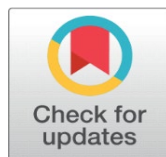
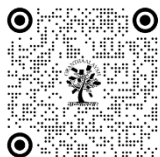


ECHOES OF THE INNER SELF: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ADI, ANGAMI, AO AND KHASI NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the psychological fiction of the Adi, Angami, Ao, and Khasi tribes of Northeast India, analysing how tribal narratives depict mental and emotional life through culturally rooted frameworks. Unlike Western psychological fiction, which emphasizes individual introspection and clinical models, these tribal literatures embed the psyche within myth, ecology, ritual, and ancestral memory. The Adi narratives reflect a psycho-spiritual self-aligned with nature and dreams; Angami fiction foregrounds trauma, war memory, and moral ambivalence; Ao stories reveal spiritual conflict induced by religious conversion; while Khasi literature portrays a matrilineal, myth-infused multiplicity of selfhood. Through comparative analysis, the paper demonstrates how these fictions reimagine psychological experience as a communal, ecological, and spiritual process, thus expanding the scope of literary psychology beyond Western paradigms. By engaging literary texts alongside anthropological insights, the study uncovers indigenous models of emotional life and cognitive dissonance, offering new ways to understand the intersection of culture and mind in tribal storytelling traditions.

Keywords: Northeast India, Adi Tribe, Angami Tribe, Ao Tribe, Khasi Tribe, Psychological Fiction, Tribal Literature, Ancestral Memory, Animism, Trauma, Christian Conversion, Matriliney, Dreams, Spiritual Conflict, Indigenous Narratives, Eco-Psychology, Identity Crisis, Myth and Psyche, Cultural Psychology

1. INTRODUCTION

The psychological fiction emerging from the indigenous communities of Northeast India offers a vital lens through which to examine inner life shaped by unique tribal cosmologies, historical experiences, and cultural transformations. Among these, the Adi, Angami, Ao, and Khasi tribes stand out for their distinct literary traditions that encode emotional, spiritual, and psychological complexities through narrative forms. Their fiction foregrounds the interface between traditional belief systems and modern anxieties, between oral heritage and written introspection, and between ancestral memory and individual identity. This paper explores how psychological fiction from these tribes portrays mental landscapes, not merely through introspection in the Western literary sense, but through myths, dreams, spirituality, ecological consciousness, and social structures. Drawing on both literary texts and anthropological studies, the following sections analyse the psychological motifs unique to each tribe and identify shared themes across their narratives.

2. ADI TRIBE: ANIMISM, MYTH, AND THE INNER SELF

The Adi tribe, inhabiting the Siang region of Arunachal Pradesh, has a deeply rooted animistic belief system anchored in Donyi-Polo—reverence for the Sun (Donyi) and the Moon (Polo). This cosmological foundation provides a framework within which individual and collective psyches operate. The Adi worldview, as encoded in their myths and folk tales, particularly the foundational Abotani narrative, reveals a distinct conceptualization of the psychological self.

2.1. ABOTANI AND THE ORIGINS OF EMOTIONAL CRISIS

The Abotani myth, which chronicles the life of the Adi progenitor, is not merely a cosmogonic tale but also a psychological allegory. Abotani's oscillation between harmony with nature and subsequent alienation mirrors an internal fall from balance. His expulsion from the forest and the resulting hardship represent a loss of spiritual equilibrium, a rupture echoed in the inner lives of characters in modern Adi fiction.

Doyum Daimary's fictionalized retellings and oral narratives show characters haunted by dreams, suffering from inexplicable guilt, and seeking redemption through ritual and reconnection with ancestral land. These motifs are not pathologized in a Western clinical sense but are embedded in the cultural logic of ritual impurity and spiritual imbalance. The psychological struggle is often interpreted as a failure to maintain harmony with nature, spirits, and ancestors—a holistic model of the mind.

2.2. DREAMS AND SPIRIT ENCOUNTERS

In Adi stories, dreams are not unconscious wish-fulfilment but visions that reveal spiritual truths. The protagonist's psychological dilemma is frequently resolved through a dream encounter with an ancestral spirit or animal guide. This form of psychological narrative prioritizes symbolic resolution over rational explanation. It aligns with what Carl Jung described as the archetypal unconscious, yet it is filtered through the Adi cosmological schema.

