

CONCLUSION

I

The moment we start to think that – to talk about ‘identity’ at this post-modern juncture is altogether irrelevant and antediluvian – it springs up in our existential and empirical terrain like a jack-in-the-box in a child’s playhouse. Take, for instance, the recent London riot triggered by the fatal shooting of 29-year-old Mark Duggan¹ by police on 4th August 2011 on the Ferry Lane Bridge, next to Tottenham Hale station. The incidence took place just few kilometres away from Tate Modern, Great Britain’s national gallery of international art which is one of the greatest hubs of happenings in the contemporary art world. Tate Modern has been for ages witness to many artistic deliberations about the possibilities in the paradigm of modern/contemporary art. It is simultaneously also witness to many debates and discussions about the exhaustion of all avant-garde alternatives in the lingual/conceptual dynamics in art, thereby posing that complex question “What Next?” Perhaps those speculative debates also include the question about the issue concerning identity/identity politics. Questions with regard to the relevance/ non relevance of the identity issue in the contemporary globalised world, considered within the vast theatre of multiculturalism and the dynamics of hybridity. However, just few kilometres away from this seat of intellectual debates and the temple of modern art, in that street called Ferry Lane Bridge there was this procession on 5th August by the Black community of London taken out in protest against the killing of Duggan. The rest of the story is all but a slice of ‘that nightmare called history!’ When there were speculations about ‘end of history’ or ‘dissemination of self’ in the contemporary predicament in a post globalisation era, there came up this bizarre controversy about the ‘authentic’ identity of Barak Obama, the President of the greatest democracy in the world! The point that one proposes to put across here is – it might be “identity to a large extent forms part of a dark underground where the struggle between reality and symbolism is waged, the backroom where the play is plotted, the backstage area where myth will be performed” as stated by Ticio Escobar (Identity and Myth Today p.146) but there is no doubt that this issue called identity is an invisible spirit haunting every nook and corner of this dark continent called human consciousness and its empirical existence or lived experiences. To add a little more hyperbole – identity seems

like the '*dhananjay vayu*' mentioned in the Ayurvedic Shastra of India – that particular wind in the body (out of the forty nine elemental varieties) which continues to flutter even when the vital force is extinct while the rest forty eight are dead! To quote Nancy Mack "Identity is a complex concept: mediated through language, socially interpreted, embodied in experience, and materially situated. To this definition I wish to add that identity is multiply conflicted, temporally developmental, and continually open to revision" ("Ethical Representation of Working-Class Lives: Multiple Genres, Voices, and Identities" p.58)

Keeping the foregoing and this particular definition in mind and considering the recurrent claim/reclaim of the identity-issue in the larger socio-political and cultural contexts of the collective sphere or public domain in the North-eastern region of India in general and the state of Assam in particular, we had taken up this research to study the dynamics of identity in the paradigm of modern/contemporary art in Assam with specific reference to the post colonial period. We proposed to carry out the study by exploring the symbolic reflexivity manifested in the artistic narration and texts in relation to the concerns of identity. We also further proposed to explore the reflections of art activism within the larger frame of identity to have a complete truth-functional mapping. Taking forward the study we began by probing into the conceptual basics of the notion called 'identity' in different lights of the ontological, psychoanalytical, socio-political perspectives to the essentialist, post modernist, post positivist positions in the first chapter as one of the primary contexts of our research. Along with mapping the conceptual formulation about the notion of 'identity' at the primary level, we also made an attempt to understand the theoretical formulations about 'modern' or 'modernity' with specific reference to the context of modern Indian art so that we can understand the dynamics of identity in relation to visual art practices of Assam in the post-colonial time. The mapping of the theoretical construction of the modern Indian art was necessary with regard to the regional developments of modern art in peripheral pockets like Assam which occluded in the canonical formulations of the "mainstream" modern or in the art historical textual accounts of the national modern so far and to make a plea for rooms for all those regional developments and thereby necessitate identity of the regional trends in the broader art historical paradigm in modern Indian art apart from the major art centres and the metros. That there can be a multi-dimensional/ multi-linear/

