



Mainstream Representations of Discrimination and Trauma in Queer Community

¹*Dr. Chitra V.S**

¹*Associate Professor, PG Department of English, Mahatma Gandhi College, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram-695004.*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.2023.4223>

ABSTRACT

The rest of the nation frequently ignores the great heterogeneity of the Northeast while perpetuating absurd misconceptions about it. The "mainland" ignores the diversity within and among the peoples of the North-East, and as a result, the North-East is only seen to be the fringe of Indian culture. The lack of mainstream representation is a fundamental barrier to empowerment. By subtly endorsing hegemonic values, mainstream media caters only to a heteronormative and racially superior segment of society, thus marginalising the queer Northeastern individual. The stigma and trauma experienced by queer community viz, typical LGBTQ individual from the Northeast could encounter in the nation's largest cities. Ethnic and socioeconomic minorities are routinely disregarded in the creation of several important theories in trauma studies, such as those of Cathy Carruth and Kirby Farrell. This study examines how the Northeast's LGBT communities have been traumatised by systemic persecution over many generations. This study explores how systemic oppression over many generations has traumatised LGBT communities in the Northeast. It is arguable whether Trauma of the Northeastern Queer is an anthology of various, unique traumas or a single, common experience. One of the most diverse parts of the nation is the north-east. As a result, there are differences in the LGBT experience in the North-East. Although some tribes and communities in the North-East continue to foster virulent homophobia, others have evolved to be more accepting and tolerant. Yet, there has been a recent tendency towards advancement. To address the internalised trauma of queer communities within the geopolitical reality of the North-East, numerous support groups have emerged. In the current study, an investigation of the homosexual liberation movements in the area is also addressed.

Keywords: *North-East, Queer, Trauma, Mainstream Representation, Support Groups.*

Introduction

The North-East of India has experienced a variety of persecution in addition to institutional exclusion, such as a lack of mainstream representation. Throughout the beginning of time, Indians from the Northeastern states of the nation have been marginalised and mercilessly cast aside, their voices restrained and their silences praised. A periphery/mainstream split that is not only absurd but also misleading has been created as a result of disrespectful and unfavourable perceptions about the North Eastern populace. The people lose their entire history and even their dignity as a result. A typical Northeastern person in mainland India experiences considerably more oppression than just racial and cultural othering. Their body is taken advantage of and overly sexualized. The unwelcome label of extreme erotica and exoticism is a lifelong curse. The unwelcome label of exoticism and extreme erotica is the Northeastern body's eternal curse. The predicament of LGBT people living in the same geopolitical region is even more terrible.

The queer has been relegated to the margins of a hetero normative society, which has already taken on the role of the mainstream. The nation's LGBT populations suffer injustice and are subjected to virulent prejudice, just like the North-East region of India. The homosexual and transgender populations from the Northeastern states are double marginalised within the context of mainland India, according to this essay. On the basis of well-known academic ideas like those of Cathy Carruth and Kirby Farrell, an effort is made to investigate the severe facts of their suffering. The "queer of the queer" or doubly marginalised people frequently slip through the cracks of general academic studies. This study urges us to reevaluate widely held beliefs about things like collective memory and trauma. Trauma's root causes are also investigated. The dynamics of Northeastern India have undergone a variety of progressive changes since the turn of the twenty-first century. The promotion and acceptance of queer pride in places like Assam and Manipur are examples of this. However, due to the North-extreme East's heterogeneity, it is incredibly difficult to categorise these developments under the broad term "Northeastern." This study examines the various innovative gay liberation and queer pride movements that have emerged in India's northeastern states, such as the Chinky Homo project. This study examines the various innovative gay liberation and queer pride movements that have emerged in India's northeastern states, such as the Chinky Homo project. This article celebrates their efforts to promote gay pride and dispel misconceptions about their location and sexuality. This article also addresses the difficulties encountered by Northeastern LGBT migrants in "mainland" India and the dearth of representation in the media.

