Chapter - III:

Nationalistic Appropriative Discourse: A Study of Yaruiningam
In the introduction to her seminal work, Sara Mills says that: “Discourse structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity” (2007; Pg. 13), in an attempt to situate the concept of discourse in the context of postmodern literary theory. The statement by Mills assumes significance because discourse help in the identification of the self and also to challenge the location and subjection of the self in other discourses. Discourses have played an important part in identity formation not only with one’s own society but also with the larger nationalistic paradigm. It has helped in perpetuating the sense of history, culture and tradition of a group in relation to other groups and thus, discourse may be identified with the institution to which it relates. The perspective of the author is highlighted through discourse and this is why there is often a subjective strain in it motivated by the institutionalized force. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya’s novel Yaruingam is a discourse which recounts the author’s lived experience as a teacher in the Venture Christian Mission High School in Ukhrul, Manipur. Ukhrul sub-division is the habitat of the Tangkhul Nagas and the author’s long association with the tribe finds reflection in the novel. In the preface to the English version of the novel, referring to the Tangkhul Nagas and their land he writes:

With them (the Tangkhul friends of the author) I travelled into the interior villages. I participated in their festivals, visited their unique institutions and churches. The men and women in the Tangkhul land deeply impressed me. They were then living in stirring times and I shared their joys and sorrows. I got my theme and characters out of that moving experience. I shall be happy if the readers feel that I have been able to communicate
that experience even partially through the fictional form.
(Preface to *Yaruingam* (tr.) 1984, emphasis mine).

In ‘communicating’ the experience of a lived reality, Bhattacharya takes the reader into the intricate question of Naga sovereignty as envisioned by two opposing sets of characters in the novel. It must be mentioned here that the discourse in the novel is an attempt at communication of an experience which the author acknowledges may be ‘partial’ indicating the subjective nature of approach. Therefore, the broader and intricate issue of Naga sovereignty dealt with by the novelist has a subjective leaning when the author apparently sides with the more rational and pacifist group of characters. Writers have a larger social role and are seldom found to espouse radical and revolutionary ideals not approved by the larger majority. In Bhattacharya’s case, while highlighting the colourful life of the Tangkhul Nagas in the backdrop of Indian independence, he was attempting to integrate the aspirations of the Tangkhul Nagas with that of the larger Indian mainstream. Naturally, the discourse employed by the novelist is one of appropriation at forging a larger unity. But the smooth flow of the discourse is affected by the continued interference of the proponents of a free Naga nation who betray the larger nationalistic ambitions of the author. The proliferation of nationalistic discourses immediately after Indian independence had a parallel centrifugal tendency in the North East. This may be due to the ethnic aspirations of the region whose concept of the ‘nation’ was often in contrast to the ideology of forging a larger nationalistic identity. These assertive tendencies manifested themselves in the fictional works of the region of which *Yaruingam* in a classic example.
The tranquil and serene hills of Manipur, the abode of the Tangkhul Nagas, provide a scenic backdrop of Bhattacharya's novel. The Second World War witnessed a brief period of occupation by the Japanese forces over the land of the Tangkhuls. The novels begins at this stage in an intimate scene between Isewara, a Japanese solider and Sharenga, a Tangkhul girl. The war had come to an end and Japan was on the losing side as a result of which it was pulling its troops back from Assam and Manipur. Isewara's hopes of creating a permanent bond with Sharenga was shattered for 'Hiirohito's order counted more with him now than the fate of his beloved' (Yaruingam (tr.) Pg. 2). This symbolic break of the union of two lovers, who were accidentally brought together because of the War, sets the tone of the novel and all the subsequent actions seems to springs from it. Like Oedipus' predicament during the plague in Thebes, Sharenga realizes her position in the Tangkhul society and risked being ostracized. Ngazek, the most respected village elder and Ngathingkhui, the headman of the non-Christian part of the village had observed her behaviour and judged her conduct for they knew her 'story' well. Rishang, one of the most important characters of the novel who professes the Gandhian ideal of non-violence, reflects on his association with Sharenga which was interrupted by the latter's subsequently developed relationship with Isewara. Sharenga could only find a friend in Khutingla in the 'Ngalalong' or the house of the virgins, 'a community education centre where young unmarried girls learnt skills in the traditional maidenly crafts and were initiated into the adult social life' (ibid; Pg. 13). It later transpires that Isewara was ambushed and killed but Sharenga could never forgive her now dead seducer. The news of Isewara's death conveyed through a letter written by
Videsselie introduces the latter, in the course of discussions between Rishang and Sharengla. It is here that the battlelines between Rishang and Videsselie are drawn by the novelist because it is apparent that Rishang who joined the Volunteer Force of Allied Army never thought that untold miseries would befall his people because of the war. His dream was shattered by War and all that he aspired for was the welfare of the people, and with the people: "We need patient men to serve the people and make them believe in the constructive path" (ibid, Pg. 19). Rishang refers to Videsselie’s notion of Naga state as ‘absurd’. However, the latter due to his association with the Indian National Army of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was inspired with the zeal of freedom and envisaged a sovereign Naga state. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya’s discourse splits between the two opposing ideals and it is here that frequent references to Jesus Christ and Christianity are deliberately brought in. A relgio-historical even that swept through the hills of Manipur in the aftermath of the Second World War, is used by the author to tread the middle path in the discourse aimed primarily at justifying the views endorsed by Rishang. Biblical anecdotes and references serve Bhattacharya’s cause in the story by referring to the influence of religion in the sphere of nation building. It can be discerned here that the author is perhaps aware of the growing rift between the two opposing forces in the novel and which was affecting the nature of the discourse. The existence of social context is one of the primary discursive practices and there is the development of a parallel opposing discourse at this point of the novel. In this context Diane Macdonnell observes:
A ‘discourse’ as a particular area of language use may be identified by the institutions to which it relates and by the positions from which it comes and which it marks out for the speaker. The position does not exist by itself, however. Indeed, it may be understood as a standpoint taken up by the discourse through its relation to another, ultimately an opposing discourse. (1986: Pg. 3)

