



ज्ञान - विज्ञानं विमुक्तये

NORTH-EASTERN INDIAN WRITINGS IN ENGLISH MODES AND CONCERNS

ANANDARAM DHEKIAL PHOOKAN COLLEGE
Nagaon : Assam

Editor
ARCHANA TALUKDAR

NORTH-EASTERN INDIAN WRITINGS IN ENGLISH

MODES AND CONCERNS

A Book of Proceedings

Edited by
Archana Talukdar



ANANDARAM DHEKIYAL PHOOKAN COLLEGE
NAGAON : ASSAM

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Editorial Board

Editorial

The construct North Eastern Indian Writings in English is regarded as a comparatively new arena of commonwealth literature showing utmost responsibilities covering the entire north east area with similar kinds of tastes and preferences. On one hand it shows the assimilative approach and on the other the literary genre among the region as a new attractive journey. It is known to the readers of the globe that the North East comprising eight states and commonly known as 'Seven Sisters'(during earlier period before the inclusion of Sikkim) is promising zone with distinct literary prospects. Writing in English by Indians in general or North Eastern Indians in particular itself is a distinct subject because of its journey through un-traversed paths with utmost care and consciousness. Because of the bright identity of North East, the North Eastern Indian Writing in English has been able to gather lots of attraction among the readers and literature lovers. It is important that literature reflects the man and society of a region encompassing their realistic, artistic and idealistic varieties. It is region with rich literary traditions- whether in written form or in the oral traditions of numerous tribes- that the writings from the North-East has been attracting the attention of big publishing houses like Oxford, Penguin or Zubban.

Mitra Phukan, Dhruva Hazarika, Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Anjum Hasan, Siddhartha Deb, are some English-language writers from North East. Assamese writer Indira Goswami is the most famous literary figure to emerge from this region. Moreover, the younger generation of English-language writers From North-East India include

Jahnavi Barua, Siddhartha Sarma, Nitoo Das, Aruni Kashyap, Manash Pratim Borah, Janice Pariat, Nabanita Kanungo, Mona Zote, Ankush Saikia, Bijoya Sawian and Uddipana Goswami are convincingly expressing the strong political awareness by addressing issues such as identity and ethnicity. The consciousness among the writers of the north eastern region is also showing a distinct identity defying identity crisis. It can be realized that with lots of literary resources, potentialities and expressions, north east can establish its identity among the global readers.

North-East India is a miniature world with lots of diversities in the various fields like geographical, political, social, economic and above all cultural. With the existence of hundreds of tribes and non-tribes along with their cultural, literary and linguistic diversities, North-East itself is a hub for promising literary 'workshops'. With a rich literary tradition, north east is always meticulous in its literature and language. With the mixed existence of plains and hills, different races and the bounty of natural beauty, the people of the north east are marching ahead keeping aside the violence-led environment and disturbances, and the writers from the region are illuminating their literary talents dripped in to singing of rivers, sounds of hills and tunes of folk-tales.

Considering the growing charisma and importance of North Eastern writings in English, the English Department of ADP College, Nagaon, has organized a UGC sponsored national seminar on North Eastern Indian Writings in English on 23rd and 24th August, 2014 to provide a platform to have the search, research and expression on the recent trends and deliberations on the dialogues of the very field of North Eastern Writings in English. Encouragingly, altogether we have received more than 50 papers and articles in different subthemes written by scholars of various institutions from North Eastern Region.

In this book of proceedings of the UGC Sponsored National Seminar, 28 articles/papers have been selectively included with a view to have a practical representation of the North East Writings in English.

I do sincerely hope that this book will be able to provide the reflection of North Eastern Indian Writings in English and to contribute, whatever little it may be, to the field.

As the Editor of this book I must offer my thanks and gratitude to our esteemed Principal and the president of the national Seminar Dr. S.U. Ahmed, Dr. Nityananda Pattanayak, HOD, English and Vice President of the national Seminar, all the respected faculty members from English Department, the faculty Members of all the other departments and the employees who actively helped us in succeeding our mission.

If I do not mention the tedious job of krantikaal prakashan, it would not be justified. Hence, I must thank to all the technicians of Ajanta Press including the proprietor Mr. Kailash Kumar Rajkhowa.

Last but not least, it is my sincere duty to beg apology from the organizers part for any kind of unwanted omissions and commissions in organizing the venture.

With lots of regards,
Archana Talukdar

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Temsula Ao: A Champion of Women Rights

Kishor Kumar

North-east is what can be described as territorially contained and culturally "contained", too, within the Indian nation-state. In India's political imaginary, the term serves to describe a region that is both fascinating, to quote Tony Howard, " If India was the Jewel in the crown of the British Empire, the remote North-East of that country is its Hidden Jewel" and yet dangerous. In other words, the term seems to homogenize a location where homogeneity is neither automatic nor autochthonous.

From this geographically and politically constructed north-east we have Writing in English that has gained momentum over last few years. Some writers, both from poetic and novelistic world, have carved niches on national scene. As a poet TemsulaAo has proved successful by voicing in her writing different issues that confront mankind, particularly to the people of the north-east. Recognizing her poetic talent she has been awarded Sahitya Akademi Award and also Padmashri Award. Temsula Ao was born in 1945 in Nagaland, educated in Assam and in employment as a University professor of English in Meghalaya has the experience of knowing the mind and feeling of the people of a vast stretch of the north-east. Major strength of her poetry lies in two features: its rootedness and its political consciousness. Nagaland in her poetry is not just a setting; it is soul of her poems.

Ao like most of the North East poets is contestatory and in her dialectical sites both the private and the public coalesce. So in her poems we hear a complex web of social and political

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consequences, where the poet does not show up herself as only a reflective poet or can only become an impersonal poet. On the contrary, we have in her romanticism and rebel spirit melting into each other. Her poetry is private yet public. She has in her poetry roots present in the indigenous bardic traditions while she imbibes new energy from the public voice of revolutionary poets. TemsulaAo's publications include *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). Her other works include *Henry James and the Quest for an Ideal Heroine*, *The Ao Naga Oral Tradition* and *These Hills Called Home*.

While reading Ao one is struck by the variety of themes underlying in her corpus of poetry like Women issues, Ecological concerns, Identity crisis of Naga people, violence due to both private and state terrorism, on Death, Ageing, Love and Compassion. And while narrating her themes she has taken the help of folklore, local myths and fables. Her poetry is marked by its basic "quest for roots" (Das: 2004:63) and socio-ecological concerns. However, this paper aims to explore only one of the myriad thematic concerns of Ao, especially regarding Women Issues in her poems.

One of the most important thematic concerns of Ao that catch immediate attention of a discerning reader is her concern for Women. Ao celebrates the role of women in society and family. Like Irigary who opines, "... we must not once more kill the mother who was sacrificed to the origins of our culture. We must give her new life...the right to pleasure...her right to speech, and sometimes to cries and anger" (Irigary 2003:421), Ao pleads for the rightful place of woman in the society.

In 'Woman' the poet is awe struck at the sacrificial role of a woman, who disregarding her own needs nurtures life. Yet she is neglected, tortured in man-made world, becoming a victim of social customs and roles assigned to her. Man beguiled her into submission thus establishing timeless dominion (*Songs That Tell*: 22).

In "Man to Woman" she tells about treacherous nature of male

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dominated world where man easily forgets his promises given to his wife before marriage. The boy while courting girl promised her everything once she enters his house like "That I want you with a yearning/ Stronger than the jhum burning? / And let me walk to next year's jhum by your side" but the moment the girl marries the boy and enters his house the boy forgets his promises, forgets how he used to woo her admiring her smile, gait, dancing and zest for work.

Ao rues the treatment received by women at the hands of men despite the fact that like beasts of burden the housewives take all responsibilities of household chores. In a traditional village setting a Naga woman remains busy bee from dawn to dusk discharging all her responsibilities despite her "aching limbs" while her male counterpart "feels a stranger/In his own hearth" and gets out with his shawl and dao to join the other men, as if to a battle field to win over the enemies. But the real life battle is won by the woman. And in the process she turns into a "beast of burden/Showered with constant abuse/And given little sustenance". Exploitation of women by men remains a recurrent theme in Ao's poetry. In many of her poems we find how Ao narrates travails and tribulations of women and abuse to them by those from whom they expect love and protection. In "Requiem" she narrates a case of bride burning for dowry. "Who will mourn/" her fate "roasted on the pyre/Of avarice." However, the culprit does not show any remorse rather gathers money and bribes the guardianns of the society to get scot free branding the death as accidental.

After depicting the sufferings of the womenfolk in her society she goes to champion their rights. She calls upon the society to treat women equally and honorably. She urges women of her land not to remain mute or constitute a muted group of them but to protest against male chauvinism. She asks them to come forward asserting their right in the family or society.

Thus my early contention that Ao through her poetry works for women empowerment and champions of women rights is proved by the text. ■

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Negotiating the Place of the Common Man in select short stories of Temsula Ao

Dr. Miazzi Hazam

The two volumes of short stories by Temsula Ao, viz. *These Hills called Home: Stories from a War Zone* (2006) and *Laburnum for My Head* (2009), contain stories from the turbulent state of Nagaland, spanning the historical time-frame from pre-independence to the early days in independent India. The stories, while narrating the armed struggle of the Nagas for an independent state, also reflect the changing colours of Movement; while at the same time putting a word of caution for the readers that the stories should not be interpreted as 'historical records'. As Ao herself puts it in the 'Preface' to the volume *These Hills called Home*, which she has titled 'Lest We Forget':

These stories, however, are not about 'historical facts'; nor are they about condemnation, justice or justification of the events which raged through the land like a wildfire half a century ago. On the contrary, what the stories are trying to say is that in such conflicts, there are no winners, only victims and the results can be measured only in human terms. For the victims the trauma goes beyond the realm of just the physical maiming and loss of life - their very humanity is assaulted and violated, and the onslaught leaves the survivors scarred both in mind and soul. (p. ix-x)

The touch of violence and sadness is conveyed also through the epigraph:

I hear the land cry,
Over and over again
'Let all the dead awaken

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And teach the living
How not to die'.

Beyond doubt, the epigraph is a lamentation of the loss of values and the scarring which any violent movement leaves behind as an aftermath.

The stories in this volume deal with the experience of the Naga people caught in the web of violence and the cross-fire between the forces of the underground and the military. In doing so, the stories present to the readers the negotiation that the inhabitants of this violence-struck land enter in order to survive.

The other volume, *Laburnum for My Head*, deals more with the ordinary events of Naga life rather than the scarring memories of the turbulent period of violence. But it does not mean in any way that the element of violence is completely missing in the stories contained in this volume; the only difference that this volume shares with *These Hills called Home* is that violence here is prominent only in two stories viz. 'Sonny' and while in *These Hills called Home* most of the stories are marked by the presence of violence of the most inhuman sort.

The present paper intends to discuss the experiences of the Naga people caught in the cross-fire between the dynamics of violence unleashed by the clash between the government and the 'rebel' forces through an examination of a few short stories chosen from both the volumes. The attempt has been to analyze the tactics of negotiation (if it can really be termed as acts of negotiation) which the common people have to undergo under pressure and the need for survival. However, it seems right to mention at the very beginning that the meaning of the word 'negotiation' as used in this analysis does not fit in properly with its dictionary meaning. The meaning of the word 'negotiation' has been provided variously in different dictionaries as is evident from those given below:

1. Formal discussions in which people or groups try to reach an agreement, especially in a business or political situation. (www.macmillandictionary.com)
2. a. Discussion aimed at reaching an agreement:
b. The action or process of transferring legal ownership of a document. (www.oxforddictionaries.com)

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3. A formal discussion between people who are trying to reach an argument: an act of negotiation. (www.merriam-webster.com)

In all the definitions of the word 'negotiation' cited above, it is visible that it is a process which is generally based on mutual discussion or agreement; but the use of the word would entail a different colour from those given above since the intention has been to view negotiation as a strategy for survival in a situation which is very akin to being 'sandwiched' without the existence of any other option.

Four short stories from the volume *These Hills Called Home* and two from the *Laburnum for My Head* have been chosen for discussion in this paper since the act of negotiation as a strategy for struggle, along with its failure in certain cases, as the discussion will make evident, is well reflected in them.

When it comes to the clash of power between the government and the underground, the most conspicuous effect is the unleashing of violence from both sides, which in turn affects the lives of the common people. So far the stories in the first volume, barring the last two, and two from the second volume are concerned, violence turns out as the common factor threading the stories together. Though for the common men, the presence of violence in any struggle aimed at political independence and which challenges the power of the state is met with resistance and violence.

The stories present to the readers that complex relationship between power, resistance and violence which is an intimate one. It is almost customary to regard resistance as a proof of the existence of power, and violence as a direct outcome of it. However, there exists a proportionately inverse relationship between power and violence, as Hannah Arendt writes her essay *Communicative Power*:

Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears when power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance (Lukes, 71)

This statement reiterates another observation on the subject of power and violence:

Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of

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a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power (69).

At the same time she also points out that there exists a common consensus among all political thinkers on the view that "violence is nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power".

Another complex nature of violence and resistance is that they unleash a spiraling phenomenon which, unknown to the parties involved in the process, contributes towards a more flagrant application of violence. Resistance, which is essentially a counter-action to the established agency of power, calls for more application of force, thereby fuelling greater violent action from the other side. What is unfortunate is perhaps that in the clash between the state and non-state actors in this self feeding cycle of violence, it is the common men who are at the receiving end, and their experiences turn into untold sagas of suffering and humiliation. It is essentially this ordeal of the common men that Temsula Ao tries to present in her stories through the ordeals of the characters, that are, more than often, enmeshed in the web of violence; much against their own wishes; and worse, are forced to choose sides and hence, become unwilling pawns in the greater struggle for power taking place in the background. This holds particularly true in the case of the female characters that have to bear the brunt of violence both when their own family members or relatives or lovers become a part of the underground army or when the government machinery tortures them in order to 'send a message' to the rebels. Both ways, the women become victims of physical and emotional maiming. The psychological scarring that takes place is not just individual; rather it extends to the entire community.

