

***QUESTIONING IDENTITIES IN POLYPHONIC FICTION: A READING OF THE
SELECTED FICTIONAL WORKS OF ANJUM HASAN***

*(A Dissertation Submitted to Nagaland University in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English)*

Probin Hazarika

Reg.No.-NU/M.Phil./Eng./75/2021

Under the Supervision of

Professor N.D.R. Chandra



**Department of English
School of Humanities and Education
Nagaland University,
Kohima Campus, Meriema-797009**

DECLARATION

I, Mr. Probin Hazarika, hereby declare that the subject matter of my dissertation entitled Questioning Identities in Polyphonic Fiction: A Reading of the Selected Fictional Works of Anjum Hasan is the bona fide record of work done by me under the supervision of Prof. N.D.R. Chandra and that the content of the dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any other research degree, fellowship, associateship, etc. in any other university or institute. This is being submitted to the Nagaland University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

Place: Kohima

Date:

Probin Hazarika

M.Phil. Scholar

Reg.No. : NU/M.Phil./Eng./75/2021

Countersigned by

Prof. N.D.R. Chandra

Supervisor

Department of English

Nagaland University,

Kohima Campus, Meriema

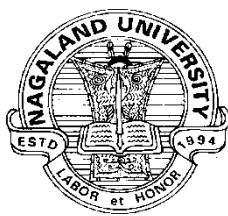
Prof. N. Das

Head of the Department

Department of English

Nagaland University,

Kohima Campus, Meriema



Nagaland

University

(A Central University established by the act of Parliament, 35/1989)

Department of English

Kohima Campus, Meriema, Kohima-797004, Nagaland, India NU/Eng/2020

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled Questioning Identities in Polyphonic Fiction: A Reading of the Selected Fictional Works of Anjum Hasan is the bona fide record of research work done by Mr. Probin Hazarika, Regn No. : 75/2021, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2020-2022 submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English. This dissertation has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title and that the dissertation represents independent and original work on the part of the scholar under my supervision. This is again certified that the research has been undertaken as per UGC Regulations.

Date :

Kohima

SUPERVISOR

Dr. N.D.R. Chandra

Professor, Department of English

Nagaland University

Kohima Campus, Meriema

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the outset, I extend my sincere gratitude towards my supervisor, Prof. N.D.R. Chandra for his patience, quick response, dedication and insightful comments throughout the research without the help of which, the research would not have been possible. I express my gratitude to the Faculty Members of the Department for all help and co-operation during the course of my research. For any fault in this work I take full responsibility.

I also thank the Librarian and Library staff of Nagaland University for enabling me to access the study materials and using other existing facilities without which it would not have been possible for me to conduct this research.

My sincere thanks are due to the all faculty members and the Head of the Department of English and Dean, School of Humanities & Education, Nagaland University for giving me the opportunity to register myself as a research scholar in the department and for their best wishes and cooperation in the course of my research.

I also extend my gratitude towards my family members, my wife and friends for supporting me throughout the entire period of the research.

Probin Hazarika

Regn.No.75/2021

CONTENTS

Declaration

Supervisor's Certificate

Acknowledgement

Contents

CHAPTER I	:	INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II	:	EMERGING VOICES IN ANJUM	
		HASAN'S <i>LUNATIC IN MY HEAD AND NETI, NETI</i>	16
CHAPTER III	:	SELF AND DIALOGUE IN ANJUM HASAN'S SELECT FICTION	41
CHAPTER IV	:	BEYOND FLUIDITY AND UNCERTAINTY: SELF-CONSCIOUS CHARACTERS IN HASAN'S SELECT FICTION	62
CHAPTER V	:	CONCLUSION	72
BIBLIOGRAPHY	:		85-89



Fwd: [Ouriginal] 5% similarity - lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in

1 message

Lemtila Alinger <lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in>
To: NDR Chandra <chandra592001@nagalanduniversity.ac.in>
Bcc: probinhazark106@gmail.com

Fri, Nov 18, 2022 at 10:02 AM

----- Forwarded message -----

From: <noreply@urkund.com>
Date: Fri, Nov 18, 2022 at 9:58 AM
Subject: [Ouriginal] 5% similarity - lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in
To: <lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in>

Document sent by: lemtila@nagalanduniversity.ac.in
Document received: 11/18/2022 4:56:00 AM
Report generated 11/18/2022 5:28:06 AM by Ouriginal's system for automatic control.

Student message: Probin Hazarika, M.Phil Dissertation "Questioning Identities in Polyphonic Fiction: A Reading of the Selected Fictional Works of Anjum Hasan.

Document : MPhil. Dissertation, QUESTIONING IDENTITIES IN POLYPHONIC FICTION, A READING OF THE SELECTED FICTIONAL WORKS OF ANJUM HASAN. Probin Hazarika.docx[D150078591]

About 5% of this document consists of text similar to text found in 67 sources. The largest marking is 71 words long and is 97% similar to its primary source.

PLEASE NOTE that the above figures do not automatically mean that there is plagiarism in the document. There may be good reasons as to why parts of a text also appear in other sources. For a reasonable suspicion of academic dishonesty to present itself, the analysis, possibly found sources and the original document need to be examined closely.

Click here to open the analysis:
<https://secure.ourkund.com/view/143050758-259349-702464>

Click here to download the document:
<https://secure.ouriginal.com/archive/download/150078591-878939-750580>

ABSTRACT

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

Anjum Hasan is an Indian novelist, short story writer, poet, and editor. She graduated in philosophy from North-Eastern Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya. She is one of the many Indian women writers writing in English who have significant contribution in the field of contemporary Indian Literature. Writers particularly, Anjum Hasan, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapoor, Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy probe into human relationships and the crusade against age-old systems. She was born in Shillong, Meghalaya and currently lives in Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Hasan's first novel, *Lunatic in my Head* was published in 2007. Her second novel titled *Neti, Neti* (Roli Books, 2009) was longlisted for the 2008 Man Asian Literary Prize and shortlisted for The Hindu Best Fiction Award in 2010. Her short-story collection, *Difficult Pleasures* (2012), was shortlisted for the Hindu Literary Prize. She is a recipient of the Homi bhabha Fellowship, and in 2021 received the New India Foundation Fellowship. She was recently hailed by *First Post* magazine as a 'genius...one of the finest Indian writers'. Her latest collection of short stories, *A Day in the Life* was published in 2018. She has also contributed poems, articles, and short stories to various national and international publications. She is currently serving as books editor for the *Caravan*, a journal of politics and culture. Anjum Hasan's writings can be placed amongst contemporary Indian women writers tackling the frequently inexplicable world of modern India. Hasan's narratives mostly deal with common people and their realities. The use of intertextual elements is another significant feature of Hasan's novel. This technique allows her to widen the scope of the narratives. Such narratives are inspired by songs, novels, as well as popular culture.

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975), a Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar who significantly contributed to and made a profound impact on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language during his life-time, is known and remembered for his extraordinary contribution to modern philosophy, areas of linguistics and schools of literary theory, to the idea of interrelatedness of language and society, and above all, for presenting a pragmatic, practical, and effective alternative to systems based on Greek philosophers. The concepts he developed, concepts such as 'chronotope' (specific time-space co-ordinates which shape every novel) 'dialogism', 'carnival', and terms/phrases he coined, such as 'heteroglossia', 'discourse in the novel' and 'grotesque realism' are relevant in an era of new and emerging knowledge societies.

Bakhtin's writings have been read by critics along with contemporary post-structuralist theory as well as feminist theory. According to Nancy Glazener, Bakhtin's idea of novelistic discourse as a struggle among socio-ideological languages acts against the patriarchal myth that there could be a language of truth transcending relations of power and desire. Bakhtin often refers to the fact that works of fiction are apt to incorporate at least some of the author's own philosophies, tastes, points of views and general attitudes to life.

In summing up the manifold aspects of language resulting from the continual duel played out between opposing centripetal and centrifugal forces Holquist hails Bakhtin's acute sensitivity to the "immense plurality of experience," pointing out that, whereas other receiver-sender models for communication involve "two actual people talking to each other as sovereign egos capable of sending messages to each other through the kind of uncluttered space," Bakhtin prefers the view that each person constitutes "a consciousness at a specific point in the history of defining itself through the choice it has made – out of all possible languages available to it at that moment – of a discourse to transcribe its intention in this specific exchange" (Bakhtin xi)

A polyphonic novel can be simply described as having a narrative that allows freedom and grants validity to multiple characters. The characters are allowed to develop on their own with the use of whatever means at hand in varied contexts. The scope of their development appears to be very wide and beyond the control of readers as well the author. The term polyphony has been derived from music that means variety in tones. Polyphony as a concept and metaphor in literary studies was introduced by 20th century Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. As a metaphor polyphony not only refers to multiple voices but also to varied viewpoints and consciousnesses. Through his writings he raised a series of debates concerning dialogue, ‘varied-speechedness’, as well as the author’s position in a particular text. According to Bakhtin, polyphonic world the protagonist must always struggle, “to destroy that framework of other people’s words about him that might finalise and deaden him.” (Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 59)

Polyphony implies the freedom of the characters’ voices and the voices that compose a polyphonic novel are dialogic in nature. The term polyphony has often been considered as synonymous with dialogism or heteroglossia. Polyphony is a way of representing heteroglossia in a novel. Polyphony means ‘multi-voicedness’, while ‘heteroglossia’ means ‘multi-languagedness’. Bakhtin in his study of Dostoevsky’s novels argues that in a polyphonic novel character and narrator exist on the same surface. Both have equal rights to speak that make a polyphonic novel democratic. This equality of utterance is central to Bakhtin’s view of the novel.

The characters in a polyphonic novel are not controlled by an omniscient narrator but they become subjects on an equal level with the narrator. This feature of the novel creates conditions for dialogism, as the readers can connect directly with the characters. According to David Lodge, a polyphonic novel is a “novel in which a variety of conflicting ideological

positions are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects, without being placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice”. (Lodge 86)

In the three selected novels of Anjum Hasan, there is the use of free indirect discourse. Free indirect speech, free indirect style, or, in French, *discourse indirect libre* is a technique of presenting a character’s voice partly mediated by the voice of the author. It has also been described as the illusion by which third-person narrative comes to express the intimate subjectivity of fictional characters. Goethe and Jane Austen were considered as first novelists to use this style and nineteenth century novelist Gustave Flaubert was the first to be aware of it as a style.

Every individual is incomplete from within but sees every other individual as complete, because they can be observed from outside. In simple words, one needs to know others’ perspectives of oneself in order to see oneself as complete. Although they may show similar characteristics, each individual is non-identical, different and unique – thus there is a multiplicity of individuals. Similarly, there are groups of languages, saturated with ideologies, which ‘interpellate’ the individual throughout life. While Althusser thought in terms of ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses), institutions controlling society, Bakhtin thought in terms of individuality – the micro level of society. Hence, the world consists of multiple languages/discourses/voices – in other words heteroglossia. Hasan’s characters find themselves in a ‘profoundly pluralistic’ world, filled with people who express opposing views which correspond to the contradictoriness of their historical ‘social reality’.

In Hasan’s *Lunatic in my Head* and other novels, heteroglossia/polyphony is exposed throughout the texts, as the voices of the characters continually interweave throughout the progress of the narrative. It is a free indirect style, guiding the readers to follow the lives of the three main characters Firdaus, Sophie and Aman, interrupted by the thoughts (voices) of other

subsidiary characters, who cross their paths. Through this technique Hasan exposes not only the characters' voices, but also the language of a variety of people and social groups, their attitudes to life, each other, and other classes. Hasan's voice can be felt sometimes as inserted commentary, often bracketed, and sometimes merged within the voices of her characters.

Issues of 'identity' in Anjum Hasan's first two novels can be basically seen in two ways. One, how the whole lot of the people were separated from the mainland India due their physical features and how the Khasi community of the hills claim Shillong as their land and outside settlers as 'dhkar'. In *Neti Neti*, one character Ribor says, "It's hard.... everyone out there thinks we're Chinese and tries to rip us off." (57) Sophie reflects that Shillong that once accommodated people "who spoke a dozen languages" has "started to throw off this crazy past and become the pure thing it had possibly never been- a place where one people of one blood lived. All through her life this had continued to be the town's defining characteristic- its search for purity and aloofness". (58)

CHAPTER-II

EMERGING VOICES IN ANJUM HASAN'S *LUNATIC IN MY HEAD* AND *NETI, NETI*

The quest for identity and self-fulfilment can be seen in the characters portrayed by Anjum Hasan. Her novel, *Lunatic in My Head* (2007) centers around such issues and the three chief characters Sophie Das, Aman Moondy and Firdaus Ansari are seen struggling to find a place in a wide spectrum of alienated people surrounding them. Their search for identity is

fostered by the ethnic divide that separates them from the locals. Hasan's novel *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not That* (2009) is read as a sequel to her first novel. In *Neti, Neti*, the chief character Sophie Das is represented as a grown up woman who looks out for fulfillment in the city of Bangalore. Both the novels represent multiple voices which are valid and diverse.

The distinguishing features of any individual, a certain social category or group, can be regarded as identity in a broad sense. One of the most essential aspects of identity is how it manifests in relationships with others. Due to migration, both internal and foreign, and the resulting integration of numerous groups of people, identity has become a difficult term. Regardless of time and geography, authors, researchers, and critics have always been concerned about themes of identity, identity crisis, and identity search. Cultural identity is linked to one's participation in certain cultural ideas and customs that one shares within the confines of a certain group. Long ago, when civilization was in its infancy, an individual's identity was determined by his affiliation with a community/ethnic group, and the traditional concept of identity was clearly viewed as a fixed construct devoid of any political affiliation or association.

The notions of nationhood, nationalism, and national identity are central to the postcolonial debate on identity. The ideology of hegemony, divide and rule was associated with the colonial mind set. Postcolonial philosophers and critics of diaspora studies and cultural studies such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, and others challenged the essentialist view of identity as a permanent construct. While disputing both the essentialist and colonial views of identity as a hegemonic construct, Bhabha proposes that the negotiation of cultural identity involves a constant interface and exchange of cultural performances, which results in mutual recognition of cultural difference. Bhabha adds a new dimension to the notion of identity by claiming that it is never fixed since it is culturally negotiated against the backdrop of postcolonial migration, transnational mobility, and diaspora

vision. Bhabha discusses the 'liminal' negotiation of cultural identity across disparities of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions in his introduction to the *Location of Culture* (1994), as well as identity in terms of 'cultural hybridity'.

Anjum Hasan's *Lunatic in My Head* is basically about the fear and uncertainty that three chief characters – Firdaus, Aman and Sophie – have to face throughout their life in Shillong. These characters are affected by the people around them in the process they become conscious of their positions and try to negotiate with the immediate surroundings in distinct ways. The author has placed them in various situations and allows them to react to ordinary realities that they face. All the chief characters are connected to people from diverse backgrounds that add variety to the novel and points to the polyphonic nature of the narrative. Apart from the chief characters the voices of other characters are given equal importance as they comment on the day-to-day realities of the society they live in. Therefore it is interesting to note how Firdaus, Aman and Sophie try to deal with the familial and societal happenings that ultimately lead to the shaping of their identities. The common thread that connects these three characters is that they are not native in the place where the novel is set. The setting of the novel is Shillong, the hill town in the Northeastern state of Meghalaya, India. They are considered as 'dkhars', a term that implies a foreigner or someone who does not have roots in the place. This attitude of the local people has been reflected through the characters of Aman and Sophie. Both Sophie and Aman feel discriminated because of their origin. There are instances in the novel where they feel discriminated because of their origin. However, there are also people who accept them as they are without any discrimination. On the other hand, Firdaus does not face any of discrimination like them.

Though the time zone has switched and Sophie is now a twenty-five year old BPO employee in Bangalore, the fears and adjustment challenges that one confronts in a new place and scenario persist in the novel *Neti, Neti*. Unlike *Lunatic in my Head*, in this novel Sophie is

represented as having her own space and freedom. Her role as mother to Mani, her landlord's two-year-old grandson, reminds her of the time she looked after her younger sister, Mukulika. Her social network is confined to the Bhattas, Swami, and a few colleagues and her boss Maya as a newcomer in the city. Sophie and Maya discusses about their lives. 'Maya, don't you sometimes feel we're all damned?' Sophie asked. 'I'm starting to believe I took a wrong turn somewhere. I thought moving here would make it all different but here I meet people equally lost.' (174)

Apart from these people, Sophie is also influenced by characters and books that she has read. She wants Swami to read the book that she has gifted. Sophie believed that if he did, some kind of irreversible mutation would take place in Swami - the same that had taken place in her when she read *Swami and Friends* at the age of nine and *Vivekananda: Awakener of Modern India* at thirteen and *Madame Bovary* at eighteen". (Hasan 37)

Hasan has skillfully used terms and phrases from Shillong throughout the story to emphasise the idea of nostalgia. Sophie Das is thrilled and sad at the same time when a rock band from Shillong arrives to perform in the city. They make her happy because they remind her of her hometown, but they make her sad because Uncle Rock, the lead man of the Shillong Blues Band, looks to have lost the aura that he and his band previously had. "Give them a chance," she pleads to everyone and no one.

Sophie feels like an alien in every city she visits, whether it's Bangalore or Shillong, and she's never pleased with the choices available. Anjum Hasan's writings are woven together by the theme of the perpetual outsider. The author explores the incomprehensible world of modern India in her novels. Sophie seemed to be unsure about where she truly belongs. She flees to Shillong, to Ribor, her dream lover, unable to cope with the fast speed of life in the big city, particularly after Rukshana's death at the hands of their mutual friend, Ringo Saar.

