



Quest for Self-Identity in the Modern Indian Writings

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Abstract

There has always been a space in modern Indian literature for the negotiation of questions of belonging and personhood on uneven social spaces. This paper compares two works by writers from the most marginalised sections of Indian society, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* by Temsula Ao (2006) and *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* by Omprakash Valmiki (1997) to examine the literary techniques employed by these two writers to assert individual selfhood in the face of collective identity. The study, based on Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity as becoming and Gayatri Spivak's concept of subaltern subjectivity, posits the idea of "double subaltern selfhood" in which both the Naga tribal subject and the Dalit subject are not only marginalised by the effects of colonial governance, but also, importantly, by the post-independence Indian nation-state itself. The paper suggests that both narratives act as a defiant mode of writing, writing as the last place of the self-determination of the nation's recalcitrant subject. The study also confirms that by comparing fiction with autobiography across genres, marginalised selfhood is shown to share a structure, as well as different methodologies for the reconstruction of the self.

Keywords: self-identity, Dalit autobiography, Northeast Indian fiction, double marginalization, postcolonial identity

1. Introduction

In contemporary Indian literature, the issue of identity and who they can be or can't be is a very sensitive one. The construction of the self in literature is never limited to an aesthetic practice in a country that has been colonized and displaced and has a postcolonial political imagination that champions certain voices. The freedom to express a cohesive identity has been challenged or denied systematically by writers who live at the margins of India's social geography, at the extremes of both the northeast hills and the northern plains, for the tribes and Dalits. In this troubled space, Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) [1] and Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (1997) [2] stand out as individual, impactful works in the contemporary Indian literary canon.

From the perspective of the Naga community, Temsula Ao writes from a place that was swallowed up by the independent India without any meaningful consultation and ruled by exceptional military force. In her short stories (set in the backdrop of the decades-long Naga insurgency and Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) of 1958) [3], she charts the lives of the ordinary people whose lives are being uprooted by political violence, displacement, and ethnic erasure. But the Dalit writer Omprakash Valmiki describes a life restricted by the denial of dignity, education and human recognition, and the denial of humanity. *Joothan* is a bold statement of the subaltern's ability to make himself. *Joothan* is an unyielding record of subaltern self-making in the face of entrenched caste oppression.

Previous studies on *These hills called home* have mostly been on the political aspects of the Naga insurgency, trauma literature and ethnic nationalism [4],[5]. Likewise, it has been treated as a socio-literary document of the atrocities of the castes, which questions the canonical literature of the upper castes [6]-[8]. But there is a glaring gap: a comparative analysis of these texts has yet to be done that would consider them together and look at the inner psychologies, cultures and existences that run through both stories. Moreover, the cross-genre aspect of this comparison (fictional short stories vs personal autobiography) has not been recognized as a fruitful methodological approach to the study of the influence of literary genre on the formation of the author's self-narration.

This paper aims to fill this void by introducing a new, previously unarticulated condition of the literary in *These Hills Called Home* and *Joothan*, one that I term "Double Subaltern Selfhood" (DSS). Ao's fiction is about the layered marginality of all his characters, including Valmiki's autobiographical self, which is suppressed not just by colonial traces, but by the postcolonial, democratic nation-state's constitution invoking the duty to liberate them. Self-governance was promised to the Naga community but they were subjected to military occupation, equality under Articles 15 and 17 was guaranteed to the Dalit community but they continue to face daily dehumanisation in civic and educational institutions. In both instances, the nation-state does a double erasure: it does not just deny material conditions, but it also denies material conditions for the living of a democratic identity.

The research is based on three intersections of framework:

- Stuart Hall's (1990) [9] definition of shifting cultural identity as a historically and memory-mediated relational process;
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) [10] exploration into subaltern speech, which is a way of articulating the breaking of enforced silence as both authors do; and
- In terms of psychic deformation, which Frantz Fanon (1952) [11] discussed, India's internal colonialisms (caste, military governance) echo the processes of racial colonialism.

