

**TOWARDS A CARTOGRAPHIC VISUALIZATION OF INDIAN CITY
NARRATIVES: MAPPING FICTIONAL SHILLONG IN *NAME, PLACE,
ANIMAL, THING* (2020)**

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Since the British withdrawal from South Asia in 1947, the independent India is contesting to integrate its North-East region into the post-colonial nation building project. The attempt was provoked with arms and conflict, which in turn was treated by the nation with the combination of force, monetary inducements, and political reconciliations. India's North-East has been scarred repeatedly by sustained separatist insurgencies, mass agitations, ethnic riots, and heavy-handed state responses resulting in continuous bloodletting (Bhaumik). The region is composed of eight states, and it shares boundaries with six different countries. It is also composed of diverse geographical, ethnic, political and linguistic factors which plays a role in rising violent conflicts across insurgent groups with a mix of socio- political elements attributed to it (Brahmachari). The literature from North-East India reflects themes such as identity, obscure political condition, ethnic clashes across various minority groups and fractured relationships with the Indian nation-state. The city of Shillong – the capital of Meghalaya, one of the eight North-East Indian states -- has its own social, cultural and ethnic ruptures that embodies the spirit of

North-East India. Meghalaya's political history bears the traces of numerous insurgent groups formed in the early 1980s to protect the rights of the three main indigenous groups – *Khasis*, *Jaintias* and *Garos*. The capital – Shillong, has seen violent episodes of ethnic cleansing of non-Khasi (locally called as *dekhas*, means outsiders) and non-Jaintia populations which cost many innocent lives. Even though Meghalaya became a separate state with Shillong as its capital by 1972, there have been episodes of mass riots, ethnic cleansing against minor ethnic groups such as Nepalis, Marwaris, and Bengalis in the last five decades (Brahmachari). Given the history of spatial analysis to shed light on the ruptures and fractures of geocentric fault lines, a study on city of Shillong as a dominant literary trope in the North-East Indian narratives will open up possibilities to enquire the radical aspirations between the city and the region's socio-political scenario. The recent scholarship on city novels paralleled the fluctuations across the urban condition and urban tastes. Probing the spatial dynamics of Shillong in literature reveals the inherent layers of the socio-political setting that are not only energized by implied social distances, but also by a wider variety of literary connotations and underlying meanings. Approaching the ethnic conflicts represented in the literary narratives set in Shillong through a cartographical lens spurs the possibility to further inspect and reveal the socio-spatial elements that are tightly embedded.

This paper attempts to explore the social facets of the city of Shillong portrayed in the novel *Name, Place, Animal, Thing* (2020). The select narrative is a bildungsroman set in between 1990's-2000's written by the Shillong based writer Daribha Lyndem. The novel's plot is set in the politically charged city of Shillong, and it revolves around a girl whose growth and personal identity evolves around the city she lives in. The paper proposes a

cartographical analysis (Reuschel et al.) of the literary space to gain insights of Shillong represented in the select narrative. The select narrative shall be broken down into individual spatial elements through a three-step data model: i.) Data acquisition ii.) Geocoding iii.) Cartographic Visualization. Every single spatial description of the text will be extracted and classified into a data grid with categories (Reuschel and Hurni): Toponym Used, Geographical Entity, Spatial Organization, Location Type, Toponym Attributes, Degree of geographical entity, Spatial Referentiality and Modes of Projection. The data grid categorizes the entire spatial structure of the literary text with the function of every single spatial entity. Visualizing the spatial complexities of the city through the proposed data model enables us to address, measure, and define the dynamics by breaking down the space of the literary fiction into individual spatial objects. It enables us to see the invisible patterns of alienation and displacement of the characters that are hitherto unexplored through a spatial lens. Approaching the select narrative with a data model based cartographical analysis shows how the city of Shillong, over the course of the plot, rises to the level of a protagonist and contributes to measure, negotiate and question the aspects of living.

Keywords: Shillong, Spatial analysis, Literary Cartography, North-East India, Data Visualization.

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