Shillong, on the other hand, looks to have lost its allure. Ribor, her ideal boyfriend, seemed to have grown cold feet and expressed interest in moving to Bangalore because the little town had nothing to offer. Her disappointment is compounded when she learns that her once close-knit family is on the verge of disintegration: while Mr. Das considers relocating to Shantiniketan to pursue his lifelong dream of translating *Hamlet* into Bengali, her mother intends to spend the rest of her life in Benares to atone for her sin of marrying outside her community.

Both the novels, *Lunatic in my Head* and *Neti, Neti* deals with the plight of immigrants. It is necessary to consider other voices and texts used in the novels that shape and guide the lives of the characters. Their identities constantly change as they negotiate with self and society. The chief characters are affected by the complex realities around them. Some of these realities and emotions appear to be universal. The author has used intertextual elements in both the texts. For instance, Sophie Das' mental state has been compared with Madame Bovary, a character from the novel by French writer Gustave Flaubert. She thought of Emma Bovary who, after she is in love with the young and ardent Leon, responds drawing the blinds tight around her world – going to church regularly and taking a sudden interest in the housework – so that behind this outward veil of dutifulness she can revel in thoughts of him. In Sophie's world the equivalent of that chastisement would be captioning all four parts of *Die Hard* without a murmur. (159)

CHAPTER-III

SELF AND DIALOGUE IN ANJUM HASAN'S SELECT FICTION

The Cosmopolitans (2015) is a novel that celebrates woman outside home, a novel that travels from city to village. The chief character Qayenaat is similar with Hasan's other characters in terms of 'search for roots' in the modern world. But unlike her other works Hasan

incorporates the element of 'art' in this novel to pose some pertinent questions concerning the place of art and individuality in modern life. There are many incidents surrounding the lives of rich and privileged as well as poor and deprived. The author has presented a multicultural canvas and has given voices to a variety of characters. Art in various forms have been variously dealt with in the novel. So it is not surprising to find characters holding position of artists, critics, audience, readers, etc.

Hasan's narrative shares simialar traits with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of a polyphonic novel, which is the representation of the world in all of its diversity of consciousnesses, with each playing a role in an equal dialogical basis to prove the truth. According to Bakhtin's theoretical precepts, the dialogical elements of the book are what really compel the reader to engage in dialogue with it. In his view, a novel is a collection of discourses, especially responses to those discourses, rather than just words and statements. A novelistic discourse depends on encounters and interactions between various points of view. *The Cosmopolitans*, which is set in the diverse, rapidly expanding city of Bangalore, recounts the life of Qayenaat, a thoughtful, passionate art admirer who starts to reflect nostalgically on her past. The remainder of the book focuses on her current situation, occasionally with the assistance of a trusty old friend named Sathi. She periodically seeks solace in art, which gives her life purpose and her thoughts life and importance. Qayenaat's personal dismissals and feeling of loss are carefully reflected in Hasan's language, which is quite subtle yet vivid. One of the main themes in the literature that stands out is memory. The perfect amount of melancholy and loss is added to Qayenaat's reflections on the passing of the years and what it means to be anchored in urban India. Anyone who is well-versed in, or at least conversant with, other cultures is said to be cosmopolitan. The *Cosmopolitans* rarely encounter themselves in a scenario where they have exposed to rites and traditions that have not changed over the centuries despite civilizational developments. However, when this happens, instead of embracing the cultural experience, they

get repulsed by the traditional barbarous traditions. In the novel this aspect has been revealed through Qayenaat.

Anjum Hasan has named the first chapter as 'Nostalgia' and has used the word nostalgia many times by revealing how the chief characters are connected to their past. In the chapter, 'Nostalgia' Hasan present various issues of a wide range of characters and who are connected to art. For instance, she refers to a pretentious lifestyle where people think they understand life but only see the tip of the ice-cream. However, the book's main focus is on art and how, as a result of urbanisation, culture as a whole is being homogenised. At the book's conclusion, the reader is left wondering if there are any hidden messages. The main characters are, at least how they see themselves to be, men and women of the world. However, the book's main focus is on art and how, as a result of urbanisation, culture as a whole is being homogenized.

CHAPTER - IV

BEYOND FLUIDITY AND UNCERTAINTY: SELF-CONSCIOUS CHARACTERS IN HASAN'S SELECT FICTION

It is common nowadays to see that one's identity depends on many factors such as where one is born, where one is working and living, with whom one is interacting with, and so on. Even if one's identity is fluid, this does not mean that one's free will is jeopardized. Hasan in all three novels bring forth the inner subjective thoughts of various characters. Despite troubles and struggles, the major characters of Hasan succeed in overcoming the private as well as public realities for the betterment of their own lives.

In the last chapter of *Lunatic in My Head* titled 'Peace' there is a message that however much people talk about kidnapping, instability, peace is very much within the reach. The only

thing is that they remain, as the items of old furniture in an old house inhabited by old people become layered with dust and the polish and glossiness become visible only when that layered of dust is wiped clear, unused and that's why unfocussed due to overwhelming spotlight on the negative aspects. Aman Moondy, an aspirant for the highest administrative service, is in search of lovely Concordella, and he is hopeful that one day he'll meet his love. Albeit Sophie, an eight-year old girl, is very much aware of the fact that she is adopted, still she is always in search of a happy and well united family picture, and towards the end of the novel Sophie's belief that she is adopted is dimmed and "she had managed to do rather well in the final exam" (326). Mr. and Mrs. Das' struggle comes to an end, as Mr. Das finds a job that he was looking for so long and Mrs. Das starts on her tuition entrepreneurship.

Sophie returns to Shillong to find that life there, too, is not what she wants. People have their own delusions about life, not the smallest being a Bob Dylan obsession which gives them the notion that they mean something in an international context. Shillong is in a sense a smaller reflection of Bangalore, centred on internet cafes and westernised values – even Sophie's parents have had enough of it and want to go their separate spiritual ways. And even the beauty that she misses, the arched bridge in the park, is not enough to console her. Towards the end, just like *Lunatic in my Head* the novel *Neti, Neti* also ends with a positive note. Sophie has overcome her identity issues to a certain level, he has become more responsible. She takes charge of her young sister after the divorce of her parents and finds the job as an editor.

Tribals and settlers both live in closed communities. There is not much assimilation. People always have to deal with interethnic conflict. Physical or mental violence serves as a strong reminder that there will always be hostility between the parties involved. To live there, people must find a way around this. The protagonists in the selected novels are mostly driven by what Freud refers to as the "pleasure principle," which is focused with avoiding pain rather than pursuing pleasure. Permanent confrontations between natives and immigrants, as well as

between individuals and the state, have created an all-encompassing climate of fear and anxiety in the region, which is a constant feature in *Neti, Neti* and *Lunatic in My Head*.

Lunatic in My Head by Anjum Hasan is about the anxiety and uncertainty that Firdaus, Aman, and Sophie, three dkharas, must encounter throughout their lives in Shillong. Firdaus' parents are no longer alive, and she now lives with her grandfather. She has not left Shillong in the last two decades, despite being in her mid-30s. She has also not seen her relatives in Bihar. She has also been teaching English to bored college students for fourteen years. She's been trying to finish her M. Phil's thesis was for naught. Her life has made no development. Despite the fact that her grandfather wishes for her to marry the maulvi's son and that she has been dating a man (Ibomcha), a Manipuri much younger than herself, she does not wish to marry any of them. However, towards the end of the novel it is suggested that Firdaus would marry Ibomcha.

CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

Whatever statements made in this concluding chapter are not finalized expressions of the researcher. Considering Bakhtin's views on open-endedness and unfinalizability, it appears improper to attempt to conclude or finalise any discussion. For Bakhtin "the final word has not yet been spoken and never will be spoken" (Bakhtin 30). Understandings cannot be fully decided in the text or in the author's original intentions, but must rely on the interpretation of others. Bakhtin, in particular, values the novel's ability to explore how people use language resources to frame selves, which is why, in his opinion, the novel is "the richest form yet devised for understanding selves." (173)

An in-depth examination of the various types of speech used by Hasan's characters reveals how each character represents a distinct way of viewing the world. As Bakhtin points out, these languages represent various social languages. Hasan presents us with the various social and individual languages of his time by allowing his characters to express themselves in their own voices. As a result, in Hasan's novels, we encounter a variety of languages that exist independently of the author. There is the language of intellectuals, laymen, artists, conman, perverts, moralists, fanatics, critics, etc. Hasan has not created the languages or the people who speak them. This task appears simple, but it is extremely difficult. In Hasan's narratives, laughter is used to undermine society's established canons. This phenomenon is referred to as carnival by Bakhtin and is associated with dialogism. Carnival is viewed as an ongoing social process that elicits laughter by subverting society's establishment and traditional constructs.

The depiction of culture, identity, alienation and migration are some of the major themes discussed in the novels of contemporary Indian English women writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy. Indian women writers are successfully carving a niche of their own with their strong voices, pacing at par with the world around them. Their writings are not merely constricted to household chores or meek feminine characters rather they excel beyond the typical adherence of Indian feminine codes of conduct and raise voice for themselves.

With the rise of modernism, people's perceptions of themselves and others have shifted dramatically. India as a multicultural nation has witnessed the challenges and atrocities of multicultural encounters in various ways and forms including ethnic clashes, militancy, mob violence, immigration, etc. Being born and brought up in the North eastern state of Meghalaya she holds up a unique perspective concerning the dilemmas of living in a society that constantly remind her of her place and origin. Thus it is not surprising to find her characters going through similar circumstances like the author and her family. Along with the issue of migration she also

delineates other ground realities of common middle class people of contemporary society who try hard to cope with the immediate surroundings. These day-to-day ordinary realities governed by numerous alternatives only heighten the sense of dilemma in her characters' lives. The need to consider cultural differences and an intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiation with 'other' cultures is a recurrent feature of the literature of the north-eastern states. Such cultural encounters with the cultures from either mainland India or from outside the border of the country have been addressed and responded by each community or linguistic group in its own distinctive manner. The main waves of cultural invasion can be traced in the Bhakti movement, followed by the various reformist dispensations of the nineteenth century, colonialism and the Christian missionary activities that accompanied it, and the new culture of development that has become a part of global culture. As a result these also found expression in the literary world of the region. The response of the writers to the onslaught of the 'modernity' of the postcolonial state, their negotiations with the idea of the gradual erasure of the notion of communities, their sensitive approach to the issue of identity could be some of the distinguishable markers of the complexity of the problem.

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

Anjum Hasan is an Indian novelist, short story writer, poet, and editor. She graduated in philosophy from North-Eastern Hill University in Shillong, Meghalaya. She is one of the many Indian women writers writing in English who have significant contribution in the field of contemporary Indian Literature. Writers particularly, Anjum Hasan, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapoor, Kiran Desai and Arundhati Roy probe into human relationships and the crusade against age-old systems. She was born in Shillong, Meghalaya and currently lives in Bangalore, Karnataka, India. Hasan's first novel, *Lunatic in my Head* was published in 2007. Her second novel titled *Neti, Neti* (Roli Books, 2009) was longlisted for the 2008 Man Asian Literary Prize and shortlisted for The Hindu Best Fiction Award in 2010. Her short-story collection, *Difficult Pleasures* (2012), was shortlisted for the Hindu Literary Prize. Her latest collection of short stories, *A Day in the Life* was published in 2018. She has also contributed poems, articles, and short stories to various national and international publications. She is currently serving as books editor for the *Caravan*, a journal of politics and culture.

Anjum Hasan is one among many contemporary writers in India writing in English. As a writer, Hasan appears to personalise the larger socio-political realities by focusing on the smaller characters, set in varied space, time and contexts. For instance, keeping the news in the background she lets the individuals react to that larger reality. Hasan is not a full-fledged poet but poetry is the foundation in her literary career. There are traces of her lyrical quality in the craft of sentences in

fiction. Her debut poetry collection *Street on the Hill* (2006) recalls the time she lived in Shillong.

The present research is inspired by some of the classic ideas and critical framework of Michael Bakhtin as well as postcolonial discourse. Bakhtin can be considered as one of the earliest precursors of postmodernism. *The Dialogic Imagination* expands on Dostoevsky's concept of “polyphony,” which he first proposed in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. The concept of identity has been questioned time and again across various fields and disciplines including literature, history, politics, education, social sciences, popular culture, etc. In the present paper the scholar attempts to explore representation of identity in ‘polyphonic’ novels written by Anjum Hasan from a Bakhtinian perspective. Mikhail Bakhtin’s notions about the genre of the novel and its scope to represent the dialogic nature of self and language are applied to study Anjum Hasan’s selected texts.

The present study undertakes a comparative study of the treatment of multiple consciousness of characters in the selected primary and intertextual texts by authors of different literary and historical background. This is done in order to-

1. To explore the play of self and consciousness in varied contexts ranging from particular to universal.
2. To find a link among the selected texts that contributes to an understanding of the relationships between consciousnesses of characters, self and context, text and author, as well as text and context.

3. To examine how individuals, including authors, artists, readers, characters and possibly self-conscious beings respond to identity and transformation of self in a multicultural and multi-lingual society.

MIKHAI MIKHAILOVICH BAKHTIN

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975), a Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar who significantly contributed to and made a profound impact on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language during his life-time, is known and remembered for his extraordinary contribution to modern philosophy, areas of linguistics and schools of literary theory, to the idea of interrelatedness of language and society, and above all, for presenting a pragmatic, practical, and effective alternative to systems based on Greek philosophers. The concepts he developed, concepts such as ‘chronotope’ (specific time-space co-ordinates which shape every novel) ‘dialogism’, ‘carnival’, and terms/phrases he coined, such as ‘heteroglossia’, ‘discourse in the novel’ and ‘grotesque realism’ are relevant in an era of new and emerging knowledge societies.

Bakhtin’s writings have been read by critics along with contemporary post-structuralist theory as well as feminist theory. According to Nancy Glazener, Bakhtin’s idea of novelistic discourse as a struggle among socio-ideological languages acts against the patriarchal myth that there could be a language of truth transcending relations of power and desire. Bakhtin often refers to the fact that works of fiction are apt to incorporate at least some of the author’s own philosophies, tastes, points of views and general attitudes to life.

In summing up the manifold aspects of language resulting from the continual duel played out between opposing centripetal and centrifugal forces Holquist hails Bakhtin's acute sensitivity to the "immense plurality of experience," pointing out that, whereas other receiver-sender models for communication involve "two actual people talking to each other as sovereign egos capable of sending messages to each other through the kind of uncluttered space," Bakhtin prefers the view that each person constitutes "a consciousness at a specific point in the history of defining itself through the choice it has made – out of all possible languages available to it at that moment – of a discourse to transcribe its intention in this specific exchange" (Bakhtin xi)

The popular label "the Northeast" entered into the Indian lexicon in 1971 and reflects an external and not a local point of view. Preeti Gill in her edited book titled *The Peripheral Centre* defines it as "to that part of India that is called, for lack of a better term". (3) It is the easternmost region of India consisting of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. That is in effect a lumping together of eight very different states, each with individual cultures, ethnicities and physical contours. Most of the writers from this region have turned down the term "the Northeast". They also strongly argue that the term is colonial and hence, an artificial construct. There is nothing called a "northeasterner" and the concept is purely geographical; it tends to homogenize an extremely heterogeneous cluster of people. But in popular imagination it is a region of green hills and lush valleys, of incessant rain, of deep dark forests, of mighty rivers, a region resonating with a deep silence. The Northeastern region has witnessed the

challenges and atrocities of multicultural encounters. The dominant popular image of this region is one the countless insurgencies where Indian soldiers are engaged in the defence of the 'nation'. People in the Northeast are different, physically, culturally, in their religious affiliation etc. and this just underlines the fact of the divide that exists between the region and the rest of the country (Gill 6). Being born and brought up in the North-Eastern State of Meghalaya Anjum Hasan holds up a unique perspective concerning the dilemmas of living in a society that constantly remind her of her place and origin. It is not surprising to find her characters going through similar circumstances. Along with the issue of migration she also delineates other day-to-day realities of common middle class people of contemporary society who try hard to cope with the immediate surroundings.

Anjum Hasan's writings can be placed amongst contemporary Indian women writers tackling the frequently inexplicable world of modern India. Hasan's narratives mostly deal with common people and their realities. The use of intertextual elements is another significant feature of Hasan's novel. This technique allows her to widen the scope of the narratives. Such narratives are inspired by songs, novels, as well as popular culture.

While the emergence of India's Northeast as a separate region has been comparatively recent, many of today's conflicts have their origins in the way the subcontinent was partitioned, international borders were reorganized and the region consequently became landlocked. Since its formation, the region has been a standing witness to almost all varieties of conflict -including inter-ethnic conflicts, conflict over natural resources, the native-migrant conflicts and border conflicts between the

states of the region so and so forth -substantially overlapping into each other. Although a hotbed of conflict, it is ironic that studies in conflicts specifically focused on the region really took off only since the late 1980s. It was during this period that we could see the growing convergence between Northeast Studies and Conflict Studies. “Literature on peace and conflict resolution consists predominantly of (a) memoirs, biographies and autobiographies of the ex-army generals, police officers, activists, ex-insurgents etc; (b) journalistic writings with detailed chronicling of the events, incidents and organizations involved in insurgencies and movements; (c) scholarly and policy-oriented writings by researchers, advisors and consultants; (d) reports, vision documents etc. of the government, the voluntary organizations and other multilateral agencies and last but not the least (e) the literary works mostly in the regional languages”(Singh 2).

A number of works of English fiction by writers from the Northeast have appeared since 2000 including, Siddhartha Deb’s *The Point of Return* , and *Surface*, Mitra Phukan’s *The Collector’s Wife*, Dhruva Hazarika’s *A Bowstring Winter*, Temsula Ao’s short story collection *These Hills Called Home*, and Mamang Dai’s short fiction *The Legends of Pensam*.

