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Editorial Note

Research is a crucial component in our lives that permeates through the realms of higher education. It aids in the advancement of knowledge, improved pedagogy, the enhancement of institutional reputation, and promotes funding which are crucial to the overall growth of an institution. Within the experience of empirical studies, the researcher, be it student or teacher, finds better scope to hone a wide spectrum of skills. The immense benefits of a consistent and vibrant research environment are the impetus behind the publication of the annual multidisciplinary Dimapur Government College Journal.

Providing a wide platform for the avid scholar, this issue contains twelve papers ranging from topics as diverse as food crops, pre-colonial Naga society, issues of identity, midwives, gender, role of media, different aspects of literature, sexual health of students and the implementation of the NEP 2020 and FYUGP. They have been written by writers across academia. We are confident that readers will find these papers relevant, thought-provoking and practical.

The papers have been thoroughly assessed by qualified reviewers for whose contributions the editorial board remains grateful.

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2025

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3. Evolving Perspectives in North-Eastern Literature: An Analysis of Two Works by Dhruba Hazarika.

Alemtula* & Washitemjen Jamir**

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Abstract:

Dhruba Hazarika occupies the distinctive position of having firsthand experience not only of his own culture but also the Khasi culture due to a childhood spent in Shillong. Such a background presents a writer not only with a wealth of diverse experiences to draw from, but also a broader perspective and deeper understanding, empathy and authenticity in the portrayal of characters and settings.

Dhruba Hazarika's works have been likened to a "breath of fresh air" (Chowdhury, 2021). Chowdhury wrote this in reference to the fact that North-east Indian literature typically reflects the political and social challenges of the region. While not ignoring these issues, Hazarika's works deliberately focus on other existential and philosophical studies, such as the relationship between man and man and between man and nature. Moreover, within a limited body of works, Dhruba Hazarika addresses a variety of themes while also experimenting with various genres within fiction. Hazarika broke new ground in *North-*

eastern literature with the fiction thriller, *A Bowstring Winter* while *Luck*, a collection of short stories delves into the modern individual's struggles of alienation, loneliness and man's condition in relation to the other living creatures in nature. This paper is an analysis of the mentioned two works for the purpose of highlighting Hazarika's versatility as a writer as well as the natural empathy for the struggles and experiences of all living beings that the writer display in his works.

Keywords: North-Eastern Literature, Fiction, Natural World, Alienation, Loneliness.

INTRODUCTION:

Dhruba Hazarika was born in Shillong to Assamese parents. Starting his career as a salesman in Delhi, he later became a lecturer at Jagi Road College, Assam, before joining the Assam civil service in 1983. In 1997, he founded the North East Writers' Forum. He has held various government positions, including Deputy Commissioner of Darrang and roles in the Department of Tourism and Department of Transportation in the Government of Assam. Hazarika's achievements include winning the Katha Award for creative writing in English in 1996 and the DY365 Award for literature in 2014. As a writer, he has produced two novels and a collection of short stories.

1. A Bowstring Winter

Dhruba Hazarika's first novel *A Bowstring Winter* is set in

the picturesque city of Shillong, Meghalaya. Published in the year 2006, it has been described as a story of love, friendship, loyalty and the inherent loneliness of man. With its tightly woven storyline and intense characters, the novel may be categorised as fiction thriller. In a thriller, the plot often involves a high-stakes situation or mystery that propels the story forward with tension, suspense, and unexpected twists and turns and the characters are often stereotypes or archetypes. The main characters of *A Bowstring Winter* are: the handsome gangster-hero, James Kharlukhi, a man with a dark past; the antagonist, Charley, once Kharlukhi's'paralok' but now the leader of a rival gang and his mortal enemy; the femme fatale, Jennifer D'Santos, Kharlukhi's girlfriend who falls in love with the quiet college-teacher John Dhkar, who joins the gang as an unofficial member after saving Kharlukhi's life; and the loyal best friend/mentor, Dor Kharkongor, an ace archer who shares a long history with the hero but who does not realise that his friend is hiding a deadly secret. Secrets are harboured by each of the main characters and this adds to the intensity of the suspense created in the story by other factors such as gang violence, attempted assassinations and manipulation of gambling results. Despite the secrets, the code of 'paralok' remains steadfast: "it was a code of friendship. Like a bowstring: tight. Like an arrow: straight" (page 239). To become a "paralok" one must have the readiness to self-sacrifice. "One must follow a code of conduct which is simple and straight but at the same time demands discipline, asceticism, and strength of character that can stand by the side of a friend when odds are hopelessly against

him. Only a self-sacrificing and dedicating 'paralok' like James Kharlukhi can create a circle of friends ever ready to give him back the same. In an atmosphere of trust, love and sacrifice, one 'paralok' vows to be loyal to another 'paralok' and subsequently they are able to wash out their loneliness in an absolute camaraderie" (Doley. 2021). It is the unbroken code of friendship that is the most enduring thematic element in the novel.