heterogeneous/inorganic and non-monolithic structure of modern in the literary and art paradigms was proposed with the intellectual aid of model put forwarded by Chana Kronfeld in her book titled On The Margins Of Modernism, Decentering Literary Dynamics (1996), which infers and extends Ludwig Wittgenstein, the German philosopher's concept of "Family Resemblance" and Charles Fillmore's and George Lakoff's work on "Prototypes and Frame Semantics and the Theory of Categorization". In keeping to our proposed agenda of mapping the regional manifestations of modernity/modernism in the peripheral pockets like Assam we also traced and developed a complete art historical account and genealogy of modern art in Assam since its inception in the second decade of the twentieth century till date through extensive documentation, fieldworks and research. It is worth mentioning herein that ours is an attempt first of its kind and a pioneering endeavour in this regard as there has been no prior evidence of such complete mapping in a holistic manner except few sporadic essays written by renowned poet and art critic Nilamoni Phukan like "Adhunikotar Bartabahi Kaigorakiman Asomiya Chitrakar" (Few Assamese Modernist Painters) in Rup Barna Bak: Essays on Art and Artists 1988), 'Pratap Baruah Samparke Aru Jatkinchit' (Shilpakala Darshan, 1998) etc. In this mapping we have traced three distinct stages of developments in the entire discourse of modern art. The first phase of modern art in Assam beginning at the twenties decade of the last century manifests British Academic Realism, Renaissansque representations with some overtones of Romanticism. The second phase comprising the period of fifties and sixties was a period of symbolic and surrealistic manifestations. The third phase came up at the advent of seventies, when a new movement encompassed the art world of Assam with a varied range of experimentation, in creative imaginative order marked with aesthetic sensibilities.

In this context, as I had already mentioned in the First Chapter we have to remember that in the complex terrain of Assam, the making/unmaking of art will have to operate within its own parameters stretched between historical/art historical context and retrieved autonomy of art (including the paradoxes and ironies this unfolds). This reconciled state of in-betweenness tallies well with in-betweenness of modernist experience – a modernity at crossroads. Here art is not a garb, but an integral manifestation of the existential core embedded in historical/cultural groundings within the enlarged theatre of political contradictions. The realm of art is but only a means and

not an end in itself. With regard to experimentation and innovations in the lingual/material levels or exploratory dialectics on “meaning” in the epistemological/metaphysical level, there may not be any tall claims to make. But the significance lie in the constant engagement of the art-praxis as politically reflexive cultural actions, working within the constraints of a peripheral pocket, dearth of adequate infrastructure and lack of genuine art consciousness. In the cultural dynamics of unilinear trajectory (Bombay Progressive to Radical), the peripheral regional developments as well as other categories like Dalit Tribal, are often sidelined by the national modern. In order to reclaim an entire truth-functional mapping of the modern Indian art, it is high time that we explore the unexplored sites in the regional ‘sub-streams’. Here regional sub-streams are but relative categorisation that denounces any status as “absolute” or “independent” category. Rather it would be an attempt to delve deeper into the intricacies and heterogeneous multiplicity of various experiences of modernism. But the pitfalls of essentialism/absolutism and the orthodoxy of geographic/ethnographic determinism have to be skirted in an objective art historical approach rather than the subjective art critical one which is often a matter of individual taste and choice.

In the second chapter we made a study about the dynamics of identity and art with specific focus on the first half of the post colonial period. However before delving into this discourse, we made an attempt to chart the historical backdrop of colonisation, its impacts and implications in the colonial and postcolonial Assam as British colonisation played the pivotal role in the dynamics of identity in this geo-political space. A reading of visual art practices right from its modernist inception to the advent of the nineteen seventies was taken in this chapter and this specific demarcation of the period had been done in keeping to the stylistic/idiomatic/ideological differentiation manifested in the art paradigm. Though our central concern was to focus on the art of the post-colonial time, in a subtext in that chapter we also tried to draw a link between the modern and pre-modern phase in a specific study about the sculptural reliefs of Srihati Satra to thereby establish it as the first instance of identity formation/identity construction in the visual practice of art in Assam in the backdrop of colonisation. At the very outset we tried to probe into internal dynamics of modernisation and the conflicts and aporias of modernity so that we could have a better understanding of the implications of colonialism in Assam.