The main objective of this paper is to prove that the task of narration is active self-construction of a denied social existence of both Ao and Valmiki and the process of writing is a process of self-determination. A secondary objective is to introduce the idea of "double subaltern selfhood" as a starting point for further research into communities doubly marginal to colonial rule and postcolonial aspirations. Finally, this paper opens the conversation of comparison between Northeast Indian literature and Dalit literature, two literary traditions which have been studied separately although they are structurally resonating with each other.

2. Related Work

The literature pertinent to this study falls into four broad categories: critical engagements with Tamsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home*; scholarly readings of *Joothan*, the epic of Omprakash Valmiki; the postcolonial and subaltern theoretical genealogies that have emerged as a result of both; and the new comparative literary studies of the marginalized literary traditions of India.

2.1. Scholarship on Tamsula Ao and *These Hills Called Home*

The scholarship on Tamsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home* usually situates the book in the context of conflict studies and ethnic nationalism, and emphasizes socio-political dimensions in the interpretation of the book instead of probing inner subjectivity. Borkotoki (2014) [12] made a first systematic attempt to look into the politics of resistance of postcolonialism, where he sees the cultural expression of the Naga as a counter-narrative to the state's administrative and military impositions.

Later, historical memory and collective trauma was the prevailing critical lenses. Singha and Dey (2022) [13] adopted the term 'transgenerational transmission' and suggested that such tales as 'The Last Song' and 'An Old Man Remembers' carry the conflict-ridden trauma from one generation to the next, thereby strengthening a sense of ethnic identity. Arora (2019) [5] also made a sophisticated feminist interpretation that the female characters in Ao are active agents of cultural continuity in the spaces of the military.

In more recent times, interventions have been centred on space, gendered-subaltern; and existential precarity. As a group these appraisals are still constrained by an approach which emphasizes the macro-structures of ethnicity and geopolitics over the internal journey towards a unified and self-determined identity of the individual subaltern character.

2.2. Scholarship on Omprakash Valmiki and *Joothan*

The critical reception of Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* has also been mainly as a socio-political document. Mukherjee (2003) [7] has revolutionized the concept of the autobiography, which was introduced by counter-testimony against the upper caste dominance of literature. Building on this, Nayar (2006) [6] explored the text using the lens of cultural trauma and testimonial pedagogy and offered a description of how the narrative is a way of documenting private trauma experienced by the community. This is however a reading that is psychologically sensitive. The interior is, however, in this case, subsumed to a representative 'we'.

Similarly, Mandavkar (2015) [14] has examined *Joothan* in the context of Dalit Writing, a systemic entitlement to civic equality. Scholarship in the last few years has focused on literacy and self making [8] and an interdisciplinary reading was offered by Aryan and Singh (2025) [15]. Of course, these works have established that the critical consensus remains focused on the oppression of caste, metrics of genres and social justice, rather than on the exact phenomenon of the individual's recovery of the story.

2.3. Theoretical Traditions: Postcolonial & Subaltern Frameworks

The current study falls under the four key theoretical interventions. The formulation of Stuart Hall (1990) [9] on 'identity not as a fixed and retrievable origin, but as a process of 'becoming as well as of being', constantly shaped by rupture and contingency, is directly applicable to Ao's characters and the persona of Valmiki, who are all in the process of creating new identities out of the fragments of systemic violence.

Second, there is a productive tension provided by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) [10] skepticism towards subaltern speech, which both engage to develop modes of address that go beyond or complicate the recuperation of hegemony in the sphere of literature.

Third, Frantz Fanon (1952) [11] has pinpointed the phenomenon of "inner expropriation", which describes the internalization of dominant administrative and social categories and their deformation of the subaltern psychic architecture. Last but not least, the notion of "third space" and cultural hybridity from Homi K. Bhabha (1994) [16] offers a language for the liminal, unstable and continuous negotiation of identity that is the hallmark of both texts.

2.4. Comparative and Interdisciplinary Work

The ensuing structural survey shows that writing and Dalit literature research has co-evolved virtually without any intersections. The comparative models usually juxtapose Dalit autobiography with a comparative subaltern text such as the African American subaltern text of testimonio as articulated by Nance (2006) [17]. Meanwhile, geographic clusters like Ao are paired with figures such as Easterine Kire, Mamang Dai etc. As Valmiki is always read with Bama or Sharan Kumar Limbale [18]. The potential of comparison between a geographically marginalized tribal tradition and a socially marginalized Dalit tradition under a common self-identity has not been explored.