Literature Review

The Northeastern region of the country has been the topic of various academic research. Aspects like conflict, ethnicity, women's rights, and language have often found their way into debates and studies. Joyati Bhattacharya (2010) talks about how women are denied entry into the political sphere of the North East. She discusses how despite holding various peace movements, the women of the region are limited to domestic realms. They fail to make themselves heard in the wider social and political context of the region. This lack of representation of women within their homeland forms the crux of Bhattacharya's work. Sanjay K Roy (2005) discusses the ethnonational conflicts that have been brewing within the fabric of the North-East. New meanings are being assigned to the very concept of Indianness, challenging the existence of the so-called 'mainland'. This study deals mostly with the socio-economic and political subjugation of the North-East. N Somorendro Singh (2006) in his essay on the issues of the North-East, discusses how the region faces integration and gross underdevelopment. The essay criticizes both national and regional governments for having failed to empower the northeastern populations.

Despite much research on the political, cultural, and social dynamic of the North-East of India, the plights of the queer have been denied attention. The present study attempts to bridge this gap in research by highlighting a few aspects of queerness within the geopolitical reality of Northeastern India.

Data and Method

The North-East of India becomes extremely pertinent to this study because it has perpetually been at the receiving end of gross misrepresentation and discrimination. Only through rampant academic research and debates can the Northeastern queer be brought to the forefront. This paper employs the methodology of non-participant observation to document certain facets of Northeastern queer existence. The data used in the study are collected from ethnographic surveys that have been carried out on related topics. Non-participant observation is a methodology employed by researchers to closely and carefully observe the subjects under study without actively participating in the situation under study. It has been chosen as the methodology for the present study taking into consideration its efficiency to maintain a neutral and unbiased point of view.

North East- In the Periphery

The existence of a problematic mainstream/ periphery binary has been prevalent for ages. Mainland India, with its developing and metro cities, has always pictured the North-East as an alien 'disturbed area', mired in violence, human rights violations, terrorism, and inter-ethnic conflict. The peculiar reality of the region and its strained relationship with the mainland is deep-rooted conundrums that need to be discussed and debated more often. The North-Eastern states share international borders with hostile countries and this, not surprisingly, adds to the political unrest within the region. Rigorous deployment of army units and the subsequent militarization of the region through acts like AFSPA has only worsened the turbulence. Moreover, the tag of being a 'national emergency zone' has proven a mighty shackle for development.

The North-East is only viewed as an underdeveloped and conflict-ridden region by the rest of the world. Mainland Indians are unwilling to share a sense of kinship or even empathize with these marginalized people. They are pushed further to the fringes of society and are considered merely foreigners even in their home country. The divergent lifestyle of the North-East is only welcomed with animosity lest it poses a threat to the prevailing cultural fabric of India. Their lifestyle and practices are perpetually considered foreign and habits of an inferior culture.

However, despite being in a state of constant political turmoil and facing gruesome persecution from the rest of the country, the North-East receives little to no mainstream representation. Neither are their stories exalted in Bollywood cinema nor do their plights make headlines on mainstream news channels. Worse still is the fate of the Northeastern queer. While occasional debates on the region's tribal conflicts, language rights, and human rights violations make their way to the mainstream, discussions on queer sexualities of the North-East are still outside the purview of national media. Even queer-centric platforms tend to keep the North-East in the blind spot. For instance, media houses that stand up for the liberation of the queer by consistently broadcasting talks on queer empowerment and debates on sexuality fail to notice similar initiatives within the Northeastern states. The pride month in cities like Delhi and Mumbai receives exponentially larger screen space on national television when compared to those of Shillong or Guwahati. As long as this inconsistency and partiality in reportage persist, the prejudice inherent in the psyche of a mainland Indian towards the Northeastern queer will remain unchanged. This issue is further elaborated on in the later sections of the paper.