The stories, '*The Last Song*' from *These Hills Called Home* and '*Sonny*' from *Laburnum for My Head* are instances in this regard. The inhuman rape of Apenyo and her mother Libeni in '*My Last Song*' by the Captain and soldiers of the Indian army, and the brutal massacre of the innocent villagers gathered in the new church to celebrate its inauguration is possibly the worst atrocity that has been fictionalized by the author as having occurred during the days of the so-called freedom

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movement for an independent Naga state. Such situations defy any scope for negotiation since the use of maximum violence in such cases negates all possibilities of other options. The other story, 'Sonny', does not speak of atrocities towards women but it contains an atmosphere of menace, an untold yet felt uneasiness for the female narrator who is faced with the Hamletian dilemma of whether to hand over the floppy disc sent to her by her dead ex-lover or to ignore his last appeal and bury the secret along with his corpse. She decides on the second course of action and tries to build a separate peace for herself, judging with practical wisdom that those who could harm Sonny, who had been an important person in the underground movement but who had shown signs of dissent, could easily harm her too. Here, one can feel a certain amount of negotiation; an individual attempt to bury the past and try to find a separate peace for oneself, though very well acknowledging the fact that the hiding of truth will always remain a prick on the conscience. At the same time, the story is also an indication of how the 'movement', which had started with great enthusiasm and idealism was later caught in an inner struggle for power; a fact which Temsula Ao mentions in her Preface to *These Hills Called Home* :

Nagaland's story of the struggle for self-determination started with high idealism and romantic notions of fervent nationalism, but it somehow got re-written into one of disappointment and disillusionment because it became the very thing it sought to overcome. (p. x)

The struggle for power within the rebel camp forms the theme of yet another story in the first volume - 'Shadows' - in which the son of the Chief-in-Command is treacherously killed by the Second-in-Command because he feels the young boy to be a threat to his rise in power.

So far the issue of gender and the vulnerability of women are concerned, it also needs to be seen that it is the woman who many-a-times saves the day for her male counterpart through her wit and courage. Two stories, one each from the two volumes, 'The Jungle Major' and 'A Simple Question' highlight the wit and heroic nature of the Naga women who save their husbands from becoming victims - of the Indian army in the first story and of the struggle between the underground

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and the Indian army in the second story. In 'The Jungle Major', it is the wife Khatila, the wife of Punaba who had joined the underground and risen to the rank of Major, saves the latter from being caught by the Indian Army by disguising him as her servant and sending him away from home. The wit of the wife is evident in the manner Ao describes her attitude towards her husband disguised as a servant when the young Captain leading the army patrol tries to stop Punaba:

The Captain tried to stop him, but Khatila was prepared for this; she said, 'Sahib, no use talking to him, he cannot talk. Besides, don't you see there is no water in the house? What do you want with a servant?' So saying, she gave a shove to Punaba with some more choice abuses and he hurried out of the house... (p. 6-7)

Never could the young Captain imagine that he had been befooled by the intelligence of a tribal woman.

The other story 'A Simple Question', also stands as an example of the heroism and intelligence of a Naga woman who dares to venture inside the camp of the Indian army and manage the release of her husband who, along with others, had been brought there for their alleged non-cooperation with the army. The story gives an example of how the innocent villagers are unwillingly drawn into the war-zone and made a party to the struggle for power between the government and the non-state actors. It also represents what can be termed as 'sandwiching' between two forces, both much stronger than them :

Though the gaonburahs were supposed to inform the government about the activities of the rebels, they were under tremendous pressure from the underground forces because every move they made was monitored from close quarters. There were instances when certain elders suspected of being 'with' the government had been summarily executed. For the gaonburahs it was an extremely untenable situation. (p. 82)

It is a situation which with all sincerity can be called as being caught between the Devil and the Deep Sea; and it is not just the gaonburahs who have to bear the brunt of pressure because they hold

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posts designated by the government the common people are also equal sufferers. The post of the 'Gaonburah', ironically, was a product of the colonial system. They have to meet the demands of the underground to supply them with food and money in the form of 'donations' and when these are not met, the amount is extracted out of them by force, and whoever hesitates or refuses to pay are dealt with brutally. The scope for negotiation is very less and the only way out for the common people is either to meet up to the demands (of both the sides) or suffer. Under such a situation, the common man is engulfed as if by a blanket of fear and their abject sense of fear is reflected precisely in the following line spoken by Imdongla:

How would you feel if your fathers were punished for acting out of fear? Fear of you Indian soldiers and fear of the mongrels of the jungle. (p. 87)

It may be noted here that here Ao does not glorify any of the sides engaged in violence.

This story also provides the reader(s) with glimpses of the process by which the Army categorizes and secludes those whom it regards as threat or whom it suspects of having either sympathy or some sort of connection with the underground movement:

Villagers who persistently resisted the setting up of army camps would be forced out of their villages; their houses and granaries would be burnt and they would be relocated along with others recalcitrant villagers in a 'grouping' zone and kept in fenced-in areas, not allowed to cultivate their fields, their movements monitored and under constant surveillance. (p. 84)

The tactics of 'grouping' within zones is a common practice during periods of emergency or violent resistance -- examples of which can be found in the writings of authors hailing from different regions of struggle. It is also important to note the presence of collaborators who provide information to the Indian Army regarding the movement of the underground as well as the activities of the villagers. The man in the shadow in the story who translates Imdongla's words to the Captain is one such person. It may be mentioned here that the role of the collaborator is of vital importance in any armed struggle aimed at the

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establishment of the power of a single agency. These collaborators are usually awed by the range of power demonstrated by the agency in control. For them negotiation consists in having a share, however petty, of the power yielded by the agency in control.

This form of negotiating with the supposedly powerful party is evident also in the story 'The Curfew Man' (from *These Hills Called Home*) where the lame character Satemba performs the role of an informer and is later punished with his only good knee being smashed as a warning that he should stop working against the 'Movement'. However, while Satemba suffers, it is his wife who feels a wave of relief as he would now be forced to stay at home owing to his bad legs and not need to carry on working as an informer for the government forces. It is a personal peace that Jemtila has won amidst chaos.

A single act of negotiation which seems to have succeeded in *These Hills called Home*, is the one which the old man Sashi and his friend Imli enter into with the Indian government in 'An Old Man Remembers'. In this story, the two friends surrender in order to secure treatment for Sashi who has received a bullet wound in a gun-battle against the Indian army. Still, their final return to the village and the later years are filled with a sense of remorse on what they had done as soldiers of the underground movement. The pathos of these two old friends, along with the description of several others who are unable to adjust to the normal run of life around them is an example of how horrid the after-affect of violence can be.

Due to the presence of violence in the stories, much of the 'peace' which is supposed to descend on the common people is not a fulfilling one, rather it is accompanied with and marked by a sense of loss - physical and/or psychological. At the end, as most of the stories present to the readers, is a feeling which Temsula Ao herself categorizes as an "onslaught" which leaves "the survivors scarred both in mind and soul" (p. x).

The dramatic nature of human tragedy being enacted before our eyes is unfurled as tale after tale we are conveyed a sense of loss involving the innocent. It is a tussle over power in which the common man is sandwiched and incapacitated. The restoration of equilibrium which is a marked feature of tragedies is missing in their sufferings

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since many of the stories in these volumes leave an after-taste much like the one created by William Golding in *Lord of the Flies* (1954). They are left with memories that are too unpleasant to remember and would have probably done away with them had it been possible. The story, 'The Last Song', in particular evokes such a sense of tragedy—a tragedy involving the unnecessary loss of much that is good.

Negotiation, thus, in the stories of Temsula Ao taken up for discussion, can be discerned at various levels with varying results - from almost successful attempts at finding peace or some sort of peace amidst the worst of violence and atrocities, to the ultimate negation of all possibilities to strike any peace in front of the brutalities and lust for power. Between these two extremes lie some stories in which a partial peace is attained, though all the while reminiscent of the fact that it is only a lull before the storm, an uneasy interval in the long history of violence in mankind. While some characters prefer to have a share in the power-struggle and become either collaborators or join sides, there are numerous characters that would, given the choice, prefer to stay aloof from all sorts of involvement in the over-all struggle over power, which unfortunately, they are denied. The only option for negotiation left to them is to try for a separate peace, though the word 'peace' would be a misnomer here. ▣

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No Life stirs in her belly now: Eco-consciousness in Contemporary Women Writers In English From India's Northeast

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There have been quite a good number of powerful women writers who seem to articulate their senses and sentiments and focus on some of the core issues of the region through their writing-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 seem to have a strong presence in the works of these women writers. Presenting myriad views of the entire ecosystem of the region their works seem to celebrate the ecological glory of Northeast with a keen ecological awareness. They seem to use ecology as a tool for acquiring an identity of their own in a conscious way. It is felt that the unique ecology of the region has been pivotal in shaping and aesthetic sensibility in these writers.

Mamang Dai (Arunachal Pradesh), Indira Goswami, Mitra Phukan (Assam), Kunjarani Lingjam Chanu, Gambhini Devi (Manipur), Anjum Haan, Esther Siyem, Indari Siyem Warjri, Patricia Mukhim (Meghalaya), Mona Zote, Margaret Chalthantluangi Zama, Margaret Lalmuanpuii Pachuau, (Mizoram), Temsula Ao, Monalisa Changkija, Easterine Iralu, Nini Langalang (Nagaland), Sudha M. Rai (Sikkim), Jogamaya Chakma, Sefali Debbarma, Gambhini Sorokkhaibam

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(Tripura) are some of the representative women writers from this region whose work have been enriching the multi-ethnic Indian writing in English from Northeast including poetry, fiction as well as non-fictional works either in original writing or through translations.

Objective Of The Study:

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 seem to have a strong presence in the works of these women writers. Presenting myriad views of the entire ecosystem of the region their works seem to celebrate the ecological glory of Northeast with a keen ecological awareness. They seem to use ecology as a tool for acquiring an identity of their own in a conscious way. This paper tries to examine the aspects of ecopolitics entailing ecomysticism, ecofeminism and the like in select works of some of these women writers from Northeast India who writes in English or whose works have been translated into English.

Hypothesis:

An apparent reading of the works of these writers shows that they have a strong ecological awareness. It is felt that the unique ecology of the region has been pivotal in shaping their aesthetic sensibilities. This paper makes an attempt to verify the extent of this eco-consciousness and the validity thereof in the writing of these women writers.

Methodology:

Methodology of investigation is based on analysis of primary and secondary sources. This is mainly a text-based reading along with the use of the tenets of ecopolitics entailing ecomysticism, ecofeminism and the like.

Analysis:

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,

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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). 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. (Iralu 2003: 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 seen 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

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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 andocentric attitude towards nature which has been seemed to be hugely responsible for environmental degradation and the present ecological crisis.

Mamang Dai (1957-), who resigned her position as and 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. Her *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. 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 practice and animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world". (Dai 2006: 1)

A rold with ecofeminist 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

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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 booking 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).

Ecomystical elements are in abundance in Dia's writing. Nature has a mystical presence in her 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

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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 manmade 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 Dai, particularly in her poetry like other women writers from this region. The poetic world of Mamang Dia is full of ecomystical images. Dia's poetry can also be read 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.

(Dia 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 andocentric 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

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nature has to say. This attitude of the human world has been greatly responsible for the present ecological crisis. Dia, like most of the contemporary writers from Northeast India seems to address this issue through her writing.

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 treat 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 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. The hills bestow on the region a typical identity of 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. 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

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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 it banks. (Phukan 2005: 342).

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).

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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 women writers seem to be seriously concerned of this. Ecology of their native land forms a central theme of many of these writers. They celebrate

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the hills, mountains, rivers and forests of their land and are greatly concerned of the environmental degradation around them. The following lines from a poem by Temsula Ao, the winner of the Sahitya Academy Award for 2013, portray a picture of the degenerated environment:

*The rivers are running red,
The hillsides are bare
And the seasons
Have lost their magic.*

(Ao 1995: 49)

In one of her poems entitled "Lament for Earth" in her collection *Songs That Tell* Temsula present 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)

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. Sudha M. Rai, another poet from Sikkim presents a poetic expression of the darker sides of the insurgency and counter-insurgency operation that are presently going on in Northeast India. A girl who conceives after being raped is telling her tale of woe and her crisis can also be seen, in a larger perspective, as a crisis in the environment:

*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)

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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, a representative Chakma poet from Tripura. She portrays as contemporary picture of Northeast India in one of her poems entitled "The War Dress" which gives an impression on the overall environment of this region in recent times:

*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)

It is seen that the women writers writing in English from India's Northeast 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 also very much critical of the 'development 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 had 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

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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 women writers from Northeast India an interesting subject to study.

Conclusion:

Contemporary writers in English from Northeast India show serious ecological concerns in their writing. The women writers too are no exception. 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. The unique ecological features of the region are celebrated in the works of these writers. Their portrayal of ecology in a broader canvass reaffirms their treatment of nature not merely as a passive object, but as a hugely dynamic entity, full of vitality and energy, and an important source of life and living. These women writers, with this eco-consciousness in their writing seem to have the potential to make significant contributions towards the body of postcolonial ecological literature. We may conclude this paper by quoting a poem by Monalisa Changkija, a poet from Nagaland, which seem to sum up the attitude, concerns and consciousness of contemporary women writers of Northeast India towards the ecology of the region:

*Yes, I've seen our 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)

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Reflection on The Naga Society in Easterine Iralu's *A Terrible Matriarchy*

Bompi Riba

This article begins with deliberating on what 'matriarchy' is. Did the author deliberately prefix the adjective 'terrible' to 'matriarchy' in the title '*A Terrible Matriarchy*' ambiguously? Does the term 'matriarchy' here refer only to the power exercised by an old woman over her family? Or is the family a miniature version of a larger society that has women playing the central roles in the governing of the various institutions of the same? Does the 'terrible matriarchy' have a cultural connotation? Classical scholars such as Johann Jakob Bachofen and Bamberger have tried to give evidence of the existence of matriarchal society on the basis of myths which talk about society being ruled by women. In these myths, such as the *Jurupari* myths of the Tukanooan-speaking Indians of South America, women are mysterious and evil-natured. They mistreat men and the latter revolt and brutally kill the former and forbid them from taking up any authoritative roles; thereby subjecting them to eternal passivity.

The ambivalent nature of the title '*A Terrible Matriarchy*' raises the curiosity of the reader. What aspect of the Naga society is the author trying to reflect? Does it have anything to do with Christianity- a religion popularly practised among the Naga tribes? Christianity as a religion focuses on man's relationship with God, the Father, His Son, Christ; and the Holy Spirit. The story of the Genesis has Adam as the caretaker of Eden and Eve as his companion. Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit and Adam's decision to follow her that led to the condemnation of mankind to dead is indicative of the patriarchal nature of the religion.

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Christianity also preaches man to love his wife and the wife to be submissive to her husband as he is the head of the house. With such religion in practice, one cannot fathom the idea of a matriarchal society.

'*A Terrible Matriarchy*' is about an Angami girl living in Kohima, Nagaland. The Angami tribe is one of the major tribes of Nagaland. Almost all the Angami population is Christian with only a meager population out of it that still practise animistic belief. Christian doctrines hold Eve, the first woman responsible for the fall of man because of her decision to eat the forbidden fruit first. So does it imply that women are not reliable as decision makers? Is the author suggesting that matriarchy, if existed, being the flip side of patriarchy would be as appalling as the latter? Or the story does not convey any farfetched ideas at all other than the plain story of Dielieno and her relationship with her grand-mother Vibaso who is the terrible matriarchy for the little girl. But the power exercised by the grand-mother is only limited to her house and to her kiths and kins. She might be a matriarch of the family but she is as insignificant as the 'others' in the larger society. This is evident in the novel when the male members of the family overlook the dying wish of the grandmother that the house after her death should go to her great grandson Salhou. They rather take their decision on the basis of the will of their dead father.