Videsselie’s objective of establishing a sovereign Naga nation stands in sharp contrast to the assimilist ideals of Rishang, and this dichotomy manifests itself strongly in the discourse. And as the novel progresses this polarity attains ominous proportions, for towards the end it betrays the nationalistic ambitions of the author.

Parallel to the Rishang-Videsselie divide, there is also the exploration of the ethnic Tangkhul way of life pitted against the advent of Christianity in the hills of Manipur. The older Tangkhuls – Ngazek and Ngathingkhui, were dead against the reformist ideals of Christianity which sought to significantly change the life style of the tribe. Khating on this point is at odds with his father Ngazek who favoured the free, indomitable ways of the Tangkhul Naga way of life. Khating’s stint with the Allied forces in the Second World War had significantly changed his outlook. As a natural consequence, Videsselie who stood for Naga sovereignty was supported by Ngazek and Ngathingkhui, as according to the latter two, the Tangkhul Naga identity can only be safeguarded if the Nagas are united and free. The freedom envisaged by Khating and Rishang is very different from the one propagated by Ngazek for as the latter says:

The Nagas need a different kind of freedom. The Christianity and the modern education are taking us on the wrong path. I
want neither the white men, nor the black men. I have no love for Japanese either. The Nagas were happier when they were naked. We had no food problem. Our needs were few and we were able to satisfy them. We happily lived without money, machines and superfluous things... We want to live in our own way. Today foreign ideas rule our life. (1984 (tr.): Pg. 31)

Education and Christianity are viewed with suspect by the traditionalists, while the rationalists in the novel sided with it. The arguments and counter arguments provide illustrative references to the author’s handling of a sensitive context of the novel. The historical background of the novel reveals the desire for freedom from foreign occupation and the establishment of a new united order resulting from the efforts of all Indians. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya also subscribes to this view for it is apparent throughout the novel that the omniscient author employs several devices to perpetuate nationalistic ambitions. While Rishang and Khating seem to perform the ideals and role envisaged by the author in the discourse, authorial intrusions and an apparently appropriative language used for the liberals and pacifists are manifest in the novel. It is also striking to note that the author often scoffs and ridicules the concept of a free Naga nation:

He (Videsselie) looked again at the mountains sadly. His heart and mind were set on them and on the green forests below the blue sky. He also loved the men who lived in the forests. He valued the natural resources of the mountains and forests, the plants and animals. Yet in spite of his patriotic fervour, he was a narrow nationalist who wanted to separate the Nagaland from the rest of the country. (Ibid; Pg. 275, emphasis mine)

Videsselie’s attachment and love for the Tangkhul Nagas and his vision of a united Naga nation, does not find favour with the author for there is a tacit
enquiry into the character of Videsselie. While his ‘patriotic fervour’ was myopic, he was also a ‘narrow nationalist’ who envisioned a Naga sovereign nation to the exclusion of all others. Perhaps this streak of rebellion lies in Videsselie’s ethnic roots, for he is not a Tangkhul but an Angami Naga from a village called Khonoma near Kohima. But he is well acquainted with the Tangkhul land and way of life and his association with the Indian National Army in the hills of Manipur made him speak and write the Tangkhul language very well. Moreover, he imbibed the spirit of freedom from his service in the Indian National Army, which fought alongside the Japanese against the Allied forces. In contrast to Videsselie, Rishang and Khating were members of the Volunteer Force organised by the Allied Army to help it. Thus, there are natural differences in the mental orientations of Videsselie on one hand and Rishang and Khating on the other.