Another possible reason for the double marginalization of the Northeastern queer community is their inability to assimilate into the pink capitalist culture. Pink Capitalism, alternatively known as homo capitalism or Rainbow capitalism, is a corporate strategy to make money off affluent queer populations by presenting them with a false sense of liberation. Like in most developed countries, major cities in India follow the pink culture as a ticket to inclusivity and recognition. The pink culture has created niche markets and spaces reserved exclusively for the wealthy queer community. The month of June, often considered the pride month, sees a rapid rise in ostensibly progressive and queer-friendly marketing strategies. Corporate companies are seen frantically advocating queer awareness and gay pride to target sections of the LGBTQI+ community with ample purchasing power. Although rainbow capitalism may facilitate the partial incorporation of queer individuals into the social dynamic, the strategy causes more harm than good.

For doubly marginalized communities like the queer of the North-East, a smooth absorption into the pink culture is difficult due to geopolitical, economic, and ethnic factors. As discussed earlier in this paper, the North-East is at the periphery of Indian culture- it falls at the blind spot of not just national media but also mainstream campaigns. Consequently, a corporate intervention in the economy or sexuality of the region is next to in-existent

even today. The plights of a vast majority of Northeastern migrants in bigger cities are also not any brighter. As a result of class prejudice and economic incapability, they are denied access to the exclusive queer spaces which radiate a sense of security, power, and belonging. These spaces remain reserved for the affluent and mostly mainland Indians, while the doubly marginalized individuals who fail to meet the expectations of a capitalist economy are treated with scorn and prejudice. The disparity thus created, pushes the Northeastern queer population further to the margins, reinstating powerfully the existence of a dangerous mainstream/ periphery binary.

Migration to the Mainland

Migration to major Indian cities like Delhi, Mumbai, or Bangalore is often in a frantic search for liberation, empowerment, and inclusivity. Queer individuals are tempted with greater options for livelihood, a wider platform for skilled labor, and job opportunities. Most importantly they crave the garb of anonymity that a bustling, overcrowded city is capable of providing. Desires and choices can be expressed without the fear of prying on questions and too much judgment. Most metro cities offer safe, inclusive spaces for community building and the vocalization of sexuality. The existence of visible gay liberation movements including pride walks is also common. However, how far the Northeastern queer are tolerated within these spaces is the topic of debate.

The curious case of the Northeastern queer migrant is that they oscillate between alienation and celebration in the folds of the big cities. Despite being faceless, nameless entities within the wild ocean of mainland India, they are not able to embrace their anonymity. Their bodies bear witness to a centuries-long history of racial profiling and cultural othering that has always been prevalent in the societies of India. Metropolitan cities are not, to this day, completely inclusive or tolerant and as a consequence, the Northeastern queer body remains a site of torture, humiliation, and othering.

Racial slurs that mark the Northeasterners as the 'other' within the fabric of developed cities are rampantly used in mainland India. The usage of words like 'chinky' and 'momos' to address the Northeastern individuals is not only preposterous but problematic as well. This reduces their bodies to mere objects of fetishization while conveniently ignoring the fierce political and cultural statement the body is capable of making. A queer individual from the North-East is at the intersection of two distinctive and equally venomous social prejudices- that of being 'chinky' and that of being 'homo'. Further on in this paper, we look at how the Northeastern population has evolved to subvert racist and homophobic social systems through the formation of support groups. Initiatives like the 'Chinky Homo Project' work tirelessly to promote representation of the doubly sidelined through digital platforms.

There, however, is no escape from the feeling of alienation for a Northeastern person living in Mainland India. Instead of being the gateway to financial and professional success, these cities often present systemic discrimination in the form of both verbal and physical abuse. Violence against the community is not a rare occurrence. For instance, in the wake of the recent global pandemic, countless Northeastern individuals were not just assaulted, but also verbally humiliated. Following Donald Trump's rather insensitive and racist tagging of the Covid virus as the "Chinese virus", persecution of Northeastern migrants in mainland areas like Delhi and Gujarat intensified exponentially. Northeastern people, mistaken for being Chinese, are racially targeted and abused even in metropolitan cities. Various instances of violence have been reported from Delhi, wherein Northeastern girls were beaten, thrown out of hostels, and even spat on. New additions like 'virus' and 'Corona' have made their way to India's bigoted lexicon against the North-East.

