

# Decolonizing the Margins: Examining the influence of English Literature on the Development of Regional Identities in Punjab and Northeast India

Muhammad Yaseen<sup>1,2</sup>, Raihanah M M<sup>3</sup>, Shanthini Pillai<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Research Scholar, Center for Research in Language and Linguistics, National University of Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer Dept of English, Preparatory Year Program, Batterjee Medical College, Dammam, 32313, Saudi Arabia

<sup>3</sup> Associate Professor, Center for Research in Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia

Correspondence: Muhammad Yaseen, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Center for Research in Language and Linguistics, National University of Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia.

Received: February 6, 2025

Accepted: March 28, 2025

Online Published: June 23, 2025

doi:10.5430/wjel.v15n7p359

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n7p359>

## Abstract

Ethnoreligious and ethnocultural affinities are socially cohesive forces in Punjab and in Northeast India that shape the internal dynamics of the region. The orthodox approach in practicing these factors destabilizes the regional fulcrum of peace in the mindset of nationalists, but contrary to it, practicing these values are pride and glory in the mindset of regionalists. The nexus of politics, religion, culture, and the stream of regionalism in transnational northeast India and in Punjab paints an agitating picture of tribes riven by atrocity and menace. Both regions, despite their distinct sociopolitical histories and cultural contexts, have utilized English literature as a medium to articulate their identities, confront marginalization, and navigate the complexities of tradition and modernity. The regional extremism on display is at odds with the dignified piety commonly linked with religion and culture. Opportunists stoke the flames and label the regional tribal community as extremist and regionalists, conflicting with the national interest of mainland India. Treating northeasterners as alien, savage, and uncivilized within India has become a default response in the state, which was not new to them, as missionaries also believed that the arrival of Christianity was the arrival of light to this dark world.

Multidimensional identity remains a major question in India. In Indian English literature, *R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Arundhati Roy, Temsula Ao, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Vikram Seth, and Khushwant Singh* are some of the most remarkable names who contributed their work directly or indirectly to identity as a serious phenomenon in diverse India. It is widely believed that the '*Indian Freedom Struggle*' and '*Imperialism*' generated sentiments of nationalism that brought together diverse religions, languages, and lifestyles to demand a home from colonizers. However, during the decolonization process, Punjab divided, and Sikhs suffered more than the rest of India. This paper will highlight how the concept of identity transits throughout Indian English literature after decolonization in Punjab and Northeast India via indigenous and diasporic writers. This study further aligns ethnoreligious and ethnocultural identities in Punjab and Northeast India and their transnational impacts on regional identity in regional literature. We will explore these concepts to examine how regional English literature has served as a platform for articulating and redefining regional identities, particularly within the contexts of Northeast India and Punjab, with a focus on the literary contributions of *Easterine Kire and Khushwant Singh*. The article will provide an in-depth examination of literary works, unearthed thematic undercurrents, illuminate the nuanced struggles and lived experiences that define the identities of these regions.

**Keywords:** Regional fulcrum, Multidimensional identity, Transnational impacts, Orthodox approach

## 1. Introduction

### *Identity and Memory in Regional Indian Literature*

According to Ricoeur (2019), 'memory' represents the knowledge of the past, and 'fiction' is the medium of representation. Throughout history, the romance of religion, language, and culture has remained a hot debate in multicultural India. This debate was more vigorous during the Mughal regime and later during the post-colonial era. Geographic division played an instrumental role in creating a consciousness of regional identity. The division of water and resources in the north and west of India also triggers hate and identity crises in the region. Partition and post-colonialism in India traumatize subjects in the form of poverty, malnutrition, economic exploitation, and identity crisis. English as a language, Christianity as a religion, and cultural modifications as a tool were introduced by colonizers. Postcolonial writers in these regions used English to address and preserve their identity. These regional literary activists have examined changes in the anatomy of the social and political structure of India and depicted the outcomes of partitions and insurgencies to maintain their presence through language and culture in their regional literature. The postcolonial writings of *Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Salman Rushdie, Amit Chaudhry, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Khushwant Singh* have made a huge contribution to Indian English literature. According to Chuhan, R. L. (2020), *regional writers' restless tendencies, such as sticking to*

regional identity in terms of language and culture, could be considered as a revolt against the national norm of unity. This is an ultimate truth when it comes to Khushwant Singh's writing in relation to Punjab and Kire in terms of Northeast India. They penned on multiple aspects of regional identity, making it as holy as Victorian morality for regionalism. They played a vital role in triggering regional flavor in their novels, and a vast array of critical discourses has been examined to figure out that their Victorian morality approach to uplift regional identity in the national framework remains prominent. According to Gauri Viswanathan in *Masks of Conquest* (1989), Indigenous literature is inextricably linked to politics, self-representation, and hybrid identities, which get rhizomic because of exile, migration, and cultural syncretism and force the indigenous intellectuals to reflect in their masterpieces, such as in Punjab and Northeast India. A Similar narrative has been established by Shiv Naipaul, in his book *The Illusion of the Third World: An Unfinished Journey* (1986), states that decolonization leads to geographic division, which triggers indigenous identity, and it is obvious in the writings of Khushwant Singh, where mostly he expresses anxiety over partition and loss of linguistic and cultural identity of Punjabis. The tension, insurgency, and turbulence exist in different regions of India because of ethnic, cultural, economic, and political clashes, which further sensitize the region, rationalizing the difference between nationalism and regionalism. According to Anthony Smith, nationalism embodies a dominant framework of overarching political, economic, and cultural principles, wherein certain individuals harbor distinct aspirations and expectations to form a de facto (Smith, 1998:126). According to Edward Said, "National identity helps in the state-building process while regional identities get diluted in this process, which can fall apart later for liberation in the form of regional identity" (Said, 2003:449). In "Nation and Narration" (1990), Homi K. Bhabha theorizes nation as a 'form of cultural elaboration' unfolding in time for other narratives and differences such as regional identities in diverse nations. Bhabha's nation is not one. To him, a nation is not what it says it is; nor, for that matter, are we who we think we are. We are not (we never were) a homogeneous India (Bhabha, 1990:300). Interestingly, Leela Gandhi pointed out that regionalism is a nostalgic return to one's cultural roots out of nationalism (Gandhi, 1998:29). The concept of 'nation' fostered the emergence of nationality and nationalism, which remain contentious in India due to the complexities of regionalism, multiculturalism, and religious stratification. According to Anderson's 'Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism' (1983), a nation is both a political and cultural concept but not integrated as one. Seton-Watson (1977) has stated that Nation and Nationality are key factors in sustaining the spirit of patriotism. Indian English literature has witnessed many writers and movements in history aiding irredentism and regionalism. Intersectionality in Indian nationalism stems from the lack of development in industrial and democratic initiatives, which often led to anger, resentment, and insurgency. This insurgency, if not catered decently, pops up as a regional movement against homogeneous nationalism. Indian Nationalism has been questioned multiple times by regional movements due to racial, cultural, religious, and ethnic differences and because of misadventures of the government and foreign infiltrations.

