



(Re)Historicizing Myth: Reconstructing Identity, Memory and Resistance in Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's *Funeral Nights*

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Abstract

Folk traditions function as a significant medium for storytelling, serving to preserve the lived experiences, beliefs, and values of various communities. In North-East India, where colonial histories and national integration policies have frequently marginalised indigenous voices, folklore emerges not merely as a cultural artifact but as a form of resistance. This paper investigates the role of folk narratives as sites of resistance within North-East Indian literary texts, with particular emphasis on *Funeral Nights* (2021) by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. This study employs theoretical frameworks established by Mikhail Bakhtin and Jack Zipes to argue that folk narratives, characterised by their inherent fluidity and processes of oral transmission, function as instruments for contesting hegemonic structures and reconfiguring historical memory. Furthermore, by incorporating contemporary theoretical perspectives, including Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and Dipesh Chakrabarty's subaltern historiography, this paper contends that the identified folk narrative, through its oral traditions and communal foundations, effectively disrupts colonial and nationalist paradigms while facilitating a counter-hegemonic discourse.

Keywords: Cultural Resistance, Folk narratives, Historical Memory, Identity, Mythology, Subversion.

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Introduction

Folk traditions in North-East India have significantly contributed to political resistance movements, extending beyond the scope of literature. For instance, the oral traditions of the Khasi and Naga communities have preserved critical narratives of colonial resistance, which are frequently marginalised in mainstream historiography. These traditions assert indigenous sovereignty and challenge official state narratives. The incorporation of folk songs in political protests, such as those associated with the Naga insurgency and the Assam Movement, further demonstrates the vital role of folklore in contemporary struggles for identity and autonomy. The subversive potential of folk narratives can be analysed through Bakhtin's concept of the "carnavalesque," which illustrates how storytelling can invert social hierarchies and contest the established authority (Bakhtin 10). In the novel *Funeral Nights*, storytelling is portrayed not only as a means of sharing experiences but also as a powerful act of defiance that reinforces the cultural autonomy of the Khasi people. Furthermore, as Nongkynrih elaborates, "Our stories are our past, our memory, and our defiance against the forgetting imposed by others" (Nongkynrih 56). This perspective reinforces the idea that storytelling is an act of resilience, providing a counter-narrative to dominant cultures that often aim to erase or marginalise Indigenous voices and histories. The concept of "hybridity," introduced by Homi Bhabha, is particularly pertinent in this discourse. Bhabha posits that colonised subjects engage in a complex negotiation of identity, frequently resulting in a cultural fusion that challenges rigid notions of history and power (Bhabha 112). This understanding of hybridity underscores how the Khasi people, through their storytelling traditions, assert their unique identity while simultaneously engaging with and reshaping external influences. Thus, *Funeral Nights* illustrates that storytelling functions not only as a medium for collective memory but also as a form of cultural resistance against erasure. Additionally, Jack Zipes' assertion that folk and fairy tales serve as counter-narratives to dominant ideologies is particularly relevant. Nongkynrih's work exemplifies how folklore operates as a mechanism for resisting cultural assimilation, ensuring that Indigenous histories and traditions remain central in the literary discourse of North-East India.

Folk Narratives as a Tool of Resistance against Cultural Homogenisation

Funeral Nights skilfully integrates Khasi myths and oral traditions within its narrative framework. Employing a frame-story structure, the novel underscores the importance of storytelling as a critical mechanism for the preservation of indigenous knowledge, thereby reinforcing both historical continuity and cultural resilience. Throughout the six-day funeral, characters recount folktales in a manner that mirrors traditional oral storytelling practices, highlighting their cultural and religious significance. Moreover, the novel critically examines the erosion of Khasi traditions in the face of external influences, positioning folklore as a form of resistance against cultural homogenisation. As Jack Zipes asserts, “fairy tales and folk narratives possess an inherent subversive power, providing alternatives to dominant ideological discourses” (Zipes 47). In *Funeral Nights*, this subversion is evident in the way folklore challenges colonial narratives that have historically marginalised indigenous perspectives.

