silent endurance are employed to construct Satya's character against the backdrop of violence in Upper Assam. The narrative underscores the traumatic stressors that both Neera and Satya endure, shaped by experiences of insurgency and the pervasive uncertainty of their environment. Neera's silence is haunted by her violent past, while Satya's life is marked by unanswered questions and an inherited sense of trauma. Within this context, Neera's hope that Satya might secure a job in Oil India Limited (OIL) reflects more than an aspiration for economic advancement. It signifies her deep longing for stability and safety for her son—a desire to shield him from the volatility that has defined her own life.

Satya's self-isolation, disengagement from studies, and association with people Neera disapproves of become a source of anxiety for her. These actions trigger Neera's fear that her sacrifices may go in vain and that the cycle of violence and disillusionment will persist into the next generation. Neera thus, comes to symbolise the burden of expectations carried by mothers in conflict-ridden societies, where safeguarding the future of children becomes both a personal struggle and a collective aspiration. Her inability to compel Satya to return to his studies reflects not only her powerlessness but also the silent suffering of women whose lives have been circumscribed by conflict.

At the same time, Neera's worry about Satya's loneliness and alienation highlights another dimension: the disconnection from both modern opportunities and traditional ways of securing livelihood. Together, Neera and Satya embody different forms of trauma—Neera through her memories and endurance, Satya through his withdrawal and uncertainty. Their relationship reveals how the remnants of violence continue to shape familial bonds, individual choices, and generational expectations, leaving both mother and son suspended between aspiration and despair.

The mother-son relationship in *Camouflage* resonates with Indira Goswami's well-known short story *Jaatra (The Journey)*. In *Camouflage*, Neera's fear lies not in revealing the identity of her son's father but in the possibility of losing Satya in the volatile post-insurgency period. By contrast, *Jaatra* foregrounds a mother's love and anxiety for her absent militant son. The gendered trauma depicted in both texts appears to be sublimated into what Rob Nixon terms *slow violence*. As Nixon argues, violence is "...a contest not only over space, or bodies, or resources, but also over time" (2011, 8). Amit Rahul Baishya, in context of *Jaatra*, further explains that both the "eventfulness of terroristic violence" and "gendered violence" are in fact forms of slow violence,

unfolding not as sudden eruptions but as prolonged, cumulative processes of suffering. Seen through this framework, the silences, fears, and anxieties of mothers in these two narratives reveal how women's trauma becomes inscribed within a temporality that extends beyond immediate acts of violence, shaping lives across generations.

Trauma in conflict narratives draws attention to the oppression and domination experienced by women who did not participate in the liberation movements of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). Ordinary, untrained women from remote villages often found themselves relegated to the margins of the politics of violence. Their lives were devastated in multiple ways: some lost their sons, others never recovered the bodies of their husbands, and many were subjected to rape and sexual harassment. These women, caught between two hostile forces, became doubly victimised.

For state agencies, such women were often suspected of being informants or collaborators of ULFA, while the insurgent group simultaneously viewed them with suspicion, assuming they might pass information to government forces. In this way, ordinary and innocent women were rendered political subjects not by choice but through the coercive dynamics of conflict. Their suffering and survival expose the gendered dimensions of violence in Assam, where women bore the brunt of both insurgent and state repression.

In the novel, the trauma of violence is reinforced through several repetitions of past events, particularly the recurring army operations conducted in Neera's house under the suspicion of sheltering ULFA cadres. Anne White (2004, P.86) head observes in her study *Trauma Fiction*

One of the key literary strategies in trauma fiction is the device of repetition, which can act like at the levels of language, imagery or plot. Repetition mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression.

The novel repeatedly returns to flashbacks of army operations, encounters, and the haunting images of dead bodies floating in the Dirak river. These memories and suspicions resurface only in fragments, disrupting the flow of the narrative. Neera's expressions continually circle back to such traumatic moments, illustrating how trauma resists integration into memory and instead persists as an unsettling recurrence of the past.

After the army leaves, the villagers slowly gather in Neera's yard. Their anger is palpable; they look at her with suspicion, and Neera hears hostile voices murmuring around her. The hostility culminates when someone spits loudly into her yard, a gesture that intensifies her sense of humiliation and isolation (pp. 54).