Thus the first chapter on the whole and the second chapter partially paved way to form the basic substratum of our study on the basis of which we started our exploration about the operating dialectics of identity in art in Assam. The reflections (whether overtly political or symbolic/metaphorical) were to be explored either in the artistic endeavours (the texts/narratives) of the artists in the individual level or in the art activist praxis in the collective level. Hence, we started with the reading of the visual narratives in the first phase of the post colonial period till the seventies in the second chapter with a glimpse about the early stage of modern art of Assam. Our special study about the sculptural reliefs of the vaishnavite monastery Srihati Satra in a subtext had enabled us to develop the basic ground for the formulation of identity discourse in the visual art tradition in Assam. Through this specific study of the politically reflexive narrative panels of the unknown artists or *Khanikars* of colonial Assam, we could observe the de-construction of the hegemonic discourse by a colonized subject (in any form of expression whether political or cultural/artistic) which can be aptly called an act of resistance and intervention. When a subject is colonized and its identity is jeopardized in the colonizing process it redefines and asserts its identity in and through definitions around its own culture, past/history/ traditions/ memories (often imagined and constructed), political and ideological institutions, which entails an independent discursive formation often appropriating its 'other'. The sculptural reliefs of Srihati Satra about which we made an elaborate study in this subtext were a fine example of such interventional strategy by a colonized subject. In the visual narratives we could see the formulation of the self and other dichotomy by the artists when the mythical characters like Krishna who is the Hero of the narrative appears in the iconographic forms and costumes of the local culture signifying the 'self' (Read Indian subject-hood/selfhood) and the villain Kamsa in the British garment, get up and prototype signifying the evil 'other' the Europe. For the first time one could see a depiction in such subversive and unconventional manner in the history of the tradition which can be said as the first ever nascent attempt to deconstruct the Eurocentric hegemonic discourse in a visual narrative of sculptural relief. The appropriation of the British academic realism as the lingual expression is the pointer to the very process of jeopardizing the identity of a colonized subject but it also signified that very act of appropriation and reaffirmation and re-definition of its identity by recourse to various contexts from culture, tradition, history, heritage, memory, socio-

political institutions and mythology and Vaishnavite cultural tradition as specific to this definite case study of Srihati Satra.

As we moved further in the study from this first instance of identity formation to the subsequent reflections in the following decades well substantiated by works of Muktanath Bordoloi (*The Opium Den*) or Tarun Duwara (*The Assamese Weaver*), we came across two important artists in the nineteen fifties and sixties who were Hemanta Mishra and Asu Deb. If Muktanath and Tarun epitomised the iconographic image-formation of an Assamese identity through these images (Of a beautiful, hardworking homemaker Assamese woman in Tarun Duwara and the rotting economic and social state of Assamese subaltern class in Muktanath Bordoloi) in Asu Deb we could see the play of identity in the body/ anatomy of his women folk. We made a comparative study with Amrita Sher Gil's depiction of the women folk to arrive at certain differential characteristic between the two. We could see a striking difference in the renderings of both the artists when we compared the vibrant dynamism and jovial mannerism of Asu Dev's representation of the native women to the static stillness and languid torpor of Sher-Gil's Indian women. The physicality of Sher Gil's women were fine admixture of western classicism and Indian Ajantasque prototype which gave rise to the slender tall dreamy figuration of women in the Bengal-School style of representation. On the other hand Asu Deb's women were more supple, voluptuous and Dravidian in nature. However one cannot deny the possibility that Asu Deb too must have felt if not overtly like Sher-Gil but subtly the same challenge of self-representation through the imagery of his women with regard to the newly formulated definition of the Indian National Identity and its representation in the realm of art which was a major issue for the artist of his generation who were often grappled with the dilemma of emblemizing an identity of authentic Indian-ness in modern Indian art while being universal in one's lingual expression. Herein we could compare the representation of female subjects by Asu Deb with the working-woman's representations by the western artists in the nineteenth and twentieth century. For instance, Courbet's "*The Grain Sifters*" (visual 100) or Millet's "*The Gleaners*" (visual 101) though visually very much different, they are both "historically conditioned mythic structures, replete with message about sex, about nature, about work, about role of woman, about the nature of history" (Nochlin, 49) and to take it further about the class identity of the working class woman in the European countryside.

Commenting on the visual representation of the peasant women during that period Nochlin observes:

The peasant woman served as the perfect visual embodiment of a conservative instinct to perpetuate age old rituals, carrying them on by practice and precept from generation to generation. Yet contradictorily – for ideology is, in effect, designed to absorb and rationalise self contradictions – at the same time that the peasant woman was viewed as naturally nurturing and pious, her very naturalness, her proximity to instinct and animality could make her serve as the epitome of untrammelled, unartificed, or ‘helpful’ sexuality, as opposed to the more corrupt, damaged eroticism of the urban working class girl. Sometimes this sexual force is veiled in idealisation, as in the work of Jules Breton, who specialised in glamorising the erotic charms of the peasant girls for the annual Salons and for the delectation of American Middle Western nouveau rich collectors . . . In either case the peasant woman’s natural role as a signifier of hard sexuality is as important an element in 19th century visual ideology as her nurturant or religious roles. Breton, who specialised in sweetly provocative field workers, literally saw his subjects as naturally glamorous – as living contemporary art works. In fact he felt that peasant girls’ figures were improved by their wholesome activity in the open air, and that their daily work in the fields helped to give them the well-proportioned bodies and the graceful, dignified posture of antique statues. (*Representing Women*, 86)