Scholars like Partha Chatterjee have examined how folk traditions operate within the framework of nationalism and postcolonial resistance. In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chatterjee argues that subaltern groups use cultural practices to contest the homogenising tendencies of the nation-state (142). The text analysed in this paper aligns with this argument, as it emphasises local histories and resists the erasures imposed by colonial and nationalist historiographies. *Funeral Nights* exemplifies how folk narratives function as subversive tools, resisting dominant histories, colonial ideologies, and patriarchal structures. Nongkynrih’s novel reclaims Khasi oral traditions as valid epistemologies, challenging the erasure of Indigenous voices. By framing storytelling as an act of defiance, he ensures that Khasi folklore remains not just a relic of the past but an active force in contemporary discourse. As one of the storytellers in the novel says, “We tell our stories not just to remember, but to remind the world that we are still here” (Nongkynrih 302). This assertion encapsulates the enduring power of folk narratives in resisting cultural domination and asserting identity. It effectively highlights the crucial role of folklore in the preservation of

Indigenous identity, emphasising that stories are not merely narratives; rather, they serve as vital connections that link the community to its history and heritage.

Furthermore, Ranajit Guha's work on subaltern studies provides insight into how folk traditions offer alternative modes of historical consciousness. Guha critiques the elitist biases of historical narratives and highlights how oral traditions and folklore preserve subaltern perspectives (Guha 88). In *Funeral Nights*, the Khasi oral tradition operates as an archive of indigenous resistance, narrating histories that challenge the colonial and postcolonial nation-state's historical omissions.

Myth and History: An Evolving and Fluid Process of Memory, Identity, and Resistance

Funeral Nights by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih engages in what Spivak calls the "subaltern" mode of speaking—where voices are gradually erased from history and find agency through storytelling. Folk traditions, as delineated in the text, function as epistemic frameworks that challenge the hegemonic structures. *Funeral Nights* engages with ritualistic storytelling, where the past is not merely remembered but re-experienced. As Walter Benjamin notes, storytelling serves as a medium that enables the past to be articulated in ways that challenge linear historiography (Benjamin 91). It presents history not as an objective, static record but as a fluid, evolving process. It aligns with James Clifford's notion of "ethnographic authority," where Indigenous narratives construct their legitimacy outside the Western Historiographical norms (21).

Folklore and folk culture, as argued by scholars like Jack Zipes and Richard Bauman, function as sites of resistance. Zipes (2006) posits that folk and fairy tales are "historically conditioned forms of narrative that have the potential to challenge dominant ideologies by presenting alternative worldviews" (Zipes 197). Richard Bauman further asserts that folklore is "a performance of cultural identity and a means of negotiating power structures within society" (Bauman 28). The novel's use of Khasi oral storytelling acts as a form of resistance to the dominant colonial and nationalist historiographies,

foregrounding Indigenous epistemologies over Western rationalist discourse. By positioning folk traditions at the centre of these narratives, the author creates a discursive space where Indigenous histories counteract dominant representations.

The writing is structured as an elaborate oral storytelling session, reminiscent of the Khasi tradition where narratives unfold during wakes, engaging the living in a dialogue with the past. The novel's frame narrative allows multiple voices to emerge, each challenging official histories and dominant discourses. One of the most subversive elements in the novel is its use of Khasi myths and legends to critique colonialism. One of the most fundamental Khasi myths embedded in *Funeral Nights* is the myth of the seven families. It depicts the story of how humanity descended to Earth from heaven via a golden vine. Seven families (*Ki Hynniew Trep*) were the first to inhabit the Earth. This myth often appears as a backdrop, explaining the origins and connection of the Khasi people to the divine and the natural world. According to Khasi folklore, humanity originally lived in harmony with the divine, but a fateful event severed their connection to heaven, leaving only a few families behind to inhabit the mortal world. This myth functions as a powerful metaphor for loss, displacement, and the search for belonging. A passage from the novel reflects this longing for a lost past: "Once, the sky was within reach, and we walked between the worlds with ease. But we forgot our path, and the bridge of roots that bound us to the heavens was cut forever" (Nongkynrih 369). It challenges the linear notion of progress imposed by colonial and nationalist discourses, instead proposing an indigenous cosmology where history is cyclical and deeply intertwined with spiritual memory. The Khasi belief in an ancestral homeland in the sky reinforces the idea that history is not just a matter of political events but also cosmic and metaphysical rupture.