Notwithstanding the claims and counterclaims, it is true that the concept of identity is in a period of rapid evolution. Changing technologies also have contributed to the problematic. In addition identities are increasingly getting hybridized. In such a scenario how does one understand identity formation and its articulation? In the context of Northeast in spite of claims of uniqueness of an identity, the identities have undergone tremendous evolution and have been

hybridized. Identities in the Northeast can best be understood to have been placed between conflicts of self/other binary, in an in-betweenness. Although many problems regarding the Northeast simply frustrate us for their monotonous repetition, reiteration and having no-possible- solution-at-hand there are areas that are stimulating and productive from academic point of view. There are many changes that have embraced the common life in Northeast within a very short period of time. Therefore; there is a kind of cultural inertia that dominates the psychology of the people. People are being caught in the conflicts between multiple structures of power and authority.

Stuart Hall speaks of three different conceptions of identity in his essay “The Question of Cultural Identity”: “those of the[a] Enlightenment subject, [b] Sociological subject, and [c] Post- Modern subject” (Hall 597). The first is an individualistic one and connected with a person’s identity. The second holds the view that identity is formed in the “interaction” between and self and society. The sociological identity of the person helps him to be a part of a culture. But in the postmodern world the identities are shifting. “The subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed not of a single, but of several sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities...This produces the post-modern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity” (598). This situation is called as “crisis of identity”.

POLYPHONIC NOVEL

A polyphonic novel can be simply described as having a narrative that allows freedom and grants validity to multiple characters. The characters are allowed to develop on their own with the use of whatever means at hand in varied contexts. The scope of their development appears to be very wide and beyond the control of readers as well the author. The term polyphony has been derived from music that means variety in tones. Polyphony as a concept and metaphor in literary studies was introduced by 20th century Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. As a metaphor polyphony not only refers to multiple voices but also to varied viewpoints and consciousnesses. Through his writings he raised a series of debates concerning dialogue, 'varied-speechedness', as well as the author's position in a particular text. According to Bakhtin, polyphonic world the protagonist must always struggle, "to destroy that framework of other people's words about him that might finalise and deaden him." (Bakhtin 59)

Polyphony implies the freedom of the characters' voices and the voices that compose a polyphonic novel are dialogic in nature. The term polyphony has often been considered as synonymous with dialogism or heteroglossia. Polyphony is a way of representing heteroglossia in a novel. Polyphony means 'multi-voicedness', while 'heteroglossia' means 'multi-languagedness'. Bakhtin in his study of Dostoevsky's novels argues that in a polyphonic novel character and narrator exist on the same surface. Both have equal rights to speak that make a polyphonic novel democratic. This equality of utterance is central to Bakhtin's view of the novel.

The characters in a polyphonic novel are not controlled by an omniscient narrator but they become subjects on an equal level with the narrator. This feature of the novel creates conditions for dialogism, as the readers can connect directly with the characters. According to David Lodge, a polyphonic novel is a “novel in which a variety of conflicting ideological positions are given a voice and set in play both between and within individual speaking subjects, without being placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice”. (Lodge 86)

Because fiction is multivoiced, many ideological positions might join the story. Bakhtin's idea is sometimes known as “dialogics”. According to Bakhtin, dialogics or dialogism refers to the process through which meaning emerges from interactions between the author, the work, and the reader/listener. These factors are impacted by the social and political forces that surround them. “The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through”. (Bakhtin 40). Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist also see the two terms interchangeable. “We consider Dostoevsky one of the greatest innovators in the realm of artistic form. He created, in our opinion, a completely new type of artistic thinking, which we have provisionally called polyphonic” (Bakhtin 3).

The plot of a polyphonic novel lacks any form of concluding underpinnings. Its purpose is to put a person in numerous scenarios that expose and challenge him/her, to bring individuals together and have them clash and conflict, but in such a manner that they do not stay within the plot's confines but go beyond it. Bakhtin slammed the traditional notion of a completed or closed piece of art. According to him, a work of art can only live if it is part of a conversation. Only works that are not

closed, that is, works that are still open, such as polyphonic works in which the writers do not retain the final word regarding their characters, are capable of dialogue. The dialogue is helped in such a work by the highly autonomous characters who are capable of conversing with one another.

David Patterson in an article titled, “Mikhail Bakhtin and the Dialogical Dimensions of the Novel” attempts to show how Bakhtin reveals to us that the novel is not simply a literary genre but – ‘it is a dynamic presence which characterizes the movement of response, the act of creation, and the search for truth.’ (Patterson 131) Patterson states that the concept of dialogue is central to Bakhtin’s approach to literature in general and to the novel in particular. As Bakhtin states in his, *The Dialogic Imagination* - “The work and the word represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers” (254). In the words of David Patterson, “the dialogical dimensions of the novel draw its readers into a dialogical interaction with the novel”. (131)

It becomes art when the views most opposite to the author’s own are allowed to exist in full strength. Without this a novel of ideas is mere self-indulgence, and didacticism is simply axe-grinding. The opposites must be free to range themselves against each other, and they must be passionately expressed on both sides. (Bellow 220)

Bakhtin's view of Dostoevsky's narrative emphasises that in his novels a character's viewpoint is allowed to exist as opposed to the author's view. Although a narrator must empathise with or even sympathise towards a character to embody polyphony, they must also be different from each other. Bakhtin seems to argue that both character and narrator must keep their unique respective self or sense of identities. A narrator in polyphonic novel shows empathy towards character but at the same time keeps a dialogic relation and there must be distance between them. Narrator and character are independent from each other and both of them keep their own identity. I have attempted to show how these issues are embodied in Anjum Hasan's novels.

In the three selected novels of Anjum Hasan, there is the use of free indirect discourse. Free indirect speech, free indirect style, or, in French, *discourse indirect libre* is a technique of presenting a character's voice partly mediated by the voice of the author. It has also been described as the illusion by which third-person narrative comes to express the intimate subjectivity of fictional characters. Goethe and Jane Austen were considered as first novelists to use this style and nineteenth century novelist Gustave Flaubert was the first to be aware of it as a style.

Every individual is incomplete from within but sees every other individual as complete, because they can be observed from outside. In simple words, one needs to know others' perspectives of oneself in order to see oneself as complete. Although they may show similar characteristics, each individual is non-identical, different and unique – thus there is a multiplicity of individuals. Similarly, there are groups of languages, saturated with ideologies, which 'interpellate' the individual throughout

life. While Althusser thought in terms of ISAs (Ideological State Apparatuses), institutions controlling society, Bakhtin thought in terms of individuality – the micro level of society. Hence, the world consists of multiple languages/discourses/voices – in other words heteroglossia. Hasan’s characters find themselves in a ‘profoundly pluralistic’ world, filled with people who express opposing views which correspond to the contradictoriness of their historical ‘social reality’.

In Hasan’s *Lunatic in my Head* and other novels, heteroglossia/polyphony is exposed throughout the texts, as the voices of the characters continually interweave throughout the progress of the narrative. It is a free indirect style, guiding the readers to follow the lives of the three main characters Firdaus, Sophie and Aman, interrupted by the thoughts (voices) of other subsidiary characters, who cross their paths. Through this technique Hasan exposes not only the characters’ voices, but also the language of a variety of people and social groups, their attitudes to life, each other, and other classes. Hasan’s voice can be felt sometimes as inserted commentary, often bracketed, and sometimes merged within the voices of her characters.

Issues of ‘identity’ in Anjum Hasan’s first two novels can be basically seen in two ways. One, how the whole lot of the people were separated from the mainland India due their physical features and how the Khasi community of the hills claim Shillong as their land and outside settlers as ‘dhkar’. In *Neti Neti*, one character Ribor says, “It’s hard.... everyone out there thinks we’re Chinese and tries to rip us off.” (Hasan 57) The title *Neti, Neti* appears to be derived from the Sanskrit for “neither this, nor that”, words that capture the protagonist’s

rejection of all the conventional narratives life has to offer. Sophie is an outsider wherever she is, be it Bangalore or Shillong, always a bit dissatisfied with the options at hand. That thread of the perpetual outsider runs through most of Anjum Hasan's writings. In the second section of the novel entitled, "*If Wishes Were Horses*" Sophie appears to be undecided as to which place she really belonged. She runs back to Shillong, to Ribor, her 'fantasy' dream lover, unable to bear the rapid pace of life in the big city. There is a comparison of life in Shillong and Bangalore:

Bangalore, on the other hand, possessed a great zest for ugliness. Everyone just wanted to obscure the view, blot out the sky, erase the gaps. The city not just proliferated but kept reproducing itself. You never arrived anywhere in Bangalore. You never turned a corner and experienced an epiphany.
(Hasan 35-36)

Sophie reflects that Shillong that once accommodated people "who spoke a dozen languages" has "started to throw off this crazy past and become the pure thing it had possibly never been- a place where one people of one blood lived. All through her life this had continued to be the town's defining characteristic- its search for purity and aloofness". (58)

Set in Shillong *Lunatic in my Head* narrates the story of three different persons; a middle aged college professor Firdaus Ansari, a civil service aspirant Aman Moondy and an eight year old girl Sophie Das. As their stories unfold we get a clear picture of the life they lead in contemporary Shillong. Hasan has named the chapters after the nine human emotions: *Wonder, Sadness, Love, Courage, Disgust, Fear, Anger, Joy and Peace*. The concept of native 'Identity' versus outsider in

Shillong becomes a central issue in the first chapter itself. Firdaus Ansari, “refused to introduce herself as a Bihari because though her parents were from Bihar,” (Hasan,4) she was born in Shillong and had never lived anywhere else. She gives a graphic account of the people she sees everyday.

Firdaus knew that the woman waving to her the window of the beauty parlour, her friend Sharon, was a quarter- British, a quarter- Assamese of the tea planter variety, and Half-Khasithe college boys whistling were entirely Khasi, that the short, scruffy men from restaurants,...were from distant Nepal but had probably never stirred out of Shillong since their parents migrated here...that the two with long black umbrella....were Bengalis. (3)

The tribal identity of the mistress of her husband looms larger than the relationship for “long suffering Nivedita,” who is Firdaus colleague at the college. Firdaus wondered how such “connections were still being established between people from opposite sides of that invisible, yet very palpable, line that divided people in Shillong.” (12) The novel is filled with such selective behavior of the people who impose certain identities on others. Sophie’s teacher Miss Wilson, who is half- British, prefers to speak “to her father Mr. Das who is a Bengali, teaches and speaks standard English. “He was one of the most distinguished teachers of English in Shillong.” (24)

Cultural intersection has long been the subject of intellectual debates across many continents. Sometimes, the discussions have bordered on the rhetoric while at other times it has led to inconclusive dead-ends, leaving as an aftermath, only the

sound of gunfights and wasted tears. As long as there are peoples and places and political boundaries, the division or distinction between the insider and outsider seems unlikely to be resolved. In a country like India where people of different religions and ethnicity live together it is necessary to respect each other's culture to maintain healthy atmosphere among them. Thus, multiculturalism as a theoretical approach advocates a number of policies in different nations. Many western nations have diversity of different cultures and so the issue of multiculturalism has become significant after World War II for various reasons such as political mobilization of indigenous people and the significance of ethnicity. It has also affected the whole world and in particular the Third World Nations.

India as a multicultural nation has witnessed the challenges and atrocities of multicultural encounters in various ways and forms including ethnic clashes, militancy, mob violence, immigration, etc. Being born and brought up in the North eastern state of Meghalaya she holds up a unique perspective concerning the dilemmas of living in a society that constantly remind her of her place and origin. Thus it is not surprising to find her characters going through similar circumstances like the author and her family. Along with the issue of migration she also delineates other ground realities of common middle class people of contemporary society who try hard to cope with the immediate surroundings. These day-to-day ordinary realities governed by numerous alternatives only heighten the sense of dilemma in her characters' lives. The need to consider cultural differences and an intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiation with 'other' cultures is a recurrent feature of the literature of the north-eastern states. Such

cultural encounters with the cultures from either mainland India or from outside the border of the country have been addressed and responded by each community or linguistic group in its own distinctive manner. The main waves of cultural invasion can be traced in the Bhakti movement, followed by the various reformist dispensations of the nineteenth century, colonialism and the Christian missionary activities that accompanied it, and the new culture of development that has become a part of global culture. As a result these also found expression in the literary world of the region. The response of the writers to the onslaught of the 'modernity' of the postcolonial state, their negotiations with the idea of the gradual erasure of the notion of communities which had only marginal links with each other in the past, their sensitive approach to the issue of identity could be some of the distinguishable markers of the complexity of the problem.

Works Cited

Althusser, Louis. *On The Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Verso, 2014.

Bakhtin, M.M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota press, 1999.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. 1973. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.

Hasan, Anjum. *Lunatic in my Head*. Penguin Random House, 2007.

Lodge, David. *The Art of Fiction*. Vintage, 2011.

Patterson, David. "Mikhail Bakhtin and the Dialogical Dimensions of the Novel." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 44, no. 2, 1985, pp. 131–39, <https://doi.org/10.2307/430515>. Accessed 25 April 2022.

CHAPTER-II

EMERGING VOICES IN ANJUM HASAN'S *LUNATIC IN MY HEAD* AND *NETI, NETI*

This chapter presents the play of multiple voices and the question of self in the selected works of Anjum Hasan from a postcolonial perspective. The quest for identity and self-fulfillment can be seen in the characters portrayed by Anjum Hasan. Her novel, *Lunatic in My Head* (2007) centers around such issues and the three chief characters Sophie Das, Aman Moondy and Firdaus Ansari are seen struggling to find a place in a wide spectrum of alienated people surrounding them. Their search for identity is fostered by the ethnic divide that separates them from the locals. Hasan's novel *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This* (2009) is read as a sequel to her first novel. In *Neti, Neti*, the chief character Sophie Das is represented as a grown up woman who looks out for fulfillment in the city of Bangalore. Both the novels represent multiple voices which are valid and diverse.

The distinguishing features of any individual, a certain social category or group, can be regarded as identity in a broad sense. One of the most essential aspects of identity is how it manifests in relationships with others. Due to migration, both internal and foreign, and the resulting integration of numerous groups of people, identity has become a difficult term. Regardless of time and geography, authors, researchers, and critics have always been concerned about themes of identity, identity crisis, and identity search. Cultural identity is linked to one's participation in certain cultural ideas and customs that one shares within the confines of a certain

group. Long ago, when civilization was in its infancy, an individual's identity was determined by his affiliation with a community/ethnic group, and the traditional concept of identity was clearly viewed as a fixed construct devoid of any political affiliation or association.

The notions of nationhood, nationalism, and national identity are central to the postcolonial debate on identity. The ideology of hegemony, divide and rule was associated with the colonial mind set. Postcolonial philosophers and critics of diaspora studies and cultural studies such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart, and others challenged the essentialist view of identity as a permanent construct. While disputing both the essentialist and colonial views of identity as a hegemonic construct, Bhabha proposes that the negotiation of cultural identity involves a constant interface and exchange of cultural performances, which results in mutual recognition of cultural difference.

Bhabha adds a new dimension to the notion of identity by claiming that it is never fixed since it is culturally negotiated against the backdrop of postcolonial migration, transnational mobility, and diaspora vision. Bhabha discusses the 'liminal' negotiation of cultural identity across disparities of race, class, gender, and cultural traditions in his introduction to the *Location of Culture* (1994), as well as identity in terms of 'cultural hybridity.'

Timothy Brennan in the essay, "The National Longing for Form", published in the influential anthology *Nation and Narration* (1990), refers to Bakhtin in a discussion of literary form in to order to address the aesthetic dimension of national

life. The form of the novel allows a platform where foreign languages intersect, forming an unsettled mixture of ideas and styles and much more. Brennan holds that, “Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on the novel – usually discussed in terms of a purely textual understanding of his key terms ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘dialogism’- describes this aspect of the novel more clearly than anyone.” (Brennan 50).

LUNATIC IN MY HEAD

In this chapter an attempt has also been made to trace the inner psyche of major characters in the selected novels. Anjum Hasan’s *Lunatic in My Head* is basically about the fear and uncertainty that three chief characters – Fidaus, Aman and Sophie – have to face throughout their life in Shillong. These characters are affected by the people around them in the process they become conscious of their positions and try to negotiate with the immediate surroundings in distinct ways. The author has placed them in various situations and allows them to react to ordinary realities that they face. All the chief characters are connected to people from diverse backgrounds that add variety to the novel and points to the polyphonic nature of the narrative. Apart from the chief characters the voices of other characters are given equal importance as they comment on the day-to-day realities of the society they live in. It is therefore; interesting to note how Firduas, Aman and Sophie try to deal with the familial and societal happenings that ultimately lead to the shaping of their identities. The common thread that connects these three characters is that they are not native in the place where the novel is set. The setting of the novel is Shillong, the hill town in the Northeastern state of Meghalaya, India. They are considered as ‘dkhars’, a term that implies a foreigner or someone who does not have roots in the

place. This attitude of the local people has been reflected through the characters of Aman and Sophie. Both Sophie and Aman feel discriminated because of their origin. There are instances in the novel where they feel discriminated because of their origin. However, there are also people who accept them as they are without any discrimination. On the other hand, Firdaus does not face any of discrimination like them.

Throughout the novel *Lunatic in My Head*, Hasan deals with the crisis of identity, the quest for roots, the collision of cultures, and the inside-outsider struggle caused by migration. It focuses on the mental anguish, suffering, and sadness brought by the mundane city life, which causes observable changes in one's life and then re-locates them. The novel's title; *Lunatic in my Head*, taken from one of the songs by popular band Pink Floyd indicates that the protagonists are fundamentally insane, scarred, and disillusioned. They suffer from isolation, alienation, and marginalisation in a place that is not their own. They were born in the area, yet they have no cultural origins there. The 'dkhars' or non-Khasis – are regarded 'outsiders' in the Khasi homeland of Shillong. Their hopes have been crushed, and they are frustrated and disillusioned. In a post-colonial context, lunacy is more internal than external. It can never be seen, but it can be felt. It is also linked to a questionable sense of self. As a result, the characters have become 'lunatic' in their desperate search for identity and roots.