### 1.1 Significance of Redefining Regional Identities.

The study in hand will critically analyze the ways in which Indian regional literature navigates the dialectical tensions between nationalism and regionalism, particularly within the frameworks of post-colonial fragmentation, cultural syncretism, and identity crises. By engaging with the literary oeuvre of selected authors, this research will interrogate how regional narratives contest, negotiate, and redefine hegemonic national discourses, thereby illuminating the multifaceted dimensions of identity formation in post-colonial India. This study is significant in its thematic analysis of how Indian regional literature contributes as a redoubtable medium in articulating and redefining regional identities within India. By analyzing regional novels of the writers from Punjab and Northeast India, the research reveals how literature confronts national narratives in relation to regional identities within India's dynamic and socio-political fabric. The study will examine the ways in which Indian regional literature contributes to the redefinition of regional identities and will further investigate and explore the dynamics of regionalism and nationalism in regional literature of northeast India and Punjab. Several scholars have written on the regional disparity, linguistic nuances, territorial reserves, and political maltreatment of Punjab and Northeast India. Literary discourses of selected writers from both regions (Kire and Singh) will provide thematic analysis of their work to comprehend regional identity. For instance, Singh depicts the social and political trauma of partition. His use of English, vernacular nuances, cultural and religious ethos, and quest for Sikh identity in his work allows him to reach an international audience to maintain identity linguistically as a Punjabi and Sikh. Easterine Kire and Tamsila Ao from northeast India depicted regional socio-political issues through Naga's Lens, and dialect to ensure that they are not marginalized. Through their literary work, they strengthen and preserve their linguistic identity, and cultural autonomy in multilingual and multicultural India. Unlikely no studies have been conducted on showcasing the similar nature of two regions (Northeast and Punjab) in India. Although several studies have been conducted on these regions in relation to politics and geography of the region but linguistic identity in literary perspectives would be a unique attempt which will unfold how these writers' used language as a medium to promote regionalism and raise regional identity, showcasing linguistic and cultural differences from the mainland. Khushwant Singh, and Easterine Kire have been selected over other writers because their work serves as a critical text (*Train to Pakistan*, *When the River Sleep*, *Naga Village Remembered*) in exploring how regional English literature helps in reconstructing or redefining regional identity. Though the narrative techniques and treatment of subject might be different in two different regions but both writers show similar tactics of using English as a language to archive people's stories of battle, colonization, decolonization, and quest for regional identity. To them, memory, tribal customs, and regional identity in their work are conversational narrative that connect the narrator's relation to their regional discourse through fragmented memories of their ancestors, such as Mano Majara in the case of Singh and Nagaland in the case of Kire. Their literary work illuminates and offers insight into how the language, culture, and ethos of these two regions are contradicting and evolving throughout history. The study will employ an in-depth examination of the literary contributions from these regions, with particular focus on the works of Easterine Kire, and Khushwant Singh, to comprehend how Punjabi language,

culture and northeastern tribal identities and folktales of natives' matter as a matter of regional identity. This investigation will further explore how Singh and Kire, through narratological choices and textual strategies, presented these marginalized and subjugated regions in their work.

## 2. Literature Review

### *Mapping Regional Identity*

Lack of economic opportunities and constant ignorance gave birth to insurgent groups in many regions of India, and regional identity has become a slogan for their acceptance and existence, which leads towards identity formation. Identity, according to *Immanuel Levinas and Erikson* as theorists, is the philosophical construction of identity as a region and then as a nation, a widespread concept that is merely considered as a root cause of violence in any society. For instance, Kurdistan regionalism, Azad Kashmir, Palestine, and Gaza are some of the most prominent examples of establishing regional identity which ultimately leads to political displacement and turbulence in the national peace process. This is the same theme that has been explored and rationalized by various novelists in the Indian diaspora in relation to regional identities. For example, *Mulk Raj Anand's* and *R.K. Narayan's* fictional work in 1935, closely followed by *Raja Rao's* in 1938, used vernacular terms in their work, considering language is a gateway to cultural identity. Historical texts and literature offer insight into experiences of regional identities that have faced systematic violence and marginalization due to their distinct cultural identities. For instance, '*The Diary of Anne Frank*' (1947) is an example of identity-based persecution. Most of the post-partition Indian literature has a sense of regret, mourning, and resentment, as well as regional flavors of identity formation within a national framework. Gandhian ideology was permeated in India, which created a socio-political identity in the national literary and political narrative of India. For instance, *Raja Rao's Kanthapura* (1938) presents Moorthy as a modeled character of Gandhi. Identity formation in literary work has remained as a central concern in Indian literary traditions. For instance, novels like *Manohar Malgonkar's The Princes* (1963), *Mulk Raj Anand's Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953), *Kamala Markandaya's The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), *Khushwant Singh's A Train to Pakistan* (1956), *Malgonkar's A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), *Chaman Nahal's Azadi*, and *Twilight in Delhi* by *Muhammad Ali* all deal with partition and articulate complex interplay between regional and national identities. Most literature emerged after the Indo-Pak partition, usually known as '*Partition Literature*,' and it mainly deals with the human psyche, suffering, agony, oppression, victimization, tragic deaths, and abuse of women and is written in almost all regional languages like Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Telegu, and English as well. The prominent writers of '*Partition Literature*' in India are *Saadat Hassan Manto*, *Faiz Ahmed Faiz*, *Khushwant Singh*, *Allama Iqbal*, *Sahir Ludhianvi*, *Qurratulain Hyder*, *Asmat Chughtai*, and *Nanak Singh* in Urdu, and writers like *Bapsi Sidhwa*, *Salman Rushdie*, *Jhumpa Lahiri*, *Balachandra Rajan*, *Attia Hosain*, *Amitav Ghosh*, etc., who have largely covered areas of religion, identity, and ethnicity in the Indian context. The identity perspective in the Indian context remained very debated because of its multiculturalism (caste and gender division) and religious transgression. The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, and The Puranas depict India as a nation and mother figure but with many cultures and social norms that align them with a particular regional identity before national identity, and that regional identity is far stronger than national identity. The proven examples are the movement of Khalistan in Punjab and struggles of regionalism in Northeast India. Therefore, regionalism springs from cultural affinities rather than national affinities. Regional cultural differences from national differences act as a centripetal force to contextualize the Indian experience in a global framework where their regional and cultural interests have preferences over national interests. This devalues the concept of nation or nationalism. According to *Das* (2007), Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into the northeast like tea from a tea bag and has transformed the religious and cultural identity. Regional literature helps to keep all our ancient kathas and fables alive in our imaginations. These kathas have Indianized English as it carries the Indian experience. For example, regional literature from northeast India, such as *Easterine Kire's* novel *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003), *Tomsula Ao's These Hills Called Homes* (2005), *Mitra Phukan's The Collector's Wife* (2005), and *Jahnvi Barua's The Next Door* (2008), is full of regional stories and cultural and traditional norms that map the changes induced by colonizers into the indigenous structure of the region. These writers are called literary activists because their writings act as an immunity against the injustices happening in the region in multiple terms. A similar condition is in Punjab; literary works in English produced by both Sikh and non-Sikh writers of South Asian origin and the diaspora have gained significant recognition, prominence, and popularity in contemporary discourse. Sikh-themed fictional novels largely mapped the culture, language, and traditions of Punjab, distinguishing the region from the mainland. For example, *Bhi Vir Singh's The English Patient* (1992), *Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan* (1956), *Nayantara Sahgal's Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *Raj Gill's The Rape* (1974), *The Days of the Turban* (1987), and *Bharati Mukherjee's Time is a Fire* (2002) are some of the well-celebrated novels depicting the pre- and post-colonial era when Sikhs were in defense against Mughals, Afghans, and colonizers. Sikh identity, religion, culture, and community portrayed in these novels claim Punjab as a region for which Khalistan as a movement has been in practice, active, and alive for years.