2.5. The Research Gaps

There are three gaps in the current work of scholarship. First of all, *These Hills Called Home* has not been considered from the perspective of the interior quest of selfhood as its analytical lens. Second, although Joothan has been compared to many other works of conflict in the Northeast India, it has not been compared to a second literature that can be read comparatively to trace the particular narrative strategies that construct a coherent "I" in the context of systemic erasure. Third, the compound condition known as 'Double Subaltern Selfhood' - in which marginalization by the postcolonial state is a direct recognition of historical exclusions - has not yet been used as a comparative analytical tool. These intersections are the domain of this study, as it shows how these texts together seek to express trauma and the loss of selfhood as a result of being denied selfhood by the nation-state that promised to give it to them in its constitution.

3. Methodology and Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research approach of an interpretive paradigm because the existence of "Double Subaltern Selfhood" (DSS) can't be quantified but must be traced in text. In this methodology, there are three axes: close textual analysis, cross-genre comparative inquiry and theoretical synthesis. What is special about the design is that it juxtaposes Temsula Ao's fictional short stories [1]: *These Hills Called Home* (2006), with the autobiography of Omprakash Valmiki [2]: *Joothan* (1997). The formal differences between fiction and life-writing are not only not obstructions to comparison, but they are also important points of analysis: how the generic form allows or limits the subaltern subject's expression.

3.1. The Original Analytical Framework: Double Subaltern Selfhood

The study proposes the creation of an original analytical category, namely "Double Subaltern Selfhood" (DSS) to analyse Indian writing in modernity. This is a system that tackles a compound subordination which has been centuries old. The first layer is pre-independence subordination, the erasure of Nagas' sovereignty by the British and the denial of Dalits' humanity by the Hindu caste system. The first layer is pre-independence subordination; erasure of Nagas' sovereignty by the British and the denial of Dalits' humanity by the Hindu caste system. The second layer is post independence structural subordination which is manifested in the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA, 1958) [3] being implemented in Nagaland and the continued caste violence despite the ban (Articles 15, 17 and 46) [19]. DSS points to the psychic weight of oppression as a nation-state claims to be a democratic liberator, manifested in four different Identity Rupture Markers (IRMs) that indicate points of destabilisation of the self:

Table 1: The Double Subaltern Selfhood (DSS) Framework and Identity Rupture Markers (IRMs)

IRM Category	Definition	Application in Ao (Fiction)	Application in Valmiki (Autobiography)
(i) State Betrayal	Moments where the post-independence nation-state increased harm on subjects it constitutionally undertook to protect.	Military violence under AFSPA; forced confessions; disappearances ("The Last Song").	Institutional humiliation by state-employed teachers; civic exclusion.
(ii) Internalised Diminishment	Scenes where the subject has absorbed the oppressor's valuation of the self and clash to dislodge it.	Characters adopting the state's administrative lexicon of insurgency and illegitimacy.	Self-assessment against upper-caste academic standards; the <i>joothan</i> as a self-symbol.
(iii) Narrative Self-Assertion	Points where the act of narrating the self becomes the primary vehicle of identity construction.	Storyteller's voice acting as cultural memory-keeper and identity-preserver.	Transition from oral subaltern experience to written Hindi literary text as authorial claim.
(iv) Residual Selfhood	Sites of memory, language, or bodily refusal where an identity irreducible to oppression is preserved.	Naga oral tradition, familial memory, and the forest as an uncolonized landscape.	Poetic imagination; Ambedkar's photograph as an identity icon; literary naming.

3.2. Primary and Secondary Data Sources

3.2.1. Primary Texts

The primary data includes two texts: Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) [1] which has a high number of IRMs (*The Last Song, An Old Man Remembers, The Jungle Major, The Pot Maker, A Terrible Matriarchy*); and Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (trans.). Arun Prabha Mukherjee (2003) [2] deals with chapters that deal with formal education, formal interactions with the schoolmaster Kaliram, encounters with Ambedkarite literature [20] and as a writer.