However, later on with the advent of twentieth century, one could see the changes in the depiction of working women as manifested in the representations of Kathe Kollwitze (Read ‘Outbreak’ or ‘Black Anna’) with their vibrant positive dynamic iconographies. Though Kollwitze is more politically reflexive compared to Courbet, both these artists were subversive in nature portraying the peasant/working woman in a different light deconstructing those idealised romanticised images by the likes of Breton. Now we can differentiate Asu Deb’s position in the context of his female figuration/depiction of those working women. Unlike Courbet, Millet or Kollwitze Asu Deb’s class differentiation is not so transparently expressed except the fact that they are also rural and nature based representations. The ambiguity of this class background may lead to the conclusion that his subjects are more racially and culturally oriented set in an ethereal idealized setting of scenic beauty and grandeur. However the racial trait catering to the tribal/ethnic characteristics leads us to a further conclusion that his subjects are built on the same notion of the ‘pristine’ ‘exotic’ identity of ethnic subject hood uncontaminated by the modernist urban pollutants. In this way he is akin in his

idealization and romanticization to likes of Paul Gauguin (visual 102). Perhaps it would be more pertinent here if we can also draw a parallelism with Ramkinkar's idealised visualization of the Santhal community in its complete vigour, energy, gay abundance and cherishing the true spirits of life amidst labour and hardship. Does these female representations and imageries of working women – sensuous, vibrant, dynamic and sexually throbbing with pent up energy and vigour capture a strand in the dynamics of identity is the major question. Our answer is founded in affirmation because the inception of the identity of a place (implied through the anatomy of the woman's body) by Tarun Duwara is taken a step further by Asu Deb and in the process he is able to build up a certain prototype of the geographic space under consideration, however idealised or romanticised it might be.

In the third Chapter which can be regarded as the crux of our research and its findings, we mainly focussed on the symbolic reflexivity of identity in five different sections as manifested through different categories or conceptual formulations. The first section delved on the issue of identity as reflected from modern and post modern perspectives. The second section considered identity as expression of the geo-political or sub-national identity as the counter discourse of national identity and as against the tendency of stereotyping. The third one explored the entire dynamics of identity as multiple voices of different marginal groups and ethnic/ tribal identities. The fourth section was probing into the political reflexivity of gender identity in the region as finally the fifth section attempted to critically analyse the concept of identity in its psycho-social and philosophical or ontological arena as reflected in the artistic endeavour in the personal/private levels of self hood and individual subjectivities. On the whole we could observe serious engagement in the dynamics of identity with regard to the ethnic/ tribal identities where multiple voices representing their definite identities like the Singhpho, Bodo, Karbi, Tea tribes etc were seen weaving their own narrations about identity. If these voices sprang up against the hegemonic dominance of 'mainstream' Assamese identity like the centrifugal forces, the rise of Assamese sub-nationalist identity against the hegemony of mainstream national identity based on the monolithic and homogeneous model is another aspect for same centrifugal operation in the dynamics of identity. To transcend the consequent binary divisions among these counteractive streams of identity, we will perhaps resort to multiculturalism. In this context we can refer to this issue of

multiculturalism and concept of 'other' in the paradigm of art in the international arena. There is no doubt that multiculturalism lies at the heart of contemporary art. The questions of multiculturalism also envisage the question of othernesses in art and thus the question of identity. In today's artistic multiculturalism as pointed out by the constant and nearly obligatory reference to other artistic culture is but the penultimate way of defining our contemporary art. It is noteworthy that presently a huge stream of contemporary western/European artists are engaged in adopting/working/mediating and creating the life-style or lived-experiences of the 'other' cultures. For instance, Jean-Michael Bruyere's work on the street kids of Dakar, a group belonging to the Black identity, expresses the intense desire to experience, mediate and identify the life of the third world poverty (though it amounts to a morbid fascination and voyeurism and quest for the primal form of one's existence or an existential 'refuge') and explore the 'primitivism' of the other marginal culture. As Jean Loup Amselle has argued: "Primitivism is no longer to be sought in the far-off jungles of the Amazon or New Guinea, but instead in the urban jungles of Africa or Europe, where one might happen upon the "primordial caves" of the artistic ideas, ideas waiting to be discovered and activated and put into circulation by a creator..." ("Primitivism and Post colonialism in Art", p.984)