The characters in Anjum Hasan's story are always on the lookout for their true selves. They adore Shillong and consider themselves to be a part of the hill city. They do not, however, belong here. They are unable to tolerate the original

inhabitants of the country, the Khasis' attitude towards non-Khasis. Sophie Das, an eight-year-old girl in Class three at a local English school, has no idea where she was born. She is from a traditional Bengali family. Her mother is a Northerner. Mr. Das, her father, was a college instructor who is currently unemployed. Her mother is about to give birth to a kid, but she is concerned about the child's future. They live in a place where they have a home, but it is not their homeland. Despite being within the same nation, the geographical borders created between states dislocate them. They yearn for a cultural tie with the earth and its people, but it is futile. As a result, national identity is under threat, losing ground in its own country and among its own people.

On the other hand, the Khasis, who live in Shillong, are on a quest to gain their rights (as are the other tribes of Assam and other northeastern regions). The Khasis' rage at the impact of colonialism on their lives and land is palpable. Meghalaya was formed from Assam in 1972 in order to empower indigenous people and give them authority over their fate. They believe that the Indian government is deceiving them about their social standing. They believe that people from other Indian states look down on them. They feel deprived, ostracised, and mocked for their shabby lifestyle. Some of them even engage in unconstitutional protests against the republic. They have taken up guns, created unlawful organisations, and marched forward to defend their rights. They are unable to choose between being an Indian or a Khasi (tribal) first. Anjum Hasan mentions graffiti on a wall in dripping red paint that reads: 'We are Khasis by Blood, Indians by Accident'. (Hasan 32)

It is not like Shillong's main issue is cultural friction. Dr Gorakh Moondy, Aman's father, sensed it in Calcutta, West Bengal. He travelled from Calcutta to Shillong. He had no intention of spending the rest of his life in the city. He did not think he stood a chance in this situation. However; his relocation to Shillong was also motivated by a frantic desire for identity. His father, a native of Uttar Pradesh, had a 'mithai' business in Calcutta. Dr Moondy moved to Shillong on the spur of the moment, knowing little about the city. Dr Moondy is dissatisfied with the political and social instability impacting Shillong's young. He has no idea what has caused individuals to become so antisocial and aggressive.

This social turmoil is also the result of a search for identity, a self-relocation. It has varied characteristics for different people. Some others have condemned Firdaus' pursuit for her identification at the time. In his eighteen years in Shillong, Sarak Singh, a Bihari 'aloo-muri' vendor has learned to cope with the villagers' aversions. He did not object to the punch thrown by the local. For his own survival, he has learned to take the insult.

Even the most immature hearts yearn for identity. Sophie Das is an eight-year-old has also experienced the feelings of being an 'outsider' in Shillong. Perhaps she picked up on this from her parents' chats. In her wildest thoughts, she imagined herself to be her parents' adopted kid. She's got an internal desire to blend in with the local culture. She informs her classmates that her biological father is Uncle Syiem, a native resident of the area. The individual is a friend of her father who pays them visits on occasion.

Sophie enjoys spending time with Kong Elsa, the Khasi landlady woman. She goes to a wedding with Kong Elsa on one occasion. Other girls of her age mock her for being a dkhar, a non-Khasi. Her tea and sweets were not offered by the tea girls. The embarrassed little girl of eight felt belittled and mocked for being an outsider, a dkhar. She realised that another female at the party had spotted the incident and was laughing at her state. Since Independence, the insider-outsider dispute has been a major political problem in India's northeast. Displacement politics, migration, and growing calls for new homelands have ravaged the whole area.

Aman Moondy misses his second try at the IAS exam and plans to leave Shillong for Delhi in quest of better chances. Firdaus notices that her relationship with Ibomcha is improving. Ibomcha offers marriage to her. She switches M.Phil. supervisors and begins her M.Phil. dissertation all over again with Mrs Khan as her new Guide. Sophie no longer considers herself adopted. Her father has taken a new position at a school, and her mother has begun tutoring several young boys. Their family has settled down. She enjoys playing with her sister and has no desire to merge her identity with the community.

Firdaus' sense of identity is governed by her dilemma concerning whether to live in Shillong forever or not. When her parents were alive she wanted to move out to Delhi. But now, the idea to leave the place terrifies her. She tries to avoid negative thoughts about her college, about her boyfriend Ibomcha and more particularly the memory of the dead bodies of her parents. She tries to repress the memory of her dead parents.

After her parents' deaths, the idea of leaving Shillong had terrified her. The journey she'd made alone to Jalpaiguri – a small town in west Bengal – to locate her parents' bodies was a thing in her memory that lay under blackness. It had grown grotesque with time because she refused to touch it or unveil it, and it lay festering, assuming different shapes in different lights. (Hasan, 107)

All these mixed and suppressed feelings bother her. Uncertainty, depression and fear make her an obsessive hand-washer. Though the work is rich in localism and highlights the beauty of Shillong, Hasan also emphasises the notion of a plural society, in which several races coexist. Sophie Das is of mixed ethnicity; her mother is from the North, while her father is Bengali. Furthermore; they speak English at home rather than Hindi or Bengali. We observe Aman Moondy and his companion Ribor trying to defend Sarak Singh, the 'aloo-muri' vendor, from the local bullies who were manhandling the helpless man without any cause in one of the novel's episodes. When Firdaus considers the improbability of her marriage to her Manipuri partner, Ibomcha, she faces the insider-outsider dilemma. Her lonely lifestyle with her eighty-one year old 'Nana' for companionship contrasts dramatically with the dozens of relatives and friends that surrounds Ibomcha's life.

Despite this, Firdaus feels a strong bond with Ibomcha. She opens up her emotions to him, telling him of her parents' death in a train accident about two decades ago, as well as the emotional torment she experienced. Firdaus resolves to marry Ibomcha, the man with a kind heart, near the end of the tale, understanding

that she has spent her time thinking her circular ideas. The author highlights the possibilities of cultural hybridity and assimilation.

Hasan's story goes even farther, questioning the temporality and transience of the insider-outsider divide. When confronted with the greater world outside, such limited insider-outsider division appears to fade into insignificance, as suggested by the literature, western music, and culture highlighted in *Lunatic in my Head*. Shakespeare, Hemingway, Dickens, Jane Austen, and Pink Floyd are all literary and musical agents that help to transcend this divide.

Being born in Shillong, Firdaus found it difficult to introduce herself as a Bihari and she had never lived anywhere else. She had been living with her grandfather since her parents' death. Her parents had died in a train accident on one of their rare visits to the village where her grandfather had lived. At that time she had been planning to leave Shillong and enroll herself in the University in Delhi. After her parents' death the idea of leaving Shillong frightened her. Sometimes the thought to leave the place occurs in her mind when life in the college appeared shallow and her boyfriend Ibomcha seemed an utter stranger to her. She would console herself by thinking that she could always leave.

Firdaus' she had been teaching English to disinterested students in a college run by the nuns for fourteen years. Her working with college brought her nothing for her sense of morality. She would feel repulsed and fascinated by the lives lead by Mother Gertrude and the nuns who were stoic in her eyes. Firdaus' colleague Nibedita had an unfaithful husband whose affair with a tribal woman was discussed

by other teachers – Flossie Sharma and Konkona. While other colleagues suggested Nibedita to divorce her husband, Firdaus told her to ignore him for some time. When Firdaus learned that Nibedita's husband had affair with a tribal girl, she liked the idea and it made her happy to think that connections were still being established between tribal and non-tribal.

In the same section of the novel titled 'Wonder', Hasan introduces Aman Moondy and his family as well as Sophie Das and her family separately. Hasan follows this pattern throughout the narrative. She has given titles to various sections of the novel starting with 'Wonder' followed by 'Sadness', 'Love', 'Courage', 'Disgust', 'Fear', 'Anger', 'Joy' and 'Peace'. These titles are connected to the chief characters going through a wide range of emotions and feelings. For instance, in the section entitled, Wonder, there is a sense of wonder running through Firdaus, Aman and Sophie. Firdaus wonders at the need of doing an MPhil at all. There is no progress in her life Aman wonders, "Why do people spend so much of their adult lives worrying about the mundane and stating the obvious?" (Hasan, 14) Sophie's mother is expecting a child and eight years old Sophie ponders the question of how the child would make its way into the world. Even though her grandfather wants her to marry the maulvi's son and she has been seeing a man (Ibomcha), a Manipuri, much younger than herself, she does not want to marry either of them.

Hasan has developed various categories of people in her narrative and has let them engage in conversations. In depicting each of these characters Hasan has adopted distinct vocabulary unique to each. Kong Bina for instance, is a domestic helper to both Firdaus and Das' family. She takes interest in the lives of people she is

working for and shares information regarding other people. In the novel, Kong Bina tells Mrs Das about Firdaus life - "... She would report, as she maniacally washed, on Firdaus, the woman who was still unmarried and lived with her wretched grandfather". (Hasan 40) Side by side Kong Bina shares her experience with Das' family in the form of occasional updates. Towards the later part of the novel she suggests Firdaus that she should marry Ibomcha, the guy from Manipur.

Memsahib, I'll tell you something, and you should listen to me when I say this because I may be younger than you, but I've seen the world. I'm not an educated person but some things I know. It's not in vain that this hair of mine has started to grey, I've borne three children, I've know two men – one a total scoundrel, the other just stupid... (Hasan 342)

Aman Moondy is an IAS aspirant. Aman and his friends "had just formed a band called The ProtoDreamers; they would play Pink Floyd covers at concerts and in private" (Hasan 19). It is clearly stated that how the significance of Pink Floyd albums kept changing as Aman' life changed. In contrast, "Banshan was a rock music enthusiast and a freelance preacher" (19).

Hasan introduces Sophie Das in a different context, "Sophie Das, aged eight, was not paying attention to Miss Wilson's history lesson on the Buddha. Her mother was expecting a baby in a few weeks, and she sat in class pondering the question of how the child would make its way into the world." As a child Sophie also pondered upon the question of relation with her parents as well as her parents' relationship with the other parents of her classmates. "She and her father and her mother- they

were all odd.” Sophie was odd for her inability to speak Bengali. Her mother was odd because she did not have any relatives in Shillong unlike the mothers of Sophie’s classmates. Likewise her father Mr Das “never chatted with the other fathers because he did not have a job at the moment...”but the oddest thing was they did not own a TV. (Hasan 23).

Reference to ongoing socio-political debate concerning tribal people can be seen when Aman and Ribor, passed a graffiti in dripping red paint, “We are Khasis by Blood, Indians by Accident” (Hasan 32) Aman “found it particularly hard to defend himself against racist attacks because he was never sure who he was defending- an encroacher, a permanent guest of the hills-people, or someone who belonged here because he had never lived anywhere else?” (37).

What are people afraid of? He began strolling on the pavement that ran around a darkened football field. People were afraid of each other, that’s what it was. Dkhars were afraid of tribals, tribals were afraid of dkhars. He had to get out of Shillong, despite Concordella. The town, like the subject of Philosophy, had no future. Aman’s father said this often, his teacher considered it a given, and many of his classmates at school, indoctrinated by their parents, had virtually considered the town a chimera. (Hasan 72)

Similarly, Aman’s concern about his roots is highlighted by the author-

He found it particularly hard to defend himself against racist attacks because he was never sure who he was defending – an encroacher, a permanent guest

of the hills-people, or someone who belonged here because he had never lived anywhere else? Which one of these? He didn't know. (37)

Firdaus' boyfriend Ibomcha, an immigrant from Manipur who "reinvented himself every week" shares his views on education while referring to complex lives in his state driven by violence and conflicts- "Education's not good in Manipur...people with money living in towns under constant threat of violence" (Hasan 62).

The sense of belongingness to a place occupies Firdaus' mind- "She refused to introduce herself as a Bihari because though her parents were from Bihar, she was born in Shillong and had never lived anywhere else. What did that make her? In Shillong's eyes if nothing else at least a dkhar, a foreigner, someone who did not have roots here, did not have the ground needed to put roots in." (Hasan 4). Being a woman who has lost her parents in train accident, Firdaus is compelled to stay with her grandfather. She finds it difficult to talk about her personal life with him.

Firdaus lived with her grandfather, a man of eighty-one who had spent most of his life in a village in Bihar till circumstances forced him to move here...Whereas Firdaus spent her winter vacations alone, eating oranges out in the sun till late afternoon, while her grandfather was away on his annual trip to the village where he has once belonged. The village figured in none of Firdaus's atlases; she'd only been there a few times as a child. She hadn't once travelled out of Shillong in the last twenty years. (Hasan 56-57)

Eight-year-old Sophie Das is too young to understand the complications of the town. But she knows that her family is odd when compared to others. They do

not speak the language that the people here speak. They do not go to her grandparents' home during winter vacations because her parents have married against their respective families' wishes. They do not have a TV, since her father thinks intelligent people do not need one. "But Sophie wasn't interested in the plains. She didn't listen when her parents spoke about the plains; she couldn't appreciate nostalgia". (84) "She was ashamed that people decided not to give her food at a party, that they brazenly pointed her out as a joke to be enjoyed, or looked at her with that slight expression of distaste around their mouths." (98) She thought that the nicest thing, the nicest thing by far, even better than being adopted, would be if she could somehow turn into one of them, somehow become Khasi.

Aman often thinks of Concordella, a student in the political science department. "The whole city appeared to Amn to be organized around his chances of running into Concordella. He and Ribor were figures on a board game and somewhere else on that board, hidden from view, was this woman whom he longed to glimpse." (Hasan 31)

Aman had always found it difficult to meet anger with anger. Confrontations in schools, insults hissed out on the street, feet shooting out to trip him up – all these he faced with seeming equanimity. He found it particularly hard to defend himself against racist attacks because he was never sure who he was defending – an encroacher, a permanent guest of the hills people, or someone who belonged here because he had never lived anywhere else? Which one of these? He didn't know. He would have liked to avoid the issue. He reacted to

reports of murder and arson, of stabbing and shoot-outs, with uncertainty.
(Hasan 37)

During Sophie's mother's pregnancy period, Kong Bina reveals that her parents want a boy. She asks Kong Bina, "...how do you know it will be a boy before it's born?" Kong Bina answers,

"Oh, it will be a boy. A babu. Your parents want a boy, na," said Kong Bina knowingly. "I heard them talking that day. Baba said – I want a boy, and Mama said – as long as the child is healthy anything's fine. But a boy would be nice, she said. He can be a doctor. There should be one doctor in the family at least." (Hasan 41)

Sophie is sent to the house of Elsa Lyngdoh to keep her company. Elsa is their neighbor, an old widow, a fat and gentle matriarch, who is also their landlady. Since Sophie does not have any friend nearby her home and since her teacher Miss Wilson asks the students about programme on Discovery Channel, Sophie wants her father to buy a TV. But her father says that TV is for brainless and idiots. Instead he tells her to focus on her studies. The inability to buy a TV is because of the poor economic condition of Mr Das, who is unemployed.

Aman, while preparing for the civil service exam was only concerned with memorizing the salient features of philosophy, of Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer etc. He wonders if his approach is correct or not. He finds no one who could advise him on these matters. His father, a doctor is convinced that Aman is not fit for the medical profession but he never expresses a clear opinion on what else he ought to do. Aman

fails to pass the exam in his first attempt. The more he thinks of the exam as the only meaningful thing he can do, the only passport out of town, the less confident he feels about passing the exam. The distance between Aman and his parents had a history-

At seven, he realized that they didn't really care about what lay inside the books they bought him, at ten he stopped showing them his poems, at thirteen he started writing a diary in which till date he had never made any reference to them. Once it had been established that his father felt nothing for rock music and that he shared little of his father's hardy, gird-your-lions sort of philosophy, Aman did not see the point of discussions like these. (Hasan 71)

What Aman wanted were gestures of recognition and acknowledgement, not patronizing advice about what he ought to do, or unconcern coupled with the persistent suggestion that he was a failure.

NETI, NETI

Though the time zone has switched and Sophie is now a twenty-five year old BPO employee in Bangalore, the fears and adjustment challenges that one confronts in a new place and scenario persist in the novel *Neti, Neti*. Unlike *Lunatic in my Head*, in this novel Sophie is represented as having her own space and freedom:

Sophie possessed all this – the view from the window, the tiny flat and every particle of air in it. She could cook what she liked, smoke to her heart's content, put every object exactly where she wanted it to be and know it would not move unless she moved it. For the first time in her life she was free. (Hasan 30) At the same time, Sophie's nostalgia for Shillong has not faded after spending a year in Bangalore. She

is forced to leave her hometown in order to make a living, and she often spends her time daydreaming about her previous life in Shillong. She thinks of Ribor, her friend from Shillong.

The last time Sophie was in Ribor's shop they'd talked about her going away and she'd found it hard to explain why she was leaving. All he knew were names and rumours – Bombay, where the bombs could go off any time and the commuter train rides were interminable; Delhi, in whose buses girls carried open safety pins to ward off lecherous, groping men; Bangalore, where too many people killed themselves and where everyone was on their way to getting rich. (Hasan 32-33)

Sophie had once been like Ribor, isolated in a small town, having never seen the inside of a train or knew what it meant to view a plain land, never seen city lights, having only watched television, imagining the world through MTV and Discovery Channel, and listening to Rock Music.