Another significant Khasi myth present in *Funeral Nights* is the legend of "U Thlen," a gigantic serpent-like demon that feeds on human greed and requires ritualistic human sacrifice to be appeased. According to Khasi folklore, those who seek wealth and power enter into a dark pact with U Thlen, perpetuating a cycle of violence and moral decay. This myth is particularly relevant to the novel's critique of modernity, materialism, and moral corruption. In *Funeral Nights*,

characters refer to this legend when discussing the moral compromises made by individuals in the pursuit of power: “There are those among us who still feed the Thlen, though they no longer name him. They have traded their souls for gold, just as our ancestors warned us.” (Nongkynrih 23). The invocation of the U Thlen myth serves as a political and ethical critique, suggesting that the same greed and corruption that plagued the mythical past continue to shape contemporary Khasi society. The legend, therefore, functions as a moral compass, warning against the dangers of forgetting indigenous values in the face of external influences such as capitalism and state control. This aligns with the work of theorists like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o—*Decolonising the Mind* (1986)—who argues that indigenous storytelling acts as a form of resistance against cultural and economic imperialism (36). By incorporating the myth of U Thlen, *Funeral Nights* positions Khasi folklore as an ongoing site of political and ethical contestation.

One of the most haunting Khasi myths referenced in *Funeral Nights* is the tragic tale of “Ka Likai,” a woman who unknowingly eats the flesh of her own murdered child, an act orchestrated by her jealous husband. When she discovers the truth, she throws herself off a cliff ending her tragic life. The waterfall where she perished—Nohkalikai Falls—remains one of the most famous landmarks in Meghalaya, thereafter became known as *Kshaid Noh Ka Likai* - the Leap of Ka Likai. It symbolises the weight of grief, betrayal, and the consequences of unchecked violence. This legend is evoked as a metaphor for communal suffering and the way Khasi history has been marked by betrayal, loss, and external domination: “Heart of stone, heart of iron! What dreadful wrong have I done to God? If God is everywhere, where was he in our moment of need? ... Heartless is man, heartless is God! (Nongkynrih 23). This passage suggests that the myth of Ka Likai extends beyond personal tragedy—it becomes a symbol for the larger Khasi experience of historical loss and cultural erosion. The myth’s retelling in *Funeral Nights* reflects what Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) describes as the politics of memory, where myths serve as carriers of historical trauma and communal identity (104). By reinterpreting Ka Likai’s story within the novel’s framework, Nongkynrih positions Khasi mythology as a repository of historical memory, resisting erasure and

ensuring that indigenous stories remain central to the community's self-understanding.

In Khasi belief systems, the dead are never truly gone—they exist in an ongoing relationship with the living. This belief is central to *Funeral Nights*, which is set during a wake where the dead are actively remembered through storytelling. The presence of spirits and ancestral guidance in the novel reflects Khasi animist traditions, where the natural world is inhabited by unseen forces. The role of spirits and ancestors in *Funeral Nights* aligns with what Walter Benjamin describes in *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1969) as a “messianic time,” where the past continually interrupts the present, demanding recognition and justice (256). In this sense, the wake in *Funeral Nights* is not just a mourning ritual—it is a political act, ensuring that Khasi history remains alive through storytelling. As one storyteller in the novel proclaims, “Dear brother, we live in our memory, in the memory of the world: stoking that memory with fondness is all that we can do. We can do no more, we can do no less” (Nongkynrih, 370). It echoes what Jan Vansina argues in *Oral Tradition as History*—that oral narratives should not be dismissed as mere folklore but recognised as legitimate historical sources that preserve the perspectives of marginalised communities (112).

