



PAPER CODE : ENG-HC-5026

INTERSECTIONALITY

in

CELEBRATION

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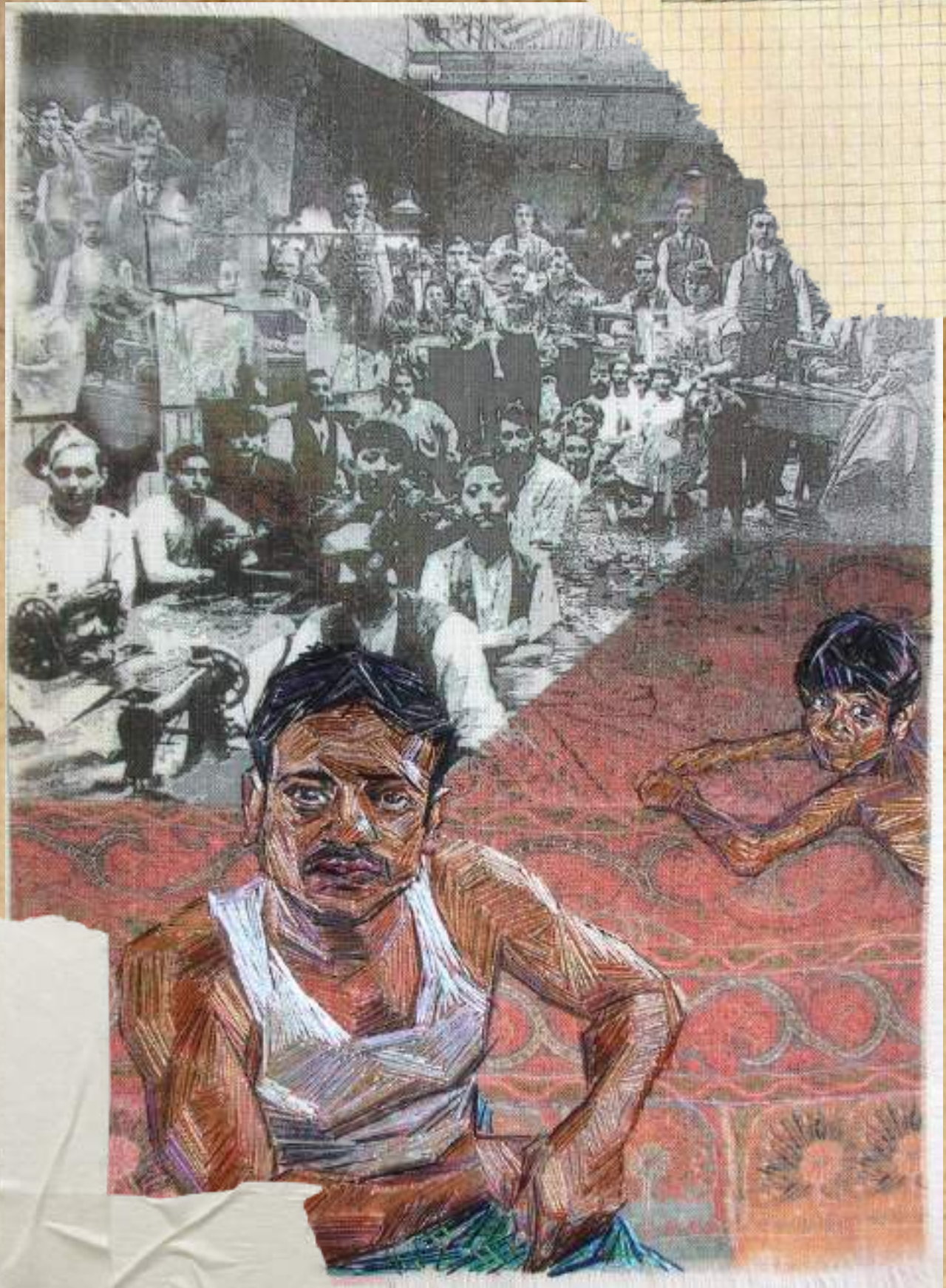
What is Intersectionality?