Sophie understood that Ribor had grown up at a period when it was still acceptable for the town to house individuals who spoke a dozen different languages and couldn't communicate with one another. She, on the other hand, was born when Shillong was first attempting to shed its tumultuous history and reclaim the pure state it had never been - a place where one people of one blood lived. This had been the town's distinguishing quality throughout her existence — its yearning for purity and aloofness.

Shiva, Sophie's friend is always confronted by the bad things in the society. He turns out to be a compulsive pessimist. He considers Northeast as a tragic place. He tells many stories to his friends about people who died in tragic incidents. He also comments on common problems of living in a city like Bangalore. Concerning the idea of India he questions Sophie, 'Who cares, really, about the idea of India. Do you? I mean if people want to raise their own flags and form their own little countries why is that a problem?' (124). Whereas, in Sophie's case it is different-

Somewhere in the depths of her childhood she had formed the idea that India was an exact feeling, a fixed series of things in contrast to everything else in her environment which was simply what it was and had no relation to India...the words of the Rabindranath Tagore poem – 'Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake' – sung during the school assembly on Independence Day were India. The yellow pages of her history book when she was eight, filled with stories about King Harshavardhan and scenes from the Mahabharata, were India. (125)

Her role as mother to Mani, her landlord's two-year-old grandson, reminds her of the time she looked after her younger sister, Mukulika. Her social network is confined to the Bhattas, Swami, and a few colleagues and her boss Maya as a newcomer in the city. Sophie and Maya discusses about their lives. 'Maya, don't you sometimes feel we're all damned?' Sophie asked. 'I'm starting to believe I took a wrong turn somewhere. I thought moving here would make it all different but here I meet people equally lost' (174). When Sophie decides to break up with Swami, Sophie tells Maya that, "we're all trying to reach some kind of understanding with

ourselves. That's what's important – being okay with ourselves. Liking the story of our lives. Finding the story of our lives to begin with". (175)

Apart from these people, Sophie is also influenced by characters and books that she has read. She wants Swami to read the book that she has gifted. Sophie believed that if he did, some kind of irreversible mutation would take place in Swami - the same that had taken place in her when she read *Swami and Friends* at the age of nine and *Vivekananda: Awakener of Modern India* at thirteen and *Madame Bovary* at eighteen". (Hasan 37)

Hasan has skillfully used terms and phrases from Shillong throughout the story to emphasise the idea of nostalgia. Sophie Das is thrilled and sad at the same time when a rock band from Shillong arrives to perform in the city. They make her happy because they remind her of her hometown, but they make her sad because Uncle Rock, the lead man of the Shillong Blues Band, looks to have lost the aura that he and his band previously had. "Give them a chance," she pleads to everyone and no one.

Sophie feels like an alien in every city she visits, whether it's Bangalore or Shillong, and she's never pleased with the choices available. Anjum Hasan's writings are woven together by the theme of the perpetual outsider. The author explores the incomprehensible world of modern India in her novels. Sophie seemed to be unsure about where she truly belongs. She flees to Shillong, to Ribor, her dream lover, unable to cope with the fast speed of life in the big city, particularly after Rukshana's death at the hands of their mutual friend, Ringo Saar.

Shillong, on the other hand, looks to have lost its allure. Ribor, her ideal boyfriend, seemed to have grown cold feet and expressed interest in moving to Bangalore because the little town had nothing to offer. Her disappointment is compounded when she learns that her once close-knit family is on the verge of disintegration: while Mr. Das considers relocating to Shantiniketan to pursue his lifelong dream of translating *Hamlet* into Bengali, her mother intends to spend the rest of her life in Benares to atone for her sin of marrying outside her community.

Mukulika, her sister, also makes it known that she would be accompanying her lover to Delhi. Shillong's political situation is no longer the same. Corruption and political gain have obliterated the people's innocence and simplicity. Sophie reflects on how Shillong is similar to Bangalore. Consequently, she escapes to Bangalore, to Swami and his dream car.

In *Neti, Neti* the readers are introduced to a grown up Sophie from Hasan's previous novel *Lunatic in my Head*. Sophie is in Bangalore now and in a relationship with Sathi Thakur, her boyfriend. Right in the beginning of the novel there is clash of values. Sathi wants to buy a car but his father does not support the idea. He calls Sophie to tell about his interest in taking a loan to buy a car. He informs her that - "I didn't want a lecture on the meaning of life etcetera so I've kept this whole car plan to myself. But last week I just said to him straight – Appa, can you give me a bit of cash for this loan I'm taking, and instead of being curious he just quoted the Upanishads or something at me." (Hasan 8)

The landlord Mr. Bhatt has handed over six pots to Sophie which are neatly arrayed on her balcony. Getting Sophie to garden is ‘one of Mr Bhatt’s ways of trying to civilize her’. ‘Give them water yeveryday’, is his advice. So, Sophie has watered them as often as she remembered, picked black ants off the geranium, but they refused to respond and grow.

Sophie’s landlord was offended by her habits and friends. Although Bhatt complained about Sophie’s hanging of underwear on the balcony, smoking and stained floors, Bhatt could not himself give ultimatums to Sophie because she wielded a unique advantage over him. Her friend, Ringo Saar, was (besides the drummer of the band Little Idlis) employed in a financial services company that, among other things, functioned as loan recovery agency for banks. Mr Bhatt had defaulted on several loans and on his credit card repayment and the company was on his case. Ringo had informed Mr. Bhatt that the next stage of the recovery strategy involved publishing his photograph in the *Deccan Herald* along with the details of his crime. It was this ignominy Mr Bhatt had been trying to stave off by promising Ringo that he would not harass Sophie but let her stay and not raise the rent. (22)

Though Sophie is away from her parents and sister, her mother calls her to tell her about Mukulika. There is an obvious lack of bonding among Sophie’s family members that affects the life of each of them. Mrs Das says, “*Sophie, there’s a boy*. I know from her voice. This is just the beginning. Wait and watch. I’ll sit here alone wringing my hands while your father shuts himself up and answers my questions from behind a closed door. What should I do? Run out into the streets to look for her? Call

the police?” (26) Sophie’s conversation with her father was clearly limited. Her father's email was concise, a written version of his spoken way. When it came to worldly things, Mr Das rarely said more than three lines at a time and was usually content with just one.

Later in the novel, Mrs Das’ fear concerning Mukulika turns out to be true as Muku becomes a victim of teenage pregnancy. Mrs Das’s respect for marriage was in inverse proportion to her hatred for boys. According to her all girls ought to care for nothing more than finding a good husband. Sophie tried to reassure her mother, even though they all knew the seemingly strong bond she had once forged with Muku was almost nothing now. Sophie’s mother declares that she wants to send Muku to stay with Sophie so that they can take care of each other. This declaration made Sophie silent because if her sister moved to Bangalore, Sophie’s secret would be out: the fact that she didn’t work in a publishing house, like she’d told her family, but a BPO company.

Sophie worked in a company called Star Titles, which had its headquarters in Los Angeles. It was the LA office that took on clients - the big American movie studios whose names had sent a thrill through Sophie on her first day at work. She sat upright at her computer in the brightly-lit, yellow and cream colour-schemed office...Sophie loved her work for the first couple of months. What she and her colleagues were paid to do was transcribe the soundtracks of Hollywood films so that they could be marketed on DVDs.

(49)

Both the novels, *Lunatic in my Head* and *Neti, Neti* deals with the plight of immigrants. It is necessary to consider other voices and texts used in the novels that shape and guide the lives of the characters. Their identities constantly change as they negotiate with self and society. The chief characters are affected by the complex realities around them. Some of these realities and emotions appear to be universal. The author has used intertextual elements in both the texts. For instance, Sophie Das' mental state has been compared with Madame Bovary, a character from the novel by French writer Gustave Flaubert. She thought of Emma Bovary who, after she is in love with the young and ardent Leon, responds drawing the blinds tight around her world – going to church regularly and taking a sudden interest in the housework – so that behind this outward veil of dutifulness she can revel in thoughts of him. In Sophie's world the equivalent of that chastisement would be captioning all four parts of *Die Hard* without a murmur. (159)

In the novel Hasan has also incorporated the elements of philosophy and spirituality. There is Baba Sampige, Vivekananda, and many other belief systems that guide people. Sophie relates herself with these in a different way,

She still thought of it sometimes – the idea, instilled by Vivekananda and reinforced by parents, teachers, nuns and Jesus Christ, that one was put on earth a weak-willed, selfish, pleasure-loving imbecile and one's work was to redeem oneself ('This world is the great gymnasium where we come to make ourselves strong'). So even though Sophie barely noticed the photographs of Baba Sampige whose moustached, wide-eyed, innocent face advocating love/peace/truth stared down from every second lamppost, shop-front, banner

and hoarding in the city, she occasionally felt she had unfinished business with the idea of God or with that of self-improvement, which she believed to be the same thing. (76-77)

Works Cited

Bakhtin, M.M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota press, 1999.

---. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. 1973. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2019.

---. editor. *Nation and Narration*. Routledge, 2017.

Hasan, Anjum. *Lunatic in My Head*. Penguin Random House, 2007.

---, *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This*. Roli Books Pvt. Ltd., 2016.

.

.

CHAPTER-III

SELF AND DIALOGUE IN ANJUM HASAN'S SELECT FICTION

This chapter shall discuss the concepts of self and dialogue and role of Bakhtin's theoretical concepts to explore the development of identity or self-understandings in a multicultural context in the novel *The Cosmopolitans* (2015). It is a novel that celebrates woman outside home, a novel that travels from city to village. The chief character Qayenaat is similar with Hasan's other characters in terms of 'search for roots' in the modern world. But unlike her other works Hasan incorporates the element of 'art' in this novel to pose some pertinent questions concerning the place of art and individuality in modern life.

Anjum Hasan in an interview that took place just before the launce of her book *The Cosmopolitans* on 6 October 2015, spoke about the setting of her novel and the chief character, Qayenaat. Speaking on the genesis of *The Cosmopolitans* and the protagonist, Hasan revealed that there were four significant aspects. First, her representation of the image of an older single woman who's made very unconventional choices, lives on her own, and belongs to a generation that is sort of in between the Nehruvian nation-building generation and the MTV – more blasé, much more self-confident – generation. Second, Hasan made it clear that the novel is not about a particular art world. But it is about art in general. It is about what someone feels entering an art gallery and the conversations people make with themselves. Third, Hasan was interested in representing Bangalore as a city and how it's changed. Hasan appeared to be concerned with Qayenaat and people like her who were affected by these changes without necessarily being a rooted native.

Fourth, Hasan tried to bring, the small town in contrast to the big city and how does it work for a English-speaking, very westernized Indian to find her way through this other reality that she idealises but also exaggerates in mind the horrors of that reality. Hasan wonders if it is possible for readers to actually experience it, and would it be interesting to the reader to actually be there first hand through Qayenaat?

The narrative of *The Cosmopolitans* is divided into Book One and Book Two. Further, each book is given titles with strong hold on the vibe of the narrative. Each character in the novel makes a tiny contribution and offers their unique point of view, some more passionately or confidently than others. Qayenaat is the central character and focus of the novel. She considers herself as ‘a rasika’, a lover of beauty. Qayenaat had only one name. At the age of twenty she had dropped her last name simply because it was Gupta and there was no way to reconcile the ordinariness of Gupta with the sublimity of Qayenaat. (37) Out of respect for Urdu language her father had named Qayenaat.

Qayenaat is a painter who has transitioned into an art critic, and her name is frequently mispronounced due to its foreignness. In Urdu, 'qayenaat' means 'the cosmos,' echoing the novel's title, which is a combination of the words 'cosmos' and 'polis.' A cosmopolitan stands on equal ground in both of these realms. He is someone who is at comfortable in a variety of cultures and finds calm and serenity everywhere he goes. She is introduced to readers at the very first page in the section titled ‘Nostalgia’; which is also a magnified piece of artwork by another character named Baban Reddy who is an internationally acclaimed artist in the plot. His latest artwork has been showcased in India as well as abroad. The narrative unfolds in

Bangalore ‘in medias res’ inside Navya, the place where internally acclaimed artist Baban Reddy exhibits his latest artwork. The artwork named *Nostalgia* raises a series of questions in the first section of the novel.

Whenever in the world *Nostalgia* went, the news on its TV screen would always be the previous day’s. From country to country *Nostalgia* would travel, bringing up the rear as it were, reminding us, according to the exhibition catalogue, that ‘we are victims of today, hostage to tomorrow, and nostalgic for yesterday’. (Hasan 4)

There are many incidents surrounding the lives of rich and privileged as well as poor and deprived. The author has presented a multicultural canvas and has given voices to a variety of characters. Art in various forms have been variously dealt with in the novel. So it is not surprising to find characters holding position of artists, critics, audience, readers, etc. The unnamed narrator also comments on the changing art scene in Bangalore which has transformed into something ‘strangely electric’.

Baban had returned in glory to his home town and these heads of companies and leaders of enterprises, movers of share prices and shakers of public opinion, had come here to lend glamour to the scene, bringing into the marginal activity of art an unusual energy. Perhaps they’d learnt of the handbag Baban had recently been invited to design, for an undisclosed sum, for that famous French fashion house. (Hasan, 4)

The author informs about Nur Jahan, whose *Painting of a Sorrow*, leads to riots and protests across the country. As Hasan states in *The Cosmopolitans*, Nur

Jahan was one of the most intriguing planets in the heavens of art, if Baban was a brilliant star. She'd been an ordinary painter of average nudes until the previous year, completely unknown to all but a few artists and collectors. She had a brief period of fame in the 1980s when M.F. Hussain greeted her with a 'masha Allah' but subsequently faded away, reportedly no longer producing new material. That is, until recently, when a gallery in Bombay decided to revive her and put together a retrospective of her paintings from their collection. When the tabloids found out, they splashed pictures of her beautiful erotica all over their pages. Tempers flared, sensibilities were hurt, and riots were sparked. The artist's identity was withheld by the gallery. Her canvases were signed 'NJ,' and she was rumoured to be Muslim, so she was given the appellation Nur Jahan after the self-proclaimed sixteenth-century queen. Soon, the fiction had completely detached itself from reality, becoming a story about a god-fearing namaazi woman who lived a double life, secretly drawing her nasty paintings.

Nur Jahan's painting triggered protests across the nation. "She was wanted for sedition, hate speech, inciting communal war, outraging the modesty of the nation, and generally being a woman who painted people sans clothes". (Hasan, 14)

Nur Jahan had painted a bedroom scene, a woman lying undressed on a bed, and a man sitting on its edge, his bare back to her, their lovemaking clearly over. The rich oils had done justice to the sweaty sheen of the man's skin, the nose ring glinting on the woman's face, the flowers printed on the curtains, the brass of a doorknob. The bodies were correctly proportioned and the colours pleasingly muted- brown, cream, a dash of brick red, olive green. It

was called *The Painting of a Sorrow* and Qayenaat had given it pride of place in her living room largely because of its poignant, Shakespearean name. (Hasan, 39)

Hasan's take on the concept of cosmopolitanism is skillfully witty and sardonic. She delves into the concept's core through the experiences of Qayenaat, an artist who began her career as a painter before realising that her mind only catches the fragmented visions of ordinary life. These images do not constitute a real vision or design like those seen in the works of previous great artists. Her calm life as an art critic in her fifties is disrupted by the entrance of a long-lost acquaintance who has now become a famous artist in the art market. This friend's return acts as a pivotal point in her life. Following an old invitation from a folk dancing academy, she begins her journey to Simhal in the second half of the story, a little town far removed from the glitz and glam of modern-day Bangalore. Disturbed by the happenings of her life, she seeks to comprehend the Simhal dance tradition, which once enchanted her with its elegance and magical power to re-establish the lost link between art and life. Hasan's narrative shares similar traits with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of a polyphonic novel, which is the representation of the world in all of its diversity of consciousnesses, with each playing a role in an equal dialogical basis to prove the truth. According to Bakhtin's theoretical precepts, the dialogical elements of the book are what really compel the reader to engage in dialogue with it. In his view, a novel is a collection of discourses, especially responses to those discourses, rather than just words and statements. A novelistic discourse depends on encounters and interactions between various points of view. The researcher will demonstrate the dialogical

interaction between the characters, the author, and the reader's active participation in an unfinished contribution to the truth by close examination of the text and the representation of the characters.

The Cosmopolitans, which is set in the diverse, rapidly expanding city of Bangalore, recounts the life of Qayenaat, a thoughtful, passionate art admirer who starts to reflect nostalgically on her past. The remainder of the book focuses on her current situation, occasionally with the assistance of a trusty old friend named Sathi. She periodically seeks solace in art, which gives her life purpose and her thoughts life and importance. Qayenaat's personal dismissals and feeling of loss are carefully reflected in Hasan's language, which is quite subtle yet vivid. One of the main themes in the literature that stands out is memory. The perfect amount of melancholy and loss is added to Qayenaat's reflections on the passing of the years and what it means to be anchored in urban India.

Qayenaat had, seemingly, done everything. She'd taken on freelance writing, taught schoolchildren, worked for a ridiculous magazine, edited academic tomes. After twenty years of doing this shit there was nothing to show for it, of course, but then again, hadn't that been the point once? That you weren't *supposed* to care? Once, it didn't matter what you did as long as you weren't showy; now it no longer mattered what you did as long as it were. Qayenaat had tried to preserve her dignity but it wasn't any good. (50)

Life in Bangalore, is recounted by Anjum Hassan in the Book One of *The Cosmopolitans* whereas, the city life is replaced by a remote village called Simhal.

She catches the essence of Indian major city life in its tiny elements, from the status and wealth fueled rush of the districts where IT workers live and spend their money, to the relaxed back streets of the older housing areas, to the glamorous, upscale ones of the affluent.