Through its engagement with Khasi myths, *Funeral Nights* asserts the power of indigenous storytelling as a means of cultural preservation, ethical critique, and historical resistance. The myths of creation, U Thlen, Ka Likai, and ancestral spirits do not function merely as folklore; they shape the novel's philosophical and political concerns, reinforcing the continuity of Khasi identity in the face of historical erasure. By embedding these myths within the structure of the novel, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih challenges dominant narratives that seek to marginalise Khasi voices. The myths become a way of reclaiming historical agency, positioning Khasi cosmology as a legitimate mode of understanding the world. Ultimately, *Funeral Nights* demonstrates that myths are not relics of the past—they are living, evolving narratives that continue to shape Khasi consciousness, memory, and resistance in the present.

Subverting Colonial and Nationalist Discourses

Postcolonial theorists have long critiqued how colonial discourse constructs indigenous communities as passive subjects of history. In *Funeral Nights*, Nongkynrih's use of funeral storytelling traditions further complicates historical representation. The act of recounting stories during funerary rites becomes a radical form of memory-making, where the deceased is not relegated to the past but continues to exert influence on the present. This aligns with Achille Mbembe's articulation of "necropolitics" where death and memory function as sites of power and resistance. One of the key ways *Funeral Nights* challenges the colonial discourse is by foregrounding Khasi oral traditions as a legitimate mode of historical knowledge. Colonial historiography often treated indigenous oral histories as unreliable or anecdotal, privileging written records as the sole means of historical legitimacy. This refusal to adhere to linear historical models subverts the epistemic violence imposed by colonial archives. By reclaiming funerary storytelling as a mode of history-making, Nongkynrih challenges nationalist historiographies that often erase Indigenous voices. Scholars like Partha Chatterjee have also examined how folk traditions operate within the framework of nationalism and postcolonial resistance. In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chatterjee argues that subaltern groups use cultural practices to contest the homogenising tendencies of the nation-state (Chatterjee 142). The text analysed in this paper aligns with this argument, as it emphasises local histories and resists the erasures imposed by colonial and nationalist historiographies. In the novel, stories are told during a funeral wake, mirroring traditional Khasi customs. Through this framework, Nongkynrih critiques the colonial tendency to relegate Indigenous voices to the periphery, "What we have are stories, stories passed from old to young, from the dead to the living. We do not write them down, but that does not make them any less true" (36). This statement directly challenges the Eurocentric notion that history must be recorded in written form to be valid. It aligns with Dipesh Chakrabarty's argument in *Provincializing Europe*, where he critiques the imposition of Western historiographical methods onto non-Western societies (89). By reclaiming oral storytelling as a legitimate historical practice, *Funeral Nights* disrupts colonial epistemologies and affirms Indigenous ways of knowing.

Colonial ethnography frequently portrayed Northeast Indian communities as “primitive,” “tribal,” and outside the flow of modern history. British colonial accounts often depicted Khasi culture as a curiosity, framing its matrilineal traditions and animistic practices through an exoticising lens. Nongkynrih directly confronts this narrative by embedding Khasi cosmology and belief systems within the storytelling framework of *Funeral Nights*. The novel presents a Khasi perspective on spirits and the afterlife, which contrasts with Western rationalist frameworks. The following passage offers a sharp critique of colonial knowledge systems that dismissed Indigenous spirituality as superstition: “To the white men, our spirits are mere shadows, our gods just figments of an untrained mind. But we know better. We have walked with them, heard them in the rustling leaves, and felt them in the silence of the forest” (327). This passage resists the colonial tendency to categorise indigenous beliefs as irrational, instead asserting them as an integral and experiential part of Khasi existence. It aligns with postcolonial theorists like Edward Said (1993), who in *Culture and Imperialism* discusses how colonial knowledge production served in “othering” the non-Western cultures by portraying them as backward (74). By presenting Khasi cosmology not as folklore but as lived reality, Nongkynrih dismantles colonial narratives that sought to delegitimise Indigenous knowledge:

Funeral Nights is an attempt to capture those stories, not of a morbid or macabre character, as one might imagine, and not even so much about death, though death did feature prominently. These are stories about life—past, present and future, rural and urban, high and low . . . anecdotes in poetry and prose, tragic tales and funny tales, myths, and true stories so strange that they sound like tall tales. All of them, without exception, are Khasi, native to the soil, nurtured by the sun and rain of home, and reveal not only their specific qualities but also their humanity and universality. (2)