Feelings of fright and victimhood are inseparable from the being of a Northeastern migrant. This often leads to the formation of small pockets within the dynamic of metro cities, where the underprivileged huddle together. Areas like Munirka and Vijay Nagar in Delhi are famous for their ethnic enclaves which have a fair share of businesses run by Northeastern people. The marginalized migrant can find safety, inclusivity, and a sense of community within these small pockets. However, even amidst such an environment, the queer invariably remains the queer. A good majority of the Northeastern population that inhabits these areas are themselves queerphobic. Tolerance, if not open acceptance, is therefore difficult to find even in these ostensibly safe colonies. While metropolitan queer spaces are accessible only to the affluent, ethnic enclaves remain exclusive to heterosexuals. Consequently, the queer Northeastern individual is doomed to a life of perpetual anxiety and is denied even the most basic right to dignity, integrity, and a sense of belonging.

Mainstream Representation

Mainstream media has, since time immemorial, been manipulated to influence the ideological outlooks of its audience. Through a tactful endorsement of hegemonic ideals, media has made itself appealing to a hetero normative and racially superior society. The media's immense popularity and prominent position in culture sprout from its ability to appease the privileged sections of the population. Television swarms with problematic rhetoric that serves to reinforce regressive ideologies subtly. Consequently, mainstream media has become the breeding ground of homophobia and racism rather than being advocates for equality or acceptance. It has been noted that despite the considerable rise of queer representation in television, it still celebrates the existence of a hetero normative superiority, causing further oppression of the queer.

During the nineties, any mainstream representation that the LGBTQI+ communities received was limited to merely stereotypes that were custom-made exclusively for humor and ridicule. Consequently, real-life experiences of sexual identity crises were welcomed only with utmost contempt and indifference by a society that has been influenced deeply by the homophobic media rhetoric. They were taught to associate queerness with immorality, resulting in the propagation of baseless and often cruel prejudices. Stereotypes about not only the queer but also cultural minorities are, even to this day, rampant in the media narrative. The mainstream, including prominent art forms like movies and music, is notorious for its gross under-representation of ethnic minorities. Almost every major debate that airs on national television pertains to hiccups faced by the racially and economically forward sections

of India. The Northeastern and often the Southern states of the country, unfortunately, receive little to no attention from mainstream broadcasting companies.

Even within the realm of Indian literature, a conspicuous dearth in Northeastern queer participation can be noted. This lack of representation bears striking similarities with the lack of Afro-American representation in the literary canon of the US. Queer writings from the North East are defined by their absence. Excessive marginalization besets queer communities all around the world. Queer experience, especially among ethnic minorities, is not a homogeneous phenomenon. The different states and tribes of the North-East display varied attitudes towards their sexually different members. While some tribes have begun to become empathetic towards their queer, others are notorious for their homophobia. A large portion of queer individuals struggles to give face and voice to the persecution that is inherent in the dynamic of their everyday life. Nevertheless, numerous contributions have been made by the Northeastern queer community toward literature. They have penned down in detail the complex conundrums of mundane life within the geopolitical atmosphere of the Northeast. For instance, Dona Marven, the first openly transgender woman from Meghalaya elaborates on her unfortunate plight through her work *A Transwoman's Hard Hitting Life Journey in Shillong*. Marven talks about the amount of hatred and disrespect she earned by defying the rigid hetero normative ideals of her tribe. She was constantly taunted for being a 'fake woman', as she refused to conform to the staunch gender roles. Another work, *Being Gay and Self-Acceptance in a Christian State like Nagaland*, written by Iohborlang Kevin Hansen documents the young homosexual man's frantic search for love and eventual acceptance of himself and his body. Accounts like these are significant because they expose the complete and intricate reality of the North-East. The truth of the Northeastern queer identity can be conclusively understood only through authentic pieces of literature like these. Apart from the two mentioned works, countless other memoirs have been birthed in the Northeast. However, the unfortunate predicament is that these works are tagged 'indigenous' and lie outside the scope of the mainstream view. Mainstream Indian literature refuses to provide a platform or space for the Northeast in its canon. Consequently, the queer of the North-East are invisibilised and silenced within the mainstream.