As mentioned above the society that has been presented to us in the narrative is without any doubt a patriarchal one. The extract given below reflects the psychology of Dielieno, the narrator, who even at a very young age could distinguish the sexual division of labour and the psycho-social distinctions and cultural mechanisms of gender constructs.

"Mother worked very hard to make the small four-roomed house cheerful. She planted flowers in boxes in front of the house. But it was hard to keep it tidy with the boys always littering the porch with their toys and books. Father did not help much. He would expect Mother to clean the house and wash all the clothes and have cooked food ready when he got home." (p. 49)

Dielieno alias Lieno exhibits resistance to the anxious process

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of self denial that makes a 'good woman' throughout the narrative. Even as a child she questioned the system that does not favour girls to carry on the name of the family. Long pondering on gender issues only exhausted her as she found no genuine way out of the system. Many a times she was also accused of being unfeminine; growing up with many brothers being one of the reasons for that. But the foremost cause was her being educated. Grandmother Vibaso had her own reasons as to why girls should not be educated.

"Men hesitate to court a woman who has too much education. They also do not like to take someone as wife who is not often seen at home." (p. 104)

She openly expressed her disapproval to Lieno's parents when they decided to send her to school. She argued that back in the old time "girls did not go to school. We stayed at home and learnt all the fieldwork as well. That way one never has a problem with girl-children. They will always be busy at some work or other, too busy to get into trouble. It is all right if boys have a spot of trouble now and then, but with girls, it is different. You would never be able to get rid of her once she has caused trouble. I really do not approve of girls getting educated. It only makes them get fancy notions about themselves and they forget their place in the family." (p.23)

Liemo is sent off to live with her grandmother when she was just five years old. The grandmother's ostentatious display of affection for her brothers made Liemo crave to be a boy and be loved and pampered by her grandmother. Since this wish could never be fulfilled, she grows up with bitterness for her grandmother and finds it very difficult to forgive her. Her mother defends her grandmother by blaming the society as the real cause of her biased nature. According to her in villages it was very important for a married woman to have many sons. In case the husband expires, then a widow without sons would lose all the property to the other male relatives. Vibaso had witnessed the suffering of her mother; so she looks upon her sons and grandsons as "a kind of insurance" (p.273) In this way, ironically the matriarch of the story was only catering to the service of patriarchy as Adrienne Rich has rightly pointed out,

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"Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values even in those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private..."

(from essay The Kingdom of the Fathers, pp.82)

In this context one can also refer to Simone de Beauvoir, who in her *'The Second Sex'*, has announced that one of the maledictions of being a woman is to be left in the hands of women during childhood. Therefore the grandmother's stand on the traditional way of educating the girls to become good Naga women is in fact just an extension of patriarchy. And Lieno's fear and dislike for her grandmother could be her fear of her grandmother's encroaching symbiosis in her which she resists from the very beginning of the narration.

Many issues pertinent to the Naga society crop up in Easterine Iralu's *A Terrible Matriarchy*. What fascinates the Non-regional readers is when the eight year old Lieno casually informs Bano that the "people in India" (p.121) grow sugar. Here the incompatibility of the State-sponsored Nationality and Indian Nationality comes to the forefront. With this enlightenment, when the reader moves backward in the narration where Lieno describes the discarding of the picture of the three elephants by her mother seems to make some sense. This particular act of the mother suggests the phenomenon of refusing to embrace the Indian nationality by the tribal people of Nagaland.

"I saw that Mother had thrown out the picture frame of three elephants given to us by an Indian friend of my aunt's husband. At first, it looked out of place in our sitting room. But it had been there for so many years that it seemed to be a part of the room and the spot where it used to hang by a nail looked oddly empty. (p.71-72)"

The above mentioned act comes under scrutiny when one reads it in the context of the life in Kohima before the war in 1943. Lieno narrates that her maternal grandfather was a scout in the British army and had got many medals for his contributions such as spying on a Japanese camp and leading the British safely to their position. It would

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be naive to comment that the Nagas had embraced the British and British culture without much resistance. But their affinity towards the English culture is quite visible even in the brief narration about the wonderful past. The mother would nostalgically look back at that time when she was educated at the Mission School and sang in the choir and played hymns on the piano. As for Lieno, her mother's stories are magical and unreal to her. It seems to her that it was a period of "picnics and festivals." (p. 184) Interestingly, the above extract also foresees the future event in the narration where the rift between the Naga society and the Indian Army is discreetly highlighted. One such episode is the account of the death of Rocky, the friend of Lieno's brother Vini.

"... life here in Kohima is so meaningless. Do you know the reason why Rocky was hitting the other guy? Well, they were arguing about politics and the other chap said that it was no use fighting for independence because, in any case, the Naga cause was a dead cause. That made Rocky mad and they kept arguing and the man said that Rocky was a fool because he couldn't see that the people who were getting anything out of the conflict were the Parties and those who sided with them. Rocky said that he would rather die than give our country to another nation. The man called him a fool, he said he was the greatest fool and he hit out at Rocky first. Do you know how frustrating it is to be a Naga and live with the fear of being shot all the time? Do you know what it does to your insides when you hear about the people tortured and killed by the army and you can't do anything about it? And then, along comes the smart Alec who thinks it is all right to stop fighting for freedom, to stop being men and be sitting at an office desk, having sold your identity away for a bundle of money. You didn't know that Rocky's father was killed by the Indian army, did you?"(p.246-247)

This account was passed on verbally by Vini to his elder brother Leto. And this in fact directs the attention of the reader towards the 'oral tradition' of passing on the vibrant stories of the ancient Naga warriors

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and their affinity towards their land. But the following is an account of a youth of the contemporary times, who might have had dreams of a free tribal council being opposed by the youth of the same town. Therefore this instant could be a mirror image of the fractions in the Naga society with regard to the question of an independent Nagaland.

To understand the national dilemma of the Nagas, here's an extract from the essay, *A Naga View of the World* by Charles Chasie, pp.261-262

"Alas! We have lost much in the last few decades. Much of the strength in our culture lay in the traditional authority system, our beliefs, and the fact that our economy did not allow much disparity between rich and poor. Even the British did not disturb these (they initially tried, failed, and decided to let us be) and we were able to maintain our way of life under them. But with the departure of the British things took a completely different turn as a result of the events that followed. And our systems were turned upside-down, often deliberately. It took sometime for the Government of India that the main prop of Naga movement was the tribal council and that the only effective way of reducing their authority would be to reduce their influence - and that, for this, a break-up of the economic pattern of the Naga people, specifically of land-relationships, would be necessary. Even a rather cursory study of the role of the Indian Army in Nagaland would reveal that, under cover of fighting the insurgents, the entire economic pattern of the Naga people has been attempted to be disrupted. In this connection one may refer to the village re-groupings that were carried out. This disruption of the economic pattern is bound to have far-reaching consequences and will, in the long run, shake the very basis of Naga society - the village republics."

Easterine Iralu also seems to hold the same distrust and bitterness towards the step-motherly treatment of the Government of India towards the predicaments of the Nagas. She quotes, "This is my

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experience, I have been marginalized simply because I am a Naga, twice-marginalised because I am a woman and thrice marginalized because I am a tribal, a member of an indigenous community." (pp.273) In her essay *Should writers Stay in Prison?*, she reports about a Naga writer whose manuscripts on the Naga political conflict was returned to him with a comment that it was "too explosive". She reprehends the publishing houses that had immediately published an Indian bureaucrat's manuscript on the same theme. According to her this prejudice was because 'he had presented the Indian version of the conflict' that 'justified the actions of the Indian armed forces' and also 'minimised the genocide, rape and torture of the Nagas'. His manuscript represents the politically correct version of the conflict where the Naga freedom movement is assessed as an insurgency movement and as secession from the Indian Union.

The author asserts that in the minds of the Naga people, Nagaland is a nation. According to her there the people are always living on the periphery. Thus the account of the indifference of the general mass towards the brutal killing of Lato's mother is not only a reflection of the tumultuous relationship that the Nagas share with the Government of India but also the exposition of the true episodes through the work of literature in the hands of Naga writers.

"...haven't you heard that they killed Lato's mother? Put a gun into her mouth and shot her dead after they had raped her. Do you know that when Lato went to avenge his mother they beat him until he was half-dead and they released him. And no one could do anything to help him, certainly not the government." (p.247)

According to Frantz Fanon, "the first step for 'colonialised' people in finding a voice and an identity is to reclaim their own past". (p. 186, *Beginning Theory*) The author does not give an account of the remote history of the beginning of the Naga society. But she does take the readers to a not so distant time zone when Lieno's grandfather served as a *dobashi* because he could speak Assamese and served as an interpreter to the British. In one instant while he was sent to collect taxes, the villagers revolted and almost beheaded him. Apart from this, there is hardly any mention of the natives' resistance to the British.

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Interestingly there is a reference of a village that has ostracized the natives who refused to become Christians. Therefore ironically the Nagaland presented to the reader is not totally free from the colonised ideology. Their embracing of Christianity points towards the assimilation of different culture. For instance, the Christian marriage of Lieno's grandparents which was conducted by an Angami Pastor did not serve cake as delicacies like the West but served a lot of meat instead, which in turn suggested the culture of hunting of the tribals.

Like marriages, even funeral services seem to have practices from both the culture. In the traditional way of mourning, the mourners would weep loudly and chant out their grief. They would talk to the body of the deceased but with the entry of the church fellows; the weeping would subside and they would bid farewell to the deceased with mourning hymns and prayer. The society that is depicted is probably the one the author is most familiar with. It is the immediate contemporary Naga society that has learnt to live almost amicably with these two differing ideologies. Even in the case of the spirits of the dead, for instance, the society accepts the beliefs propagated by these two cultures. The Christians as explained by Bano believes that people "who believed in Jesus would not return if they died". (p.151) But this belief differs from the indigenous belief of the natives that spirits of the dead people haunt the places that they had frequented in their life time. However even the second idea does not seem unnatural to the Christian Nagas too. For instance, the fear generated in the village after the death of Zekuo. It was spread through gossip that his spirit visited the drinking house of an old woman. She in turn reprimanded him to leave the house and warned him of dire consequences if he ever made any future visits. After that she struck the blade of the *dao* at different places in the wooden doorway, which gave her the conviction that she has shielded her house from the ghostly visits. This incident almost paralysed Lieno and Bano with fear at night.

Another instance worth mentioning would be the spirit of grandmother Vibaso returning from the dead to haunt the tenants who occupied her house after her death. It was through dream that the

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grandmother conveyed her message to the pastor who was asked to pray for the unquiet spirit.

"My house is not for strangers. It is for my family members. How can I be at rest when they have thrown out of my house those who cared for me?" (p. 313)

This particular account frightens the readers but at the same time propounds the authenticity of such instances in a place where people believe in the existence of spirits and sing about them in their folksongs and folklores.

The Nagas might have resisted the Indian culture but they could not totally remain detached from the same. There are evidences of them being influenced by their neighbouring states. For instance, their common dialect Nagamese is actually a pidgin of Assamese. Even their food habits have been influenced by their neighbouring states. For instance, the fried fish prepared by grandfather Sizo during one of his visits. Lieno and Bano who were familiar with only the traditional way of boiling fish could not stop asking for more of the crispy fish. Grandmother did not have any of the fried fish though. It could, therefore, be indicative of the younger generation's flexibility to embrace new culture as opposed to the rigidity of the older generation.

The narrative also exhibits the emerging problems of the Naga society. The earlier generation thriving mostly on agriculture has been succeeded by new generation of government servants. Many have relocated themselves into towns and have left behind their old parents to make their living all by themselves. This is a typical malady of modern society that is characteristic for its individualism. One such instance in the novel is the sad case of an old man named Heurang.

"When mourners went to his house, they found that there was no grain in his house. The neighbours quickly brought food from their own houses and arranged his funeral. After his wife's death, he had been living on alone in their house and cultivating their field. His son never came back after going away to live in Dimapur with his wife and two children. Word was sent to him but he never came to his father's funeral. ...he died both of

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starvation and loneliness." (p.45)

Conclusion :

In this paper I have endeavoured to discuss some relevant issues of the Naga society on the basis of my close reading of Easterine Iralu's *A Terrible Matriarchy*. Contrary to the suggestion of the title, the story echoes the practices of patriarchy in which women are conditioned to accept the modest and passive roles. Ironically, Patriarchy as a culture has obtained such universal success that a society with women as its heads seems unnatural. Thus the title which is attributed to Vibaso, the grandmother is probably an attempt to grab the attention of the readers or it might, as mentioned above, reflect Lieno's fear of her grandmother's encroaching symbiosis in her. Or it might just be an account of a cantankerous old woman who tries to make a good woman out of her young granddaughter and in the process one also gets subtle hints of the various aspects of the Naga society. ■

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Negotiating History through Oral Narratives: A Study of The Legends Of Pensam

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*The history of our race
Begins with the place of stories.
We do not know if the language we speak
Belongs to a written past.
Nothing is changed.*

(From An Obscure Place)

In the quoted lines from her poem, Mamang Dai eloquently voices the irreplaceable position of stories and memories that form an integral part of the oral traditional discourse. It is the life and soul of orality and history. Story telling is a sacred process, because it is the foundation on which the socio, cultural and historical context of a tribe is framed. It acts as a cohesive force that binds a community, acting as a cultural ground for the entire belief system of the tribe. Oral narratives has a definitive function of preserving the cultural history of a group that has to rely on memory and word of mouth due to absence of a written script. Thus in this context this paper seeks to analyze Mamang Dai's *The Legends Of Pensam* (2006) as an alternative historical narrative of the Adis based on the postmodernist approach to the possibility of multiple representations of history. The Adis are a tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, they 'practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world'. It is of concern that literary history of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is an area that needs immediate attention by

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scholars and writers of the state. The lack of a script, has resulted in an absence of any form of written documentation by the tribe themselves. The current state of knowledge or information is recorded as encyclopedic or government records, in most cases from an outsider's perspective. One can also question the nature of this knowledge, the limitations and biases if there are any. An absence of documented history necessarily does not entail an absence of historical legacies, on the contrary the need is to restore the lost legacies and articulate, authenticate, document and preserve history till posterity in the form of written document. Dai's concern is to foreground the history of the marginalized tribal community whose story is absent in the narratives of the State and Nation. Drawing on the stories, legends and myths from the chroniclers of Adi oral history, Dai stresses on the factual representation of the tribe in the form of historical fiction by appropriating the traditional oral narrative discourse enabling interpretations that are subjective as well as objective. Since ages indigenous history and knowledge has been passed through orality and these stories survived as individuals like priests, shamans, lore narrators became the repositories of these ennobling narratives. They had to rely on memory driven by the thrust of the solemn and grand role entrusted upon them by the community. *The Legends Of Pensam* is also an experiment in narrative form, a discourse interspersed with multiple perspectives of oral/rhapsody/lamentation/repetition in impeccable English. The authorial voice is accompanied by the testimonial voices of the characters, where perspectives become further entrenched, where experience become the primary source of stories. They embark on a narration that engenders possibilities of self-examination as well as self-assertion. Indeed the book defies categorisation into any of the literary genres of poetry and fiction, appearing as a hybrid between the two, a historical fiction in prose-poetry, a heteroglossia, a pensam-a space of in between.