Through oral narratives, myths, and folk knowledge, the novel challenges the uniformity imposed by external historical accounts

and affirms the independence of the Khasi historical perspective. While *Funeral Nights* resists colonial historiography, it also critiques the nationalist discourse of post-independence India, which has historically marginalised the Northeast. Indian nationalist history, focused on anti-colonial struggle and the consolidation of the postcolonial nation-state, often excludes the Northeast from its dominant narratives. The region is frequently portrayed as a peripheral space—politically, culturally, and historically disconnected from the mainland. Nongkynrih’s novel challenges this erasure by centring on Khasi voices and histories that refuse assimilation into dominant nationalist frameworks. One of the most striking passages in this regard critiques the way the Northeast is treated in mainstream Indian discourse: “They say we are part of the nation, but do they know our stories? Do they hear our dead speak? To them, we are a distant hill, an unfamiliar name in a forgotten place” (358). Here, Nongkynrih critiques the mainland’s neglect of the Northeast, highlighting how national integration often comes at the cost of cultural and historical invisibilisation. This aligns with Sanjib Baruah’s argument in “Durable Disorder,” where he describes how the Northeast has been kept in a state of political and historical liminality—simultaneously included within India’s territorial boundaries but excluded from its mainstream national imagination (63).

Another way *Funeral Nights* subverts dominant narratives is through its treatment of death, memory, and temporality. In contrast to nationalist discourses that frame history as a linear progression towards modernity, Khasi funerary storytelling presents a cyclical understanding of time, where the past is always present. The novel’s structure—where stories emerge during a funeral vigil—resists the nationalist idea that history must move forward toward a singular goal (such as development or modernisation). Instead, it suggests that history is constantly being revisited, reinterpreted, and experienced anew: “The dead do not leave us. They whisper in the wind; they walk beside us in the dark. Time is not a river flowing forward—it is the breath of the ancestors, lingering in our bones” (159).

This cyclical temporality directly opposes nationalist and colonial narratives that position indigenous communities as being

“behind” in a linear trajectory of progress. It aligns with Walter Benjamin’s argument in *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1969), where he critiques the Enlightenment notion of progress and instead proposes a view of history as layered, fractured, and always present (257). By embedding funerary storytelling within the novel’s structure, *Funeral Nights* resists the teleological impulse of nationalist history and reclaims an Indigenous temporal framework. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih’s *Funeral Nights* is a powerful example of literary resistance against both colonial and nationalist discourses. Through its use of Khasi oral traditions, it subverts colonial historiography that sought to erase indigenous voices, while also critiquing the nationalist neglect of the Northeast. The novel functions as a counter-memory, reclaiming Khasi epistemologies and offering a vision of history that is not linear, but cyclical, relational, and deeply embedded in the community’s lived experience. By positioning Khasi funeral storytelling as a form of historical resistance, Nongkynrih seeks to preserve Indigenous traditions while concurrently reclaiming narrative authority from the influences of colonial and nationalist frameworks. In doing so, *Funeral Nights* becomes a critical text in postcolonial Indigenous literature—one that reasserts the power of oral storytelling as both an act of remembrance and an act of resistance.

Folk Traditions and the Politics of Memory

As Pierre Nora argues in his exploration of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory), memory plays a crucial role in subverting dominant narratives. In *Funeral Nights*, folk traditions function as living repositories of memory, resisting the erasures of colonial and nationalist historiographies. The cyclical structure of these narratives resists the closure of historical time, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge remains dynamic and relevant.

Moreover, this text exemplifies what Edward Said describes as “contrapuntal reading”—a method of reading literature that accounts for voices excluded from official histories (75). Through the use of folk traditions, Nongkynrih demands a re-evaluation of historiographical methodologies, urging readers to acknowledge the legitimacy of oral narratives as historical discourse. The wake in

Funeral Nights serves as both a literal and symbolic space where memory and history converge. In Khasi culture, funerals are not just about mourning the dead but also about reaffirming communal bonds through shared storytelling. The structure of the novel mirrors this ritualistic practice, reinforcing the idea that memory is a collective act rather than an individual one.