Khating’s father Ngazek had also vehemently opposed his son’s marriage to a Khasi girl and being the head of his clan his opinion carried much weight. Ngazek could never savour the idea that his son had converted to Christianity against his wishes and was going to marry a non-Tangkhul girl. Even Ngathingkhui’s persuasions could not alter the mind of the traditionalist Ngazek. The former was however reconciled to the idea that winds of change were inevitable in Tangkhul land because of the spread of education and Christianity. Even Khutingla his daughter was studying in a Mission School. But Ngazek’s resoluteness could not be shaken even by the entreaties of Rishang who felt that ‘he was meeting a man of iron’ (Ibid: 35). Ngazek and other conservative villagers even blocked a vaccination campaign.
The repeated intrusion of the references of the Bible and Christianity intersperse whenever there is an impending clash of interests or the fragile peace is threatened in the novel. Sharengla finds solace in the Bible and there is an apparent authorial support for her cause. This is highlighted in the feelings that develop between Rishang and Sharengla, "A new relationship had grown between them through the Bible reading and their mutual concern to serve each other" (Ibid: Pg. 39). Even Khutingia harboured love and admiration for Rishang. This relationship is symbolically developed during the period of India's independence, which is also celebrated in the hills of Manipur. Meanwhile, the breakup of the small pox epidemic and need for vaccination was hotly debated. The conservationists led by Ngazek and the reformists led by Rishang argued their respective cases, for while the former group attributed the epidemic to the breakdown of the unwritten laws of society, the latter group advocated its eradication through vaccination. Even the conservative Ngathingkhui advocated vaccination because the war had taught the Tangkhuls many things unknown before. The author depicts another clash of interests when there is a dispute between Rishang’s clan and Ngathingkhui’s clan regarding ownership of the highest ground of the village where a church was situated but destroyed during the war. Neither of the two clans was in a compromising mood and the issue was left undecided. The author, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya develops these conflicts in an attempt to depict the intra-ethnic strife that engulfed the Tangkhul society during the period of Indian independence. The discourse shifts alternatively between the opposing ideals to highlight and showcase the ethnic specificities of the Tangkhul Naga way of life and the change that had set in
threatening the traditionally conservative way of life. The desire for order and of maintaining intra-ethnic peace and solidarity is manifest in the novel as the novelist constantly intervenes either through the speeches of the reformists or through authorial intrusions. This serves the author’s purpose of writing the novel and reaches out to a larger audience, the Indian mainstream. The advocates of assimilation and rationalism in the novel espouse the author’s cause, which accounts for the attempt at forging a nationalistic appropriative discourse of Yaruingam. This intention is often defeated as characters like Ngazek and Videsselie remain steadfast in their avowed aim of Naga pride and sovereignty and the author seemingly loses his grip on these two characters and the ideals they portray.

The clash of interests is sought to be intensified further as Rishang leaves for Calcutta for admission into St. Xaviers College for the B.A. course, but not before realizing fully the Christian tenets of peace, spiritual perfection and the sins of the warring nations. His love for Khutingla and the impending marriage between the two lovers had drawn the ire of Ngazek because the union would immediately bring in the quarrel of the two Tangkhul clans over the piece of land where the church was situated, to the fore. Ngathingkhui’s persuasions and entreaties in favour of his daughter Khutingla, fell on deaf ears of Ngazek, the clan elder. The latter’s disapproval is unequivocal. He says to Ngathingkhui:

I am as good as dead. Everything about me is dying . . . I feel it is time I should die. Then you will find no obstacle standing in your way in marrying your daughter to a Christian. (Ibid. Pg. 65)
The old and ailing Ngazek symbolize the decay and ‘degeneration’ that plagued the Tangkhul Naga community, where the traditional way of life is challenged and questioned by the younger generation. Even Khutingla wanted to defy the clan elder’s opposition to her marriage with Rishang. The last blow to Ngazek came in the form of his son, Khating’s letter, which contained the information that the latter had married a Khasi girl in a church at Shillong. The symbolic breakdown of the old Tangkhul order is depicted through the deaths of Sirala, Phanitphang’s mother and Ngazek. Before his death, Ngazek expressed a strange wish, he wanted to elect his own thilakapo - ‘someone who would be exactly like him in mind and spirit’ (ibid; Pg. 82) – while he was alive. The demand was unusual because according to Tanghul custom he could not do so when he was alive. When he wanted to satisfy his wish he chose Videsselie who was a Christian. When it was pointed out that Videsselie was not only a Christian but also from another village and did not belong to the Tangkhul tribe, Ngazek said:

All the Nagas now belong to a single village. We are all one. Videsselie is a true Naga. I was long in search of such a man.

(Ibid; Pg 83)

The gradual deterioration of the Tangkhul Naga community in terms of old beliefs and practices leads Ngazek to identify himself with the great Naga cause which marks out a tacit support for an independent Naga nation wherein the Nagas and their customs and traditions can thrive and prosper. Even Phanitphang is attracted towards this ideal because of Videsselie’s convictions. At this stage of the novel, the author introduces the infatuations of Phanitphang towards Khutingla and the rumours regarding the alleged affair of Rishang and Sharengla. This helps reduce the tension building up in the discourse where the
divisions in the novel stand sharper than before. Videsselie who was organizing a band of rebels for independence of the Nagas was closely watched by the authorities. Phanitphang’s tacit support to Videsselie was also noticed. Khaikho, the local Sub Divisional Officer who was from a non-Naga tribe made the government’s intention clear through a Tangkhul anecdote: “...if there are rotten potatoes in the field, they should be dug out immediately” (Ibid; Pg. 110). Meanwhile, the turf war between the two Tangkhul clans over the piece of land on a hill was pushed to the background by the two opposing parties represented by the traditionalist Ngathingkhui and the reformist Christian Yengmaso, Rishang’s father, over the impending marriage of Khutingla and Rishang. The novelist succeeds in resolving an intra-clan conflict in which an intra-clan marriage is accorded priority over the dispute over land. Ngathingkhui’s proposal to Sharengla, and Phantiphang’s joining Videsselie’s group entrusting his house to Sharengla, are smaller episodes and digressions which help the author’s purpose in keeping at bay the overtly developing opposing nature of the discourse at this stage of the novel.

