

**CONTEMPORARY WRITING IN ENGLISH
FROM INDIA'S NORTHEAST :**

**A
STUDY IN ECOPOLITICS**

*(Thesis submitted to the Nagaland University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English)*

By

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2012

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I hereby declare that the thesis entitled ***Contemporary Writing in English from India's Northeast: A Study in Ecopolitics*** is a record of bonafide research done by me under the supervision of Dr. Nigamananda Das, in the Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus during the period of 2009-12 and that it has not been submitted either in full or in part to any other university or institute for the award of any other degree, diploma and title.

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-CERTIFICATE-

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DEBASHIS BARUAH

PREFACE

The northeastern region of India, casually stereotyped and commonly referred to as 'the Northeast', is a geographical area of 2.55 lakh square kilometers that actually comprises eight different states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. It is a meeting place of different tribes and ethnic groups with their varied tradition, culture, religion, language and dialects. An archive of some rare species of flora and fauna, it is also quite rich in biodiversity. It contains more than one-third of the country's total biodiversity and is one of the 18 biodiversity hotspots of the world. With its mountains, hills, rivers, valleys, people, myths, legends, rites and rituals the region is blessed with a unique ecology.

Writing in English from Northeast India is relatively a new literature. This corpus of writing is a recent thing in comparison to the literatures in English from other parts of India. As a discourse of self-expression it took shape casually in the eighties and the nineties of the twentieth century, while Indian provincial writing in English began in Bengal much before Independence. The writers writing at present are the first generation of writers. As such, it is premature to talk of a tradition of Northeast Indian Writing in English at this point of time. But in this relatively short span of time it seems to attain a legitimate and powerful voice by articulating their senses and sentiments and focusing on some of the contemporary core issues. It is a distinctive voice in the realm of Indian Writing in English. Works by some of the writers from this region have been included in the Post-Graduate English syllabus in some Indian universities like Nagaland University, NEHU, Delhi University and IGNOU. But does here the critical attention this corpus of writing that adds a new and

varied dimension to the body of Indian Writing in English enlarging its existing domain end?

Although the eight states of the region hugely differ from each other in tradition, culture, language, and religion, it is possible to locate some common grounds, shared values and concerns of these writers. Issues like insurgency, identity crisis, search for roots, self-assertion, claim for a political space, and also an ecological concern in their writing unite them on a common platform. Their writing manifests different aspects of the entire ecosystem of the region. They celebrate the ecological glory of Northeast with a keen ecological awareness.

This thesis tries to examine the aspects of ecopolitics entailing ecomysticism, ecofeminism and the like in the works of select writers who can be said to be representative among those writers who write in English, or whose works have been translated into English. From an apparent reading it seems that varied aspects of ecopolitics are available in the works of these writers. The thesis makes an attempt to study the extent of availability and the validity thereof.

The first chapter presents an overview of writing in English and in translations as well from Northeast India. It also builds the theoretical framework required for the study.

Chapter two deals with prose writing, both fiction and non-fiction. A few novels, short stories as well as non-fictional work by some select writers from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are studied examining the matrix of ecology, ecofeminism and mysticism.

Chapter three deals with plays. The states of Northeast India have plays written in their vernacular languages. Some of these states have rich tradition of theatre that dates back to centuries. But a few representative work of some of the

Manipuri and Assamese playwrights have been translated into English. This chapter tries to explore the ecological and ecomystical world in select plays by Manipuri and Assamese playwrights.

Chapter four discusses the myriad manifestations of ecology in contemporary poetry. Some of the works of select poets from the eight states are examined using the tenets of ecocriticism. It tries to study the extent of availability of varied aspects of ecopolitics in poetry.

The fifth chapter looks into contemporary writing in English from Northeast India as a postcolonial discourse. The term ‘Postcolonial’ is a portmanteau word derived from the combination of the words ‘postcolonial’ and ‘ecological’. It is a theorizing of the ecological and postcolonial concerns to address the issues of ecocide derived from the current contexts of the marginalization of Nature, environmental racism etc. In both colonial and postcolonial times there have been several forms of resistance in Northeast India to safeguard the erosion of its biodiversity. This chapter tries to look into the reflection of such resistance in literatures of this region.

The concluding sixth chapter sums up the findings of the previous chapters. It tries to define contemporary writing in English from Northeast India from an ecological viewpoint.

It is seen from this study that these writers seem to use ecology, in a conscious way, as a tool for acquiring an identity — an identity which is unique, legitimate and a powerful one. It is felt that the unique ecology of the region has been pivotal in shaping an aesthetic sensibility in these writers. Contemporary writing in English from India’s Northeast present before us a myriad, mesmerizing world of nature, and, at the same time, echo a conscious voice of resistance as well as assertion. It negotiates varied issues simultaneously — it fights against the stereotypical construct

'Northeast', asserts an identity, and tries to create a 'space' and a 'place' for itself amidst political and cultural hegemony. This study shows that the ecology of the region is one of their strongest weapons for all such negotiations. Their writing presents a critique of the colonial perspective of, and the colonial attitude towards, the environment. It is also a literature of resistance against what can be termed as neo-colonialism. Because of this consciousness of the ecological degradation and efforts of propagating ecological preservation in writing, this body of ecological writing can very well be said canonical.

It is seen from this study of both creative and critical works of the contemporary prose writers, playwrights and the poets from Northeast India that writing in English from this region has a world of possibilities. This study finds that this immensely rich body of writing has the potential of creating a tradition of its own. Contemporary writing in English from India's Northeast will always be relevant and will remain of great significance in re/inventing the Northeast India as well as India as a whole.

With these notes, it is hoped that this thesis would add a new dimension to the existing scholarship on this subject.

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DEBASHIS BARUAH

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INTRODUCTION

The northeastern region of India, casually stereotyped and commonly referred to as ‘the Northeast’ is a geographical area of 2.55 lakh square kilometers that actually comprises eight different states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura, which have huge cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or religious differences among them. The region covers 7.8 per cent of the country’s total area, shares only 2 per cent of its boundary with India, while the remaining 98 per cent is shared with the international borders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China and Nepal. It is linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor which is referred to as the Chicken’s Neck’.

The region is a melting pot where the brown and the yellow races meet, where the tradition and culture of different tribes and ethnic groups mingle, and where there is a rich storehouse of different languages and dialects of these multi-ethnic people. There are tribes still following traditional ‘animistic’ faiths those are ‘woven around forest ecology’ and profess ‘co-existence with the natural world’ (Dai 2006: xi), even though religions like Hinduism (particularly in the states of Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim), Christianity (in the hills of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland), Buddhism (in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim) and Islam (particularly in the state of Assam and other parts of the region) have made a dominant presence.

An immensely rich archive of some rare species of flora and fauna, the Northeast India is quite rich in biodiversity. The region contains more than one-third of the country’s total biodiversity. It is considered one of the 18 biodiversity hotspots of the world having about 8000 varieties of flowering plants, 700 varieties of orchids, 58 varieties of bamboos, 64 species of citrus, 28 species of conifers, 500 varieties of

mosses, 700 varieties of ferns and 728 lichen species. The region has also rich faunal diversity. An estimated 3624 species of insects, 50 molluscs, 236 fishes, 64 amphibians, 137 reptiles, 541 birds and 160 mammalian species have been identified so far (Barik et al, 2000). The following figures highlight the biodiversity significance of the region:

- Most of the NE states have more than 60% of their geographical area under forest cover.
- 51 forest types are found in the region broadly classified into six major forest types, viz., tropical moist deciduous forests, tropical semi evergreen forests, tropical wet evergreen forests, subtropical forests, temperate forests and alpine forests.
- Out of the 9 important vegetation types of India, 6 are found in the NE region.
- According to the India Red Data Book published by the Botanical Survey of India in 2003, 10% of the total flowering plants in the country are endangered. Of the 1500 endangered floral species, 800 are reported from NE India. (Hegde 2000:2)

The region with its mountains, hills, rivers, valleys, people, myths, legends, rites and rituals is blessed with a unique ecology. It is a part of the great tropical rainforest that spreads out from the foothills of the Himalayas to the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula and the mouth of the Mekong River.

The Northeast India is also the abode of about 225 tribes, out of 450 in the country (Myers 2000:853). Almost all these tribes have rich oral traditions. The oral

history of these tribes “tells of ancestors from the shadowy past, from mountains steeped in mist and romance, from lands far away, of snake gods and princesses, epic battles and great warriors”(Hazarika1994: xviii). Besides having rich oral literatures, some states like Assam and Manipur in particular, have literary histories that date back to centuries. Writing in English from Northeast as a discourse of self-expression took shape casually in the eighties and the nineties of the twentieth century. The writers writing in English from this region at present are the first generation of writers. They already have attained a legitimate as well as a powerful voice by articulating their senses and sentiments and by focusing on some of the core issues of the region. The ethos and milieu of their respective communities are some of the dominant preoccupations of these multi-ethnic writers. “The writer from the Northeast differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way. While it may not make him a better writer, living with the menace of the gun he cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and woolly aesthetics but must perforce master the art of witness. As a natural aftermath to the above, our society has been reduced to a mute witness to the banality of corruption and the banality of terror...We think the task that literature of the Northeast must address is what Albert Camus called ‘the double challenge of truth and liberty’.(Nongkynrih & Ngangom 2003: ix-x). Aruni Kashyap, an Assamese writer writing in English, while commenting on the legitimacy and uniqueness of this rich body of writing, says (as mentioned by Utpal Borpujari in an article), “Due to the troubled relationship with the narrative of the Indian state which north-east shares with India, the writers have something very different to say than the other Indian-English authors. Apart from having different sensibilities, it’s the political nature of these writings which make them different. The fraught relationship most of the North-eastern states have with the centre often gets reflected in the

literature, be it in English, Assamese or Bodo. The fact that literary circles have been discussing ‘literature from NE’ as a different body of work, attests that it is in developing in opposition to Indian-English writing, which probably mirrors the fraught relationship NE has with Delhi” (Borpujari 2011: <http://www.timescrest.com>). Tilottoma Misra says about the nature of writing in English from Northeast India in *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays*, “An intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiation with ‘other’ cultures is a recurrent feature of the seven north-eastern states. Each small community or linguistic group has responded through its oral or written communication to the encounters with the majoritarian cultures from either mainland India or from outside the borders of the country, in its own distinctive manner.” (Misra 2011: 3)

Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama, who is a Professor of English literature, a writer, translator and a social activist from Mizoram, seems to be quite right in her observation when she opines:

The term “North East” is a geographical, linguistic and ethnic stereotyping that clubs together these often misconstrued, misjudged and misunderstood eight states — ... in the northeastern geographical periphery of the Indian union ... The northeastern region, which accounts for 7.8 per cent of the total land space of the country, is different from the rest of India in almost every way — be it in terms of culture, tradition, language and ethnicity or of history, physicality, cuisine, dress and indeed, the very cosmology and ethos of life of the people here. This diversity is further reflected within the region itself — each state, and indeed, even each small region within the states, has

its own distinct tradition, lore, music, myths, language and even cuisine, though separated by only a few kilometers in physical terms.

(Zama 2004: 7-8)

Since the eight states of the region hugely differ from each other in tradition, culture, language, and religion, it might seem to be an injustice to homogenize literatures from this region. But in spite of this diversity, it is possible to locate some common grounds, some shared values and concerns of these writers. Identity crisis, a sense of alienation is some of the dominant features of contemporary politics in the Northeast. Racial autonomy, cultural and linguistic conflicts and the problem of insurgency have been ravaging the region. These are some of the recurrent themes in these writers that bind them in one single thread. Besides issues like identity crisis, search for roots, self-assertion, or claims for a political space, it is the ecology of the region, and an ecological concern that predominantly seem to unite these multi-ethnic writers in a common platform. The works of the writers in English from India's Northeast have many different aspects of the entire ecosystem of the region. The writers celebrate the ecological glory of Northeast with a keen ecological awareness. Although ethnicity is their chief concern as they hail from various ethnic groups, mountains, hills, valleys, people, myths legends, tribal rites, mystic as well aesthetic sensibilities, communal violence, insurgency are also some of the dominant and recurring themes in their works. They seem to use ecology, in a conscious way, as a tool for acquiring an identity - an identity which is unique, legitimate and a powerful one. It is felt that the unique ecology of the region has been pivotal in shaping an aesthetic sensibility of these writers.

Mamang Dai, Yumlam Tana (Arunachal Pradesh), Navakanta Baruah, Nilamani Phookan, Hiren Bhattacharya, Harekrishna Deka, Bhupati Das, Lakshahira Das, Dayananda Pathak, Umakanta Sarma, Rupanjali Baruah (Assam), Robin S Ngangom, R. K. Madhubir, R. K. Bhubonsana, Kunjarani Longjam Chanu, Yumlembam Ibomcha, Thangjam Ibopishak, Raghu Leishangthem, Arambam Ongbi Memchoubi, Saratchand Thiyam, Ilabanta Yumnam, Gambhini Devi (Manipur), Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Desmond L Kharmawphlang, Tarun Bhartiya, Pijush Dhar, Ananya S Guha, Anjum Hasan, Paul Lyngdoh, Donboklang Ryntathiang, Almond D Syiem, Esther Siyem, Bevan L Swer, Indari Siyem Warjri ((Meghalaya), Mona Zote, Cherrie L. Chhangte, Lalrinmawii Khiangte, L. Biakliana, H. Ramdinthari, (Mizoram), Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, Easterine Iralu, Nini Lungalang (Nagaland), Rajendra Bhandari, Guru T. Ladakhi (Sikkim), Bhaskar Roy Barman, Niranjan Chakma, Jogamaya Chakma, Bijoy Kumar Debbarma, Narendra Debbarma, Nandakumar Debbarma, Kalyanbrata Chakraborti, Krittibas Chakraborty, Swapan Sengupta, Sudhanya Tripura, Sefali Debbarma, Chandra Kanta Murasingh, Pijush Routh and Gambhini Sorokkhaibam (Tripura) are some of the representative poets whose work have been enriching the multi-ethnic Indian Poetry in English from Northeast either in original writing or through translations.

Among the major prose writers, whose writings evoke myriad views of ecology and its interventions in contemporary cultural life are Mamang Dai, Yeshe Dorji Thongchi (Arunachal Pradesh), Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, Hem Barua, Indira Goswami, Arup Kumar Dutta, Mitra Phukan, Sanjoy Hazarika, Dhruva Hazarika, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Sanjib Baruah (Assam), Arabam Ongbi Memchoubi, Thingnam Kishan Singh, Tayenjam Bijoykumar Singh, Pradip

Phanjoubam, Yumlembam Ibomcha (Manipur), Patricia Mukhim, Siddartha Deb, Anjum Hasan (Meghalaya), Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama, Margaret Lalmuanpuii Pachuau, Mona Zote (Mizoram), Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu, Charles Chasie, Anungla Aier (Nagaland).

The plays of Ratan Thiyam, G. C. Tongbra, Athokpam Tomchau, Arambam Somorendra, Wairokpam Kamni Singh (Manipur), Ganesh Gogoi and Arun Sarma (Assam), which are translated into English have profusely exposed a canonical writing with ecological themes. The basic Indian ethos teaches to be compassionate to nature and to live in harmony with it. In Indian culture there has been a tradition of living with nature in a relationship of mutual dependence. The people of Northeast India too feel an affinity with nature; they believe in a harmonious relationship with nature. The unique ecosystem of the region plays a pivotal role in shaping such a mindset of the people.

Writing in English from Northeast, although has attained a remarkable stature, seems to be deprived of proper critical attention in the national level. In the histories of Indian literature in English written by K. R. S. Iyengar and M. K. Naik, the works of the writers of this region have not been mentioned. K. R. S. Iyengar mentions only Praphulladutta Goswami's *Bihu Songs of Assam* (Iyengar 1987: 642). M. K. Naik in his *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982) makes no mention of any work by a writer from Northeast India. Another book by him (with Shyamala A. Narayan) entitled *Indian English Literature: 1980-2000* (2001) mentions only two writers from India's Northeast. The present work intends to critically examine writing in English

from this region and to make an attempt to determine the position of the writers in the sphere of Indian Writing in English and their canon of ecopolitics. It is felt that the unique ecology of the region has been pivotal in shaping the aesthetic sensibilities of these writers. So it is hoped that studying their writing from an ecological perspective may even help in understanding this colourful, mesmerizing land called the Northeast India— a land, which is a great geographical as well as a psychological entity.

The work tries to examine the aspects of ecopolitics entailing ecomysticism, ecofeminism and the like in the works of select writers, who in my opinion, are said to be representative among those writers who write in English, or whose works have been translated into English. From an apparent reading it seems that varied aspects of ecopolitics are available in the works of these writers. The work makes an attempt to study the extent of availability and the validity thereof. This is mainly a text-based reading along with the use of the tenets of ecopolitics, ecomysticism and ecofeminism.

ASPECTS OF ECOPOLITICS

I

Ecology and Ecocriticism

Ecology:

Ecology is the scientific study of the relationship and interdependence between each and every life form of the environment. The word 'Ecology' has been

derived from the Greek words *oikos* and *logos* meaning ‘household’ and ‘knowledge’ respectively. The term ‘Ecology’ was coined by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866, when he defined it as the science of the relationship of the organisms to the environment. It has developed as a reaction against the practice of isolating creatures and studying them in laboratories. Ecology, in its present connotation, is an umbrella term that absorbs in it “Linnean taxonomy, quantified Darwinian evolution, and revolutionized Mendelian genetics, creating what amounts to a vernacular and democratic science. Open to the common, everyday discourse of species, ecology ranged freely across many fields, dipping into evolution, behavior, and physiology...” (Howarth1996:73).

Ecological thinking has been there for a long time, but ecology as a principle has developed gradually. The word ‘Ecology’ is very often used in connection with the ‘green’ movement. There are a number of philosophical concepts based on ecological principles. “These philosophies use the word ‘ecology’ in a much looser sense than the scientific. This practice—somewhere between seeing culture as manifestation of ecology and using ecology as metaphor for culture—is common in ecocriticism” (Kerridge 2006: 536). A look into some of the ecological philosophies brings to light this ecology-culture relationship.

Deep Ecology:

Emerging from the sense of a global ecological crisis Deep Ecology calls for a profound transformation in the traditional ecological paradigm entailing new

metaphysical, epistemological, religious, psychological, sociopolitical and ethical principles. “It calls for a new ontology (science of being), a new epistemology (way of knowing), a new psychology (idea of self), and a new metaphysics (assumptions about the world)” (Merchant 2005: 92). The basic tenet of Deep Ecology advocates the same right for the living environment as enjoyed by humanity to live, grow, flourish and develop. As a part of the intricate web of the entire ecosystem, the development of humanity is possible only through a peaceful co-existence with each and every organism. Such self-realization in the individual level would provide an ecocentric perspective to human activities. This helps in expanding the human self where the gap between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ decreases. Deep Ecology opposes the anthropocentric idea of ‘development’ at the cost of environmental degradation. Such developments have already posed a great threat to the ecology of our planet. To present a critique of the anthropocentric concept of development, which is primarily a European concept, Deep Ecologists refer to the spiritual and philosophical values imbibed in the Native American, Buddhist, Jain or Hindu traditions. Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher, who is said to be the pioneer of this movement, presenting a critique of the Judeo-Christian tradition opines: “The arrogance of stewardship consists in the idea of superiority which underlines the thought that we exist to watch over nature like a highly respected middleman between the Creator and Creation” (Naess1989:187). Deep Ecological standpoint does not approve such a position.

Deep Ecology opposes the attitude of human beings of treating the earth as a resource to be exploited for their welfare and so called development. As human beings are just a part of the ecological web like any other creature, and not masters, they cannot claim superiority to any other object in the ecosystem. Instead, it is

always the system that is superior, greater and of more importance. So it is necessary to honour, preserve and maintain the system for a holistic development. This responsibility primarily lies on human beings. Deep Ecology advocates for such an ecosophy, with the knowledge of which human beings can shoulder their responsibility in this regard.

Proponents of Deep Ecology offer an eight-tier platform to elucidate the fundamental principles of this philosophy. They are:

- The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have intrinsic values in themselves. These values are interdependent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
- Richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
- Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
- The flourishing of human life and culture is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
- Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
- Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
- The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

- Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes. (Devall & Sessions 1985:70)

Apart from these, Arne Naess has set the following principles for Deep Ecology:

1. Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational, total- field image.
2. Biospherical egalitarianism.
3. Principles of diversity and of symbiosis.
4. Anti-class posture.
5. Fight against pollution and resource depletion.
6. Complexity, not complication.
7. Local autonomy and decentralization. (ibidem 92)

The first principle views humans as an entity in relation to nature, and not above it. It draws a metaphysics of humans and nature in a relationship like cosmic/ ecological, I/ thou, or person/ planet. It calls for a democratic set up where everything in the ecological web has equal importance. The second principle calls for a close partnership among all forms of life. It envisages an ecocentric earth rather than an anthropocentric one where everything has equal rights, where everyone lives and let others live. The third principle speaks of diversity and symbiosis. Diversity brings new modes of life and it is through symbiosis co-existence and co-operation is possible. This principle offers a holistic worldview and sets a new ecological paradigm where the intrinsic value and beauty of all beings are recognized. Anti-class posture, the fourth principle, speaks of the exploitation and suppression of some groups by some other groups of the society. This exploitation and suppression have

adverse effects on both the groups as they both live in the same society and in a broader sense, are parts of the same system. While fighting against pollution and resource depletion, the fifth principle of this movement, sometimes seems to have a stand which is detrimental to their purpose. In focusing more on the issues of pollution and resource depletion, there is a chance of increasing class differences. Therefore, awareness is very much necessary. The sixth principle favours division of labour. To think of the whole ecosystem is, without any doubt, a complex idea in itself. To understand, observe and analyze this complexity a newer and deeper sensitivity is required. The seventh principle speaks of decentralization of power in order to obtain an ecological equilibrium. Local autonomy can reduce the amount of energy consumption.

Ramchandra Guha speaks of four tenets of Deep Ecology. First, Deep Ecology argues that the environmental movement must shift from an anthropocentric to a biocentric perspective. Secondly, it focuses on the preservation of wilderness; thirdly, it has a universal significance as it was practiced also in the ancient non-Western spiritual traditions, and the fourth tenet sees itself as the spiritual, philosophical and political vanguard of world environmentalism. (Guha1994:282)

Shallow Ecology:

Shallow Ecology fights against pollution and resource depletion. Its central concern is the health and affluence of the people in the developed countries. The Shallow Ecology movement tends to talk only about resources for humans, whereas

Deep Ecology talks about resources for each species. Practitioners of Shallow Ecology look at the narrower problems of population growth, environmental pollution, and resource depletion from the viewpoint of science and human affairs. Such views may seem to be limited as the basis of such views is anthropocentric assumptions that seem to fail to infuse nature with an intrinsic value of its own. Moreover, as it sees the entity of the natural world to exist mainly to serve the material needs of human species; it seems to fail in providing a framework for the sustainable future of all life on earth.

It advocates preservation of environment for the benefit of people, especially the people of the developed countries. Unlike Deep Ecology it places human beings at the centre of any ecological discourse and hence it puts utmost importance on their wellbeing. Shallow Ecology believes that saving the world is necessary only because of the reason that it sustains human life. Any object in the ecosystem is to be preserved only if it is of obvious value to humans. For example, preservation of wilderness is necessary as it is a resource for the human world, or the rainforests are to be preserved as they provide much needed oxygen to human beings. Considering these notions it seems that Shallow Ecology is self-centered in comparison to Deep Ecology and can be labeled as anthropocentric.

Social Ecology:

Social Ecology is the science that deals with the social and natural relationship in an ecosystem. As said by E. A. Gutkind, “The goal of Social Ecology is wholeness

and not mere adding together of innumerable details collected at random and interpreted subjectively and insufficiently” (Bookchin 1994: 155-156). It focuses on the relations of production and the hegemony of the state in reproducing those relations. It has primarily an anthropocentric ethic which is modified by ecological and dialectical science. It envisages a world in which the fundamental human needs are fulfilled through an environmentally sustainable economic restructuring. It advocates a science with social values. It seeks a total transformation on the economic basis. It supports an ecologically-based development policy that uses resources in a sustainable way.

Developed by Murray Bookchin in the 1960s this philosophy holds the view that the present ecological crisis originates from the hierarchical political and social systems which is essentially dominating in nature. So, without dealing with the problems within the society it is impossible to even realize the present ecological crisis, not to speak about its solution. Social Ecology argues that it should be kept in mind that the present ecological crisis is not only due to natural calamities, and catastrophes created by human beings, but also has other important aspects like political, economic, social, cultural, ethnic or gender conflicts.

In the framework of Social Ecology “ the very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human” (Bookchin2005:65). This pace of this domination, which is the product of the society, accelerates under capitalism. In the words of Bookchin:

The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man...but it was not until organic community relation...dissolved into market relationships that the planet itself was reduced to a resource for exploitation. This centuries-long tendency finds its most exacerbating development in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. Just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into a commodity, a resource to be manufactured and merchandised wantonly...The plundering of the human spirit by the market place is paralleled by the plundering of the earth by capital. (ibidem 24-25)

Socialist Ecology:

Socialist Ecology is an ideology emerging from the doctrines of Marxism, Socialism, Green Politics, Ecology and alter-globalization. It holds that globalization works for the expansion of capitalism that builds a repressive social structure. In such a repressive social structure 'power' is a keyword that pervades from the centre to the periphery in a hierarchical order. This power-politics works as a catalectic force also for ecological degradation. Hence, Socialist Ecologists advocate dismantling of capitalism, or any power-centre for that matter, in order to prevent ecological degeneration. Instead, it emphasizes on common ownership of the means of production rather than the ownership of the State. It envisions a transition to a post-Capitalist society. Arguing that environment and ecology are key issues, this movement encourages an analysis of the dialectics between economy and ecology,

and between nature and history, and it believes in reconstruction of ecological socialism.

Radical Ecology:

Radical Ecology emerges from human beings' profound sense of crisis in the urbanized world. It puts domination of nature and domination of human beings in the name of race, sex, class, etc. in an equal level. It empowers people to make changes for a new ecological ethic. It can be termed as the cutting edge of social ecology. "It pushes social and ecological systems toward new patterns of production, reproduction and consciousness that will improve the quality of human life and the natural environment. It challenges those aspects of the political and economic order that prevent the fulfillment of basic human needs. It offers theories that explain the social causes of environmental problems and alternative ways to resolve them. It supports social movements for removing the causes of environmental deterioration and raising the quality of life for people of every race, class and sex." (Merchant 2005: 2)

Human Ecology:

Human Ecology puts deep insights in the interactions between people and the environment. It is the study of the relationship between human and all natural objects as they are intimately connected in a web of interactions. It explores the influence of humans on their environment and vice-versa. It has been a sociological discipline for more than half a century. Focusing on the inter-relation of human beings with their physical space, it also attempts to make systematic studies of the nature of all human

behaviour. As a theory, Human Ecology is based on the premise that human population has to negotiate and share space with other species in order to maintain the ecological equilibrium.

It is an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary study of the relationship between humans and their environment. Recent developments in Human Ecology tend to relocate disciplinary boundaries crossing and even transcending these boundaries. This shift has redefined this philosophy adding new dimensions to the discourse. Recent scholarship on this branch of study tends to move towards a pluralism where Human Ecology becomes an umbrella term covering multi-disciplinary activities.

On the theoretical level Human Ecology tries to bridge the increasing gap between human beings and nature. It is of the belief that the behavioural pattern of an individual is influenced not only by the external environment but also by his/her intrinsic values and goals. Different communities, cultures and societies build up their distinctive sets of values and goals in relation to nature. This interaction plays a pivotal part in the entire ecology as both human beings and nature are intricate parts of the ecosystem. Human Ecology studies this interactive and inter-dependant relationship. It studies and analyzes the influence of humans on the environment on the one hand, and the influence of environment on human behaviour on the other, for a better understanding of the ecosystem.

Spiritual Ecology:

Spiritual Ecology is a term that refers to the interaction and inter-relation between religion, spirituality and environment. It tries to provide a spiritual dimension to the present ecological crisis. This ecological crisis is posing a great threat for the future of our planet. This is not just an environmental problem that is taking place in the outer physical world, but also indicates towards a deeper, inner crisis of the human soul. Spiritual Ecology is primarily concerned with this very spiritual crisis. It emphasizes on the importance of prayer and meditation. Prayer is the medium through which human beings meet the Divine. Meditation is a silent way of talking to one's own self and thus to feel oneness and affinity with the whole of creation. This sense of oneness would inspire the human world to honour the sacred in creation. This consciousness of considering the human soul as a part of the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world is the need of the hour in order to address the present ecological crisis. Honouring and worshipping nature is an age-old practice in human civilization irrespective of class, creed and community. The traditional Indian doctrine of *Vashudhaiva Kutumbakama*, for example, which literally means that all of creation is one family, is the manifestation of the 'Great Chain of Being', of the realization that each and every object of nature is a part of the intricate web. The major aspects of Spiritual ecology have been highlighted in section analyzing ecomysticism in this study.

But there has been a tremendous change in human beings' attitude towards nature. Nature has been objectified, mastered over and has been degraded to the level of a mere commodity. And thus explored, exploited and degraded. Spiritual Ecology

advocates the restoration of the age-old values of honouring the ecosystem so that instead of domination of nature by human beings both of them co-exist peacefully and with perfect harmony.

Rational Ecology:

Rational Ecology is the theoretical framework of ecological rationality that emphasizes on the role of human beings' rationality in preserving the environment and maintaining ecological sustainability. Ecological rationality ascertains "the capability of ecosystems consistently and effectively to provide the good of human life support." (Dryzek 1987:36)

Human being, who is a part of the ecosystem and who has a self-proclaimed assertion of being rational animals, must shoulder the responsibility of maintaining a sustainable ecology. It has framed for itself different values necessary for a meaningful living. In the history of human civilization economic, social, cultural, political, or legal values of human beings have been playing a pivotal role in bettering and uplifting the standard of human life. These values are always dependent upon the ecosystem as it supports and sustains human life and its very existence. So, ecological rationality should be given the topmost priority while framing any value for the human world. But Rational Ecologists believe that this is where human beings have failed miserably. They have failed to develop an ecological rationality yet.

According to the principles of Rational Ecology, human beings are to find out a mechanism to preserve the ecosystem, and it is their rationality that would determine the nature and scope of this mechanism. There have been a number of social choices as adopted by human civilization for its survival. But Rational Ecologists are of the opinion that these social choices have their limitations in attaining ecological rationality. John S. Dryzek finds out nine forms of social choices those have been adopted by human civilization. They are:

- i) Markets, which co-ordinate their actors through “price signals”.
- ii) Administered systems, which co-ordinate through commands.
- iii) Legal system, which co-ordinate through formal rules and laws.
- iv) Systems of moral persuasion, which co-ordinate through values.
- v) Polyarchic systems, which co-ordinate through partisan mutual adjustments.
- vi) Systems involving bargaining, which co-ordinate through formal negotiation.
- vii) Systems involving armed conflict, which co-ordinate through force.
- viii) Systems involving radical decentralization, which co-ordinate through cordial cooperation.
- ix) Systems involving practical reason, which co-ordinate through discussion.

(ibidem 64)

The first seven choices, according to Dryzek, cannot promote ecological rationality. It shows that our existing systems are rather poorly equipped from the viewpoint of Rational Ecology. Dryzek suggests that the last two in the above list can be used as primary tools for attaining ecological rationality.

Ecocriticism

The term 'ecocriticism' is said to be used for the first time by US critic William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. Also known as ecopoetics, environmental literary criticism, or green cultural studies, Ecocriticism or ecological criticism "is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996: xviii). It is based on the connection between human culture and the entire ecosphere. It is "an avowedly political mode of analysis.... is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory." (Garrard 2007: 3). It assures that 'nature' is a cultural as well as a political construct and seeks to consider *place*, like race, class and gender, a critical category for evaluating a literary text — to observe in a text the 'place' of nature and the 'nature' of place.

The idea of 'nature' is a key concept in any ecocritical discourse. The politics of representing 'nature' in literature is a necessary study. Because of this politics of representing nature, the romantic ideology of 'worshiping' nature may even seem as a cover for the continued exploitation of nature. Therefore, in ecological discourse nature has multi-dimensional roles with multiple voices. Kate Soper speaks of three ideas of nature as conceived by the human world — the 'metaphysical', the 'realist' and the 'lay' or 'surface'. She goes on defining these ideas and says that while talking about nature, the Green Movements most commonly conceive the 'lay' or 'surface' idea of nature. (Soper 2004:125). Ecocriticism, says Jay Parini, "marks a return to activism and social responsibility; it also signals a dismissal of theory's more solipsistic tendencies. From a literary aspect, it marks a re-engagement with realism,

with the actual universe of rocks, trees and rivers that lies behind the wilderness of signs” (Parini1995:52). Simon Estok argues that Ecocriticism is more than “simply the study of Nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function — thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise — of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds.” (Estok 2005:21)

Taking an earth-centered approach to literary studies ecocriticism is based on the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world having a strong and meaningful interaction between them. This interaction is the basic subject of study in ecocriticism. Another notable feature of ecocriticism is that it expands the notion of ‘the world’ including in it the entire ecosphere unlike most of other literary where ‘the world’ has a limited sense standing only for the social sphere.

The premise of ecocriticism is motivated with an awareness that the actions of human civilization has brought the environment of the planet to a point of no return, where there is a constant threat of an ecocide. Ecocriticism also tries to create an awareness to be proactive in preserving the environment and thus preventing the global catastrophe. Human beings’ ignorance as well as lack of awareness is very much responsible for the present crisis of environmental degradation. The following observation by Donald Worster, an environmental historian bears significance:

We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature as precisely as possible, but even more, it requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. (Worster1993:27)

Feminist criticism has been a major influence in the growth and development of ecocriticism. Feminist theorist Elaine Showalter shows three stages in the development of feminist criticism (Showalter1985:10-12). According to Cheryll Glotfelty these three stages “provide a useful scheme for describing three analogous phases in ecocriticism” (Glotfelty1996: xvii). The first stage in feminist criticism, as shown by Showalter, is the “image of women” stage. It is concerned with the representation of women in canonical literature. Similarly, the first stage of ecocriticism studies the representation of nature. The second stage of feminist criticism deals with the function of consciousness where literature is rediscovered, reissued, reconsidered and restudied. Likewise, the second stage of ecocriticism is a kind of a re-evaluation, where a given literary text is restudied in order to find out the place of nature as well as the nature of place in it. The third stage of feminist criticism, as identified by Showalter, is the theoretical phase; and in ecocriticism also the third stage tries to theorize different power-relations in terms race, ethnicity, gender etc.