2.3. THE IMPACT OF MODERNITY

Postcolonial transitions and state-led modernization efforts have further intensified inner conflict. Fiction by contemporary Adi writers often portrays protagonists torn between traditional values and modern aspirations. The internal crisis is not merely cultural but psychological—marked by anxiety, depression, and self-fragmentation. In one story, a young man educated in the city returns to his village only to feel alienated. His insomnia, flashbacks, and disorientation are not addressed medically but through a communal healing ceremony that symbolically reunites him with the spirit world. This suggests a psychospiritual model of mental health.

3. ANGAMI TRIBE: TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAGMENTATION

The Angami Nagas of Nagaland, known for their rich warrior traditions and later their central role in resistance movements, bring a distinct tone to psychological fiction—marked by trauma, existential doubt, and moral conflict. Angami stories are often situated in the aftermath of war, colonization, and Christianization, blending confessional realism with symbolic depth.

3.1. THE BURDEN OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

Easterine Kire's *Mari* and *Bitter Wormwood* present characters haunted by memories of war and violence. In *Mari*, the eponymous protagonist relives the trauma of the 1944 Battle of Kohima. Her psychological state—characterized by nightmares, dissociation, and melancholia—mirrors collective memory. The Angami psyche in fiction is therefore a fractured mirror reflecting both personal pain and historical burden.

Kire's use of interior monologue and narrative fragmentation reflects a consciousness destabilized by violence. These formal strategies parallel the psychological techniques used in modernist literature, yet they serve a different function: to convey trauma within a framework of tribal memory and collective mourning.

3.2. CHRISTIANITY AND GUILT

The Christianization of the Nagas introduced new moral dichotomies that redefined inner life. Sin, confession, and redemption replaced older animistic modes of psychological understanding. In *Bitter Wormwood*, the protagonist Vilie undergoes a spiritual crisis rooted in guilt—both for his past as a revolutionary and for his betrayal of tribal values. His internal dialogue reflects a mind torn between Christian repentance and tribal honour, creating a complex psychological portrait of ambivalence and unresolved emotion.

3.3. IDENTITY AND URBAN DISLOCATION

Urban migration introduces yet another layer of psychological tension. Young Angami characters, especially in recent short fiction, are depicted as dislocated, experiencing identity crisis, and struggling with intergenerational communication gaps. In one story, a college student in Delhi suffers panic attacks after being racially targeted. The narrative links his anxiety to a severance from Angami land and ancestral roots, again privileging a cultural-ecological model of psychology over Western atomism.

4. AO TRIBE: SPIRITUAL CONFLICT AND THE DIVIDED SELF

The Ao Nagas, among the earliest tribes to embrace Christianity, present a distinct case of psychological transformation. Ao fiction reveals a self-divided between animistic past and evangelical present, with internal conflict often revolving around belief, guilt, and ancestral dislocation.

4.1. CONVERSION AND INTERNAL DISSONANCE

Temsula Ao's stories, especially those in *These Hills Called Home*, depict characters haunted by dual allegiances. In "Laburnum for My Head," a woman grapples with terminal illness and finds solace not in church but in a symbolic flowering tree linked to her childhood. Her psychological peace comes not through religious absolution but through reconnection with nature and memory—an implicit critique of imported religiosity.

The tension between inherited myths and Christian morality produces a form of psychological conflict unique to the Ao imagination. Characters are not merely confused; they are ethically torn, often suffering from depression and spiritual paralysis. This is rendered not through medical vocabulary but through symbolic disconnection—from land, language, and dream.

4.2. CONFESSION AND NARRATIVE VOICE

Temsula Ao's use of confessional voice reflects this internal division. Her characters speak in a tone of restraint, guilt, and yearning. This aligns with the psychological mode described by Julia Kristeva as "melancholia"—sadness without an object. Ao characters long for a wholeness they cannot name, fractured by religious conversion and socio-cultural transformation.

4.3. GENDERED PSYCHES AND SUBVERSIVE MEMORY

Female protagonists in Ao fiction often carry the burden of this psychological dissonance. In "The Last Song," a woman remembers forbidden rituals performed by her grandmother. Though now a devout Christian, she finds herself emotionally stirred by those memories. Her psychological conflict is rendered as a maternal haunting, showing how memory operates beneath doctrinal belief. This evokes Freud's theory of the return of the repressed, but within a cultural idiom that foregrounds collective over individual trauma.