Now taking this argument as the take-off point we can compare the endeavours of these western counterparts to the artists of our research work. The bearers of multiculturalism who sought to explore in the elemental primitivism and the experiences of the subjects belonging to the 'others' (read ethnic'/tribal/ marginal or other minority identity) in the contemporary paradigm of art in the international stream to create new forms of meaningful art are very often artists who can be termed outsiders even though they manifest great emotive proximity. There always remain a thin line of boundary and authenticity between the selfhood of the natural identity and the naturalised one. Such kind of naturalisation on the part of the artists from the Euro-American, non-primitive genres are not new in the history of art with instances of artists like Picasso or Gauguin. However all the artists of our concern who belong to the distinct ethnic/tribal groups are not Picassos or Gauguins but insiders growing up from their very own authentic grounds of identity and creating politically reflexive texts of identity with its inherent ironies and

contradictions. These narrations of identity are truthful representation of their own existential predicaments and subsequent symbolic mediation.

As far the dynamics of gender identity is concerned, like the pan Indian scenario, the gender narratives are also mainly an individual endeavour rather being an overwhelming political movement and praxis adopted by the western counterparts of the woman artist of feminist disposition. Here – both in the pan-Indian and in Assam – it is more of an elitist endeavour of the predominant hegemonic structure of Indian mainstream art catering to the parameters of galleries, and market economics. However there is no denial of the fact that gender centric art of the women artists addressing the various critical issues of gender identity at the backdrop of an oppressive patriarchy is a very positive development in the dynamics of identity in Assam. However most of the works taken into preview basically address the problematic areas in a generalised way unlike some of the woman artists of pan Indian scene such as Nalini Malini who not only addresses the social maladies inflicting the female subjects in a patriarchy but also weaves up strategies for art historical intervention by creating certain texts of meta-criticism about the representation of woman by artists of former generation from Indian art history discourse like Raja Ravi Varma and the construction and deconstructions of these seminal works by critics like Geeta Kapur. It is interesting to take note of the further meta-critical review of such reflexive praxis of Nalini Malini by Geeta Kapur herself who is also a firm advocate of emancipator gender discourse.

In a seminal water-colour, *Rethinking Raja Ravi Varma* (1989) Nalini Malini sets up a quarrel with the 19th century artist (and with me over the interpretation of his work), and offered a virtual summation of her iconographic serial on women. A supportive mother-figure was shown blessing and metamorphosing youthful bodies and recomposing them in a heraldic sign of female solidarity. The swooping angel pointed at debilitating female personae in the history of images (the musician figures painted by Ravi Varma in his *Galaxy* were shown pushed to the margin of Malani's water colour) and , arms outstretched , proclaimed her protective project on behalf of her young protégés. The melded bodies live, full bottomed, alert, were positioned to take an intrepid stand against the burden of tradition-against representing women outside the frame of history." ("Body as Gesture: Indian Women Artists at Work", p.183-84)

The women artists of Assam working within this frame of gender identity also perhaps need to delve into the issues of representation of women in different sphere of intellectual dialectics in a more meta critical manner like the foregoing instead of weaving nature-gender equations or dreams of liberty from the caged images of a collapsing feminine self in their narration on gender. This however does not undermine the politically reflexive texts of the artists where the voice is bold, poignant, subversive and assertive apart from being aesthetically engaging. In this context one would also draw the attention to the apparent paucity of any work addressing the Gay/Lesbian identity which at present has become a very powerful stream of identity – politics in both the national and international paradigm of art.

In the fourth chapter which is an extension of our central concern and the main area of study we explored the possibilities of art activism in the artistic paradigm in Assam. We could observe through our research that though the issue of identity is very much in circulation/ articulation and intellectual speculation in the entire dialectics of modern/contemporary art in Assam, art activism is yet to go big as it is still in its embryonic state. In the respective genre of art activism with regard to the larger concerns of identity there were only few sporadic endeavours to be seen in the broader collective sphere. However, it is interesting to note that all these initiating endeavours except “Periphery” by Desire-Machine Collectives are suburb centric phenomenon which indeed is commendable development. It was indeed heartening to observe in faraway hill district like Karbi Anglong some glimmer of art activism initiated by Karbi Anglong Fine artists and Craftsmen’s Association (KAFACA) with immense enthusiasm and commitment of artists like Leonard Bey and Satyendra Terang. They have been celebrating International Artists Day on 25th Oct since 2009 by active community participation and public art endeavours among the ethnic tribes of the Karbis taking up issues closely connected to their life and the challenges they are facing with the aggressive modernisation spree in the hilly region such as deforestation, erosion, and dwindling of the traditional thought systems and socio-cultural structures of their ancient tradition.