A dark, moody painting of two figures sitting at a table, possibly in a historical or religious setting. The figures are rendered in a style that suggests a classical or religious context, with one figure appearing to be in a more active or seated position while the other is more passive. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the figures against a dark background.

- ‘Intersectionality’ is a sociological theory first articulated by Professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989, to describe the impact of multiple oppressions experienced by black women.
- It examines how various socially and culturally constructed categories, such as gender, race, class, disability, and other axes of identity, interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels and contribute to systematic social inequality.
- Intersectionality recognises that intersecting and overlapping identities can be both oppressive and empowering.
- It creates both strengths and vulnerabilities in individuals. Some of our identities help us to be resilient and productive members of our communities, but others lead to discrimination, marginalisation, and oppression.

Celebration

(a short summary)



The story “Celebration” follows the life of Kuhila bai, a poor widow who sells fish for a living. It is set during 1980s Assam when the Assam Movement was at its peak and ethnic clashes were a common occurrence. Misfortunes kept coming Kuhila’s way for longer than she could remember. Initially, she had six children but it reduced to five after her eldest son died at the age of ten as a result of high fever. Following her eldest daughter’s marriage the family count kept shrinking little by little as another child suffered an untimely death. With that, one of the two remaining girls was married away while the other who was disabled wasn’t much of a marriage prospect. Then the unfortunate happened, her husband died and all the responsibilities fell on Kuhila’s shoulders.

She took up her husband's trade and started selling fish in the market. The inexperienced fishmonger endured each gruelling day until her youngest son relieved her from her misery. But unbeknownst to Kuhila, the worst was yet to come. Her only remaining son became a victim of a bomb explosion, leaving behind his wife and a young son. Likewise, her regular customer, Dhaneswar Barman, a widower carpenter too lost his son in the agitational movement in the hands of the Assam police. After his son's demise, Barman had withdrawn from society and put all his attention to his craft. On a hot sunny afternoon while Kuhila Bai was on her way to Bengali Para, faint cries of people could be heard from a distance. She deduced that it was another procession led by the youths. Despite the fact that she was worried about encountering the rally, her fear was overshadowed by her need of feeding her family of four. By the time she had entered the gully, she had already succeeded in selling some of her fishes to the first house but the woman that emerged from the second house did not seem as enthusiastic on buying as the first one. Kuhila Bai resonated with that woman as she had lost her younger son in the same bomb explosion as Kuhila Bai's. As she was about to speak, the faraway noise that she had heard earlier was becoming clearer. Both the women stood with anxiousness as the procession approached them. The group was celebrating the signing of the Assam Accord. It drew a contrast to the two women who were still grieving the death of their innocent children and will continue to do so for the remainder of their lives.



What is the Assam Movement?

- The Assam Movement, also known as the Assam Agitation, was a regional socio-political movement that spanned from 1979 to 1985. It was led by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), with the primary objective of detecting and deporting all illegal immigrants, mainly from Bangladesh, who had entered Assam after March 25, 1971.
- Although it started primarily in 1979, the stage was set much earlier. It was revolution of the indigenous people of the state to protect their rights, their homeland against the illegal migrants who were penetrating into the state for years.