By structuring the novel around a wake, Nongkynrih underscores the politics of memory—who gets to remember, how stories are passed down, and what histories are preserved or erased. As one of the characters reflects: “The stories we tell here will outlive us. They are not just for the dead, but for those who come after, so they may know who we were” (Nongkynrih 39). It speaks to the continuity of memory, where storytelling becomes a means of cultural survival. The wake becomes a site where Indigenous history is actively reconstructed, resisting the historical amnesia imposed by both colonialism and nationalism. Through its cyclical structure, mythological frameworks, and communal storytelling, the novel demonstrates that memory is not just about preserving the past but about actively shaping the future. In doing so, *Funeral Nights* becomes a vital text in indigenous and postcolonial literature—one that insists on the legitimacy of Khasi epistemologies and the enduring power of oral history.

Gender and Folklore: Subverting Patriarchy

Nongkynrih also uses Khasi folklore to challenge gender norms. The Khasi people follow a matrilineal system. In the novel, folk tales reaffirm female agency. The legend of Ka Li Dohkha, a woman who outsmarts the men who seek to control her, serves as an allegory for the ongoing struggle against patriarchal structures. Jack Zipes discusses how traditional fairy tales were often sanitised to reinforce patriarchal norms (103). But in the novel, Nongkynrih restores the original rebellious spirit of Khasi folk tales. One female storyteller remarks: “Our ancestors knew that women were the ones who kept the world alive. The men, they only try to take what is already ours” (Nongkynrih 134). By embedding such perspectives within folklore, the text not only preserves Khasi traditions but also challenges the patriarchal structures that persist within and beyond the community.

Folk Humour and the Subversion of Power

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's *Funeral Nights* is a novel rich with humour, particularly the kind rooted in folk traditions, oral storytelling, and cultural satire. Humor in the novel is not merely for entertainment—it serves as a subversive tool that challenges authority, mocks power structures, and provides an alternative way of understanding history and community. Folk humour, as used in *Funeral Nights*, critiques both colonial and nationalist narratives, highlights the contradictions of modernity, and reaffirms Khasi identity in the face of historical erasure. The novel employs humour in a way that aligns with Bakhtin's theory of the 'carnival'—as found in *Rabelais and His World* (1984)—where folk laughter functions as a form of resistance, temporarily inverting social hierarchies and questioning dominant ideologies. In *Funeral Nights*, humour allows characters to navigate grief, interrogate history, and reaffirm their cultural resilience.

Khasi folk humour often emerges in *Funeral Nights* through irony, satire, and playful exaggeration. The novel's characters, particularly the storytellers at the funeral wake, use humour as a means of cultural survival, ensuring that colonial or national histories do not overshadow their narratives. One passage encapsulates this use of humour when an elder recounts how the British misunderstood Khasi customs: "The white men thought we worshipped trees because we left offerings at their roots. So, we let them believe it. Better they think us foolish than try to make us wise" (Nongkynrih 212). Here, humour becomes a weapon of resistance, subtly ridiculing the colonial gaze that sought to interpret Khasi traditions through a Eurocentric framework. This aligns with postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha, who discusses in *The Location of Culture* how mimicry and irony serve as strategies of resistance—where the colonised simultaneously appease and undermine the coloniser's authority (86). It often mocks the pretensions of those in power, whether they be colonial officers, nationalist politicians, or self-important intellectuals. By turning the tables and making the powerful the subject of ridicule, *Funeral Nights* inverts the traditional power dynamic, offering an indigenous perspective that resists subjugation.

One of the novel's most potent uses of humour is its satirical treatment of colonial and nationalist figures. British officials in the novel are often depicted as clueless bureaucrats, struggling to comprehend the Khasi way of life. This satire exposes the absurdity of colonial rule, where laws were imposed without understanding local cultures. In one anecdote, a Khasi elder recalls how the British attempted to implement a tax system in the hills:

They came with their papers and pens, asking us how many cows we had, how many children, how many houses. We told them we had as many as the gods gave us, but they wanted numbers. So, we made up numbers, and they wrote them down. Who were we to argue with men who believed in paper more than people? (248)

This passage humorously critiques the bureaucratic absurdities of colonial administration, where Indigenous ways of life were forced into rigid, Western systems of governance. The laughter here is not just amusement—it is an act of defiance, showing how Khasi people outwitted their rulers through clever deception.