## 3. Theorizing Transnational Identity

Punjab and NE-India exhibit similarities in identity crisis and regionalism. For instance, Punjabi language and culture make them distinct from the rest of the state, while Northeast Indians' complex mosaic of tribal affinities and language challenge the homogenizing narrative of India as a nation. These two regions have strong transnational ties and diasporic communities that broadcast their identities in national and international scenarios through literary work and politics. These transnational ties fuse cultures, engage in transborder marriages (Punjabis in Canada), and encourage locals to act as a catalyst for regional identity, and these transnational diasporic communities aid regionalists in initiating separatist movements in the name of identity and regionalism, which always amend national narratives. As a result of aid, affinities, and political gains from a transnational perspective, regionalists act the against state which creates chaos and

turbulence in the region, because the government wants to maintain law and order while activists demand regional identity, which contradicts national discourse. The philosophy of transnationalism came into prominence in the early 1990s (*Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blac-Szanton*, 1992). According to this philosophy, transnational migration existence for a longer period than required could lead any part of the state towards turbulence, which could further integrate social ties between aliens and nationals in the form of religious and matrimonial integration, as in the case of Canadian and Indian Punjabis. I believe this same phenomenon of “longer-period” interaction and collaboration with neighboring states inflows and outflows creates a lot of chaos in NE India, especially regarding social, cultural, religious, and regional ties. According to *Chaube*, many communities in NE India and Punjab have migrated from various places at different times. Although their ‘racial purity’ is questionable and ambiguous due to the pattern of their migration in the past (*Chaube*, 2000). They now shared cultural affinities, linguistic patterns, and religious practices. As in the case of Punjab, Sikhism, the Punjabi language, and their cultural practices are major factors in sticking them together as one petitioning Punjab as a separate region. According to *Pahi Saikia* (2011) in her book ‘*Ethnic Mobilisation and Violence in Northeast India*,’ tribes of the Northeast have been found to share common myths and deep-rooted cultural connections from Indo-Austrian to Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Gangetic cultures. These long-term inflows and outflows of transborder migration stitched and merged neighborhood belts into matrimonial, cultural, social, and religious pans, giving birth to a strong sense of regionalism via transnationalism in NE India. According to *Taher*, the earliest transmigration into the region is believed to have been in Assam by 500 BC, and they were Tibeto-Burman speakers (*Taher*, 2022:175). According to *Sanjoy Hazarika* (2018,21), the Northeast has best been described as *Asia in miniature*; a region where the brown and yellow races meet, mingle, and intermix, reflecting a unique cultural and ethnic mosaic. It is crucial to understand that the construction of “ethnic differences” had been fundamental to tribal survival and regionalism. Many folktales, folksongs, and novels of both regions have mentioned folk heroes who had bravely fought against invading tribes, including British colonizers, during the Indo-Pak partition. Transnationalism is a systematic or structural shift occurring in places and regions like northeast India and Punjab. It has significant patterns of outmigration from nearby states due to diasporic affinities. This migration and transnational connection have deepened or at least broadened the existence of social, religious, and cultural acceptance. It also leads to strengthening ties between locals and northeastern regionals. This acceptance was a simple transformation from regionalism to transnational regionalism. It is very important to comprehend that the transnational framework, whether in northeast India or in any other region like Punjab, benefits from its unique position simultaneously engaging with both ends of these connections and flows, effectively mapping the networks and channels through which people and resources move, and this is one of the prime reasons for strong feelings of regionalism in northeast India. The centrality of marriage practices creates strong ties between regional and trans-border migrants, which further enhances localism in the personality of transnationals and transforms it into regionalism on an individual level. The same concept lies in creating a transnational network in the northeastern region and in Punjab. Similarly, migration and reverse flows often move through caste or kinship or reinforce them and extend these relations across space (*Velavutham and Wise*, 2005: 67). These factors work as institutional actors in developing a stream of transnational regionalism in regions like Punjab and northeast India while playing power dynamics and policies below and above the level of the nation-state *Das, G.* (1970). The movement of greater autonomy and regionalism is common in hill politics, especially in Mizoram and Assam as among Canadian Punjabis and in Punjab itself.

#### 4. The Influence of English Literature on the Development of Regional Identities in Punjab

While Mulk Raj depicted Sikhs in English fiction, however, he marginalized Sikh identity through his protagonist, Lal Singh, whose gradual estrangement from Sikh culture and identity in his trilogy, *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1939), and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), sheds light on distinct regional identities. These identities, according to *Anand and Khushwant Singh* (1942:384), have been portrayed in two ways. One via regional writers, the other via diasporic Sikhs. According to Ballantyne (2006), the diasporic Sikhs are well recognized as having a unified culture yet are dispersed or dislocated either temporarily or permanently from their homeland, struggling to maintain their identity in literature and culture in foreign countries. This dislocation could be sensed in *The Exile* (2008), where the book explores Sikh Maharaja’s experience of displacement and struggles for the reconstruction of Sikh identity. A similar notion of displacement and identity has been addressed by Khushwant Singh in his work too. On the other hand, John Locke says that identity in the post-colonial arena of diaspora is emerging out of social constructionism (*Locke*, 2012), while *Stuart Hall* believes in *Questions of Cultural Identity* (Hall, 2003:1) that identity relates to one’s language, culture, and religion. Similar to what Kire and Khushwant emphasize. While *Homi K. Bhabha* argues that identity is of differences about past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion (*Bhabha*, 2004:1), which creates consciousness of regionalism in nations. Sikh’s concept of identity has a strong impact on Indian nationalism because of socio-political and cultural transformations that have taken place in Punjab and in the diasporic Sikh community settled in the USA, Europe, and Canada. In *Train to Pakistan* (1956), *Khushwant Singh* reconfigured Sikh identity following the partition massacre. Singh addresses the massacre in his novel while bringing up regional identity as well. There are many places where he used language as a tool and literature as a device to uplift regional identity for his audience. Some of Singh’s linguistics stances have been listed below from his magnum opus, ‘*Train to Pakistan*’.

*According to Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is both tortured and raped. Hindus and Sikhs fled towards their communities on foot, in bullock carts, crammed into lorries, and clinging to the roofs and sides of the train (9). Mano Majra is a tiny place. It has only three brick buildings, one of which is the home of the moneylender ‘Lala Ram Lal; The other two are the Sikh temple and the mosque, and there is a large peepul and Keekar tree in the middle (1956:11).* Singh uses terms like Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to employ religious nomenclature. He showed communal means of transportation. Mano Majra is a Punjabi (Muhalla-town), while three brick buildings show

‘religious plurality’ where three religions and three identities are co-existing. Lala Ram Lal represents Hindu name, while temples represent Sikh identity and the mosques represent Muslim identity, and peepul trees (sacred figs) Keekar trees (Babul trees) are Punjab’s landscape and identity.