Northeastern Queer Trauma

Trauma Studies took birth at the juncture of change from Modernism to Postmodernism. More than a century ago, the concept of trauma pertained merely to esoteric Medical debates. However, the progress of the Twentieth Century witnessed a rapid inculcation of the term into bland, common parlance. The unchecked trauma of the Northeastern population in the wake of armed conflict between and across communities has been the topic of numerous academic research within the field of trauma studies.

However, it has been noticed that ethnic and social minorities are often overlooked in the framing of certain influential theories in Trauma studies. The tendency to classify varied forms of queer experiences under the umbrella of 'Collective Trauma' is observed in the works of Cathy Carouth, a prominent scholar in the field. It remains unclear if experiences of discrimination get manifested as a "Collective Trauma" or if different individuals from the same community realize trauma in drastically different manners.

In her groundbreaking book, *Trauma- Explorations in Memory (1995)*, Carruth suggests that memory is not mandated to a theoretical representation and one should not "stubbornly persist in bearing witness to some forgotten wound". Kirby Farrell in *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and interpretation in the nineties* resonates with Carouth's ideas about trauma. Both find trauma not in the catastrophe, but the ensuing period of 'post-trauma'. Even when the context of the traumatic event fades away, the memory and therefore the trauma remains unimpaired in the psyche of the victims. Oftentimes, the victims of trauma are incapable of conceptualizing the event. However, these "unclaimed experiences", which render no narrative of the event are not any less traumatic. Based on Carouth's and Farrell's theories, one can assume that a multitude of such "unclaimed experiences" rest within the make-up of any Northeastern queer individual. Generations of double marginalization and social ostracism have left scars too deep in the collective memories of the queer community from the North-East. Their trauma transcends the limitations of individual events of agony, merging into single shared suffering. Trauma awaits such an individual from the very instance of their birth.

The concept of 'Collective Trauma', stemming from the collective memories and earlier lived experiences of a community is, however, problematic. While queer theory ostensibly seeks to help resist the societal shunning of the LGBTQI+ community as a whole, it sometimes forgets the 'queer of the queer'. The community cannot be considered one unified entity, disregarding its racially, culturally, economically, and politically weaker factions. A member of the queer community hailing from a geographically lesser privileged area like the North East may have a considerably different experience of trauma. The extent of inclusivity provided by academic theories on gender has long been an area of debate. E Patrick Johnson asks, "What, for example, are the ethical and material implications of queer theory if its project is to dismantle all notions of identity and agency?What is the utility of Queer Theory on the front lines, in the trenches, on the street, or any place where the racialized and sexualized body is beaten, starved, fired, cursed-Indeed, where the body is the sight of trauma?"(5). This contradicts Carouth's theory which invites the conviction that the crux of trauma lies not in the catastrophic event, but rather in the memories [and consequently the trauma] emanating from them. According to her, the general trauma that engulfs the queer community, has its source in a single, ancient social taboo, disregarding their current degree of victimization. However, it is debatable whether Trauma of the Northeastern queer is one single shared experience or if it is an anthology of diverse, personalized traumas.

Any discourse on trauma demands a probe into not merely its consequences, but also its causes. Studies reveal a shuddering disparity in the number of cases of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among straight and LGBTQI+ individuals. Four distinct factors that aggravate the trauma of a Northeastern queer person have been identified here. The First and most important cause is childhood maltreatment and exposure to violence. Straight children from the mainland are in a more privileged position in this regard as instances of military conflict, cross-firing, or inter tribe disputes are less frequent in comparison to the North-East. This conspicuous systemic discrimination is not surprisingly a glaring reason for the trauma that permeates

into both individual and cultural domains of the sidelined communities. Another reason could be the contagious nature of trauma. It has been observed that trauma is inter-generationally transmitted. Consequently, one can easily assume that the trans-historical and inter-generational facets of trauma are partly responsible for the alarming number of PTSD cases among doubly marginalized communities like the Northeastern queer. According to critics like Kirby Farrel a 'post-traumatic culture' has evolved in the modern individual following their ancestral trauma. The North East has been at the receiving end of systemic racial discrimination for centuries. The remnants of a massive trauma in the past have, subsequently, seeped into the pool of contemporary individual trauma, contributing to the rise in cases of trauma disorders in today's Northeastern individuals, especially the queer ones.