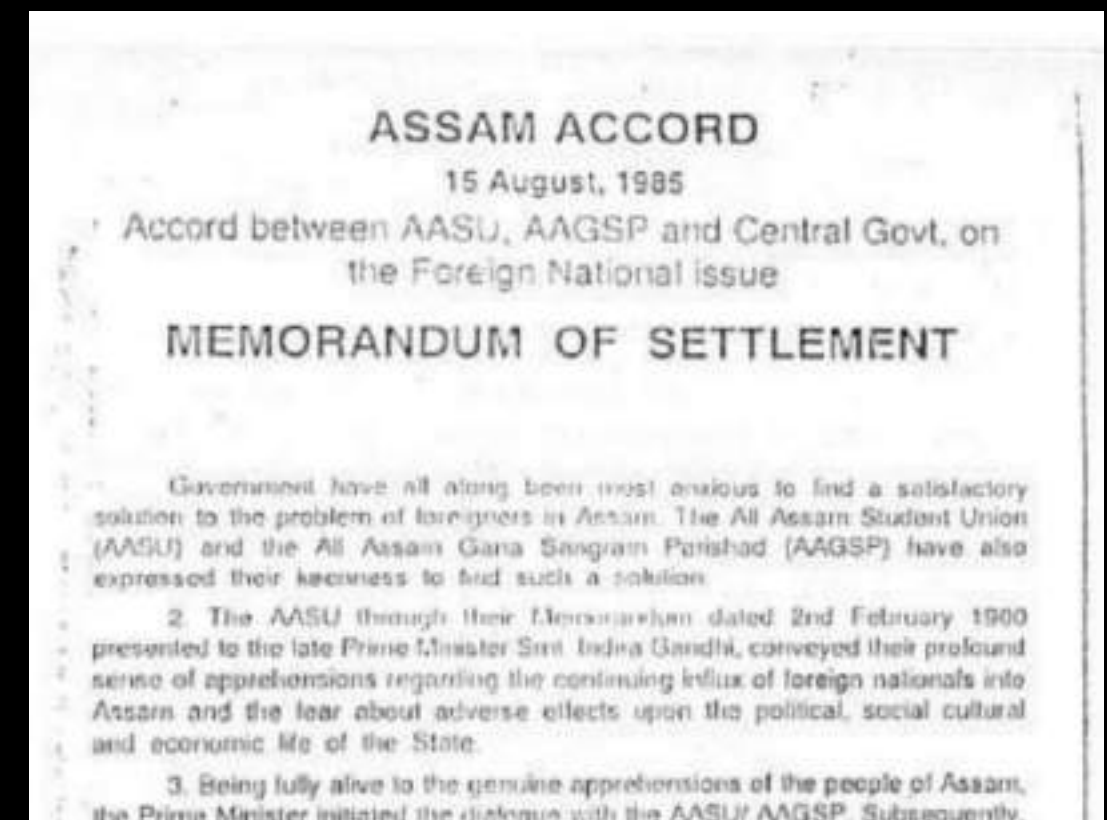


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- It all started when the then Lok Sabha MP from Mangaldai constituency, Hiralal Patwari passed away and which in turn required a by-election to fill his seat. During the process it was noticed that there was sudden massive increase of registered voters. Subsequently, articles in newspapers like the Dainik Asom published news and statistical data over the massive influx of illegal settlers.
- This discovery led to widespread protests, boycotts, and strikes, which severely disrupted daily life in Assam.
- The movement turned violent at times, leading to the loss of lives and property. The movement reached its peak in 1983 with the Nellie massacre, where over 2,000 people, mostly Bengali-speaking Muslims, were killed.



What is the Assam Accord?

- The Assam Accord is an agreement signed in 1985 between the Government of India and the leaders of the Assamese movement in India. It marked the end of 6 years agitation over the entry of Bangladeshi immigrants into the state.
- It aimed to detect and deport all foreigners who had entered Assam after 1971, the year Bangladesh was created.
- The accord agreed to protect the cultural, social, and linguistic identity of the Assamese people. It also agreed to provide constitutional, legislative, and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve, and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.



Gender



The story emphasises a male-centric society where traditional gender roles are enforced, often to the detriment of women like Kuhila. Kuhila is compelled to become a fishmonger out of necessity, not choice, highlighting how women often have limited agency in their professional lives due to societal pressures. The physical strength of her husband and son is emphasised, creating a stark contrast to her struggle with larger fish, symbolising the limitations placed on her due to her gender. The poor woman faces the dual challenge of managing both her

professional duties and domestic responsibilities alone, a common expectation of women in a patriarchal society. The story highlights her traditional feminine traits, while neglecting similar details for male characters, reflects societal stereotypes about women's roles and appearances. Dhaneswar's daughter's unquestioned role as a homemaker further illustrates the entrenched gender stereotypes that dictate women

Class Struggle

In Nirupama Borgohain's short story "Celebration", the issue of class is poignantly evident in the struggles of the narrator's family and Dhaneswar Barman's family, who grapple to make ends meet. During the procession, their already scarce work opportunities dwindle their poverty. The loss of family members further plunges them into despair, leaving them to suffer the harsh consequences of poverty in their daily lives. As members of impoverished families, they toil daily to provide for their loved ones, yet the trauma of losing family members weighs heavily on their minds.