3.2.2. Secondary and Theoretical Sources

There are three kinds of secondary materials:

Theoretical Corpus: The writings of the authors who laid the foundations of the field of post-colonial studies and subalternity, *Subaltern Studies'* [9]-[11], [16] writings of Gramscian hegemony, and Ambedkar's philosophical works on caste negation [20,21].

Critical Corpus: For this study, taking existing secondary scholarship on Temsula Ao's work, including Arora (2019), Borkotoki (2014), and Singha and Dey (2022)[5,12,13]. For Valmiki's *Joothan*, have used Nayar (2006), Mandavkar (2015), and Brueck (2014) [6,14,22].

Historical Corpus: Primary documents relating to the Naga political question (AFSPA [3] records, 1975 Shillong Accord) and primary documents on constitutional archives on articles 15, 17 and 46 [19].

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is done through five systematic process of documentation in the form of texts:

- **Macro-Structural Mapping:** Mapping the overall text architecture and narrative structure of identity in both texts [1, 2].
- **IRM Documentation:** Using a standardised indexing structure to document each text example of the four IRMs, identifying location, category and narrative content.
- **Close Textual Analysis:** Identifying linguistically dense text sections, and theoretically relevant ones, from the IRM index, that are to be analyzed formally in multiple layers.
- **Cross-Genre Comparative Analysis:** Analysing how the same IRM are presented in each genre, how fiction allows for certain patterns of selfhood to be expressed and how autobiography limits these patterns of selfhood.
- **Theoretical Synthesis:** Testing the empirical adequacy of the DSS concept, in order to systematically refine the analytical frame.

3.4. Tools and procedures for analyzing data

3.4.1. Close Reading as Primary Method

Close reading is employed as a strategy that emphasizes word choice, connotations, rhetorical features (silence, irony, understatement), and narration (point of view). This process is flexible enough to accept changes to previously defined categories with respect to text resistance, and is guided by the DSS framework.

3.4.2. Comparative Method: managing cross-genre analysis

In the comparative procedure, there is a definite focus on formality. Analysing Ao [1] and Valmiki [2], the analysis highlights not only the thematic similarities but also the differences in genre capacities between Ao's fictional texts, whose symbolic, compressed textuality is contrasted with the evidentiary, testifying First Person plural genre capacities of Valmiki's 'autobiography'.

3.4.3. Theoretical Application: Avoiding Mechanical Overlay

To avoid the application of theory mechanically, this study takes dialogic theorization as a technique. The relationship between the DSS framework and the primary texts is two-way; that is, during analysis, the texts can challenge, complicate and enrich the DSS framework.

3.5. Theethical considerations and the positionality

This study assumes that it has ethical responsibilities to the historically marginalised communities whose expressions are often expressible in a diluted way within mainstream academic discourse, and it strives to be analytical and transparent in the sense that it sticks to the facts of the text, but also reflects on itself as a researcher within the interpretative process.

3.6. The scope, boundaries, and limitations

The aim is to restrict the scope to the two main texts [1,2], and is not an attempt to cover the totality of Dalit or Northeast Indian literature. Some methodological issues also arise, such as the formal incommensurability between fictionalized narratives and the lived testimony of the author of an autobiography. Additionally, the study mainly focuses on the English versions of the texts, recognizing the language mediation process in Mukherjee's translation of the Hindi prose of Valmiki.

4. Reading Temsula Ao: The Self Under Occupation

4.1. The Naga Hills as a Landscape of Contested Identity

These Hills Called Home: Stories [1] from a War Zone is a war zone before a line of words is read. These hills called home is an ontological statement that states that topography in Nagaland is an integral part of the Naga Subjectivity. Place is not just a stage setting, it's what you are. Thus, the Indian state's militarization of these hills, its actual spatialization is the space wherein the Naga self is formed and reproduced. The term "war zone" in the subtitle is ontological in form as it suggests a conflict over the right to define the self. This geographical-personal fabric is severed by forced displacement, military detention and by the top-down modernization.