In reclaiming the history of the Adis, and rekindling the historical consciousness of her tribe to their past Dai makes an immense contribution indeed one can say that Dai treads where no ancestral historians of the community has done so. The text keenly discourses

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on how the Adis negotiate their daily existence as modernity and globalization with all its sophisticated nuances seep into the animistic habitation. The human being is a story telling being, and 'There is a new attention across disciplines to narrative knowledge-the impulse to story life events into order and meaning' (Sandelowski, 1991). 'Doing requires some form of social interaction and thus story is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people'(qtd by Mudgal, 1994:7). Salman Rushdie states that 'Man was the storytelling animal, the only creature on earth that told stories to understand what kind of creature it was. The story was his birthright and no one could take it away' (Rushdie, 2012:19). Like every ancient communities stories form an integral part of the tribal life of the Adis too. Dai uses stories within stories as the structural framework helping the readers to negotiate through the maze of lore's to discover their significance. As an interpreter she illuminates these stories with her own subjective understanding of it, and as a writer her understanding is also conditioned by her own contexts and position as a member of the community. The text provides for multiple voices establishing their credentials as an authentic and reliable source of tribal history . The book problematizes the traditional claims to objectivity of historical interpretation. Postmodernist understanding of history demands for the subjectivity in the interpretation of historical events, that history is a construct that depends on the individual understanding of it. 'Literature is not simply a product of history ,it also actively makes history'(Bertens: 177). Similarly Hayden White writes, 'It was possible to believe that whereas writers of fiction invented everything in their narratives -characters, events, plots, motifs, themes ,atmosphere and so on-historian invented nothing but certain rhetorical flourishes'(White, 1987:X). White here suggests the possibilities open to the writer to take recourse to imagination and create a world in order to critique the socio-economic-political development of a particular period. The New Historicists influenced by poststructuralist view of relativism and multiple histories, challenge the traditional concept of history as objective, linear and closed progression of

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events. White further writes in his *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*(1982) that, 'the facts do not speak for themselves , but the historian speaks for them... novelists might be dealing with only imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing events ,whether imaginary or real , into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of a representation is a poetic process'(White,1982:125). In another of his exemplary essay '*The question of Narrative in contemporary Historical Theory*' he writes that the story in a narrative form is nothing but 'a 'mimesis' of the story lived in some region of historical reality and insofar as it is an accurate imitation it is to be considered a truthful account thereof'(White,1995:106). Infact Dai herself writes 'The Truth , after all, exists only in portions, and the rest is a matter of words changed by each person's oerception'(Dai:32). Her treatment of the stories is both synchronic and diachronic, in that she presents events, persons and cultures that co-exist at certain points in time , and at the same time, she trails the changes in the Adi society from the time of the ancestors till the present time. Adding an insight to the lives of the community and for the better sense of the reader , a central figure in the narrative Hoxo asserts that the stories the writer writes ,though strange and staggering at times 'We only begin to know about them when they happen to us'(Dai:24). Hoxo, the 'son of the forest' is the central persona around which the other stories and legends are recounted. He binds the narrative because the incidents that are significant in the construction of the past are connected to him. 'He seemed to live in a timeless zone and from a great distance,... he followed his interest in the lives of men, animals and plants , in the origin of the universe' (Dai:24) .His presence spans pivotal events like the World War II, the Abor Expedition, the great earthquake of 1962. When hordes of trees were felled to pave for the 'famous and mysterious Stillwell road dubbed as 'a-man-a-mile road' Hoxo voiced the apprehensions of an entire tribal society 'We need courage and faith in the face of change. That is all we can do' (Dai:43). In a sense, events of the past are intertwined with Hoxo's life. One can even say that his character embodies the predicaments and

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dilemmas faced by the tribe, their way of life, that is slowly and gradually engulfed by the tide of globalization. He is the metaphor for the individual's struggle against inevitable changes, at the same time standing for collective survival.

The Legends of Pensam puts into perspective a past that at times defies objectivity. The comingling of fact and fiction conjure up a world of past that at times defy analysis. The Adi oral stories in its fluidity makes account for a world where spirits coexist with men, magic and spells are a part of everyday life and where language casually makes way for the conventions of exaggeration and credulous effect. For example, the incident of the Biribik, the water serpent, 'No, one for generations now, remembered the name of the person who had seen it, but the event was fixed in the collective memory'(Dai:9). The incident reoccurs in the form of a tragedy to Hoxo's father and thus history repeats itself in a way. The tragedy that the sighting of the Biribik prophesized also indicated a very significant development in the life of the community; the Firearms. 'Ever since the arrival of the firearms into these hills hunting became a passion' (Dai:10). In this sad fate of a hunter and the hunted, Dai describes the practices, rituals and taboos imposed by the tribe during such a calamity. There are different levels of enunciation of a tale like this. The fact that the tale is told by Hoxo's father, a respectable member of the community underlines the veracity of the event. The story defies rational explanations but it becomes an important part of the communities life and belief system. At another level the tale also warns against the careless use of firearms and its deadly consequences for the tribal world where hunting is a part of survival. Adding an insight to the lives of the community and vouching for the authenticity of verbatim knowledge, a central figure in the narrative Hoxo asserts that the stories though strange and staggering at times 'We only begin to know about them when they happen to us'(Dai:24). The underlying intention of the writer is also to illuminate to the mainstream, the tribal sensibilities that are sometimes considered primitive or uncivilized, 'They think we are a village of horror, but it is not true!'(Dai:55). Her writing acts as a benchmark for future

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progress in studying and understanding native history .In fact if one can see beneath the surface, the life in the hills are no different in their significance than life in the cities or urban hubs. Dai writes '... I felt that all of the world that I would read about could be reproduced in this dusty village with its one road'(Dai:17).

Postmodernist understanding of history also provides ample scope for the feminist voice to challenge not only the mainstream history but also the dominant patriarchal discourse even within the tribal oratory. The women in Dai's narrative vouch for their own tales enabling their lives to be a part of the legacy within this discursive structure. The tribal world order is patriarchal and women are subjected to tacit expectations of them. Some of the chroniclers are women like Hoxo's mother who narrate history living in the peripherals of hills and forests where no modern road leads to the outside world . In the story of Pinyar and Nenem, Dai gives voice to the women of the tribe , describing their predicaments and the difficult choices that they have to daily contend with .Women are an enduring concern finding conspicuous voice and presence in Dai's narrative. She presents a realistic delineation of how women are treated in history and how history is treated by women in a tribal community. Pinyar's first husband Orka is rejected by her family, especially since 'the clan of Orka are no good' (Dai:26).Orka himself evaded any questions of marriage although he accepts the paternity of Pinyar's child. Pinyar's predicament is heightened by the callous Orka on one hand and the repressive dictates of the customary law on the other. Inundated by the force of the two , she is voiceless and left alone to ponder her uncertain future .When she gives birth to a son ,Orka takes him and leaves never to return as the child was a son and the father had the traditional right on him. 'Pinyar bowed her head in shame. But by all the laws of her clan she alone was to blame for her misfortune and there was nothing any one could do about it '(Dai:27).The story of Nenem 'a woman who was eternally young'(Dai:90),is recounted with the outbreak of the World War II in the background. Dai narrates how even in that remote region of Gurdum, the reverberations of the war was felt. The first white men

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who had made an entry into the land around 1800s were the priests. The locals called them '*migluns*'. 'The *migluns* were terrifying in their energy and determination' (Dai: 39). The great Stillwell road, the workmanship of the *migluns* tore through the mountains and hills razing them barren. 'The village had moved to its own quite rhythm for centuries with old certainties and beliefs, but the road was changing all that' (Dai:148). The Abor expedition of 1912 and the Komsing incident were followed by the ruthless assault of the white men on the villagers. 'When the gunfire set the villages ablaze, the elders had conceded defeat by waving tattered old newspapers' (Dai:90). Unconcerned by these developments, Nenem a local village girl falls in love with a young British officer David Ferguson. 'It was an enigma how two strangers could be so unaccountably drawn to one another in a little town in the hills from where even the rest of the country was remote and unknown' (Dai: 99) . Sadly such histories are absent from the mainstream discourse especially in the national narratives. Dai, interrogates and investigates these incidents at the local, peripheral, and ordinary level .

The enunciation of the oral world also depends on the association of the auditory as well as visual levels that enhances the comprehensibility of this act of telling and retelling stories. Bakhtin states in *Discourse In The Novel* 'The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance'(Bakhtin:272). In the Chapter *songs of the rhapsodists* this dialogized utterance is exemplary. The narration is in the garb of the song of the shaman, who is accompanied by dancers performing the *Ponung*, the most important dance ceremony of the Adis. Priests or miris are central to Dai's narrative. They are the repositories of orature ,respected elders ,held in high esteem and trusted by the community. '...the shaman is a shadow man leaping up larger than life. He has sung of the beginning of the world , of the sword of the five metals that ignited the bonfire of the villages. He has sung the story of his brother, the one who killed a man and

became a martyr ;the story of the hawk woman who defied the community to live in a house by the river. These are the stories, rhapsodies of time and destiny that he must guard'(Dai:55) .The narration is intense ,dealing with the war and ravages brought by the white men to the village and the bloodshed and tragedy that follows. The Komsing incident is an important subtext contesting national narratives questioning the conspicuous silence on colonial invasion in the region. The chants of the miri, the Priest moves rapidly into the night, narrating events of bygone years, the tragedy is reinforced by the rhythmic repetitions of the accompanying dancers. As the tempo reaches its crescendo describing the killing and defeat of the village men, the dancer's soft lamentations instils the air with sadness and despair at the loss of life.

'Softly, softly, they must follow this terrible journey' (Dai:51) repeat the dancers.

'A white man had been killed. A sahib who had come to the village bearing gifts. And now the soldiers were trampling the sad, disquieted hills and hunting the killer with all the might of the universe.... They had laughed in the face of the poor villager and said that he was a wild beast eaten up with disease who would never receive the attention or sympathy of the white officer.... Why should anybody look at a man with disgust when he was a man of the land and the other was a visitor trying to conquer the villages with lies and bags of gifts?'(Dai: 51)

This chapter appropriates the intrinsic part of story- telling using chants and repetitions conjuring up in the English language a communal world with its tradition and history. Not only the author herself but every man and woman in the eponymous narration has a constructive role to play in this discursive structure of the text. 'These days many visitors are finding their way here and you can hear voices asking the way ,the curious migluns shielding their eyes and asking for help to enter the maze of stories that the miri remembers and restores to life'(Dai:56).The priest and the dancers engage in a ritualistic duet where their rhythmic actions builds to charge the narration with the enchanting effect of a ritualistic ceremony.

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In an interview Dai asserts that her writing 'has always been on Arunachal , just to bring out a few words of our language into fiction writing or just showing how we live and even lost our history'. The biographical approach adds to the intensity of Dai's narration. In fact Dai is at once rooted and grounded in her culture. Lives of ordinary men and women and their extraordinary stories is the locus of her interrogations. In doing so the boundary between story and history has been bridged for the sake of history as well as for a new kind of aesthetic discourse. Mamang addresses such vexed question of the state and the nation by projecting her aesthetic concerns on her community the men and women and their lives. Dai cautiously avoids the mere reflection of events as they took place. She is aware of her role as a writer as well as the fact that without history the Adis are without identity. She also reiterates that the respect and recognition of one's indigenous ways of living and learning is very significant in cementing the bonds that an individual has with the community. At the same time she also articulates the need to recognize the marginalized and peripheral cultures of the tribal community. By problematizing the position of the historian-narrator, Dai rejects the normative standards of judging and accepting history instead representing a hybrid approach and in doing so she calls for the appropriation of traditional oral discourse into the global language of English. ■

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Locale' Redefined : A study of A Bowstring Winter and Sons of Brahma

Dr. Abhigyan Prasad

"The novel as a form has been vigorously international from the start; we know that Spanish, English, French, and Russian novelists have read each other's work avidly since the eighteenth century. And yet, the paradox of the novel as a form is that it is founded upon a myth of parochiality, in the exact sense of a parish - a place named and charted, a definite location. A novel, in other words, must always be set somewhere : it must have its setting, and within the evolution of the narrative this setting must, classically, play a part almost as important as those of the characters themselves. Location is thus intrinsic to a novel...." (Ghosh, 294)

The epigraph above is from an interesting and path-breaking essay by the Indian English novelist, Amitav Ghosh. He makes an important point that has been generally held to be true of the novel genre. In a way, when one thinks of space, one thinks of the novel. The evocation of the sights, sounds, smells etc. of a place real or imaginary, has been the hallmark of novel writing. Though some of the fundamental features of this genre have undergone transformation in the last fifty years or so, this feature continues to hold forte. And I deliberately quote Ghosh here to emphasize this. Many contemporary novels, and a good number of them from India, illustrate it; as do A Bowstring Winter and Sons of Brahma, two novels from the periphery of the Indian nation.

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Comprised of the seven sister states and the recently added Sikkim, the Northeast has always been typecast as the periphery as opposed to the mainstream/ mainland. The establishment of a dedicated Ministry of DONER has put the official approval of the Indian state on the special character of the region. This special character of the region or its uniqueness manifests itself through various discourses and counter discourses - social, cultural, racial, political, geographical etc. While the popular imagination of the rest of India (the Mainstream) imagines the Northeast through various lenses, one of the most abiding has been the terrain, the topography or the locale. The rugged terrain marked by the lush green hills and the last flowing rivers have been crucial signifiers of the region. The question of 'locale' vis-a-vis writings in English from the Northeast gathers an imperative urgency as the terrain and the topography are crucial markers and determinants of the region. At the same time, they are powerful quotidian realities for the residents of the region that they can ignore at their own peril. The setting, the locale then, is central and essential (If I may be permitted to use these two terms) to the novel genre and Northeast India ? Is it (the Northeastern novel in English) overpowered by the setting ? Does the 'locale' determine the identity of the characters ? Are the characters and their actions moored fixedly to the 'locale' ? the present paper seeks to find answers to these questions and more by way of offering analyses of two novels of Dhruba Hazarika - *A Bowstring Winter* and *Sons of Brahma*.