A Bowstring Winter captures the darker, grittier side of Shillong, a world where *teer* is nearly the sole focal point of existence. *Teer* is a form of licensed gambling involving the Khasi traditional sport of archery. It is a world of gangsters, bookies, fixers, and guns and arrows, where violence explodes over territorial issues or when a gang seeks dominance or attempts to manipulate the results of gambling. Archery has ancient roots in the Khasi culture. It is considered as a divine gift from a goddess to the Khasis and the practice of gifting a bow and three arrows to a newborn son to remain with him through his lifetime and to be buried along with him is still alive. In the novel, as the story progresses, archery becomes a symbolic representation of the tribal ethos of honourable combat, one that is fought between individuals observing traditional codes of honour and valour. On the other hand, modern firearms are disdained as tools for the cowardly and indicative of a society in decline through the influence of modern and western cultures. At the end of the story, it is the arrow of Dor Kharkongor which avenges the death of James Kharlukhi. Yet, it is with a sense of nostalgia and a sense of loss that Kharkongor speaks of his days as an ace archer, an acknowledgement that the old ways are

numbered, just as Kharkongor's days are numbered by the illness that he hides from his wife and friends.

A Bowstring Winter is also known as the 'Shillong novel' because the writer captures the essence of this North-eastern town of India in all its sights, sound and aroma. Spanning the winter months of November, December and January, the story follows two distinct plots: one of violence and revenge, and the other of forbidden love. The action unfolds against the backdrop of the deepening coldness of Shillong's winter and the gradual intensification of the coldness reflects the escalating tensions and conflicts within the plot, the wintery landscape serving not only as a physical setting but also as a metaphor for the emotional and psychological landscapes traversed by the characters.

2. Luck

Hazarika's third book is a collection of short stories published in 2009. It is a "small book… (but) …a rewarding read about people discovering something familiar in other creatures at the same time that they discover something unfamiliar in themselves…. What Hazarika does is suggest an almost mystical connection between humans and other species; in some cases, through a flickering, twilight moment when even the most self-absorbed people become aware of the deep relationship between themselves and other denizens of the natural world (Singh.2024).

The book opens with the story titled 'The Hunt', in which a doctor joins a hunting trip soon after losing his wife and baby during childbirth. He was known as the second-best

hunter in the area and his friends had organised the hunt in order to alleviate his grief. He quickly shoots a doe but is horrified to discover that the doe was pregnant and that the babies have been killed along with the mother. Perhaps struck by a profound epiphany of the parallels between the death of the two mothers and their babies, of the shared experiences of loss and grief across species, the doctor cannot stop his tears.

In the title story 'Luck', a bachelor with very little money to spare buys a live pigeon on an impulse. Though he is struck with immediate regret for his purchase, his attempts to keep the pigeon alive and happy brings to his own life the spark that had been extinguished by the relentless grind of survival. In gratitude he names the bird Luck. 'Soul Egret' is a first-person narrative of a clerk whose troubled mind is soothed by a fleeting encounter with an egret late one night. In 'Chicken Fever', a young, melancholic magistrate out on a police raid spies a fat black hen in a haystack. This alters his mood resulting in his decision to save a girl from his own men during the raid.

According to Ruskin Bond, the book reveals Hazarika's "empathy with all creatures great and small". Animals and birds are the catalysts in the stories. They enter the lives of his characters at crucial moments. These contacts with the other living creatures could be fleeting, but it serves to remind that human beings are not alone and that they share the world with an array of creatures equally unique and multi-faceted who are also engaged in a struggle for survival. In their momentary contact with these creatures

of nature, the characters come into contact with the nature of their own selves.

The writer does not ignore the violence and cruelty that is a part of the animal kingdom. In 'Vultures', a man witnessing carrion birds feasting on a carcass cannot reconcile these birds with the 'real' birds like pigeons and sparrows that live on grain and grass. In 'The Leopard', a leopard eating his kill is interrupted by three boys. This experience leaves the boys with a heightened sense of awareness of the primal instinct of survival, the fragility of life and the harsh realities of life in the natural world. The story 'The Gunrunner of Jorabat' portrays human characters that prey on the weak just as the feral cats in the jungle prey on weaker animals. By highlighting the primal instincts and predatory behavior that transcends species boundaries, Hazarika bridges the gap between the human and animal realms, prompting reflection on the interconnectedness of all living beings and challenging conventional notions of hierarchy and the superiority of man over animals. Through his exploration of shared instincts and behaviours, Hazarika invites readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world and recognise the inherent complexity and richness of life beyond human experience.

The stories of *Luck* thus illustrate several fundamental truths about the nature of existence for living beings on earth: mankind's thoughtless cruelty towards animals; the law of survival in the natural world which operates without discrimination or favouritism; and the capacity of nature and its creatures to facilitate healing, restoration and a greater self-understanding for humanity.

Conclusion

North-east literature is a lens through which the unique landscapes and cultural ethos of the region come to life. The connection to home and nature is an essential thematic undercurrent in literature from the region and Dhruba Hazarika's works are no exception. His works capture the essence of home, whether Shillong or Assam, revealing the pull of the familiar, the nostalgia for childhood haunts, and the rhythm of indigenous life. With the breakdown of traditional community structures, his characters are often confronted with the inherent loneliness of modern life, a sense of disconnect from other human beings. Some, like Kharlukhi, pass on without ever acknowledging the trauma of this disconnect, while others find redemption in the companionship of their fellow creatures. An important aspect of Hazarika's discourse lies in his profound comprehension of the intricate relationship between humanity and nature and the intrinsic interdependence between the two entities.

Dhruba Hazarika is regarded as an outstanding voice of India's North-east. His works carry close details of the natural environment against which the drama of human existence unfolds navigating the complexities of human nature, relationships, and the human condition.

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