Ecocriticism, as viewed by Greg Garrard, is

an avowedly political mode of analysis, as the comparison with feminism and Marxism suggests. Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a

‘green’ moral and political agenda. In this respect, ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory. Developing the insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists and environmental justice advocates seek a synthesis of environmental and social concerns. (Garrard 2007: 3)

The basic tenets of Ecocriticism may be identified as follows:

- Green Cultural Studies: Inter-dependence of Nature and culture
- Ethical component of literature: Recycling of old moral and mythological stories into new one
- Ethical wholeness and living places
- Household, family and community (Oikos and Habitats)
- Life and death, time and change, pattern and rhythm
- People, Nature and versions of Pastoral
- The city as Second Nature
- Local and Global
- Nation states and international relations
- Ecofeminism
- Hyperreality [Das, N. 2007:19-23)].

Recent developments in the field of ecocriticism show that it is not at all an ‘interdisciplinary study’, or it is not merely a study on ‘nature writing’, but it is an essential component of literary studies. Joseph Meeker in his seminal book *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*, the book that in a sense pioneered the study of literature from an ecological viewpoint, says:

Human beings are the earth's only literary creatures... if the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment—to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us. (Meeker 1974: 3-4)

II

Ecomysticism

Ecomysticism may be defined as ecological mysticism or living ecologically like a mystic's way of life. Mysticism "is the art and science of living perfectly; it is the self-knowledge that subsumes the knowledge of the world. It is the quest for and the union with the absolute" (Paranjape1989: 1). Further, "it is the concern with the nature of the ultimate reality. It includes both means and ends, both the goal and the way" (ibidem). The major terms in the aforesaid definition like "Absolute", "ultimate reality" are the parts of the cosmos/ecology. So ecological mysticism implies the art/science of living perfectly ecologically and earning the self-knowledge required for the said purpose. The spiritual ecology/creation spirituality is same as Ecomysticism.

Ecomysticism/Spiritual ecology has four aspects or it is of four types like: *Via Positiva*, *Via Negativa*, *Via Creativa* and *Via Transformativa*. *Via Positiva* is the experience of the Divine in terms of delight, awe, and wonder at being present in the world; it involves the institution that creation is a blessing, and response of gratitude. *Via Negativa* is the experience of the darkness, deprivation, suffering, and pain. These two kinds of experiences lead to a rebirth of creativity and it is the *Via Creativa* that involves identifying new ecological virtues for living such as vegetarianism, recycling, relearning the sacredness of nature, redefining creation through political action, and making new rituals to celebrate sacred places, times, and being in nature. *Via Transformativa* is the transformation to a more compassionate society in which all beings love one another. (Fox 1998:228).

The concept of Ecomysticism has been there since ancient times. A strong awareness of it emerged during the twentieth century as a result of human beings' profound sense of crisis in the environment. Since time immemorial human civilization has been in deep attachment with nature. It has been worshipping and nurturing nature and has been living with inter-dependence. But due to the increase of human population, industrialization and rapid urbanization there seems to arise some loop-holes in this age-old bond. In order to meet the challenges posed by these modern phenomena human beings started to exploit and dominate nature. Spiritual Ecology opposes this very concept of dominance. It attempts to develop among human beings a sense of reverence and love for nature. An ethical sense enables human beings to feel an empathy with nature, to observe closely the mysteries behind it and thus to preserve it for mutual benefit. The performance of the traditional rites and rituals of human society with regard to nature is one of the major concerns of

Spiritual ecology. These rituals may not be substitutes for any social action to preserve nature, but the Spiritual ecologists believe that these can create awareness and can prepare the people for social activities in that direction. Carl Von Essen opines, “A vision evolved that our spiritual bond with the natural world can be a potent path of action toward environmental healing.” (Essen 2010: 1)

The Council of All Beings was developed by Joanna Macy, John Seed and others in Australia to propagate the concept of Spiritual Ecology. The present generation of human beings is very much concerned of two major threats to our planet: the possibility of a nuclear holocaust and the ecological crisis. The Council of All Beings framed a 5-point spiritual response to these concerns. They are:

1. Feelings of pain for our world are natural and healthy.
2. This pain is morbid only if denied.
3. Information alone is not enough.
4. Unblocking repressed feelings release energy and clear the mind.
5. Unblocking our pain for the world reconnects us with the larger web of life.(Merchant 2005:119)

Creation Spirituality is a way of living with nature where there is partnership and reverence instead of exploitation and dominance. It is a concept that unifies body and spirit, arts and science; that inspires people, irrespective of class, caste, creed, community, religion, race and sex, to see themselves in terms of the entire cosmology; that emphasizes on ecocentrism instead of anthropocentrism. Matthew Fox, founder

of the University of Creation Spirituality in California, and one of the pioneers of this ecological concept, speaks of some of the major principles of Creation Spirituality:

1. The universe is basically a blessing, that is, something we experience as good.
2. We can and do relate to the universe as a whole since we are a microcosm of that macrocosm and that this relationship intoxicates us.
3. Everyone is a mystic.(Fox 1998:229)

Imbibing these principles in one's self one can feel an affinity with nature, can feel it as a part of the self. This widening of the self surely brings a radical change to human understanding. John Seed, Director, 'Rainforest Information Centre', Australia, while was asked how he felt in safeguarding the rainforests replied, "I try to remember that it's not me, John Seed, trying to protect the rainforest. Rather I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into human thinking." (Macy1994: 294). This is undoubtedly a revolutionary change in human understanding. This is what can be termed as the greening of the self. This notion of the Green self can be seen in the ancient Indian scriptures. It can also be seen in the Chipko Movement in India where women protected the trees from cutting and thus falling down by embracing the trees feeling themselves as the trees. This consciousness of finding self in nature and nature in self is basically what Spiritual Ecology deals with.

III

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is one of the significant ecological and feminist movements emerged in the 1970s. An increasing consciousness of the relationship between women and nature primarily resulted in the advent of this movement. It draws a parallel between the domination of women and the domination of nature by the patriarchal society. Arising out of the struggle of women to sustain themselves, their families and their communities this movement advocates for environmental protection as well as protection of women, preservation of indigenous cultures, traditional values, sustainable development and other such issues that can bring a social change. It views that racism, classism, and sexism are interconnected and liberation of women cannot be fully achieved without the liberation of nature and vice versa. It begins with the assumption that cultural texts construct particular notions of 'nature', and, therefore, literary, visual and other representations of nature are reflections of an age's views and treatment of nature. It links between literary studies and environmental discourse and observes the effects of such discourses on culture.

Francoise d' Eaubonne, a French woman, writing in the early 1970s, is often credited by many scholars for giving an intellectual and theoretical base to ecofeminism. But as an academic discourse it did not develop until the mid to late 1980s. The Japanese ecofeminist Natsuko Hagiwara defines ecofeminism as a "women's resolution to create an ecological revolution for the subsistence of human

beings on this planet.” (Hagiwara 1997:46). This movement involves activism as well as ideology. The activism involved in this movement can be seen in various activities performed primarily by women around the world for preserving the environment and ecology. For example, women in the US protested the atrocities at Love Canal and analyzed the shock waves of the nuclear leak at Three Mile Island; there the housewives organized to clean up hazardous waste sites; in Kenya, women of the Green Belt movement banded together to plant millions of trees in arid degraded lands; in Canada, they took to the streets for a signature campaigning against uranium processing, and in India women initiated the Chipko Movement, where they hugged the trees to save them from getting cut and thus felling down.

There has been a systematic exploitation of nature as well as of women since the long past. Nature has been subordinated to ‘the master subject’ that is meant to be explored, exploited and used to the optimum extent. This can also be said about women who have been considered to be inferior to their male counterparts. In order to show this dualism regarding women and nature Val Plumwood presents a list of binary oppositions where the qualities on the left hand side are considered to be superior to those on the right hand side and are regarded to be essentially ‘masculine’. Plumwood says that the master identity depends on this dualistic structure of otherness and negation:

Culture / Nature

Mind / Body

Male / Female

Masculine / Feminine

Human / Animal

Reason / Emotion

Subject / Object

Public / Private

Adult / Child

Universal / Particular

Freedom / Nature (Plumwood 1993:43).

Ecofeminism challenges these dualities and seeks to acknowledge value and honour women's biological particularity and affirms women as subjects and makers of history. This understanding is crucial in the transformation of feminism.

Feminist thinkers, theorists, critics and activists right from Simone de Beauvoir have argued that the allocation of women to the side of nature has been greatly due to their role in procreation. And it is essentially the female biology that determines her role in procreation. The female, as de Beauvoir puts it, is 'more enslaved to the species than the male, her animality is more manifest' (Beauvoir1972:239). This, according to her, is one of the primary reasons of devaluation and de-historization of female in regard to male or nature to culture. Through this naturalization women have been devalued and denied cultural participation.

The devaluation and denial of women in cultural participation at large have also resulted in the subordination and downgrading of nature due to its representation as 'female'. Since the dawn of human civilization 'mother nature' has been explored for resources, tilled and sowed with seeds. Even various objects of nature such as trees, rivers, hills and streams are very often personified as female and compared to the parts of the female body. Thus "nature is allegorized as either a powerful maternal force, the womb of all human production, or as the site of sexual enticement and ultimate seduction. Nature is both the generative source, but also the potential spouse of science, to be wooed, won, and if necessary forced to submit to intercourse." (Soper 2004: 14)

Ecofeminism believes that there is a deep-rooted connection between women and nature. This Nature-women connection can be seen from eight different levels — historical connection, conceptual connection, empirical/experimental connection, symbolic connection, political connection, philosophical connection, theoretical connection, and ontological connection. On the basis of these connections Ecofeminism is broadly divided into six types. They are: Liberal Ecofeminism, Cultural Ecofeminism, Social Ecofeminism, Socialist Ecofeminism, Radical Ecofeminism and Spiritual Ecofeminism. Although there are these different schools of ecofeminism having different ideals and principles, some fundamental points are common to all of them. They all share the common premise that there is a close connection between the domination of nature by humans and the oppression of women by men. All of them have the common goal of liberating both women and

nature, and to create a new society without any hierarchy or environmental destruction as such.

Liberal Ecofeminism:

Liberal Ecofeminism is concerned with the over use of natural resources in the name of development. It believes that women have the potential to conserve natural resources and maintain high quality of life. As argued by Simone de Beauvoir, women can and should transcend the notion regarding their biology, which is a social construct, in order to actively participate in environment conservation (Beauvoir 1972: 95-96). This movement was inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). According to Beauvoir's argument, although men and women are biologically different, women can transcend their biology and can free themselves from their predicament of being treated as mere biological reproducers. Flourished mainly during the 1960s this movement fights for an equal status for women in the workplace as well as in the social, cultural, economic and the political sphere.

During that same period when Liberal feminism exploded, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) was published. Considered as one of the seminal books those deal with environmental issues, *Silent Spring* greatly influenced the wave of liberal feminism giving it a direction to various environmental issues. A parallelism between women and nature in many planes were drawn and thus liberal ecofeminism gained a momentum.

Liberal ecofeminists believe that the large-scale plundering of nature in the name of so called development is one of the major causes of ecological degradation. Awareness as well as activism is of utmost importance in order to prevent this. Given equal opportunity in education and other social participations women can also contribute towards the improvement of the environment. Women should join men hand in hand in this important project even by transcending the social stigma of their biology. This is what the main point of contention of the Liberal Ecofeminist Movement. It plays a vital role in challenging the structure of the state and broadening the environmental agenda.

Cultural Ecofeminism:

Cultural ecofeminism, as defined by Judith Ress, concentrate on “the moral superiority of women over men and the values associated with women, such as compassion, nurturance, and peacemaking; it seeks to better society by stressing the contributions made by women.” (Ress 2006:76). It, like the other types of ecofeminisms, is based on the perception that women and nature are mutually associated. It is a response to the exploitation, domination and devaluation of women as well as nature by the patriarchal society. Technological development, which is considered by Cultural Ecofeminism to be essentially masculine, is responsible in degrading and ruthlessly exploiting the ‘feminine’ nature. Because of this standpoint Cultural Ecofeminism is often considered to be an anti-science, anti-technology movement. As Cultural Ecofeminism celebrates nature as a female entity, it tries to revive the ancient rituals of worshipping various goddesses and the female

reproductive system in order to develop a reverence for nature and for its preservation. Carolyn Merchant observes that Cultural Ecofeminism “look to earth-based spiritualities, premodern rituals, and the idea of living, nurturing earth taken from Renaissance organism in order to locate resources for their efforts to revalue women’s experience and to reestablish women’s connection with nature.” (Castree & Braun2001:17).

Social Ecofeminism:

Social Ecofeminism seeks to restructure a decentralized society where there would be no specific power centers. “Social Ecofeminism accepts the basic tenet of social ecology that the idea of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human. Only ending all systems of domination makes possible an ecological society, in which no states or capitalist economies attempt to subjugate nature, in which all aspects of human nature----- including sexuality and the passions as well as rationality----are freed.” (Biehl 1988: 7). Unlike Cultural Ecofeminism, which believes in goddess-worshipping and in the historical connection between women and nature and wishes to liberate the both, Social Ecofeminism begins with an analysis of early radical feminism that sought to break down the structure of domination and oppressions imposed upon women by society, religion, or the state through various methods like romantic love, marriage, family, capitalism etc. Instead, it advocates liberation of women through overturning economic and social hierarchies. Then only, it believes, women can participate in the activities of public domain without any domination or oppression as such. Social Ecofeminism although accepts the differences in male and female reproductive capacities, does not consider these

differences as the cause for gender hierarchies and oppression. It envisions a society where women would be liberated from all kinds of oppressions----- reproductive, intellectual, sensual and moral, a society where both men and women would have an ecological ethic based on caring, sharing and mutual understanding.

Socialist Ecofeminism:

Socialist Ecofeminism centers on the traditional Marxist concepts of production and reproduction. It also, like Social Ecofeminism, considers capitalism and patriarchy as oppressive both to women and nature. It also advocates liberation of women through their participation in ecofeminist activities. It views nature as an active subject and not a passive object to be exploited, oppressed and dominated. There must be a transformation of human being's social and ecological ethics in order to build a cordial relationship between human beings and nature, which can ascertain sustainable development for both of them. Socialist Ecofeminism raises some vital questions such as:

1. What is at stake for women and for nature when production in traditional societies is disrupted by colonial and capitalist development?
2. What is at stake for women and for nature when production in traditional methods and norms of biological reproduction are disrupted by interventionist technologies (such as chemical methods of birth control, sterilization, amniocentesis, rented wombs, and baby markets) and by chemical and nuclear pollutants in soil, water, and air (pesticides, herbicides, toxic chemicals, and nuclear radiation)?

3. What would an ecofeminist social transformation look like?
4. What forms might socialist societies take that would be healthy for all women and men and for nature?(Merchant 2005: 208)

During the process of production and reproduction human beings come into direct interaction with nature and thus disrupt or sustain the ecology. This direct interaction with nature should be a reminder to human beings of their responsibility towards nature. Socialist Ecofeminism seeks women to play a more active role in handling this responsibility as they are more involved in production and reproduction of life and have more direct interaction with ecology.

Socialist ecofeminism links the oppression of women and exploitation of nature to the patriarchal and capitalist system. It talks about a restructuring of society. Carolyn Merchant argues that Socialist ecofeminism is a critique of capitalist development where reproduction and ecology are subordinate to production. (Merchant 1990:105). It views both nature and gender as social as well as cultural constructs and opposes the conceptual dichotomies as masculine/feminine, mind/body, nature/culture etc. In short, the goal of Socialist ecofeminism is sustainable development, a harmonious relationship with nature without any domination whatsoever.

Radical Ecofeminism:

Radical Ecofeminism can be divided into two categories. According to the first category, women have a biological, spiritual and natural link with the non-human

world and hence are 'closer to nature' than men. The second category believes that women's oppression is due to their biological role in reproduction and due to the social and cultural construct of sex or gender. Radical ecofeminists argue that the role of women is determined by the patriarchy either as mother, whose primary function is to bear and raise children or as objects of sex, who are to satisfy the sexual desire of men. Therefore, Radical ecofeminists are of the opinion that the liberation of both women and nature is possible only by dismantling the patriarchal archetypes and the male control over the earth as well as over the woman body. Like the Socialist ecofeminists, they also oppose such polemics of masculine/feminine, nature/culture, or production/reproduction, which, they believe, are mere socio-cultural constructs. Radical ecofeminism advocates an ethics of care, compassion, and co-existence with inter-dependence and mutual understanding. With such thought-provoking ideals Radical ecofeminism has placed itself as a fundamental movement in broadening the ecological agenda.

Spiritual Ecofeminism:

Spiritual ecofeminism seeks a link between the degradation of earth's ecosystem and the commonly held Judeo-Christian belief that humans have the right and power to have domination over the earth given by none other than God Himself. Spiritual ecofeminists are of the opinion that the Judeo-Christian tradition sanctions subjugation of women as it encourages and sanctions subjugation of earth. So it is necessary for the Judeo-Christian religion to discard the idea of a male God, and if it cannot and do not do so, it is necessary to celebrate nature through the practice of "earth-based spiritualities" (Tong 2009:260). According to Starhawk, a renowned

Spiritual ecofeminist, the three most important concepts of earth-based spiritualities are the immanence of the Goddess in the living world, interconnection of mind, body and nature, and a compassionate life-style. (ibidem 261-263).

In her book entitled *Ecofeminist Philosophies: A Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters* (2000) ecofeminist philosopher Karren Warren provides an overview of the history and development of Spiritual ecofeminism. She opines that there is a general agreement among the Spiritual ecofeminists that “earth-based, feminist spiritualities and symbols (such as Gaia and Goddess) are essential to ecofeminism.” (Warren 2000: 31). According to Warren, the concept of Spiritual ecofeminism can be elaborated using three definitions:

1. Ecofeminist spiritualities are feminists: They express a commitment to the elimination of male gender privilege and power over women in their myth, rituals, symbols, language, and value-system.
2. Ecofeminist spiritualities are spiritualities: They express faith in a life-affirming (rather than life-denying) power or presence (energy, force, being, deity or deities, God or Goddess) other than and in addition to one’s own individual ego.
3. Ecofeminist spiritualities are ecofeminists: They express a two-fold commitment to challenge harmful women-other human-nature interconnections and to develop earth-respectful, care-sensitive practices toward humans and earth others. (ibidem 198).

IV

Ecopolitics

Ecopolitics includes various aspects of ecology, biodiversity, ecomysticism, ecofeminism and ecosophy. Checking destruction and degeneration of ecology, mystifying its existence and providing its role in upholding the peace and prosperity of humanity are the subjects covered in Ecopolitics. Human beings are an integral part of the world. The planet we live in is full of wonder, mystery and exquisite beauty. It is the responsibility of human beings to maintain the unique ecology of our planet. But owing to various destructive practices by human beings in the name of development and technological advancement, the ecology of the earth is presently under a tremendous threat. The present ecological crisis is leading to political, economic, and social crisis for human civilization. Also known as Green Politics, it is playing a vital role in the global ecological scenario through various Green Movements. The ‘politics’ of these movements has been debated among environmentalists, activists and social thinkers worldwide. Some of these Green Movements associated with global environment protection are:

The Group of Ten or the Big Ten:

The Group of Ten or the Big Ten has traditionally focused on the legislative and the judicial process for raising environmental standards. Its ethic was homocentric with the maxim of “the greatest good, for the greatest number, for the longest time.” The Group of Ten includes the following organizations:

- i) Environmental Defense Fund
- ii) Environmental Policy Institute
- iii) Friends of the Earth
- iv) Izaak Walton League of America
- v) National Audubon Society
- vi) National Parks and Conservation Association
- vii) National Wildlife Federation
- viii) National Resources Defense Council
- ix) Sierra Club
- x) Wilderness Society

The Anti-Toxics Movement:

This movement was started in 1983 and published a newsletter entitled *Everyone's Backyard*. It is primarily a homocentric movement which also thinks about other species and the environment as well. It opposes toxic waste incinerators that increase acid rain forming gases and toxic ashes.

Environmental Justice Movement:

This movement took off in 1982 in North Carolina mainly by African-American and Native American people. It talks about the hazards of toxic waste pollution and affirmed the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment.

The Greens:

Australia's United Tasmanian Group, formed in 1972, and New Zealand's Values Party, formed in the same year, were the first political parties with green platforms to challenge established parliamentary systems. Then came the West German Greens emerged in the 1980s, the Italian Greens in 1984, the French Greens in the early 1980s, and the Green Party in Sweden was formed in 1981. The political platform of the Greens is based on four pillars:

1. Grassroots Democracy
2. Social Justice, and Equal Opportunity
3. Ecological Wisdom
4. Non-violence. (Wall 2010: 12-13)

Along with these four major pillars six additional principles are also there:

5. Decentralization
6. Community-based Economics and Economic Justice
7. Feminism and Gender Equality
8. Respect for Diversity
9. Personal and Global Responsibility
10. Future Focus and Sustainability (Merchant 2005: 176)

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the reunification of Germany, the rising importance of the European Union, and the creation of the European

Parliament the European political scenario has been radically reoriented. In 2004 the federated green parties of Europe united forces to form the European Green Party.

Earth First! :

Founded by Dave Foreman in the early 1980s, Earth First! advocates strategic ecotage. Their motto is “no compromise in defense of Mother Earth”. It believes in the defense of wilderness.

Greenpeace:

Greenpeace takes on a variety of environment related issues using direct action and confrontation as strategies for change. Its issues range from nuclear-free seas to saving whales and seals, checking toxic wastes, saving Antarctica, etc. As an organization it was founded in 1971.

Direct Action:

Inspired by the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence the concept of civil disobedience, this movement was started in 1990 in San Francisco, although such activities of ecological preservation through non-violent ways were there even before.

The Gaia Movement:

This movement is named after Gaia, the Greek goddess of Earth. Its hypothesis states that “the physical and chemical condition of the surface of the earth, of the atmosphere, and of the oceans has been and is actively made fit and comfortable by the presence of life itself”.

The Chipko Movement:

This movement in India during the 70's of the last century was largely participated by women. Women came to the forefront and transformed their own struggle into this movement. ‘Chipko’ literally means clinging. Men and women expressed their concern for trees by clinging them and not allowing the contractors to cut the trees for profit. This movement heralded many environmental as well as social movements in India. The slogan which became quite popular during the movement was: “The forest is our mother’s home. We will protect it with all our might”. (Kumar1993: 183).

The aforementioned discussion on ecological, ecomystic and ecofeminist principles will be used as the basic tools for analyzing the works of the chosen authors from various provinces of Northeast India. The Northeasterners are eco-conscious by nature from time immemorial. The travelers from abroad in various ages have appreciated the ecology of the region. Huen Tsang’s account of Kamrup is a strong proof of it and even the Western missionaries and travelers have made profuse appreciation of the ecological glory and mysteriousness of Northeast India.

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The people of the Northeast are the guardians of its most precious asset: its uniqueness. Which other area has such beauty among its people and its environment? Which sees such a range of religions, creeds, communities, lifestyles and traditions? Which other area can match it in the sheer raw power of nature: whether it is the Brahmaputra that resembles a great sea during its rain-swollen, flood-hungry days, or the force of its gales and the grace of its waterfalls, the lushness of its forests and bamboo thickets and the solitude of its spirit, found in the mist of the mountains. (Hazarika 1994: xx)

Prose Writing in English from India's Northeast is a powerful genre. There have been a number of writers, both in fiction and non-fiction, who claim serious attention. Nationhood, identity, insurgency, ethnic violence, corruption in the bureaucracy, home, migration, exile, memory are some of the dominant themes that the novelists of this region deal with. They have been also dealing with the ecology of the region. An ecological concern is inherent in most of the writings. Ecology has been consciously used to attain an identity --- an identity that is legitimate, powerful as well as unique. A study of these writings from an ecological perspective helps not only to evaluate the writers, but also to understand this vibrant region of India – the Northeast.

Some of the representative prose writers of the region are Mamang Dai, Yeshe Dorji Thongchi (Arunachal Pradesh), Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Hem Barua, Indira Goswami, Arup Kumar Dutta, Mitra Phukan, Dhruva Hazarika, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Sanjoy Hazarika, Sanjib Baruah (Assam), Arabam Ongbi Memchoubi, Thingnam Kishan Singh, Tayenjam Bijoykumar Singh, Pradip Phanjoubam, Yumlembam Ibomcha (Manipur), Patricia Mukhim, Siddartha Deb,

Anjum Hasan (Meghalaya), Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama, Margaret Lalmuanpuii Pachuau, Mona Zote (Mizoram), Temsula Ao, Easterine Iralu, Charles Chasie, Anungla Aier (Nagaland). Apart from dealing with some of the core issues of the region, these writers explore through the history and the mysterious ecology of their native states in particular and the region in general. This eco-consciousness is a significant feature of their writing.

Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* is a novel that has a strong ecological concern. History, myth, tradition, memory and fiction merge together in this novel which showcases the unique ecology of Arunachal Pradesh. Revolving around the myths, legends, tradition and culture of the Adis, one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the book re-invents that part of history which is yet unexposed. Dai also conveys through this book, the clash between tradition and modernity that can well be studied from an ecological viewpoint. The very nature of the tradition of the land can be felt in these poetic lines at the very beginning of the novel:

In our language, the language of the Adis, the word 'pensam' means 'in-between'. It suggests the middle, or middle ground, but it may also be interpreted as the hidden spaces of the heart where a secret garden grows. It is the small world where anything can happen and everything can be lived; where the narrow boat that we call life sails along somehow in calm or stormy weather; where the life of a man can be measured in the span of a song.(Dai 2006:vii)

For her inquisitive odyssey through the ecology of the vibrant tribal world of Arunachal Pradesh, Dai chooses the Adis, the community she herself belongs to, as this tribe has a rich cultural and ecological heritage: “Like the majority of tribes inhabiting the central belt of Arunachal, the Adis practise an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world.” (ibidem 1)

The landscape of Arunachal Pradesh, its geographical as well as topographical position and its environment find expression in a number of passages in the novel. The pristine environment of the region is referred to in the following passage:

The river cuts through our land as before in its long journey to the sea. In spring the red flower still blaze against our sky. But the old people now, the few of them alive, turn slowly in their sleep as the fires burn down to a heap of ash. In the middle of the night a bird swoops low and calls out in a wild, staccato note. The thatch rustles. The bamboo creaks. The darkness is full of breath and sighs. (ibidem 4)

This aforesaid passage is also a portrayal of the clash between the pristine past and the polluted present. The mysteries engulfing the tribal world, its faiths and beliefs, its oral traditions, myths, legends, folklores, rites and rituals are presented in a labyrinthine web of nineteen stories depicted in the four sections of the novel. This ecological portrayal of the land is in a larger sense, a conscious way of asserting an identity of the indigenous people of the region, the marginalized voices. Dai also talks about the ecological degradation of the lands as well as degeneration of traditional values during the colonial period. The novel advocates the revival of tradition and

restoration of the age-old bond between the human and the natural world as a way of retaining the identity of the tribal communities in this age of globalization. Here too lies the significance of *The Legends of Pensam*. “Mamang Dai through her chain of stories called ‘Legends of Pensam’ has asserted an identity of Arunachal and its tribes by associating the tribal life and activities with nature. All transactions assume unlimited dimensions here in the bosom of nature. The natural surrounding and human and nonhuman transactions assume unlimited dimensions.” (Das 2011:283-284)

A world with ecofeministic ideals is clearly seen in the novel. The third section of the novel entitled “daughters of the village” deals with such tribal myths, legends and folklores those have a powerful note of ecofeminism in them. The nature-women relationship, the basic tenet of ecofeminism, is reaffirmed through these traditional tales. Women have a tender care for the society at large and for her immediate family. Like nature, they too sustain life and their close proximity with the world of nature as it shapes a caring attitude in them. But again, like nature, it is the women who are kept in the periphery and remain unheard by the patriarchal society:

The women stirred uneasily. It was a big thing to invoke the sun and the moon. Words have magic, and powerful words have powerful magic. We knew, in these villages, that the men slept peacefully with no blame to touch them. The laws of birth, life and death were fixed and unchangeable. And despite everything women always prayed. ‘Let no harm come to our men.’ (ibidem 77)

The changing scenario of the world at present has brought radical changes to the environment and even to the life-style of the tribal people. A kind of a cultural hegemony in the name of globalization has pushed these people to the margin. There seems to be confusion in their traditional world and they are at a loss in this topsy-turvy new world. Identify crisis, sense of alienation and loss have started haunting these people. Mamang Dai, as a novelist, believes that an ecomystical way of living is the only solution to these problems. Going back to their roots is the key to their resistance against these winds of changes. Worshipping and preserving nature, living with complete harmony with nature would help them to restore an identity in this period of transition and crisis. This note of Deep Ecology as well as Creation Spirituality is heard time and again in the novel. The sub-section entitled “the scent of orange blossom” of the third section of the novel has a resonance of this ecomystical tone:

Nothing was complete. But there was comfort in looking at the green hills and the river that she had crossed to become Kao’s wife. Together, they would raise a family, guard their land and live among their people observing the ancient customs of their clan. Surely these were enough gifts for one lifetime. (ibidem 120)

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, a prominent literary figure of Assam, and a Jnanpith awardee tells “a story that had never been told” (Bhattacharyya 2005: blurb) in his novel *Love in the Time of Insurgency*. Set in Nagaland during the World War II, the novel talks about war, love and life in a large dimension. The landscape and the ecology of Nagaland as well as the Northeast India come to life in this novel. Natural beauty of the land has references in many places in the novel and the environmental

degradation due to the war is also talked about: “Far away towards the northeast, the Shiroy peak looked as calm as ever, home to most of the rivers that originated in its many crevices and slopes and flowed through the village and its surrounding areas” (ibidem 17). But that calm and serene atmosphere is no more. It has been disturbed and degraded by the ravages of war, a man-made hazard that destroys the ecological equilibrium. Sharengla, the main female character of the novel climbs up a hill and what she sees from the top of it is the impact of war on the ecology as a whole:

Slowly she climbed a nearby hill and reached the top. She looked at the village at her feet, looking so sad and devastated in the midst of the softy rippling hills, the ribbons of streams and rivers. Some houses were still burning, pigs and chicken scurrying helplessly around. The village church, too, burned. The spire was licked by small shooting flames and bits of burning wood beginning to fall from it. The cross was no longer visible. (ibidem)

Again in the following passage ecological ideas are used to depict the inner self of a character:

The way to the field was lonely. His thoughts turned to Khatingla. Strange that he should think of her when his thoughts were on motherly love. But then, the loneliness of hill roads and lanes always made him think of his loved ones. The season was not chilly but the leaves and flowers were wet with dew. A scent of pine trees wafted in the air, reminding him of the girl he

loved, the luster of her body fresh from her weekly bath at the river,
(ibidem 169)

The human world has a deep relationship with the world of nature. The world of nature is responsible in shaping a frame of mind in human beings. This ecomystical concept on the human-nature relationship is seen in many occasions in the novel. Even a single sentence, taken casually from any part of the novel substantiates the ecomystical concern of the novel: “The glorious weather evoked strange feelings, and once again he felt free and inspired” (ibidem 170). The arrival of the missionaries created a clash of cultures, a confrontation between the old tradition and a new faith. People debated on the issue and some of them felt that their age-old tradition and culture had been ruined in the name of development and modernization. The novel voices the views and sentiments of both these generations, the old and new:

“But don’t you see how Christianity and education have widened our outlook, released us from the bondage of a superstitious and parochial existence?” Khating asked, impetuously. “Thank god for Reverend Pettigrew and Dr Brock. They opened schools and churches in the villages and gave us new ideas, and the benefits of modern medicines and machines. The government has set up a modern administration, built roads, ended things like head-hunting. Are these not the very things that we wanted?” (ibidem 36)

To this the older voice that believes in the necessity of grasping to their age-old tradition, replies:

“Pettigrew ! Ngazek barked out. He comes here and makes us all cowards. You call his work, work? Because of your ideas people will no longer remain real Nagas. To be modern means aping your masters. Puny white men. Puny black men. Mental Slaves. You see the sahibs laugh at you when you ape them. They don’t consider you their equals. Are you not ashamed of it?”
(ibidem 36)

Ecofeminist ideas pervade this novel. There are many passages which can be seen from the canons of ecofeminism. Sirala, an old woman is disgusted with the war. Her disgust finds expression in the following lines which can also be the voice of nature that has been ravaged by wars and battles from time to time: “Oh, the war!” Her tone was bitter. “What are you fighting for, tell me? To sacrifice the little you have, for others? This killing business is terrible.” (ibidem 33). A close look into the long history of wars and battles in human civilization shows that warfare is primarily a man’s business, where, most of the time, women have nothing to say. So it is basically the males who are responsible for degrading nature, and in that way degrading women. This is expressed in this sentence: “...I don’t understand politics and war. They are primarily a man’s business” (ibidem 26)...Sharengla, like nature, voices her ‘feminine’ sensibility: “You have to be a woman to realize what war means” (ibidem 32). *Love in the Time of Insurgency* is full of passages that portray the natural landscapes, the entire ecology of the land, clash of traditions and cultures. The novel also consciously deals with ecofeminist and ecomystical ideas.