Cultural and social attitudes towards an individual traumatic event can also contribute to the personalized experience of trauma. Even in modernized societies, sadly, the reception of trauma does not come without the tags of judgment and retribution. The societal and cultural attitudes towards the event may shape one's perception of the event and therefore the memories leading to trauma. Unfortunately, certain sections of the Northeastern society even today nurture taboos and prejudices against queer sexuality, which results in a turbulent environment for the Northeastern queer even in their homeland. The final cause of queer trauma is characterized by the geographical location an individual is destined to have been born. "Place is not only a physical location of experience but also an entity that organizes memories, feelings, and meaning because it is the site where the individual and cultural realities intersect," observes Michelle Balaev (150). Being condemned to live and die in a place that witnessed tremendous historic persecution of one's ancestors could be emotionally tolling and could easily develop into trauma disorders.

Acceptance of the Queer in the North-East

Although the sad reality of the North-East includes violence and conflict, it is not the single aspect that defines the wholeness of the region. The North-East is one of the most heterogeneous spaces in the country. Countless tribes and sub-tribes contribute to the formation of the varied cultures of the Northeastern states. Subsequently, the culture of the region is not single or fixed, it is an amalgamation of myriad spatially and contextually different realities. The queer experience in the North-East is, as a result not, homogeneous. The diversity of the region is reflected in the difference in queer acceptance as well. While the LGBTQI+ community has been able to establish itself as a strong entity among certain tribes, others still exhibit vehement homophobia and intolerance.

The transgender community of the Meiti tribe in Manipur is given the privileges of inclusivity, acceptance, and even economic superiority. They have risen to be one of the most powerful business classes, with commendable purchasing power. The beauty and fashion industry in Manipur is dominated by the *Nupi Maambi* or trans women. However, the heterogeneity of the Northeastern region is such that even within the same state, different communities experience queerness in completely different ways. For instance, the Kukis, Nagas, and the Meitei Pangan of Manipur are quite hostile toward their queer. They do not enjoy financial prowess or inclusion and are condemned to lives of invisibility. Likewise, Nagaland and Mizoram are renowned for their staunch faith in Christianity, which means that homosexuality is viewed as an aberration and is discouraged.

However, in recent years, the North-East has seen increasingly visible queer liberation movements and support groups. Despite the linguistic, social, and cultural diversity among the eight states, it can be observed that the general trend is in favor of progress. Gay liberation initiatives like queer pride marches and support groups have been inculcated into the fabric of the North-East recently. Community-based organizations (CBOs) for the upliftment of the transgender population have been prevalent in Manipur since 2008. AMANA (All Manipur Nupi Manbi Organization) and ETA (Empowering Trans Abilities) are the two most popular organizations in the state. Samakami is a similar initiative that functions in Meghalaya. It offers health care and legal aid for members of the queer community. The first pride parade in the North-East region was held shortly after the controversial Supreme Court judgment of 2013, which criminalized homosexuality. This homophobic verdict was met with resistance from all parts of the world including Northeastern India. The region's first queer pride demonstrations took place in the streets of Gauhati. In February 2014, a queer collective known as the XUKIA was formed in Assam to promote queer solidarity and inclusivity, mainly by organizing movie screenings in schools and universities.