*Before daybreak, the mail train rushes through on its way to Lahore. The driver blows two long blasts of the whistle, and all of Mano Majra comes awake. Crows begin to caw in the Keekar tree, bats fly back, and the mullah (Imam of the mosque) knows time for the morning prayer. The priest in the Sikh temple lies in the bed until the mullah wakes him up. By the morning 10:30, the passenger train from Delhi comes to Mano Majra. Men are in the fields, women are at home, children are grazing cattle by the river, and sparrows fly about the roofs. As the midday express goes by, Mano Majra stops at rest. Men and children come home for dinner and siesta hour. The men later gather under the peepul tree. Boys ride their buffaloes into the pond. Women rub butter into their hair, pick lice’ and gossip about deaths, births, marriages, and divorces etc. (12,13).*

As Rabia Sabeen (2023) observes, that one of the most appealing aspects of ‘Train to Pakistan’ is the use of language, which has turned the novel into a playground of linguistic experimentation (566). Singh indigenizes English to address and capture the essence of the regional identity through the window of culture and daily lifestyle. For instance, he links the rhythm of life in Mano Marja in Punjab to the routine of trains, symbolizing a distinct cultural pulse. He used vernacular nuances like Keekar, peepul, and mullah, panchayat, gharaoli, choora, aroma of desi ghee, pyaar (love), and pain to flavor his writing and to enrich his narrative and to infuse his cultural identity within framework of the colonial English. He used tactics to play with characters to sketch Punjabi culture. For instance, he sketches the lifestyle of how men go to work, take rest under the peepul tree, boys swim on buffaloes’ back and women gossips while applying butter to their hair and combing out lice.

The simple lifestyle of Punjabis has been a recurring theme in many literary works, which showcase the cultural, and social identity of the Punjabis. For instance, Michael Ondaatji, in his novel *‘The English Patient’* (1992), highlights Sikhs’ valor during the Second World War, mentioning that Sikhs fought bravely for the British Empire, showing exceptional warrior skills. Ondaatji further draws attention to symbolic elements that remain central to Sikhs. These elements are the Punjabi language and the turban (Singh, 2011:15). The Indo-Pak partition was mainly a construction of India for Hindus and Pakistan for Muslims. In this binary construction, the Sikhs’ homeland Punjab, got split into unequal halves, leading to mass displacement, and they lost their links to ancestry Gurdwaras, and were suspended in between repatriation and massacre anxieties. Shauna Singh’s *What The Body Remembers* (1999) portrays a similar scenario of migration and displacement. The novel presents the horrors of village burnings and rapes and holds a view of the partition of Punjab rather than India. It was an absolute loss of identity and a disconnection from cultural heritage (Singh, 2020:75). Train to Pakistan is not limited to linguistic and cultural identity but also religious identity. For instance, Singh wrote, “*meet Singh, who is a peace-loving caretaker of the Gurdwara, claims that Everyone is welcome to his religion. Here next door is a Muslim Mosque. When I Pray to my Guru, Uncle Imam Baksh calls to Allah*” (1). Singh, while talking about identities in his novels, symbolically stresses on the theme of coexistence and saving India as a pluralistic nation, similarly to the coexistence of the locations of mosques, Gurdwaras, and Hindu temples in their close affinities, metaphorically showing shared cultural and religious identities. A similar idea of coexistence can be sensed in Rupa Bajwa’s *The Sari Shop* (2004) and Bhi Vir Singh’s *Sundari* (1898), which shows identity differences but pluralistic coexistence. The existence that has developed the religious harmony but had a unique cultural and linguistic identity. Singh, in his novel, presents the heteroglot world of Mano Majra, where plurality coexists. He used religious and Punjabi terminologies to show the identity of Mano Majra. The loss of religious, linguistic, and cultural identity because of partition. Singh induced Punjabi in his work to enhance the authenticity of his narrative and to foreground his identity as a Sikh and Punjabi. For instance, “*The girl slapped him on the face. Have you no shame? Have you not mother or sister in your home? I will tell the inspector sahib (sir) that you are a budmash (evil character)*” (21,22). The use of a vast variety of Punjabi terms to express the sentiments and feelings of the characters is a matter of linguistic identity for the audience. Singh successfully used English as a language to express his narrative and presents the coexistence of plurality and partitions. He used different Punjabi terminologies at different events in the setting of his novel to maintain a rhythm of his identity. For instance, “*the couple lay still, peering into the dark. The five men carrying guns and spears passed within five yards of them. They had uncovered their faces and were talking. “Dakoo! Do you know them” the girls asked in a whisper.*” (25). The word ‘Dakoo’ (thieves) is a pure Punjabi term. Singh’s usage of terms is very enjoyable. For instance, “*No one can harm you while I am alive. No one in Mano Mjra can raise his eyebrows at you and get away from Jugga. I am not a budmash for nothing*” (25, 26). The word ‘Jugga’ (hypermasculinity) is a term that is used in Punjab interchangeably with budmash. Singh, while mentioning the displacement, quoted, “*Hindus from Pakistan were stripped off all their belongings before they were allowed to leave. There must be no killing. Just peaceful evacuation. He took off his turban and put it on table which needed re-tying. It was a khaki muslin*” (32, 33). Singh’s strategic use of English as a language, inducing vernacular nuances in articulating, and preserving regional identity, which has now transformed as a transitional regionalism, which will be further discussed in the article.

## 5. The Influence of English Literature on the Development of Regional Identities in NE-India.

Similar to Punjab, another turbulent region is NE-India, which is prone to regional insurgencies and prolonged unrest. The Indo-Pak partition was driven by religious, social, and racial discrimination between Hindus and Muslims. Similar is the case with the indigenous NE-Indians, who have been discriminated against and marginalized by mainland India. Partition literature such as ‘Train to Pakistan’ and ‘A Naga Village Remembered’ plays a pivotal role in maintaining regional identity because of the use of regional nuances, linguistic terms, and folk stories to reflect the true spirit of the region. India and Pakistan have faced significant challenges during the post-partition