Dhruba Hazarika's *A Bowstring Winter* is a novel on the life in Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya during the 1970s. Meghalaya, more specifically Shillong, with all its ecological features, can be said to be the main character of the novel, which is divided into three chapters named after three month of the year---“*U Naiwieng*”(November), “*U Nohprah*” (December) and “*U Kyllalyngkot*” (January). Description of the natural landscape of Shillong is found in many of the places in the novel:

It was not a very big field. To the left, a stony track curved down from a cleft between the low hills that screened off the highway from the valley. Shrubs and thin bamboo stems hung over the entrance, the dirt road roughened by tufts of grass gone brown Beyond the rise the floor dipped down once again to a forest and then half a furlong ahead the two sides merged, swelling hill, thick with pines, spruce, and juniper. (Hazarika 2006: 40)

Or

From the forests above the town, the smell of wood smoke drifts through trees and shrubs into streets and houses. In the hills the undergrowth burns at night, uneven lines of fire spreading in wide unpredictable stretches Against the dark of the night, they look like miniature creatures in red dresses....The woods are thick with pines, tall with wide trunks and leafy tops, which shed their leaves in October (ibidem 77-78).

Such descriptions of the environment and ecology of Shillong are numerous throughout the novel.

Ecomystical sentiments are heard in many places of the novel. The affinity of the tribal people with nature and sharing a deep ecological relationship with it is celebrated in many occasions in the novel. In one such occasion Charley, the Khasi gangster says: “I’m of the hills, and the hills are in me” (ibidem 118). Here the presence of a ‘green self’ can be marked and this greening of the self is typically an ecological consciousness. Hazarika reflects the urge of the tribal people of going back to their roots for retaining their identity. Dor Kharkongor, the Khasi “teerman” or archer advises John to teach their mother – tongue Khasi properly: “Also, John Dkhar, it is not enough for you to have a Khasi name if you do not speak Khasi. So, you must try everyday to learn one Khasi word....” (ibidem 133)

John, who is an ethnic Khasi but raised and educated in Delhi, is called by the local people a *dkhar*, a foreigner as he, after his long dissociation from the tribal society, becomes a stranger to the traditional khasi culture. To the advice of Dor Kharkongor John replies in a lamenting tone, “Yes, I must improve my Khasi.” (ibidem 133)

Indira Goswami, popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, the Jnanpith Award winner litterateur from Assam has a strong ecological concern as reflected in her novels like *Pages Stained with Blood* or *The Man from Chinnamasta* or *The Shadow of Kamkhya*, a collection of short stories. Insurgency in the region, especially

in Assam, complexities of modern life and, above all, an all pervading love are some of the major themes of Goswami's writings. The plight of women in a patriarchal society and their trauma has been touchingly portrayed in most of her writings. Hiren Gohain, an eminent litterateur and critic, while commenting on the creative world of Goswami, observes:

Her writing is like a stifled cry of pain at man's inhumanity to man, which modulates sometimes in quiet bitterness and at times into poignant pathos. An obstinate feudal way of life has survived into our times, which crushes the soul with rigid dogma and inhuman ritual and squeezes into a husk the life-blood of healthy emotion. The results are a staggering inferno of broken lives, frustrated dreams, wasted promises and monstrous distortions of humanity. (Gohain 1994: 26)

The novel entitled *Pages Stained with Blood* is written in the diary form. The setting is Delhi, the capital city of India during the communal rioting immediately after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. The pathetic condition of the innocent victims, as presented by Goswami, is heart-rending. She talks about terrorism, separatist movements, bombings, killings, extortions and communal clashes. Although she talks about all these with a setting in Delhi and with references to Punjab, the readers cannot shift his/her attention from the Northeastern context. India's Northeast has been experiencing all these ghastly experiences since many decades. All these have been the part of regular news from this region. Terrorism in the context of Northeast India, as Goswami feels, has one of its roots in a general feeling among the local people of the region, of isolation from the 'mainland',

of a sense of being ignored, neglected and deprived of an equal treatment with the 'mainstream'. To substantiate her point she refers to the bias ever in writing history: "...I have grown up reading about the Richard the Lion Heart, the Vijaynagar Kingdom, the Kalinga War, the French Revolution, the downfall of the Mughal Empire. All on British history and Indian history – but there is nothing about Assam or the 600 – year old Ahom rule, the same dynasty ruling a huge state for 600 years. Even a major uprising like the revolution of common people against the Ahom monarchy where, it is said, one lakh people died in the Moamoria Revolution is not mentioned." (Sen 2006: 295).

The landscape of Assam has been explored in many of Goswami's short stories in the collection *The Shadow of Kamakhya*: "On either side were distant hills. The paddy fields were a riot of brilliant colors, flaunting golds ... the fields or forests that teemed with cotton, khaira, sisoo, holong poma, bogi poma, bokul and teak trees. Evening wrapped the teak in shreds of silk that the stippling sun seemed to turn magically into deer skin" (Goswami 2005:2). But this beautiful landscape has been disturbed due to insurgency: "Last year, this road was smeared with blood. There was always crossfire of machine guns, exploding grenades." (ibidem 2)

The biodiversity of the region, with a rich flora and fauna has been presented time and again in Goswami's writings:

There were many different trees, some with wild creepers twining themselves around trunks of muga silk. Some trees looked like majestic ruins dressed in shimmering gossamer. All around the monochromic green, ranging from the richly succulent to those that remind me of puthi, the tiny fish. Some leaves were round, like the heavy silver coins with Queen Victoria emblazoned on them. And the birina trees were smothered in white blossoms that looked like clouds flirting with the earth. (ibidem 3)

Or,

The bulbuls on the Hijol tree started chirping noisily. The sun rose above the Brahmaputra. Wreaths of violet and brown clouds clung to it.... (ibidem 38)

The peaceful co-existence of human beings and animals, an enviable feature of Northeast India, and their mutual congenial relationship have been expressed in many of these stories. This ecomystical ideal is a significant feature of the stories. This has consciously been explored by the writer to assert a distinctive identity of the region through its ecology:

“Did you have a chance to see tigers in Kaziranga? People say there were only twenty tigers there in 1966. Now there are about sixty. Rhinos have grown in number from three hundred to one thousand and five hundred. There are some five hundred elephants too, (ibidem 8)

Besides many such passages on the flora and fauna of the land, other references such as “A flock of wild ducks” (81), ‘a horde of bats” (81), “long –tailed monkeys” (3) and the like, are also made time and again in these stories.

The nature-women relationship can be explored to a deeper extent through these stories. In many of the stories women are presented not as parts of nature, but as nature itself. With this point of view the stories have strong claims to be studied from an ecofeminist standpoint. In one of the stories in that collection entitled “The Beasts”, the nature-woman relation is beautifully presented: “She knew each and every *holong*, *bonsom*, *Shisham*, and *catechu* tree in the area. She was also familiar with the herds of barking deer and swamp deer which frequented the forest in that region” (ibidem 84). The female body is described in terms of objects of the world of nature: “Her body glowed like a fresh young mango saplingHave you noticed her lips? They are like ripe slices of guava” (ibidem 83). Such descriptions of the female body can be traced in the other stories of that collection. In the story entitled “The Offspring”, a man called Pitambar longs for a physical relationship with Damayanti, a widow. He casts his amorous eyes on her and conceives of her with detailed physicality: “In Pitambar’s eyes, the moon became Damayanti, naked and voluptuous, her breasts soft and rounded like the stomach of a pregnant goat. And the shaft of her body, like a tender bamboo shoot” (ibidem 23). The comparison of the female body with that of the world of the nature has significance. This type of physical description is also reflective of the typical male gaze of the female body.

Her novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* is a story that depicts, to quote the blurb, “the hoary history of Assam’s most famous temple of the Sakta cult, Kamakhya.” It is the story of Chinnamasta Jatadhari, a hermit who leads a movement against the ritual of animal sacrifice and is supported by some spirited young men like Ratnadhar. The novel also deals with the relationship between Jatadhari and Mrs. Dorothy Brown, a British lady, who comes to Kamakhya in search of peace of mind. The novel can be read in a political level insofar as its voice of protest against the ritual of animal sacrifice before the goddess Kamakhya is concerned. It has also a strong ecological perspective as it intelligently talks about the disturbance on the ecological equilibrium due to the age-old ritual of animal sacrifice.

Here in this novel Goswami vividly depicts the landscape, people, myths and legends of Assam like she does in many of her other novels. The natural landscape has come to life through her unique prose style. The flora and fauna, the rich vegetation, the mystery of the jungles, a sense of mysticism all around nature, and overall the ecology of the region has been explored in this novel. There are numerous references to the natural world that shows a conscious ecological sense of the writer:

Seuli flowers cast forth distracted fragrance to soften the raw odour of butchered flesh. A hushed whisper of dewdrops brushed the kendur shrubs, the round flat outenga leaves that snakehooded them, the ripple leaved ashoka, the vast khokan. (Goswami 2006:1)

Like Goswami’s many other writings, this novel can also be studied from ecofeminist ideals. The novel has a number of references to events and incidents

where nature and women become synonymous. Goswami's treatment of the myth of Goddess Kamakhya exploring through traditional beliefs, myths and legends heightens the ecofeministic note of the novel. Goddess Kamakhya is worshipped by the people in her different manifestations, and it is believed that she protects and sustains human beings like a caring mother or like nature:

The jatadhari closed his eyes and meditated for a while. Then "Ma! Ananga-kusuma protect the space before me. Ananga-mekhala protect from behind. On the left, Ananga-madana protect me...Ananga-rekha always, and forever, shield me from above. Ananga-kusha always protect me from all directions! Ma! Ma!" (ibidem: 12)

In the Kamakhya temple an annual festival known as "Ambubachi" is celebrated during which the doors of the temple are closed for four days "because the Goddess is believed to be going through her menstrual period" (ibidem 14). This traditional belief of the goddess having her menstruation bears great significance considering the fact that the goddess is worshipped as a mother; she is also the embodiment of the 'mother' earth. This is very much suggestive of the vitality of earth and also of its capability to produce, procreate and sustain life. Goswami consciously uses these myths and beliefs in this novel and it draws attention of the reader to study it with an ecofeminist perspective.

Goddess Kamakhya is worshipped as the mother who gives birth and sustains life:

The blood from your womb spawns
Myriad forms of life.
The milk from your breast
Makes life immortal.

Mother, I know that you will come by this path

Where this fair skin of my body I will lay down...

(ibidem 167)

The native land is also revered as the mother: “This country is our mother and superior even to heaven” (ibidem 73). There has been a tradition of worshipping women as the manifestation of the Goddess. In the Kamakhya temple there is a ritual called ‘Kumari Puja’ is performed where girls, who have not attained their puberty are worshipped as they are supposed to be the embodiment of the Goddess. It bears great significance that even the prostitutes are worshipped as incarnations of the Goddess:

“Yes, they are prostitutes. They have brought the little girl to offer Kumari Puja. The most exquisite form of the goddess is the beautiful virgin Tripura. The scriptures say that those who offer puja to a prostitute’s daughter will be greatly benefited.” (ibidem 87)

In the same line people also have reverence for nature. There are many references to the ecology of the region that portray people’s love and respect towards nature. The following description of a particular spot in the majestic Brahmaputra is suggestive of ecomystical fervour:

...He looked back at the mighty Brahmaputra — just where it veered off its course, to take the shape of a sacrificial machete. The waters had receded around Urvasi an island in the river, revealing carvings of Vishnu in his half-lion form, the Narasimha avatar. A strip of sand also lay exposed, like the pelt of a white goat laid out to dry after the sacrifice. (ibidem 17)

The novelist intelligently explores the nature-women relationship in many occasions in the novel: “The full moon rippled on the fair woman trapped naked underwater.”

The flora and fauna of the region has been referred to by the novelist in many occasions like in her other novels. Here is a reference to some of the indigenous fruits:

The fruits in Assam have a special flavour – She eats Indian palms, ripe bakuls, jamuns and figs. Even ripe jackfruit. (ibidem 69)

So the Goddess, the motherland, women and nature — all are bestowed upon with the mother image and hence they all are worshipped. The novelist shows this reverence. But she also talks about exploitation of women which is suggestive of the violation of the natural order. It is the women who are always the soft targets of the society in any given circumstances. They are the first to suffer for any social taboos and they are also the first to be victimized in the name of any social custom. This irony of worshipping women as the embodiment of the Goddess in the one hand, and to exploit, torture and oppress them on the other, has been touchingly presented by Goswami in this novel. The treatment of a ‘drunken husband’ towards his wife and the language he uses for her are very much suggestive of the plight of women in an essentially male-dominated society:

The man, pounced on her, and grabbed her by the hair, hurling abuses. “You bitch! You should be pounding the paddy at home. How dare you come to this charlatan who has abducted a foreign woman. You whore!”

(ibidem 27)

There are other such incidents in the novel where a woman is tortured both physically and mentally suggesting how vulnerable position a woman holds in society:

Men rushed in. They were ransacking the room. Two ruffians pounced on her, ripping open her nightgown. Before Dorothy even knew it, her sensibilities were violated. Darbhanga House Reverberated with echoes of pain. Then with some miraculous burst of strength, Dorothy, spread eagled on the floor, brought one knee up hard into the groin of the man about to mount her. When the police came, she was lying there, half naked, scrapings of human skin and blood under her fingernails. (ibidem 67)

This violence against women can also be seen as violence against nature. The violence against the natural order is further emphasized by the novelist by referring to the practice of animal sacrifice. There is ancient history that tells us that there was a time when Goddess Kamakhya was worshipped with human sacrifices. Even the scriptures contain the rules and rituals of human sacrifice. Although this ritual is no longer in practice, the practice of animal sacrifice started in course of time. The novel has a long debate over this issue presenting both the traditional view advocating animal sacrifice and the modern one that advocates offerings of flowers in stead of animal blood before the altar. The novelist taking her own position argues that animal sacrifice is to be abandoned in the greater ecological interest. In this era we live in anthropocentric ideals have given way to ecocentric principles due to human beings' growing sense of awareness for preserving and protecting the ecology of the planet. This concern is well reflected in the novel. The idea of Creation Spirituality pervades throughout the novel. The voice advocating peaceful co-existence of all the creatures

is the voice of that ecological consciousness with a strong sense of Deep Ecology and also Creation Spirituality:

Man is god's creation. Man has many on thing to learn from animals. Only when men and animals live in harmony will the world become a paradise.
(ibidem 180)

Goswami by using myths and legends and with the power of her mesmerizing language recreates an atmosphere of ecological mysticism in this novel. With the sheer power of her minute observation, her emotion and sensitivity as a writer, Goswami builds up a mystic world of awe and wonder centering round the Kamakhya temple and the life around it. The description of the typical local ecology with rare species of flora and fauna can be seen as identity marks for the region, and at the same time become instrumental in creating an ecomystical sense. Here in this place people have been living with nature empathizing with the jungles and with birds and animals. People have been coming here to attain a sense of absolute peace, in search of the ultimate reality, in quest of a solution to unite their disjointed lives as "Life is a passage of separation; a heartless journey of disunion" (ibidem 76). This is what the basic tenet of ecomysticism is all about. This ecomystical concept has been reverberating throughout the novel. In many pages of the novel there is depiction of the age-old peaceful co-existence of all the creatures of nature:

Once only the chirpings parhugas and mynahs came at dusk to feed on the seeds of the seleng trees. Now, dawn broke to the sound of the sahibs' guns. Wild shrubs and evergreens covered the hill, all the way down to the river. Along its banks the smoky blue jacarandas blossomed. This side of Kalipur

was the tiger's domain. Their roars were blown across by the winds in the daytime. (ibidem 28)

The idea of evil has been there in the human mind since the dawn of human civilization. Cultural studies explore and analyze a number of myths and legends relating to the idea of evil in any communities around the world. Goswami explores through the myths and legends of Assam showing the traditional notion of evil and some of the rituals to get rid of the evil eye. Because of the very notion that evil is also sustained by nature, people have been worshipping various natural objects like the rivers, the mountains, the trees, the rocks etc. Nature, besides being treated as a benevolent mother, has also been creating a sense of awe and wonder in the human mind since time immemorial. There are many passages in the novel that refer to such human notion that creates a mystical sense. The following passage is an example of the novelist's use of myths, legends and traditional faith in creating an ecomystical atmosphere:

...Softly the hymns drifted in - homage to the sixty four goddesses. ... O Mother, Violent and Impetuous One, O Golden Goddess ... Raudri, Indrani, goddess of wrath, ever-youthful Mother of all. Vaishnavi ... Durga. Narasinghee. Chamunda ... The sixty four names of the divine yoginis spilled over, seeping into every nook and cranny of the Nilachal Hills, like fragments of enchanted music. (ibidem 5-6)

This ecomystical sense is further heightened by the portrayal of characters, which are very close to nature. One of them is described like this:

It was said that this period he had lived at one with nature. Venomous serpents had nested in his matted locks. Wild birds had perched on his arms.
(ibidem 179-180)

Such conscious use of ecology by the novelist is significant and owing to this the novel demands a serious study also from the perspectives of Deep Ecology.

Mitra Phukan is a celebrated Assamese novelist writing in English. Her novel *A Collector's Wife* is a touching story of a young lady called Rukmini, the protagonist of the novel by probing into her inner life. With this story on the surface, the novelist also deals with the atmosphere of terror, violence and insurgency that has been pervading in Assam's recent history especially during the last three decades. Phukan speaks of the agitation of 1970s and 1980s and the gradual development towards a full blown insurgency. She also speaks of the threat and the sense of insecurity among the indigenous people posed by the illegal migration from Bangladesh, one of the burning issues in Assam's contemporary politics.

The novel also deals with ecological issues. There are rich portrayals of the landscape of Assam with rivers, mountains and woods. There is a description of the Brahmaputra as seen by Rukmini from the window of their bungalow at the hill top:

As she ate her rice and fish curry alone, Rukmini looked out at the river below, a swathe of silver which seemed deceptively still and silent from this height. A half-moon shone down on the scene from above. While the river as well as its banks were bathed in the soft, milky glow, the craggy mountains behind the river stubbornly refused to succumb to the light of the moonbeams, and remained dark and forbidding. What was it about them, Rukmini wondered, that always kept them in such deep shadow? She felt the

same, familiar flicker of unease and quickly averted her eyes from the jagged tops that seemed to pierce the silver sky. (Phukan 2005:65).

The same river is again described from the same position i.e. from Rukminis Bungalow atop the hill at different point of time:

Rukmini gazed at the placidly-flowing Red River below the house ... The river was now a tamed, shriveled band of water, with barren wastes of empty sands forming wide white expanses on both banks. After the monsoons deluged the earth, and the icy mountain-tops where the Red River had its origins melted in the summer heat, these banks would be swamped by the fertile flood of water which would bring life-enhancing silt from the hilly regions, upstream. (ibidem 84)

The landscape is described in many occasions:

But the view from the hillock was marvellous ...To the north, below and a little away from them, the Red River, or the Luit as it was known here, snaked its way past Parbatpuri in deceptively lazy loops. (ibidem 19).

The following lines drawing the landscape during the monsoon are as if the artistic strokes of a brush:

The monsoon in Parbatpuri was always impressive. Rain-bearing clouds, black and heavy-bellied, billowed in from the south. The thousand-kilometre journey over ocean and rivers, over the paddy-fields of another country, over the range of low hills that bordered the district, brought them straight into Parbatpuri, where the clouds deposited their burden. For days, weeks, the sky

was blotted out by wave after wave of cumulo-nimbus clouds that came rolling up, black and heavy, from beyond the southern end of the town, intent, it seemed on drowning Parbatpuri. (ibidem 279).

There are also reference to the people around the river, their life and living. This reflects an ecological concern of the novelist as well as her conscious use of the ecology of the region that bestows a definite identity on it:

Rukmini never tired of gazing at the tiny boats that floated past. Some had hoods made of woven bamboo strips to protect the boatman from the weather. Others had along tail of logs that floated, comet-like, behind the boats as they headed downstream. Whole families lived on these floating logs as they were taken down from the vast forests further upstream to the timber mills of the big cities downstream. The sight of faded cotton saris strung up to dry, of a woman washing cooking pots even as her man poled the raft past Parbatpuri, always fascinated Rukmini. Often, there would be dark, chubby children playing in as carefree a manner on the logs as though they were within the secure confines of a park, or a school playground.

(ibidem 19-20)

There is also vivid description of the hills. The beauty, grandeur and mystery of the hills are elaborately depicted. That the novelist is consciously using the ecology of the region also as a means to attain a self-identity can very well be marked from this passage:

There was something forbidding about these hills. Though she had spent less than two years in Parbatpuri, Rukmini had lived much of her life in other towns in this region of hills. She was so used to hills forming a part of the landscape wherever she went, that she missed their presence when she

traveled out of the region. The long beaches of Goa and Tamil Nadu had attracted her immensely when she had first gone there... But soon, she had begun to miss the familiar landscape: the thickly-wooded green hills suddenly rearing up to cut off the expanse of sky before her... Flatness in a landscape made her uncomfortable, whether it was the blue-green flatness of the ocean, or the khaki sameness of a desert. (ibidem 20).

These hills bestow on the region a typical identity of its own. They make this region different from other parts of the country such as Goa and Tamil Nadu and make this land a unique one— the essential Northeast. Such treatment of ecology is remarkable and this consciousness can be marked in the works of many of the writers from this region.

Rukmini is told by her husband Siddhartha that she is infertile. One of their consulting physicians also confirms it. Frustrated Rukmini takes on medication and other measures based on traditional beliefs like wearing an amulet in order to overcome her infertility. This barrenness and infertility in this woman can be studied as violence against nature or the natural order. In the novel there is a strong parallelism between Rukmini and the external nature. In many occasions Rukmini feels a close affinity with Nature. This is reflected in the following lines where Rukmini not only finds a similarity with the river, but as if she becomes the river herself:

Rukmini gazed at the placidly-flowing Red River below the house, and wondered whether she wanted a child badly enough to endure all that would take place once she took the route charted out for her by Dr. Rabha. The river was now a tamed, shriveled band of water, with barren wastes of empty sands

forming wide white expanses on both banks. After the monsoons deluged the earth, and the icy mountain-tops where the Red River had its origins melted in the summer heat, these banks would be swamped by the fertile flood of water which would bring life-enhancing silt from the hilly regions, upstream. But how did the stretches of sand feel about the floods that obliterated their very existence every year? Did they not miss the warmth of the sun, the birds that pecked around on them, searching for food? To be drowned by Science, or the river, for the sake of fertility. What would ribbins of bleached sand say about that if they could give voice to their feelings? (ibidem 84)

Here words or phrases like 'barren wastes of empty sands', 'fertile', 'life-enhancing silt', the Sun's warmth or the pecking birds— all are used to describe the river's condition. But they are also very much suggestive of Rukmini's predicament, the very condition of her inner self. Thus the river becomes a metaphor for Rukmini's life. This intelligent use of language heightens the overall effect of the novel and, at the same time, adds an ecofeministic dimension to it.

But Rukmini suddenly discovers that she is pregnant and does not have a dysfunctional womb as has been told by her husband and Dr. Rabha, their physician. That she is capable to conceive makes her overjoyed. It is a fulfillment of her heart's desire and she finds a meaning of her life. Her joy is depicted with images from the world of nature:

She was surrounded by the chirps and thrills of feathered creatures she could neither see nor identify from their calls. There was a hum of music everywhere, a low thrumming, an unbelievably pleasant sound. She could see no birds moving, yet the air was full of movement, it was invisible to her, yet

she could feel it in the vibrations all around her, the pulsating air in synchronous melody. She felt she was inside a drum which was being gently touched from outside to yield up, not rhythm, but cascades of melody. The only visible movement on the hillside was the gentle stirring of the leaves around her. And if she leaned down, below, under the green canopy she could see clouds of sunshine-yellow butterflies, rising and falling, falling and rising, their wingbeats keeping perfect time to the music all around them. They were engrossed in their dance, oblivious, like the invisible birds, to the gunshots and strife around them. This was a joyous celebration of life
(ibidem 261)

Siddhartha's ignorance for her and his affair with another woman called Priyam is a shock for Rukmini. The ignorance from her husband makes her closer to Manoj, one of her friends and she becomes impregnated by him. It seems that Rukmini has been deprived of love, tender care and a genuine concern all through her married life. Even her mother-in-law Mrs. Renu Bezboruah's concerns for her seem not as a genuine love for the daughter-in-law but as a responsibility for the bearer of her son's heir. Such attitude of her immediate family members plays as a catalectic force in Rukmini's relationship with Manoj. The novelist consciously draws a parallelism between Rukmini's world and the world of nature. There are many occasions in the novel where the novelist deliberately uses images, metaphors and other references from the natural world to reflect the private world of Rukmini. This has a strong claim of studying the novel from an ecofeministic perspective. The closeness of woman with nature has been shown in many a times. Both women and nature create and sustain life. This parallelism between nature and women can be marked also in the following lines.

There were never any women in the funeral processions. Males, of all ages, would form long, straggly lines as they walked towards the cremation ground. Women were forbidden to witness the actual act of the body being consigned to flames. Birth belonged to women. But death (...) had been appropriated by men. (ibidem 50)

Our traditional rituals have always a male perspective in them as they have been framed by the male-dominated society where the female voice is often silenced. This patriarchal attitude finds an ironical reference in the following passage:

The dead, if they were female, were consigned to flames amidst a crowd of men. Rukmini sometimes wondered if the souls of the just-dead women missed the company of other women at this juncture. Surely the female soul would want to be surrounded by a sorority of grieving women friends, at this critical moment of its entry to another world? Instead, what she got was a circle of males, many of whom she barely knew, who looked surreptitiously at their watches out of the corners of eyes suitably somber, even as the corpulent *doms* hovered around and the lean Brahmin priest chanted his mantras over the leaping flames. And if the woman had had misfortune of not bearing a son, her mouth would be fed flames by a male relative of her husband's, possibly somebody whom she had not even liked. (ibidem 50)

Nature also has a devastating aspect. A sense of awe and wonder for malevolent nature has been prevailing in human beings' mind since time immemorial. This awesome aspect of nature has been manifested in the images of some of the ancient deities suggesting the destructive force of nature. Because of this sense of mystery and mysticism in nature human beings have been worshipping it in the forms of some idols. The following reference to goddess Kali, a Hindu deity shows the

violent aspect of nature, or the 'mother' image that destroys disorder and paves the way for a new order:

The people of Parbatpuri were proud of their cremation ground. A large image of Kali stood to one side of the entrance. On the other side, a small park had been developed. In season, roses, marigolds and tuberose grew in carefully-cultivated rows. Little children played under the watchful eyes of the skull-draped, scimitar-wielding Kali, unperturbed by the processions carrying dead men and women on pallets. The entrance to the cremation-ground-cum-park had a large arched gate, on which was written, in a somewhat macabre fashion, "Welcome". (ibidem 22)

The novelist is also concerned of the present ecological degradation. Terrorism and other such hazards created by human beings have posed a great threat to the environment. It has a tremendous impact on the present ecological crisis. This concern of the novelist finds an expression in the following lines:

But the main aspect of the landscape here, dominating sky as well as mountains, was the river itself. The Red River is spate, wearing its full monsoon regalia. It was indeed red here. Red with the topsoil washed down from the high mountain plateau above. Red with the tumultuous volume of water that rushed through this cleft between two hill ranges. Red with fury at being thus confined. Red with violence that raged on its banks. (ibidem 342)

This can well be seen as a voice of protest against ecological degradation. This protesting voice is remarkably common to contemporary writers writing in English from Northeast India. This seems to make their writing canonical.

Siddhartha Deb is considered to be one of the representative novelists from the region. His first novel *The Point of Return* was adjudged a New York Times Notable Book of the year in 2002. Set in an unnamed town which is presumably based on Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya, one of the states of India's Northeast, the story of the novel revolves around the father-son relationship. This partly autobiographical novel also delves deep into a world of corruption in the bureaucracy, communal violence and ethnic clashes that have taken place in Maghalaya. The novel also has a few passages from which one may have an idea of the ecology of the region:

In the spring, the gardens flowered from house to house, and in the backyards, along with shrubs and weeds, there were vines of squash, their prickly golden-green skin rough with fiber and indentations and little hollows like a piece of the earth itself. There were butterflies, berries, and rare orchids in the forested walks up toward Laitkor Peak, crabs that scuttled along the slippery, stony beds of streams. (Deb 2002: 257)

Divided into four parts entitled "Arrival", "Departure", "Terminal" and "Travelogue" the novel also talks about history, maps and memory. Dr. Dam, the father is ethnically connected to Bangladesh, the former East Pakistan, and who is in search of a 'home' in a land where they are a part of a cultural minority. Even after staying in that region for so many years and rendering their service for its development, they are still marginalized and treated as the "other" by the local people. The local people also have their own points of view as they feel that they themselves are being treated as the "other" by the Indian 'nation' in many occasions. Thus this novel can be studied with a postcolonial perspective. It is also a saga of the displaced people and the insider-outsider dichotomy. This undoubtedly has far-reaching impact

on the ecology. Displacements, communal violence or ethnic clashes greatly influences the ecosystem. Hence *Point of Return* can also be studied as postcolonial writing.

Deb's another novel *Surface* is also set in one of the regions in Northeast India. This unnamed remote part of India is referred to as 'the region'. However, a close study shows that 'the region' might be Manipur, one of the states in India's northeast. Amrit, a reporter for *The Sentinel* has been sent to the region by the Kolkata head office with a particular assignment. It is through this journey of the scribe contemporary politics, economics, society and life in Manipur are presented. Through the eyes of Amrit the ecology of the land is also unveiled:

...a national highway that disappeared into the hills of Meghalaya where the green of the river valley gave way to a more ethereal blue.

(Deb. 2005 : 49)

There are such other references to the land through which one may gather an idea of the ecology of the region. One of the characters, a bureaucrat, who once served in this land speaks about it:

There you go. Manipur. The Moirang Lake, perhaps as remarkable a water body as you will even come across.....The people there live on floating huts in the lake, with this incredible environmental sense, in complete harmony with the ecology. (ibidem 34)

Such references present the unique ecology of the land as well as the peaceful co-existence of the local tribes with nature. Both of them have been accommodating each

other in their respective worlds and have been providing a 'place' and a 'space' to each other. This inherent attitude of the tribal people of Northeast India is seen in the contemporary writing in English from this region. This attitude makes a significant study from Deep as well as Spiritual Ecology and also from postcolonial ecological studies.

The novelist is also concerned of the ecological degradation due to insurgency. This pristine and serene land where 'hibiscus and jacaranda flowers were in bloom' (ibidem: 44) is nowadays on headlines for 'encounters between insurgents and the army, political scandals, a mortar attack on the state assembly....' (ibidem 58). News such as the seizer of 'one thousand four hundred numbers of gelatin, five hundred numbers of detonators, and sixteen numbers of bundles carrying fuse wires' (ibidem 43-44) are some of the regular news items from the land these days in stead of its 'Hog deer, Barking monkeys, jungle fowl' and other such rare species of animals present in the land and are vital ingredients of its ecology. The ecological degradation can be felt from such passage where the protagonist speaks of his immediate reactions on his arrival to the land:

That initial, aerial view of a green and fecund valley gave way to the camouflage of army uniforms and the dour faces of soldiers once I set foot in the city. The monsoons had turned the ground soft and squishy, and the brown silt of the valley lapped at the black boots of the soldiers. (ibidem 6)

While going through such passages readers along with the protagonist, feel a pain within and this degradation of ecology appeals to their consciousness.

The novel also talks about ethnic violence in present day Manipur. The clashes and violence have effects on the political, economic and social level. But above all, these have adverse effect on the ecology as a whole. One of the characters in one occasion speaks of such violence:

In Manipur, the Kuki tribe has been fighting the Nagas for all of last year. Villages burnt on both sides, passengers pulled out of buses and gunned down.... (ibidem 47).

Such references clearly show the serious threat posed by violence and insurgency for ecology. The novelist, like his counterparts from the other parts of the region, seems to be writing with a strong and conscious ecological sense. Such writing can also play a canonical role in creating an ecological awareness among the masses.

Anjum Hasan is a poet, novelist and a chronicler from Meghalaya and is presently based in Bangalore. She has published two novels *Lunatic In My Head* (Zubban-Penguin, 2007) and *Neti, Neti* (Roli Books, 2009), a book of poems entitled *Street on the Hill* (Sahitya Akademi,2006) and a number of short fictions, reviews and essays in many books and journals. Her debut novel *Lunatic In My Head* was shortlisted for the Crossword Book Award 2007 and her second novel *Neti, Neti* was on the longlist for the 2008 Man Asian Prize and was shortlisted for the Hindu Best Fiction Award in 2010 and the 2011 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. In *Lunatic In My Head*, she talks about roots, identity, clash of culture, home, etc. The novel is divided into nine sections entitled “Wonder”, “Sadness”, “Love”, “Courage”, “Disgust”, “Fear”, “Anger”, “Joy” and “Peace”. Siddartha Deb, another leading novelist from Northeast India, while commenting on Hasan’s novel, which is set against Shillong during the 1990s, opines: “Anjum Hasan’s novel is haunting, lyrical

and daring, bringing fresh air into the stale confines of Indian writing. A deceptively quiet portrait of a hill town, it is one of the finest works to have come out of the forgotten territories of the North-East.” (Blurb)

There are voices in the novel raised on the issue of identity born out of the outsider- insider conflict. The outsider also has an identity crisis, a fear of losing its originality. The parents of a young girl, who are outsiders to this land, are worried of their daughter’s future: “You stay here for eight, ten years and then you can’t go anywhere else. You get used to this place....She will lose her culture....Ask her about the *Mahabharata*, why Diwali is celebrated, who Meera Bai was---nothing. Zero” (Hasan 2007:243). This difference of culture is reiterated while a non-Khasi girl is proposed by Ibomcha, a Khasi young man: “You, your homeland, your tribe, your love for your mother, your dozens of cousins, your schemes, your beliefs--- I share nothing of this.” (ibidem 143). Issues of home and exile are also raised, which again, in a way, brings forward the cultural conflict: “....why don’t you apply for a job elsewhere, outside Shillong? Where is it written that we have to stay in Shillong? There’s nothing in this place anyway. No jobs, no culture. I have no one to talk to. And look at Sophie---she’s picking up all sorts of tribal habits.” (ibidem 241). This is undoubtedly not the Shillong in Dhruba Hazarika’s *A Bowstring Writer*.