4.2. IRM (i): State Betrayal - The Nation-State as Second Oppressor

State Betrayal is a narrative game that is oblique. Ao does not use a polemical tone, but rather the tone of the everyday in a militarized life: uniformed soldiers in village clearings, arbitrary midnight arrests, institutional silence.

The short-story, "The Last Song" [1] is a good example of this marker. In a politically neutral village of people who are bound to cultural songs, a protagonist is detained under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) [3] on the basis of a structural suspicion which lacks material evidence. Ao highlights the inward violence, the violence meted out on the interior self, the interior self of the musician, the interior self of the song: In the liminal zone of State-interrogations, the structure of the songs becomes meaningless. His selfhood is recognized via legal and institutional categories that the state's administrative categories (loyalist versus insurgent) do not have.

Likewise, with the oral passing down of tribal history by an elder in "An Old Man Remembers", [1] the criminalization of this act is under the state's lens of security. This is ontological violence against the elder's role as keeper of memory, in his community. Under the Double Subaltern Selfhood (DSS) framework, what makes this betrayal "double" is that the post-independence Indian nation-state claimed to liberate Indians from British colonialism in a democratic manner [19], but used the same colonial military logics and practices with a different flag.

4.3. IRM (ii): Internalized Diminishment - Speaking the Oppressor's Language

Internalized Diminishment reveals the partial assimilation of the subaltern subjects by the administration and economy of the state. "The Pot Maker" [1], is an older woman's quiet, subtle re-valuation of her traditional art by a market economy that is imported from elsewhere. Her hands have her organic identity, her economic calculations her devaluation.

Ao identifies this marker as acutely in educated youth that have come back from state schools with a split perspective. They believe their communities are in the "mainland culture" point of view and live in a condition of self-alienation. These characters hang in an in-between place that is not places they are enhanced by but drained from, not part of a state, and not part of an ancestral system.

4.4. IRM (iii): Narrative Self-Assertion - The Storyteller as Identity-Keeper

Narrative Self-Assertion places emphasis on telling stories as the main means of building and safeguarding identity. This works both within the text, as characters maintain their humanity through orality and in the outside, as Ao's authorship restores Naga humanity in the global literary marketplace.

"An Old Man Remembers" is about remembering the past, and in doing so, the elderly narrator helps himself keep the community that he leads from falling into the hands of the state, which it wishes to make a homogenized, manageable people. Omprakash Valmiki does this by telling a true story about himself while Ao does this through fiction. Both modes claim that there is a 'marginalised self' and that that self has the absolute right to be known, by means of the act of writing [10].

4.5. IRM (iv): Residual Selfhood - Forest, Memory, and the Uncolonized Interior

Residual Selfhood marks the exact locations of identity in face of the absolute pressure of double marginalization. This is localized in Ao's text in communal memory, in the form of the oral text, and in the uncolonized natural landscape.

The forest is a physical and symbolic space of no administration in "The Jungle Major." Forest spaces change the characters of spaces surveyed by the state to spaces before the state. The state's control and domination of the village creates a space within the jungle for the character, Etiben, to find her own inner space of selfhood, shaped by AFSPA [3].

5. Reading Omprakash Valmiki: The Self Written Against Erasure

5.1. The Autobiography as Act: Writing as Self-Determination

In contrast to Ao, which circulates identity-work through the fiction, the network of Valmiki's Joothan [2] is an ethically opened-up autobiographical writing in which the writing of the self becomes synonymous with its construction. His text is full of a non-shielded testimonial weight, due to the autobiographical pact.

The title Joothan (food scraps dumped in the trash on upper-caste plates), invades a vocabulary of degradation. Valmiki adopts this symbol of systemic shame as the title of his work, and dispenses with the sentimentality and euphemisms of conventional translation, instead making a tool of caste shame a witness to endurance, a manifestation of Narrative Self-Assertion.