Of course, in the context of strategic implementation and experimentation in exploring the lingual formulation to find viable options of public or protest art, the

agencies have to still go a long way. As Matteo Pasquinelli points out, “activism, art, marketing share by now the same grammar and work on the same networks”. Thus the “vertical assault on the Code” of the modern avant-gardes and counterculture is progressively replaced by new tactics such as the multiple-use name which are not primarily aimed at undermining power or demystifying the Spectacle, but at affirming the constitution of new forms of subjectivity springing from within the social bio . . .” (**“An Assault on Neurospace (Misguided Directions for)” *Mind the Map! History is Not Given*. Ed. Marina Grzinic and Gunter Heeg. Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006. 229–235. p.234)**)

Now, what will/should be those new tactics in the context of Assam is perhaps the biggest challenge the artists are grappling with. In a place like Assam the artist community is faced with the double challenge of transcending the gap between the art and life as seen and experienced by the greater mass of the society or negotiating the wide gap between the individual sphere of the artist as the creative self and the larger public domain in the first hand where there is a huge lack of art consciousness. As a transgressive genre springing up because of the British colonisation and Westernization in place of the dwindling traditional art forms like manuscript painting, modern art yet has no mass appeal, greater reach or deeper communicative power in the cultural realm of Assam compared to some other creative expressions like literature, theatre or music owing to the complex lingual format or structure of this genre called modern art. Apart from this first challenge the artists are yet to device meaningful interventional strategies to counteract the hegemonic discourses which are anti-liberal- anti-progressive and exploitative and destructive in nature. The pressure of juggling between the international, national and local at most of the time make the scope for negotiation with regard to artistic expressions and language more challenging.

Contemporary art activists often state the intention to ‘disrupt’ the normal flow of things by intervening with art in the public space. Herein one can refer to Christian Scholl’s deliberation about contemporary praxis of art activism in the essay, ‘Bakunin’s Poor Cousins: Engaging Art for Tactical Interventions’ where certain issues and questions with regard to interventional strategies in art are addressed. These are as the following—‘What do Western radicals mean when they speak about *disruption*? How do

we think of the coordination of social relations once we assume that we can disrupt them? What does this tell us about how to conceive of revolutionary change? And, how do these epistemological premises change once we think about the use of art in terms of *confrontation*?' By addressing these questions an attempt was made to sharpen the debate about the tactical use of art interventions for revolutionary street politics and for locating art not merely as an object but as a social relation that potentially transforms the way we know and act in the world. Christian Scholl while talking about the epistemological premises of the dynamics of art activism observes:

The way my considerations are presented might appear a little schematic. It should be clear, however, that the reality of activist art interventions is a little messier than that. I will show that many of them are actually based on both constitutive moments—disruption and confrontation—instead of constructing them as exclusive categories. The reason to disentangle these two moments analytically is to sharpen activists' awareness about their possible choices when using art for interventions in the public space. I will start my considerations by presenting four important premises behind the epistemology of disruption: the temporality of a rupture, the importance of participatory self-production, the orientation toward confusion and subversion and, finally, the will to provide an exemplary gesture. It will become clear how the imagery around disruption has epistemological consequences for the way we think about change. ("Bakunin's Poor Cousins: Engaging Art for Tactical Interventions, Cultural activism, Practices, Dilemmas, and Possibilities", p. 159)

The four premises which Scholl mentions can be examined in the context of the art activist endeavours in Assam too, to explore if such methodical strategy of 'disruption' and 'confrontation' have been implemented in these attempts. Delving critically we could arrive at our observation that the 'moments of disruption' in Schollean term has been experienced and executed to some extent when we consider the interruption/intervention in the public sphere through public art. KAFACA's attempt of public art about deforestation and pollution among the uninitiated ethnic tribes of the Karbis definitely disrupted the normal flow of things, the apathetic torpor by intervening with art in their public space thereby igniting new awareness about the horrific threats to the very existence of mankind. Similarly Debananda Ulup's public art 'Tears of a river' about the threat to the élan - vital of river Brahmaputra by the industrialisation, deforestation and pollution or those instances protest art by several artists like Rajkumar Mazimdar, Dilip Tamuly or Dadul Chaliha against the hoary serial bomb blast on the