The dichotomy of the insider-outsider conflict has predominantly a burning issue of politics in India’s Northeast since Independence. Politics of displacement, migration, and ever-raising voices for new homelands have been ravaging the entire region. The polemics of power seems to be very much functional in creating an

atmosphere of doubt and distrust between the ‘insider’ and the ‘outsider’. The divide between them may also be seen as the postcolonial distance between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’. This issue of insider-outsider dichotomy is addressed in Anjum Hasan’s *Lunatic In My Head*, or more visibly in Siddhartha Deb’s novel *The Point of Return*. Migration, displacements, and separate homelands are dominantly postcolonial issues, and besides others, they have a great impact even on ecology. The issues of migration, displacements, or new homelands in contemporary politics of Northeast India are to be seen from their historical perspective. In the words of Sanjib Baruah:

The regime of citizens and denizens that has evolved in Northeast India has to be understood in a historical context. It began as an attempt by the colonial state to insulate some of the peoples organized in pre-capitalist social formations from the devastation that the initial onslaught of global capitalism had brought. Given this history, one can argue that a model of formally equal citizenship would only reinforce discriminatory outcomes and that the only way to protect such vulnerable groups of peoples is a regime of differentiated citizenship. But whether a particular regime of differentiated citizenship can achieve its intended goals has to be a matter for investigation. For the costs of sacrificing the basic principle of equal citizenship are high; and there are intended as well as unintended consequences of regimes of differentiated citizenship. (Baruah 2005: 187).

Lunatic In My Head has occasional references to the ecology of Shillong. There is a passage that talks about an earthquake:

Deep in the old rocks that make up the Khasi Hills, some blind and minute shifting of century upon century of stone, transmit its vibrations to the earth's surface. The tremors spread outward – north to a little highway town called Nongpoh, west to the Garo hills, south to escarpments standing high above the plains of Bangladesh. Wave upon wave, fanning out across the hills like a tremendous bout of shuddering, though no one can tell what emotion it is that the stones are expressing – horror, revulsion, fear? (ibidem 267).

A rich oral tradition of folktales, myths and legends is a vital source for modern Mizo literature. In the words of Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama:

This oral tradition has also proved to be an invaluable source of data for the tracing of their [the Mizos] cultures and structuring of their history, in the absence of written historical records. They help throw light on their long migration trail from Central Asia, their way of life, important events like wars and famines, while at the same time expressing their deepest sentiments and aspirations. Their early songs and chants, seemingly a natural outcome of their poetic and nostalgic nature, first originated as couplets which later developed into longer, more complicated forms. They seem to have emerged not out of a conscious effort to compose but rather out of a spontaneous need. (Zama 2011: 207).

After the arrival of the Christian missionaries to Mizoram (then known as the Lushai Hills, a district in the province of colonial Assam) in the year 1894 'the Mizo got their present Roman script' (ibidem: 205), which was adopted for the Luesi dialect. Like the contemporary poets, in the works of the representative prose writers

from Mizoram like C Thuamluaia, Biakliana, K C Lalvunga, Vanneihtluanga, Kaphleia, Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama, Margaret Lalmuanpuii Pachuau, Mona Zote there seems to be an urge of going back to their tradition in search of roots and identity. They seem to deal with contemporary issues and the socio-cultural milieu of their people in particular and of humankind in general drawing inspiration from their rich oral tradition and cultural heritage. Contemporary writing from Mizoram can be studied by using the tenets of ecocriticism.

“Lali”, the first ever Mizo short story (Zama 2004: 9) is written by Biakliana, the writer of the first ever Mizo novel *Hawilopari*. Apparently a story of a girl called Lali it portrays the hopes and aspirations, pain and pleasure, agony and conflicts of human life. It also gives us an impression of some of the traditional beliefs of the Mizo society. The writer also presents, sometimes directly and sometimes obliquely, the predicament of women in a male-dominated society. Regarding the fate of women in a patriarchal social set up, it is said in the story:

For, finally, we remain but simple hillfolk, and our economic conditions are pathetic to say the least. Our women bear the burnt of it, for they are sold off like cattle, and cattle buyers buy the best and the most hardworking of them all. It is as if we auction them off. And even after we possess them, the adage —Women and fences are but disposables! — still holds good. We men beat them and leave them at a whim. In the olden days, the value of slaves was dependent on their health and strength. We look at our women today in much the same way ... The dreaded habit of slavery was abolished due to the painstaking efforts of Christians and other noble hearted men who invested

time, labour, money and talent for the cause ... Who shall lead Mizoram's enslaved women into the light of freedom? (Biakliana 2004: 203).

A sharp note of irony as well as a strong voice of protest can very well be marked in such observations. In any social set up where patriarchy dictates terms, the women voice is always marginalized and hence remains unheard. This silencing of the voice of women has parallelism in the silencing of the voice of nature. Because the ever-growing market economy tends to devalue their position by treating both of them as mere commodities.

Vanneihluanga's short story "Thunderbird" is a celebration of the invincible human spirit that has been inspiring human beings all through the ages to stand against all odds of life. The story can also be studied with a Deep Ecological perspective. It seems to portray the age-old bond between the human world and the world of nature and the peaceful coexistence of these two worlds. The story depicts a man who is bound to a wheelchair after he was attacked by somebody for speaking against corruption publicly. Dejected and frustrated with life this man sometimes even thinks of committing suicide. Sitting all alone in his wheelchair he watches a flock of martins through the window. He starts to feel an affinity with them and suddenly discovers a new meaning of life:

Everyday I would fly with them, their small wings holding me up. The martins taught me freedom, and showed me how to be carefree. I grew to know each one of them individually and they never tired of what I had to say. Because of them I began to look forward to each new day. (Vanneihluanga 2004: 240).

The martins fly away as the season changes and it was the sparrows that appear before this man as his companions. Finally this man overcomes his physically challenged condition and stands on his own feet. When his surprised, overjoyed elder son asks him whether he will be able to walk this man simply replies:

I don't know. It all depends on that sparrow down there. (ibidem: 245).

Here the martins or the sparrows become metaphors for the life of the protagonist of the story. This relationship between the human and the natural world as suggested in this short story bears significance and keeps avenues open to study it from an ecocritical viewpoint.

In some of the prose writings there are beautiful depiction of the landscape of Mizoram. There are also references to Mizo myths and legends as well traditional rites and rituals. In a short story entitled "Chhingpuii" written by Kaphleia quite a good number of Mizo traditional songs are used that makes its reading enjoyable and enriching at the same time. In this story there are also references to the wonderful landscape of Mizoram. The Mizo landscape comes to life in the following lines:

The next morning, the autumn sun lit up the Tawitlang slopes and struck aflame the hills of Darlawng. The morning mist hung low over the Tuirial river, enveloping it in white. At a glance it appeared as if one could walk on these soft clouds. From there, one could detect the shadow of Darlawng hills. The day sparkled clear and the hills loomed much closer. No wind blew, and so quiet and still was the air, as if the eastern sun had bid all of nature to be still and calm. The sky was a clear azure blue, save for a couple of dark

shapes looming at the southern horizon like the pointed tips of a spear and a pipe. After a while these too vanished. (Kaphleia 2004: 251).

Such portrayal of the landscape also provides an idea of the ecology of the region.

More than half a century of bloodshed has marked the history of the Naga people. Their struggle for an independent Nagaland and their continuing search for identity provide the background of Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home*, a collection of stories. It is the saga of ordinary people in an atmosphere of violence and bloodshed. Here she talks about the predicament of children, housewives, older people, or even the militant in a violent atmosphere of insurgency. Ao believes that in such a war zone "there are no winners, only victims and the results can be measured only in human terms." (Ao, 2006: x). The oral tradition of the Nagas, their myths and legends and also the ecology of the land are depicted in these stories apart from portraying the problem of insurgency. The conflict of traditional faith with Christianity is also felt in some of the stories: "Though the whole village had embraced Christianity long ago, some of the old superstitions and traditions had not been totally abandoned ... "So what, we are still Nagas aren't we? And for us some things never change" (ibidem 30). The fate of women in a male-dominated social set up is beautifully presented in the story entitled "The Night". An unmarried girl called Innala is impregnated and deserted by a man. Being a woman, this incident has changed her life drastically, but the man, responsible for the whole act, goes on living a normal life. The patriarchal concepts of illegitimate motherhood and paternal security are presented in this story:

The one consolation amidst the chaos of her life was that her unborn child had been given the right to call some one “father’ in a society where acknowledged paternity was crucial for a person born out of wedlock. (ibidem 56)

Here the underlying note of irony and satire is unmistakably strong.

A Naga Village Remembered by Easterine Iralu is the first novel in English from Nagaland by a Naga writer. The novel is an account of the great battle of Khonoma (1879-1880) and of the advent of the Christian Missionaries to Nagaland. References to tribal faiths, festivals, myths and legends, hills, rivers and forests of Nagaland, the entire ecology of the region are in abundance in this novel. There is also a sense of degeneration of ecology and the writer is very much concerned of it. The writer seems to be concerned of history, ecology, ecological theosophy and the turmoil of time against animistic faiths. The novel reflects the degradation of pristine ecology (Das 2011:288).

Although a fictional account of the Naga village of Khonoma in particular, the novel *A Naga Village Remembered* is also a document of the socio-cultural life of any Naga village in general. The age-old value-system of the tribal people, their traditional beliefs, their rites and rituals, and the overall ecology of the land — all are depicted here in a form of a novel. There are geographical descriptions of the village of Khonoma and also of its natural landscape. Such descriptions play an important role in providing an idea of the ecology of the region in general:

From this vantage-point the village of Khonoma spread out before him rather majestically, the fields to his left and the village in front of him and at his back, its houses clinging to the cliffs they were built into. The fields ran right through the cleft of land between the two hills and ploughed down the land next to the river ending on the borderlands with Mezoma. Fed by the rivers, these fields yielded good harvests each year. The village had never known a year of famine and want. (Iralu 2003: 40-41).

But such self-sufficiency in the rural economy was disturbed as the ecology was degenerated by battles and wars, predominantly a human affair. The novel has references to various such wars those have had adverse effect also on the ecology. A depiction of one such war is indicative of its role in the degeneration of the ecology:

The tough little village of Khonoma was encircled on all fronts... the valley came alive with sounds, the calls of soldiers to one another and the rumbling of an army on the offensive. At 10 in the morning it came, shells dropping out of the middle of the sky, so it seemed, and falling into *Keyaba*, east of the village. (ibidem: 82).

This passage also voices the postcolonial resentment against colonial invasion on the land and its people, and also on their tradition and culture. The novel seems to have a voice of protest against neo-colonialism also. In its “Introduction” it is said:

It the village of Khonoma] delineates the ingrained sense of honour and deep love of independence bred by it which drove its men to repulse any invasion on its lands and any attempt to suppress its freedom loving people, first by Britain and in later years by India. (ibidem: xv).

This voice of resistance as well as of identity is typical of postcolonial writing in English from Northeast India.

The traditional tribal way of living in harmony with nature has been referred to in more than one occasion in the novel. Their sense of respect for the natural world reiterates their age-old way of practicing the philosophy of what in recent times known as Deep Ecology and Creation Spirituality. The following words from a mother to her son reflect the traditional attitude of interdependence between the human world and the world of nature:

The sun and rain are the Creator's blessings. They rain and shine in turn for us to make our fields and get our harvests. (ibidem: 10).

There are also references to some traditional beliefs which can be interpreted in terms of ecofeminism. There is a reference to two beautiful young women who are also expert weavers. Even then they have not get married as they are considered by the society as *Kirhupfumia*, which means ominous women having evil powers. This belief of the society that has women as particular targets of contempt and torture reiterates the authority of patriarchy. It also re-affirms the critical position that sees womanhood as a social construct. The elder of these two young women says to her younger mate, "My sister, we are not as the other women. I cannot explain how we are different." (ibidem: 41). The younger one too tries to accept this *reality* since acceptance is the only way for them to survive amidst a social hegemony. Accepting her destiny she says: We are *Kirhupfumia* and what is born of us will never find life. Our destiny tends towards death and destruction, not life." Thus lamenting on their fate "she wept a bit but resigned herself to her sad fate". (ibidem: 41). But it can be felt that she 'resigned' not to their fate but to the social framework, which is

essentially male-dominated. The sorrow of these women that remains unexpressed, their voice that remains unarticulated seem to be typical of women in general whose voice is also silenced and hence remains unheard, and who is suppressed and considered as 'the second sex' by the patriarchal social set up. The story of these two young women is also suggestive of the violation of the natural order. Women that create and sustain life, are being associated with 'death and destruction' in the story. This can also be seen from an ecocritical viewpoint where it may be suggestive of the anthropocentric or, in a more specific sense, the androcentric attitude towards nature which has been seemed to be hugely responsible for environmental degradation and the present ecological crisis.

In her another novel *A Terrible Matriarchy* Easterine talks about gender inequality. She raises this issue with a new perspective showing how women exploit women in a set up of matriarchal hegemony. The story revolves around a five year old girl Dielieno, who is the youngest and the only girl child of the family. She happens to live with her grandmother, who has a firm belief that "education is wasted on girls". (Iralu 2007:158). The grandmother holds the supreme authority in the family and she takes Dielieno for granted in every occasion. In most of the times Dielieno is unwanted and is made to sacrifice her ambitions and aspirations for her brothers. The grandmother here represents the traditional attitude towards the girl child:

In my father's day, boys never did any work because they had to look after the village and engage enemy warriors in warfare. The household that did not have a male heir was considered barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would only have one man to protect them.

That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best of food. And we should. (Iralu 2007: 37)

But when Dielieno meets her grandmother at her deathbed she forgives her grandmother: “Grandmother, it’s me, Lieno, I want to say that it is okay, I forgive you for being harsh with me”. (ibidem 280). Dielieno here seems to be as calm and benevolent as nature. The novel has a sharp note of ecofeminism throughout.

Dielieno is all the time ill-treated by her grandmother. The following lines depicting the little girl’s expression of the treatment she met during her stay in her grandmother’s house show how a girl is oppressed and tortured even by her grandmother and who herself is a woman:

...Mother, you don’t know how I was treated at Grandmother’s house. I never told you that I was not allowed to bathe with warm water in winter. That Bano bathed me in icy cold water following Grandmother’s instructions. And I was only five and a half. ... That is not all, Mother, I would have to stand in the dark counting her chickens and if I counted them wrong she would make me go out in the dark again. I was so terrified. You said that Grandmother loved me but I know that she held it against me that I was a girl and not a boy. I used to feel I was being punished for being born a girl. For many years, I hated it so much, I wished that I was not a girl. (ibidem: 272).

The grandmother embodies the traditional attitude towards a girl child even within the family. She justifies her attitude towards Dielieno, the little girl:

In my father's day, boys never did any work because they had to look after the village and engage enemy warriors in warfare. The household that did not have a male heir was considered barren. They were always in constant danger if there was a war. The women would only have one man to protect them. That is why we love our male children so much and we give them the best of food. And we should. (ibidem: 37).

In her justification we may mark the reflection of the patriarchal legacy of which, significantly enough, the women are faithful bearers. This seems to be quite interesting and this issue has been critically dealt with by the novelist. The patriarchal set up is so strong that women have to live with it, accept it, and be a part of it. The grandmother here, although apparently seems to be an oppressor, in reality, a victim herself of that strong patriarchal social set up. She has been living these experiences all through her life and these have become a part of her consciousness may be even unknowingly. Dielieno's mother's words to her speak of the experiences that have been lived by the grandmother all through her life in a social set up where women constitute the voiceless, marginalized group that does not have a 'space' in the politics of representation in any social or even familial discourse. These words seem to reflect a complex, critical stance the novel tries to provide:

... When she [the grandmother] was young she lived through a very hard time. In the village, widows without sons lost all their husband's property to other male relatives. So she understood that it was very important for a married woman to produce as many male offspring as she could. ... But people were unkind and mocked those who could not produce male children. The understanding was that a woman without a male heir would be sheltered

by her in-laws but her daughters could not inherit the father's property. Their best bet would be to marry a man rich enough to have property of his own. Then they would devote the rest of their lives to trying to produce a male heir. ... I think your grandmother looks at her sons and grandsons as a kind of insurance ... You know that our people say we should love our sons because they are the ones who look after us in our old age. (ibidem: 272-273).

In a social set up where patriarchy dictates terms, this is the very situation women usually find themselves in. The Grandmother here, behind the robes of an oppressor, is a victim herself. She is the suppressed, silenced voice who has been compelled to accept and live with such experiences. This social set up is so powerful that it works not only on the physical level but also invades her mind, memory and consciousness. But against this oppression and male-dominance the novelist makes Dielieno's mother say:

I can see that women are not weak. They just have a strength different from men. (ibidem: 274).

This is also another position from which the novel can be looked at. Although it is apparently a 'terrible matriarchy', the novel, with shifting critical foci and changing perspectives of power structures, provides niches to study the women locus. This is where lies the significance of studying *A Terrible Matriarchy* using the tenets of ecofeminism.

There has been quite a good number of non-fictional writing as well on ecology from Northeast India. These writings also discuss some of the core issues of

the region such as the problem of insurgency, the issue of identity, racial autonomy and so on and so forth. Sanjoy Hazarika, the journalist, who has been associated with quite a good number of leading international newspapers, delves deeper into the history of insurgency in Northeast India in his book *Strangers of the Mist*. The book helps in developing a consciousness that apart from having a geographical dimension, the Northeast is also a psychological entity that exists in the mindset of the people both outside and inside the region. Right from the time of Independence of India, the people of this part of the country has been feeling a sense of being the 'other'. This has been largely responsible in creating a general feeling of insecurity as well as a sense of alienation from the 'mainstream.' Going back to the history of the insurgent movements in the region, Hazarika writes:

India's Northeast is a misshapen strip of land, linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor just twenty kilometers wide at its slimmest which is referred to as the Chicken's Neck. The region has been the battleground for generations of sub national identities confronting insensitive nation-states and their bureaucracies as well as of internecine strife. It is a battle that continues, of ideas and arms, new concepts and old traditions, of power, bitterness and compassion. (Hazarika 1994: xvii)

Hazarika also talks about the people, their tradition and history:

The Northeast has best been described as Asia in miniature, a place where the brown and yellow races meet and mingle. The oral history of the tribes of Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and other areas tell of ancestors from the shadowy past, from mountains steeped in mist and romance, from lands far away, of snake gods and princesses, epic battles and great warriors. (ibidem xviii)

The ecology of the region comes to life in such passages in the books:

The people of the Northeast are the guardians of its most precious asset. : its uniqueness which other area has such beauty among its people and its environment? Which sees such a range of religions, creeds, communities, lifestyles and traditions? Which other area can match it in the sheer raw power of nature: whether it is the Brahmaputra that resembles a great sea during its rain-swollen, flood-hungry days, or the force of its gales and the grace of its waterfalls, the lushness of its forests and bamboo thickets and the solitude of its spirit, found in the mist of the mountains. (ibidem xx)

Such passages are expressive of a spiritual ecology prevalent in the region.

The ecology of the region centered on the mighty river Brahmaputra has been explored to the deepest extent by Sanjoy Hazarika in his essay entitled, "The Brahmaputra: muse metaphor, source of life." The 'Brahmaputra Ecology' has also been dealt with in detail by Arup Kumar Dutta, another powerful writer in English from Northeast India. His book *The Brahmaputra* is a detailed account of the oral traditions, myths and legends, rites and rituals, tradition and culture, especially of the people of Assam, centering the Brahmaputra River, which is said to be the lifeline of Assam, in particular.

Sanjoy Hazarika speaks of the Brahmaputra discussing its salient features. He describes in detail the role of the river as a life force as well as the politics, economics and culture centering this mighty river. His description is suggestive of the role of the river in the ecology of the entire region:

The Brahmaputra is one of the greatest rivers of the world, traversing three nations and many cultures, as it flows from Tibet through North-east India and Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal, on an extraordinary journey spanning nearly 3,000 kilometers..... The river is revered in legend, ballads and contemporary literature as the most visible face of Assam and the North-east, dominating the geography, history and cultures of both Arunachal Pradesh and Assam....The Brahmaputra's extraordinary power can be seen in a simple fact: this single river carries as much water as almost all the rivers of India put together. (Hazarika 2006:245)

Arup Kumar Dutta makes a historical as well as an anatomical survey of the Brahmaputra in his book entitled *The Brahmaputra*. He also discusses the myths and legends associated with the river. He goes back to the pages of remote history and finds out scriptural references to this mighty river. Dutta presents different shapes of landscape while exploring the Brahmaputra Ecology: The following passage is one such example:

The unbroken green of the landscape as seen from the Brahmaputra is soothing, and the rustic environment, unsullied by ugly scars of industrialization, imparts to the ambience an extraordinary quiescence. Copses of the plantain, bamboo, coconut, betel nut and other palm half-conceal clustered helmets, with thatched roofs and bamboo walled cottages. The hills rise in gentle slopes from the fringes of the valley, taking on a steeper gradient as one proceeds north to south. (Dutta 2005:67)

Dutta's book also talks about the ethics and values of the indigenous people regarding the Brahmaputra. All these are suggestive of the traditional ecomystical ideals of the people of this region.

Contemporary politics in India's Northeast is a complex one. Voices of dissent search for identity, ethnicity, aspirations for new homelands, and crisis of displacement are some of the dominant issues of contemporary politics in the region. These issues are addressed and looked into from different angles with different perspectives in *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, a book by Sanjib Baruah. The book talks about the geopolitics of the region and also focuses on the politics of representation in regard to this politically volatile part of the country. While taking on ethnicity, Baruah discusses the tradition and culture of the tribal communities of the region. These have ecological significance. He also talks about the crisis and politics associated with the problem of displacement, an issue that hugely has an ecological aspect in it. Baruah observes:

Questions of social justice in Northeast India are significantly more complex today than what the regime of protection was originally designed to accomplish. The informality of the arrangements exposes a large number of poor people to a more vulnerable legal position than that already implied in the marginal nature of the economic riches they occupy. (Baruah 2008:197)

These poor, displaced people and the problem of their settlement is a serious issue that also has an ecological concern.

The prose writing in English include both fictional and non-fictional prose and as characteristic of the region, the writers have mostly dealt with the eco-cultural

tenets of the region. Even writing about the crises of the region, writers like Sanjib Baruah, Sanjoy Hazarika, Hem Barua and Arup Kumar Dutta have mostly highlighted the ecological glory of the region. The political life of the region, and the cultural aspects along with the ecological greatness constitute the ecopolitics which magnificently signify the region.

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Why soldiers in camouflage, imitation of green leaves, are let in to destroy the beautiful green fields and thick forests with busy canopies of green leaves? Where shall the fatherless children of war, born of women, deceptively called prostitutes, go? In every con, at the birth of 'Time', one 'Earth' devoid of morning and day, with the sky covered by the vultures, turned by human beings, is created. (Thiyam 2008:69).

The states of North-East India have quite a good number of plays written in their own respective vernacular languages. But the works of some of the Manipuri and Assamese playwrights have been translated into English and these have shown how successfully this literary genre has been explored by these playwrights. These plays exhibit local colours, local sense and sentiment, deal with some of the core issues of the region, and at the same time, they have a universal appeal. The world of these playwrights, no doubt, is the very world around them; but ecology, myths and legends, tradition, mysticism etc. form a vital part of their world. This reminds of their rootedness to their tradition and culture and even being a part of the corpus of Indian drama, these also make them essentially northeastern playwrights. They are recognized with an identity of their own because of their legitimate, powerful voice.

Manipur has a rich theatre tradition. It became a constituent part of the Indian Union in 1947 after British colonial rule from 1891 to 1947. Under the Ningthouja dynasty it enjoyed a long stint of independence since the early Christian era and its political and cultural features were greatly developed during this long period of time. An ethnic tribe called the Meiteis, which constitutes two-third of Manipur's population lives in the central valley and have accepted Hinduism in the 18th century. Thirty-odd tribes of Naga and Kuki denominations live in its hills and the process of

their conversion to Christianity started in the late 19th century. Along with these indigenous faiths and beliefs also survived and have been contributing towards Manipuri art and culture. The Meiteis had encouraged mainly the growth of theatre, while the hill tribes enriched music and dance.

Manipuri theatrical performances originated in the primitive fertility-cults and ancestor-worshipping festivals, a kind of rituals those are said to be established in the 12th century. In the 17th century the “Wari Liba”, an art of solo storytelling before the King or community became institutionalized. During the 18th century folk dances and music, rituals of different clans performed especially during the cyclic festivals were developed into a national culture.

The defeat of Manipur in the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891, apart from causing impacts in many other spheres, also brought the old theatre of Manipur under the colonial influence. In a new social order Proscenium-arch theatre became prevalent and such performances gained popularity those were modeled upon the historical and mythological drama imported from that Kolkata(then Calcutta), which was looking toward the Victorian England for artistic craftsmanship during that time. Manipur’s political annexation with the Indian Union in 1949 brought obvious changes also to its dramatic sphere. Nehruvian ethos, melodrama of love, romance, suffering or family crisis became popular subject matters. But in the course of time, the changing faces of political, economic, social or cultural spheres greatly influenced the world of Manipuri theatre. Rapid urbanization, new economic structure, decline in moral or community values, changing power-relations, and, above all, a new world order contributed towards the growth and development of critical, modernist drama in

Manipur. In the late 1960s a kind of discomfort as well as a discontentment against Indian rule, a strong feeling of being exploited and ignored and thus marginalized, a sense of insecurity, identity crisis started shaking the Manipuri mindset. All these have led to a separatist movement and eventually violence and insurgency. This separatist ideology as well as the atmosphere of violence and insurgency has led to the rise of experimental theatre during the 1970s.

After its interaction with the British Indian Empire in the 19th century, people were exposed to western drama. The introduction of western education in Manipur during the last quarter of the 19th century also influenced the advent of a new group of playwrights into the scenario --- playwrights such as Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh (1895-1966), Lamabam Kamal (1900-1934), Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh (1983-1955), Arambam Dorendrajit Singh (1907-1944), Ashangbam Minaketan (1906-1995), Hijam Angahal (1892-1943) etc. But it is Ratan Thiyam (1948-) in whose hand Manipuri theatre has achieved a new dimension. He is a playwright of high caliber, a director, actor, poet, novelist, musician as well as a painter. His is a respected name in the realm of Indian drama, whose plays have been staged all over the world. He set up the Chorus Repertory Theatre in 1976 that has immensely contributed to the development of Manipuri theatre. He is also one of the leading figures of the “theatre of roots” movement in Indian theatre during the 1970s.

As a playwright Thiyam seems to be very much concerned of the erosion of human values that has also resulted in the degradation of ecology. With a prophetic voice his plays have spiritual yearnings amidst the chaotic socio-political atmosphere of the present world. Apart from being a sensible theatre personality and an artist of

high caliber, Thiyam is also an activist who is very much aware of and sensitive to various contemporary issues. He relinquished the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in the Republic of India that was conferred on him by the government of India protesting the Indian Government's decision to extend the territorial limits of the ceasefire with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN—IM). In a letter to the then president of India he said in 2001, "...I have been witnessing the political developments and the deteriorating condition of life in Manipur. When I look at the present situation of Manipur, my heart bleeds... Life is not normal in the valley of Manipur for the past month. No tangible effort and urgency is visible on the part of the centre. It is decaying by the day and there is no helping hand coming forward. It is not disrespect of the civilian honour of Padma Shri conferred on me, it is the compulsion of my bleeding heart. Although it is a very painful decision, I am, as a protest, relinquishing this honour..." (www.rediff.com/news/2001/jul/20_mani.htm). This clearly exemplifies Thiyam's commitment as a playwright.

Ratan Thiyam explores through the vibrant world of Manipuri tradition and culture. He rediscovers the folklores, myths and legends of Manipur and bestows on them a contemporary meaning. Ecological concerns are strongly voiced in his plays. The plays of Ratan Thiyam "present a remarkable juxtaposition of traditionalism and the demands that a remorseless technological world takes on all of us .And through presentation of opposites and conflicts, he puts across the clear message that unless mankind resists war, halts the rat race of a frenetic existence and reverses the destruction of the only planet that we have, there is only doom in store for us.... His lament of the diverse ways in which we have destroyed or perverted the world of today is heard against the backdrop of angst presences in the mythical world of Manipuri deities and damsel, of mothers and wise men. In the ultimate analysis, his

plays represent the victory of abiding traditional values over the present world of wars, conflicts, violence, greed and inequity” (Bezboruah 2008:1). Thiyam himself says, voicing his concern for the environment, “The human race has come a long way, especially due to technological advancements, but in the course of our development, we have somehow lost touch with our emotions. The more we become advanced, the more our society is forgetting its traditions, roots and the importance of human relationship.” (Thiyam 2008: 111-12).

The plays in Thiyam’s *Manipur Trilogy* are *Wahoudok* (Prologue), *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (My Earth, My Love) and *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills, One Valley). *Wahoudok* is a play with four scenes that tells, the Meitei traditional myths regarding the creation of the universe. At the beginning of the creation there was a vacuum full of darkness. Then the Almighty cried “Hoong”. “Hoong” is a term used for invoking gods at the start of incantation; it is also used as an explanatory word meaning ‘No’. As soon as the lord cried ‘Hoong’, suddenly a halo of seven colours appeared and there was light everywhere like it happened also in the Bible as God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light (Genesis: Chapter I). He went on creating the celestial bodies, animals and plants. Then following the advice of Mother Goddess, the sons of God created human beings in the image of their Father, the Almighty God, like that in the Bible, “God created man in his own image”(Genesis : Chapter I) .Thus human civilization flourished on earth and they went on enjoying the bounty of nature and the earth was a perfect paradise for human beings. In due course of time human population increased that put pressure on food and natural resources. Human beings started fighting one another for a share of the ever-diminishing resources in order to survive. Scientific and technological development failed

miserably in liberating human beings from such a disaster. This war for survival eventually brought political and economic crisis that led to a crisis in tradition and culture. The earth was no more a paradise; rather, it became an entity under constant threat of extinction. People started introspecting. They went back to the history of human civilization for a solution in order to face these challenges before them. The worried, helpless people called upon their forbears, the seven wise men and the seven nymphs who had helped in creating human being and who were lost in oblivion by that time. They prayed their forbears to save them from this disastrous condition. This is the story in brief in *Wahoudok* told in four episodes: The birth of the Universe, the creation of living beings, the outset of human civilization and the modern times. The play tries to justify the need of practicing traditional values as it is tradition, culture and age-old values that enable human beings to fight against the hazards of so-called modernization. Speaking on the importance of tradition, Thiyam says in an interview with Kavita Nagpal and Geeti Sen, “it is by the use of tradition that you try to drive away the civil factors.” (Sen 2006:242).

The ecology of our planet has been talked about in *Wahoudok* time and again. People have been reminded of the beauty and bounty of Nature quite a number of times. The Narrator in the play says, “See, how beautiful is the earth/Green, black, saffron and white colored / Ranges of hills.” (Thiyam 2008:41). He speaks of the entire ecology of the earth. He speaks about the oceans, the green forests, the varied flora and fauna of earth. But this beautiful earth is now under threat. Human beings’ exploitation has brought on ecological imbalance. “In the race of civilization, in the passage of time, grudge among nations have become very frequent. Killing and wanton murder arresting and kidnapping would happen more frequently, news of wars

and devastations would reverberate in all the four directions and eight corners.” (ibidem 38-39). But this should be stopped in order to create a peaceful planet in which all creatures can live peacefully. The ecology of the earth is to be maintained as “there is no paradise better than the earth.” (ibidem 42)

The ecomystical tone is well heard in this play. The varied coloured hills, the clouds, different kinds of trees, flowers, fruits, and different species of animals, birds and insects are mentioned. All these, along with human beings are integral part of the ecological web. Mutual love, respect and dependence is must in order to maintain the ecological balance. This is what eco-mysticism tells us. It is the way of living ecologically like a mystic’s way of life. Spiritual Ecology advocates the growth of an ethical sense that enables human beings feel an empathy with nature, to observe closely its mysteries and to act for its preservation. *Wahoudok* is a manifestation of this ecomystical spirit.

The second play in Thiyam’s trilogy is *Hey Nungshibi Prithivi* (My Earth, My Love). It also powerfully voices ecological concerns. The play addresses a very important global issue like terrorism and shows how it can lead to environmental degradation. It has also references to Manipur suggesting Thiyam’s sense of belonging to his native land. The play unfolds the dark pages of the history of human kind. Human history has been a witness of a number of horrendous events. It has witnessed hundreds and thousands of people died in the concentration camps during the Nazi regime in Germany and the revenge of the Russians when they raped fifty thousand German women, the Japanese attack of the Pearl Harbour and the American retaliation by atomic bombarding in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the genocide during the

Khmer Rouge regime in Kampuchea, the terrorist attack and devastation of the twin towers of World Trade Centre in Ground Zero. Besides all these, human history has also witnessed the devastation of Manipur by the Burmese. The play introduces the characters of seven celestial nymphs taken from Manipuri myths and legends, representing the peace-loving citizens of the world in general. They pray to the almighty to restore harmony and peace in the world.

Ecomystical ideas have been well explored by Thiyam in this play. Wars, battles and armed exercises of nations for attaining superiority have polluted the planet apart from doing manifold harms to human civilization. They have been posing a threat to the very existence of the earth. “Do you hear, the Emperor called “War” has vowed to devastate the Earth? Wake up, open your eyes.” (ibidem 69). The devastation created by human beings has destroyed nature and the ecological balance: “...one ‘Earth’ devoid of morning and day, with the sky covered by the vultures, turned by human beings, is created. In the garden of heaps of dead bodies, one is searching for varieties of flowers....” (ibidem 69). But in order to live in a perfectly ecological way, a new ethic is to be developed, in which anthropocentrism should give way to ecocentrism. This is the primary concept of ecomysticism and this is what Thiyam tries to express in this play: “The nature of human beings, to think and act for their benefit only, has crippled me....” (ibidem 78).

My Earth, My Love can also be studied from an ecofeminist viewpoint. Here women and nature are presented as synonymous. The wars and other man-made devastations in the history of human civilization have totally a negative impact on the ecology of the planet. Nature has been polluted and exploited by these devastations.