era as newly established states. Where many regions have experienced development, while many have been ignored. Many regions have gone through short and brisk development while some have been ignored due to multiple challenges for the new governments. Such regions have been subjected to prolonged economic, industrial, educational, and cultural marginalization that has developed the tendency of self-reliance and hatred, which proceed to anti-nationalist sentiments. One such region after Punjab is NE-India. Northeast India is a mountainous part of the larger Indo-Burmese arc characterized by complex topography, diverse ecology, and transitional inhabitants, including a variety of indigenous tribes. This region has been extended from the Eastern Himalayas to the Indian Ocean. It is inhabited by a diverse tribal population articulating a wide array of languages and practicing different cultural traditions, all within unique ecological niches. According to Saika and Chatterjee (2014), Northeast India was a vibrant cultural ecumene before the era of colonialism. Later, the East India Company declared plain areas of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura as their protected states and set up their tea plantations in the 1830s, and missionaries started to educate the locals while setting up missionary schools and dispensaries. According to Baruah (2020: 25), colonizers also encouraged transnational movement from nearby countries, particularly from Bangladesh and Myanmar, for tea plantations, which later turned into regional tribal populations disrupting native culture, language, and traditions. *A Naga Village Remembered* (2003) is written in the background of the battle between the British forces and the Naga's in 1832, where they signed the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 and later the non-intervention policy in 1857. This nonintervention policy creates a soft corner in the hearts of Nagas as they fought bravely for the British against the Japanese in the war of Kohima, which lasted from April to June 1944. According to Mandrelle (5:2022), British colonization, the spread of Christianity, and Western education directly impact Nagas's identity, culture, and tribal system. For instance, Kire in 'Walking the Roadless Road' (2019) says, *"It was alien to the Nagas, and the taxes of Rs 3 per house was a great burden"* (220). This burden forces them for self-defense, as Kire mentioned, *"We are not going to be coolies anymore for the white men"* (106). They paralyzed Naga identity culturally and religiously. For instance, missionaries and Dr. Sidney Rivenburg altered tribal norms. He was known as 'old sahib' (old sir) amongst indigenous people. Nisier and Sato become the followers of Isu (Jesus). Kire shows how a united tribal community got divided because of missionaries; they altered their identity via religion and changed their language via missionary schools. They colonized us religiously and linguistically. *"The creator deity we worship and sanctify ourselves unto at Sekrenyi, the one we call Ukepenuopfu, has another name in the new religion. He is the father of Isu. Isu is his son, and he is our chicken sacrifice. He sacrificed himself for all our ailments and misfortunes, so we do not have to make chicken sacrifices again. The new religion says, do not steal and do not lie, how is it so different from the old religion?"* (101). Kire used many vernacular nuances in her novel to maintain her identity. For instance, *Kichuki* (a house to educate young men about art, culture and history of the region) *Lashu* (woman dying during childbirth), *Terhunyi* (to do prayers and celebrations during harvesting season), *Gemma days* (no workdays in Naga culture), and *Theku Kete* (a ritual of piercing the tiger). Young men were always trained in thehou about their cultural values to maintain Naga's legacy of identity. For instance, they were told, *"if you break the taboos, you break yourself"* (31). Kire's 'A Terrible Matriarchy' (2007) highlights the internal and social strife of the Naga people and their perplexed tribal identity to overthrow the patriarchal position. For instance, *"mother work hard to make the small four-roomed house cheerful... father did not help much. He would expect mother to clean the house and wash all the clothes and have cooked food ready when het get home"* (49). She further quoted that *"girl children are never considered real members of the family. Their mission in life is to marry and have children and be able to cook and weave cloth and look after the household"* (26). Kire employs the English language as a critical tool to unfold the harsh socio-political realities, marginalization, and transnational influence on the northeast region that has altered the economic and cultural anatomy of the region. She carefully used English as a medium in her work to present identity issues and gender preferences. For instance, she quoted that northeastern tribal society is very male chauvinistic and patriarchal, where female identity is very submissive. *"my grandmother did not like me. I knew this when I was four and half"* (1), *"the girl must start working at home, don't let her run about with her brother"* (4), *"in our days girls did not go to school, we stayed home and learned the housework"* (22). Kire conceptualizes the scenes of Kohima war. Dielieno's mother was a young girl *"one day a British soldier enter their house and tried to molest her. He pulled her into his arms and there was no doubt about his intention"* (171). She quoted how indigenous Nagas suffered at the hands of the British and Japanese in 1940 and later in the 70s and 80s at the hands of Indian armed forces in the name of peace and security. Kire beautifully presents the tribal identity and values of Nagas in her work. For instance, *"Revenge was connected with honor. In the Northeast, a man is not a man if you let outsiders kill your kin and torch your houses and you remain impotent"* (3). Talking about cultural identity, she quotes that *"many men never told their wives about the meetings of the clan"* (5). On the other hand, Easterine Kire's representation of Northeast India is more like Chinua Achebe's *"Things Fall Apart"* (1994), where part one talks about Okonkwo as a main character and the lifestyle of the people of Umuofia, in part two introduces insurgency, where Okonkwo and his family get banished and white Christians come into Umuofia and try to change the life, culture, and religion of the Indigenous. For instance, *"he (the white man) says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amazed of his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan no longer can act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together, and we have fallen apart"* (129). A similar scenario of colonizers happened in the Northeast, and Easterine Kire has presented how missionaries contributed to altering indigenous values, religion, and culture, as in the case of *"Things Fall Apart"*. For instance, Kire quoted that *"Naga people, though converted to Christianity, still follow their old beliefs and taboos. For them, 'Isu (Jesus) was the same as a chicken sacrificed for men in their tribe to be free from diseases'"* (139). They still believed, even being Christian that *"genna was a death to those who defied it but life to those who abided by it"* (72). She mentioned that *"Sky is my father, earth is my mother; I believe in Kepenuopfu"* (57). Kire uses English to express the identity of the region,

in relation to culture, religion and social values.

