**Living between two worlds**

It took me a while to pen down these thoughts. Thoughts that otherwise would have just found some space in the corners of my journal. It took me great courage to write these thoughts out openly and and place them in front of my readers. I feel the need to do this because most often we are invisible minds behind the academic work that we produce. Our lived realities greatly influence our work but very rarely do we put out our reflections to the world. There are myriad reasons for this.

For someone growing up in a frontierland in a Global South country amidst massive inequalities, violence, poverty, gender, caste and class discrimination, even dreaming of applying for higher education seemed far-fetched. I grew up in Assam, a north eastern state of India, a region that has deep colonial continuities with episodes of violence, ranging from state sponsored, communal violence arising out of fear of identity crisis, to insurgency and gross human rights violations. It is a region that has many indigenous communities constantly living in fear of being marginalized and exploited.

The region also has very rigid yet sanitized ways of perpetuating gender discrimination, be it families gifting pieces of fish to neighbors when a son is born, but not at the birth of a girl. Sending boys for higher education to other cities, whereas girls are given very few career choices. Or a groom’s family insulting a bride’s family for being low caste, and the practice of dowry when the bride goes to live with her in-laws.

This region also has one of the highest crimes against women rates in India according to National Crime Records Bureau Survey, 2019[[1]](#footnote-1), dowry deaths are quite high as well. In my 8 years of work in the gender and development space, I have seen extreme cases of sexual and domestic violence, cases where [in-laws burn their daughters-in-law alive](https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2018/05/dear-sister-dont-rest-in-peace-till-we-can-bring-you-justice/) for failing to bring a double door refrigerator as dowry, cases where single unmarried women are called witches and the whole village buries them alive, cases where an elder brother poisons his young unmarried sister because she claims her stake in their ancestral property.

Life on the margins is very hard, crimes against women cases seldom makes it to mainstream media or policy attention. For me too, growing up in such a rigid heteropatriarchal society was hard. I reckon through years of being bullied for my skin color, being sexually molested and abused by uncles and cousins, surviving extremely abusive relationships, being groped at and molested by strangers in public spaces, toxic work environments, I have bred deep insecurities.

Even when I received the news of getting awarded the [Felix Scholarship,](https://www.felixscholarship.org/) awarded to students from developing nations by the Felix Trust, I doubted if I really deserved it or whether it was a mistake. Having had the privilege of getting a scholarship and being able to finally start my research studies, shifting to the UK was a big step for me. Exploring archives and constantly reworking my project that attempts to traverse feminist spaces of resistance in Assam within the border and borderlands space in South Asia, I realized how deep my existential crisis is.

As a woman of color who happens to be a post partition subject of the British Empire, studying a social issue that has colonial legacies with an aim to decolonize the knowledge and produce newer insights from an intersectional feminist episteme driven by grassroots knowledge, whilst doing it in a university in Britain, I constantly question my positioning as a feminist activist from the global south and a de-colonial researcher. Perhaps, once I complete my project, I will be in a better space to find some solace to this crisis. But till then, this identity crisis shall linger on, just like the tea pickers from Jharkhand whose family migrated to Assam during the British colonial period, yet she sings songs of going back home, a space that eludes time and demography.

Bio:

Megha Kashyap is a doctoral scholar at the Centre for Gender Studies in SOAS, University of London. She also works as a Policy Specialist with Action Aid UK and has over 11 years of experience of working on issues of gender and development in the Global South. Her PhD project is an exploration of borders and borderlands in South Asia from feminist perspective. She is a feminist activist and blogger. You can read her blogs at: [Etched by Clouds](https://kashyapmegha8.wordpress.com/)

1. https://www.sentinelassam.com/topheadlines/assam-tops-list-of-crimes-against-women-national-crime-reports-bureau-505867 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)