As if to reinforce and reassert the cult of non-violence and nationalism, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya places Rishang in the larger national space – in the YMCA Hostel in Calcutta, which metaphorically denotes the larger social role of the novelist. The character of Rishang, a Tangkhul Naga from the periphery of the Indian mainstream is sought to be reinforced by the ideals of Indian nationalism by his association with Calcutta, the city being one of the nerve centres of the freedom movement. The tenuous link between Calcutta and the hills of Manipur are sustained with the help of letters and the nostalgic thoughts
of Rishang. There is a reflection of Videsselie in Abinash who shared the same hostel with Rishang in Calcutta and in Sharengla laid the reflection of Abinash's sister. In a very passionate mood, the author intervenes:

Wars and famines were breeders of evil. Guns were wielded by those who were in power. But the gun cult was bad. It was bad like any other primitive human cult. Made into a fetish, it killed the initiative for other fresh ideas. Rishang still had implicit faith in the renovating power of education. It was otherwise with Videsselie and Phanitphang. It seemed that Abinash also belonged to the same tribe. (Ibid; Pg 160)

However, Rishang’s stay in Calcutta exposed him more intricately with the Indian freedom movement, the Gandhian cult of non-violence and the violent ways of the revolutionaries. There is no doubt that Rishang is more chastened and matured in regard to views of nationalism and democracy but the author’s apparent aim of developing Calcutta as a locale in sharp contrast to the hills of Manipur, does not succeed. The city of Calcutta is also exposed to pre-independence violence where revolutionaries and the civic authorities were in a constant state of confrontation. The shouts of "Quit India" and "Inquilab Zindabad" reverberated through the lanes and by-lanes of Calcutta and Rishang realized that 'revolutionaries first wanted freedom, not schools’ (Ibid, Pg. 165) a thought, which even the novelist endorsed, 'one could not deny that there was some substance in this view point’ (Ibid). Abinash’s death in the police firing, however, demonstrated the futility of revolutions to Rishang. Communal riots also claimed the life of Rishang's friend Amulya and the violence in Calcutta greatly affected Rishang. The reference to the Bible is evoked here again by the
novelist ostensibly to pacify the turmoil in Rishang’s soul and also to highlight the futility and uselessness of violence:

Rishang had taken to reading the Bible to get over the gloom that had engulfed his otherwise balanced soul. Again and again he kept turning to the passage Sharengla used to recite to him during the tour in the villages two years back. ‘I command you to love one another as much as I love you’. That was Jesus’s message to a loveless and strife-torn world. (Ibid; Pg 170)

Even Gandhiji’s appearance at this point of the novel and his plea for tolerance apparently reinforces the larger social role of the novelist, that of a moralist. Jesus and Gandhi are recurrent images in the novel and the discourse ideologically bases itself on the tenets of non-violence and peace, which is more often than not always invariably pitted against violence and discord. Moreover, the reference of Jesus and Gandhiji forebodes the development of an impending showdown between the rebels and the nationalists in the hills of Manipur.

Rishang’s return to his home was due to his father’s failing health caused by a spear wound by Ngathingkhui’s clan over the dispute of the church land. Rishang’s thoughts constantly shifted between Calcutta and Ukhrul as he pondered over his father’s health. Videsselie’s brother-in-law, Jivan who is an Assamese, is introduced to Rishang, along with his six year old son, Koncheng. In course of their discussions, the fratricidal conflicts of the two Tangkhul clans figure prominently which is an attempt by the novelist to analyse the conflict from two spatial perspectives. While Jivan says, that, ‘the Nagas have not taken seriously the message of non-violence’ (Ibid; Pg. 188), Rishang replies:
You are biased. Those who are not Nagas are not serious about non-violence either. The only exception is Gandhiji. (Ibid)

However, there is a certain similarity in their thinking as Jivan refused to join or endorse Videsselie’s dream of an independent Naga nation. Videsselie had sold his dream to a large number of people who idealized the venture and supported it. The clamour for independence echoed through the hills of Manipur and both Videsselie and Phanitphang went underground. India’s independence had opened up a new chapter in the Tangkhul land. The nationalistic perspective of the author manifests again in the form of an intrusion in the discourse delineating the turmoil, which threatened the independence of India. The very notion of assimilation and appropriation sought to be achieved by India’s independence is seemingly threatened by the clamour of an independent Naga nation. The helplessness with which the author grapples with the situation is apparent in the ambivalent nature of the discourse:

Even independence had not brought so far the needed peace to the villages. Videsselie’s men projected to them another image of independence. It was the wild and unrealistic dream of separating the Nagas from the rest of India. This movement had already led to a confrontation between his men and the new government. It also divided the Nagas as ever before. One did not know what would happen to them in the near future. Rishang was convinced that this path of separation was suicidal. (Ibid, Pg. 194)