Likewise, women are also made to suffer. In fact, they are the worst sufferers. One of the women characters speak of this pathetic condition of women throughout the long history of human civilization, which is dominantly patriarchal. The character's speech can also be seen as the voice of Nature:

War, you have made us prostitutes.

War, you have made us prisoners.

War, you have made us bonded slaves....

women and children are fed to war...

The epic of the Earth and voluminous

Chapters of thousands of pages would not be

sufficient to describe the woes and sufferings

of women alone." (ibidem 73).

The very process of creation is under threat. The future of civilization is bleak as both women and nature, that sustain life, are polluted:

"Oh! I'm at a loss.

Submerged in my blood,

Growing in my womb

It's a leftover of some inhuman and

Characterless one." (ibidem 74).

The last play in Thiyam's trilogy entitled *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills, One Valley) has a powerful dramatic voice that also strongly expresses ecological concerns. Here, in this play a mystical valley is encircled by ranges of hills, which is supposed to be once paradise. But during the passage of time this valley has been robbed of its glory and tradition due to unfortunate turn of events. Genocide, political instability, unemployment, extortion, corruption--- all these have become day- to- day affair in this land that is posing a great crisis before it. The common people are at a loss whose tradition and rich cultural heritage are at stake. The Seven Wise Men, who have been lost in oblivion so far and who are supposed to save the people and the land from this present crisis, call upon the celestial nymphs, the mothers, to help them write a new book of wisdom that may help the people to go back to their roots in order to rediscover themselves. After completing the book that contains the wisdom of freedom, peace, religion, politics, human rights, traditional culture etc. The Seven Wise Men disappear leaving behind this book to the younger generation. Towards the end of the play mothers sing lullabies to their children stating the glorious history of the land and all these past happening. The play ends with lamps lightened on the hill tops and in the valley to enlighten and remind the people of their glorious past. The burning lamps also enlighten the people with a desire to bring back those peaceful days once again. When the theatre doyen, former director of the National School of Drama, and father of contemporary Indian theatre Ebrahim Alkazi saw the production of this play, he remarked, "It's always very gratifying when a student you have taught gets ahead of you in a production, but with this one play, I am very proud to say that Ratan Thiyam has surpassed my entire career." ([http:// www.e-pao.net](http://www.e-pao.net)).

Thiyam in his other plays explores Manipuri myths, legends, tradition and culture as is done in this play. In the 'Prologue' the rites and rituals performed by the Seven Old Women, the sentinels of Manipuri cultural tradition, shows Thiyam's use of his native tradition. The 'Chant' at the very beginning of the play is reflective of the myths and legends of Manipur. Throughout the play Manipuri folk culture has been intelligently exploited and explored though that makes the play a richly colorful one. The playwright is very much concerned of the ecological degradation of the land. He has been referring to this crisis in the play time and again: "...Peepul tree was on fire; dead bodies were floating in a row in the river;..."(ibidem 87). People are proud and in praise of their native land which was once enriched with the bounties of nature, they say:

Ah! Much adored oval-shaped land
Where golden rice plants sway forming
undulating waves,
a land encircled by nine ranges of hills
like a necklace studded with gems,
O beloved golden motherland,
the best of all. (ibidem 94)

But that beautiful land is now chaotic. The ecological balance has been disturbed by untoward events. It has become a cursed land where "people's minds are divided, all are irritated" (ibidem 88) or where "The sound I hear is that of a mournful voice, children were swimming in the river of blood, with no one to save them, they

were calling for their mothers before being drowned.” (ibidem 88). Due to these unfortunate happenings “the land is heading for utter chaos that will result in war.”(ibidem 88). This is the same grim and gloomy world that Rachel Carson also talks of in her *Silent Spring*:

Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled in the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death. (Carson 1999: 21).

The play advocates a revival of traditional values, cultural heritage and ancient wisdom in order to resist the evil forces. This quest of the people in search of their roots will enable them to rediscover themselves in a chaotic situation where people are facing an identify crisis. “Identify crisis, a sense of alienation are some of the dominant features of contemporary politics in the Northeast. Racial autonomy, cultural and linguistic conflicts, the problem of insurgency have been ravaging the region. All these find artistic expression in the works of the writers writing in English from region. There is a conscious urge, in their works, of going back to their roots and it is used as a means of asserting an identity of their own” (Baruah 2010: 63). This is what is reflected in this play by Ratan Thiyam.

The playwright is also concerned of the incidents of terror and war in the global scenario those have been leaving a devastating effect on human civilization. The play has references to a number of such terrorist incidents happened in different parts of the globe such as Dar-es-salam, the United States, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba,

Tunisia, Karachi, Indonesia, Russia, Morocco, Spain, Istanbul, Saudi Arabia, London, etc. All these violent events have a long lasting devastating effect that has ravaged human civilization as well as has destroyed the ecological equilibrium of the globe. In the same interview with Kavita Nagpal and Geeti Sen Thiyam says that even sitting in Manipur he thinks about Indo-Pak relationship, about the Gaza Strip, about Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan or about a bomb blast in Bali. (Sen 2006:230) This concern, both local and global, of Thiyam as a playwright, heightens the effect of his plays. He is voicing the sentiment of the common people:

With prayer to the Almighty
let's make a beautiful new ideal world,
manured with goodness and love,
where gentleness and peace prevail. (Thiyam 103)

In order to create such a world human beings must develop an ethic of living together with each and every objects of nature with complete harmony. They have to realize the mysteries of nature. The playwright recreates the mystical world of nature with the help of some touching images:

Dusk has fallen, the crimson sun
has set behind the hills. (ibidem 106)

Or,

Look, manifesting as the history of many eons,
the peace of many ages,
the hilltops are standing. (ibidem)

Or,

Night dew has turned into tears

Of bamboos and trees... (ibidem)

An understanding of this mystical world of nature would make human beings feel empathy towards it and would inspire them to live in a perfectly ecological way by letting “the dwellers of hills and valley co-exist.” (ibidem: 107). This ecomystical fervour is dominant throughout this play. The play may also be studied from an ecofeminist standpoint. Throughout the play women and the environment have been treated synonymously. They both are the innocent victims of terrorism and war waged by the patriarchal society all around the globe. In order to recreate a world of peace and harmony nature as well as women, are to be restored. And in the play finally it is the women, the mothers, the sentinels of tradition who play a pivotal role in restoring an order in the society. This is also suggestive of human civilization’s journey towards nature to restore an ecological equilibrium.

Another major Manipuri playwright is G.C. Tongbra who tries to expose the anomalous condition in the society and envisions a better life through his plays. He, as a playwright, believes that to sustain life is the fundamental question of human beings and challenges the issues of morality, law or justice as impediments to the life of the exploited class of the society. Tongbra’s *Taj Mahal* (1972), said to be his masterpiece, revolves round the lives of some downtrodden people. Kebal a blind beggar, Ranimata, his daughter, Yadav, a hotel boy and Rajmohan, a bus handyman----- all

are slum-dwellers. All of them have dreams in their eyes of living a dignified life like human beings in the true sense, but they cannot afford to live such a life. Both Yadav and Rajmaohan have fascinations for Ranimata and they disclose this time and again. Rajmohan is a thief who, getting a chance, snatches valuables from rich people. Chitragupta, an artist with somewhat a peculiar temperament lives in a Kala Mandal. He dreams of breaking the Taj Mahal into small portions and hopes to distribute those portions to the poor people who are homeless. Rajmohan and Ranimata go to him and request him to make them Shahjahan and Mumtaj with the help of his artistic power, even for few moments. Rajmohan murders Sanarei, a rich woman and loots all her valuable possessions and gives these to Ranimata. In the Kala Mandal while Rajmohan and Ranimata are playing Shahjahan and Mumtaj and thus feeling the taste of a royal, majestic life, police comes and arrests Rajmohan for the crime he had committed. Eventually, Yadav takes charge of Ranimata at the request of Rajmohan who is to be hanged. Rajmohan says that Shahjahan inherited immense riches from his forefathers, who were emperors of a vast and rich empire. Likewise, ordinary people like them inherit poverty, grief, struggle, hunger etc. Shahjahan, being an inheritor of immense riches could build the Taj Mahal. But they cannot afford to build a monument like the Taj even if they want to. But it is significant that the Taj Mahal was, in the real sense, built by the blood and sacrifice of the labourers, the forefathers of the ordinary people like them. Yadav and Ranimata build two pillars in front of the Temple of Art in the memory of Rajmohan. They also make a bell hanging between the pillars that reminds of the hanging body of Rajmohan.

Ecofeministic ideas can be marked in the play. Ranimata, one of the female characters is the prototype of the socially downtrodden class of women; she is a slum-

dweller, a beggar who is utterly dissatisfied with her present condition of life: “The creator of this world must be surely an evil-hearted, prejudiced character.” (Tongbra 2000: 41). She is in love with Rajmohan, a vagabond, and aspires to live a prosperous life even momentarily as she believes that she and her fiancé have the right to dream as they are also human beings: “...We both destitutes are still human beings.” (ibidem: 53). But after Rajmohan is pronounced death sentence by the court of law, it is Yadav who takes charge of Ranimata. She does not have a choice of her own. It is as if mandatory for her to take a support from a male as she is insecure being a woman. She is a daughter of someone (Kebal’s), a beloved of someone (Rajmohan’s) and a wife of someone (Yadav’s), but she does not have an identity of her own. This silencing of the voice of Ranimata by the social set up, which is essentially patriarchal, is, in a sense, the silencing of the voice of the women folk as well as of nature. The play has a reference also to Rajmohan’s mother by Rajmohan himself: “I did not recognize my mother,...I had many fathers.” (ibidem: 54). This is also very much expressive of ecofeministic fervour.

Bus stop is a play written by another important playwright of Manipur Athokpam Tomchau. The play begins with a woman waiting for a bus. A woman is waiting for a bus to go to the city. Her dramatist husband is busy writing a play without paying any attention to her. They don’t have a cordial relationship between them and she decides to part with him and leaves for the bus-stop. A traveler appears in the bus-stop and they go on talking on various topics in order to pass the time. Their conversation is a commentary on the modern way of living – a selfish, monotonous and a meaningless kind of life. A Gentleman comes to the bus-stop and he is killed by a man just before their eyes. But neither the woman nor the Traveller

wants to engage themselves in a problematic situation and do not help the dying person. Instead, they bet on whether the person is dead or alive. But just for a moment the woman is awakened by her 'feminine' qualities and wants to help the person. But again she becomes selfish reflecting herself as a typical modern human being. They all leave the dying person without extending any help. The husband, who is a dramatist, who speaks of the downtrodden in his plays, also does not want to show his responsibility as a human being and leaves the helpless person. The dying person knows he is going to die but is uncertain of himself. He wants to die. The play portrays the modern predicament that is full of cut-throat policies, meaningless rat races and rampant corruption in all levels and so on. These have been creating confusion all around and not only human beings, but the entire ecosystem also is disturbed:

I have come from that place

Tension is very high there,

There is a drama of skeletal phantoms

In the river of blood (Tomchau 2000 : 72)

The ecological crisis posed by the changing values in the name of modernization is well depicted:

It is the end of the earth, the end; There is

war between the progenies of Darwin, the

situation is worsened! It is terrible! What

Shall we do now if the flames of war engulf us? (ibidem 72)

The note of ecomysticism can be heard in the play in its emphasis on a peaceful living together with the environment:

...Light up the pine torches, pick up the fallen
grains one flesh of lightning and you'll see
stray coins on the flour. This mud house might
fall when it so desires. But do not stop decorating
the same, with new ornaments.

(ibidem 73)

The play reiterates the need to develop a new environment ethics that can restore peace and harmony:

The condition of your environment has
charmed you, it protects, promotes, threatens
And destroy;
Taking a stand within the silent zone of
Your heart just stands forth with a plan.

(ibidem 76)

The woman in the play feels sympathy for the dying man even for a moment. It is suggestive of the 'feminine tenderness' both in women and in nature because both of them sustain life on earth. This can be interpreted in ecofeministic terms.

Leipaklei (A Tender Earth –Flower, 1988) is another notable Manipuri play written by Arambam Somorendra (1935 —) ,a notable playwright of the post- War era, who attacks the hollow pretensions of the middle class and envisages a better society where human beings can live an unburdened life. *Leipaklei* is the story of a helpless destitute woman called Leipaklei. She has been in intense love with Ibotomba, but under some untoward circumstances she has to marry Chandrababu, who has gone to Macockchung to live with another woman abandoning Leipaklei. Leipaklei with her little girl has to live a life of misery and hardship. Thoiba, a rich but amorous contractor visits Leipaklei every now and then and proposes her to marry him which she strongly refuses all the time. She only thinks about Ibotomba, her only and real love. Finally, Ibotomba arrives all of a sudden, after being a prisoner of war for many years and Leipaklei gets a new meaning of life. Being a woman, Leipaklei is treated by the male –dominated society just as an object----- an object to be exploited, enjoyed and used for one's own interest without giving her an option of her own. Leipaklei is doubly burdened as she is a woman and also a poor woman. Above all, her loneliness as a poor woman makes her a soft target of the male gaze. The helplessness of such wretched women find expression while Leipaklei says: "I am a woman and cannot challenge you. I live a very poor life."(Somorendra 2000:91). Ecofeministic ideas may be seen in the objectifying of women as an entity who does

not have a meaning without a man: “You cannot live alone, mind you. Women are meant for men.” (ibidem: 90), or “A woman belongs to a man.” (ibidem 107). Exploitation, domination, poverty are some of the major problems faced by women in any society. The patriarchal social set up has methodically placed women at the periphery. They have been reduced to such a condition where they are even unable to voice their sentiments. The pathetic condition of the dominated section finds expression in the following lines uttered by Leipaklei: “It is such a difficulty to stay with this small child alone. It is such a poor life. There is no other help except my own personal effort. In the meantime, men do not leave me in peace because I am a woman. I have suffered greatly under their hungry looks. I could not show my mettle as I live alone in poverty....” (ibidem 105)

Myriad views of ecology have also been presented through this play. The description of the natural objects is also a description of the ecology of the region: “... The fields are all green, ... look at the colour of the sky, the patches of white clouds, are not they beautiful? The air is also so fresh,....” (ibidem 97). Nature has an important role in molding human behaviour. It is because of the age-old relationship between human beings and nature. This notion of the human- nature bond has also an echo in the play: “.... with the beautiful aspect of nature in front of them I thought all people would seem good.” (ibidem 97). The mysterious aspect of nature has also been presented: “Nature also has different aspects ...” (ibidem 97). Ecofeminist and ecomystical ideas are thus artistically expressed in the play.

Hing-ning-liba Thawai (A Soul, Still Wishing to Stay Alive) is another play from Manipur written by Wairokpam Kamni Singh (1948 —), a playwright with serious concern for the loss of human values in the modern society. Also an actor and a theatre director Kamni Singh is a renowned figure in the realm of Indian theatre. Many of his plays have been translated into English as well as various regional languages of India. He is quite innovative in the art of theatre constantly experimenting with characters with symbols, similes and metaphors, technique, language, and with the overall theatrical treatment.

The play *A Soul, Still Wishing to Stay Alive* revolves around the dead body of a young boy who naturally had hopes and aspirations in life. His mother breaks down at the untimely death of her son; vultures are gathered near the body to have their own share of it. Bones and skeletons, the lamenting voices---- all are personified and presented symbolically. Even the soul of the dead boy that still wishes to stay alive, has a symbolic presence. The play is a commentary on the contemporary time where the age-old human values have been degenerated, where human beings become hostile to one another. Every individual is as if in a war with him/herself, with another individual, or with nature as a whole: “Man hunted man like a beast of prey, and he who still wants to stay alive, met his end at the hands of a hunter” (Singh 2005:46). The blood- thirsty nature of human beings in this degenerated modern times can also be marked from such images like:

The droplets of blood sticking on the bones,
let's suck even those completely,
let's suck those completely dry.

(ibidem 51)

Human beings are mechanized. They become so insensitive that even death of a fellow human being cannot arouse pity in them. Their only concern is to get a “profit from the dead.” (ibidem 46). In such an insensitive, mechanized society women have to suffer more. The desolate condition of women in modern times is echoed in the following lines:

My own mother,

survives alone, a true widow.

Whenever anyone among you hungers for fresh human flesh,

don't divide her, don't devour her.

She has no one to call her own,

She lives, because she's born human.

(ibidem 49)

Because of her wretched condition and the treatment meted to her, the mother here can also be synonymous to Mother Nature. Hanuba, the old vulture says that it was born a human, then turned into a dog, and then, in present times, turned into a vulture. This metamorphosis has great symbolic significance suggesting the degeneration of life of that entity who is dissatisfied of its present living: “born a human, I am no longer content to live.” (ibidem 56)

Echoes of ecomysticism are recurrently heard in this play. There are suggestions that in order to make an end to this overall degeneration in modern living,

and to revive the good old days of the past, going back to nature as a solace is a must. Human beings can peacefully survive on this earth only by identifying themselves with nature: “Let my soul enter the immobile trees and the bamboo, grass and reeds”(ibidem 59). Human beings must feel empathy for nature and consider nature as a part of their selves:

As we, the living beings suffer,

the immobile trees and bamboo, grass and reeds also have

limitless miseries.

Only when you are born as one of them,

will you come to know their suffering and discontents.

Will you be able to feel their sufferings and discontents.

(ibidem 60)

Nature is not a passive object only to be explored, exploited and consumed for the benefit of human beings. Instead, nature is a dynamic entity and is to be revered, preserved and taken care of: “All the living beings in this world, whether mobile or immobile, have to accept the inescapable duty of life. It’s the law of nature” (ibidem 60). Such ecomystical ideas embodied in the play enshrine Deep, Shallow as well as Spiritual ecology. Deep Ecological philosophy advocates equal right and share for each and every object of nature. In the words of Betty and Theodore Roszak, Deep Ecological thought “reveals the web of vital relationships embedded in all things; its vision of the universe is what (Herbert) Read called ‘a prodigious animism’. It reminds us that the great drama of our time is the discovery that all things and creatures on Earth share a common destiny. We are linked to one another in what the

poet Robert Duncan once called a 'symposium of the whole'. (Roszak 2004: 226). Kamni Singh's play is also a manifestation of this spirit.

Assamese theatre is rooted in a rich tradition. It has a glorious and long history ranging from the great creations of the *Mahapurushas*, the saints, Sankardeva and Madhabdeva in the 15th century to the works of the very recent playwrights. *Ram-Navami* (1857) by Gunabhiram Baruah, which deals with widow marriage, a burning social issue of that period, is said to be the first Assamese modern drama. The modern social theatre witnessed its development during the late 1940s and early 1950s. After India attained independence in 1947, Assamese playwrights concentrated more on issues like class struggle, caste system, erosion of social and human values, problem of unemployment, disintegration of joint family, hopes and frustration of the middle-class, individual psychological crisis etc.

Ganesh Gogoi (1907 — 1937) was an eminent Assamese poet and playwright. His *Sakunir Protisodh* (Revenge of Shakuni) is a remarkable play in the history of Assamese drama for its theatrical consciousness as well as unique treatment of the subject matter. Its story is taken from the *Mahabharata*, the great Indian epic and its protagonist is Shakuni, the maternal uncle of the 'Kauravas'. Shakuni has been instigating the 'Kauravas' against the 'Pandavas', their cousins. It is he, who, in a treacherous way, aided the 'Kauravas' to defeat the 'Kauravas' in the great game of chess that eventually led to the battle of Kurukshetra. But Shakuni had a specific purpose. In reality, he wanted the defect of the 'Kauravas' as he had a great revenge to take against them. Shakuni, along with his father and his ninety nine elder brothers

were once put to prison by Dhritarashtra. His father along with his ninety nine brothers starved themselves by feeding Shakuni with their share of food. They wanted Shakuni to survive so that he could avenge the injustice showed to them by Dhritarashtra. So Shakuni took the revenge by letting the 'Kauravas' defeated and killed by the 'Pandavas' in the battle of Kurukshetra. *Revenge of Shakuni* ends with the death of Shakuni who dies a happy and a fulfilled man.

The play can be studied from ecofeministic ideologies. As the story is taken from the *Mahabharata*, it is interesting to note that recent concept of ecofeminism dates back even to the age of the epics. Ecofeminism believes that nature as woman/mother has been exploited and treated as a passive object by the patriarchal society. The ecofeminists are of the opinion that the notion of womanhood is a social construct and women have been without a 'space' in all ages of human history. A close study of the play *Revenge of Shakuni* opens up many such issues that strengthen this claim of the ecofeminists.

In the play there are three female characters viz. Gandhari, queen of Hastinapur and wife of King Dhritarashtra, Padmaa, wife of Karna and Draupadi, wife of the 'Pandavas'. That they are marginalized in many occasions can be seen even in the *Mahabharata*. Draupadi had married to the five brothers of the 'Pandavas' where her consent was never asked for; but she was a wise lady who surely had a say of her own. The wisdom of Draupadi can be marked in one occasion in the play where she is counseling and encouraging a dejected Arjuna with her wise words: "This accidental defeat can't demoralize our force. It right prevails; it the judgement of right

and wrong is the prevailing order, then the greedy Duryodhana will definitely meet with a faithful end.” (Gogoi 2006 : 134)

Like Draupadi, Padma, wife of Karna, the illegitimate elder brother of the ‘Pandavas’ and the great general of the ‘Kauravas’ has been silenced and kept in the periphery, far from the centre of action. But she was also an intelligent lady whose opinions and observations could have mattered a lot during the whole course of action in the battle of Kurukshetra. She is a mute spectator of events and is presented with just one identity, the identity of being the wife of Karna : “You’re my husband, my best guru and my lord supreme.” (ibidem 115). This is reflective of the concept of womanhood as constructed by the traditional patriarchy. Her ‘feminine’ quality also comes out when she comes to know how Kunti, Karna’s mother abandoned Karna immediately after his birth: “Oh God! How cruel a mother can be to sacrifice motherhood for femininity—”(ibidem 117).But it is the women who suffer the most. Their sensitivity aggravates their sufferings. Anything happened in the world of nature might be a premonition of any happening in the world of human beings, and, significantly, this could even be perceived by a woman. During the battle of Kurukshetra, Draupadi has a mental disturbance and this trauma has been expressed with the help of images from the world of nature:

Why do I feel something ominous?

My heart is trembling

Why is the melody doleful?

Why is melancholy echoing all around?

Why is the air heavy with
a strange, doleful tune?
The autumn dew
that sits on plantain leaves
Instead of glinting -----
why do they appear as tears?

(ibidem 134)

Gandhari, mother of the ‘Pandavas’ has also been going through such mental traumas. Being a woman and a mother she sustains life, but becomes mentally devastated after loosing her sons in the battle. It is Gandhari the mother who has a wise counseling to Duryodhana, her elder son to stop the war, to live together with the Pandavas peacefully: “Then stop this fight. I lost everything. Now I’m left with you and Dushasana only. Arrest further misfortunes befalling the race. Stop this war son; stop this.” (ibidem 122). She is voicing here the sentiments of a woman as well as a mother. But she is never listened to with serious attention neither by her husband Dhritarashtra nor by her son Duryodhana, the representatives of the patriarchy. But it is she who suffers the most : “... The agony of a bereaved mother is beyond words to make you feel what it is. I groomed one hundred lads in mirth and merriment. I am in bereavement of ninety-eight of them at their prime. They filled my heart with joy, which is now deserting it. How much more I have to bear?”. (ibidem 123). Gandhari is sad, frustrated and upset. Her mental agony is externalized when, in a course of discussion, she says to her husband: “Who can stand unperturbed at the untimely sad demise of my hundred sons except the two? To that stonehearted father

what penalty can a lady inflict, Maharaja?” This may be seen as a voice of protest against male arrogance or domination.

Arun Sarma (1931 —) is one of the major Assamese playwrights of the post - Independence era who has a distinct voice as a dramatist in the scenario of Indian theatre. His famous plays like *Ahar*, *Nibaran Bhattacharya* and *The Wolf Boy* have been translated into many Indian languages and they have been included in the volume of hundred best Indian plays compiled by Sahitya Akademi. His *The Wolf Boy* (also has a different translated version entitled *The Wolf Man*) is a typical modern play presenting doubts, conflicts and contradictions in the backdrop of a complex set up.

Prof. Ashok Choudhary, a genetic scientist goes to Ramsang forest in search of an endangered tribe known as the ‘Wolf Men’, a human species that has acquired some of the wolf-like qualities because of its long-term association with the wolves. Prof. Choudhary recovers a child of that species whose parents have been killed by the wolves and brings it along with him. He christens this child as Romu and brings it up with utmost care and love like his own daughter Reema. Romu, at the beginning, behaves like an animal in his manner of talking, eating and other day-to-day behaviour but gradually adopts human nature owing to Prof. Choudhary’s and Reem’s continuous effort. Professor gets Romu admitted into a very prestigious school along with Reema but has to withdraw him because of public pressure. As people consider Romu as ‘non-human’ and make it a prestige issue in sending their wards to the same school in which Romu also studies. Prof. Choudhary offers Romu education himself in their home itself, and in due course of time, Romu becomes a great genetic scientist

himself. Dilip, son of Nripati Baruah, a politician and a friend of Prof. Choudhary, is an M. Sc. who assists Romu in a research project as per the advice of Prof. Choudhary. Romu develops a fascination for Reema but her marriage is finally fixed with Dilip. The research project becomes successful that discovers newer things in genetic science only because of Romu's hard work. But Nripati Baruah, by dint of his political power, arranges a prestigious award for his son Dilip for this discovery completely depriving Romu of any recognition. Mr. Baruah speaks of Romu's 'non-human' origin, his lack of a formal education etc. as the 'technical reasons' for not considering Romu's name for the award. He also arranges a scholarship for Dilip for pursuing higher studies in the USA. Prof. Choudhary also feels helpless but does not say anything considering the future of his daughter. Thus all of them snatch from Romu the things he actually deserves showing that they are 'wolf men' in the real sense. Finally, Romu takes out a piece of stone, the very piece of stone he had taken with him when he came to this house for the first time. He says that the piece of stone is his very identity that keeps on reminding him of his background and tradition.

The play envisages a human – animal association. The possibilities in such interactions have been explored. Romu, the representative of the species called the 'Wolf Men' has acquired wolf – like qualities because of his long term association with the wolves in the jungle. That same Romu, after his stay in the human world adopts human behaviour again. This is suggestive of the various interactions between the human world and the world of nature. The 'place' of nature and the 'nature' of place interacts in this situation when wilderness is accommodated in the human world. It surely calls for a new ethic that has a larger 'space'. But the doubts, conflicts and reluctance of the human world to accommodate the wilderness at the very centre

can be seen in many occasions during the course of the play. People complain Prof. Ashok Choudhary against enrolling Romu in the same school where their 'human' children are also admitted: "But Ashok, a lot of letters have been received by the Principal of Great Heart School, and a number of people have also complained verbally that they object to this boy being allowed to study with their children. That is the issue raised by the respectable guardians of the town. So it would be best if the boy is taken out of the school....." (Sarma 2005:76).

That Romu has been treated as the 'other' is seen in other such occasions. He deeply loves Reema but it is Dilip, the 'human' who gets her, he discovers revolutionary things in the field of genetic science, but again it is Dilip, the 'human' who gets the award and a scholarship. Romu's taking out of that piece of stone which he brought with him from the jungle, is significant. It may be a token of his protest against the so called human world or may be assertion of an identity.

Ecocritical principles may be adopted in studying the play. It expresses the agony of the rootless people. They have been displaced, in many cases, for the interest of the powerful section of the society. But there is little chance of their rehabilitation. They are marginalized and their voice remains unheard. At the end of the play there is a note by the author that speaks of these things. It says, "In the central theme of this play, the wolf boy represents the plight of minority communities. When an uprooted community also happens to be a minority, its very existence suffers from grave disadvantages. A community may get severed from its roots because of natural calamities, or man-made political and economic crisis. History has established a sad

fact about displaced people: their rehabilitation is a difficult process..... This play is about the deprivations of rootless people and more.” (ibidem 114). “Ecological humanism (eco-humanism) is a theoretical coinage to humanize ecology and to give humanist/human dimensions to ecology. Ecology in its multiple manifestations essentially refers to the physical macro nature and the human spiritual world including all moral and ethical values that govern the human activities”. (Das 2011:181)

According to Lucy Lippard, ‘place’ is ‘a layered location’, and is ‘temporal and spatial, personal and political’ that involves ‘time, history, and memory’ (Lippard 1997). Place is temporal because it records the history of human life; it is spatial as it forms the physical as well conceptual ‘space’; it is personal as it gives the feeling of the space one lives in, and place is also political since it is constructed by social relations. Place connects people with their experiences and forms the space people live in and have the sense of that place. While talking about ‘space’ Henri Lefebvre says that it is a construct by the sensory experiences of the body: Within the senses (from the sense of smell to sight, treated as different within a differentiated field) prefigure the layers to social space and their interconnections. (Lefebvre 1991: 405). Therefore, personal experiences have great significance in both ‘place’ and ‘space’. Edward W. Soja speaks of ‘Firstspace’, ‘Secondspace’ and ‘Thirdspace’, where Firstspace studies “historical development, class conscious, cultural preferences, and rational economic choice” (Soja 1996: 77), Secondspace is produced “discursively devised representations of space, through the spatial workings of mind” (ibidem 79), and Thirdspace is comprised of perceived, conceived, and lived spatialities “with no one inherently privileged as *a priori* (ibidem 68). Thus sense of place is formed by

personal experiences of life and the social relation between an individual and the 'place' s/he belongs to.

This concept of 'place' and 'space' is necessary for our understanding of the predicament of Romu in *The Wolf man*. He represents the rootless, displaced people who is in search of a 'place', 'space', home, or identity. Such postcolonial concepts are also seen in contemporary poetry from Northeast India. It is seen that the poets from Tripura, in particular, deal with issues like exile and displacement. Such dominantly postcolonial issues also have huge impact on ecology, and the writers from Northeast India seem to be quite aware of this. It is felt that they use these issues consciously with a view to addressing larger social, cultural, economic, political, and above all, ecological issues. This seems to make their writing canonical.

Sarma's *Robes of Destiny* (2009) is a trilogy containing the plays *Sri Nibaran Bhattacharya*, *Agnigarh* (The Fortress of Fire) and *Aditi's Atmakatha* (Aditi's Autobiography). The first one is translated into English jointly by Suranjana Baruah and Jyoti Prasad Saikia while the other two plays have been rendered into English by Deba Chaudhury. The plays in this trilogy have a link with each other through the histories of the main characters. Originally written in Assamese in 1964 the first play, which is an allegorical and symbolic work, is the story of the inner life of Nibaran Bhattacharya, a playwright with a social commitment. As a committed artist he is a lonely person far from the recognition of the materialist society around him. He finds support only in Nandini, his daughter and the central female character of the second play in the trilogy *Agnigarh* (The Fortress of Fire) originally written in Assamese in 1990. This is a kind of a psychological play that delves deep into the mind of Nandini.

A college teacher and a busy actress Nandini gets emotionally and physically attached to Atindra, an aged filmmaker. Nandini gives birth to an illegitimate girl child and dies in an accident after being refused by Atindra to accept her as his wife. The child that Nandini has given birth is Aditi, the protagonist of *Aditir Atmakatha* (Aditi's Autobiography), the last play in the trilogy written in Assamese in 1999. *Aditir Atmakatha* is the story of a free-spirited woman and her struggle against the environment she finds herself in. The play portrays the journey of Aditi's life from the younger days to her old age. Aditi lives a lonely life. She is overjoyed while she meets Partha, one of her friends. It is Partha who fills her life with love, care and affection, the very things this orphan girl has been hankering after all through her life. But unfortunately there is a break-up in their relationship and Partha disappears from the scene. This is again a tumultuous period in Aditi's life. The psychological probing into Aditi's character and her struggle against the society for individual freedom and self-assertion add a strong feminist perspective to the play. There is an incident of a gang rape, which is very much suggestive of the exploitation and dominance of women and the violence against natural order. Aditi's struggle to assert her identity as an individual can be seen as the struggle of the dominated, exploited, marginalized class against the patriarchal social forces. And this marginalized, secluded, voiceless class can well be identified both with women and nature.

The matrix of ecology, ecofeminism and ecomysticism in the plays from northeast India is very much apparent. The ecological world in the plays of this region is enriched with exploration through ecology enacting the very idea of ecomysticism — the idea of living together peacefully and maintaining a balance in the entire ecosystem. (Baruah 2012: 18-19).

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Yes, I've seen our rice fields
turn into factories and mills
our green hills
reduced to barren brown
our rivers have dried
and our once sparkling fish
lie dead on sandy banks.
It's no more the pines I can smell
nor hear the tragopan and the hornbill.

(Chankija 2003: 216).

Contemporary poetry in English from India's Northeast has multi – faceted voices. It is an expression of an individual poetic self, and at the same time, it is the saga of the people of the region in general. It presents a vista of images of the mountains, hills, rivers, myths and legends, tradition and culture, and multi – ethnic people of the region. The subject matters it deals with ranges from geography to politics, myths and legends to ecology. Ecological concern is a notable characteristic of poetry from this part of the country. Identity crisis, a sense of alienation is some of the dominant features of contemporary politics in the Northeast. There has been a conscious use of ecology as a means for an assertion of identity in the works of the poets of this region. (Baruah 2012: 16).

Experimentation with style, technique, subject matters, or language is marked in the works of the contemporary poets from this region writing in Assamese, Bengali, Manipuri, English, or in any vernacular language of this region. Most of these poets seem to have extensive reading of modern world literature having “cut their teeth on Lorca, Seferis, Arghezi, Neruda and the hard-edged modernists of the Third World”. (Jenkins 1993: 67). Their poetry deals with the psychological and social difficulties of modern life and living and seems to be concerned of the subjective realities and predicament of their people in particular, and humankind in general. The eight different states of the region, although there has been marked a common tendency to club them under one tag, the ‘Northeast’, hugely vary from each other in tradition, culture, language, and religion. So it would be a grave injustice, especially in any academic discourse, to homogenize poetry, or any literary genre for that matter, from this region — a land inhabited by an assorted conglomeration of peoples with a *mélange* of traditions, cultures, languages and religions. But in spite of this diversity, it is possible to locate some common grounds, some shared values and concerns of these writers. Besides a number of issues like identity crisis, search for roots, or contemporary socio-political atmosphere of the region, it is the ecology of the region, and an ecological concern that predominantly seem to unite these multi-ethnic writers in a common platform. And this is primarily what this thesis tries to study. Speaking on the common thread of these poets Jayanta Mahapatra, the eminent Indian poet writing in English opines:

Undoubtedly it is poetry that unites us. It is the poets who will not keep us away from one another, who will not separate us. This is the strongest feeling one gets when one reads these poems from the very different regions of the North-east. (Mahapatra 2003: xi).