Published in 2006, *A Bowstring Winter* is set in the mid nineteen seventies in Shillong. A thriller to the core that tells the story of gangs, murder, love, treachery and archery, this novel has a special appeal for those nostalgic about the shilling of yore. It begins when John Dkhar, a young lecturer in Political Science at St. Edmund's College, Shillong saves, by chance, the life of James Kharlukhi, a gangster and the owner of the restaurant named Kaizang, where most of the novel is set. This earns Dkhar the friendship of James and he is gradually sucked into their world that include, among others, Dor Kharkongor, the wise 'teerman' or archer and Jennifer d'Santos, James's girlfriend, As the action of friendship with James, filial attachment with

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Kharkongor and love with Jennifer. While the first two follow the code of friendship exemplified in a tight bowstring, the third break that code providing, thereby, much of the interest of the novel. As the action tautly moves towards the discovery of Dkhar's treachery, James is killed by the rival gang of Charley while watching the movie sholay. More fights follow which finally end in Dkhar and Kharkongor avenging James' death by killing Mukhim, a member of Charley's gang. The novel closes giving the impression of relative peace.

One of the strength of the novel is an intricate plot structure that sustains the interest of the reader till the end of the narrative. The novelist displays good degree of subtlety and maturity in placing crucial information and secrets to be let out to the reader. Another is the evocation of Shillong of the mid nineteen seventies. Since the representation of space in a novel is not necessarily predicated on verisimilitude, one need not lose sleep trying to establish the authenticity of the portrayal. The chilly wintry mornings; the knolls and the gentle slopes; the undulating roads with thin traffic; the bows, skums and the iron tipped arrows; the small restaurants etc are all deftly drawn so as to contribute to a rich evocation of Shillong. It is a powerful presence - dangerous, friendly, violent romantic and brooding. At the beginning of the novel, James and his gang order Mukhim, a traitor, to leave shilling. Instead, he joins the rival gang of charley, plots the murder of James, and is killed at the end by Kharkongor. One of the last actions of the novel is Dkhar administering rum to the dead man's lips :

Kneeling, John Dkhar uncorked the bottle and from the cap poured drops of rum into the dead man's lips. The liquid dribbled out, mingling with the blood. As he stood up, he thought, we had only asked you to leave Shillong. But now you have gone far beyond this place. (342)

This is not a significant incident in itself, but I take this to represent the pull that the setting, the place, the locale exercises over the characters.

The best example of this is offered by the protagonist, John Dkhar. He is an outsider in the narrative primarily because he spent his childhood at Delhi and has practically to relations in Shillong. The outsider tag applies to him more so because his professional of teaching

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sharply contrasts with the world of which he becomes a part. It is never persuasively explained or even hinted at in the narrative as to why Dkhar, a lecturer in a prestigious college, is attracted to the world of the gangsters. Moreover, the professional side of Dkhar is summarily written off the narrative as the action never moves to his place of work. This is doubly surprising and intriguing : the novelist is an alumnus of the college of which his protagonist is a lecturer; and the action is always routed through the protagonist. In fact, the narrative in the present never leaves the protagonist. Is it another instance of the setting, the place, the locale exerting tremendous pull on the characters ?

Eight years later, Hazarika publishes his second novel, *Sons of Brahma*, set in a different time and space. Though the story has a time span of hardly ten days in July 2002, it proffers a kaleidoscopic view of contemporary Assam and its myriad problems. The protagonist, Jongom Hanse, again is an academic, a Ph. D. student in Physics at Gauhati University. Suddenly one day, the placidity of Jongom's cocooned existence is broken as he witness the staged encounter by police of a hardcore terrorist, Anjan Phukan. Caught between the police on the one hand and the terrorist on the other, he flees the university hostel at night along with Pranab, his junior and friend. First they take shelter at Kamakhya temple; when they come to know they have been whiffed out, they take a boat and hit the mighty Brahmaputra, the 'Lohit' or 'Luit' as it is called in Assamese. The narrative follows their travails from one place to another place and from one story to another story. They spend a couple of nights on the river before getting down at Orange National Park. Either the Police or the terrorists are always a couple of places behind them. Meanwhile, the local newspapers and the news channels splash the news of their fight everywhere, quite unknown to them. Thus giving slip to the policemen as well as the terrorists, they reach a tea garden in Golaghat district whose manager is a relative of Pranab's fiancée's friend. On his advice, they surrender before the police, specifically Nilim Kumar, IPS an honest officer who had actually shot Anjan Phukan in front of Jongom's eyes. In the last scene of the novel, that takes place in the river island of Majuli, Jongom comes face to face with the rebels but is able to

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rescue his abducted father with assistances from Nilim Kumar.

Eight years have elapsed but the retains the thrill, intrigue and numerous stories embedded in the past. Sons of Brahma is another gripping narrative that has all the elements of a thriller : lavish parties with wine and bances; a sudden search and arrest; fake encounter; threat calls; good cop bad cop; decapitation; surrender etc. Moreover, in a grand sweep, there is the recounting of Assam's contemporary history. From the point of view of this paper, however, I am interested in two locations or settings where Jongom and Pranab hid themselves from the police as well as terrorists - the Kamakhya Temple and the river Brahmaputra.

Both these locations are iconic locations of not only Assam, but also the Northeast. While one is geographical, the other is religious and cultural. At the temple, they are witness to a Buffalo sacrifice that has become synonymous with it, one of the greatest shakti peeths of the entire country. The blood of the sacrificed buffalo on the floor is two-directional - even as it looks back on to the past, it prophetically anticipates the future.

Above the chants from the people, I heard the buffalo's lowing, a long rumble, desperate and dry, as if seeking water for its parched, terrified throat minutes before its head rolled on to the blood-soaked floor. Even as I stepped deeper into the recess, I thought, Even you cried, Anjan Phukan, even you cried. When death comes, we all cry. (48)

Hazarika's novel dives into the recent bloody past of Assam often as different characters narrate blood-curdling stories of brutality perpetrated mainly by the terrorists. In the time frame of the narration, there is only one witnessed murder (Anjan Phukan); two reported abductions (Suren Mama and Brahma Hanse); and one reported murder (Hakim). Compared to a Bowstring Winter Hazarika's second novel seems ostensibly to have fewer incidents of direct murder and violence. Yet, the surfeit of stories from the turbulent times, the weight of the past ensures that the pervading ambience of Sons of Brahma is pessimistic and bleak. And this, has as much to do with the stories

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as with the setting, The Brahmaputra (literally son of Brahma) is also called the Lohit and carry connotations of the colour red, the exact colour of the blood, here symbolized in the blood of the dead buffalo. It is also interesting to know that names of the fathers of Pranab (Lohit) and Jongom (Brahma) refer to the mighty river, which flows slowly carrying the weight of contemporary Assam's violent history.

The paper is intended as a sort of a preliminary enquiry so as to ascertain the importance of settings or locale within the narrative of the Northeastern novel in English. The analyses had begun with the thesis that for the novel genre as well as for the region called Northeast India, the setting, the place or the locale is of foundational importance. There indeed exists a very organic bond between the characters and their setting in the novels taken for study. This can be also said to be true of other works such as Mitra Phukan's novel the Collector's Wife and the works of Arup Kumar Dutta. At times, as is evident from the analyses above, the locale exerts tremendous pressure on the characters to behave in particular ways. At other times, it is an unseen presence, gentle and soft that allows the normal flow of life. Indeed, the setting or the locale in the novels discussed above seem to work at multiple levels thereby bestowing a richness upon the work. ■

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Social Realism in Dhruba Hazarika's "Sons of Brahma"

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The term "Social Realism" is derived from Russian - inspired beliefs about the function of literature in a revolutionary socialist society. The international production of social realist fiction is characterized by a belief in the power of the word and in the writer's ability to portray in a satisfying documentary fashion and the structure of social reality. Social Realism is inspired in various ways by the Russian Revolution, Soviet Communism, International Marxism and need to respond critically and in a denunciatory fashion to the various mechanisms of repression and the frustration of personal and collective aspirations. There is the difference between social realism and socialist realism. Social Realism means the depiction in literature of social reality as it is; there should be a point one to one correspondence between the society depicted in literature and the real actual society. Socialist Realism means the depiction of the social reality not as it is but as it should be; idealized. Socialist Realism demanded that all art must depict some aspect of man's struggle toward socialist progress for a better life. It stressed for the creative artist to serve the proletariat by being realistic, optimistic and heroic. True realism depicts man and society as complete entities instead of showing merely one or the other of their aspects. It is not just an echo but the real sound of an individual or society or jointly voice of their being. Realism is nothing but an acute observation of life as it is. Social Realism is concerned with dynamic interpretations of life with the purpose of changing the existing reality. As literature is mirror

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of life which can be justified through realism only. Only realism reflects the life of an individual or mass with humanistic approach and zest for their betterment. Over the years literature has reflected the prevailing social issues in many eminent works of literature under the shadow of realism.

Literature from the North-East India is popular mostly in the representation of the various political problems and violence that are typical to the north-east situation. Dhruba Hazarika is one of the contemporary writers to bring into light the remarkable issues and features of the region. Literature from the North-East India abounds in tales of the troubled political climate, violence, backwardness, underdevelopment and poverty. The unique geographical positioning of the seven states and their equally different political, economic and social situations from the rest of the country, have resulted in the rise of a body of writing that is considered to be different from mainstream Indian English Literature. However, many contemporary writers of the North-Eastern States like, Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai and Harekrishna Deka, have expressed their discomfort with the terms 'North-East Literature' and 'North-East writers', as they relate those with the colonial legacy. Senior Editor of Zubaan, Preeti Gill rightly states "To say that the North-Eastern states are different from the rest of India in almost every way is to state the obvious, but it is important to recognize that these 'differences' have created rifts, giving rise to insurgencies, demands for secession from the Indian state and years of internal conflict and discontent.

To the people of the North-East their world is central to themselves; to 'mainland India' it is a borderland" (Tehelka, 2009). The strong political awareness, issues related to identity and ethnicity, violence in different forms and above all the shadow of the gun are some of the common realities of North-East India which hardly any writer of that region can ignore in their works. It has been pointed out correctly; "It is tragic that the long running unrest, violence and terrorism in the North-East has remained a mere digression in the mainstream of the Indian nation-state..." (pratilipi, 2010).

Jongom Hanse, the hero of the novel is a Ph. D. Scholar in

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Physics. He is a brilliant student who writes articles for the University's magazine. Everything is running smooth in his life until he met Anjan Phukan, a terrorist, who wanted him to write for the separatist cause. When he sternly refused to contribute, Anjan talks about the Democracy and the Constitution of India. Anjan is against the Constitution for allowing other people, outsiders, to take away Assam's wealth and their pride. "Look, look at our resources, our oil, our forest, our rivers.. all drained away from us" (SOB, ch-3, p-20). He tried to brainwash Jongom and said "If men like you work for our cause we can change Assam's destiny" (ch-3, p-20-21). In this context Hazarika shows how the terrorist tried to convince the educated and talented youths of the state to work for their own cause. Without any warning they are arrested on their second meeting and Anjan is shot dead while trying to escape for his life. Caught in the snare between the police and the rebels, who hold him responsible for their leader's death, Jongom is forced to flee the safe confines of the University Campus. Accompanied by his loyal friend, Pranab, he races through the lush Brahmaputra Valley, facing a macabre world of ruthless politics even as they discover along the way a terrible secret that binds them together in ways they never thought possible.

Hazarika also shows the cruelties and terror inflicted on the youths when they tried to help the police in giving them information. Jongom came to know from Suren mama's daughter how her brother has been tortured by the terrorists. "They tied him to a tree and beat him for days. They cut his thighs with knives and poured salt into the open portions. When he fainted, they pissed on his face. On the fourth day when he asked for water they made him drink his own urine mixed with a dog's. when they drop him at the railway station seven days later we found him his right leg broken and his testicles burnt with cigarette butts. He was the brightest student in his college, Dada, but now he cannot speak properly... They damaged him mind, Dada. He's not the same any more" (ch-7, p-64). In this way they tortured the innocent and dehumanized them.

The author also depicts the animal sacrifices made at the

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Kamakhya Temple, the blood of the sacrificial buffalo becoming a metaphor for the killings that the gun-toting terrorists indulge in. "Blood from the sacrifices made. Goats, buffaloes... They cut off the head and offer it to Ma down there in the cavern" (ch-8, p-71). The Luit, Brahmaputra is also a symbol and metaphor of the bloodshed by the terrorists. Once this river known for its sanctity and purity is now filled with blood. It is the Red River, its redness symbolizing the bloodied land through which it flows.

The perennial problems with the illegal immigrants are also touched upon by the author. The influx of the Bangladeshis in Assam was the burning issues of the day. From the words of Pranab it is known that they are unwelcomed and looked with suspicion - "I don't think you can trust any. They come in millions. Take over our land. And we can't do a damn thing about it... Damn Politicians. Damn the underground" (ch-10, p-79). There are instances in the novel where we came to know the main reason behind the influx. "...the burgeoning Assamese middle class, forever seeking white-collar jobs, indirectly encouraged this flow." (ch-10, p-79). We also came to know about the National Revolutionary Army which had sought and received shelter and arms training from Bangladesh. Jongom and Pranab talks about the insurgents which are strange and weird. They talk of freedom for our state from the Indian yolk and yet they keep killing their own brethren... How many rapes? ...All young boys, who could have done so much for our land, otherwise." (ch-10, p-80).

There are also instances in the novel where we came to know about the supply of guns in disguise with boxes carrying statues of Lord Ganesha. It was during the trip to Nagaon that they came to know about all these and how Hakim who was doing the job of transporting the boxes, was tortured and disabled by the rebels. When three crates of AK-47s were lost, they "held onto to my legs... only when they lifted my lungi I knew what they wanted to do. The boy with the dao grabbed Hakim's Penis. With a single, swift stroke he severed it." (ch-12, p-98-99).

There is the rhino poaching in Orang, the issue of "secret killings". While Jongom and Pranab were trekking along the swampy

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area with Haren, they smell of something associated with decay. When Tilak focused his torch under a banyan tree there was a headless figure of a rhino." It seemed to me like a wooden table, four legs and a surface. (ch-16, p-138). From Haren they came to know that these poachers were rebels who were trained by Anjan Phukan. "The flesh for meat and instant energy. The horn for money to buy more arms." (ch-16, p-138). It is more terrified to know that the rebels have a complex network. Some of the villagers in the forest support them. "Some of our forest personnel help them out. Only a few of us guards are loyal with such low salaries, most of us are easily bought out." (ch-16, p-139). When the two friend moved away to the tea bungalow they came to know the violent incident meted out to the housekeeper Jonathan Horo. When Jonathan refused to join the rebels, they chopped off his arms.

The author also gives a vivid description of the tea life in Assam, the pomp and luxury. There is a darker side of the tea gardens. The tea managers were demanded crores of rupees. In the novel Haresh Bordoloi refused to give money to the rebels. He knew he would not be saved and so he decided to take his family to a rented house in Kolkata. On the way they were attacked by the rebels who led to the ultimate death of his wife and two daughters. Haresh described it as - "From the AK-47s held by the two pillion riders bullets rained in, the staccato like Diwali crackers." (ch-22, p-193).