Yengmaso’s death compounded Rishang’s problem. He found solace in the Bible and in some books on Gandhiji. His attitude towards Christianity changes at this juncture for he realized that serving God meant stopping the quarrels amongst
the two warring Tangkhul clans. The service to the divine was inextricably linked up with the turmoils on earth. The church refused to intervene in the fratricidal conflict of the two clans. Dr. Brock, the Christian missionary advises Rishang to fight the evil in the individual human heart and let religion chart its own course. Rishang realized the fundamental difference between a Naga and Christianity, which he judged from the character of his father: ‘... his father had been a good Naga, but he had proved himself to be, like all his fellow clansmen, a poor Christian’ (Ibid; Pg. 199). This dichotomy seems to be central to the problem that afflicted the Tangkhul community in the novel. The essential primordial ethnic consciousness manifested itself in the characters where the Naga identity gains precedence over the acquired religious identity. Even Rishang is not above this rule. His ethnic consciousness manifests itself when he realizes that the internecine conflicts of the two Tangkhul clans were more important to be resolved, than service to the Church. In this lies the welfare of the Tangkhuls through which the ideal position of the Tangkhul Nagas can be realized in free India. In this connection, Prof. Gangmumei Kamei’s observation is relevant:

Ethnicity has been the motive force behind the ethnic movements throughout the world leading to the rise of ethnic nationalism. Ethnicity is behind the linguistic and identity movements. Ethnicity is the driving force of the global mobilization of the indigenous peoples. It is because of this “primordial consciousness” that the search for the ethnic genesis, or ethnic roots, is a part of worldwide phenomenon of ethnic identity assertion (quoted in Ethnicity and Social Change, 2002, Pg. 4).
The psycho-social moorings of Rishang dictated to his conscience that it is intra-ethnic stability through which a community identifies itself with the larger cultural space, and it is the only avowed goal of Bhattacharya’s protagonist. The identity of the self is contingent upon the stable identity of the particular ethnic group and Rishang is no exception. The discourse here again shifts from the religious perspective to one exploring the ethno-national dimensions where assertion of Tangkhul identity is torn between two opposing ideals. The author’s viewpoint is echoed by Stuart Hall in his essay *New Ethnicities*:

> The term ethnicity acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated and all knowledge is contextual. Representation is only possible because enunciation is always produced with codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time. (quoted in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 1995, Pg. 226).

At this point of the novel, Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, focuses his attention on the general masses of the Tangkhul community who are confused regarding the right path they should adopt. Whether Videsselie is correct in his approach and vision of a sovereign Naga state to be achieved through underground activities, or whether it is Rishang who advocated peace and non-violence and his ideal of the hills of Manipur to be part of free India, is hotly debated among the Tangkhuls. Videsselie being the *thilakapo* or representative of Ngazek after the latter’s death yielded considerable influence over the clan members of Ngazek. While elders were apprehensive of Videsselie’s aspirations, the younger generation smelt a romantic spirit in his ideal. The overtly nationalistic ambitions
of the author manifests itself again in the form of an authorial intrusion, just as it appeared that the Tangkhuls were getting ready for another fratricidal conflict:

The majority of the people disliked violence and the idea of secession. But they were helpless. It was the minority coercing the majority into accepting a reality which they did not think inevitable. Rishang was convinced that the people wanted peace. (Yaruimgam (tr.), 1984; Pg. 200).

A careful perusal of the novel, particularly where the clash of ideas occur in the Tangkhul society, between those of Rishang and Videsselie, there is no reference regarding the numerical strength of the advocates or proponents of both the opposing ideals. The term ‘minority’ in the above mentioned extract is entirely a metaphoric term to vindicate the intentions of the author, to lead readers to believe in the Gandhian culture of non-violence, which largely affected the Indian mainstream immediately before and after independence. This ideological stance of the author intensifies after Rishang realizes that his service to God lay in ensuring the welfare and well being of his people; ‘he was stepping beyond the limits of rural and tribal existence into a universal life’ (Ibid, Pg. 207). In between, his growing admiration of Sharengla and the death of Ngathingkhui, significant changes have taken place in the Tangkhul land. Videsselie’s men became very active and Ukhrul became their base. Police and soldiers swarmed Rishang’s village for after the Second World War local troubles took up center-stage. A meeting of like-minded people was proposed to be held at Huining to find a way out of the impasse. The rebels decided not to allow the meeting to be held. While Rishang and others were proceeding to Huining to attend the meeting, they are ambushed by the rebels and he alongwith Jivan are taken
hostage. In the meeting at Huining, members expressed concern about the kidnapping of Rishang and Jivan and as the news reached Ukhrul, Khaiko ordered the Assam Rifles to send search parties and raid the camps of the rebels. The frustration of some of the rebels is summed up by the novelist in describing the sense of despair of Phanitphang:

... so far he had lacked the power to act freely. The underground political work had made his life a miserable hell, where he could see man only as a tool of rebellion, fighting without questioning. (Ibid; Pg. 247).