Similarly, the novel's humour extends to critiques of postcolonial nationalism. The Indian state, while claiming to integrate Northeast India, often marginalises its voices. In a sharp moment of satire, a character observes: "Delhi remembers us when the elections come. The rest of the time, we are the faraway cousins no one wants to visit" (315). This aligns with Sanjib Baruah's argument in *Durable Disorder* (2005) that Northeast India is included in the Indian state but excluded from its historical and political consciousness. The humour here reveals a deep truth: Khasi people, like many other marginalised communities, recognise the superficiality of political inclusion.

Since *Funeral Nights* is structured around a wake, much of its humour emerges in the context of mourning and storytelling. This aligns with indigenous traditions where laughter and grief coexist—where storytelling is not just about sorrow but also about celebrating life, mocking fate, and making peace with death. The wake becomes

a ‘carnavalesque’ space where rigid boundaries between life and death, the sacred and the profane, collapse. This follows Bakhtin’s concept of ‘carnival’, where humour disrupts solemnity and gives space for collective catharsis. A recurring joke in the novel involves an elder humorously reflecting on his impending death: “I am not afraid of dying. I am afraid they will serve bad rice at my funeral” (348). This dark humour transforms the fear of death into a communal moment of laughter, emphasising that Khasi funerary traditions are not just about mourning but also about strengthening social bonds. This reflects Paul Ricoeur’s idea that storytelling helps communities make sense of loss by remembering and reframing grief through humour. He highlights how narratives shape our understanding of time, self, and experience, including trauma. Storytelling enables the reconfiguration of experiences, providing new perspectives and transforming the meaning of loss over time (Ricoeur 122).

Many of the stories in *Funeral Nights* feature trickster-like characters—figures who use wit, deception, and humour to challenge authority. These tricksters are not villains but folk heroes, representing the Khasi ethos of outsmarting the powerful rather than directly confronting them. For example, the story of a poor man who outsmarts a corrupt village headman by pretending to be a spirit, scaring him into giving up his wealth. This aligns with the universal trickster archetype, found in many indigenous storytelling traditions, where humour is used as a tool of subversion and empowerment. Trickster humour in *Funeral Nights* also questions social norms, particularly rigid hierarchies within Khasi society itself. Folk humour in *Funeral Nights* is not just a form of entertainment—it is a method of survival, resistance, and cultural affirmation. By using humour to mock colonial officials, expose nationalist hypocrisy, navigate grief, and question social norms, the novel reinforces Khasi storytelling as a dynamic and evolving tradition. Much like the trickster figures in its tales, *Funeral Nights* refuses to take authority too seriously. Instead, it wields humour as a subtle but powerful weapon, ensuring that Khasi identity is not erased but continues to thrive through laughter and storytelling.

Conclusion

Folk traditions in North-East Indian literature serve as a significant platform for subversion, enabling authors to challenge prevailing cultural narratives while amplifying the voices of historically marginalised Indigenous communities. This paper analysed Nongkynrih's *Funeral Nights* illustrating how folklore functions as both a means of cultural preservation and a form of resistance against historical and political oppression. The study meticulously examined the text, highlighting the intricate integration of folk narratives within the framework of resistance and emphasising their role in shaping the consciousness of marginalised communities. It was able to provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of Indigenous populations, offering a critical perspective on their struggles and triumphs. Moreover, by employing theoretical frameworks centered on subversion, this paper elucidated how folk traditions contribute to resilience within contemporary literature while underscoring the relationship between folklore and modern storytelling, showcasing the capacity of traditional narratives to engage with current socio-political issues. Additionally, this study accentuates the importance of contemporary theories of hybridity and subaltern historiography, demonstrating how folk narratives contest established historical accounts and affirm Indigenous experiences within the discourse of national identity. Ultimately, this paper aimed to elucidate the substantial impact of folk traditions in literature that interrogate dominant societal narratives.

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