## 6. Transnational Regionalism and Crisis of Belonging in Regional Literature

According to “A History of Sikhs by Khushwant Singh” (1999), Sikh regionalism dates to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During partition, the mass relocation of Sikhs to Indian Punjab changed the region’s dominance. The Sikh identity remains ingrained when it comes to (a) religion and (b) language. Punjab has a very strong diasporic community in Europe, Canada, and in the USA. This diasporic community has consistently resisted adopting foreign influence or altering their religious, cultural, or linguistic practices, thereby preserving their distinct identity as Sikhs or Punjabis. On the other hand, Northeast India has strong transborder ties and an influx of migrants even before the era of colonization. These outsiders have strong ethnic, cultural, religious, traditional, and linguistic bonds with indigenous and foreigners such as Bengalis. This pluralistic existence has created identity crises and insurgency in the region (Akshya Saxena, 2022: 35). Even in “Train to Pakistan” Singh successfully created this pluralistic image while mentioning ‘*the Sikhs own all the land around the village*’ (57). Similarly, Kire paints the identity in respect to tribal existence as “*Our umbilical cords are buried here, and we would always be restless if we tried to settle elsewhere*” (88). “*Every individual has a social obligation to the village. When you are older and your hearts are strong within you, you will take on the responsibility of guarding the village while others will go out to earn a great name for our village*” (30). Kire, in her writings, reconstructs Naga’s cultural and tribal identity, which remained a war-affected zone for years. For instance, she presented Mari’s self-identity as a collective identity of Naga and indigenous. She presented Kohima’s past and present as “*Kohima today is very different from the Kohima of my childhood and completely unrecognizable from the Kohima of Mar’s childhood*” (13). According to Siddharth, Nagaland was a hub of insurgent groups who have created militarization, necropolitics, ethnic polarization, and political violence in the region (2004:75). The same narrative of violence and necropolitics could be sensed in regional writings such as in Temsula Ao’s “*These Hills Called Home*” (2015). Ao tries to evoke the historical consciousness of Naga people before British colonialism, when they lived in a collectivist society in their own culture and traditions. She harbors the forgotten past of the Nagas and current violence in the region, clubbing migrants and indigenous in their disguised identity. Khushwant Singh’s *Mano Majra* is the reflection of Kire and Ao’s Nagaland. Where in *Mano Majra* people from different religions and castes were living in harmony before partition, while in Kire and Ao’s Nagaland was also a home to tribal who were happy in their own religion, culture, and taboos. In comparison to *Mano Majra* and Nagaland both got divided with the emergence of colonization. Nagaland experienced migrants and changed into a transnational community, while *Mano Majra* experienced partition and disparity of division. Kire, as a literary activist and supporter of regionalism, unlike Singh, has provided several reasons why Northeast India remained a minor, underprivileged region of India. For instance, she quoted, “*I felt nauseous all the time and thought it was the lack of food and shelter*” (66). This shows the sufferings of the people of the region because of scarcity of resources. She further quoted that “*Japanese alienated the local population completely by taking away what little food they had*” (65). This shows the helplessness of the regional community in the hands of foreigners. She further quoted that “*I could not help but feel that I had been completely transformed by the war*” (113). It shows the brutal scars of war on fragile memory, which develop as a regional identity in her writings. While talking about the experience of colonizers, she quoted that “*we are abandoned by the British and left at the mercy of the enemy*” (76). Foreigners paralyzed them and left the region in a state of trauma. For instance, she quoted that “*war makes Jimmy prematurely a man because his cheerful boyish attitude is gone, and he does not respond to any smile or waving*” (86). She presented the collective memory through her work to identify what triggers indigenous tribes to initiate the consciousness of regionalism. Aruni Kashyap’s “*The House with a Thousand Stories*” (2013), Sawian’s “*Shadow Men*” (2010), Deb’s “*Point of Return*” (2004), Anjum’s “*Lunatic in My Head*” (2012), and novels like *Next Door* (2008) by Jahnvi Barua also provide a glimpse of northeastern alienation because of lack of socio-economic development in the regions which ultimately nourished different ethno-nationalist and ethnic-regionalist movements, causing insurgency in the region.

### 6.1 Transnationalism in NE-India

On the other hand, plain and hilly areas of the northeast are occupied by numerous tribes and sub-tribes. These tribes have their own distinct cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic norms, which have striking similarities with other tribes, forming a collective sense of identity, but the region has an influx of migrants from neighboring states, giving birth to transnationalism in northeast India. These settlers or outsiders are known as ‘dhakar, deshwali, or bidekhi in northeast India. According to McDuie (2009), India’s northeast is a landlocked, alienated, and marginalized region, where ethno-nationalists spring up and the state militarizes the region as a reaction, giving birth to chaos, hate, insurgency, and consciousness of regionalism. For instance, Ao highlights insurgency in ‘The Curfew Man’ as “*There were several incidents where civilians were shot dead by the patrol after curfew and their deaths reported as those of underground rebels killed in encounters with the army*” (21). Kire states that “*Nags were de-identified, robbing them of their unique ethnic and linguistic identity. The villages of Nagas were dislodged from their ancestral sites and herded into new ones by state military*” (11). She further showcases the brutality of the Indian military by saying that “*because of this truculent army and policemen, the innocent villagers of Naga cannot work in their own fields peacefully. Who is there to protect us from all these evils?*” (69). She further quoted, “*they treat Nagas as animals that they can shoot.... when they will*” (59). According to Anita Albert and Nithya (2024), “*the treatment of the Indian forces towards Naga validates that Nagas were merely not considered as Indians but ‘others*”. According to Wouters, the Naga hills were known as excluded and backward even during the early years of British colonization (17). Tea plantations proved to be a successful resource for the colonizers, which brought Bengalis to the region. For instance, the significance of land and forest near Kire is “*Land gives a Naga his identity. Naga lives very close to the natural world. The forest yield timber for their houses and provides food in the forms of herbs, fish, and wildlife*” (45). In her work, she portrays that lush green tea plants, serene natural beauty, and crops of the region attract ‘outsiders’

and colonizers to be in the region. With the passing of time, these outsiders started to settle in these hills, causing alteration to ethno-cultural aspects of the indigenous. According to Dzuwichu (2014), *"the 'outsiders' were invited by the colonial officials in the form of 'coolies' for public works, tea plantations, and for transportation of resources"* (91). Only Nagaland has more than fourteen tribal languages, and English has been introduced as the fifteenth. Kire used English to express her regional identity and decolonizing agent to answer the misinterpretation of northeast India in the Indian context. As northeast India has a distinct identity in terms of religion, language, and culture exactly the same as Punjabis and Sikhs are completely unmatched with mainland India. According to Jahnavi (2008), once you step out of the northeast, even while reading a novel or short story, you have to renegotiate the question of being an Indian within India because geographically the northeast is a part of India, but culturally and racially it is not. Dasgupta and Biswas (2000) are also of the view that literary texts, novels, and novelists from northeast India made it possible through English as a medium to let the audience experience the region's rich cultural traditions and pluralistic epistemologies. These novels have no romance but harsh lifeline stories such as those of the Kohima War, the Assam Movement, regionalism, and influx of migrants. For instance, Siddhartha Deb's *An Outline of the Republic* (2005) centers around Leela. Who serves as a character and a metaphor, symbolizing a land that has been harassed and oppressed. It portrays an abused image of indigenous people, endangered, feminized, and paralyzed by phallogocentric patriarchal discourse carried out by the Indian state, who are subject to the violence operated by migrants and insurgent groups in the region. According to Atul Sarma (2018), this region is an ethnicized space struggling for economic prosperity from a land-locked to a land-linked region. The land-link connection helps in sliding the transborder population. This trans (border) population trans (forms) tribal identity into trans (national) identity. According to Mukherjee (2011), the 2011 census recorded 14.9 million migrants in the region. During the colonization regime, the region experienced a heavy influx of Bengalis, followed by Nepalis and people from Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh. Domination of Bengalis over property, cross-cultural marriages, and grip over the local business and economic sector have raised the question of an identity crisis in the region as the government's lack of interest triggers anti-nationalism, which ultimately leads to ethnic nationalism. The Khasi, Ahom, Naga, Mizo, Bodo-Kachari, Miri, and Deuri were the pioneers in demanding ethnic representation. This started a consciousness and continuous struggle for the demand of regionalism, which has been equally accelerated by transnational migrants in the region and later turns into insurgent groups; some in favor of transnational regionalism, while others started to abuse locals and military for their own advantages (Ghosh, 2020: 32). Kire uses English and folktales as a tool to narrate the transnational interruption into regional ethnic space. Kire mentioned that after the Nagas were colonized by the British, they were slowly devoured by Christianity, bid away from ethnic rituals, taboos and altered the old traditions of our ancestors, and embraced new religions, new norms, and lifestyles (7). This progress to Nagas proved to be an evil. The rest of the addition to add ambiguity to our regional identity was contributed via trans(border) population. Community novels that resonate with the polyphonic nature of complex expressions of identity in the region highlight the diverse and multifaceted voices, reflecting the intricate interplay of cultural, social, and historical factors shaping individual and collective selfhood. For instance, 'The Northeast Anglophone Literature' is the outcome of great novelists like Kire, who raised regional identity over national identity.