The commonplace was that Bangalore had grown beyond measure; the truth within the commonplace was that an older modern city lay hidden behind the newer contemporary one. It was still there, though mostly obscured, often falling into despair or covered with signboards, and likely to be torn down as soon as the land on which it stood became so valuable that it justified nothing less than the building of a skyscraper on it. Meanwhile, these crumbs remained, consoling Qayenaat for being cosmopolitan. And, along with them, scattered all over the city, from the Cantonment to Gandhinagar to Jayanagar, those houses like Blanche, roomy, reinforced concrete, pale-coloured, modestly embellished.

Anyone who is well-versed in, or at least conversant with, other cultures is said to be cosmopolitan. The Cosmopolitans rarely encounter themselves in a scenario where they have exposed to rites and traditions that have not changed over the centuries despite civilizational developments. However; when this happens, instead of embracing the cultural experience, they get repulsed by the traditional barbarous traditions. In the novel this aspect has been revealed through Qayenaat.

She was interested in rekindling an old love affair she thought she had with Baban years ago, before he became well-known. However; according to Baban, she was the one who wasn't always receptive to the relationship at that time, while he

was. Qayeenat is upset by this. "...However; much she adored Baban; Qayenaat could never be like that. Her generation were the shy, ambivalent, in-between ones, no longer thoroughbred patriots but not confident MTV-era brats either." (Hasan 95)

To make matters worse, she unintentionally overhears Baban and her best friend discussing her. She spontaneously sets "Nostalgia" on fire to destroy it. Unfortunately, other things also get destroyed. This entirely deflates Qayenaat. She departs from Bangalore for a rural region called Simhal, putting a stop to all criminal preparations. Simhal, a community cut off from contemporary civilization, serves as the setting for the book's second section. People there have a stronger faith in their monarch than in the Indian government, which is making great efforts to modernise them. The populace retaliates by engaging in guerrilla warfare against the Indian army and police. Qayeenat has a certain dance style in mind that Simhal is known for.

...I'm going to write about those boys. But they won't talk to me. I want to know what kind of lives they lead. Everything – what they feel when dancing, childhood memories of what they learnt, which gods they love, what they've seen on their travels, how they're able to become other people while dancing.' (225)

She encounters the King, the Dancers, the Teachers, and the People here. She gradually comes to understand that the Government is working hard to seize control of the mining and forests that the Simhal people are currently occupying.

...Growing up, she always imagined the government as a pompous, blundering old man, the unseen figure who held the key to their lives, who decided when they must move to the next town, when her father would be prompted, what kind of projects he'd be assigned. If Qayenaat had ever thought of God, it was the government. As an adult she could not be anti-government without a twinge of regret and she could never agree with those who, like Sathi, put all the blame on it. The government was inefficient, greedy, ostentatious, self-important, confused. But not outright evil. And here she was now, back in its arms, in this academy, which was nothing if not a government dream, the result, it seemed clear, of misplaced ambition and wasted funds. (211-212)

On the other side there is the presence of rebels around Simhal. Sitaram, the caretaker of the academy asked Qayenaat to be careful with Vipul Singh. He tells her that Vipul has links with the rebels. He also tells her about the rebels that – 'Every district surrounding ours is under the control of the rebels. It's only a matter of time before we're theirs too. They've started kidnapping important people to hold the government to ransom. They need to get their comrades out of jails.' (214)

Dr Chittaranjan Durg, MD, tells Qayenaat about the place of Simhal.

...Everyone here, he claimed, lived in harmony: upper castes, tribals, Muslims, lower castes, Rajputs who once ruled, Banias from North India drawn to the region because of its forest and mineral wealth, communities speaking varied languages who had drifted in from neighbouring states. He

used the word 'bichitra' to describe this mix and Qayenaat wanted to believe him...(Hasan, 316)

She is enthralled by the King's manner, and over time, they start to get along. She admits that she loves him. He began to tell her an anecdote. When his forefathers fled the deserts of Rajasthan to build their fortunes in this region over 400 years ago, they were contacted in a temple by members of a tribal clan, the Koyla, who asked for their assistance in thwarting a violent rival. The King's people rushed to the rescue, because what were they after if not martial glory? The opponents were defeated, and the Rajputs, who liked the lay of the territory, decided to settle there. The monarchs, as Kshatriyas, did not mix with other ethnicities or tribes, let alone totem-worshipping tribals who were not even Hindus. However, they made an exception for the Koylas in this case. They offered water, which they took. They dined out of their kitchens. Even some Koyla women got married into the royal household. Due to the fact that it had been documented and was periodically evoked through rites that Qayenaat had witnessed, this link had endured for millennia. The custom of placing the king atop a bullock cart and pulling it with thankful human flesh was homage and an offering offered to those long-ago braves. The Koylas would never forget that little would be left of their name if not for the Rajputs and their prompt arrival.

The reality hits hard one lovely holiday day. The King invites Qayeenat to a private annual ceremony. She is unable to comprehend the horrifying things she experiences. She asks the government officer she had before detested for attempting

to stop her from falling in love with the King for help in escorting her back to Bangalore, where she lives.

Numerous serious subjects are covered in the book. Indian modern art is in a haste to leave a mark in major art centres like New York and Paris. However, the modern Indian artist runs the risk of neglecting the demands of the local Indian art consumers in favour of working with a template to flourish in such a country. The government-funded efforts to preserve art and culture in the villages, which lacked any other purpose than to survive off of the government stipend, are the exact antithesis of that. Other topics centre on how religion plays a controlling role in both urban and rural society.

It's always a delight to read Anjum Hasan since she always adds a new viewpoint to any topic, enriching our knowledge. Anjum Hasan seemed to have entirely reinvented herself in *The Cosmopolitans* from the start. While her earlier two novels demonstrated her writing talent, this novel demonstrates her writing ability. A skill she has carefully cultivated over time and practised to perfection. The plot revolves around Qayenaat, a Bangalore-based art critic. The story begins with Qayenaat attending an art show of a friend, Baban Reddy, who was formerly her friend but is now a well-known international artist.

After dominating the artistic community in New York and other cities across the globe, Baban Reddy brings his enormous art piece, dubbed Nostalgia, to Bangalore. Anjum Hasan sets the reader's expectations for the novel using the metaphor of nostalgia. Anjum Hasan does an excellent job of not only presenting her

own tale in Book One of the book, but also educating the reader about art by giving them diverse viewpoints on it through the characters she uses. Due to misunderstandings, Qayenaat destroyed a work of art, resulting in the unintentional death of a prominent art critic in Bangalore who was present in the hall where it was on show. She runs away to Simhal, a small village in Rajasthan, to study about a dance style that people think is classical but which the authorities refer to as folk dance because she can't face the guilt of killing. Book Two details her voyage and adventures throughout the book. Simhal is a small town where a battle is raging between the rebel local tribes that have taken up arms and the government. Because she is in a conflict zone and is unsure of whom to believe, Qayenaat has an attachment with the King. Her return to Bangalore and the realisation that art is merely the outward expression of society occur as a result of a series of circumstances.

Anjum Hasan has named the first chapter as 'Nostalgia' and has used the word nostalgia many times by revealing how the chief characters are connected to their past. In the chapter, 'Nostalgia' Hasan present various issues of a wide range of characters and who are connected to art. For instance, she refers to a pretentious lifestyle where people think they understand life but only see the tip of the ice-cream. However, the book's main focus is on art and how, as a result of urbanisation, culture as a whole is being homogenised. At the book's conclusion, the reader is left wondering if there are any hidden messages. The main characters are, at least how they see themselves to be, men and women of the world. However, the book's main

focus is on art and how, as a result of urbanisation, culture as a whole is being homogenised.

The book begins with a party in an art gallery, a stereotypically affluent situation that could just as easily have taken place in New York or London as it could have in Bangalore. The visitors are noticeably affluent, sipping wine, eating vol-au-vents, and speaking an amazingly colloquial kind of English while discussing European philosophy. A new work by the internationally renowned local artist Baban Reddy, who currently resides in New York, is the focus of the exhibition. Qayenaat, a former coworker from the twee pet magazine where Baban worked before becoming well-known, is trying to capture his attention. Despite having her own artistic ambitions, she has not experienced Baban's success.

Despite the fact that they haven't talked in around twenty years, Baban's return fanning the flames of a platonic encounter she had with the much younger man, and she is propelled north into the conflict countryside bordering the provincial town of Simhal as a result of a series of events. The show is the first target for author Anjum Hasan's scathing gaze. Baban's installation, "Nostalgia," is primarily consists of a giant video screen playing yesterday's news. Hasan establishes it as a genuine work by demonstrating the academic debate and celebrity wit it creates.

However, she depicts a swarm of gorgeous girls sitting on the artwork and snapping selfies, implying that the work is not as serious or significant as it claims to be. To emphasise this point, Hasan incorporates a subplot starring Nur Jahan, a female artist who offends conservative "non-cosmopolitans" with her portrayals of

nudity. In sharp contrast to the social gathering where Baban is feted, she is eventually slaughtered by a lynch mob. Qayenaat travels to Simhal to explore its traditional dance, the nritya, in order to find a genuine form of artistic expression.

The Modern Nritya Academy struck her as an absolute contrast to those lovingly plastered and painted mud houses she had noticed en route – those were old-fashioned and yet signalled vitality. This place was modern both in name and appearance – all bulky concrete and expansive porticoes and whitewashed bricks marking paths – and yet evoked utter neglect and boredom. (203)

She initiates an affair with the region's hereditary, but now deposed, monarch here. Qayenaat initially feels she has discovered enlightenment among the decaying palaces and traditions of the divinities Shiva and Vishnu. Qayenaat, as a cosmopolitan, is unable to tolerate the more murderous aspects of the archaic rituals and returns to Bangalore. She brings Chota, a seven-year-old friend's boy, with her with the idea of "educating" him and enhancing his life prospects by bringing him to the city.

When these factors are combined, they appear to convey a relatively dismal assessment of Indian cultural output. Traditional rituals are "primitive" and should be shunned, whereas modern art is flimsy and derivative. Meanwhile, those who try to use art to express themselves (Nur Jahan) are stifled by the philistine majority. However; Hasan never fully responds to that query or a different, more important one that Qayenaat and Baban discuss: "Of what use art then?" It seems like very

little. When given the responsibility of looking after Chota, Qayenaat puts up painting to pursue "a real job" and finds happiness in a makeshift family with her ex-boyfriend Sathi. The novel's final phrase also praises the commonplace in a stormy celebration: "the generous, forgiving, uncontrolled, ordinary rain."

Perhaps Hasan is implying that life is long and art is brief in this instance, the polar opposite of the maxim that Qayenaat has engraved on her cigarette lighter. The insightful insights of this provocative work lend itself to numerous more interpretations. However, Hasan's exploration of a city dweller's search for significance in the origins of her civilization and in its modern metamorphosis will be the main point of interest for the majority of readers. Hasan vividly illustrates the concerns of a nation in flux through Qayenaat's experiences and poses issues that the so-called developed nations should be considering for themselves.

After witnessing the cruel ritual Qayenaat compares herself with the woman in *Painting of a Sorrow*. "...I am the naked woman in Painting of a Sorrow, that's who I am. And thinking of how she had once laughed at the soppieness of that work, and was now altered in spirit that she had actually become its subject, she could not help smiling wryly." (336) When Qayenaat labels the participation of the King in the ritual as primitive, he tries to justify his position. Here too, Hasan dialogically incorporated the opinion of the King "...established his superiority over the villagers, through this unbelievably cruel practice? Had they all done it, those kings of old? Why hadn't he warned her?" (336)

...What is your heritage, Mandakini? Don't you belong to this nation of snake worshippers and idolaters? Don't you know that we undertake to marry frogs

and donkeys when the rains fail? Our rivers are holy and our tree sacred. We wear gems on our fingers to ward off illness, amulets on our necks to keep us safe, and thread on our wrists to ensure divine attention. We are people whose main preoccupation, as you'd have noticed if you just took a look around you, is warding off the evil eye, fighting malevolent spirits, and making sure to undertake every single task at an auspicious time. What do you mean "primitive"? (337)

The King also attacks western civilisation. Through the character of the king Hasan shows how the traditional India is attempting to adapt to the rapidly modernising India.

I have travelled the wide world and seen the great emptiness. Think for a moment what we consider normal life today. Live in the city cut off from the land and the sky and the seasons. Work for a large and faceless corporation which, in its mad pursuit of profit, disregards your uniqueness as a human being, cares nothing about the contents of your soul. The less you differ from other people, the more you fall in line, the better for the success of this monster. Waste decades worrying about whether you will be able to clear the dues on the material things you own. Spend endlessly and yet always crave what your neighbours have. Consider all relationships functional. And your culture? Your roots? Culture has nothing to do with you, it's what you see on TV, what the films show. Culture is an exotic bird that has flown away into freedom. (343)

Qayenaat at one point of time also considers a question, “Is everything we have experienced locked somewhere inside us, waiting only for the right trigger to float to the surface again so that it can confuse and enchant us?” (325). After listening to the tape recorder Qayenaat comes to know about facts revealing truth about the dance and rituals.

Who leads the rituals?’ Satya asked, rhetorically for it was he who had the answers rather than Vipul. ‘A group of twelve bhagats, devotees, drawn from all the lower castes. Imagine that! Oil pressers, peasants, milkmen, barbers, carpenters. Men who are usually shunned by people like you. But for that short time they’re something else. They get sacred threads to wear. They become Brahmins briefly. You understand? These are downtrodden men given a reprieve, they become sacred enough to be priests. (348)

There was no way Qayenaat was confiding in Sathi about her adventures in Simhal. ‘From everything that’s happened over the last few months.’ She took a deep breath and said, ‘There’s a difference between right and wrong.’ (372) Towards the end of the novel Sathi was winding up his work in the city. Sathi’s involvement with Shahrukh Bhai and their relationship in the novel point out another aspect of identity.

He’d interviewed many minor crooks in addition to Shahrukh Bhai; each successive encounter seemed to have made him happier, not only because it added up to material for his book but also for the reason that each of these crooks gave him one more perspective on crooked humanity, and reinforced his feeling that these fellows, despite their commitment to illegal activities, were okay. The good bad crooks – this was to be the theme of his book.

When Qayenaat is informed that Nur Jahan has been killed, she really affected by the murder. It is also a shock to the read

The murder was part of an ancient pattern of rebellion and revenge that had little to do with the belief of cosmopolitans like Qayenaat in the possibility of a better world, the one promised by the English fairy tales. He had history on his side while Qayenaat only had her imagination. And imagining the death of NJ, her screams of pain, the blood spurting from her fingers, made Qayenaat's mouth flood with a terrible bitterness. She remembered what she had told Gyan Pai that long-ago evening – if anything happens to NJ, I'm out of here. (376-377)

Towards the closure of the novel transformation of characters can also be seen in Tanya and Baban. In one of the episodes Qayenaat meets Tanya and Baban; both have undergone a kind of transformation.

She told them a little about Simhal and a lot about Chota. Tanya was impressed and asked about Qayenaat's theories of child rearing. Qayenaat said she had none. Tanya smiled and did not challenge that; she was less assertive than on previous occasions; she seemed to have stopped feeling the need to thrust her superior Americanisms on the local yokels. Baban was more thoughtful too, less bent on career talk. Perhaps India would be the best cure for them, India and its ability to turn all certainties to dust. (378-379)

The novel ended at the same gallery where Baban's exhibition appeared in November. The meaning of the name, Nur Jahan, inspired him to name the show the Light of the World. While asking each artist to produce something that would reflect

NJ, even if it took the shape of a disagreement with her and her art, Qayenaat inspected the odd assortment of items Baban had put together. Some had chosen the grand path, while others had chosen the small one. The largest but most modest piece was created by Baban. He had created a larger-than-life charcoal painting of Nur Jahan, but it was little more than a harsh contour of her face with just the tiniest strokes for eyes and a smile. The artwork was based on the artist's sole photograph, which was distributed widely after her passing and released by her family. Baban's art eased the misery that was depicted on that face, allowing NJ to have lived more than just the life that the snapshot represented. One artist had made an exquisite, gold and silver shrine with a canopy that was filled with flowers, incense, coconuts, and sweets. Amid the shrine, in a golden frame, was a blank canvas with a smudge of scarlet that could either be the vermilion on a deity's brow or a drop of blood. The faces of legendary painters from history—laughing, winking, crying, or wide-eyed with horror—now stared out at the viewer in lieu of the faces of NJ's nudes in one person's digital manipulation of NJ's paintings. Another artist invited the observer to construct a verbal and visual composite by painting large parts of a wooden jigsaw puzzle with a picture and the words "queen, whore, Hindu, Muslim, genius, charlatan" on each piece. Qayenaat preferred a fourth piece of art that had no evident connection to New Jersey. It featured a man sitting alone on a bench in a crowded public space, such as a train station or bus depot, and gazing intently at the spectator as they passed by in a flurry of moving bodies. This was utterly the antithesis of NJ's art. She turned her women to face the viewer so that one could see them but not her men.

Is all this any good, Qayenaat wondered. Do they display resistance, these works that mourn and celebrate NJ, or they just been produced to be consumed by the forever open maw of that monster, the market? She did not know but felt at home as she walked among them. Here again was déjà vu all over again. Art, which was long in contrast to life's shortness. Art, which she had been a student of all her adult life, burnt down one evening, left Bangalore to get away from, found in another form in Simhal, and then escaped yet again to return to where she'd started. Art, which had killed NJ and was perhaps the only thing that could avenge her death, bring her back to life in some small way. (381-382)

Works Cited

Bakhtin, M.M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota press, 1999.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. 1973. Ed. Michael Holquist. "Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Hoiquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Hasan, Anjum. *The Cosmopolitans*. Penguin Random House, 2016.