Some key points :

- Financial struggles: Both families have work hard to make ends meet, with limited financial resources.
- Impact of poverty: Poverty affects their daily lives, causing suffering and trauma.
- Loss and grief: The families have experienced loss and grief due to the deaths of loved ones, exacerbating their struggles.
- Class contrast: The story likely highlights the contrast between the poor families and the more affluent families, emphasizing the class divide.

Caste Struggle

The caste struggle is subtly woven in the narrative by the author. She illustrates how caste distinctions impact the interactions between characters and influence their roles and expectations. Nirupama Borgohain being a Marxist focused more on the class disparity but in a country like India where caste discrimination is deeply rooted in our society we can't merely ignore the interlinked nature of caste with other social issues.

Some of the ways the caste struggle is explored in the story are mentioned below:

1. The story highlights the rigid social hierarchy based on caste.
2. Limited Access to Social Mobility
3. Vulnerable to violence.





Minority Struggle

During the 1980s in Assam, people felt very insecure. This fear wasn't just about getting hurt physically; it also affected their minds and emotions. Many people, like Kuhila in the story, lost loved ones during the conflict. This caused them deep emotional pain that couldn't be measured by just counting the number of people who died. Even though the official records said that 606 people died, this number didn't show how deeply the conflict hurt people emotionally and mentally. The conflict created a lot of fear and tension, making everyone in society feel uncertain and scared, no matter what their situation was. When the 'Assam Accord' was signed, it was supposed to bring peace and help things go back to normal. But for parents who had lost their children, this agreement didn't really change anything for them. While society celebrated the end of the conflict, the parents who had lost their children didn't feel any relief. Their lives were still filled with grief, and the celebration didn't make things better for them.



Education

In the story, education is portrayed as a privilege reserved for the affluent, while the underprivileged are denied access to it. The poor Barman's son is forced to attend night school due to his family's dire circumstances, highlighting the struggles of the disadvantaged. Similarly, Kuhila's Bai children are deprived of educational opportunities, as it is not deemed a priority or necessity for them. Moreover, the young children who should be focused on studying and educating themselves are instead entangled in processions, which has a ripple effect on their lives, families, and society as a whole.



Struggles of Differently-abled Women

Disability as a theme is faintly explored particularly in the context of the protagonist's daughter who has a physical disability. Infact it is used as a tool to highlight the vulnerability of Kuhila's situation. This deliberate attempt by the author scarcely highlights the struggle that is faced by those outcast among the outcasts.

Some key points-

1. Poverty further limits Kuhila's daughter to reach her full potential making her even more vulnerable to the society.
2. Social Stigma attached to disability.
3. Financial Impact on the family due to her disability

Conclusion

To sum it up, intersectionality is a major focal point in the story. The protagonist, Kuhila Bai, faces multiple challenges due to her gender, ethnic identity, and economic background. Had she been born into a more privileged position or married into wealth, her life would have been significantly easier. Physical ability and gender play significant parts in the story, as it is repeatedly highlighted that Kuhila lacks the skill and talent in fishing and selling that her late husband possessed. She has no means to compensate for her shortcomings and can only hope that her son will eventually relieve her of the burden. When her son does take over, it is short-lived for due to escalating tensions between the Bengali and Assamese communities, which ultimately lead to his untimely death from a bomb explosion. “Celebration” illustrates a parallel between Kuhila’s son and Barman's son. As one died without a cause and the other died for a cause. The story also addresses the fate of her daughters. Of her three daughters, two are able to marry, while the third who is deaf and mute, remains unmarried.