5.2. IRM (i): State Betrayal - The Constitution's Broken Promise

State Betrayal in Joothan [2] is a study of the stark conflict between the democratic ideals of the post-independence Indian Constitution (Article 15, 17 and 46) [19] and the reality of institutionalization of caste. This is a structural betrayal represented by the schoolmaster Kaliram. Kaliram himself is a state official and a government school employee, who implements his authority to maintain caste hierarchy, not democratic equality, in the school. The school, which is supposed to provide literacy education to the children, is now an instrument of untouchability, as Valmiki is made to sweep the school courtyard. The school is supposed to teach children and Vyasa is made to sweep the courtyard, thereby making the school an instrument for producing untouchability. The heart of the DSS framework is the concept that the state is committing to liberating people from their chains by their very existence, which psychically devastates them [19]. As Hall [9] argues, identity is always shaped by the historical contingency of what has been promised.

5.3. IRM (ii): Internalized Diminishment - The Joothan as Self-Symbol

The "necessity" of consumption of Joothan is a mechanism of Internalized Diminishment [2] that brings up the subaltern body as a means of delivering the message of structural worthlessness of the oppressor. By eating the "scrap food", the child absorbs the caste system's attitude that they have the least value among humans. Valmiki refuses to be a mere victim of a contradiction he sees in his own development: the dignified experiences in his own family unit, and the sub-humanity ascribed to him by civic space - echoes Fanon's [11] concept of 'inner expropriation', which he records and sees the psychological cost of repudiating as necessary to not accept the dominant caste's notion of his selfhood.

5.4. IRM (iii): Narrative Self-Assertion - The Passage from Oral to Written Self

In Joothan [2] the most important identity event is the shift from an oral to a printed text-from the subaltern culture to a published text. The arrival of the upper caste dominated Hindi literary arena makes that point. The structural scaffolding for this transition comes into play from the time of Valmiki's reading of B.R. Ambedkar's writings [20,21]. The rational and historical critique of caste by Ambedkar, eliminates the internalized diminishment in favour of the combined witness/analyst authority of the Valmiki's.

5.5. IRM (iv): Residual Selfhood - Poetry, Ambedkar, and the Act of Naming

In Residual Selfhood, Valmiki [2] situates the concept in time-bound instances of self-constitution in creative and political ways. His relationship to poetry makes an inside, impenetrable field of imagination appear, out of reach of economic or social prohibitions from the upper castes. Poems are a site of self-expression within oneself, which are not colonized by the double structure of historical caste hierarchy and postcolonial state failure.

6. Comparative Analysis: The Architecture of Double Subaltern Selfhood

6.1. Structural Parallels: The Shared Grammar of Double Marginalization

The analysis of *These Hills Called Home* [1] and *Joothan* [2] using the Double Subaltern Selfhood (DSS) concept results in a consistent structural grammar that is identifiable across the differences of community, genre and historical moment. This grammar works in four systematic moves which are analogous to this study's Identity Rupture Markers (IRMs).

The deep contrast between the structural promises made by the Indian democratic state [19] and its actual delivery is the promise-betrayal sequence of the first movement. In Ao's naga regions [1], the pledges of recognition of sovereignty and culture were fulfilled by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and military occupation. The constitutional safeguards and the equality in education were broken when a schoolmaster in a state school made Valmiki sweep the school yard. Valmiki's [2] constitutional rights and equality in education [19] were violated when he was ordered to sweep the school ground by a state schoolmaster. The democratic promise made use of against those it purports to defend-still eludes visibility when these texts are examined individually.

The second movement is based on the psychic receding of diminution. When the categories of worth are hegemonically imposed on the external oppression, they become the most corrosive form. Ao's [2] characters are seen from the administrative-militant point of view of the State [3], and the narrator in Valmiki's story [2] notes a nearly-acceptance of degradation of the caste. Both have to traverse the psychological and psychological ordeals of maintaining an internal self-independent of the evaluator's judgement.

The third movement focuses on reclamation through narration, where storytelling and autobiography are the main tools used to build, fix and declaim (make public) oneself that is denigrated from a social existence. Fourth, the presence of the residual self in the long-term suggested that the subaltern self is never fully 'absorbed' by the double marginalization, but is present in 'oral tradition', 'natural spaces' and 'creative imagination', and on which literary self-assertion is built.