These feelings of Phanitphang are developed in the backdrop of his inability to command love either from Khutingla or Sharengla or from his innate understanding of the views of Rishang. He was truly frustrated with his life, which manifested in his inflicting physical violence to Khutingla as he met her alone when the latter went to bathe in the village stream. Later, Khating who was under instructions from Khaiko to keep a tab on the rebels found Phanitphang at his residence talking to Sharengla. Phanitphang is arrested and led away; 'he did not bother about what might happen to him the next moment' (Ibid; Pg. 267). Meanwhile, it has been a month now that the rebels hold Rishang and Jivan captive. The onset of winter facilitated the government army to close in on the rebels' hideout. Videsselie during his intermittent visits to the camp did not exhibit any sense of hostility or enmity towards either Rishang or Jivan. Rishang felt that it was better to die than live an impotent life. After an exchange of fire at the camp, Rishang and Jivan are called into Videsselie's tent where a heated conversation ensues regarding the true identity of the Nagas. Videsselie's concept of the Nagas as a 'separate and distinct nation' (ibid;
Pg. 273) is challenged by Rishang who maintained that: ‘The Nagas are a distinct group no doubt, but they belong to a great family, I mean the Indian nation’ (ibid). This fundamental conflict between the concept of ‘Naga nation’ and that of the ‘Indian nation’ is the central theme of Yaruingam in which the local or specific ideal is pitted against a universal and general one. Apart from Rishang and his group, the author identifies this universal perspective with Konchung, Jivan’s son and Videsselie’s nephew, who being a half Naga and half Assamese justifies the great assimilative ideals that the author wanted to portray in the novel. Rishang says about Konchung.

Even a child of two cultures can be a man. He will be a brother to all. (ibid; Pg. 232).

This appropriative stance aimed at securing a place in the larger national context is intermittently interspersed in the discourse in an attempt to consolidate the ‘national’ boundary. The dangers of the periphery lied in isolation for the nation cannot be conceived of a single group alone, for it risked being further isolated and marginalized. What Bhattacharya perhaps fails to analyse is that national consciousness is too fragile and imaginary a construct to be idealized. As Frantz Fanon puts it:

National consciousness, instead of being the all embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been. The faults that we find in it are quite sufficient explanation of the facility with which, when dealing with young and independent nations, the nation is passed over for the race and

The very notion of nation and nationalism in whatever perspective the terms may be viewed, are prone to multiple interpretations and as Benedict Anderson (1983) puts it, very difficult to analyse. The concept of ‘nation’ in Rishang’s terms in *Yaruingam* is a manifestation of his broader outlook and has much to do with his stint in the Volunteer Force of the Allied Army and his exposure to a new world in Calcutta. Videsselie, on the other hand, is not a Tangkhul and his association with the Indian National Army imbibed in him the spirit of freedom, from any colonizing power, whether it is the Allied Forces or the Indian Union. His concept of ‘nation’ is constructed on exclusion and isolation where the unfettered socio-political life of the Nagas could go on unhindered. The author’s notion of appropriation therefore cannot be realized for the Tangkhul community is split between the two opposing ideals. The intra-ethnic strife that beset the Tangkhul Nagas was more important to be resolved so that concerns of identity, subjectivity and nationhood could be addressed. The discourse falters at this stage and the characters seem to assert their individualistic aspirations at the expense of the author.

The geographical space is explored in the last part of the novel where the serenity of the hills of Manipur is pictured through Rishang and Videsselie in an attempt by the author to metaphorically symbolize and depict the clash of opposites. It appears to be a last ditch effort on the part of the novelist to fulfill his nationalistic ambitions. As the camp of the rebels is deserted because of the
pressure of government forces ostensibly because of Phanitphang’s information to the government agencies, Rishang and Jivan are set free and rescued by Khating; Videsselie makes his way towards Burma. Rishang relates Khating’s father, Ngazek likes for Videsselie and Khating concedes that Videsselie, like his father was a revivalist. But he disapproved of Videsselie’s ways unlike his father. The implications of the title of the novel which means ‘people’s rule’ is brought out in Rishang’s speech in which he disapproves of Khating’s contention that to serve the people better, one must be a part of the government. Rishang observes:

In a democracy the people are supreme. The change of government is not enough. We need a real ‘people’s rule’. We should start working out from the people’s end. Stay with them, serve them. The people are restive, you know. They need so many things. The Government has to be reminded of their responsibility. (Yaruingam (tr.). Pg. 280).

The martyrdom of Gandhiji was shocking to Rishang more so because Gandhiji’s name was evoked by Videsselie in making the Nagas believe that Nagaland can be freed in as much the same way as India. The rebels’ attitude of touching a familiar chord of the Nagas has the tacit approval of the author for the invisible image of Gandhiji looms large over the novel and influences the actions of Rishang to a considerable extent. The parallel government run by Videsselie necessitates Rishang’s presence in Nungbi immediately after the latter’s marriage to Khutingla. The turmoil depicted by the novelist in Nungbi because of the rebel presence has a prelude in the form of an authorial comment:

Now the imperialist rule was gone, and the Nagas were inspired by the new vision of self-rule. They wanted to have the
dignified status of a constituent unit of the Indian Nation, having legitimate powers to rule and work for their progress at the district and village levels. Rishang knew that Gandhian nationalism was liberal enough to accommodate their specific Naga aspiration. (ibid, Pg. 298).

