

Marking the Genes in the Blood: Exploring the Problematics of Ethnic Identity in *The Story of Felanee*

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Abstract

Ethnic identity as the primary attribute of a human being and ethnicity as genetically determined, as primordial, is a predominant notion in several nationalist and separatist discourses. An ethno-cultural conception of nationality lays emphasis on a community of believed common descent with a common history to which the members are bound by birth. In recent times ethnic identity has emerged as the primary mobilizing force in the struggle for power and resources especially in third world spaces. *The Story of Felanee*, delineates the problematics of ethnic identity in the backdrop of ethnic conflict in Assam, between the ethnic-Assamese desiring complete dominance or even independence, the Boros claiming a separate state, and Bengalis who belong nowhere. I wish to demonstrate, through an analysis of the text, how the novel challenges the reification of human beings into ethnic subjects. The novel questions the preconceived notion of biological descent and therefore challenges the essentialist underpinnings of the notion of ethnic identity. The concept of ethnic identity, which usually confronts us as uniform and homogenous, is exposed as inconsistent and unstable. I also wish to discuss how ethnicity functions as a discourse of power propagated by dominant groups and therefore counterprimordialist notions and argue in favour of constructivism as the basis of ethnicity. The analysis also reveals how ethnic ideologies construct signifiers of difference to recognise, isolate and identify the other and how the reducing of the human to the non-human, a migrant into a “locust”, facilitates the justification of violence against the ‘other’.

Keywords: ethnicity, identity, primordial, ethnic violence, Assam