## 7. Vernacular Nuances and Regional Identity

Kire uses vernacular nuances in her novels to express regional culture, norms, and identity, such as "Miawenuo, Terhunyi, genna, thehou, jotho, Gara, Gapa, and many more. Kire's work constructs regional identity by employing English as an instrumental medium in Indian discourse to the global community. She focuses on individual narrative to present socio-political disparities faced by the tribal community of northeast India. For instance, in *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), she portrays the narrative of a "Naga girl" whose life is intricately shaped by the entrenched patriarchal and hierarchical structures of power, where her grandmother's overt favoritism towards her brothers underscores the pervasive gender inequities and systemic discrimination that define her world. Kire reflected ethnic values as an identity and showed patriarchal and matriarchal control as a complex gender dynamic in the region to show collective identity in regional discourse. Kire brought us Dielieno's character to comprehend patriarchal and matriarchal dynamics of the region. For instance, Dielieno quotes that *"also because I was a girl after four boys, they never seemed to be sure whether to buy me girls' clothing or let me wear leftover boys clothing"* (2). According to Gour Vena (2021), her work is about gender identity that shows matriarchy misusing patriarchy. She further quoted that *"In the village, widows without sons lost all their husband's property to other male relatives"* (102). Talking about regional values and identity, she further quoted, *"you know that our people say we should love our sons because they are the ones who look after us in our old age"* (250). Kire's work is a window to see the whole world of northeast India. The world of taboos, religion, spirits, cultural practices, and socio-economic disparities. Many other Anglophobe novelists from the region revealed their militants as inhuman monsters who act in the favor of neocolonialists (Gopal, 2006:8). For instance, Tilottoma Misra in *"High Wind"* (2020) pointed out militants who were supposed to be defenders of the region turned out to be the abusers in the region. On the other hand, Kire states the presence of soldiers as *"I came back early because there were a lot of army trucks parked above us on the road. We were afraid of the soldiers. They simply stood on the road and stared at us as we went past them"* (556). Kire, while talking about Act 1953, on which Mose's grandmother Khrienuo was killed by bullets fired on civilians. Kire expresses the brutality of Act 1953 as if indigenous were animals. Military personnel were instructed to *"shoot and kill, in case it is felt necessary to do so for maintaining of public order"* (728). To Kire, regional identity and cultural values remain significant. She raised regional identity through her work, which was not limited to misery and disparity but also included the bravery of the locals too. For instance, *"it is about ordinary people whose lives were completely overturned by the freedom struggle because the conflict is not more important than the people who are its victims"* (6). She mentioned the ironic statement of Ghandi, for whom the lives of the victims were insignificant as compared to freedom. She quoted, *"that man Nehru, the man shouted. Do you know what Nehru said when he got his copy of the Nagas plebiscite? He shocked first and shouted, whether*



heaven falls, or India goes to pieces and blood runs red in the country, I don't care. Nagas will not be allowed to become independent" (62). While talking about the integrity and identity of the Nagas particular and the northeast in general, she refers to "Phizo, who was in central jail, and his letters to the British parliament, to which Khrienuo responded, 'we have never been part of India before; why should we join them now?'" (53). For Naga, India is just an infant nation that has been just decolonized, but northeast India existed far before the formation of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. For Kire, we have separate identity, culture, and language, which have zero resemblance to Indian nations. Similar notions have been presented in *Mari* (2010), *Bitter Wormwood* (2013), *Son of the Thunderclouds* (2016), *Spirit Nights* (2022), *Don't Run My Love* (2017), *Journey of the Stone* (2022). Despite gender discrimination and the patriarchal system, female contemporary writers in Anglophone literature from the region have questioned Indian nationalism, transnationalism and triggered regionalism in their novels as first-generation writers from the region. Writers like Temsula Ao, Easterine Kire from Nagaland, Anjum Hassan and Daisy Hassan from Meghalaya, Mitra Phukan and Jahnavi Barua from Assam, Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh, and Janice Pariat are some of the greatest female voices from the region who are well known as literary activists in Indian discourse. Northeasterners have been marginalized and militarized to suppress their identity same as in Punjab. Kire shows this suppression when an officer angrily says that "they are traitors, and all traitors should be eliminated" (103). In Punjab the identity has been presented in different contexts by Singh. For instance, this dialogue between Juggut Singh and Hukum Chand shows how identity in religious and social context as a Sikh and Punjabi has been portrayed by Singh. *Juggut Singh: "I am a Sikh. Why do they call me a Muslim? Is it because I wear a beard and don't cut my hair? I have always been a Sikh. It's just that nobody knows it. Hukum Chand: "It doesn't matter what you are. The fact is you are an outcast."* (37). Similarly, another socio-religious dialogue between Iqbal and Nooran portrays religious and indigenous identity. Singh beautifully uses English as a language to express how important was the identity as a Sikh. *"Iqbal: Religion doesn't matter to me, Nooran. I see you as a person, not as a Sikh or a Muslim. Nooran: But the world sees us differently, Iqbal. We cannot ignore the reality around us"* (51). Singh, while emphasizing the significance of identity in religious and social contexts during refugees' arrival in Mano Mjara, presents a beautiful dialogue between Malli and refugees showcasing identity in multidimensional dynamics. For instance, *"refugees are saying: We are Hindus. We belong to India. Malli: "There is no India anymore, brother. There is no Pakistan. There is only Mano Majra."* (61). In *Train to Pakistan*, Singh emphasizes cultural and religious identity, which was destroyed during partition because of displacement and socio-political crisis. Singh views partition as a distortion of emotional and cultural ties of pluralistic Indians. To him, Mano Majra was a hub of religions, cultures, and traditions, where people were coexisting with love and harmony as he mentioned in his novel. *"It is the local deity, the deo, to which all the villagers-Hindu, Sikh, Muslims, or pseudo-Christian repair secretly whenever they are in need of blessing."* (2). Though they had their own distinct identity, but there was an element of coexistence. Partition gave birth to displacement and left us in two parts as Punjabis. He viewed partition as a partition of Punjab's identity. Singh depicted his indigenous identity as a Punjabi and Sikh in his work to showcase his cultural, religious, and traditional values. Easterine Kire showcases tribal values of Nagas, the suffering of her people, and transnational elements in her work using vernacular nuances same as Singh used abundantly in his work. To Kire, regionalism is important because the northeast has been ignored and marginalized since decolonization. They are facing economic disparities and an influx of migrants from neighboring states exploiting their ancestral agricultural land, marrying locals, mixing up the cultural norms, and occupying the economic sector. Kire shows resistance of Nagas in relation to linguistic and regional identity. According to *Alfred* (2009:36), resistance is necessary for indigenous survival against centuries of genocidal policies that make them insecure in their own land. Resurgence in any form is Indigenous self-determination, and literary constellation from northeast India shows the magnitude of dehumanization of Indigenous in their work. The problem is the collective imagination of India as a nation where they perceived the northeast as a single entity with a common political destiny and national media presenting dreadful inter-ethnic clashes, showing transnational criminalized insurgent groups, and transnational separatist demands against Indian nationalism. The depiction of regional rights, economic disparities, linguistic and cultural differences are hard to present. This is why indigenous writers have depicted the real scenario in their work, and this resurgence in indigenous literature is tagged as political literature, and writers as literary activists who worked for their collective identity. The reflection of tribal norms and Punjab's identity is obvious in Khushwant Singh and Easterine Kire's work. Singh developed a sense of identity and belonging within the socio-political contexts of partition, while Kire showcases identity in regional, transnational, and historic contexts, which are multidimensional.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper is a trailblazing effort in its comparative analysis of two marginalized regions in India. Both regions possessed distinct socio-political, religious, and cultural identities. This study delves into Khushwant Singh and Easterine Kire's work. These regional literary activists employed English as a medium to present the challenges and disparities faced by indigenous of Punjab and the Northeast to a global readership through their novels. They incorporated vernacular nuances, folklore, and cultural narratives to display regional identities within their literary expressions. Singh and Kire tactically employ character development, plot construction, and setting to depict the lived experiences of marginalization in two regions. For instance, Singh in *Train to Pakistan* situates the narrative of 'Mano Majra,' a fictional village, and depicts symbolically cultural fabric of Sikhs, the trauma of partition, and how Punjab was fractured during partition. Singh strategically used Punjabi nuances, religious references, and cultural names to reassert the significance of Sikh and Punjabis' regional identity. Conversely, Easterine Kire outlined Nagaland and Northeast India in her work to mirror regional geopolitical marginalization and cultural erasure. Kire critiques the demographic shifts brought about by the influx of transnationals from neighboring states. They are well known as 'dhakars' who disrupt indigenous cultural values and contribute to the emergence of transnational regional identity. The addition of these 'Bongal or Boga bongal' (foreigners) has transformed the socio-political anatomy of the region. Kire and