After the army raid, instead of relief, Neera faces another form of hostility from the villagers who gather in her yard. They become angry and stare at her with suspicion, and one even spits into her yard—an act that symbolically marks her as guilty in the

eyes of the community. The villagers deliberately distance themselves from her to avoid being implicated, highlighting the social stigma that ordinary women like Neera experience during insurgency, caught between the distrust of both the state and their own community. This erosion of trust creates profound loneliness and alienation, as women are no longer regarded as neighbours but as potential collaborators. The humiliation and suspicion she endures intensify the gendered burden of conflict.

Neera's trauma, therefore, extends beyond the direct violence of the army; it is reinforced by the social judgment and rejection of her community. In sociological terms, her experience can be understood as a form of *social death*, in which individuals, though physically alive, are stripped of recognition, belonging, and dignity within their society (Patterson, 1982). Furthermore, according to Erving Goffman (1963), Neera's identity is a "spoiled identity"—she becomes a *stigmatised subject* whose social value is defined by the community's labelling of her as untrustworthy. The novel thus shows how conflict transforms ordinary women into both psychological and social victims, whose suffering is compounded by societal perception and stigma.

Bhumka Rape: Xehat

There have been many violent incidents that have had a significant impact on women since the Bodoland Movement began in 1987. The peculiarity of the violence against women during the Bodoland Movement is that not only Bodo but Adivasi, Muslim minority women were also subjected to gang rape, assault and humiliation. Due to the loss of their social and personal space, women of all ages suffered the most during and after the violence, and their physical and mental health suffered greatly as a result (Baruah, 1999).

During the Bodoland movement (1987–1993), Assam Police and the Assam Police Task Force (APTF) conducted repeated raids on Bodo villages, and credible contemporaneous documentation records serious human rights violations arising from these operations. Amnesty International (1992) documented specific incidents of rape by security personnel during village raids, including the gang rape of two minor girls in Goyvari village and the reported rape of fifteen tribal girls in Rupnathpur, both in Kokrajhar district, and recorded the torture of eighty arrested Bodos between 1988 and 1989, the youngest of whom was twelve years old. Contemporary Bodo leaders described the raids as pervasive across Bodo inhabited areas, with the then president of the All Tribal Women Welfare Federation stating publicly that she doubted any Bodo village had been spared (Bodoland Watch, 2015, citing Bodo student organisations' representations to Amnesty International). Academic accounts of the movement similarly note that the state's counter agitation operations were accompanied by rape, molestation, looting, and destruction of property during police raids on Bodo settlements. The police also used lethal force against protestors on specific occasions, including the fatal shooting of ABSU volunteer Obiram Mushahary near Serfanguri, Kokrajhar, on 25 September 1987 (George, 1994; Bodoland Watch, 2015). The movement was suppressed by harsh laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, the Disturbed Areas Act,

1995, the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, and Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure (Goswami, 2014). In addition to state oppression, the movement also saw an increase in anti-Bodo sentiment and hostile actions from some Assamese-speaking people.

In communities devastated by conflict, women and children are frequently the most affected. Unreported occurrences of rape, molestation, and trafficking are often the result of violence (Enloe, 2000; Skjelsbæk, 2001). Women become easy targets—not only for extremists but also for security forces—under the pretext of upholding law and order. All throughout the world, combat zones exhibit this trend (Brownmiller, 1975). In these areas, security becomes a top priority, yet those who are entrusted with keeping them safe frequently become lawbreakers. Sexual violence against women is a form of terror and control, and many of these incidents go unreported out of fear of embarrassment and intimidation (Foucault, 1978). In these circumstances, sexual and reproductive health also becomes a crucial concern.

In the Kokrajhar district, one such incidence happened at Bhumka No.12 of Bismuri, nearby Gossaigaon. The Assam Police Task Force searched the village for militants on the evening of January 25–27, 1988. However, they allegedly engaged in violent crimes against the people, including targeting women, rather than offering protection.

Juri Bora Borgohain's novel *Xehat* explores the narratives of rape victims of Bhumka village with in-depth analysis of women's trauma passing through generation after generation in the village. The novel raises the misuse of armed power in the name of protection, as social stigma, lack of victim support facilities, and lack of counselling are hardly highlighted as important in conflict-dominated regions (Das, 2007). Trauma of rape in the case of Bhumka was reported because of the courage of the Bodo women survivors who participated in the Bodo movement wholeheartedly. The novel also pinpointed that the meaning of trauma of rape in context to Bhumka rape was not understood as social, spatial, and political loss (Caruth, 1996).