Even the family members of the victims were also suffered in the hands of the rebels. They also abducted Jongom's father (ch-21, p-181), as Jongom was delaying to submit himself to the rebels. The rebels also wanted Nilim Kumar, who have killed their leader, Anjan Phukan. After along interrogation Nilim Kumar determined to help Jongom. Jongom was now under the custody of Nilim Kumar. When he was to surrender himself to the police, Haresh Bordoloi said - "Put your faith in Nilim. He's all you've got now. From him, Jongom came to know that Anjan "was psycho, a born killer, beyond redemption, different from the other rebels." (ch-27, p-235). He also narrate one the violent incidence of Anjan during his childhood - "He'd thrust a split bamboo pole into a cow's rectum. He'd keep on driving it deeper

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and deeper until the pointed edge came out of throat. He'd laugh as the cow bled to death." (ch-27, p-235). According to the plan made by Nilim Kumar, it was successful in rescuing Jongom and his father. After coming out of the forest, Jongom took the envelope that Nilim Kumar had handed to him. Extracting the letter, he read the lines: "Do not touch the Hanses. If you do, Lohit Kalita dies in hands." (ch-29, p-259). Anjan is the illegitimate son of Lohit Kalita.

This is a story that horrifies in the way cruelties are described, not to "exoticise", but to show how brutality and acts of terror dehumanize the perpetrators, so that they spiral down into becoming demons themselves. The story twists and turn, keeping its most surprising sting for the last. There are foreshadowing's of events to come, just as there are, also flashbacks to past events. The characters are all very true to life. Hazarika is firm in his abhorrence for killings and maiming, which he voices through the mouth of several characters during the course of the story. There is the author's own "voice" of humanism which provide the balance, the hope, the optimism that in spite of the dark clouds, there are people to whom values matter, to whom kindness and compassion matter. It is through these people and ideas that the novel ultimately offers a redemptive faith in a better future for our land. ■

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The Theme of Insurgency in the Short Stories of Temsula Ao

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Writers from North East India writing in English have not always been well represented in mainstream Indian English literature. Literature from this region abounds in tales of the troubled political climate, violence, backwardness, underdevelopment and poverty. The unique geographical location of the seven states and their equally different social, political and economic situations from the rest of the country have resulted in the rise of a body of writing that is considered to be different from mainstream /Indian English writing. The construction of terms like North -east literature and North east writers have been a cause of concern and discomfort for some of the well known contemporary writers of the North-Eastern states like Temsula Ao, Mamong Dai and Harekrishna Deka. Senior editor of Zubaan, Preeti Gill rightly says- "to say that the North-Eastern states are different from the rest of India is obvious, but it is important to recognize that these "differences" have created rifts, giving rise to insurgencies, demands for secession from the Indian state and years of internal conflict and discontent. To the people of the North-East their world is central to themselves; to mainland India it is a borderland¹.

Literature from North-East India is popular mostly in the representation of the various political problems and violence that are typical to the North-East situation. In the last two decades, a section of the North-East writers have got their work published from

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mainstream publishers. Authors like Temsula Ao from Nagaland and Mamong Dai from Arunachal Pradesh have been published more than once by publishers like Penguin and Zubaan. Young writers from Assam like Aruni Kashyap, Jahnvi Baruah and Siddhartha Sarma have also been a part of reputed publisher's booklist. The theme of insurgency or violence sweeps over their writings covertly or sometimes overtly as well.

Temsula Ao and her Creative World:

Temsula Ao, a well known short story writer, poet and ethnographer hailing from Nagaland, has five collections of poetry: *Songs that Tell* (1988) *Songs that Try to Say* (1992) *Songs of Many Moods* (1995) *Songs from Here and There* (2003) *Songs from Other Life* (2007). She has also authored the book *Ao-Naga Oral Traditions* (2000). *These Hills Called Home : Stories from a War Zone* is her first attempt at story writing which was published in the year 2006. Another collection of Short stories which was published in the year 2009 entitled *Laburnum for my Head* fetched her prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in 2013. A recipient of the Padmashree award, Temsula Ao was born in October 1945 at Jorhat, Assam. She did her Ph.D. from North-Eastern Hills University and was a Full-bright fellow to the University of Minnesota, United States in 1985-86. Temsula Ao retired from the North Eastern Hill University where she served as professor of English and also as the Dean of Humanities and Education. In her volume of short stories *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*; she neither condemns nor justifies the violence in Nagaland. The focus of this paper is on the theme of insurgency in some of the short stories of Temsula Ao and how she has used this theme to foreground the sufferings of the innocent natives in her stories.

Set in the initial turbulent decades of the Naga insurgency the book *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* is inspired by the political turmoil that has ravaged the land. The book is a collection of ten short stories that record the life of the Naga people and tells the tale of everyday life of Naga men, women and children

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who struggle to survive in their ever changing homeland- the land that gradually becomes unfamiliar. In the light of these issues the paper is an attempt to locate the fear-ridden lives of people in terms of violence and displacement.

The first story in this collection *The Jungle Major* is the story of survival of a man named Punaba whose physical features were rather incomparable to his beautiful wife Khatila. Punaba who have joined the Naga underground militants was saved by the wit and presence of mind of his wife Khatila from the clutches of Indian soldiers. In the second story *Soaba*, Soaba meaning 'idiot' in Ao language is a mentally retarded young boy from a village who loses his life in the hands of Imlichuba who serves as a lackey for the Indian Army. In the third story *The Last Song*, the legend of a young exceptionally talented singer Apenyo, who was brutally raped among the festivities of the village, becomes a tale of remembrance for the story tellers. In *The Curfew man* the protagonist Satemba who is a state informer roams about the town during the army-imposed curfew hours to spy on his fellow Nagas who have joined the insurgent group. *The Night* deals with issues that revolve around families amidst the days of war and the regulated life. It is the story of a young girl betrayed by a man who has left her with a bastard child. In *The Pot Maker*, Arenla, a skilled potter refuses to pass on the art to her daughter as it suggests security of not only the family but of the village too. *Shadows* tells the story of the young Naga boys driven with the romantic idealism of fighting for the cause of the state wake up only to the harsh reality of the situation of the tragic power struggle. *An Old Man Remembers* is the story of an old man, Imtisashi who was a member of the underground force and whose past was a secret kept between himself and his close friend. The story unravels the unwanted thoughts within him as he begins to explain his violent past to his grandson. *The Journey* is the story of Tinula who goes through hurdles to receive formal education. The painful journey she undertakes is imprinted on her body as scars as she travels with her brother. *A New Chapter* is the story of a contractor whose position and influence helps him rise in the social ladder as he gradually joins the world of politics. However

his honesty which helped him gain status soon gets replaced by corruption and compromise. All the ten short stories of the book tell us of a region that has been inflicted in wound for decades. Our study deals with four select short stories from the collection viz. *Soaba*, *The Curfew Man*, *The Last Song* and *Shadows*.

The Thematic of Insurgency in North-East India:

The thematic of insurgency in North-East India is the recovery of a lost terrain, and the reconstruction of a legitimate and autonomous identity. This thematic of insurgency is, in fact, a counter thematic to the dominant national imagery of the celebration of 'nationhood'. Various insurgency movements of the North-East such as Naga, Mizo and Assamese national struggles have identified the 'Indian State' as their common enemy and undercut the claim of Indian national identity. In contrast, they assert the illegitimacy of the claim of nationhood of India and present a differentiated interior to point out the impossibility of 'fusion' or melting-pot imagery².

The case of Naga insurgency in the context of North-East India is the earliest expression of Ethno-national moorings. The early efforts of colonization which took place by subsuming them under the Indian state had continued by way of different kinds of maneuvers till today, and have correspondingly generated a sense of alienation and dismay.

It is worthwhile to remember that as early as in 1929 the Naga Club (a political Platform of Unified Occupied Nagas) submitted a memorandum to the visiting Simon Commission of British India in Kohima, demanding that the Nagas be left alone and free as they were before being conquered by the British Empire. In 1941, Sir Robert Reid the then Governor of Assam Province, saw a possibility of creating a nation comprising of the areas inhabited by the Naga tribes belonging to Mongoloid race who were neither Indian nor Burmese. In 1946, The Naga National Council (NNC) a political platform of Nagas outside British jurisdiction as well of territories occupied by the British was formed. This served as an all-Naga political institution, which directly undertook the guardianship of a unified independent Nagaland before and after British India. The Nagas declared themselves

independent on 14th August 1947³ and the legitimacy of this act by NNC is upheld by every Naga Nationalist till date. This history of Naga claim of independence and their subjugation provides a background articulation to the culture of insurgency.

Insurgency in the short stories of Temsula Ao :

Temsula Ao's short story collection *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* originates from a land still in turmoil. The stories have their roots in the Naga Separatist Movement. In her own words, many of the stories in this collection have their genesis in the turbulent years of bloodshed and tears that make up the history of the Nagas from the early fifties of the last century and their demand for independence from the Indian state⁴. The book does not explicitly point towards the political struggle of the Naga people; rather it captures the voices of the common Naga people trapped in the struggle between the state and the separatists. Violence had been a way of life in the North Eastern part of India and Temsula Ao depicts in her short stories how the native common people cope with violence and how they find safe spaces for themselves. The lives of Naga men and women were influenced by the activities of the separatist militants although they were not directly involved in activities of the underground army.

Set in the initial turbulent decades of Naga insurgency Soaba is the story of a young boy Imtimoa popularly referred to as Soaba meaning 'idiot' in Ao language, who was destined to be caught up in the whirlwind sweeping through the land and creating havoc in people's lives⁵. In this attempt to liberate their homeland from forces many people abandoned family, school, career, permanent jobs, field-work and joined the underground army. Words like convoy, grouping, curfew and 'situation' began to acquire sinister dimension as a result of the conflict taking place between the government and the underground armies⁶. During those turbulent years of insurgency the government forces did 'grouping' where whole villages would be dislodged from their ancestral sites and herded into new ones, making it more convenient for the security forces to guard them day and night⁷. People

who lost their ancestral homeland were forced to reside in unfamiliar environment and meted out intense physical and mental torture. During those troubled time various kinds of political groups were formed, one such group known as 'flying squad' equipped with vehicles and guns operated in Mokokchung and guided the army in those unknown terrain. Imlichuba, known as Boss of the 'flying squad' used his force to harass public. One day he shot Soaba dead accusing him of being a suspect that ultimately brought about his downfall. Soaba who could seldom speak a coherent sentence became victim of violence.

The Curfew Man is a tale about a retired police constable, Satemba, who is physically handicapped and his wife Jemtila. Satemba had shattered his knee cap while playing a football final game for the coveted East Zone trophy. He was an excellent football player and even though he had not passed the matriculation examination, he was taken into the force because of this quality. But after the mishap he was not qualified enough to hold a desk job as he became somewhat invalid. Satemba's wife Jemtila at that time suggested that he take premature retirement from the service so that they could return to their village and take up farming. After two miserable years of farming at the village the couple came to Mokokchung town and took up residence at a small rented house. Satemba was hired as a government informer by the Sub-Divisional officer in whose house Jemtila worked as a housemaid. Their only source of income, except the paltry pension came from Jemtila's work. Satemba was told that if he did not work as an informer for the government, then his wife would lose her job. Moreover, he knew that the underground members of the organization would punish him if they came to know about the truth. Caught in the vortex of a dilemma, "like a man who had strayed into a minefield and could not take another step either backwards or forwards", Satemba had no other option but to disfigure his other 'good leg'. Temsula Ao begins the story by rightfully pointing out how the natives had to bear the atrocities and brickbats as a result of both the "warring parties". She writes everything had been plunged into a state of hostility between two

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warring armies; the one overground labeling the other as rebels fighting against the state and the other operating from their underground hide-outs and calling the Indian army illegal occupiers of sovereign Naga territories. Caught between the two, it was the innocent villagers and those living in small townships who had to bear the brunt of the many restrictions imposed on their lives⁸.

The Last Song depicts the plight of Apenyo, a young singer of exceptional caliber. The festivities and celebrations on the occasion of dedication of the new church building was transformed to a graveyard where many people were burnt alive as they the villagers were paying taxes to the underground government. There was chaos everywhere. Villagers trying to flee the scene were either shot at or kicked and clubbed by the soldiers who seemed to be everywhere. The pastor and the gaonburas were tied up for transportation to army headquarters and whatever fate awaited them there. More people were seen running away desperately, some seeking security in the old church and some even entered the new one hoping that at least the house of God would offer them safety from the soldiers⁹. Apenyo was brutally raped as she defied the orders of the army. Even Apenyo's mother was raped by the soldiers as she tried to haul the captain off her daughter's body. The village people as they were trying to lift the limp bodies, the captain happened to look back and seeing that there were witnesses to their despicable act, turned to his soldiers and ordered them to open fire on the people¹⁰.

In another story *Shadows*, Temsula Ao shows how dissension and hatred among the members of a particular insurgent group can lead to brutal killings. Imli, a college going student becomes a part of the underground Naga Army and was going to China for training. Imli was inducted into the group because he was the son of the second highest boss in the headquarters and who happened to arrive at the precise moment when the names were being finalised. Hoito the leader of the group going to China had a grudge against Imli's father because he had once reprimanded him in public for failing to carry out an order in the proper manner¹¹. Hoito was troubled by Imli's presence in the group and planned his death. The way an

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innocent boy had to face death in the story clearly sends a strong signal from Ao that violence begets violence.

Conclusion:

Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* is a record of what happened in Nagaland in 1960s and 1970s. In her short stories Temsula Ao records the subaltern history of Naga people bringing out issues on how insurgency has caused problems for the society as well the family. Her stories document individuals, irrespective of gender, caste, age and social status who lived their lives under the fear of turmoil and warfare. In describing the home, the land and the people, the author emphasizes on the need to restore peace and stability in the state that has been experiencing violence and brutal killings for decades. In her own words, "I hear the land cry/ Over and over again/Let all the dead awaken/And teach the living/ How not to die"¹². ■

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- ³ Ibid, pp166
- ⁴ Ao Temsula: *Lest We Forget, These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006 pp x
- ⁵ Ao Temsula: Soaba, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006 pp 9
- ⁶ Ibid, pp 10
- ⁷ Ibid, pp11
- ⁸ Ao Temsula: The Curfew Man, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006 pp 34
- ⁹ Ao Temsula: The Last Song, *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006 pp 28

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¹⁰ Ibid, pp 29

¹¹ Ao Temsula: *Shadows, These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006 pp 74

¹² Ao Temsula: *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006 pp vi

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Life Writing as an Art: A Discourse on Temsula Ao's 'Once Upon a Life'

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Although in North-east writing in English, few writers have started writing autobiography, it seems life writing is yet to receive critical attention. Padma Shri Temsula Ao, a poet and story teller's autobiography 'Once upon a life' can be considered to be a substantial work for serious discussion on life writing. The present paper attempts to apply life-writing as an art in Temsula Ao's 'Once upon a life' which has all the makings of successful autobiography with sincere life story free from usual celebration with fictional overtone written in rare sensitivity, intensity, emotion and passion like Kamal Das 'My Story' and Mamoni Roysom Goswami's Adhalekha Dastabez (An unfinished autobiography). Throughout the rest of her autobiography, how she has survived in a family where the children have lost their parents at early childhood and becoming the remarkable writer that she now is. In her autobiography though she calls it, in her words a 'memoir' recounts the intense memory of her parents is striking all throughout her early life and mundane account of her experience as woman 'who faced seemingly insurmountable odds and who through sheer grit and belief managed not only to build a distinguished career and also became country's finest writers'.