It is worth mentioning that authorial intrusions, often forced and deliberate has a sequel, which negates the appropriative stance of the novelist. The village of Nungbi bore the burnt of the conflict between the rebels and the government forces, and this fact is highlighted immediately after the pronounced declaration of the author that ‘Gandhian nationalism was liberal enough to accommodate’ the Naga aspiration. The principle and ideal of non-violence has almost a foil in violence propagated by the rebels. The rebels began to collect forced taxes and the people were apprehensive because the ideal of the rebels was farfetched. The people aspired for their own spokesman to ventilate their grievances to the government, because the police ‘were a negative force interested only in maintaining peace and enforcing law’ (ibid, Pg. 309). Moreover, war compensation had not reached the villages. Some frustrated youths thus joined the rebel cause. Rishang’s initiative of uniting the people through democratic means was resented by the rebels, some of whom warned the elders against following Rishang’s leadership. A public rally of the people was to be held at Ukhrul after which a petition was to be handed over to the civil administration. Rishang’s newly married life was disturbed by the urgency of ensuring peace in the Tangkhul land as he was the only accepted spokesman or advocate for the cause. Village after village are covered in the process to instill in the mind of the Tangkhuls the necessity and importance of the path of amity and non-violence.
Rishang is also admired by a section of the rebels who confessed that whatever he was doing was right but that it clashed with their interests. Envey, a rebel was under strict orders from Videsselie to shoot Rishang if he proceeded with preaching his ideals beyond the village of Cingjiroy. At a meeting in Cingjiroy the endorsement of the author’s views are echoed by Rishang:

... the Nagas are as much Indians as the Assamese or Manipuris. They live in a common territory and under the same administration, and share the same economy. Their present and future are bound up with the fate of the country as much as their past was. (Ibid; Pg. 318).

The author’s concept of a united Indian nation in which the ethnic Tangkhuls are also a constituent unit, is stressed in the last part of the novel more than once demonstrating the avowed appropriative notions of the author. The discourse here is overtly steeped in nationalistic fervour with Rishang as the most vocal proponent. Even villagers endorsed his views. The author once again reaffirms the natural support for the cause of non-violence:

The initial success of the peace campaign had made the rebels nervous. The response of the people had been spontaneous and their preference for the peaceful way was obvious. Most disturbing to the rebels was the assault on their principal demand of a sovereign Naga state. (ibid).

Rishang’s decision to proceed towards Phek to further the peace campaign was fraught with dangers of armed assault by the rebels led by Envey. But alongwith Jonathan, Jivan and other villagers they continued on their hilly journey undaunted. The rebels mortally wound Jivan and a bullet in his right calf hits Rishang. As Rishang recuperates he thinks of the two faces of violence –
Videsselie with his avowed aim of a sovereign Nagaland and Khating and Khaikho who used institutionalized force to ensure peace. 'Violence ultimately did not put an end to violence' (Ibid, Pg. 324), Rishang surmised over the death of Jivan who left behind a spiritual legacy. As Rishang prepared to leave for Imphal for better treatment, his wife Khutingla confided that she was going to be a mother. The author in a short conversion between husband and wife brings out the full implication of the title of the novel. Rishang begins the conversation:

"If it is a boy, do you know what he should be named?"

".... What would you call him?"

"Yaruingam"

"What does that mean?"

"People’s rule".

"It is a strange name."

"No, it is the best". (Ibid; Pg. 330)

The past and the present seem to coalesce for a brighter and optimistic future. The Tangkhul land turns into chaos as more and more people demanding war compensation are arrested and put behind bars. Phantiphang is shot dead by the rebels apparently for betraying the cause of sovereignty. And the novel ends without any signs of normalcy or order.

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya’s apparent aim at consolidating the nationalistic discourse falls into disarray because of the very nature of the ethnic configurations he has sought to portray in Yaruingam. The intra-ethnic discord resulting from India’s independence unfolds a chain of events, which
Bhattacharya is unable to control in the novel. The every ending of the novel is somewhat conjured up by the author signifying the failure of the discourse to write into the Indian mainstream at forging unity, basically because ethno-social problems of the North East demand a different outlook and perspective. Bhattacharya’s attempts at ensuring intra-ethnic solidarity among the Tangkhuls are too strongly matched by the centrifugal forces to thwart the aims of the author. It appears that the discourse gropes for meanings and situations to carry the action forward. The intensity of situations and the individuality of characters like Ngazek and Videsselie, who seem to grow out of proportion of the author’s desired intentions, account for the failure of the author to ensure a peaceful resolution towards the end of the novel. Though apparently, there is hope and optimism signified by Rishang’s unborn child, there are no hints as to the fate of Videsselie or his ideals. The fact is that Bhattacharya is in a dilemma over Videsselie’s out-grown character and the ideology he stood for, and this aspect is manifest at the weak ending of the novel. The nationalistic appropriative stance of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya of merging the periphery with a supposed core – the hills of Manipur with the Indian mainstream – is destroyed by the very nature of the discourse which frequently invokes Christian tenets and the ideals of Gandhiji. It is as if the author seeks solace in piety and non-violence in a situation in which the opposing forces weigh heavy on the author. And immediately after Jesus and Gandhiji are invoked the sequel is followed by violence or reports of it. The indeterminacy of Rishang is also a pointer in this regard, for his changes in the course of the novel deserve attention. From a nationalistic who followed the principles of Christianity and non-violence, he
transforms himself to serving the society, becomes a mass leader and realizes that violence, that of Videsselie and his men, only begets violence, in the form of state sponsored terrorism signified by Khating and Khaikho in the novel. The author sums up Rishang’s dilemma thus:

... it was difficult to eliminate the causes of violence. That would need a tremendous effort. It would require a mind that was always wedded to the best values of life and ever eager to translate them into action. (Ibid; Pg. 324).