‘Black Friday’ of 30th Oct, 2008 by the militant extremists can be termed as attempts for disruption. However, going by the definition of confrontation as an interventional tool for art activism one cannot term these endeavours as acts of confrontation because in such acts the intervening agencies attempt to hit the very enemy – the target source of social anomalies and social maladies or the agents of the anti-thesis/antithetical forces in a given situation. Though there are several instances in the socio-political domain of Assam/North-east where confrontation has been the quintessential character, the activities within the paradigm of art have yet to build up that strategy or sharpen this particular tool. Moreover the art activism as seen in this part of the geographic space is more of fragmented in nature and lacks certain focussed emphasis on any particular issue at hand rather taking up multiple issue together in a loose simplified manner. There are also not enough group or collective endeavours as seen in the western counterparts where several pro-active groups works with a specific objective /issue/problematics/ideology to arrive at a set goal with set agenda. As Emrah Irzik has pointed out:

. . . cultural activism should be conceived within the framework of a dialog with communities in struggle and be focused in its aims and vision, rather than being fragmented and purely critical. I have reaffirmed the place that practices of cultural activism such as culture jamming and its tools such as detournement have in oppositional movements, offer unique advantages as communication strategies. However, by criticizing the general orientation of Adbusters as an example, I have also drawn attention to some of the pitfalls that must be avoided. I have argued that we must have a positive vision and must concentrate on community empowerment to avoid political cynicism, and focus on struggles where we act out of active subject positions. I have tried to present examples of such practices with which I am familiar and to articulate their merits in order to inspire others. If adbusting and detournement are to be our new agit-prop, we must make them relevant to actual movements and struggles. I disagree with Lasn, who states that, to him, the agit-prop in the form of adbusting *is* the movement of the twenty-first century.

The critique of capitalism is not adequately captured in the term “consumption society” and the capitalist system is not a pyramid scheme that can be made to collapse by refusal alone. Our activism will have to move beyond the creation of a generalized disdain for the ills of society, which is hardly in short supply, and focus on empowerment for tangible change. Cultural activism should concentrate on moments of political antagonism where actual differences in outcome are at stake because, after all, activism should not be for the sake of activism itself “. (Emrah Irzik, “A Proposal for Grounded Cultural Activism: Communication Strategies, Adbusters and Social Change”, p.154)

Now extending all these arguments of art activism to the larger frame of identity, we can see that there have been several different positions with regard to the theoretical formulations about art activist strategies. As some of the thinkers like Irzik proposes more focused kind of activism set within definite frame of identity politics be it cultural or racial and community based categories, some thinkers like Anja Kanngieser or Massumi propose a 'Politics of Belongingness' to escape the ghettos of separatist tendencies at the backdrop of present multicultural and hybrid nature of contemporary life-states which might not necessarily be biological in nature but quite often socio-cultural and historical. As Anja Kanngieser argues:

If, as Massumi has proposed, what is required is “a politics of *belonging* instead of a politics of identity, of correlated emergence instead of separate domains of interest attracting each other or colliding in predictable ways [...] a pragmatic politics of the in-between”, then it is clear how the performative encounter might help contribute to such a politics. From its conception as a mode to destabilize the autonomy of art and to intervene in the socio-political realms by the Dadaists, the encounter has been a means through which to forge new relationships between individuals and communities united in a common desire for emancipation and self-determined conditions. The extension of these transformative capacities of the Dada event into the Situationist constructed situation helped to develop ontology counteractive to the alienation plaguing capitalist modes of production/consumption through the revitalization of radical subjectivities. While the Berlin Dadaists were explicit about their adaptation of representational vanguardist relations between the author and her audience, despite all intentions, it was through the constructed situation that it became clear that the specter of a dialectical hierarchy also haunted Situationist organizational tropes. (“Breaking Out of the Specialist “Ghetto”: Performative Encounters as Participatory, Praxis in Radical Politics”, *Thamyris/Intersecting* No. 21, 2010, page 131)

Now proceeding further as we take a holistic overview about the entire dynamics of identity and the construction of its basic binaries in the opposing antithetical position of certain 'self' and 'other', at one point we find ourselves grappling with a question that isn't at certain level the concept of “Others” also becomes a construct?” How far the question of location and identity can be stretched at the present context of a post modernist post global contemporary world? To quote Mary E. John:

Questions of location are becoming increasingly elusive today, historically and theoretically. Whether it is the ambivalent meanings in the term “postcolonial” or the contemporary processes of globalisation (to which Indian nation is a latecomer), the present trend seems marked by an unwillingness to recognise nations as places defined by differences and dominations. Thus for instance, the urban middle class in India today seek to erase their colonial past by claiming to have the same right as anyone else to the images, goods, and lifestyles of “the world.” Meanwhile, many of their emigrant sisters and brothers in countries like United States attempt to compensate for their cultural dislocations by cultivating a variety of fundamentalisms that colludes strangely with those of their counterparts at home.” (*Discrepant Dislocations* p.5).