CHAPTER - IV

BEYOND FLUIDITY AND UNCERTAINTY: SELF-CONSCIOUS CHARACTERS IN HASAN'S SELECT FICTION

This chapter shall discuss Hasan's craft of language in her novels- *Lunatic in My Head*, *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This* (for subsequent references only *Neti, Neti* will be used) and *The Cosmopolitans* in terms of Bakhtin's concept of Dialogism from a postmodern perspective. Hasan's narratives are 'hybridised' and 'double-voiced'. This chapter shall refer to the relationship between dialogism and other terms such as polyphony, free indirect discourse, focalisation, etc. It shall reconsider the question: Is dialogism a solution to a narratological problem, or a set of complex philosophical and linguistic problems in search of a solution? The fluid and uncertain nature of the select novels seem to highlight such problems that are also encountered by characters featuring in Hasan's fiction. Mostly, the characters are seen dealing with their personal and social identity in a post-colonial and multi-cultural setting. Hasan allows the readers to participate with some of the chief characters in her novels who are also self-conscious beings as well as outsiders. The author shows the inner psyche of these characters. Some of the chief characters include, Aman, Sophie, and Firdaus in *Lunatic in My Head*, Sophie and Swami in *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This*, and Qayenaat in *The Cosmopolitans*.

It is common nowadays to see that one's identity depends on many factors such as where one is born, where one is working and living, with whom one is interacting with, and so on. Even if one's identity is fluid, this does not mean that one's free will is jeopardized. Hasan in all three novels bring forth the inner subjective thoughts of various characters. Despite troubles and struggles, the major

characters of Hasan succeed in overcoming the private as well as public realities for the betterment of their own lives.

Shillong's majority belongs to Khasi community who considers themselves elite. Separatist and militant graffiti are not uncommon. Aman sees a graffiti "We are Khasis by Blood, Indians by Accident" in red (Hasan 32). This divide is further illustrated when the so called natives attack aloo- muri vendor Sarak Singh. Such racist attacks are common and non- Khasi people are referred as 'dhkar'. When Aman tries to save Sarak Singh from the attack he becomes attackers' butt of ridicule. Aman says, "He found it particularly hard to defend himself against the racist attacks because he was never sure who he was defending –an encroacher, a permanent guest of the hills of the people, or someone who belonged here because he had never lived anywhere else." (37)

The second chapter called *Sadness* throws more light into history than identity crisis. People are clearly separated along the class and race lines with the Khasi majority seeking for their superiority by attacking the people who have no physical resemblance to them. In the speech between Sharon and Firdaus the former enquires about a call for *bandh*. This is to include Khasi in the eighth schedule of the constitution. One's identity becomes a major concern as the characters reflect on it. Lack of educational facilities, corruption along with government apathy and unemployment are major problems depicted in this work. Imboacha, Firdaus boy friend is a Manipuri who works as a mediator helping Manipuri students with money to get admission in Shillong. Firdaus reflects on her odd relationship Imboacha. She

considers her situation as, “vaguely North-Indian, in Shillong but not of it, yet old not old, having no family other than old-fashioned grandfather’’. (57)

The demand to recognize Khasi identity in the constitution is high. As Aman’s father asks the reason behind the shut-down call, Aman replies, “Usual stuff. Withdraw business permit from outsiders, give identity cards to everyone who’s come here after 1971.” (67) Dr Moondy tells Aman how some young natives barged into his clinic and demanded money. (69) Similar incidents are narrated in the chapter *Fear*, we learn the insurgent activities like a motor shop spare parts owner was attacked by two people for money and one man shot the owner. Similarly Ribor’s brother Max creates violence during the rock band show of Aman and his friends because they didn’t invite the native band for performance. But these are stray incidents of violence.

The concept of native identity runs deep into the traditional families. Non-community people are excluded in their functions. Even an eight year child is not an exception. Khasi matriarch and Sophie’s neighbour Elsa Lyndoh takes her to her community’s wedding. Sophie was denied the food. “The girl didn’t give her cake because she is a dhkar. Sophie felt not anger but shame.” (98) If this is the situation of Shillong life next door is not different. Ibomcha the boyfriend of Firdaus speaks about the situation in Manipur.

In south Manipur, Kukis killing Paites, and in Imphal one school boy was kidnapped and killed.... “It’s like that in Manipur,” he continued. “And no exams,” he said with a relish. “My neighbor, he has to take his high school

exam this year, but don't know if they'll hold exams. He'll have to miss one year, that fellow." (121)

The dominant attitude of Khasi community is further illustrated through the character of Angel War. There is a possible vacancy of an English faculty in the university. By all means Mr. Das is an ideal person to fit into that position. The dominating characteristic of Khasi people is revealed when Angel War visits Dr. Thakur, the head of the department to recommend her for the position. Dr. Thakur tells Firdaus, "These people", said Thakur, "They feel all jobs in the state are their birth right. Any vacancy they will be at your door, howling like wolves." (170)

Though Aman's father thinks "Shillong has no future" (70), and her grandfather advises Firdaus that, "this town is a desert island where people will cling to anyone they can find" (112) at the end of the novel, where she says, "...we keep complaining about Shillong, but think of all the good things about this place". (344) Then she and Flossie "spent a few silent moments contemplating the town's unnamed virtues" (344). So, the overwhelming perception that one carves out from the novel is that Shillong is not everything about violence and insurgency; there are lots of other dimensions of the place which the people of Shillong can really be proud of.

The last chapter significantly titled 'Peace' clearly points out the message that however much people talk about kidnapping, instability, peace is very much within the reach. The only thing is that they remain, as the items of old furniture in an old house inhabited by old people become layered with dust and the polish and glossiness become visible only when that layered of dust is wiped clear, unused and

that's why unfocussed due to overwhelming spotlight on the negative aspects. Aman Moondy, an aspirant for the highest administrative service, is in search of lovely Concordella, and he is hopeful that one day he'll meet his love. Albeit Sophie, an eight-year old girl, is very much aware of the fact that she is adopted, still she is always in search of a happy and well united family picture, and towards the end of the novel Sophie's belief that she is adopted is dimmed and "she had managed to do rather well in the final exam" (326). Mr. and Mrs. Das' struggle comes to an end, as Mr. Das finds a job that he was looking for so long and Mrs. Das starts on her tuition entrepreneurship.

Neti, Neti brings a clear contrast between India and Northeast-India divide. The protagonist Sophie Das is lover of *Madame Bovary*, *Vivekananda: Awakener of Modern India* and *Swami and Friends*. The reason for her exile from Shillong is rather strange. She left her home after the local mad woman whom she called 'killer woman' asked Sophie what she has been staring at. The difference in attitude to the people of Northeast is very visible from the beginning of this novel. "The six pots, neatly arrayed on her balcony, had been handed over to her by the landlord and his wife soon after she'd moved in. Getting Sophie to garden was one of the Mr. Bhatt's ways of trying to civilize her." (Hasan 10) Sophie compares her life in Shillong and Bangalore. What she loves most in her birth place seem to the beauty of land.

What she really missed was Beauty. When people talked about hill towns, they imagined them as holiday destinations. They imagined them as places that offered a brief respite from reality and were for that reason adorable. They imagined them as a collection of views and things to do....

Bangalore, on the other hand, possessed a great zest for ugliness. Everyone just wanted to obscure the view, blot out the sky, erase the gaps. The city not just proliferated but kept reproducing itself. (35-36)

Ribor, Sophie's friend and fleeting lover tells her when she initially says she wants to know what is on the other side of the mountains, "It's hard.... everyone out there thinks we're Chinese and tries to rip us off." (57) But Sophie deep in her heart knows she has to leave Shillong once, though she was born and brought up there. For Shillong people she is always an outsider and when she moves out of Shillong for rest of Indians she is again an outsider because she comes from the Northeast. "Sophie was saying -of course you can't take off into India just like that- you with your secret language and unique face. And Ribor was saying -even if you are a dhkar, even if people have always wanted your people out, even if blood had been shed, you have the right to say." (58)

Rock music is in the blood of those who live in the Northeast. Aman and his friends most past time hobby seem to be listening to English songs especially their favourite band Pink Floyd. Their effort to conduct the music show "Happening" is the major incident narrated in *Lunatic in my Head*. Similarly in *Neti, Neti* Sophie and her Bangalore friends attend a rock completion. Sophie makes a comparison between the boys of Bangalore and her Shillong. She thinks Bangalore boys "were fundamentally nice boys unlike those at concerts in Shillong for whom violence was often physical... they badly want a face to punch." (106) Swami believes music is a way of protest. "It is the only way to protest." (113) Sophie reflects on her friends comments thus:

Her friends would never know, a place where university students sang in the backs of the buses, prodigies went to Europe to study piano in famous conservatories, churches resounded up to heaven, there were impersonators galore of everyone Elvis downloads, every boring government ‘function’ was preceded by a chorus doing wonderful harmonies, taxis basted metal, restaurants still played Queen hits, the local radio channel never stopped playing bye-bye to Miss American pie, and carollers took over the streets every Christmas. (114)

Sophie has a fetish for ironing. This is a symbolic way of trying to iron out her past. The image of roads crisscrossing recurs throughout the book – Sophie is always travelling, creating spaces for arrivals and departures within her heart. Around her are people to whom she half relates to. The middle class Kannadigas of Bangalore, drawn with gentle ironic humour, and the muddle of their lives set against that of the outsiders who have come to Bangalore looking for futures. Occasionally certain things jar – like Baba Sampige who plays no real role and who graduates from sneering at spilt beer to being a kind of *deus ex machine*, or the constant violent accidents on the road – Sophie defines her new self by the fact that she is no longer squeamish when she sees a man squashed to death. There is also a sense of far too much happening at the same time.

Sophie returns to Shillong to find that life there, too, is not what she wants. Shillong is in a sense a smaller reflection of Bangalore, centred on internet cafes and westernised values – even Sophie’s parents have had enough of it and want to go their separate spiritual ways. And even the beauty that she misses, the arched bridge

in the park, is not enough to console her. Towards the end, just like *Lunatic in my Head* the novel *Neti, Neti* also ends with a positive note. Sophie has overcome her identity issues to a certain level, he has become more responsible. She takes charge of her young sister after the divorce of her parents and finds the job as an editor.

Both the novels *Lunatic in my Head* and *Neti, Neti* appear to articulate the view that, music and literature not only keep the sanity of youths intact, but further help in fostering peace and harmony, especially in a pluralistic set-up like the North-East of India. As in her debut novel here too, Anjum Hasan finds herself thrilled by ordinary things to represent the larger realities of the society. *Neti, Neti* ends with a dialogue by Swami that shows a kind of transformation in his personality as he realizes that- "The only problem we'll have in life from now on is the problem of where to find parking space." (287)

Tribals and settlers both live in closed communities. There is not much assimilation. People always have to deal with interethnic conflict. Physical or mental violence serves as a strong reminder that there will always be hostility between the parties involved. To live there, people must find a way around this. The protagonists in the selected novels are mostly driven by what Freud refers to as the "pleasure principle," which is focused with avoiding pain rather than pursuing pleasure. Permanent confrontations between natives and immigrants, as well as between individuals and the state, have created an all-encompassing climate of fear and anxiety in the region, which is a constant feature in *Neti, Neti* and *Lunatic in My Head*.

Lunatic in My Head by Anjum Hasan is about the anxiety and uncertainty that Firdaus, Aman, and Sophie, three dkhars, must encounter throughout their lives in Shillong. Firdaus' parents are no longer alive, and she now lives with her grandfather. She has not left Shillong in the last two decades, despite being in her mid-30s. She has also not seen her relatives in Bihar. She has also been teaching English to bored college students for fourteen years. She's been trying to finish her M. Phil. thesis was for naught. Her life has made no development. Despite the fact that her grandfather wishes for her to marry the maulvi's son and that she has been dating a man (Ibomcha), a Manipuri much younger than herself, she does not wish to marry any of them. However, towards the end of the novel it is suggested that Firdaus would marry Ibomcha.

In *The Cosmopolitans* Hasan's approach to the idea of multiculturalism and cultural encounters is deftly intelligent and ironic. She has dealt with the issue of cultural intersection through the experiences of Qayenaat who started her career as an artist but her life as a painter ended when she realized that her mind only captures the fractured images of everyday. These images do not form a grand vision or design as is evident in the works of the great artists of the past. In her fifties, her quiet life as an art-critic is disturbed by the arrival of a long lost friend who in the meantime has become a celebrated artist in the marketplace of art. This homecoming of the friend serves as the turning point of her life. In the second half of the novel, accepting an old invitation from a folk dance academy, she starts her journey to Simhal, a peripheral city quite opposite to the glamour and glitter of modern day Bangalore. Disturbed by the events of her life, she aims to understand the Simhal dance tradition

which once overwhelmed her with its beauty and magical power to bridge the severed tie between art and life. In Simhal, Qayenaat's cosmopolitan ideals are put to test; she manages to escape from the hostile land but her compassion inverts a child's destiny by saving him from becoming a trainee in a terrorist group. The novel shows how the people living in the periphery of a nation are neglected, but their fight against injustice is often burdened with petty self-interest and insane logic. There is an India within India that has the "ability to turn all certainties to dust." (Hasan 379) Qayenaat's experiences at Simhal shakes her earlier conviction in the greatness of art. Hasan's narrative stands out as an apology for art in an age when art apparently seems to lose its inner tie with life.

Works-Cited

Bakhtin, M.M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota press, 1999.

---. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. 1973. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.

Hasan, Anjum. *Lunatic in my Head*. Penguin Random House, 2007.

---, *The Cosmopolitans*. Penguin Random House, 2015.

---, *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This*. Roli Books Pvt. Ltd., 2016.

CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter will summarise and present the findings of the research and reconsider the scope of polyphonic novel. The findings of this research include the experience of reading Hasan's fiction in the light of theories connected to self, dialogue and identity. Whatever statements made in this concluding chapter are not finalized expressions of the researcher. Considering Bakhtin's views on open-endedness and unfinalizability, it appears improper to attempt to conclude or finalise any discussion, whether about his theories or this thesis. For Bakhtin "the final word has not yet been spoken and never will be spoken" (Bakhtin 30). Understandings cannot be fully decided in the text or in the author's original intentions, but must rely on the interpretation of others. Bakhtin, in particular, values the novel's ability to explore how people use language resources to frame selves, which is why, in his opinion, the novel is "the richest form yet devised for understanding selves." (173) This aspect of the novel is due in part to the novel's close relationship to everyday values. have an appreciation of centrifugal forces, and a sense of the world's essential messiness (its resistance to being concluded or finalized), and partly to the fact that, of all genres, the novel is the most dialogic, treating character, society and knowledge as unfinalizable and thus open to growth and change. In contrast to genres that are disposed towards "claims of certainty, expressions of absolute truth and assertions of timeless wisdom," the novel is "ever skeptical, experimental, and open to the unpredictable experience of every present moment" (303). Whilst other genres may claim to know, the novel's awareness of "the multiplicity of languages, conceptual schemes, and social experiences" disposes it towards how we know so

that, “where others might prophesy, the novel merely conjectures” (303). In the process of creation, therefore; great authors evaluate their work not only by its ability to express what they mean, but by the “richness of its possible meanings” (285). There are countless reasons why the evaluation and meanings of works change over time, not the least of which is that dialogue activates potentials already present in the works. As Bakhtin observes, “great novelistic images continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation; they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth” (422).

An in-depth examination of the various types of speech used by Hasan's characters reveals how each character represents a distinct way of viewing the world. As Bakhtin points out, these languages represent various social languages. Hasan presents us with the various social and individual languages of his time by allowing his characters to express themselves in their own voices. As a result, in Hasan's novels, we encounter a variety of languages that exist independently of the author. There is the language of intellectuals, laymen, artists, conman, perverts, moralists, fanatics, critics, etc. Hasan has not created the languages or the people who speak them. This task appears simple, but it is extremely difficult. In Hasan's narratives, laughter is used to undermine society's established canons. This phenomenon is referred to as carnival by Bakhtin and is associated with dialogism. Carnival is viewed as an ongoing social process that elicits laughter by subverting society's establishment and traditional constructs.

Dialogical Dimensions of the Novel

The use of Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of polyphonic and dialogic novels provides a unique perspective on Hasan's novels. Bakhtin elaborates on the dialogic and polyphonic novel in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *The Dialogic Imagination*. He demonstrates how Dostoevsky allows his various characters to express different points of view and how Dostoevsky's true genius lies in his ability to hear the dialogue of his time. Similarly, Hasan's unusual sensitivity to language has always fascinated her critics.

As has been noted, dialogism is a broad concept that is woven throughout Bakhtin's thinking on a variety of topics. It contends that a message or utterance is constructed among speakers as a product of the specific socio-historical context in which it is situated, rather than being solely the product of the speaker. Bakhtin holds that life is an endlessly ongoing and "unfinalizable dialogue." (Bakhtin 59). Morson and Emerson attribute the term 'unfinalizability' to Bakhtin's advancement. "complex of values central to his thinking: 'innovation, 'surprisingness', the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom, and creativity" (36).

As a result, Bakhtin placed a high value on the polyphonic author's capacity to create characters that can surprise not only themselves, but also other characters and, on occasion, the author. Bakhtin is resolute that all heteroglossia languages, no matter how distinct, have one thing in common: they all signal a specific point of view on the world. He says, they may all be "juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically"

(Bakhtin 291 – 92). The type of language used by the different characters in Hasan's fiction reflects such disparities in worldviews.