Even the author’s protagonist is a divided self, unable to utilize his innate understanding of the best of religious and political views to bring about a resolution to the imbroglio facing the Tangkhuls. It is precisely this inability, which forces Rishang to pin his hopes on his unborn child. Bhattacharya’s precarious position may also be attributed to the fact that he being an Assamese was trying to portray an ethnic group with which he was intimately familiar but was unable to portray the complex ethnic dynamics that characterized the Tangkhuls in the hills of Manipur. According to Dr. Umesh Deka:

Being composed on the background of the Naga society a great many customs, lifestyle and behaviour of the Nagas have come to light in the novel. However, it is also worth mentioning that Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya is not a member of the Naga community and whatever he portrays in the novel is done as an outsider. Therefore, it is natural, the Naga life and society which have been reflected in the novel Yaruingam is also incomplete in its true spirit. (quoted in Post-War Assamese Novel; date not mentioned; Pg. 65)

Therefore, the complex dynamics of the intra-ethnic strife that plagues the Tangkhul community in the novel defies and often negates notions of
appropriation desired by the author, not only because of the author’s distinctive background and exposure to a larger cultural space but also lack of understanding of a specific ethnic perspective of the North East of which the hills of Manipur is only a microcosm of a greater whole. This is because Bhattacharya views the situations in the novel from an ideological perspective manifested in the level of creating writing in India immediately after independence. But the North East context is singularly different from mainland India owing to the forces of ethno-nationalism that is at work and reflected clearly in the novel.

‘The written text is a social situation’ (Bill Ashcroft, 1995, Pg. 298) and the society of the Tangkhuls is viewed by the author from a different spatial frame, a fact that he concedes in the Preface to the English version of the novel, as a communication of an experience that may be partially true. Commenting on the great social cause of Assamese novelists in the Post-Second World War period, P.C. Sabhapandit writes:

The novelists (Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Lakshminanda Bora and Homen Borgohain) are deeply concerned with the rescue of the nation from the disaster which is bound to overtake it unless moral and religious values are restored, particularly in the political field. (quoted in Sociological Study of the Post War Assamese Novel, 1988; Pg. 124; emphasis mine)

The ‘nation’ which Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya envisaged refuses to incorporate the views of not only the traditionalists like Ngazek, neo-traditionalists like Ngathingkhui or radicals like Videsselie, but also fails to go beyond the ideals of nationalism advocated by Rishang and his group. The split in the Tangkhul society demonstrates that reformists alone cannot enforce the values and morals
of an ethnic group, and this accounts for the open-endedness of the novel, which even the novelist, cannot apparently resolve. Thus, there is the persistent pull of the discourse to absorb the elements of mainland India and to integrate it with the land and people of the hills of Manipur. Gandhiji’s iconic status is evoked repeatedly in the discourse in an attempt to imbibe the non-violence method of gaining freedom. That Gandhiji’s spirit is antithetical to the very character and spirit of the ethnic Nagas missed the author’s attention. And this accounts for the conflict in Yaruingam. The margin thus exhibits characteristics, which may not subscribe to those professed by the centre. Calcutta is another metaphoric location depicted in the novel aimed mainly to demonstrate the similarities that exist in two spatial planes. The internecine hatred and subsequent conflicts that engulf the Tangkhul Naga society finds a parallel in the streets of Calcutta where the revolutionaries fight with the police and the Hindus fight against the Muslims. But intra-ethnic strife and the Naga spirit of freedom are severely at odds with communal riots and the yearning for freedom by revolutionaries in Calcutta. The links between the hills of Manipur and the Indian mainland represented by Rishang’s presence in Calcutta and the epistolary exchanges are too fragile and weak and the discourse demonstrates the wide gulf between the two geographical extremes. The nationalistic appropriative discourse also attempts in the novel to demonstrate the geographical continuity and oneness of the ‘Indian’ civilization. During the journey to Huining, Jivan contemplates on the beauty of the forests, a situation that the author exploits to further his social cause:

Jivan’s thoughts turned to the forests. It was in these forests that India’s civilization had been born, ideas as well as a way of living. And the learned sages who lived in hermitage lit
the torch of knowledge. The forests gave man his feeling of oneness with the whole universe, and they inspired the sages in contemplation, seeking truth. The sages who lived in them proclaimed the universal message of love, knowledge and light and asked the rest of mankind to follow. Jivan felt in his heart of hearts the romance of that unending human adventure. It was an adventure of ideas, of actions supported by ideas. It was a long journey, simple at first but gradually becoming complex and a journey that attained mystical proportion as it transcends the barrier of everyday reality. (Yaruingam (tr.); Pg. 239)

The appropriative ideology of the author is clearly manifest in the above passage, which also portrays a veiled mystical element to signify a definite break in the sequence of events. The situations in the novel tends to slip away from the hands of the author as he invites one metaphor after the other – the personal, geographical and spiritual/mystical – to highlight the appropriative stance, but which ironically have little or no relevance in the specific ethnic context of the North East. Therefore, the rationalistic appropriative discourse of Yaruingam is an attempt in failure owing mainly to the complex dynamics of ethnic aspirations and ethnic consolidation of the Tangkhul Nagas in a changing socio-political scenario.
Works Cited:


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