However, despite these progressive changes, the lack of mainstream representation remains an unfortunate reality. The pressing urgency for upliftment calls for widespread awareness of the sidelined lives, which can only be achieved through the inculcation of the North-East into the mainstream rhetoric. To prevent the gate-keeping of narratives from the North-East, initiatives like the Chinky Homo Project and XUKIA have relentlessly worked to explore, document, and archive stories of the underrepresented population. Only by raising a loud and persistent voice through frequent publications of authentic narratives can the North-East gain the attention of the rest of the country. For this very purpose XUKIA has launched the first multilingual LGBTQI+ journal in the North-East- '*The Forbidden: ek xukia dristanto*'. The Chinky Homo Project too provides an inclusive digital platform for the expression of the Northeastern queer self through a vast collection of personalized narratives from the community. They exalt the digital form of storytelling due to its versatile nature. The texts uploaded to the platform can be changed, edited, or even deleted, reflecting the actual dynamic of the Northeastern thought. The texts are therefore protected from misinterpretation or re-interpretation, while at the same time given stage to make themselves heard.

The interesting lexicon of the initiative's name, 'The Chinky Homo Project' has been much discussed. Both the words 'Chinky' and 'Homo' are derogatory. The word 'Chinky' is used, predominantly in mainland India, to ridicule the Northeastern immigrants for having East Asian features. This usage is threatening to the Northeastern populations in other parts of the nation as it imposes an 'outsider' status on them. Uttering the term is now punishable by law. The next word, 'Homo' is also a slur used to shame and socially ostracize the queer community.

The founders of the project claim that a conclusive and ultimate liberation from the shackles of discrimination can be facilitated only through an embracing of the shame that is imposed upon them. Only through a vocal confrontation of racial and homophobic slurs can a true liberation from it take place. As it is often through language that resistance becomes possible, the queer communities have reclaimed numerous words that used to slur once.

Sexual slurs like ‘ Queer’, ‘Dyke’, ‘Flamer’, ‘Sod’, and ‘Twink’ have now been embraced and even inculcated into common parlance in an attempt to subvert the discrete linguistic discrimination that is pervasive in mainstream discursive. The ‘Chinky Homo Project’ becomes remarkably pertinent to this study because, through its very name, the initiative blatantly exposes, ridicules, and subverts the prejudices of mainland India. Consequently, through the inclusion of these very words in the name of a Northeastern Queer liberation initiative, they prove that language can not only oppress but also liberate.

Conclusion

Despite brutal neglect and discrimination from the rest of the country, the North-East is learning to resist and make their voices heard louder than ever before. It is through an acknowledgment and subsequent acceptance of their queer Northeastern identity that they attempt a radical subversion of systemic oppression. The only escape from generational trauma lies not in shying away, but in embracing the shame that is associated with their identity. “Queerness is intimately tied to shame... Shame is integral and residual in the process by which identity itself is formed” observes prominent queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (59).

The queer individuals from North-East India are exposed to the risks of early rejection and shaming by a homophobic, racist society and are consequently coerced into assuming a false self to escape from the shame. The internalization of unjustified guilt combined with the absolute apathy of governments and religions create a shame so intense that non-normative individuals prefer to conveniently run away from the shame rather than embrace and acknowledge it. However, the acknowledgment of shame is crucial, for unacknowledged shame, has been proven to be one of the causes of trauma, withdrawal, and self-harm. The Chinky Homo Project, through its name, exposes this very shame that the mainland has been trying to impose upon generations of Northeastern queer individuals. The trauma emanating from such vicious maltreatment can be erased only when the doubly sidelined communities begin to acknowledge, accept and embrace their authentic selves.

References

1. Bhattacharya, J. (2010). Gender, Peacemaking and the case of Northeast India. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 71(1), 233-239.
2. Caruth, C. (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1st ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press.
3. Frank, A., & Sedgwick, E. (2003). *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity (Series Q)*. Middle Eastern Studies Journal (MESJ).
4. Haokip, T. (2020). From ‘Chinky’ to ‘Coronavirus’: racism against Northeast Indians during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Asian Ethnicity*, 22(2), 353-373.
5. doi: 10.1080/14631369.2020.1763161
6. Johnson, E. (2010). "Quare" studies, or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother.
7. Roy, S. (2005). Conflicting Nations in North-East India. *Economic And Political Weekly*, 40(21), 2176-2182.
8. Singh, S. (2006). Integration and Development in North-East India: An Assessment. *Indian Political Science Association*, 67(2), 329-342.