5. KHASI TRIBE: MATRILINY, MYTH, AND THE MULTIPLICITY OF SELF

The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya presents a distinct cultural framework rooted in matriliney, oral tradition, and animistic cosmology. These elements create a complex psychological landscape that departs from the patriarchal and linear

models dominant in Western literature. In Khasi fiction, the psychological self is deeply enmeshed with ancestral memory, communal identity, and gendered consciousness.

5.1. MATRILINY AND IDENTITY FORMATION

The matrilineal structure of Khasi society radically reconfigures notions of identity, inheritance, and gender roles. In the stories of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Bijoya Sawian, matriliney is both a source of empowerment and psychological tension. Female protagonists struggle with the burdens of inheritance, duty, and self-expression.

In Nongkynrih's story "The Ancestor's Tale," the protagonist—a modern Khasi woman—experiences anxiety, guilt, and spiritual confusion about her role as Ka Khadduh. Her psychological conflict stems from her simultaneous desire for autonomy and her ancestral obligations. This duality reflects a culturally specific crisis of identity.

5.2. DREAMTIME AND MYTHIC MIND

Khasi fiction integrates dreams and myths as expressions of psychological states. In *Shadow Men* by Bijoya Sawian, dream encounters with ancestors guide the protagonist toward emotional resolution. These are not symbolic dreams in the Freudian sense but spiritual communications that realign the protagonist's moral and psychological path.

5.3. DEATH, ANCESTRY, AND THE COLLECTIVE PSYCHE

Khasi stories depict psychological breakdowns as results of neglecting ancestral rituals. In Nongkynrih's prose, a man who refuses a death ceremony for his aunt begins to hallucinate her presence. His decline is not treated as madness but as ancestral retribution. This shows how Khasi culture interprets mental imbalance as a rupture in cosmic and familial order.

5.4. FEMININE PSYCHE AND SILENT DEFIANCE

In Sawian's "A Family Secret," a daughter reads her mother's diary and uncovers hidden dreams and regrets. This revelation triggers a crisis of identity, leading her to question the roles women are expected to play. The story presents feminine interiority as layered, repressed, yet powerfully expressive through memory and silence.

5.5. ECOLOGY AND EMOTIONAL RESONANCE

Nature in Khasi fiction is often a mirror of psychological states. In "The Pine Tree," the death of a sacred tree causes emotional collapse in the protagonist. This is not simply grief but a symbolic death of identity, memory, and rootedness. Environmental destruction is depicted as psychic devastation.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: INTERSECTING PSYCHES, DIVERGING PATHS

The psychological fiction of the Adi, Angami, Ao, and Khasi tribes reveals a rich tapestry of emotional experiences shaped by distinct cultural frameworks. Despite differences in language, geography, and belief systems, common themes emerge: dislocation, ancestral memory, spiritual crisis, and identity fragmentation.

Adi fiction emphasizes ecological unity, mythic time, and psychospiritual harmony. Angami fiction foregrounds trauma, historical memory, and the moral burden of survival. Ao fiction captures spiritual ambivalence and psychological fracture induced by conversion. Khasi fiction centres on matrilineal tension, ancestral haunting, and ecological grief.

What unites these literatures is their shared resistance to Western individualism. Dreams, spirits, and rituals are not marginal but central to their psychological models. Yet each tribe articulates this differently—through mythic allegory (Adi), narrative fragmentation (Angami), confessional realism (Ao), and symbolic ecology (Khasi). Their fiction collectively expands the boundaries of psychological literature.

7. CONCLUSION

The psychological fiction of the Adi, Angami, Ao, and Khasi tribes of Northeast India reveals a deeply introspective body of literature that redefines conventional boundaries between self and society, mind and myth, individual and ancestry. Rooted in oral traditions yet evolving through modern literary forms, these narratives articulate the inner tensions of tribal communities navigating the pressures of historical trauma, religious transformation, and cultural survival.

Through dreams, inner monologue, ancestral hauntings, and symbolic landscapes, these tribal literatures construct psychological selves that are plural, porous, and culturally embedded. These fictions compel us to expand our understanding of psychology—moving beyond individualism and clinical frameworks toward a culturally grounded, myth-infused, and ecologically attuned model of the human mind.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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