Temsula Ao's 'Once upon a life' is an remarkable achievement in the field of autobiography in North-East Indian writing in English as it throws light on the variegated experience of her life starting from Naga hills to the Khasi hills through plains of 'two leaves and a bud'. The reasons are manifold, the principal of them being the attempt at self

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expression, identification of self, self construction, comprehension and transcendence of one's own self. What strikes us most about the memoir at first sight is her committed involvement in issues like tormented childhood, marginalization of woman, human relationship. In her own words the memoir is an "attempt to exorcise my own personal ghosts from a fractured childhood that was ripped apart by a series of tragedies."

In 'Once upon a life' Ao in her simple, lucid style speaks of her life in a true confessional mode. The autobiography begins with an account of factual description that gives a lasting impression of her, self-reflection as well as reckoning of her troubled childhood. Misfortune disturbed her time and again since her early life. Born to a father who served as supervisor in a Christian Hospital at Borbhetta Mission compound in Jorhatr, Assam, she was brought up in an environment of cosy comforts of her father as a pampered child, and the sylvan setting and panoramic beauty of the tea gardens of Jorhat, but a fear psychosis always haunted her when she imagines post period life without her most trusted father who she loves and trusts whole heartedly. Her young mind was so perturbed when she has seen the sudden sufferings of her father, for complained of severe toothache and taken to the hospital on a stretcher and died soon after a tooth was extracted. Just nine months after her father's death, mother underwent a surgery to remove a growth in her body. While operated, the wound festered and become septic and died within a few days. The relationship with her father, mother and family rightly points to her humanist aspect of life. This humanist attitude here reminds us of the early life of another noted writer of repute Mamoni Raysom Goswami's autobiography 'An Unfinished Autobiography' (Adha Lekha Dastabez) where like a humanist Goswami too paints the sufferings of a child who lost her most beloved father at a tender age.

While remembering the death of her parents, she was haunted by the memory stamped by her misfortune. She opines in her own words :

*"I began to think about what the second woman said :
if you think hard enough about a dead person, you can*

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actually see her! So I tried to recollect mother's face, her voice and even the clop-clop sound she made when she walked in her wooden sandals, all in the hope that sooner or later mother would show herself to me."

She was obsessed with the memory of her mother at this time. Here comes out a very delicate aspect of Ao's autobiographical self-fear for and contemplation of death.

Raised in a traditional Naga family, losing both the parents at an early age, she was helpless. But immediately the doctor of the hospital appointed their eldest brother in father's place on part time basis and allowed to live in the company's quarter till retirement and she was admitted to English medium school. In Ao's word—

"It was through the intervention of this missionary couple that I was admitted in the boarding school at Golaghat where, I believe, the expenses were mainly borne by them. In reality it was their benevolence which gave me the opportunity to have an excellent education which became the corner-stone of my subsequent academic achievements."

Her autobiography rightly brings all the incidences of life, mostly miserable experiences, that help in moulding her as a writer. And self-reflection and retrospection is strongly seen in her work which is one of the major characteristics of an autobiography.

Schooling in Golaghat Ridgeway Girls' High school, Assam is full of incidences but she realized that the space she got now to stay is going to be her home for the next six years and that new phase of life changed the direction of her life forever. She realized at she was alone among the strangers and no one could understand her tormented psyche. In a terribly isolated situation she struggled for few months but later learnt how to adjust to the new environment and determined to study hard. She made study her single pursuit. In this context, mention may be made that Temsula Ao may have been influenced by another distinguished writer of contemporary era, Amrita Pritam, who writes in her autobiography, "The Revenue Stamp" when asked whether you feel happy if you retain the same life after death. She replied in her

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widely read autobiography. "The one thing did not let me down during the most depressing times was my pen. Whether, I wrote my own thoughts down or wrote about partition, my pen was as much a poet of as the limbs of my body. The pen was the decisive factor in my life." (The Revenue Stamp P. 133)

Ao's memoir 'Once upon a life' a retrospective self reflection describes various incidences of her life ranging from her failure in class four examination to married life with four children, her relentless struggle to achieve academic success from Intermediate Arts examination to bachelor and master degree and joining as Assistant Professor in the department of English in NEHU, Shillong.

Ao's life writing recounts the religious exploitations of a class five standard girl who lost her husband before attained puberty. She writes:

"She was married off when she was six or seven and had to stay with her parents until she attained puberty according to the custom in their community. Only then would she be sent to her husband's home. But before this happened, her child groom died and she found herself a widow without ever having had any contact with her husband."

Ao reveals the nefarious design of the Orthodox Hindus, who in the name of tradition, superstitious religious belief exploit the weaker woman and girl. Her quality of kind heartedness and its effect seen in her girlhood days when she experiences the ruthless behavior of the society that brings tears to her eyes which she presented in her autobiography with pain and protest. Author's disturbing awareness and anxiety for the age old oppressive system of Indian society, inferior attitude to girl child, marriage and widowhood is very much reflected in the autobiography.

'Once upon a life' seen so far how the author shapes and structures his autobiography more in the form of bildungsroman. The structure of the book is determined by the search for self accounts of Ao and continues to be developed through her relationship. She proclaims her indebtedness in her relationship with her politician husband. The difference and closeness between her husband is clearly

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evident in her later life. Ao reminisces her husband, her father-in-law, the local high school headmaster, the Principal of her college, servant Gurung and their contribution in the growth of her both academic and family life. The process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into comprehensible totality is seen in her self-exploration.

The constant search for knowledge and peace had started from the beginning of her school days and continued till the days of the research in NEHU, her life as writer in Shillong and Kohima and her dream for a better and happier society where nobody would suffer, oppressed and all would be able to live with dignity. At the end we can come to conclusion that 'Once upon a life' is a successful autobiography that involves experience, recollected experience and writing. ■

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Marriage, Family and The Trope of Desire: Exploring Women's Issues in Srutimala Duara's Short Fiction

Harajit Goswami

I

You called me wife,
I was taught to break saccharine into your tea, and
To offer at the right moment the vitamins cowering
Beneath your monstrous ego I ate the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reason, to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies.

From "You Planned to Tame a Swallow," by Kamala Das.

Marriage in India is considered to be a sacred bond and it is of unrivalled significance in the lives of Indians. However, as the lines from the poem by Kamala Das brilliantly bring out, marriage is also an institution which may result in the marginalization, subordination and oppression of women. It is now increasingly thought that marriage is not only about taming of a woman but also involves the extinction of her individual identity. The "dwarfing" effect or the reduction of a woman to a non entity in the family after her marriage is an issue that has been frequently brought up by the feminist scholars. R.K. Gupta states:

The searching critical examination to which the institution of marriage has been subjected in recent years may well be an offshoot of the growth of a feminist outlook. Marital relationships, and the oppression that

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is often inherent to them, have been a subject of great concern for modern Indian writers, both men and women, although it is women writers who have felt most strongly and passionately about it for understandable reasons. Writers such as Shivani, Amrita Pritam, Binapani Mohanty, and Sneha Devi have effectively and sensitively brought out the frequently oppressive nature, from a woman's point of view, of such relationships, and the legitimization of women's exploitation which the supposed sanctity of the institution of marriage sometimes involves. (185)

Under the feminist scanner, marriage is viewed as a social institution that defines and restricts women's role. Many contemporary women writers of India have highlighted the gendered structure of the family and also have critiqued the institution of marriage as exploitative and which leads to subordination of women. It is believed that the supposed sanity of marriage often involves a process of legitimization of women's exploitation. Women, besides being deprived of the privilege of a "room of her own" to hone their creative skills, also face the strong social and family pressure to hold all creative activity in subservience to her role as homemakers. Myra Marx Ferree rightly observes, "Feminists agree that male dominance within families is part of a wider system of male power, is neither natural nor inevitable, and occurs at women's cost." (866)

The trope of desire, on the other hand, is closely related to the issue of restrictions imposed by marriage and family on a woman's attempt to explore her own space. The development of a 'theory' about women's desire dates back to Freud's concept of 'penis envy' - whereby he sought to postulate that women's desire originates from a 'lack'. Lacan on the other hand tried to relate the concept of desire to that of language and held that our desire is always for "jouissance" - a state of blissful ecstatic union that would complete us. Feminist critics examine the concept of desire from the point of view of gender and seek to analyze how desire is expressed in literary representation.

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This paper would seek to critically examine the aspirations, longings and expectations that drive female desire in select short fiction by Srutimala Duara. Attempt will be made to analyze the representation of the trope of desire and the institution of marriage vis-à-vis the feminist concerns about women's struggle for the realization of their selves. Select narratives by Srutimala Duara from her two collections of short stories viz. *The Sunset Hour and Other Stories* and *The Jhoolan Evening* will be studied to examine how the institution of marriage circumscribe or restrict women's pursuit of her desire and how they respond to such restrictions.

II

Duara's treatment of the institution of marriage vis-à-vis women's desire can be viewed in the light of the feminist concerns highlighted above. Srutimala Duara, in some of her short stories, seeks to foreground the stresses and strains of married life from a woman's point of view. Her narratives view the institution of marriage as detrimental and suffocating for women and which tends to circumscribe a women's desire for self assertion and personal growth - intellectually, financially emotionally or otherwise. However, there are instances in Duara's short fiction where woman finds herself a comfortable life with an understanding husband and supportive environment with favorable family conditions. "The Slander" is a story of such nature. But such delineations are few and most of the time women are shown to find themselves trapped and caged in marriage situations which threaten to suffocate their possibilities and potentials. Her desires and aspirations face the risk of getting ruthlessly thwarted or stunted by the constraints and demands of the family and marital responsibilities. Trapped in such situations, women in Duara's narratives are projected as figures that rebel and reject male hegemony within the family.

In narratives like "Leaf in a Cobweb" (*Sunset Hour and Other Stories*), marriage is projected as something that is eminently desirable for a girl. This is the result of the process of socialization that every girl goes through in a gendered society. The patriarchal

structure of the society makes her believe that all her happiness depends on the single seminal event of her life - marriage. Conditioned by the precepts of a gendered society, women are often made to look forward to their marriage as their only goal in life. They internalize the patriarchal discourse about marriage and schooled in such principles, they begin to think of marriage as something that is indispensable and that it is but natural for a girl to pin her hopes and future happiness in her marriage. Tora— the female protagonist of the story is a housemaid and, therefore, understands that her prospects of getting married are very thin. She is understandably pained to see that her mistress' daughter, who is of her same age, has been 'happily married' while she is left lurching and pining for her own marriage. Her longings and fond hopes about her own marriage are succinctly expressed in the following lines, "Marriage! Tora sighed. How she laid night after night on her narrow bed dreaming of Prince Charming who had rescued Cinderella from her miserable condition!" (*Sunset* 28)

Failure to get married is considered to be a major setback in the Indian society. In fact, women are made to believe that nothing could be more terrible for a woman than not being able to get married at the proper time and die as an old lonely spinster. The patriarchal society leaves little space for women who remain outside the institution of marriage. Hence it is but natural for a woman to believe that she would be rendered utterly helpless if she 'fails' to get married. Tora's dejection at not being able to get married, not difficult to comprehend:

Tora continued to dream of her prince. One day her prince too would come. She had thought. But her prince never came... The peon had refused to marry a housemaid. She realized for the first time that she was just like a leaf caught in the cobwebs. She belonged neither to the tree nor to the ground below." (Sunset 29-30)

Disappointed though she is, the seemingly timid looking Tora turns into a resolute and strong character as she resolves to get the better of her desire for marriage. She diverts her attention towards seeking other avenues whereby she can be self reliant and not just

keep pining for marriage. "How she had wept that night! In anger, hurt and frustration she had, that very night, decided to rule out marriage from her life and buried the thought of Prince Charming into the deep recesses of her mind." (*Sunset* 31). The decision she makes becomes a liberating experience for her and this gives a new meaning and direction to her life. Tora's change in attitude towards marriage can be read as a woman's refusal to be dependent on it and the emergence of the new woman who is propelled by the desire to explore her own self and her potential rather than simply looking forward to her marriage as the only meaningful thing a girl can do.

There are, however, other women figures in Duara's short fiction who are not as lucky as Tora and who had to swallow the bitter pill of marriage and endure the travails and trials of a married life before they could comprehend the oppression that is inherent in marriage. Enakshi, the female protagonist in the narrative titled "The Stanchion" (*Sunset Hour and Other Stories*), feels threatened and suffocated as her life gets enmeshed in a complex family situation with an insensitive and tyrannical husband. Enakshi, to her utter dismay, realizes that her desire for honing her creative talent receives a near-fatal jolt in the altar of marriage. Enakshi is gifted with a creative talent but is faced with a situation in the family where her creativity stands the risk of being muffled and silenced because of an unappreciative and insensitive husband. The narrator states:

...things began to change after her marriage to Anil Barua, the business tycoon. Her pen lay idle, her thoughts stopped flowing as her mind was arrested in the opulent prison of her husband ... Her artistic mind was becoming sluggish and was in danger of becoming defunct. She had to do something to find herself, to become something more than a mere decorative piece in her husband's social circle, to drag herself from that dreadful whirlpool and set her feet on some solid ground before she was totally lost. (Sunset 34)

Marriage for Enakshi, thus becomes a 'dreadfull whirlpool' and she is driven by her desire to look for her own space. She finds it

imperative to nurture her creative spark and safeguard it from being crushed under the heavy burden of marital obligations. It is for her identity and her space that she has to struggle for. Therefore she tries to convince her husband about the necessity for her to work and she explains, "It's not for money that I want to work Anil. I want to find myself, I want a circle of my own." (Sunset 35) Her statement brings out the fact that marriage may make one lose her identity and render her invisible and therefore it is very necessary to seek ways by which one can 'find' herself. Enakshi's insensitive husband is visibly upset at her decision to work or seek employment. His displeasure at his wife's decision to go out to work is a reflection of the gendered view about the role of men and women in a patriarchal society. In this regard, it is pertinent to note Myra Marx Ferree's comments on the gendered outlook on ascribed roles to the male and female member of the family:

Models of family functioning have also been gendered: women are assumed to be present and available to meet the needs of other family members, so that women's paid employment is considered a social problem or stain in the family members and women's economic dependence unproblematic ... Men's paid employment has been taken for granted, the demands it may place on the family members normalized, and men excused from active participation when their jobs interfere ... (871)

Enakshi, hence, has to contend with her husband's gendered mindset which believes that it is 'normal' for women to be economically dependent and "problematic" for the family if she chooses to do otherwise. However, Enakshi resolves to chase her dream and her desire for unbridled self expression ultimately results in divorce. R.J. Kalpana says:

In modern society, we find the regulations imposed on women by marriage are always more stringent than those imposed on men. That she loses more and gains less is a known fact. Considerable well-authenticated data

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shows that there are actually two marriages in every marital union - his and hers - which do not become - theirs...(44-45)

The marriage between Enakshi and Anil, like R.J. Kalpana states above, fails to become "theirs" and under the "stringent" regulations imposed by her husband, Enakshi realizes that she would "lose more and gain less".. Enakshi refuses to be bogged down by a bad marriage which threatens to suffocate her artistic mind and with her single-minded efforts, she manages to build an identity of her own. She goes on to win the Sahitya Academy Award.