A reading of contemporary poetry in English from Northeast India makes one feel that there has been a conscious use of ecology in their works. It seems to play a pivotal role in their search for identity, root, traditional values culture, which they feel, is lost in the humdrum of modernization and urbanization. “Northeast India is one of South Asia’s last land frontiers and through much of the twentieth century these sparsely populated areas have attracted large-scale migration from the rest of the subcontinent. The protective discrimination regime...arose partly as a response to these demographic trends. Many of these tribal societies have been going through a *process of transition* from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, from clan control of land to *commodification of land, urbanization, and cultural change* associated with the process of ‘*modernization*’ (italics mine) (Baruah 2005: 185). That ecology plays a vital role to provide a common ground to these poets, or to bound them together can be seen in the overwhelming presence of nature in the works of almost all of these poets, sometimes imaginatively, sometimes romantically, but most of the time consciously. Their works also reflect their serious concerns of various ecological issues such as large-scale deforestation, coal and uranium mining, ethnic violence, insurgency and counter-insurgency operations — all that ultimately lead to the degradation of ecology. Their poetry strongly advocates preservation of ecology of the region as, they believe, it would be the way of preserving their land, their native tradition and culture, and above all, their identity.

It is seen that works of translation have been enriching Indian poetry in English since its formative years during the third decade of the 19th century. The

history of poetry in English from Northeast India is no exception. The journey can be said to be started in 1957, when in Assam, Praphulladatta Goswami published his translations of some of the Bihu songs, one of the most popular genres of Assamese folk songs under the title *Bihu Songs of Assam*. The next such venture was *Modern Assamese Poetry*, an anthology of poems in English translations of twenty-six Assamese poets published by Hem Barua in 1960. These were followed by quite a good number of translated works of high standard such as *Ancient Gongs* (1985), an anthology of Hiren Bhattacharya's poems translated by Pradip Acharya, *Where Seas Meet* (1993), a collection of some of the lyrics of the maestro Bhupen Hazarika, or *Selected Poems of Nilamani Phukan* by Krishna Dulal Barua to name a few. Krishna Dulal Barua has received the Katha Award for translation in 2005.

This practice of translating regional poems into English is also seen in other states of Northeast India. Poets, writers and translators like Robin S. Ngangom, Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, T. Bijoykumar Singh, Daisy Hasan, Paul Lyngdoh, Easterine Iralu, Rita Chakma, Kalyanbrata Chakraborti, Rameswar Bhattacharya, Dibyendu Nag, etc. have been contributed to the corpus of Indian Poetry in English with their original works as well as translations. Many of these people, who are genuinely representative poets of this region, claim critical attention also as translators.

There are translations also of the folk songs of some of the tribes of Northeast India like the Hmars, Ao-Nagas, Zos, Darlongs Apatanis, Noktes or the indigenous people of Tripura speaking Kokborak. A proper documentation and publicity would

draw a wide readership to these literary works and they would surely add a new dimension to the body of Indian Writing in English enlarging its existing domain. It is a worth-mentioning point here that although the works of some of the poets from this region have been included in the Post-Graduate English syllabus in some Indian universities like Nagaland University, NEHU, Delhi University, or IGNOU, it cannot be said even then, that these writers are receiving the critical attention they genuinely deserve.

Arunachal Pradesh, the easternmost state of India, bordering China, Myanmar and Bhutan, is abundantly gifted with the bounties of nature. As its very name means 'the mountain of the sun', Arunachal Pradesh experiences sunrise earlier than any other Indian state. It is one of the twenty-five biodiversity hotspots of the world where there are "twenty-six tribes with over one hundred and ten sub-clans, each with a different language or dialect." (Dai 2006: xi). The land is enriched with different species of flora and fauna, mighty rivers, high mountain ranges and also with these varied tribes each one of whom having different languages, a vibrant culture and tradition of their own. Arunachal Pradesh is also the home of ten distinct species of pheasants, the great-tigers, clouded as well as snow leopards and all three kinds of the goat antelopes. In its forests there are five hundred varieties of orchids, fifty-two species of rhododendron and one hundred and five varieties of bamboos (Baruah 1999: 33). Because of the presence of various tribes as well as varied species of flora and fauna, the region is blessed with a unique ecology. The poets from this region show ecological concerns in their poetry. Insurgency, identity crisis, a sense of alienation from the mainland are some of the dominant issues of the contemporary politics of Northeast India, and these have a resonance in contemporary poetical works of the Arunachalee poets like the poets from the other states of the region.

There has been an urge of going back to their roots through their native culture and tradition. The ecology of the region has been consciously used by the poets as a means also for asserting an identity of their own.

Mamang Dai (1957-), who resigned her position as an IAS officer to become a full-time journalist as well as an environmental activist, is a reputed writer and a poet of Arunachal Pradesh and also has been awarded Padmashri by the Government of India. Primarily a nature poet, she reveals life in Arunachal Pradesh, its natural beauty, tradition and culture of different local tribes, tribal myths and legends in her works. She is proud of the rich heritage of her land and believes that only it can save the tribal communities from the humdrum of modernization and urbanization under the burden of which their age old faith and identity seem to be gradually fading away. In her poetry, life in Arunachal Pradesh, people's faiths and her own, agriculture, mountains, streams, rivers and stones, myths and nature's magic, reveal myriad world of Arunachal's ecology, and mysterious and glorious heritage. She reflects the Arunachalee culture and tradition and recent or modern transitions in the mosaic of living conditions. A keen explorer of heritage, she seems to be a sentinel of traditional tribal values. Environment/ecology, profound serenity in nature, and an innocent voice about the things in the surroundings have been her important concerns. She voices her emotions and feelings through the images and metaphors chosen mostly from nature. Her search for identity has exposed her to be a nature-loving humanist. She reveals her beliefs in tribal pantheon of God and mystery of environing ecology. (Das 2004: 96)

In her poetry the 'river' becomes a metaphor for life. River is the life – force, an eternal entity that bestows an identity on the people around it. It is like in the poetry of Langston Hughes, the African-American poet where the very existence and identity of the African – American people become synonymous to that of the river:

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (Hughes 2001: 143)

Mamang Dai too explores through the river with a same purpose. This is seen also in the works of other poets of Northeast as 'river' is a central image in Indian poetry in English in general. "Indian English poets are 'river poets'. Poems on rivers abound." (Sarang 1995: 13). In one of Dai's poems entitled "The Missing Link" she says:

The river was the green and white vein of own lives

linking new terrain,

in a lust for land brother and brother

claiming the sunrise and the sunset,

in a dispute settled by the rocks

engraved in a vanished land. (Dai 2004: 11)

She again speaks of the river:

The river of dreams

penance and pilgrimage,

linking life's designs

will your remember
the golden chain
that linked us
in a dream? (ibidem 65)

Or,

The river has soul.
It knows, stretching past the town,
from the first drop of rain to dry earth
and mist on the mountaintops,
and river knows
the immortality of water (ibidem 29)

Thus 'river' is a recurring image in Dai's poetry.

Ecomystical elements are in abundance in the works of the poets from Arunachal Pradesh. Nature has a mystical presence in their works and there has been an attempt to explore through the mysteries of nature. This reaffirms the understanding that nature is not merely a passive object, but is a dynamic force that plays a pivotal role in shaping an ecological consciousness. Such a consciousness is the need of the hour when ecology is under threat primarily due to man-made disasters in the environment. Such an ecomystical consciousness can develop a new ethics in human beings that teaches to live in a perfectly ecological way by respecting and preserving each and every creature of nature. This concept of Creation Spirituality is present in the poetry of Arunachal Pradesh like in the poetry of the

Northeastern states in general. The poetic world of Mamang Dai is full of ecomystical images:

The yellow mustard is a field of gold.

The slanting sun promises to return

tilting the day like a temptation....

Then ask the fences of love

About this enigma. (ibidem 56)

An ecomystical sense enables the human voice even to think about the birds, which have a different entity but a similar self with human beings:

I thought you loved me.

How sad it is,

this spring sky,

the caresses of

mist and vapour

Why do wild birds cry? (ibidem 54).

Dai's poetry can be read also with an ecofeminist perspective. In many of her poems and in her prose writings too, she draws sharp parallels between women and the external nature. It is felt that while speaking of the wretched condition of women she tries to speak about the degraded nature. Her concerns for the degeneration in ecology can be sensed from such treatments in her writing. In the following lines from

her poem “The Sorrow of Women” she talks about the marginalized women voice which is silenced and remains unheard by the patriarchal society:

My love, what shall I do?

I am thinking how I may lose you

to war, and big issues

more important than me.

... ..

and they are talking about escape,

about liberty, men and guns,

ah! The urgency for survival.

But what will they do

not knowing the sorrow of women.

(Dai 2009: 90-91)

The narrative voice here can also be identified with the voice of nature. Men are at arms with each other for their own ‘survival’. This is essentially an anthropocentric, or androcentric to be precise, view that has been very much functional in widening the gap between the human world and the world of nature. Human beings are trying to decide the fate of the earth without paying any attention to what nature has to say. This attitude of the human world has been greatly responsible for the present ecological crisis. Dai, like most of the contemporary writers from Northeast India seems to address this issue through her writing.

Traditional values and recent ecological principles like Spiritual Ecology or Creation Spirituality teach us for harmonious co-existence with the world of nature. Traditional tribal societies have been living with nature with a sense of awe and wonder mystifying its overall entity. The following lines from a poem by Dai are reflective of this spirit and have an ecomystical perspective:

Without speech
we practiced a craft,
eaving imprints on sky walla
coding the trailing mist,
in silent messages
across the vast landscape (ibidem 13)

Tribal folklores, myths and legends have also been explored that heightens the effect of ecomysticism in the poetic world of Mamang Dai. Many of the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh believe that human beings and tigers are born brothers, so the killing of a tiger is regarded as equivalent to that of killing a human being. This exhibits the age – old eco-consciousness among the tribal communities and this has been explored in one of Dai’s poems, where there is an appeal to tiger to have mercy on its brother, i.e. human beings:

My brother, Oh! My brother!
Have mercy for our destiny. (ibidem 51)

This may well be treated as an appeal for mercy to the animal world on behalf of human race for the injustice done to them by human civilization having an anthropocentric world view. The use of this myth to express an ecological concern is also seen in Yumlam Tana (1976-), another important poet from Arunachal Pradesh. In Tana's poem entitled "The men and the Tiger" this tribal myth is again comes to life. (Tana 2003: 14-15).

Dai as a poet seems to be unhappy with the present life-style of her people. In contrast, she, in the following lines tries to present a picture of the ancient way of living. Although apparently these lines seem to be a romantic construct, a way to escape to the 'lost' world, a close reading suggests the poet's conscious journey in quest of her roots by recreating the past, the traditional world. This can also be seen as a tool for identity formation:

I know, from the faces that I meet
in these lives that have crumbled,
that the past lives in the eyes
that the jungle shows, sometimes....

The mountain knows
how we pressed our hearts against its earth.
We placed the shadows where they are,
in the leisure of dreams

the sky wind knows

how we grew flowers in fields of stone (ibidem 57)

This sentiment is further reiterated in these lines:

We left the tall trees standing.

We left the children playing.

We left the women talking

and men were predicting

good harvests or bad,

that winged summer we left,

racing with the leopards of morning. (ibidem 22)

This is the uniqueness of the poets from India's Northeast where ecology has been consciously used for asserting identity. This is what seems to make their writing canonical.

Yumlam Tana's poetry is rooted in Arunachalee culture and tradition, particularly the traditional world of the Nyishi community — the tribal community he belongs to. His poetry explores Nyishi legends, folklores, rites and rituals and also the ecology of his native land in quest for identity and root. Search for identity, which is a significant feature of postcolonial literature, is a recurring theme in the works of the poets from Northeast India. In one of Tana's poem entitled "The Kurta and the Pyjama" we mark a search as well as an assertion of identity:

I write in English

Which is not my language

You see, I am a Nyishi

A tribal claiming to be a man.

I am all humanity

With no geographical boundary

No social restrictions, no biological limitations

....Nothing to divide me from my fellow men. (Tana 2003: 13)

Tana is also concerned of the veils of mysteries in nature as is seen in his poem entitled “Superstitions”:

The blind waters all over

The darkness hides such mysteries

That even the colours of day

Fail to lighten the tone of its hue... (ibidem 15)

There has been a myth among different tribal communities, including the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh that tigers and human beings are brothers. Although these two brothers have developed physical features different from each other, they are potentially same and united with one another. This myth is the manifestation of the philosophy, which in recent terminology, is known as Spiritual Ecology or Creation Spirituality. It inspires us to feel oneness with each and every object of creation. This sense of oneness would inspire the human world to honour the sacred in

creation. This philosophy considers the human soul as a part of the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world. It advocates the restoration of the age-old values of honouring the ecosystem so that instead of domination of nature by human beings both of them co-exist peacefully and with perfect harmony. The aforesaid Nyishi myth manifests this spirit, and also signifies the traditional attitude of the people of Arunachal Pradesh in particular, and Northeast India, in general, towards nature as well as their values and ideals of a peaceful coexistence with the world of nature. Tana, as a poet who is deeply rooted to his native tradition and culture, explores this myth in one of his poems and seems to re-invent a contemporary meaning in it. It shows his ecological concern as a writer. This re-creation of a world of his own exploring traditional myths and legends is also suggestive of his conscious use of ecology as a tool for obtaining a space for himself — a distinctive feature of contemporary writing from Northeast India. In that poem Tana, while exploring the myth also presents a picture of the ecology of his native land:

My brother, my mother nestled so fondly on her bosom

Singing lullabies in the night and

When away to the *jhum* fields in the mountains

We played various games around the house.

He was my playmate. He was my nurse.

And I was his soulmate in a world

Where my young mind could stretch

The length and breadth of imagination....

The Tsangpo flowing through the Dibang valley

And the plains of India

And Bangladesh

At last in the ocean finds the solace of brotherhood. (ibidem 14-15)

Hem Barua's publication of *Modern Assamese Poetry* in 1960 can be said to be the beginning of poetry in English from Assam. That anthology was followed by Maheswar Neog's *Under One Sky* (1970) and Amaresh Dutta's *Captive Moments* (1971). Since then there had been a long silence till 1990. In 1990 Lakshahira Das published her anthology of poems entitled *Between Births* followed by Hareswar Deka's *The Protest* in 1993. In 1998 three collections of English poems by Assamese poets were published--- *Coral Island* by Dayananda Pathak, *Thawing Out* by Umakanta Sarma and *may i* by Bhupati Das. Bhupati Das published his second anthology entitled *life and beyond life* in 2004. Besides these, the works of quite a good number of Assamese poets, written originally in English and also in English renderings, have enriched English poetry from Assam. Devakanta Baruah, Hiren Bhattacharya, Nilamoni Phukan, Keshab Mahanta, Nabakanta Baruah, Harekrishna Deka, Nilim Kumar. Sameer Tanti, Rupanjoli Baruah are some of the representative Assamese poets whose works have been translated into English.

Nature is a major subject-matter of these poets. Yet a concern for ecology is rare in their works in comparison to the poets of the other states of the Northeast. (Das, N. 2004:8). But a mystical tone is heard in the works of some of these poets.

Bhupati Das is found to be one of such poets. In his first collection of poems *may I*, he deals with nature, its mysteries and the problems of human existence:

the lonely road
I walk it
alone
counting the dead leaves
falling
vibrations
of my thoughts
ripple thro' them
and
make the dead leaves
alive (Das 1998 : unpaginated)

There is an existential problem mysteriously presented in his poems. In one of his poems entitled “my prison” this problem of existence is beautifully presented that is open to numerous interpretations:

she died
with it
my world

died

and

i stopped living. (ibidem)

The sense of mysticism in him is further seen in the following lines from his second collection of poems entitled *life and beyond life*:

at the lost horizon

the moon was dying

in the arms of the elusive god

the blood-red sun

came out afresh

ambushing the night

and the pregnant dream

undelivered

she cried out

god

why are you silent. (Das 2004 : unpaginated)

Poetry in English from Manipur have been enriched by the works of the poets like Rabin S. Ngangom, R.K. Madhubir, R.K. Bhubonsana, Kunjarani Longjam Chanu, Yumlembam Ibomcha, Thangjam Ibopishak, Raghu Leishangthem, Memchoubi, Saratchand Thiyam, Ilabanta Yumnam etc. Of all of them Robin S.

Ngangom, the Shillong-based Manipuri poet can be said to be the most celebrated one. Robin's poetry, like many of his fellow poets from the state is a kind of a nostalgic search for roots. There is a quest for identity through native tradition and culture. Tribal folklores and traditions have been explored through his poetry for asserting an identity that can be claimed as his own. Robin is also concerned of the problem of insurgency in the northeast in general, which, to a large extent, is responsible for the erosion of human values as well as degradation of the environment:

I hear a wicked war is now waged

on our soil, and gory bodies

dragged unceremoniously

through our rice fields....

I hear that freedom comes there, only

if escorted by army men

(Ngangom 1988: 10-11)

An ecofeministic tone is often heard in Robin's poetry. His poem entitled "To a Woman from Southeastern Hills" echoes this tone:

You, woman from southeastern hills,

cloud-covered mystery, gliding on rain,

deep drink of rice wine with eyes closed,

child of the dancing bamboo, unctious

of ginger on the wagging tongue.

Your voice is soft because mountain streams

taught your heart. (Ngangom 2006:18)

This ecofeministic fervour can be felt in the works of other Manipuri poets also. Memchoubi's poem "My Beloved Mother" can be studied from such an angle where a mother who is 'serene as a deep mountain wood' and 'tenacious as the earth' is carrying her husband and son in a basket on the back. When she is asked why she is carrying them, she calmly replies:

How would they survive

If not carried by me? (Memchoubi 2003:102)

Here the mother can also be the 'Mother Earth' as both of them sustain life. In another Manipuri poet Saratchand Thiyam's poem entitled "Sister" the vulnerable condition of a female in a male-dominated society is intelligently presented:

Sister, I won't allow you to go

Every road is reverberating

With the deafening utterance of boots.

Hide inside the house, sister

Don't you go at all. (Thiyam 2003:104)

Since time immemorial human beings have been sharing a cordial relationship with nature. Their life has been in a close proximity with nature. The poet from Manipur celebrates the ecology of the land. A Manipuri poet Thangjam Ibopishak explores through the ecology of Manipur in his poem “Manipur, Why Shouldn’t I Love Your Hills, Marshes, Rivers, Fields, Open Spaces”:

Manipur, I love your hills, marshes, rivers,

Greenfields, meadows, blues sky.

Why shouldn’t I love them?

I never had a quarrel with them,

There’s no resentment. (Ibopishak 2003:88)

These poets are equally aware of the ecological degradation of their land. R.K. Bhubonsana voices his concern for the ecological degradation caused by a dam constructed under the Loktak Project:

Loktak Project wastes paddy fields, fishes

Submerges by water

Ruins people

Deprives people of homes

Denies people of working space

Gets on one’s nerves. (Bhubonsana 2003:75)

A mystical sense regarding nature as well as a sense of belonging to it is also pervading in their poetry:

Hill, you and I have seen
only upheaval since our birth.
When I was torn from the universal womb
I echoed your silent cry.

(Ngangom 1994:39)

An urge of going back to the roots is seen in contemporary poetry in English from Meghalaya. A host of poets from this region have been writing in English and have already attained a powerful, legitimate and a distinct voice of their own. Robin S. Ngangom, the Manipuri poet presently based in Shillong, Desmond Lee Kharmawphlang and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih are the best known English poets from Meghalaya besides Ananya S. Guha, Anjum Hasan, Almond D. Syiem, Indari Syiem Warjri, Esther Syiem, Donboklang Rynthathiang, Paul Lyngdoh, Pijush Dhar, Tarun Bhartiya, Emmanuel Narendra Lall and Bevan L Swer. Almost all of them deal with the myths, legends, folklores and rich tradition of the land. In their poetry the natural beauty of Meghalaya is explored to the deepest extent. There seems to be a conscious use of the ecology of their land as a means of asserting an identity. They seem to believe that the ecological degradation in their land is a threat not only to the environment alone, but also to their very identity. How nature is exploited for some futile purposes can be marked in the following lines by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih written on the occasion of the then Prime Minister of India I.K. Gujral's visit to Shillong:

When Prime Minister Gujral
planned a visit to the city
bamboos sprang up from pavements
like a welcoming committee....
Only the bamboos watched in silence
too used to the antics of men.

(Nongkynrih 2003:159)

The word 'Meghalaya' literally means 'the abode of the clouds'. The state is surrounded by hills and mountain ranges from all sides. The clouds that play hide and seek in the sky almost all the time, the mountains and the hills, the thick green forests, the hilly rivers and the colourful tribal people play an important role in bestowing a unique ecology to this beautiful land. All these ecological features are celebrated in the works of the poets from this region. They portray nature as a mysterious entity that has a profound note of mysticism behind its veil. Such portrayal of ecology in a broader canvass reaffirms their treatment of nature not merely as a passive object, but a hugely dynamic entity, full of vitality and energy, an important source of life and living. Almost all the poets from this region exhibit a strong ecological concern in their poetry. As if ecology becomes synonymous to their very existence and identity. Ananya S Guha, in his poem entitled "In Mawsynram" speaks of the ecology of Mawsyanam, the place in Meghalaya having the highest rainfall in the world:

In Mawsyanram the cloud capped hills
Spiralled into a questioning loneliness

Mawsyanam truly was a

wonderous sight;

(Guha 2003 :125)

Desmond Kharmawphlang in his poem “Ranikor” speaks of the ecology of his land as a medium through which he can have a peep into his ‘roots’. He is also referring to the Surma River, the river in Bangladesh bordering Meghalaya as this is also an important part of the ecology of the region:

How could the sweat and tears

of my forefathers escape these hills

to form silent rivers on the

plains of the Surma?

(Kharmawphlang 2003:136)

The poets have been exploring through the folk-tales, myths and legends of the Khasis, the indigenous people of Meghalaya. These myths and legends show that nature has traditionally been an integral part of culture of this tribal community. It also reflects their age-old ecological consciousness conceptualizing what presently known as Deep Ecology. In Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih’s poetry there seems to have a conscious use of these tribal myths and legends that reflects his ecological concern as well as becomes a means of asserting an identity. Nongkynrih’s poem “Ren” is based on a Khasi folk story about a fisherman called Ren who is said to have fallen in love with a river nymph, and eventually, to have followed her into the river. And thus

they are united both physically and spiritually. This folk tale celebrates the nature-human relationship that bears an ecomystical sense in it. That nature is a living entity with a deeply mystical aspect can be marked in the following lines of “Lucia”, a poem by Almond D Syiem:

Girl, who arrived from yawning valleys
and hills where clouds perform rituals,
show me the highway of your palms,
let me take you to silent woods of mushroom
and herbs, wet leaves, of wild berries, moist earth.

(Syiem 2003:173)

But this beautiful, mystical world of nature is under threat at present. The ecological chain of being has been disturbed due to reckless attitude of human beings. In the name of modernization and technological development nature has been exploited and used to the optimum limit. In order to meet their own selfish ends human beings started viewing nature just as an object forgetting the age-old bond they share with nature. This is a major environmental issue of present times and the poets from Meghalaya are seriously concerned of this. Uranium mining is a matter of grave concern in Meghalaya at present, which is very much responsible for environmental degradation. In a poem entitled “Domiasiat’ by Paul Lyngdoh the issue of environmental degradation due to uranium mining is addressed:

Draped in the hill’s Sunday attire,
you have seen summers come and go

and still cling to mother earth's womb,
obscure, like the famed *tiewdohmaw* of the hills.

Today, a cacophony of voices
rouse you every morning---
from the love –calls of the ancient thrush
to be happy laughter of children,
newly arrived,
playing cricket on a makeshift ground. (Lyngdoh 2003:146)

A lamenting voice for the degeneration of the environment is heard also in
Nongkynrih:

The barren hills
that bear the pockmarks
of miners and a foolish people
that burn and cut at will,
looks as unremarkable
as half-naked little brats. (Nongkynrih 1992:24).

These poets have serious concerns for the loss of ecology. It is felt that they
are quite aware of the dire consequences of ecological degradation in the name of so-

called progress and development. In them we mark the similar note of protest and resentment to that of Arundhati Roy, the prolific writer-cum-environmental activist, who is also very much critical of the ‘developmental agendas’ of the government at the cost of a degenerated ecology. In an article published in *The Guardian*, Roy strongly criticizes the government for selling the hills of South Orissa for its bauxite ores to Vedanta, one of the biggest multinational mining corporations in the world. Speaking on its ecological impact, Roy says:

If the flat-topped hills are destroyed, the forests that clothe them will be destroyed, too. So will the rivers and streams that flow out of them and irrigate the plains below. So will the Dongria Kondh. So will the hundreds of thousands of tribal people who live in the forested heart of India, and whose homeland is similarly under attack. (<http://amazon.com/guardian.co.uk>, 30 October, 2009).

The impact of such practices will be the same in the entire Northeastern region of India. Because of its rich natural ‘resources’ India’s Northeast has been the target of the colonial/neo-colonial gaze that has been adversely affected the ecology of the region. Recent technological developments have accelerated the pace of degeneration in the ecosystem of the region. Contemporary writing from the region has a strong voice of protest against such ecocides and propagates an ecosophy that advocates ecological preservation sticking to the native traditional values. This is what makes the writing of these postcolonial ecological writers from Northeast India canonical.

This exploitation of nature is also the exploitation of women since these poets celebrate nature in the image of the mother. Ecofeministic ideals find expression in their poetry where nature and women become synonymous. Desmond L Kharmawplang's poem "Pictures" reflects this spirit:

Lightning is happily licking the clouds,
and a light drizzle falls.
Your hair is wet, damp clothes
delicately sculpt your body. (Kharmawphlang 2003:135)

Almond D Syiem's "On top of a Hill" also echoes this ecofeministic sentiment:

I'm standing on top of a hill
which is bare like a naked women,
whose breast have been uncovered
by a ravishing madman.(Syiem 2003:174)

Esther Syiem, another notable poet of Meghalaya explores through a Khasi legend in order to present the nature- women relationship. According to the legend, the father of a beautiful girl organized a race for all her suitors who were to run up the hills, and the winner would marry her. The legend has a tragic end where the boy

favoured by the girl, even after winning the race, could not marry her as he died owing to sudden exertion at the moment of victory. The girl decided to remain on the hill to mourn his death and her fate forever. In the said poem the girl speaks to her father:

Father I know you decreed this for me.
My destiny you wrote
on these grassy steeps?....
You've stalled me forever
and the future is yours for the taking. (Syiem 2003:178)

The helpless girl here may easily be the representative of women in general, and her voice is the unattended voice of the women to the patriarchal society represented here by the father. Her voice may also be the voice of nature which is always kept suppressed by the essentially male- dominated human society. The suppression of women in an essentially patriarchal society can also be seen in the following lines by Indari Syiem Warjri:

The sons became men, royal in stature
Having wisdom gifted by the gods
They came to rule the misty hills;
To dwell in pinewood mansions
Where carpets of clouds
And cloaks of rain
Conserve the forests of the Khasi hills.

(Warjri 2003: 190).

These poetic expressions are also reflective of the varied aspects of the ecology of the land.

Human civilization has arrived such a stage that it seems to lose the power to listen to the voice of nature. On the contrary, they seem to engage themselves in the commodification of nature for the sake of achieving so-called prosperity and development:

For sale

this battered, artistic land with its lucre-laden earth,

our precious minerals, medicinal herbs, rare orchids,

and trees and fields and waters,....

our young, nubile girls, beautiful like the land itself,....

our cumbersome anachronistic tribal roots.....

our pride, values, work culture,

our sense of shame, our collective conscience. (Lyngdoh 2003:145)

It is seen in the works of the writers from Northeast India that there is a continuous urge of going back to the native tradition in search of roots. These writers strongly advocate preservation of their own culture and tradition, which they seem to believe as a powerful way of asserting their own identity amidst cultural and political hegemony. In doing so, they also emphasize on preservation of ecology, as ecology of

their region and their self-identity seem to be synonymous in their perception. The above lines from Lyngdoh's poem strongly exemplify this particular consciousness of the writers from Northeast India. This certainly opens up new avenues of studying this body of postcolonial ecological writing from Northeast India.

These writers are advocates of a drastic ethical change because, according to them, only this can check the large – scale destruction of nature. In order to develop an ethic for the conservation of environment, it is necessary to go back to the traditional values. The age-old values regarding environment preservation can restore the ecological equilibrium and only this restoration of ecology can revive the root and identity of the tribal people. This has been re-iterated in contemporary poetry in English from Northeast India. For example, the need of the revival of the cultural ecology of the Khasi tribe in Meghalaya, for asserting an identity of their own, finds expression in the following lines by Nongkynrih:

A Khasi is a man, who once a year,

sport a *muga-mulberry* turban,

an *eri* shawl and is seen *en grande tenue*

at *weiking* or *pomblang*

who once a year, speaks of these great festivals

and the teaching of his great ancestors.

who once a year, says, “to know Man,
to know God, to Earn Righteousness” is our faith.

(Nongkynrih 2004:29)

Mizoram has a rich tradition of oral literature. Folk songs sung in the hunting ground, in the battlefield, during harvesting festivals, or dirges sung at the loss of near and dear ones constitute a rich part in the corpus of Mizo literature. Love, patriotism, nature, revolution are some of the recurring themes of these songs. Some of these songs, such as the songs of Laltheri, has powerful social message that redefines the relationship between the village chiefs and their subjects. (Zama 2011: 207-208). Such a rich tradition of oral literature is naturally a constant source of inspiration for the present generation of poets from Mizoram.

L. Biakliana, Lalrinmawii Khiangte (1961-), Cherrie L. Chhangte (1977 -), Mona Zote (1973 -), H. Ramdinthari (1976 -) are some of the notable poets from Mizoram. Miizoram, originally known as the Lusai Hills has a beautiful landscape with dense forests surrounded by green hills from all sides. The landscape of the land finds a nostalgic expression in the poetry of both Zote and Ramdinthari. A mystical and a kind of a religious ecology echo in the following lines from Mona Zote's poem entitled "Lilyum":

Thin-skinned October
With its cold religious air
Eyes of coal
Veins of ice
And the dark – enfolded insects
Go to sleep insects
Go to sleep.

O Allah she thinks of Jesu

When out of the honeycomb of right

Church drums busily advertise

The high percentage of faith (Zote 2003:204)

An ecomystical tone is heard also in the poems of Ramdinthari:

For us the fogged lights of green leaves

and the thick lamp-post of crushed boulders

are antipodes where we build our huts;

(Ramdinthari 2003:197)

Both these poets choose their images and metaphors from the ecology, tradition and culture of their native land. The world of nature has been explored in search of metaphors in order to express their inner selves.

Contemporary writing from Mizoram can be studied using the tenets of ecofeminism and ecomysticism. A note of ecomysticism is heard in the works of these poets. It is felt that this ecomystical sense heightens the poetic effect of their creations. These few lines from a poem by Cherrie L. Chhangte entitled “Rain” substantiate this argument:

... ..

I see you, an ephemeral shadow,

Sitting by the piano,

Lost in the symphony of timeless Time.

The soft breeze caresses your hair

While you play for no audience

But the velvet blackness of night.

... ..

I become the keys your fingers awaken,

I am the rain that dances with life.

(Chhangte 2011: 73)

Biakliana, another major writer from Mizoram seems to be concerned of women's issues. His poem "Cry of Mizo Women" reminds us of his short story "Lali". In both these works the marginalized voice of women is very much prominent that seeks equal rights and status for women in the society. In "Cry of Mizo Women" the poetic voice seems to be disturbed by the wretched condition of women within a social set-up in which the fate of women is as if predetermined:

Raising my voice in my own way,

To speak out about wretched life of women,

I'll always wonder at the ultimate goal,

Of perceiving our Heavenly King face to face.

Bowed down and suffering ... (Biakliana 2011: 78)

The poem appeals for a reawakening of the mind that inspires for a united struggle in order for women to attain their right status:

Let us rise up with justice,

Let us act together jointly, (ibidem 79)

This might be a clarion call not only to women irrespective of time and place, but it can also be seen as the postcolonial voice of any subaltern corner that remains far away from the power centres.

In another poem by Cherrie L. Chhangte entitled “Plea”, there is assertion of individual identity. It also speaks of women identity. Here the poetic voice wants to be identified as a woman, who is a human being, rather than a mystified creature or an idol of worship:

Demystify me.

I would rather be woman

Than shadow or idol.

Flesh and blood

With human failings,

And also human failings.

(Chhangte 2011: 75)

This is a very important issue that these lines try to address. It also leads to a recent critical stance in the field of ecocriticism. According to feminist argument, ‘womanhood’ is a social construct and the role of women is determined by patriarchy. Radical ecofeminism believes that a woman is either worshipped as a mother who creates and sustains life, or mystified as a wonderful ‘object’ that satisfies the sexual desire of men. Janet Biehl, a Social ecofeminist envisages a society “in which all aspects of human nature — including sexuality and the passions as well as rationality — are freed”. (Biehl 1988: 7). Cherrie’s poem “Plea” seems to suggest a dismantling of such patriarchal archetypes.

Poetry in English from Nagaland can be said to be started with the publications of *Songs That Tell* in 1988, which was an anthology of poems by Temsula Ao. She has five collections of poems to her credit- *Songs That Tell* (1988), *Songs That Try to Say* (1992), *Songs of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs from Here and There* (2003), and *Songs from the Other Life* (2007). Besides her, some other representative poets in English from Nagaland are Nini Vinguriau Lungalang, Monalisa Changkija and Easterine Iralu. These poets speak of universal human values in their poetry and also address some of the core issues of the region. There has been a search for roots in their works exploring through their native tradition and culture. In them the ecology of their land comes to life and it is used as a means of asserting an identity.