One of the novel's many strengths, according to Bakhtin, is its understanding of time as it is lived. Not only is the present influenced by past events, but it is also influenced by the future because it is always oriented toward the future, “presentness” is “never whole” but “demands continuation” by actually shifting into the ambiguous future, and thus becomes similarly ambiguous. (Bakhtin 30). When Bakhtin insists that utterances are distinct from sentences, he means that, while utterances undoubtedly contain words and sentences, the former does not exhaust their distinguishing features. This is because a sentence is a unit of language in the traditional sense. (125). As Morson and Emerson put it, “one can respond to an utterance, but one cannot respond to a sentence” (Morson 126). This is because a sentence, in Bakhtin’s view, has only abstract meaning, or potential to mean. Real meaning, on the other hand, takes place “when that potential is exploited for a particular purpose on a particular occasion” (127). Unfinalizability is apparent in all the three novels of Hasan. It is seen in majority of the characters.

Author’s Position

In an interview conducted Hasan tackles the question of her role as a critic and writer in English in the following manner,

More than forty years ago Adil Jussawalla said in the introduction to his *New Writing in India* that anyone who is concerned with Indian writing should at some point state their limitations. That introduction – and the anthology itself

– are a benchmark for me for how to make engagement with Indian literature a personal, exploratory, local project. Whatever one's position in relation to the literature – and increasingly it is the case that if one operates in English then one operates *only* in English, the bilingualism of the earlier generations is fading – this recognition of one's limitations combined with a strong need to reach out seems the only productive route.

Fluid nature of identities can be seen in the characters including Sophie, Baba Sampige (Shiva's friend Raghavan), Mr Das and Mrs Das, Shanthi's mother, Sophie as well as her younger sister Mukulika). In *Lunatic in My Head*, Hasan offers no resolution to the conflicts reflected in the novel. In the novel the characters are dialogically linked together and are from different geographical and cultural background. According to Bakhtin, novelistic discourse is based on meetings and encounters, coexistence and interaction of diverse points of views. These diversities are reflected through the characters portrayed by Hasan.

With the rise of modernism, people's perceptions of themselves and others have shifted dramatically. India as a multicultural nation has witnessed the challenges and atrocities of multicultural encounters in various ways and forms including ethnic clashes, militancy, mob violence, immigration, etc. Being born and brought up in the North eastern state of Meghalaya she holds up a unique perspective concerning the dilemmas of living in a society that constantly remind her of her place and origin. Thus it is not surprising to find her characters going through similar circumstances like the author and her family. Along with the issue of migration she also delineates other ground realities of common middle class people of

contemporary society who try hard to cope with the immediate surroundings. These day-to-day ordinary realities governed by numerous alternatives only heighten the sense of dilemma in her characters' lives. The need to consider cultural differences and an intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiation with 'other' cultures is a recurrent feature of the literature of the north-eastern states. Such cultural encounters with the cultures from either mainland India or from outside the border of the country have been addressed and responded by each community or linguistic group in its own distinctive manner. The main waves of cultural invasion can be traced in the Bhakti movement, followed by the various reformist dispensations of the nineteenth century, colonialism and the Christian missionary activities that accompanied it, and the new culture of development that has become a part of global culture. As a result these also found expression in the literary world of the region. The response of the writers to the onslaught of the 'modernity' of the postcolonial state, their negotiations with the idea of the gradual erasure of the notion of communities, their sensitive approach to the issue of identity could be some of the distinguishable markers of the complexity of the problem.

Identity in the postmodern scenario is not constant but in a state of continuous flux. It shifts its position according to the character's location in the culture. North-East India is a complex picture of multiple languages, cultures, ethnicities and hence giving rise to a complex structure of identity. This sense of negotiation with one's identity is one of the major concern in Anjum Hasan's novels. If an individual is unable to come to terms with his or her sense of identity and belongingness then it leads to various chaos and uncertainty in the character's psyche

and affects his or her relationship not only with the surrounding but also within oneself. The characters in Hasan's novels are seen continuously struggling to hold to their identity in a cosmopolitan world in the novels selected for the research. The reason may be attributed to their past instability to locate their sense of identity. In *Neti Neti*, Sophie Das is living in Bangalore in a rented apartment and throughout the novel is seen struggling to maintain a fine balance between her family, boy-friend Swami or the neighbors. The suffering and suffocation that she encounters or is unable to counter can be traced back to her unsettled past in the North-Eastern city of Shillong.

Sophie's unsettling state of mind can be further analyzed with the concept of Insider and Outsider as explored by Preeti Gill in the book *Insider/Outsider: Belonging and Unbelonging in North-East India* "The dividing lines between the insider and outsider are often confusing and unclear, even for those who have grown up experiencing being 'othered'. In the hills of Shillong for instance, the clash was often seen as one between tribal insiders and non-tribal outsiders."(Preface, X)

Sophie and her family belonging to the Bengali community who are considered as outsiders in the North Eastern state of Meghalaya. They never had an identity of belonging in this state. The characters in the novel such as Sophie's sister and Sophie's life were always filled with chaos and an urge to belong in a state where they were treated as outsiders. In this context Sophie was doubly isolated and frustrated with her surroundings. Living in Bangalore she was once again viewed as an outsider by her owners despite her identity as a Bengali, people tend to see identity in terms of geographic location. This twin experience as being both outsider

and insider within one's own nation highlights in Hasan's novels the dilemma of a character in living a stable life and adjusting to other cultures. Hasan's narrative delves deeper into the psychological aspects of the characters development. In the anthology *Insider/Outsider*, Anjum Hasan has contributed a writing titled "Growing up with Mrs P" where the readers encounter a glimpse of the rampage, clashes that occurred during the 90's in Shillong and the psychological impact of those incidents on the victims. "As we grew out of childhood, local lives seemed to give way to something meaner.... we were ready to leave Shillong, even though the rest of the country was a blur and we suffered from the vertigo of not knowing exactly who we were."(Gill 31)

Identity and Migration in Jhumpa Lahiri's Novels

The depiction of culture, identity, alienation and migration are some of the major themes discussed in the novels of contemporary Indian English women writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy. Indian women writers are successfully carving a niche of their own with their strong voices, pacing at par with the world around them. Their writings are not merely constricted to household chores or meek feminine characters rather they excel beyond the typical adherence of Indian feminine codes of conduct and raise voice for themselves.

When one explores Indian Women Writers, it is Jhumpa Lahiri whose works has also to be appreciated and acknowledged for dealing with the dilemmas of an individual's mind and the experience of being an insider/outsider. Jhumpa Lahiri

herself being an immigrant novelist like Anjum Hasan portrays clearly a picture of her characters sense of alienation, clash of cultures, rootlessness, identity crisis, nostalgia in her novels. This multicultural life that she depicts in her novel *The Namesake* (2003) is expressed through the characters of Gogol and Ashima Ganguli who are at continual quest for their sense of identity. Gogol like Hasan's Sophie finds its difficult juggling between two different cultures, Indian and American. Lahiri attempts to examine through Gogol's character the tension of clinging to two cultures at the same time- family tradition and also the freedom of individual expression and also the realization of being an outsider even though one is born and brought up in America. *The Namesake* is the story of the Ganguli family who migrate to America in the 1970's. The title of the novel refers to Gogol, Ashima and Ashoke's son who is named Gogol after the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol. He is unable to identify either with the American's or Indians through his name. Being in America, he changes his name from Gogol to Nikhil when he grows up only to realize that the search for one's identity rests on much more than one's name.

Jhumpa Lahiri's writings have certain traces of autobiographical elements. As she mentions in the Afterword of the novel *The Namesake* titled "A matter of spaces" she allows the readers with a brooder insight into the character of Gogol and his continuous struggle with his name. She goes on to add that she herself suffered such dilemma because of her name like Gogol. As it is stated in the author's own words -

Gogol Ganguli, my protagonist, who in hopes of being fully admitted into the adult, American world, decides one day to rename himself. Over twenty

years ago, when I first drafted *The Namesake*,...When I had to choose a name for my account, I leapt at the chance to call myself something new. Since then I have created countless profiles simply to lead my daily life-.... Each of these virtual alter-egos, contains an entire trajectory of multiple identity, comprising a given name, invented names, words and symbols to indicate- both to myself and to the impenetrable websites- who I am, and how to make sure I am no one else.” (294).

She further adds that she too faced difficulty with her name like Gogol faced in America, “the difficulty both Gogol and I have always had: that of accepting, appreciating and identifying with the names we were given.”(294) Unlike Gogol who is lucky enough to be born in America and able to change his name, Jhumpa Lahiri says that “I have lived my whole life with my given name: Jhumpa Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri” and the embarrassment that she had to go through with such a long name. She has faced difficulties that she had to go for creating passports and she had different names for British as well as American passports. She questions her existence as “My two national identities, American and British, didn’t match. Who was to say I was the same person?” (294). She connects her situation with the characters - “My characters these days are individuals with only vaguely identifiable backgrounds. They dwell in nameless cities. And yet they, too struggle with who they are” (298). The themes of *The Namesake* resembles with my life, “the battles within myself, my origins, my place in the world, goes on.”(298)

Another novel by Jhumpa Lahiri that deals with the issue of identity crisis and cultural conflict is *The Lowland* (2013). In this novel her characters struggle to

come to terms with their identity and the characters of Gauri, Subhash and Udayan face difficulties of adjusting and transfiguring their sense of identity formation. The backdrop of the novel is the Naxalite movement of the 1960,s in West Bengal and how the two brothers' lives are juxtaposed in the process of identity formation amidst political turmoil.

It is seen that both Hasan and Lahiri have included and referred to their personal lives in their fiction. However, it is revealed that Jhumpa Lahiri has included more autobiographical elements than Hasan. Nevertheless, both the authors have created characters who directly or indirectly reflect the personal lives. The sense of identity in the characters points to the space that is occupied by the authors too. Anjum Hasan does not seem to put her head into some of the clichéd issues discussed by many other writers of the Northeast. She tries to hold a mirror to the life of north-east people in the first novel and how they are treated in the second novel. She doesn't speak about the militant issues associated with the place. At the same time she is brave enough to mention them realistically. Alienation is one of the central themes discussed by Hasan. The ways people are alienated according to the socio-economic, socio-linguistic and socio-cultural settings are expounded subtly by meticulous characterization. She also mentions about the class, caste, gender and attitude issues of Indians in general and the so called natives of the Shillong in particular. The concept of 'cultural otherness' looms large in her works. To quote Uncle Rock somewhere in the middle of the novel in *Neti, Neti* "No one really has a time to have a conversation. And whether you are from Shillong or Assam or

Nagaland ... the whole damn Northeast- it's all the same to them. They can't handle us- our strange names, our strange language, our strange accents.” (183)

Shashi Deshpande, another prominent women writer in Indian Writing in English has also highlighted about the issue of identity in her most famous novel *That Long Silence* (1988). The novel discusses how a woman is silenced throughout her life not only by her own family before marriage but also after marriage by her in laws and husband. The novel throws light on the existential predicament of the protagonist Jaya who is finally able to speak for herself and break that long silence between her and her husband. The novel is partly autobiographical in the sense that Jaya as well as Shashi Deshpande belong to the educated middle class women, and both are writers by profession. Through the novel she explores the various shades of identity a woman has during her life time even though she is educated and well established. The society always identifies a woman with her father's name before marriage and after that by her Husband's name. In the novel Deshpande examines the meanings of silence- which is expected to be practiced by a wife to keep her marriage blissful. As she herself adds it in the epigraph of the novel, “you learn a lot of tricks to get by a relationship. Silence is one of them. You never find a woman criticizing her husband, even playfully, in case it might damage the relationship” (Deshpande iii). Thus, the novel can be attributed to be partly autobiographical for depicting the psychological turmoil of every woman through the character of Jaya who manages to break the long silence and live at par with her husband.

Anita Desai, another major author in Indian Writing in English whose works have immensely enriched students and scholars is also known for the depiction of

autobiographical elements in her novels. Her novels include *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *The Village by the Sea* (1982), *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), *In Custody* (1984) *Clear Light of Day* (1980) to name a few. The novel *Clear light of Day* is autobiographical in nature. It narrates a story about four sisters and brothers- Tara, Raja, Bim and Baba, set during the partition of 1947. The impact of partition on the personal lives of the siblings, their individual differences and the emotional decisions they had to take owing to political pressures in an around the nation.

Dialogue is an integral part of any communication, literary discourse as well as of any individual's day to day life. Studies show that various attempts have been made to overcome the limitations and complexities involved in the process dialogue across disciplines. These complexities are often the result of the unfathomable dialogues that constantly occur within the psyche of individuals rather than what goes outside. The process of conversation through dialogues has occupied a significant place in literary analysis, theory and criticism as well as multiculturalism. A significant shift can be noticed in narrative technique- from monologic to dialogic form of narration. This change in representation of dialogues in literature can be attributed to postmodern notion of pluralities in dialogue and meaning. Nevertheless, dialogue in the dialogic form of narration metaphorically represents the predicament of contemporary life in general and literature in particular. Anjum Hasan's *The Cosmopolitans* very minutely depicts the complexities involved in the negotiations between self and other. "Being a modern Indian is a hard work". (Hasan 235)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Hasan, Anjum. *Lunatic in my Head*. Penguin Random House, 2007.

---, *The Cosmopolitans*. Penguin Random House, 2016.

---, *Neti, Neti: Not This, Not This*. Roli Books Pvt. Ltd., 2016.

Secondary Sources

---, . *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota press, 1999.

Alfaro, Maria Jesus Martinez. "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept." *Atlantis*, vol.18, no.1/2, 1996, pp.268-285. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41054827. Accessed 30 Jan. 2021.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Edited by M. Holquist, Translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981.

Banerji, Himani. *The Dark Side of the Nation: Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Canadian Scholars Press, 2000.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Viva Books, 2010.

Batory, Anna M. "Dialogicality and the Construction of Identity." *International Journal for Dialogical Science*, vol.4, no. 1, Fall 2010, pp. 45-66.

Bhabha, Homi K, editor. *Nation and Narration*. Routledge, 2017.

---, *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2019.

Borgohain, Mamoni Gogoi, editor. *Literature of the North-East India*. Demow College, 2014.

Chakrabarti, Paromita. "We're so busy writing about important things, who is going to write about feelings?" *The Indian EXPRESS*, April 1, 2018, <https://indianexpress.com/article/express-sunday-eye/were-so-busy-writing-about-important-things-who-is-going-to-write-about-feelings-5118751/> Accessed 8 Feb. 2018.

Chandra, N.D.R. *Multicultural Literature in India: Critical Perceptions*, Vol.I & Vol.II, Sarup Book Publishers, 2009.

Clark, Katerina. "M. M. Bakhtin and 'World Literature'." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2002, pp. 266–292. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/30224583. Accessed 2 Feb. 2021.

Desai, Anita. *Clear Light of the Day*, Penguin Books Ltd. 1980.

Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. Hamish Hamilton. 2006.

Deshpande, Shashi. *That Long Silence*, Penguin Random House. 1988.

Dhawan, R.K. editor, *Multiculturalism in Literature: America & Beyond*. Prestige Books, 2016.

Dhawan, R.K., and D.K Pabhy, editors. *Multiculturalism Canada and India*. Prestige Books, 2005.

Emerson, Caryl. "Polyphony and the Carnavalesque: Introducing the Terms." *All the Same The Words Don't Go Away: Essays on Authors, Heroes, Aesthetics, and Stage Adaptations from the Russian Tradition*, 2011, pp. 3–41. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt21h4wh9.5. Accessed 3 Feb. 2021.

Gill, Stephen. *Immigrant*, Vesta Publications Ltd, 1982.

Gordon, Milton. *Assimilation in American Life*. Oxford University Press, 1964.

Gutmann, Amy. editor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton Paperbacks, 1994.

Hasan, Anjum. ---, *Difficult Pleasures*. Penguin Random House, 2013.

---, *A Day in the Life*. Penguin Random House, 2018.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974

Jain, Jasbir. editor, *Dislocation and Multiculturalism*. Rawat Publications, 2004.

John Sturrock. *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 77, no. 2, 1982, pp. 398–402. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3726822. Accessed 1 Jan. 2021.

Khan, Abdul S.A. "The Indian Diaspora in Canada: A Note on Rohinton Mistry." *Spiel Journal of English Studies*. 1.2, 2005: 63-68.

Kymlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. OUP, 1997.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Namesake*. Harper Collins, 2003.

---. *The Lowland*. Random House, 2013.

Lodge, David. *The Art of Fiction*. Vintage, 2011.

Ludwig, Sami. *American Multiculturalism in Context: Views from at Home and Abroad*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006.

Mazumdar, Arunima. "Of Shillong, Lunacy and life." *Times of India*, 11 July, 2013, timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/features/Of-Shillong-lunacy-and-life/articleshow/14407572.cms. Accessed 10 March, 2018.

Philips, Anne. *Multiculturalism without Culture*. Princeton University Press, 2009.

Rahman, Azera. "Lunatic in My Head: a migrant's view of Shillong." *The Hindustan Times*, 6 June, 2008, www.hindustantimes.com/books/lunatic-in-my-head-a-migrant-s-view-of-shillong/story-yaYRFV4WTgd0zGd2XzNN1K.html. Accessed 8 Feb. 2018.

Ramsay, M.F. "Promoting Equality in a Multicultural Society: The Canadian Experience". *Indian Journal of Canadian Studies*. Vol. I & Vol. II, 1998.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. Penguin, 2002.

Seturaman, V.S., editor. *Contemporary Criticism: An Anthology*. Macmillan, 1989.

Shi, Yanling. "Review of Wolfgang Iser and His Reception Theory." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 3, no. 6, June 2013 pp. 982-986.

Thapa, Manjushree. "Sophie's Voice." *Outlook*, 21 Dec.2009, magazine.outlookindia.com/story/sophies-voice/263248. Accessed 10 March. 2018. Waugh, Patricia, editor. *Literary Theory and Criticism: an Oxford Guide*. Oxford UP, 2006.