6.2. Productive Divergences: What Genre Does to Selfhood

Fiction and autobiography have distinctly different formal characteristics that create different forms of ideological operations in the DSS. In Ao's [1] fiction, the sharing of identity-work with multiple characters produces a collective

identity for the subaltern self. The responsibility for representing the occupied Naga subject is not solely held by one theme or character; rather it is spread amongst many stories and several characters. The collection builds a plural and internally diverse Naga identity; a communal and non-reductive individual image of the naga.

In contrast, Valmiki's autobiography [2] focuses on identity-work in his single, continuous first-person narrator. The structural story is the time frame from childhood to maturity: the continuity of the autobiographical "I" in systemic humiliation underscores a coherent selfhood, which a caste system intended to destroy. Valmiki claims an irreducible Dalit identity, where Ao constructs a communal Naga identity as a variety of fictional lives.

In addition, there are differences between the individual and the political, in terms of genre. The external forces and tensions in the geopolitical field (insurgency, AFSPA), are an impenetrable pressure that shapes the character's interiority. The political is also an internal structure of self-production in Joothan [2], and it is here that the notion of an empowerment vocabulary, provided by the political through Valmiki's interaction with B.R. Ambedkar's philosophy [20,21] and the broader Dalit movement, makes its way for an individual to be empowered in a war zone where the aforementioned individuals are living in isolation.

6.3. Testing the DSS Framework: Validation, Refinement, and Limitation

The framework of the DSS is validated through textual analysis as it is able to name compound forms of postcolonial marginalization. But a significant theoretical development is required for close readings. In the original conception, the concept of historical and state-induced marginalization was understood in a symmetrical way as a form of structural pressures. State-enacted betrayal happens with a unique psychic force, the violation of an egalitarian promise has a more terrible effect than the perpetuation of an unpromised historical oppression.

This study will thus propose a new sub-category of State Betrayal, namely 'Constitutional Betrayal Trauma' (CBT). CBT refers to the particular type of psychic experience which the subject is promised legal, civic protection by a democratic state, but which is then delivered to him by his own state's institutions which violate his protections. This is because CBT puts into sharp relief the unique historical context of Dalit [2] and Nagas [1] in post-independence India wherein the structural erasure is specifically aggravated by the state's apologia of self-liberation.

6.4. Towards a New Map of Indian Literary Marginality

In comparing *These Hills Called Home* [1] and *Joothan* [2] using the lens of the discourse of the Dalit Studies (DSS), the comparative approach can be seen to be a very productive approach to the study of these two literary traditions of the Northeast Indians and the Dalits. This mapping points to a larger research agenda for an analysis of comparative studies of the subaltern, including Dalit writers' autobiography, Kashmiri writers' fiction, Adivasi literature, and other militarized or socially subordinate literature.

This framework extends beyond the local context of ethnic or regional population to explore the issue of seeking a coherent self in a democratic, nation-state [19] that upholds the while administratively ignores marginalised populations of the nation-state. The texts of Ao [1] and Valmiki [2] are part of the same moment; not only do they share a structural solidarity, so do the subjects of their texts since they reject the state-defined identities imposed on them, but also the objects of their texts: the formal construction of literature is the last place in which subaltern self-determination is guaranteed described by Spivak [10].

7. Conclusion

The novelty level of this study is fourfold, across the fields of Corpus, Concept, Methodology and Institutional Critique. It delves into the parallels in the structures and voices of marginalised identities for the first time on the corpus level, comparing the works of Tamsila Ao (Northeast Indian fiction) and Omprakash Valmiki (Hindi Dalit autobiography). Theoretically, the paper captures the Double Subaltern Selfhood (DSS) and its operational effects of 'Identity Rupture Markers' (IRMs) to think about how post-independence state oppression adds on to the historical marginalization experienced by the caste and/or colonized communities. In terms of methodology, it provides a cross-genre matrix which is repeatable and examines identity construction in the two literary genres of fiction and autobiography as a coherent system; it can be used as a model for future minority literature scholarship. Finally, the institutional critique is also a footbridge between literary critique and the history of the constitution of the postcolonial nation-state, showing how the nation-state promises democratic citizenship, which is not accompanied by material conditions. Finally, this work reconfigures something that is often seen as the modern Indian literary archive, bringing together the traditions that are often at odds with one another and that have greater structural similarities.

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