Ecology of their native land forms a central theme of their poetry. They celebrate the hills, mountains, rivers and forests of their land and are greatly

concerned of the destruction of these, which has degraded the ecology. This ecological concern is seen in all of these poets:

The rivers are running red,
The hillsides are bare
And the seasons
Have lost their magic. (Ao 1995:49)

Monalisa Changkija also shows this ecological concern:

Yes, I've seen own rice fields
turn into factories and hills
reduced to barren brown
our rivers have dried
and our once sparkling fish
lie dead on sandy banks. (Changkija 2003:216)

Nature and Women become synonymous in many occasions in their poetry. Nature is tortured and exploited like a woman tortured and exploited by the patriarchal society. Such ecofeministic treatments add a powerful dimension to the

works of these poets. In one of her poems entitled “Lament for Earth” in her collection *Songs That Tell*. Temsula Ao presents the Earth as a woman who is raped and has a bleak future ahead:

No life stirs in her belly now

The bomb

And the bleaching powder

Have left her with no tomorrow. (ibidem 46-47)

These lines echo the philosophy of Cultural ecofeminism. Cultural ecofeminism is a response to the exploitation, domination and devaluation of women as well as nature by the patriarchal society. It believes technological development, which is essentially masculine, is responsible in degrading and ruthlessly exploiting the ‘feminine’ nature. The above lines can very well be interpreted as referential to woman and also to nature in a broader sense. It should be kept in mind that ‘bomb’ or ‘bleaching powder’ that mars the possibilities of a ‘tomorrow’ are great threats to the environment, and are the by-products of so-called technological development’. Such concerns for ecology using the principles of recent ecocritical theories are predominantly seen in the works of the contemporary writers from Northeast India. This is what seems to make their writing canonical.

These poets are ecomystics in many occasions. They believe in a peaceful co-existence with nature. It has been traditionally believed that the mountains are the ancestors of the Naga people. In a poem entitled “On Puliebadze” Nini Vinguriau Lungalang expresses this traditional belief and emphasizes on living ecologically. Such sentiments reflect the ecomystical world of these poets:

Stern sentinel trees silently guard
The secret pulse that throb beneath the skirts
Of ancient ancestress Puliebadze.
Walk with care: for here is holy ground,
Let not your footfall sound further
Thaw the crisping crush of twig or leaf!
Let then the wisps of mist that stroke
The flanks of old Puliebadze. (Lungalang 1994:46)

Rajendra Bhandari (1954-) is the poetic voice from Sikkim, who also writes in Nepali, his first language. Like his contemporaries from the other Northeastern states, Bhandari too speaks about the ecology of the land. He, as a poet, is preoccupied with the landscape of Sikkim with its hills, rivers, forests and people. The ecology of the land is a source of inspiration for the poet:

I haven't materialized these lines
by the sleight of my hand.
Reclaiming them from sliding land

I've lifted them from
the forests, the lowlands,
the grain fields, the cliffs.

(Bhandari 2003:72)

A search for roots is a significant feature in Bhandari's poetry like his fellow poets from Northeast India:

What could be more explosive:

The city's lonely man

Or

the bomber's lonely briefcase abandoned at some junction?

Memory's tree, lush branches

laden with fruits

where are the roots? (ibidem 75)

"The extraordinary enshrined in the matters we consider ordinary, has been a mysterious area of concern of human kind from time immemorial. The poet [Bhandari] in his quest for that extra-ordinary enumerates the 'ordinary' in worlds personal and impersonal." (Das 2004(b):78).

Bhandari's poetry portrays the landscape of Sikkim. This portrayal of the natural landscape becomes instrumental in providing an impression of the ecology.

The following snapshot from “Ganktok, January, Night”, a poem by Bhandari, is suggestive of the ecology of the region:

Between snow-capped trees,

a smooth black road hurries down.

... ..

Clouds conspire with undemocratic rains

to spoil the harvest.

... ..

All the beauty of the village

lies in the paddy haystacks.

(Bhandari 2009: 29)

Nature is a recurring theme also in the poetry of Guru T. Ladakhi (1967 -), another poet from Sikkim writing in English. One of his poems entitled “A Himalayan Ballad” tells the story of a wife and a husband who has to live in a distant place for purpose of trade. Both of them talk to each other in their own mind:

Across the wind-filled pass of Nathu

In the valley of the orange country

Lives the mother of my child-to-be.

... ..

Bear these tidings of a rootless trader.

Tell her I’ll come speeding on my Yarcund mare

If a year-end business should prove fair.

Oh father of my child, come soon!

Today your son has uttered your name.

You left on the eve of the last peach blossom

And now their fallen hues collect about my bamboo gate.

... ..

Maybe when you return you can take me along too.

But alas, I do not have warm shoes to follow you.

(Ladakhi 2009: 158-159)

This can also be seen as the lamenting voice of displaced people in search of roots.

Sudha M. Rai, another poet from Sikkim presents a poetic expression of the darker sides of the insurgency and counter-insurgency operations that are presently going on in Northeast India. A girl who conceives after being raped is telling her tale of woe:

This environment,

This resentment,

This huge stomach,

This pain,

In the pollution-filled milieu,

To repeat the same story,
Is growing in my womb,
This foetus again.

(Rai 2009: 239)

The violence on her body and mind is further intensified with a description of the external world during that night:

Villages and towns were deserted
By the terror and disturbances,
Every window was closed
In the main road of the street.
Openly, he, as a hungry lion
Had torn my body into pieces.

(ibidem 238)

This tells the tale. In many parts of Northeast India this is the very atmosphere people find themselves in.

According to Judith Ress, the renowned ecofeminist, the basic premise of Cultural ecofeminism is the belief that women are morally superior to men. They have superior values like nurturance, compassion, kindness, peacemaking etc. Therefore, it is mainly women who can build a better society with their superior values. This principle of Cultural ecofeminism can be marked in the character of the girl in

Sudha's aforesaid poem. She seems to have compassion and fellow-feeling even for the wife and the children of the very man who rapes her:

The night I was raped,
Yes, that night,
His wife, baby in her arms, was
Crying speechlessly.

(ibidem 238)

In the poem the raped girl asks herself a question:

'Instead of men
Why animals as pets?'

(ibidem (239)

This is a question which is put before indeed the whole human world. It needs an answer and needs it urgently. It might very well be the clarion call to the human world to ponder seriously over its present activities. Having such perspectives in it contemporary writing in English from India's Northeast seems to be canonical in nature.

Contemporary poets in English from Tripura have been greatly contributed to the large body of writing in English from India's Northeast. Bhaskar Roy Barman (1950-), Niranjan Chakma (1951-), Jogamaya Chakma (1960 -), Kalyanbrata Chakraborti (1940-), Kritibas Chakraborty, Sefali Debbarma (1957-), Chandra

Kanta Murasingh (1957-), Pijush Routh, Gombhini Sorokkhaibam (1971-) are the poets presently writing from Tripura. They too talk about ecology, myth and legends of their land. The ecology of the land comes to life in the following lines from Krittibas Chakraborty's poem entitled "Tripura":

One day they left beyond the dawn towards the woods

The green corn of *jhum* and

Terrain flowers greeted them

They started living in the silent hills

Across the cucumber and *futi* fields. (Chakraborty 2003:247)

That nature is a living entity and every object of nature has a soul is an ecomystical concept. This is seen in this poetic expression:

A tree's also just the same-

Will take birth, grow, spring leaves, spread branches

will bear flowers, will hang fruits....

But, it doesn't have the power to say anything.

So I, where no love is bred in hearts,

am a frustrated woman of a society's brutal stage.

(Sorokkhaibam 2003: 262)

These lines can be read also from an ecofeministic standpoint. The silencing of the tree as well as of the girl is suggestive of the silencing both of nature and women. Such ecofeministic ideals can be seen also in such expressions like:

A girl from the hills, Manirung Reang, is now naked,
Hanging from the top most branch of a tree.
The ferocity
Of the civilized interprets the spell of gloom and silence,
In dense Ampura forests, only the wind whispers.

(Chakraborti 2003:243)

The plight of the Chakma refugees finds poetic expression in the poetry of Niranjana Chakma and Jogamaya Chakma, the two representative Chakma poets from Tripura. Their poetry echoes the subaltern marginalized voice of pain and suffering. In order to appreciate their poetry it is necessary to have an understanding of the Chakma ethnic crisis and the very situation the Chakma people find themselves in. These displaced people, who are in a continuous search of a 'home' of their own, constitute the marginalized, subaltern voice. They have been raising their voices for a 'space' in the national discourse. The predicament of these people can be better understood from the following observation made by Nigamananda Das:

The Chakmas and their fellow tribespeople have been made homeless by the selfish migrants from the plains. They have been made refugees in their own land. The intruders have snatched away their rights, land and livelihood and have made them beggars in the midst of plenty inherited by them. Their refugee state of life and all sufferings have made them lament of their fate ... (Das 2012: 19).

The predicament of the Chakma people is a tragedy not only for them but it has also a negative ecological impact. Niranjana Chakma in his poem entitled “The Right Hour” says:

The hills and valleys are steeped in an infinite silence
there are interminable tremors now
in the wide jhum fields
bloodstains fresh and dried lie scattered
everywhere on the ground.

At this crucial moment
my motherland *Dejhkool* is in turmoil
caused by a downpour of wounded feelings
in the deep forest of *Kachalong*
in the deep forest of gunpowder.

(Chakma 2009: 77)

Insurgency and counter-insurgency operations have been ravaging the entire Northeast region politically, economically, socially, culturally, and even ecologically. Niranjan Chakma juxtaposes the serenity of the natural landscape of the region and the acts of violence on it. The following lines from one of his poems entitled “When Debate Has No Room” show how the region, its environment, and the life and living of its people have been disturbed by violent activities:

Grass leaves here

clad in pungency of gunpowder;

Lies the spiritless body of a gang raped

hill woman on the lobby of a *Jhum Tong*.

And of course,

The frantic movements of

some aberrant youths, up for autonomy

Completely changes the meaning of ...

Hither and thither

Dirty tricks of gunpowder traders everywhere.

Terror grips you often,

Conscience takes the other way then.

(Chakma 2003: 239).

Niranjan's poetic self seems to ponder over the the plight of his native people and it laments for their predicament. He sings for these people who have either been driven out of their land or have become refugees in their homeland. In the poem "The Words will be Uttered Boldly", he says:

Because,
They are displaced
From their homeland
By the intruders,
Their dew-wet
Courtyard inundated
With tears,
Their survival's tide
Has been seized by
The midnight lamentation.

(Chakma 2003:240)

The impact of political or social violence on the environment and ecological degeneration due to this seem to be of serious concern for Jogamaya Chakma, another

notable Chakma poet from Tripura. She portrays a contemporary picture of Northeast India in one of her poems entitled “The War Dress”:

There’s no peace, it’s said, in the forest too

In tree after tree, in creeper after creeper

In root after root

There are diseases,

Of sabotage and pangs of uprooting.

(Chakma 2009: 74)

The postcolonial gaze of so-called “development” has devalued nature by bringing it down to the position of a mere commodity. And so does women. Jogamaya seems to draw in her poetry a parallel between the predicament of both women and nature in a postcolonial patriarchal set up and this makes an interesting study of her poetry from an ecofeminist angle. In one of her poems entitled “The Illegal Goods of the Market” she portrays the position of women in the perspective of the present trend of market economy with a sharp note of irony:

Women are valuable goods in the market

Women’s relation with men

Are the most bought and sold

The market rates of the day are in the news

When food comes in dressed-up dishes

The market hots up

All the relations of human beings are then

Put up for auction — yes

Even the poems and their bodies.

(Chakma 2009: 75)

Such treatment of women as a commodity immediately reminds us of the Mizo short story “Lali” written by Biakliana (discussed in Chapter II of this thesis).

Ecological concerns can be strongly felt in the poets writing in English from India’s Northeast. Native culture and tradition, myths and legends are consciously explored in order to assert self identity. Going back to the traditional values is seen as an answer to the present ecological degeneration. The world of their poetry can also be observed from ecofeminist and ecomystic point of views. This body of postcolonial poetry in the light of the tenets of ecomysticism, ecofeminism and ecocriticism makes quite an interesting, meaningful as well as an enriching study.

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The 'largest democracy in the world'.
Sounds good on paper; not too good
For those who, in a land that professes
To deny the presence of a mainstream,
Still has little rivulets and brooks
Furiously trying to keep pace with the river,
Sidelined, side-tracked, side-stepped,
A minority in a majority world.

(Chhangte 2011: 76)

Postcolonialism is a body of discourse that critiques the 'Empire'. Its chief concerns are the experiences of exclusion, 'othering' and resistance under colonial power centers. It "addresses itself to the historical, political, cultural, and textual ramifications of the colonial encounter between the west and the non-West, dating from the sixteenth century to the present day" (Boehmer 2006: 340). It critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship undercutting the myths of power, the race classifications, and the imagery of subordination in the colonial discourse. Postcolonial literature believes that one's identity is rooted in one's own tradition. Hence it explores traditional value system in quest for personal, racial or cultural identity. This exploration as well as the dismantling of the myths of power, subordination, race, or gender classifications add a strong dimension to postcolonial writing and it becomes a powerful tool for resistance as well as identity, assertion and

self-definition. For this self-definition of the colonized people, and to obtain a space and a place for them, postcolonial literature seeks to reconstruct the past even by recreating history.

The legacy of anti-colonial nationalist thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi or Frantz Fanon is very much crucial in molding a spirit of opposition, resistance and self-determination—the very spirit of postcolonialism. But it was the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1978 that marked the beginning of postcolonial studies as a critical, academic, or even a political discourse. Said argues in this book that the 'Orient' is a construct of the West and has always been considered as the 'other'. In his words, orientalism is 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient' (Said 1978:11). There can be marked, in a broader sense, three main historical and cultural genealogies of contemporary postcolonial critical practice:

- The shaping force of anti-colonial and non-Western national liberation struggle by people like Mahatma Gandhi or Frantz Fanon.
 - The deconstructive or interrogative impact of French post-structuralist thinking pioneered by people like Derrida, Foucault, or Lacan.
 - The influence of form-giving concepts derived from the so-called Third World literatures and the critical frameworks through which they have been read.
- (Boehmer 2006:343).

Postcolonial ecological writing is a resistance against the colonial gaze on nature and the rampant destruction of the natural world. Under the mask of development and progress, there was the terrible face of the colonial agenda of exploring and exploiting nature and thereby degenerating it. All the colonies, including India, have a long history of this experience.

The term 'Postcolonial' is a portmanteau word derived from the combination of the words 'postcolonial' and 'ecological'. It is a theorizing of the ecological and postcolonial concerns to address the issues of ecocide derived from the current contexts of the marginalization of Nature, waste colonialism, environmental racism, discriminatory intellectual property rights, ecocidal globalizing scientific technology and the absence of Nature as a category in the theorizing of postcolonialism (Nayar 1999:71). Pramod K. Nayar defines the role of Postcolonial theory as the following:

Postcolonial theory ...advocates ecocentric epistemologies and development models geared to local needs and conditions.... Postcolonial theory and its radical praxis-politics constitutes a definitive "detraditionalisation" involoving a shift of authority from "without to within" (i.e., from the centralized, non-local modes of planning to a locally self-empowered one) and "entails the decline of the belief in pre-given or natural order of things" (Heelas1996:12).... In short, postcolonial theory seeks a deconstruction of power structures that circumscribe Nature and women by their colonial modes of operation. (ibidem 73-74)

This argument obviates that Deep ecology is a significant constituent of postcolonial thought. As we depend on the Mother Earth for our various needs like (i) survival needs (food, shelter, health), (ii) security needs (protection from danger), (iii) belonging (social needs-love, friendship) (iv) self-esteem (ego needs-recognition, status) and (v) self-actualisation (creativity, fulfillment of potential) (ibidem 77), we must protect our eternal abode and honour her.

The Northeast part of India being a biodiversity hotspot has been famous for its natural glory since time immemorial. This land of the Mother Goddess Kamakhya is a real manifestation of the eternal Nature. But the colonial regime distorted its glory. As such during both the colonial and postcolonial times there have been several forms of resistance to the colonial forces to safeguard the erosion of the biodiversity and such resistance has been reflected in the literatures of the region.

Nature has a significant place in Indian traditional values. It has been worshipped and revered since time immemorial. Basic Indian ethos teaches to be compassionate to nature and to be in complete harmony with it. It propagates the idea that human beings and nature share a bond of mutual understanding, respect and interdependence. It is interesting to note that traditional Hindu beliefs associate various birds and animals to different gods and goddesses, and thus attributing those birds and animals a position of respect and reverence. For example, a white swan is believed to be the companion of Lord Brahma, the Hindu god of Creation; a bull and snakes with Lord Shiva, the god of Destruction; or Garuda, the half-human, half-eagle-like creature with Lord Vishnu, the Protector. Even the physical feature of Garuda is very

significant which is suggestive of traditional Indian belief of the deep and intrinsic relationship between the human world and the world of nature. This is what in modern terminology may be said 'the greening of the self'. This traditional reverence for the animal world is seen from such further associations of gods and animals such as the owl with goddess Laksmi, the rat with lord Ganesha, the goose with goddess Saraswati, the peacock with lord Kartika, or the lion with goddess Durga. Nature has always been a mystery for the human world. People have been worshiping nature mystifying its presence and entity. The malevolent aspect of nature has been a source of human woe and wonder since the dawn of human civilization. Because of a sense of the presence of an 'evil' in nature human beings have been worshiping it in its different manifestations. Indian traditional belief worships lord Indra, the god of the storms and wars, and who is associated with a white elephant. Lord Varuna, the rain-god, and who is also the god of the sky and the ocean, is believed to be accompanied by Mukura, a sea-monster. All this indicate traditional awareness, concern as well as knowledge of the fundamental constituents of environment like air, water and soil. This also reflects reverence for both the biotic and abiotic elements of the natural world suggesting eco-consciousness in traditional values. The cultural ethos of various tribes of Northeast India is also reflective of the spirit of reverence for the world of nature. In the folk narratives of Tripura, Burasa, the god of woods and forest is worshipped (Murasingh 2006: 12), while the Sikkimese myths of Creation believe that the earth was created by Itbu-moo or It-moo, who they believe is the Great Mother Creator (Chophel 2006: 15). Reverence for nature is reflected in people's worship of the natural objects like the Sun, trees, rocks, rivers, fire or various animals. People worshipped those forces and natural agencies from which they were benefited by getting energy and life force. It was reciprocity, a way of showing gratitude to the

benevolent nature. This is the very concept of Deep Ecology and this has been practised with all sanctity and sincerity in Indian society since time immemorial.

The Indian scriptures written thousands of years ago speak of the preservation of nature, environment and the entire ecosystem. The Indian scriptures, which are said to be the repositories of Indian philosophy, speak of preservation of environment and thus to maintain the ecological balance. The Hindu scriptures, such as the Vedas, the Upanishadas and the Puranas are abundant with hymns glorifying and worshipping the environment. The ecological concern found in these scriptures written thousands of years ago testify the traditional Indian attitude towards environment. Ecological consciousness can be marked in the following hymn from the *Yajurveda*, one of the four Vedas:

dwou santih, antariksa santih,

prithvi santih, apah santih,

ausadhaya santih, vanaspatayah santih,

viswadeva santih, brahma santih,

sarva santih, santih eva santih,

sa ma santih edhi. (Sarma & Rama 1965: 37.17)

This means:

let there be peace in the sky,

peace in the space,

peace on earth,

peace in the water,

peace in the herbal forest,

peace in the world of vegetation,

peace in every creature in Nature,

peace among all gods,

peace in the whole universe,

and then only I can expect peace in me. (Tr. Debashis Baruah).

The 'I' in the last line stands for all human beings. The importance of the ecological chain of being that says that everyone is dependent on everyone else in the entire ecosystem is beautifully depicted in this hymn. This concern for environment and the ecological awareness in these ancient literatures are amazing that reflect the Indian consciousness towards environment conservation. In the *Rigveda*, the earliest of the four Vedas, there are a number of beautiful hymns dealing with environment and the need to protect it with all its purity. One of the hymns in the *Rigveda* says:

madhu vata ritayate,
madhu ksaranti sindhavah,
madhvirna santoosadhi,
madhu naktumutosaso,
madhumat parthivam razah,
madhu daurastu na pitah,
madhumanoo vanaspatih,
madhumanastu suryah,
madhigabo vavantoonah. (Sarma & Rama 1962: 55)

This means:

sweet do the winds become for the one who abides by the moral law,
sweet do the streams for that one,
sweet do the herbs,
sweet be the night and the dawn,
sweet be the earth and the heaven,
our father, the sylvan god be sweet on us,
sweet be the Sun,
and sweet may our kins become. (Tr. Debashis Baruah).

This is a holistic view of the universe as well as the entire ecosystem that reflects the traditional Indian values, concept and awareness for the environment and the ecology.

Then the British came and there started a new history in India. The colonial gaze of profit and prosperity has started exploiting nature. In the name of progress and development, nature was made to degenerate to the deepest extent. The age-old values regarding nature and its sanctity were shaken of which the colonized people had to be mute spectators. They were the ‘other’ compelled to live in the periphery and whose voice was obviously unheard.

People gradually started sensing the loss of nature as an aftermath of colonialism. They began to suffer due to the ecological imbalance. Population growth, environmental pollution and resource depletion have posed great threats to human civilization. To cope with the changing scenario in the environment, people started undertaking various projects like plantation, resource management, etc. This is what basically Shallow Ecology is all about. It is predominantly a postcolonial concept.

Postcolonial ecological writing in English from India’s Northeast constitutes an important discourse. Many of the writers deal with the issues how nature was destroyed, how traditional values became dilapidated, how ecology of this pristine region was degenerated during the colonial period. Mamang Dai’s *The Legends of Pensam* can be said to be one of the representative postcolonial ecological writings.

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the twenty-five biodiversity hotspots of the world where there are twenty-six tribes with one hundred and ten sub-clans with rich culture and tradition, various species of flora and fauna, rivers, hills, forests and valleys. “Isolation has so far been the best protection for the pristine ecology of Arunachal. But Mamang, through the nineteen chapters of the book upholds how the myriad shapes of pristine ecology and changes during the colonial period and the tribe’s life reflect both the cosmic and toxic consciousness. The animistic faith of the people here and their co-existence with the forest ecology and natural world depict the matrix of many mysteries” (Das 2011: 163).

Dai’s novel is an account of the ‘virginity’ of the land in the pre-colonial era and also its erosion during the colonial regime. There is a conscious exploration through the tribal myths and legends, rites and rituals in order to restore the traditional values. The revival of tradition only, as the novel consciously tries to project, can help in retaining an identity. It may also help in developing an ethic that inspires and teaches to live ecologically.

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya’s novel also portrays the doubts and conflicts of the local people with regard to the colonial rule. In his novel *Love in the Time of Insurgency*, the conversation between two characters has a hint on the Janus-faced colonialism:

But don’t you see how Christianity and education have widened our outlook, released us from the bondage of a superstitious and parochial existence?”
Khating asked impatiently. “Thank god for Reverend Pettigrew and Dr

Brock. They opened schools and churches in the villages and gave us new ideas, and the benefits of modern medicines and machines. The government has set up a modern administration, built roads, ended things like head-hunting. Are these not the very things that we wanted? We want builders, not destroyers and cranks.

“Pettigrew!” Ngazek barked out. “He comes here and makes us all cowards. You call his work, work? Because of your ideas people will no longer remain real Nagas. To be modern means aping your masters. Puny white men. Puny black men. Mental slaves. You see the sahibs laugh at you when you ape them. They don’t consider you their equals. Are you not ashamed of it?” (Bhattacharyya 2005: 36).

Arup Kumar Dutta’s seminal book on the ‘Brahmaputra Ecology’ can also be studied from a postcolonial standpoint. There are many places in the book where postcolonial ecological writing has a strong presence. It is a historical as well an anatomical study of the river Brahmaputra. It studies the politics, economics, tradition and culture centering the river. The impact of colonialism on the river and thus on the entire ecosystem centering it is observed:

The natural vegetation of the basin is as diverse as the terrain, changing from alpine meadows and steppes of the Tibetan ranges to the tropical evergreen, mixed deciduous forests and tropical savanna of tall reeds and grasses of the plains. Within the century, due to increased colonization and consequent man-induced changes such as deforestation as well as denudation of hillsides

for shifting-cultivation, the natural vegetation of the region has suffered a sea-change for the worse. Both in Arunachal and Assam the once dense tropical forests have been woefully depleted due to wanton felling of trees. Though experts differ on the extent of depredation caused by exploitation by man, his contribution towards ecological imbalances leading to climatic aberrations cannot be denied. (Dutta 2005: 82-83).

The thick forests in the entire Northeast region of India are known around the world for their rich biodiversity and wonderful scenic beauty. Over two hundred and forty distinct ethnolinguistic groups are distributed through the mountains, plateaus, upland valleys and river plains, making the whole region one of the cultural as well as biodiversity hotspots on the planet. The unique ecology of the region has shaped a typical mindset in its inhabitants. The people of this region, those represent varied ethnic clans, have been living with an eco-consciousness since the remote past. Their society, culture, values, economy, and their life-style as a whole, has been based on reverence, mutual understanding and inter-dependence with the world of nature. This relationship of inter-dependence has been pivotal in maintaining the ecology as well as the growth of a sustainable economy. As for in Assam, the then geographically larger valley people were economically self-sufficient till the Burmese marauders in the 19th century. Problems like food-scarcity, hunger, or famine were foreign to them. This self-sufficient economy was possible primarily because of their ecological awareness and their art of living with the world of nature in perfect harmony and inter-dependence. “Fish, fowl, game, fruits, ferns and herbs from Nature, betel-nut and paan from the backyard, lime from snail-shells or limestones — the humblest of farmer or artisan, indeed, did not lack for anything!” (Dutta 2005:166). And then the

British came. They had their colonial gaze on the naturally rich region and that colonial gaze not only disturbed the political, economic and socio-cultural life of the 'natives' by turning their world to a topsy-turvy one, but also had serious impact on the ecology of the region. The Britishers "through colonial exploitation impoverished it beyond measure" (ibidem 165). The following lines from a poem by Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, the poet from Meghalaya, depict the change in the overall environment after the arrival of the British:

I never get tired of talking about my

hometown.

In summer the sky is pregnant,

swollen with unborn rain.

Winter arrives, with a tepid sun

touching the frozen hills, the dream-boats on lakes....

Later came the British

with gifts of bullets, blood-money

and religion.

A steady conquest to the sound of

guns began.

Quite suddenly, the British left.

There was peace, the sweet

smell of wet leaves again. (Kharmawphlang 2003: 134).

That colonial legacy continues even today. In recent decades deforestation and watershed deterioration have progressed rapidly due to land clearing by migrants and local people and heavy timber demand from Bangladesh and urban centres of India. A lament for the degraded ecology and also a strong voice of postcolonial resistance can be marked in these lines by Almond D. Syiem:

I can talk endlessly about my land,

my ancestors, the myths, its geography.

I can narrate tales of love and sacrifice,

of warriors who brought home foreign women

from the wars they waged, the white man

who taught us how to be inferior,

and the dark man came with a smile

on his face and a viper in his heart.

Today, they still inflict wounds upon

These tragic hills, while fools continue

To barter their names for cars and houses. (Syiem 2003: 174)

These lines also seem to voice the sentiments of the marginalized groups having the neo-colonial experience, which is the matter of concern of this glorious region.

Robert Bruce, one time employee of the East India Company, during his visit to the land in the 1820s, came to know about the tea bushes grown wild in the jungles of Assam, and that those have been traditionally used by the native tribes such as the Singphos and Khamtis as a popular drink. Bruce was introduced to Beesa Gam, a Singpho chief by a nobleman Maniram Dutta Baruah, popularly known as Maniram Dewan. In order to check the Chinese monopoly in tea, the British were in search of a suitable place for tea plantation. Assam, having a 'virgin' land for production, and with the mighty Brahmaputra for transportation of the produced material, was recommended by the East India Company as an ideal place for tea plantation. The rapid growth in this trade greatly profited the Company and thus boosted the British economy. But in this growth and development of their economy the contribution of people like Beesa Gam had never been recognized. Even Maniram Dewan, who first brought the existence of the tea-plant to the notice of the British, was later convicted of rebellion against the Empire and hanged! (Dutta 2005:178).

The prospect of huge profits in the tea trade attracted a good number of Europeans to the land and eventually they became the biggest landlords in the region. The divide between the natives and the Britishers was ever increasing due to "the reckless expansion of British entrepreneurs into new lands, which threatened British

political relations with the hill tribes” (Baruah 2005: 94).The Company also imported people from tribal areas of Bengal, Orissa and Bihar as labourers required for the tea-gardens in Assam. They were transported to Assam in country-boats and steamers like cattle, resulting in a great mortality rate. But the irony lies in the report by the then Superintendent of the Jorehaut Tea Company in 1860 where it says that, “there were only two casualties.” (ibidem 181-182). This immediately reminds us of the experiences of the African labourers transported to the United States during the “Infamous Middle Passage”. We encounter the horrible experiences of those people imported as slaves in a number of literary works. *Beloved*, a novel by Toni Morrison, the Nobel laureate is a telling tale of the pain, agony and anguish of those African labourers. This is the very colonial experience also of the labourers imported to the tea-gardens of Assam. Their experiences are touchingly depicted in the Assamese novel *Ezak Manuh Ekhan Aranya* (*Songs and Shackles* in the English version) by Umakanta Sarma and also in *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the widely-acclaimed novel by Mulk Raj Anand, the doyen of Indian Writing in English.

The purpose of annexing the land to the British Empire was to “turn Assam into an agricultural estate of tea-drinking Britons and to transform local traditional institutions in such manner as to suit the colonial pattern of economy” (Guha 1977: 34). The colonial gaze of greed, exploitation and profit-making was on each and every natural element of the land and they were viewed only as resources:

Oil was struck and India’s first refinery set up at Digboi. Coal was discovered and mined much earlier, as also minerals like silimanite. Plywood factories

were set up all over the valley to exploit the forest wealth of the region, particularly to make tea-chests. (Dutta 2005:183)

This had an adverse effect on the ecology of the region. In the opinion of the ecological historians Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, “ As one mode of resource use comes into contact with another mode organized on very different social and ecological principles, we expect the occurrence of substantial social strife. In fact the clash of two modes has invariably resulted in massive bursts of violent and sometimes genocidal conflict.” (Gadgil and Guha 1993: 53).

The colonial subordination and dominance were based on the binaries like ruler/ruled, exploiter/exploited, master/slave, or self/other. This finds expression in the following passage from *Durable Disorder*:

Even communication between villages was disrupted as parts of public roads were fenced off and villagers were denied access...Even many weekly bazaars and *hats*, where the villagers brought their farm products for sale came within the limits of tea gardens. Planters exercised exclusive control over these markets. Indeed the right of way through tea plantations became a major issue during the anti-colonial struggle in the twentieth century. For in many parts of Assam, a villager had to walk many miles around tea gardens. The use of roads that went through the gardens was restricted. For instance, Indians could not go through a tea plantation on a bicycle or on horseback, or with an umbrella open. When the automobile arrived on the scene there were

cases when bullock carts were not allowed on these roads for they might damage the roads and make them unfit for the automobile. (Baruah 2005: 93)

Search for identity exploring own tradition is one of the notable features of postcolonial literature. Contemporary writing in English from Northeast India can be seen as a journey in quest of roots. The multi-ethnic writers often revisit tribal folklores, myths and legends, rites and rituals and re/discover a contemporary meaning in them. The ecology of the region is also consciously used in their writing as a tool for acquiring identity and for self-assertion. In Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* a girl named Arsi, who represents the young, modern generation, is upset with her native land that has a remote geographical location, and is far off from the mainstream India, or from 'modern' civilization. She cries out in utter agony and disgust:

Is this a place to live? ... Why did our forefathers choose this place? Surely we are outcasts dumped in this bone and knuckle part of the world! (Dai 2006:74)

To this the older, self-conscious voice of Mamo Dumi replies in an assertive tone: This is our world (ibidem 74). This is the voice of assertion and consciousness that identifies itself with the ecology of the region. It can also be seen as a strong appeal to the modern, rootless generation who suffers from identity crisis due to their ignorance of their native tradition and culture.

Postcolonial literature critically scrutinizes ‘othering’ in the name of race, gender, or class. The ‘othering’ of women as a marginalized, secluded class is one of the dominant issues in postcolonial discourse. In the following lines from *The Legends of Pensam* we may mark the parallelism drawn between women the natural world and also the underlying ironical note regarding the ‘othering’ of women and their vulnerable position in an essentially male-dominated world:

The women stirred uneasily. It was a big thing to invoke the Sun and the Moon. Words have magic, and powerful words have powerful magic. We knew, in this village, that the men slept peacefully with no blame to touch them. The laws of birth, life and death were fixed and unchangeable. And despite everything women always prayed: ‘Let no harm come to our men.’
(ibidem 77)

In the section entitled “river woman” of the same book, Dai depicts the sad tale of Nenem, an innocent village girl. Her story also suggests the kind of position a woman holds in the patriarchal hierarchy. Even the title of the section “river woman” bears significance. All this can well be studied in ecofeminist terms. This is what seems to make *The Legends of Pensam* a noteworthy postcolonial ecological writing.