Singh exhibit identity in their work. For instance, Naga's culture, language, and bravery remain central in Kire's work. She even uses local terms, cultural nuances, and religious practices. She highlighted how Naga transitions their cultural values to the young generation. While Singh emphasizes the fragmentation of Punjabis' and Sikhs' identity during post-partition. They utilize language not only as a communicative tool but also as an instrument of cultural reclamation and resistance.

### Acknowledgments

Not Applicable.

### Authors' contributions

Muhammad Yaseen was responsible for drafting the manuscript, Dr. Raihanah M. M. was responsible for study design and the numerous revisions, and Dr. Shanthini Pillai conducted the final revision of the paper. The authors collectively read and approved the final manuscript.

### Funding

Not Applicable

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### Informed consent

Obtained.

### Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

### Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

### Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

### Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

### References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: William Heinemann Ltd.
- Al-Etaibi (2023). *Identity and Belonging: Indigenous Narrative*. Sharjah: Routledge.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.
- Ao, T. (2005). *These Hills Called Homes: Stories from a War Zone*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Bajwa, R. (2004). *The Sari Shop*. Ontario: Penguin.
- Baldwin, S. S. (1999). *What the Body Remembers*. New York: Knopf Doubleday.
- Ballantyne (2006). *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*. Duke: University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822388111>
- Barua, J. (2008). *Next Door*. New Delhi: Hamish Hamilton.
- Baruah, M. (2024). *Hunter, Peasant, Rebel: Colonialism and the British Assam Frontier*. New Delhi: Taylor & Francis.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003508366>
- Baruah, S. (2003). Citizens and Denizens: Ethnicity, Homelands, and the Crisis of Displacement in Northeast India. *Journal of Refugee*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/16.1.44>
- Bhabha, H. K. (2004). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

- Bhabha, K. H. (1990). *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge.
- Bhaumik, S. (2007). *Insurgencies in India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-option & Change*. Washington: East-West Center.
- Buongpui, L. R. (2013). Gender Relations and the Web of Traditions in Northeast India. *The NEHU Journal*, 11(2), 73-81. Retrieved from JournalJuly\_DecArt5111213.pdf (nehu.ac.in)
- Chatterjee and Saikia (2014). Connected Histories and the Dream of Decolonial History. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 41(1), 69-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2018.1414768>
- Das Gupta and Biswas (2000). *Geology of Assam*. New Delhi: Geological Society.
- Das, S. K. (2007). *Conflict and Peace in India's Northeast*. Washington: East-West Center.
- Deb, S. (2004). *The Point of Return*. London: Macmillan.
- Deb, S. (2005). *An Outline of the Republic*. London: Harper Collins.
- Frank, A. (1947). *The Diary of a Young Girl*. Amsterdam: Contact Publishing.
- Gandhi, L. (1998). *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474468312>
- Gill, P., & Choudhary, S. (2008). *Insider Outsider: Belonging and Unbelonging in Northeast India*. New Delhi: Amaryllis.
- Goswami, I. (2006). *Melodies and Guns*. New Delhi: UBSPD Books.
- Hazarika, S. (1994). *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Kire, A. (2022). *Where The Cobbled Paths Leads*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Kire, E. (2003). *Sky is my Father: A Naga Village Remembered*. Kohima: Ura Academy.
- Kire, E. (2011). *Bitter Wormwood*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Kire, E. (2011). *Life on Hold*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Kire, E. (2015). *When the River Sleeps*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Locke, J. (2012). *Of Identity and Diversity*. London: Black Swan.
- Markandaya, K. (1977). *The Golden Honeycomb*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- McDuaie, D. (2012). *Debating Race in Contemporary India*. New York: Palgrave Pivo.
- Misra, T. (2020). *High Wind*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Mukherjee, J. (2015). *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190209889.001.0001>
- Naipaul, S. (1986). *The Illusion of the Third World: An Unfinished Journey*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Narayan, K. R. (1942). *Malgudi Days*. New Delhi: Thought Publications.
- Ondaatji, M. (1992). *The English Patient*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Phukhan, M. (2005). *The Collector's Wife*. New Delhi: Zubaan.
- Raj, M. (2002). *Reflections on White Elephant*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications.
- Rao, R. (1938). *Kanthapura*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Rushdi, S. (1992). *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Penguin.
- Said, E. (1988). *Identity, Negation and Violence*. Ontario: University of Waterloo.
- Saika, P. (2011). *Ethnic Mobilisation and Violence in Northeast India*. London: Routledge.
- Sarma, S. (2011). *Grasshopper's Run: Friendship, Honor, and Revenge*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Sarna, N. (2008). *The Exile: A Novel Based on Life of Maharaja Duleep Singh*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Saxena, A. (2022). *Vernacular English: Reading the Anglophone in Postcolonial India*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691219981.001.0001>
- Schiller, G., & Blanc-Szanton (1992). Towards a Transnationalization of Migration: Race, Class ethnicity and nationalism reconsidered. New York: Penguin.
- Singh, K. (1956). *Train to Pakistan*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal.
- Smith, A. (1998). *Nationalism and Modernism*. London: Routledge.
- Viswanathan, G. (1989). *Maska of Conquest*. Columbia: University Press.
- Watson, S. (1977). *Nation and States: An Inquiry Into the Origin of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*. Massachusetts: Methuen.