The author in an interview stated that for the first time when she visited the village to take interviews of the survivors, she was welcomed and the survivors narrated their sufferings and struggle for their justice. But when the author wanted to revisit the village, some of the survivors suggested her not to come to their homes because they were warned not to disclose their violence to an outsider by some anonymous male leaders. The novelist stated that such a warning is an example of conspiracy of silence over rape (Durham, 2017; Felman & Laub, 1992). The novel also pinpointed that the meaning of trauma of rape in context to Bhumka rape was not understood as social, spatial, and political loss (Caruth, 1996). As Nivedita Menon (2004) argues, rape in conflict zones is not merely an individual violation but a symbolic act, inscribed onto the collective identity of the community. This perspective highlights how the trauma of rape for the women of Bhumka extends beyond personal pain into a shared cultural and political wound. The novelist stated that such a warning is an example of conspiracy of silence over rape (Durham, 2017; Felman & Laub, 1992). Menon (2012) similarly

stresses that silence around sexual violence is politically constructed, reflecting not only stigma but also patriarchal anxieties about controlling women's bodies and voices. The metaphor of "picking flowers" intensifies the horror: flowers traditionally symbolise beauty, purity, and fragility, but here the image is grotesquely inverted—her body is treated as an object to be plucked and consumed. The cruel act transforms her humanity into something ornamental and disposable, illustrating how sexual violence not only assaults the body but also desecrates the symbolic essence of femininity and innocence (Mohanty, 2003; Menon, 2012).

The novel portrays rape in context to the character of Chila in *Xehat*:

Rape! The words trembled violently and pierced Chila's chest... that new word. Slowly, the word rap became fastened to her... Suddenly, she felt the terrible experience of that night. They tore away her clothes. They forced her mouth shut and climbed onto her body one after another... again, and again. Slowly, relentlessly, she bled to death (pp. 218).

The above description of the novel reflects how the trauma of rape becomes an unbearable memory, one that cannot be separated from the survivor's sense of self (Caruth, 1996). The violence and trauma of rape are inescapably bound to Chila's identity and existence. The narrative also reveals the stigma surrounding rape, where survivors are often defined not by who they are, but by the violence inflicted upon them (Galtung, 1990). The repetition of the phrase "again, and again" conveys the relentlessness and brutality of the assault, emphasising that rape was not a single act but a repeated, overwhelming violation. This repetition underscores the stripping away of Chila's dignity and identity, symbolically silencing her voice and erasing her humanity.

Another description of rape of Chila is narrated in the novel:

Chila's yellow dress is torn. There is no sign of her blouse. A few pieces of torn blouses lie in the distance. Scattered pieces of fabric are strewn at a distance. Her tender chest is exposed, and cruel hands pluck at her body as though picking flowers (pp. 263).

This description is rich with disturbing symbolism. The torn yellow dress and scattered blouse fragments signify both the destruction of Chila's physical dignity and the violent erasure of her identity. The detail of her "tender chest protruding" highlights her vulnerability, emphasising innocence violated. The metaphor of "picking flowers" intensifies the horror: flowers traditionally symbolise beauty, purity, and fragility, but here the image is grotesquely inverted—her body is treated as an object to be plucked and consumed (Mohanty, 2003). The cruel act transforms her humanity into something ornamental and disposable, illustrating how sexual violence not only assaults the body but also desecrates the symbolic essence of femininity and innocence.

Similar to Chila, Pakhila's pain was narrated in the novel:

Pakhila collapsed with a scream. The innkeepers and the crowd turned to look. A terrible, unbearable pain seared through her thigh, and the heavy smell of blood filled the air around her. There was a faint stirring in her blood. Her dahkhana was drenched in it (p. 218).