It is quite interesting to note that postcolonial nationalism is a political formation, and, according to political theorist Tom Nairn, is ‘janus-faced’ (Boehmer 2006:348). It works within the dialectics of ancient cultural traditions and modern political structures. If nation is an imagined community (Anderson 1983), nationalism or national identity may also be seen as an abstract idea. The concept of postcolonial

nation-state is based on the very colonial set-up of power and authority. Class, gender, or racial hierarchies remain intact. The divide between the centre and the margin remains the same. The irony of the post-independent nation-state is manifested in the struggle for identity and space of the marginalized voices those are echoed in the corridors of power in the centre. This is what the great leader from Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah terms as neo-colonialism. (ibidem 349)

The term 'Northeast' itself is a political construct that carries the colonial legacy in it. Although usually clubbed together as a single stereotypical entity, India's Northeast comprises eight states with huge cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious diversity. Hence the concept of 'Northeast' tries to homogenize an extremely heterogeneous cluster of people. A land mass of approximately 2.55 lakh sq. Kms. the region is linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor and sharing only two percent of its boundary with India while the other ninety-eight percent is shared with the international borders of Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. This geographical or 'between-ness' has also a cultural or even psychological implication. "As the crow flies, it is closer to Hanoi than to New Delhi." (Hazarika 1994: xv)

The geographical land mass often referred to as the Northeast immediately brings to the mind the centre-periphery model of state-formation. Stereotyping, and thus ignoring the essential differences among its constituent states the Northeast has been very often referred to by the rest of India suffixing different adjectives from time to time — a land with rich *natural resources*, a land of *exotic beauty*, or a *troubled zone*. It seems to be a kind of packaging of sort, a strategy of market economy in this

age of globalization that “has become a money-spinner for the more enterprising bureaucrats and NGOs from across the country” (Mukhim 2006: 179). The following advertisement published in the *Employment News* (21-27 April, 2012) further substantiates the packaging and stereotyping of the region:

Incredible! Northeast

The North-eastern States of India are indeed incredible in terms of their diversity, natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. However, they lag behind in economic development. There is need to channelize the vast resources for the overall growth and development of the region. *Employment News* is launching a new feature ‘Incredible! Northeast’ from the issue dated 28.04.2012. The major objective is to strengthen human resources specially of youth to make them skilled and employable... (ibidem 1)

Such stereotyping of the region seems to fail to understand the fact that each of the eight states of the region, some of which are even bigger in size than states like Kerala or Goa, has widely different socio-political, or economic problems. “Each state has its own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. To therefore embark on a policy that does not recognize these strategic needs and interests but treats the region as a composite whole with atypical problems is to belittle diversities and the inherent strengths that lie untapped — in this ‘remote eastern frontier of India’ which is actually the gateway to South-east Asia.” (Mukhim 2006: 179)

In any discourse on the Indian nation-state it is seen that the Northeast has been seen as 'the other'. It is "commonly referred to as the 'periphery' or the margin of the Indian nation-state. This idea is clearly a post-independent concept which emerged from the sudden isolation of the North-eastern region from the rest of the country following Partition...Once this region became a periphery of the centre, a variety of socio-economic as well as historical factors surfaced, eventually leading to the rise of militant ethno-nationalism. It is in this complex North-eastern mosaic of different nationalities at different stages of socio-economic and political growth that the Indian nation-state is today facing some of its gravest challenges. It is here the centralized authority of the Indian state is being repeatedly questioned, issues relating to uneven development raised, and the very idea of the 'mainstream' being re-defined" (Misra 2006: 265-266). Even the creation of a separate ministry by the government of India in order to give the people of this region a feeling of government's concern for them is resented by the people as the benefits flowing out of that ministry actually do not reach the people thanks to official red-tapism and rampant corruption in the bureaucracy. The so-called 'development' remains confined only in the official reports while the common people struggle hard for the basic amenities required for a decent living. "Subjected to the highly extractive nature of colonial rule for almost a century, this resource-rich state (Assam) is today amongst the most backward in the country in terms of per capita income, industrial growth rate, literacy, health, etc. this, despite the fact that the state produces about 54 per cent of the country's tea, a substantial portion of its petroleum, and is rich in timber, coal and hydro-power resources. Upto one and a half centuries ago, Assam was quite in the hub of development, which continued till Independence" (ibidem 269). The irony of shouting slogans of achieving progress and development as against the stark reality of

unfulfilment of the basic needs of the common mass is powerfully expressed by Monalisa Changkija, the poetess from Nagaland in one of her poems entitled “Of People Unanswered”:

You tell me we are advancing rapidly
into the 21st century
and never fail to mention
that you brought
progress to our tribes.
But I wonder why you remain silent
when I say we are hungry.

(Changkija 2003: 216).

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, the poet from Meghalaya says in an article that satire is a powerful weapon for the Northeastern poets. He opines:

Reacting to the rampant corruption, the poets [from Northeast India] resort to the only weapon available to them — *satire*. There is a lot of it in their poetry as they denounce, with anger and disgust, those who are turning the place into a habitation of headless and bodiless monsters ... While they talk of the perils of terrorism, they also talk to the greater peril of lawmen turning terrorists. Whatever may be the case, as the common man gets caught in the crossfire between insurgents and security forces, the poetry becomes more and more a reflection of this reign of terror. (Nongkynrih 2006: 42).

The following few lines from the poem “I Want to be Killed By an Indian Bullet” by Thangjam Ibopishak, the poet from Manipur substantiate the aforesaid observation made by Nongkynrih:

Whatever it may be, if you must shoot me please shoot me with a gun made in India. I don't want to die from a foreign bullet. You see, I love India very much. (Ibopishak 2009: 133).

The sharp tone of irony in these lines cannot escape from our attention even for a moment.

Indian government's strategies for negotiating the struggle of certain ethnic nationalities of Northeast India for political space may raise many eyebrows. The voices of resentment have been suppressed by military forces even by introducing some draconian laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958. Irom Sharmila (1972 -), a poet and a civil rights activist, who is known as the “Iron Lady of Manipur” has been on hunger strike for the last twelve years (from 2 November, 2000) demanding that the Indian government should repeal the said Act. There are other such powerful acts of protest like the incident where a group of Manipuri women parading naked before the Indian Army inviting the soldiers to rape them too protesting the alleged rape of one of their fellow women by jawans of the Indian Army deployed in the region to conduct counter-insurgency operations. Such reports appear occasionally in the national media. “But they do not capture national attention long enough to provoke serious debates and soul-searching. The region seems distant from the hearts and minds of many Indians: its lush green landscape evokes the picture of another part of monsoon Asia, and the local people, in the eyes

of many, look racially different. An undifferentiated picture of nameless ‘insurgencies’ and Indian soldiers engaged in the defence of ‘the nation’ dominate popular impressions of the region. This is hardly the climate for an informed and vigorous national debate on nearly four decades of failed policy” (Baruah 2005: xv). Insurgency and counter-insurgency operations in Northeast India since Independence have been ravaging the entire region. This seems to be very much functional in broadening the divide between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, or the ‘centre’ and the ‘margin’. The following lines from “Sister”, a poem by Saratchand Thiyam, a contemporary Manipuri poet are very much suggestive of the present atmosphere of terror, fear, anxiety, and insecurity of Northeast India:

This rain has not let up

Don’t go out yet, sister....

Your umbrella alone will be useless, sister

You’ll not be able to cover

Your body from the raindrops....

Sister, I won’t allow you to go

Every road is reverberating

With the deafening utterance of boots.

Hide inside the house, sister

Don't you go at all.

(Thiyam 2003: 103-104).

Sally Morgan says in *My Place* (1987) as referred to by Elleke Boehmer, “The trouble is that colonialism isn’t over yet” (Boehmer 2005: 246). Boehmer in this regard refers to the aboriginal people of Australia or New Zealand who consider themselves still colonized under the white domination. It seems that such a feeling prevails in the minds of the majority of the people of Northeast India also. In an interview with Sanjoy Hazarika and Geeti Sen, Indira Goswami, popularly known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, the Jnanpeeth Award winner litterateur from Assam, while speaking of the reasons why the people of this part of India feel neglected and ignored by the rest of the country, refers to the bias even in writing history:

In (NCERT) books prescribed for history, I have grown up reading about the Richard the Lion Heart, the Vijaynagar Kingdom, the Kalinga War, the French Revolution, the downfall of the Mughal Empire. All on British history and Indian history — but there is nothing about Assam or the 600 – year old Ahom rule, the same dynasty ruling a huge state for 600 years. Even a major uprising like the revolution of common people against the Ahom monarchy where, it is said, one lakh people died in the “Moamoria Revolution” is not mentioned.” (Sen 2006: 295)

There are many other such examples. The contributions of the local heroes from this region in the ‘periphery’ seem to be unheard of by the ‘mainstream’. “The same can be said also about U. Tirot Sing, the Khasi martyr who fought against the British aggressors for the freedom of his native land and died for that cause. But he also fails to find a place in ‘Indian’ history. Apart from apathy in the political level all these have contributed in increasing the gap between the centre and the margin.” (Baruah 2010: 68).

For decades India’s northeast has been experiencing violence in its ugliest form. Bombings, kidnappings, extortions, insurgency and counter-insurgency operations have become a regular part of news from this region. But this does not necessarily mean that the people of this region are in an enemy territory conspiring against the Indian state. They have their own tale to tell and seem to appeal to the ‘centre’ to listen to the voices from the ‘margin’ with patience. There has been raising of voices of resentment as there has been a strong feeling among them that their voices have been suppressed with strong hands:

Since long, I could not sleep, only my eyelids are closed

Out of fear I cannot open my eyes, tell me what should I do!

If I crave something, only the stormy-fire,

If I move out, only the heat of the path!

I will never know

How long you will burn, Northeast horizon!

(Chakraborty 2003: 247).

They are upset with all such proceedings that have been not only ravaging their life, but also degrading the ecology of their beloved land. This lamenting voice of resentment and protest is very often heard in contemporary writing from this region. Few lines from the poem “Forest — 1987” by Chandra Kanta Murasing, the poet from Tripura may be cited here to identify the lamenting voice for the degenerated ecology:

For I miss the cock’s call at dawn,

And the deer’s bark in the dusk.

The hen in the forest now

Roams and clucks from noon to dusk,

The haunting *madhavi* fragrance escapes the rustle of spring,

It is acrid with the smell of gunpowder.

(Murasing 2003: 254).

It is felt from a close reading of contemporary writing from Northeast India that the margin is consciously writing back. It is in search of roots, of identity, and seems to claim with conviction a legitimate space in the national narrative. This attitude of contemporary writing from Northeast India has an echo in a statement (as quoted by Utpal Borpujari in an article) by Easterine Iralu, presently Norway-based

Naga writer and former teacher in the Department of English, Nagaland University.

She says:

The North-east has always been under-represented because all literary output from it has been hitherto overshadowed by the political conflicts that plague the region. We have had to make our own mark in the Indian literary world by focusing The North-East Writers Forum and showing the rest of India that there was much more to the North-East than political literature...The entire cultural base of the North-east is different from the rest of India. We may have some shared folk stories with some of the other states of India but otherwise, what the region has to offer is a wholly new literary experience. Its myths and legends are tied to the land, the hills and the rivers. Both the natural world as well as the spiritual world is always alive and real to the North-easterner. What the North-East has to offer in the spiritual apprehension which is unlike anything that the other states have in their cultures. (Borpujari 2011).

Iralu further articulates the postcolonial voice from Northeast India in one of her essays:

We feel the immense pressure to document our oral literature and native wisdom and simultaneously direct the path Naga writing would like to take. But Naga writing is facing the same fate that Aboriginal writing of Australia had faced some years ago. As Ernie Dingo, Aboriginal actor and poet wrote:

Aboriginal achievement

Is like the dark side of the moon

For it is there

But so little is known.

Naga writers face the same experience of apathy and more. We have always lived on the periphery. This is my experience, I have been marginalized simply because I am a Naga, twice-marginalized because I am a woman and thrice-marginalized because I am a tribal, a member of an indigenous community... Our truths are being distorted. Our stories are being stolen. Our voices are being silenced. These prisons are man-made and invisible. But they are as real as visible prisons. (Iralu 2011: 273-274).

It is felt from a minute reading of this body of work that in their search for identity and root, and in claiming a space and a place, these writers use ecology of the region as a powerful tool. “Forest Ballads”, a poem by Nirranjan Chakma, the Chakma poet from Tripura is a befitting example of postcolonial ecological writing. Here in this poem Chakma strongly satirizes the strategic suppression of the marginalized voice by different power centres. He draws various objects from the natural world as his metaphors and uses them as tools for attaining identity and a space for himself. A powerful voice of postcolonial resistance as well of assertion is unmistakably heard in this poem:

After each devastating storm

a silence descends on the entire hill.

Distraught birds are puzzled!

Should they return to their shattered nests

or go out in search of food?

One fine morning the birds are afflicted

with an identity crisis.

The name currently used to spot them

had never been heard by them before.

Recently a huge debate about their identity and rights

rocked a scholarly Geneva conference.

References were copiously made to the Vedas.

Stale, century-old theories of the expansionists

were presented with great gusts.

But these participants

had never tried to understand

the ballads of the forests.

(Chakma 2009: 81)

It is seen that these writers are concerned of the degradation of ecology and seem to believe strongly that loss of ecology of the region will eventually lead to the loss of their identity. A strong voice of protest is heard in their work against the prevailing atmosphere of violence created by insurgency and counter-insurgency operations as these have adverse effects also on ecology, besides doing other evils. The works of many of these writers expose, with blatant irony and satire, the darker side of the so-called counter-insurgency operations presently going on in the region. Some of these writers seem to be very much critical even of the local militants, who want to dictate terms at gunpoints. The following lines from the poem “Of A People

Unanswered” by Monalisa Changkija exemplify this attitude, and can be seen as the *vox populi*:

Don't waste your time

laying down diktats

and guidelines

on how to conduct my life

on matters personal and political.

You may not know

for you do not know

beyond the AK-47...

(Changkija 2003: 217).

Such expressions are reflective of the desire of the common people for an end to the atmosphere of violence by bringing back the good old days of peace and normalcy. But what will be the nature of the peace that the people of this part of the country want? This seems to be a significant issue. While talking about the nature of that peace, Sanjoy Hazarika opines: “peace with honour, peace with justice, peace with dignity” (Hazarika 2006: 294-95). Peace apparently means absence of war. But war always does not necessarily mean fighting with arms alone. It may also be in the mental or psychological level. A person from Nagaland or Mizoram, or any other state from Northeast India for that matter, while checking into a hotel in Delhi is

asked to show his/her passport at the reception counter because of the physical features s/he shares with the people of China, Japan or Thailand. The experiences of students from Northeast India studying in Delhi or Mumbai are, most of the times humiliating. The girls are often referred to as ‘Chinki’ because of the shape of their eyes and the high cheek bones, and the boys as ‘Chapta’ because of their flat nose. A Naga student resided in Pune once commented that he became “half Naga and half Indian” after coming to Pune, while he was ‘a complete Indian” before (Baruah 2006: 169). Another student from Manipur said about his experiences in Mumbai that he was treated as a foreigner, and when he had told that he was from Manipur, people asked where this place was and whether it was really in India. In order to avoid such embarrassing situations he started telling them that he was from Thailand because “it was more convenient”. (ibidem 169)

Such incidents or attitudes can very well be seen as nasty and ugly wars that leave a permanent scar in the mind or the psyche. But even then, it is felt that these marginalized people of this part of the country are eagerly waiting for brighter days to come:

There’s got to be ... a morning ... after ... the night ...

... for a better tomorrow!

(Khangte 2011: 78)

In a meeting in Mumbai, a minister from Arunachal Pradesh said with all his agony and pain that in a vast country like India a few Indian people may even look

Chinese, Japanese or Thais, and the rest of the people should accept this fact. He invited people from other parts of India to his native land Arunachal Pradesh to see how they would be greeted with “Jai Hind’ by the local people of this northeastern state of India bordering China, Bhutan and Myanmar (Baruah 2006: 175). The minister here seems to have the resonance of the postcolonial voice of resistance as well as of assertion — a voice that strives for a place and a space in the larger discourse.

A similar sentiment may be felt while reading the following few lines. This is an extract from a poem entitled “What does an Indian Look Like” by Cherrie L. Chhangte, the poet from Mizoram:

You look at me, and you see

My eyes, my skin, my language, my faith.

You dissect my past, analyse my present

Predict my future and build my profile.

I am a curiosity, an ‘ethnic’ specimen.

Politics, history, anthropology, your impressive learning,

All unable to answer the fundamental question —

‘What does an Indian look like?’

— An Indian looks like me, an Indian is Me.

(Chhangte 2011: 76)

This can be seen as a strong postcolonial voice that asserts an identity of its own and claims a 'space' in the greater discourse of the 'nation'.

These writers are writing with a consciousness. Their works present before us a myriad, mesmerizing world of nature, and, at the same time, echo a conscious voice of resistance as well as assertion. Contemporary writing in English from India's Northeast negotiates varied issues simultaneously. It has to fight against the very notion of 'Northeast', a stereotypical construct, has to assert an identity, and has to create a 'space' and a 'place' for itself amidst political and cultural hegemony. It is quite interesting to note that the ecology of the region is one of their strongest weapons for all such negotiations. The writings in English from this region, having serious ecological concerns, can be seen as essentially a postcolonial discourse. It presents a critique of the colonial perspective of, and the colonial attitude towards, the environment. It is seen that contemporary writing in English from India's Northeast is also a literature of resistance against what can be termed as neo-colonialism. Because of this consciousness of the ecological degradation and sincere efforts of propagating ecological preservation in writing, this body of ecological writing can very well be said canonical.

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India's Northeast, although usually put together as one stereotypical entity, is a geographical area of 2.55 lakh square kilometers that actually comprises eight different states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura having huge cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or religious differences among them. The region covers 7.8 per cent of the country's total area; shares only 2 per cent of its boundary with India, while the remaining 98 per cent is shared with the international borders of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China and Nepal. It is linked to the rest of the country by a narrow corridor which is referred to as the 'Chicken's Neck'.

The region is a meeting point of the brown and the yellow races, of the tradition and culture of different tribes and ethnic groups. It is a rich storehouse of different languages and dialects of its indigenous multi-ethnic people. There are tribes still following the traditional animistic faith even though religions like Hinduism (particularly in the states of Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim), Christianity (in the hills of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland), Buddhism (in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim) and Islam (in different parts of the region) have made a dominant presence in the region. Ordinarily all religions have their believers more or less in different parts of the region.

An immensely rich archive of some rare species of flora and fauna, the Northeast India is quite rich in biodiversity. The region contains more than one-third of the country's total biodiversity. It is considered one of the 18 biodiversity hotspots of the world having about 8000 varieties of flowering plants, 700 varieties of orchids, 58 bamboos, 64 citrus, 28 conifers, 500 mosses, 700 ferns and 728 lichen species. The region has also rich faunal diversity. An estimated 3624 species of insects, 50 molluscs, 236 fishes, 64 amphibians, 137 reptiles, 541 birds and 160 mammalian

species have been identified so far. (Barik et al, 2000). In spite of having all these diversities, these states have many things in common. They share common political, economic or social problems such as the problem of insurgency, separatist movements or the issue of rampant corruption in the bureaucracy. Apart from this, all the states share almost the same natural landscape. They have hills, mountains, lush green forests with rare flora and fauna, rivers, valleys and multi-ethnic people with vibrant culture and tradition. With such bounties of nature, these eight states, as a whole, are blessed with a unique ecology. Because of this rich ecology, the entire region is a biodiversity hotspot. The commonality in the core issues and also the common ecosystem bind these eight states in one single entity with one single identity---the Northeast, the vibrant, colourful and rich Northeast of India: “Although a great cultural cauldron, the Northeast of India remains little-known and largely misunderstood. The uneasy coexistence of paradoxical worlds such as the folk and the westernized, virgin forests and car-choked streets, ethnic cleansers and the parasites of democracy, ancestral values and flagrant corruption, resurgent nativism and the sensitive outsider’s predicament, make this picturesque region especially vulnerable to tragedy.” (Nongkynrih & Ngangom 2003: ix). The geographical position of the region is such that it is linked to the rest of India by a narrow corridor which is referred to as the ‘Chicken’s Neck’. Further, “as the crow flies, it is closer to Hanoi than to New Delhi [from this region]”. (Hazarika 1994: xv). Partly this geographical location, and largely a parochial attitude of the successive central governments, right from the time of India’s Partition, is responsible, to a greater extent, in creating a sense of isolation among the people of this region. There has been a general feeling, and which has been growing deeper and deeper that the ‘centre’ is too far from the ‘periphery’.

Apart from being a geographical position, the Northeast is also a psychological entity that exists in the mindset of the people both outside and inside the region. It is a 'state of mind' that defines the divide between the centre and the marginalized. Geeti Sen says about her feelings about the region: "On an invitation to Brazil, I was intrigued that in that country almost twice the size of India there is also an area described as 'the North-east'. This too is located at a great distance from the capital, populated by people whose folklore and customs are being documented, who are being assisted to modernise by the government. I realized then that the 'north-east' is a peculiar state of mind which prevails—a term which defines that divide between the centre and the marginalised." (Sen 2006: viii).

The Northeast India is also the abode of about 225 tribes, out of 450 in the country (Myers 2000:853). Almost all these tribes have rich oral traditions. The oral history of these tribes "tells of ancestors from the shadowy past, from mountains steeped in mist and romance, from lands far away, of snake gods and princesses, epic battles and great warriors" (Hazarika 1994: xviii). Besides having rich oral literatures, some states like Assam and Manipur in particular, have literary histories that date back to centuries. Writing in English from Northeast India is relatively a new literature. This corpus of writing is a recent thing in comparison to the literatures in English from other parts of India. It started only about three decades ago, while Indian provincial writing in English began in Bengal much before the Independence or the partition of India. Writing in English from Northeast India, as a discourse of self-expression and consciousness started only in the 80s of the 20th century. As such, it is premature to talk of a tradition of Northeast Indian Writing in English at this point of time. But in this relatively short span of time it seems to attain a legitimate and

powerful voice by articulating their senses and sentiments and focusing on some of the core issues of the region. It is a distinctive voice in the realm of Indian Writing in English. Although it has already achieved a remarkable stature, it seems to be deprived of the critical attention it really deserves in the national scenario. In the histories of Indian literature in English written by K. R. S. Iyengar and M. K. Naik the works of the writers of this region have not been mentioned. K. R. S. Iyengar only mentions Praphulladutta Goswami's *Bihu Songs of Assam* (1987: 642). M. K. Naik, in his *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982) makes no mention of any work by a writer of Northeast India. In his recent book (with Shyamala A. Narayan) entitled *Indian English Literature: 1980-2000* (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2001) he mentions only two works of Northeast Indian writers in English. This naturally limits the corpus of Indian Writing in English narrowing the varied world of this literature. Commenting on the absence of a proper critical concern for the marginalized voices, Amit Chaudhuri says, "Had they [the critics] done so [to bring the marginalized voices to our notice], our view of Indian Writing in English would be a different, a more heterogeneous and unexpected one that it has been in the last twenty-five years" (Chaudhuri 2005: xxvi). "The writer from the Northeast differs from his counterpart in the mainland in a significant way. While it may not make him a better writer, living with the menace of the gun he cannot merely indulge in verbal wizardry and wooly aesthetics but must perforce master the art of witness. As a natural aftermath to the above, our society has been reduced to a mute witness to the banality of corruption and the banality of terror...We think the task that literature of the Northeast must address is what Albert Camus called 'the double challenge of truth and liberty' (Nongkynrih & Ngangom 2003: ix-x). Aruni Kashyap, an Assamese writer writing in English, while commenting on the legitimacy and uniqueness of this rich body of

writing, says (as mentioned by Utpal Borpujari in an article), “Due to the troubled relationship with the narrative of the Indian state which north-east shares with India, the writers have something very different to say than the other Indian-English authors. Apart from having different sensibilities, it’s the political nature of these writings which make them different. The fraught relationship most of the North-eastern states have with the centre often gets reflected in the literature, be it in English, Assamese or Bodo. The fact that literary circles have been discussing ‘literature from NE’ as a different body of work, attests that it is in developing in opposition to Indian-English writing, which probably mirrors the fraught relationship NE has with Delhi.” (Borpujari 2011:<http://www.timescrest.com>). Tilottama Misra says about the nature of writing in English from Northeast India in *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays*, “An intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiation with ‘other’ cultures is a recurrent feature of the seven north-eastern states. Each small community or linguistic group has responded through its oral or written communication to the encounters with the majoritarian cultures from either mainland India or from outside the borders of the country, in its own distinctive manner.” (Misra 2011: 3)

Since the eight states of the region hugely vary from each other in tradition, culture, language, and religion, it might seem to be an injustice to homogenize literatures from this region. But in spite of this diversity, it is possible to locate some common grounds, some shared values and concerns of these writers. Identity crisis and a sense of alienation are some of the dominant features of contemporary politics in the Northeast. Racial autonomy, cultural and linguistic conflicts and the problem of insurgency have been ravaging the region. These are some of the recurrent themes in

these writers that bind them in one single thread. . Besides issues like identity crisis, search for roots, self-assertion, or claims for a political space, it is the ecology of the region, and an ecological concern that predominantly seem to unite these multi-ethnic writers in a common platform. The works of the writers in English from India's Northeast have many different aspects of the entire ecosystem of the region. The writers celebrate the ecological glory of Northeast with a keen ecological awareness. Although ethnicity is their chief concern as they hail from various ethnic groups, mountains, hills, valleys, people, myths legends, tribal rites, mystic as well aesthetic sensibilities, communal violence, insurgency are also some of the dominant and recurring themes in their works. They seem to use ecology, in a conscious way, as a tool for acquiring an identity — an identity which is unique, legitimate and a powerful one. It is felt that the unique ecology of the region has been pivotal in shaping an aesthetic sensibility of these writers. The present work has engaged itself in a multi-pronged study of contemporary writing in English from India's Northeast from an ecological standpoint in canonical perspectives.

Ecological concern is one of the dominant features of the writing in English from Northeast India. Even in the vernacular literatures nature occupies a significant place. The oral narratives, the myths and legends, the folktales, and the rites and rituals of different tribes of this region reflect the intangible heritage and the age-old bond they share with nature. The basic Indian ethos teaches to be compassionate to nature and to live in harmony with it. In Indian culture there has been a tradition of living with nature with mutual respect, understanding and dependence. The tribal communities of Northeast India too have been worshipping, nurturing and preserving nature since the long past. Writing from Northeast India celebrates this human-nature

relationship exploring the tradition, culture and heritage of the multi-ethnic communities of this region.

In contemporary writing in English from India's Northeast there has been a conscious use of ecology as a means of asserting an identity- an identity which is legitimate, powerful and unique at the same time. Their works present before us a myriad, mesmerizing world of nature that also echoes a conscious voice of resistance as well as of assertion. It is a voice of resistance against the neo-colonial powers and also a voice of assertion for a distinct identity. It attempts to create a 'space' and a 'place' for itself amidst political and cultural hegemony negotiating different issues simultaneously. Their writings, besides talking about contemporary socio-political problems, seriously raise ecological issues. There is glorification of nature, and also deep concerns for ecological degradation. Their works form a strong voice of protest against colonial/neo-colonial eco-degradation and exploitation of nature. Because they seem to believe that it is a threat not only to the environment alone, but also to the very identity of the indigenous tribes. It has been seen through this study that the ecology of the region has been consciously used by the contemporary writers in negotiating these issues. This consciousness makes this immensely rich corpus of writing from India's Northeast canonical. This canonical writing plays a pivotal role in understanding the region as a whole.

Prose Writing in English from India's Northeast is a powerful genre. Nationhood, identity, insurgency, ethnic violence, corruption in the bureaucracy, home, migration, exile, memory are some of the dominant themes that the novelists of

this region deal with. They have also been dealing with the ecology of the region. An ecological concern is inherent in most of the writings. Ecology has been consciously used to attain an identity --- an identity that is legitimate, powerful as well as unique. A study of these writings from an ecological perspective helps not only to evaluate the writers, but also to understand this vibrant region of India – the Northeast.

The states of North-East India have quite a good number of plays written in their own respective vernacular languages. But the works of some of the Manipuri and Assamese playwrights have been translated into English and these have shown how successfully this literary genre has been explored by these playwrights. These plays exhibit local colours, local sense and sentiment, deal with some of the core issues of the region, and at the same time, they have a universal appeal. The world of these playwrights, no doubt, is the very world around them; but ecology, myths and legends, tradition, mysticism, etc. form a vital part of their world. This reminds of their rootedness to their tradition and culture and even being a part of the corpus of Indian drama, these also make them essentially northeastern playwrights. They are recognized with an identity of their own because of their legitimate, powerful voice.

Manipur has a rich theatre tradition. Manipuri theatrical performances originated in the primitive fertility-cults and ancestor-worshipping festivals, a kind of rituals those are said to be established during the 12th century A.D. During the 17th century the “Wari Liba”, an art of solo storytelling before the King or community became institutionalized. During the 18th century folk dances and music, rituals of different clans performed especially during the cyclic festivals were developed into a national culture. The defeat of Manipur in the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891 brought

the old theatre of Manipur under the colonial influence. In a new social order Proscenium-arch theatre became prevalent and such performances gained popularity those were modelled upon the historical and mythological drama imported from that Kolkata(then Calcutta), which was looking toward the Victorian England for artistic craftsmanship during that time. Manipur's political annexation with the Indian Union in 1949 brought obvious changes also to its dramatic sphere. Nehruvian ethos, melodrama of love, romance, suffering or family crisis became popular subject matters. But in the course of time, the changing faces of political, economic, social or cultural spheres greatly influenced the world of Manipuri theatre. Rapid urbanization, new economic structure, decline in moral or community values, changing power-relations, and, above all, a new world order contributed towards the growth and development of critical, modernist drama in Manipur. In the late 1960s a kind of discomfort as well as a discontentment against Indian rule, a strong feeling of being exploited and ignored and thus marginalized, a sense of insecurity, identity crisis started shaking the Manipuri mindset. All these have led to a separatist movement and eventually violence and insurgency. This separatist ideology as well as the atmosphere of violence and insurgency has led to the rise of experimental theatre during the 1970s. After its interaction with the British Indian Empire in the 19th century, people were exposed to western drama. The introduction of western education in Manipur during the last quarter of the 19th century also influenced the advent of a new group of playwrights into the scenario. Ecocritical and ecomystical ideas are elaborately used by playwrights like Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh, Lamabam Kamal, Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh, Ratan Thiyam, Arambam Dorendrajit Singh, Ashangbam Minaketan, and Hijam Angahal. Particularly, playwrights like Ratan Thiyam explore native tradition and culture in their quest for roots. He, like his

predecessors as well as his contemporaries shows a serious concern for ecology in his plays. His plays try to address the issues of ecological degradation and degeneration of human values. He, through his plays seems to propagate the idea of peaceful co-existence with the environment, the very idea enshrined in the principles of Deep as well as Spiritual Ecology.

Assam has also a rich theatrical tradition. Many of the plays translated into English are apt to study using the tenets of ecocriticism. Ganesh Gogoi's *Revenge of Shakuni*, or the plays of Arun Sarma are open to interpretations with perspectives of ecofeminism and ecomysticism. Arun Sarma's plays deal with some of the essential postcolonial concepts like space, displacement, rootlessness, home, or identity. This is to be kept in mind that these issues have also major ecological implications. This consciousness from the part of these playwrights, make their writing canonical.

Contemporary Poetry in English from India's Northeast has multi – faceted voices. It is an expression of an individual poetic self, and at the same time, it is the saga of the people of the region in general. It presents a vista of images of the mountains, hills, rivers, myths and legends, tradition and culture, and multi – ethnic people of the region. The subject matters it deals with ranges from geography to politics, myths and legends to ecology. Ecological concern is a notable characteristic of poetry from this part of the country. Identity crisis or a sense of alienation is one of the dominant features of contemporary politics in the Northeast. There has been a conscious use of ecology as a means for an assertion of identity in the works of the poets of this region. (Baruah 2012: 16). A reading of contemporary poetry in English from Northeast India makes one feel that there has been a conscious use of ecology in

their works. It seems to play a pivotal role in their search for identity, root, traditional values and culture, which they feel, are lost in the humdrum of modernization and urbanization. “Northeast India is one of South Asia’s last land frontiers and through much of the twentieth century these sparsely populated areas have attracted large-scale migration from the rest of the subcontinent. The protective discrimination regime...arose partly as a response to these demographic trends. Many of these tribal societies have been going through a process of transition from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, from clan control of land to commodification of land, urbanization, and cultural change associated with the process of ‘modernization’ (Baruah 2005: 185). That ecology plays a vital role to provide a common ground to these poets, or to bound them together can be seen in the overwhelming presence of nature in the works of almost all of these poets, sometimes imaginatively, sometimes romantically, but most of the time consciously. Their works also reflect their serious concerns of various ecological issues such as large-scale deforestation, coal and uranium mining, ethnic violence, insurgency and counter-insurgency operations — all that ultimately lead to the degradation of ecology. Their poetry strongly advocates preservation of ecology of the region as, they believe, it would be the way of preserving their land, their native tradition and culture, and above all, their identity.

These writers are writing with a consciousness. Their works present before us a myriad, mesmerizing world of nature, and, at the same time, echo a conscious voice of resistance as well as assertion. Contemporary writing in English from India’s Northeast negotiates varied issues simultaneously. It has to fight against the very notion of ‘Northeast’, a stereotypical construct, has to assert an identity, and has to create a ‘space’ and a ‘place’ for itself amidst political and cultural hegemony. It is

quite interesting to note that the ecology of the region is one of their strongest weapons for all such negotiations. The writings in English from this region, having serious ecological concerns, can be seen as essentially a postcolonial and postcolonial discourse. It presents a critique of the colonial perspective of, and the colonial attitude towards, the environment. It is seen that contemporary writing in English from India's Northeast is also a literature of resistance against what can be termed as neo-colonialism. Because of this consciousness of the ecological degradation and sincere efforts of propagating ecological preservation in writing, this body of ecological writing can very well be said canonical.

It is seen from this study of both the creative and critical works of the contemporary playwrights, prose writers and the poets from Northeast India that writing in English from this region has a world of possibilities. From this study of this writing it seems that it has all the power to go on in its creative journey with all vigour and vitality. It has greatly contributed to the corpus of Indian writing in English. It is hoped that it will be more enriched both with quality and quantity and will go on infusing newer ideas, themes, technique and style. This study shows that this immensely rich body of writing has the potential of creating a tradition of its own. Contemporary writing in English from India's Northeast will always be relevant and will remain of great significance in re/inventing the Northeast India as well as India as a whole.

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