I had begun my third chapter with the analysis of a visual text ‘My Parents’ by artist Munindra Narayan Bhattacharjee to put across the idea that, the notion of a pure pristine authentic cultural identity can be questioned. In a country like India, the associated polemics of “third world” “post colonial” “peripheral” which constitutes a significant “Other” it’s existential experiences are strangled by nostalgia, tradition and it’s pranks, the opposing pulls of modernity and tradition (which is often imagined and constructed) triggering off a quest for an “authentic” and “original” cultural selfhood. But this quest gets problematized as the experience of modernity/modernism is split and distorted by several modernist aporias. Rashid Areen, (“A New Beginning, Beyond Post Colonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics” the magazine of art culture and theory observes that at certain level within the discourse of “Others” a new post colonial subject is being created ontologically, socially culturally, on the basis of a notion of a post colonial migrant suffering a sense of displacement and loss. As the idea of exile has been a fundamental pillar of post-colonial theory, Rasheed Areen feels that at the contemporary, exile is no longer a loss from which one necessarily suffers like the artist migrants of 1960s and 1970s. But it is now used by many to elicit sympathy, which in turn allows the ruling system to define and construct them as post colonial “Others”. But this does not mean that the concept of post-colonial “Other” is irrelevant. Without being migrants in the etymological or literal sense of the term, artists in specific locale such as Assam face similar sense of loss and displacement within one’s own geographic space due to a quantum transition to modernity. Another question has also been raised as to whether there can really be authentic “Other” in the contemporary, where everything is disseminated by the centripetal forces of globalization and multiculturalism bridging most of the gaps? In today’s world, right from the morning pizza to the late night skin

flicks, global seems so near that it becomes almost impossible to ignore the it's impact on our life and art. Today, the situation is such that, the option to close the window no longer exists. Now what will be the critical reflexivity that a cultural practitioner can take? As K. N. Pannikar (An Agenda for Cultural Action and Other Essays) has emphasized, we must not be blown off our feet by the winds of globalization. The situation is more precarious because globalization at one level acts on the same agenda of cultural homogenization based on power differentials and economic disparities. To refer to Pannikar, "freedom of choice" (which is put forward in support of globalization) becomes an illusion, even if culture operates with an aura of neutrality, as global does not exercise direct political control. The marginalisation of indigenous cultural practices is an inevitable outcome. The marginalisation is however only the beginning, it leads eventually to fossilization.

Considering all these pros and cons of the issue called identity I would like to conclude with an anecdote about the Chamacocos tribe of Latin America as narrated by Ticio Escobar ("Identity and Myth Today" p.150-51)

Ancient Chamacocos obtained the title of palota (chief) when they had collected the necessary identities to lead a nomad horde successfully. A good chief had to be a skilled hunter, a courageous warrior, a convincing speaker and a wise negotiator. Today, the new chiefs need to assume other identities. Barnuo Barras, present palota of the Chamacocos group, speaks five languages besides his own, has several names he has won in the forest, villages and cities and says with great pride that, besides the strict ritual initiation in his community, he has been baptized according to Catholic, Protestant and Mennonite rites. He knows that to maintain his identity and that of his people he must carry today several passports. His people, descendants of ancient nomad hunters, are today mostly farmers and day labourers. The Chamacocos he leads listen to radios and tape-recorders; walk to Bahia to make phone calls and dream of having of having their own motorcycles. But when the night falls, they tell, whispering and staring at the fire, stories that took place before the beginning of time. Then, at an invisible signal, they enter the jungle looking for their deepest identity, erase their face with masks, cover themselves with paint, feathers and cries, shed their identities and become gods and strange birds.

In reality we all are Chamacocos, who dream of our own motor cycles at daytime, as we parade from modern to post modern from rural to urban to global but as the night

descends we all become those strange birds shedding our outer garbs to search for our deepest identity.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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