The above narration foregrounds the immediacy of violence and its embodied impact in context to rape. Pakhila's collapse, accompanied by a scream, underscores both her vulnerability and the public exposure of her suffering. The onlookers—the innkeepers and the crowd—become silent witnesses, their presence heightening the sense of isolation rather than offering help (Felman&Laub, 1992). The detail of “unbearable pain searing through her thigh” grounds the trauma in the body, while the “heavy smell of blood” turns it into an overwhelming sensory experience, almost suffocating. The phrase “a faint stirring in her blood” suggests a fragile persistence of life, a tenuous struggle between vitality and death. Finally, the image of her *dahkhana* soaked in blood is profoundly symbolic: clothing, often tied to dignity and cultural identity, is here desecrated, and signalling both physical violation and the erasure of personal and social honour (Das, 2007).

The above analysis of *Xehat* demonstrates that the violence of rape not only strips away bodily integrity but also erodes cultural markers of identity, leaving the victim exposed and symbolically objectified. However, unlike in *Camouflage*, the protagonists in *Xehat* are not silent about rape; rather, they become vocal, questioning why those who participated in resistance had to risk their bodies. The survivors refuse to submit to the threat of rape; instead, they transform their bodies into sites of resistance against the systematic violence of armed power (Shinko, 2012). In this context, the body becomes not only a space of vulnerability but also a space of defiance, where collective acts of resistance are enacted (Mohanty, 2003). They portray themselves as serial survivors of rape, standing as a form of “talking back” to power (Hollander, 2005).

The narration in *Xehat* also illustrates the distinction between cognitive resistance and emotional resistance as described by Hollander (2005). Cognitive resistance reflects a state of mind in which women reinterpret sexual violence as an attempt to suppress their political agency while simultaneously planning alternative strategies for protection. Emotional resistance, on the other hand, involves coping mechanisms through which women safeguard an inner core of selfhood from being destroyed by violence (Enloe, 2000). The survivors of the Bhumka rape case embody both forms of resistance, challenging oppression not only through strategies of survival but also through acts of political and emotional resilience. The above analysis of *Xehat* demonstrates that the violence of rape not only strips away bodily integrity but also erodes cultural markers of identity, leaving the victim exposed and symbolically objectified. However, unlike in *Camouflage*, the protagonists in *Xehat* are not silent about rape; rather, they become vocal, questioning why those who participated in resistance had to risk their bodies. The survivors refuse to submit to the threat of rape; instead, they transform their bodies into sites of resistance against the systematic violence of armed power (Shinko, 2012; Menon, 2004).

Conclusion

The histories of the Bodo and ULFA movements reveal the complex interplay of political aspirations, insurgent violence, and state repression in Assam. Both movements articulated demands centred on identity and autonomy; this paper does not adjudicate the legitimacy of those demands, but examines how the resulting cycles of violence devastated civilian life and eroded trust in institutions, both social and state. Women bore the disproportionate weight of this conflict, becoming both symbolic targets and embodied battlegrounds in insurgency and counter insurgency politics. The state's failure to safeguard civilians further entrenched cultures of impunity and normalised gendered vulnerabilities.

Yet it is through literature, especially the writings of Assamese and Bodo women that silences are broken and suppressed memories preserved. These narratives go beyond recounting trauma; they interrogate the structures of violence that shape conflict and reimagine women as active agents rather than passive victims. Literature thus becomes a form of resistance, documentation, and alternative historiography, an archive of human rights struggles in Northeast India.

This study has argued that the interrelated themes of violence, trauma, memory, and women's identity are central to the novels under consideration. The narrative styles of these works integrate spatial, temporal, and political dimensions, using storytelling both as a means of recovering memories of conflict and as a bold reinterpretation of women's historically marginalised spaces. As Douglass and Vogler (2003, p. 16) remind us, forgetting is as crucial to memory as remembering, and these novels highlight how both shape personal and collective identities.

By fictionalising trauma and memory within the context of separatist movements, the texts encourage readers to re-examine the experiences of ordinary women from multiple perspectives. They expose how histories of insurgency often obscure women's suffering while foregrounding male centred political narratives. Through intergenerational depictions of characters shaped by violence and displacement, the novels demonstrate the persistence of trauma across time, while also offering possibilities of resilience and reconfiguration of identity. These literary works underscore the necessity of integrating gendered perspectives into both peace building and historical discourse, reaffirming the power of literature as a critical site of testimony, memory, and resistance within the broader domain of locating women as survivors of violence and atrocities whether by state or non state actors in organised assertions by collectives.

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