Marriage - for Priyam - the central character in the story titled "The Scintillation" (*Sunset Hour and Other Stories*) is something that seems to sap her vital energy and her zeal for life. Commenting on her married life, Priyam confesses:

Life had become so monotonous. Dwipen had been quite caring and had given her company in the early years of their marriage. But now he remained busy with office works and tours ... she sighed. Now-a-days, she felt that she had become only a part of the various objects of the house ... her life had become absolutely dry, perhaps drier than the desert dust. (Sunset 140-141)

Married life hence, even if the husband is not a 'bad' one, can slowly sap a woman's vitality and enthusiasm. Priyam's desire for finding something invigorating while leading her listless married life takes the form of a "scintillation". Her otherwise dull and "monotonous" life suddenly becomes thrilling and exciting with the chance meeting with her ex-boyfriend - a friend who was in love with her during her college days. Her pent up desire pushes her to strike a romantic relationship with Nibir - her old friend. She is thrilled at the prospect of meeting him everyday while going to drop her daughter at school and this revives her lost interest in life.

"Sparks of Frustration" (*The Jhoolan Evening*) is another story which demonstrates how marriage, motherhood and the obligations of a family can be detrimental to and suffocating for the growth and development of the female self. Veda Hazarika, the protagonist of

the story, expresses her frustration in the following words:

Veda Hazarika, a brilliant student of yesteryears, was now a mere Mrs. Ajan Saikia. I had no identity of my own. I had no job besides my houseworks. I had no friends apart from my husband's circle of friends. I was no one besides a mother and a wife. (Jhoolan 99)

Thus Duara makes an implicit critique of the institution of marriage as something which involves an erasure of the female identity. It entails male domination and the resultant subordination of woman. This is clearly expressed by Veda, as the demands of her family grow and she finds herself in a situation where she is compelled to sacrifice her personal longings and aspirations for the sake of the family:

... Ajan suggested, "Why don't you give up your job for a year or so and when Rohit grows up, you can join once again." I gave up my job and became a full time housewife. Then came Snigdha. I had two kids to look after and before I had realized I was more and more drawn into the whirlpool of my family duties." (Jhoolan 98)

Marriage, motherhood and the burden of a family as evident in the above lines are institutions and practices that systematically force the woman to accept a subordinate status in the family and obliterate her personal and individual desires and aspirations. It is seen as a frustrating hindrance towards meaningful growth of a woman. Hence, R.J. Kalpana makes the following observation in the introduction to *Feminism and the Individual* :

Women are doubly yoked to the reproduction process, by the psychological assertion that motherhood is an eminently desirable status, and by laying the burden of continuing the human race on the shoulders of women. Feminist ethos states reproduction to be the source of women's oppression. Reproduction entails marriage. (7)

Therefore the institution of marriage now comes under close scrutiny in the hands of the feminist scholars.

In the story titled "Suppressed Desire" (*The Jhoolan Evening*) Nisha undergoes a different kind of suffering as she finds herself

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stuck with a husband whose only interest is in the accumulation of wealth and who is completely oblivious to her physical yearnings. Nisha suffers the pangs of being neglected by her husband who prefers to stay aloof and drunk. Harboring her "Suppressed Desire", she ponders despondently:

What a life she had been living! Cooking food, preparing tiffin for children, dropping them in their schools, picking them up from schools, taking them to tuition, helping them with their home-works and preparing things again for the next morning. Life simply rolled away and before she realized she had stepped into the thirty-sixth year of her life. Slowly she began to realize what she had missed out in her life. (Jhoolan 51)

Housework becomes identified with the housewife, or even for an employed wife for that matter. This is because the division of labour in the households is done in a gendered manner. Certain types of tasks get identified with the female and certain with male. Housework and childrearing is considered as a "natural" and culturally expected responsibility of being a wife and Nisha finds herself lost in the ritualistic performance of these repetitive and uninteresting tasks. Myra Marx Ferree observes:

Although women do not seem actually to like or enjoy housework more than men do, they often accept it as an expected element of being a wife, or the "price" of domestic harmony. The gender perspective points to the symbolic construction of housework as "women's work" and as an expression of both love and subordination. (877)

Duara's female characters, as is evident, refuse to accept housework as something natural for a wife. They perceive such a life as a form of subordination from which they desperately seek to liberate themselves.

III

It was a conventional phenomenon to make a distinction between the public and the private spheres and to bracket married life and the

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family within the private sphere. It was also assumed sometimes that although there may exist different kinds of power politics and gender discrimination in the public sphere where women are always in a disadvantaged position, the private sphere of the family is free from such discriminations. But contrary to such opinions, the family too is seat of subordination and oppression as Myra Marx Ferree observes. According to her, the 'privatized view' of the family assumes that:

Within this supposedly private domain, women take centre stage, appear to have unlimited power, and are held responsible for everything - the quality of the marital relationship, the mental health of children, even for preventing male violence. Feminism questions every aspect of this privatized view. (867)

Duara takes a feminist's position when she interrogates and critiques the institution of marriage in her narratives. In Duara's narratives, women emerge as individual actors and as agents with desires, aspirations and interests that are distinctive and meaningful. Rather than remaining passive and allowing their individual identities to be subsumed by the demands of marriage and the family, they strive to eke out a space for themselves. The narratives discussed above tell the same story - the oppression, domination and subordination that is inherent in the institution of marriage and family. It is perceived as having a crippling effect on a woman's psyche and tends to stunt woman's growth and stops self expression and liberation. R. J. Kalpana observes:

... marriage in our society is more important for a woman's happiness than a man's. The woman's view of marriage influences her general feelings of well-being. Since women have been forced to put all their eggs in one basket of marriage, they have more at stake in its stability and they pay a high price for their dependency. (44-45)

The restrictions and limitations that marriage imposes on women's individual desires and aspirations are the "high price" they have to pay while entering into marriage. Srutimala Duara's stories highlights some of these aspects while bringing out the oppression

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that may lay beneath the idealized notions of marriage and family.

Women in Indian English fiction has been mostly portrayed as a silent sufferers and upholders of the 'tradition' and 'traditional values' of family and society. But the new Indian women as an individual has been rebelling against the traditional role, breaking the silence of suffering and trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting her individual self. Duara's narratives discussed above looks into this struggle of the new woman who tries to negotiate and claim her own space by responding to the restrictions and limitations imposed by marriage and family. Duara captures the dilemma of the emerging new woman who tries to create her own space and retain her individuality but who also does not wish to break up the family ties. Her narratives register these gestures of defiance and also critique the institution of marriage and family. ■

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The Dialectics of Tradition and Modernity in Aruni Kashyap's *The House with a Thousand Stories*

Dr Sabreen Ahmed

The dialectics of tradition and modernity and the contesting ideologies of the same have an irrevocable presence in our contemporary existential circumstances and *The House with a Thousand Stories* is an incisive tapestry of the same. Aruni Kashyap's debut novel *The House with a Thousand Stories* is a spectacular representation of rural Assamese village life as observed through the humorous insight of a city-bred boy Pablo. The aim of my paper is to showcase the constant clash of tradition and modernity in the novel that has often led to the loss of traditional forms and the adoption of new cultural icons in a decolonizing social phase. The cross currents of tradition and modernity fill in all major rituals and life style habits of Pablo's ancestral village Hatimura in Mayong. Kashyap intricately weaves the social map of events hovering under the brutal shadow of insurgency, repressive military measures, the secret killings due to extortion, rapes of innocent women like Mamoni, tribal unrest among Karbis near Mayong, the regressive culture of Assam bandhs and so on in telling and retelling the myths, rumors, hearsay and the gossipy stories of Hatimura village to the world. The narrative moves in flashbacks and flash-forwards where nostalgic experiences etched in the cultural memory of a Delhi university student Pablo of his native Assamese village are relived and mulled over. The onomatopoeic resonance of Assamese words is felt within the evocative narrative of

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Kashyap's prose juxtaposes the ancestral families' dark secrets against the socio-cultural scenario of contemporary Assam. Silhouetted against the petty day to day rural events like funeral mourning, marriage celebrations, haunting spinsterhood, unconventional romances, aura of folk bihu songs and Zubeen Garg's music, the horrid picture of Assam's internal colonization by the army and the ruling government, the competing violence between ULFA and SULFA and the myriad narratives of secret killings between 1998-2002 is consciously yarned within Aruni Kashyap's gripping storytelling style.

Memory and tradition are elementary issues in postcolonial literature and Kashyap's prose vibrantly plays with the same in depicting the bipolarities of tradition and modernity. The village Hatimura is represented as an archetype of tradition where signs of progress and modernity are met with scathing sarcasm. The novel is also rich in encapsulating a folk base in terms of following a vibrant story telling tradition which is intrinsic to rural or folk life. Though the vivid choice of traditional Assamese words to enliven the rural spirit of the narrative is commendable there is an unavoidable lacuna in Aruni Kashyap's prose in deliberately missing out on the magical folklore spawning around the very name Mayong. The author begins his narrative with the idea of rumours spreading around weddings:

Rumours arrive at a wedding like unwanted guests. Sometimes old, hoary, hunchbacked women who enjoy spreading bad news bring. Sometimes old men who have nothing better to do and sometimes even young men or women who love to pull the strings and watch a new scene in the large wedding drama, usher them. (p 1)

The narrator depicts gossip and people's reactions to the same as an integral part of the rustic manners of village life and the story which begins around the chief protagonist's aunt's wedding also ends with the same only to unfold several layers of salaciously gossipy narratives within the main story line. When the author through his 'mouthpiece' Pablo describes his native place Mayong as 'Kalapaani' it incites in the mind of the reader an elaboration about the magical

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content of the place, but the narrator is strangely reticent about the witch-hunting and magic realist narratives intrinsic to the very character of Mayong. The very title *The house of Thousand Stories* and the Mayong connection are befittingly present only to miss out upon the magical content perhaps with obvious reasons of building up an ambience of secrecy about the place. Mayong could have been very well represented like Marquez's Macondo, but Kashyap comfortably keeps away magic realism to have a firm base on the social realism of his representation of Hatimura in Mayong. With reductive sense of humour juxtaposes SULFA's nouveau rich status with the declining social position of ULFA:

Everyone in our village was scared of the SULFA since they carried carbines and AK 47s with them all the time and roamed around everywhere at will; apparently they needed these to protect themselves. People also said that they were allowed to do so by the government, since the ULFA were jealous of the Sulfa's nouveau riche status. While ULFA suffered from jaundice, malaria, mokhlong fever, hunger, rain, sun and malnutrition fighting for the cause of Assam's independence from India, the SULFA basked in their wealth. No wonder the ULFA wanted to kill them. (p. 11)

Thus the socio-political scenario of Hatimura could have been the same, just a reflection of any other Assamese village, leaving apart its Mayong connection.

The clarion call of the traditional village Hatimura has an emotional impetus in young Pablo's mind. His friend cum cousin Mridul though elder to Pablo bridges the gap between Pablo's Guwahatian manners and the traditional etiquettes of village life and aids Pablo in building up his cultural nexus with the village. Pablo as a teenager observes the traditional customs and rites with neither open appreciation nor ironic sarcasm. The narrative is a lucid representation of the existing social reality of eerie myths and regressive superstitions in the rural life of an Assamese village in times of modernization. Though written in English the novel has a

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typical tone of the author's mother tongue which brings to one's mind Raja Rao's seminal statement in the preface of *Kanthapura*: 'language not one's own but spirit own' and makes Kashyap very much the specimen of a postcolonial writer. The Assamese spirit reverberates in every page of the novel with rhythmic pulsation through the names (*Okoni, Oholya, Moina, Ronga* etc), relations (*Aaita, Jethai, Pehi, Khura, borta-borma* etc) customs and rituals like *Motshosporkho, Juroon* etc socio-political realities like *Asom bondho, Ulfa -Sulfa* and so on and of course through objects of material folk culture like *dheki, dola, kahn* plates etc. There are also constant references to Borgeets, medieval Assamese literature and Madhav Kondoli's Assamese Ramayana, journals like *Bismoi* and pulp fiction like *Dosyurani Bijuli* series that offer a glimpse into the vast Assamese literary world.

Aruni Kashyap's postcolonial experimentation with hybridity and bilingualism cannot be seen as a meticulous imitation of the process of 'chutnification' in Salman Rushdie's prose style. In Rushdie there is a voyeurism of the outsider in representing one's cultural and social history for the foreign reader. But Kashyap though a Delhi based writer doesn't make an alien representation of his socio-cultural scenario. There is a perfect internalization of one's cultural syndromes without any deliberate effort to make things intelligible to a non-Assamese reader. The voiced utterances typical to Assamese language like the portrayal of *eeh, eesh* sounds made by Moina pehi, the *kot kot kot* sound of drinking, the *niu niu niu* sound of a hooting owl, the superlative expression *phai phai enrazi*, the use of the sound *dei* for emphasis bring alive the ambience of an Assamese folk narrative technique in the novel.

There are snippets of description of traditional folk life in the village at regular intervals in the narrative. The novel begins with the elaborate preparations of a traditional Assamese rural marriage. The setting of the *pandal*, customary gifts of *Juroon*, ablutions by elderly women are all vividly infused to reflect the festive spirit. The description of the funeral rites of Bolen Borta, Mridul's father comes as a flash back in the main storyline of telling the tale of Pablo's ancestral

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house. There are descriptions of the village fisherman with their tools as a part of showcasing material folk tradition.

Modernity is a state of mind rather than a way of demeanor, while tradition is a manner of scrupulously holding on to the roots, yet both tradition and modernity intersect and cross connect one another. Modernity in terms of urbanization is very meagerly present in the novel except for the occasional description of Pablo's lifestyle and that of his parents in Guwahati. The dirt of the Guwahati city is juxtaposed against the serene loveliness of Hatimura village. The novel has purely an agrarian base in terms of the central protagonists' emotional attachment to his ancestral roots which reverberates in the tempo of the narrative. Mridul's village upbringing especially his responsible position after the death of his father comes as a foil to Palbo's carefree and luxuriant lifestyle in the city engulfed in its processes of globalization. Yet the adolescent consciousness of Pablo includes Mridul in his own growing sensibility of the modern world of unconventional realities away from the gripping clutch of value judgments and traditional mores. The modern world of the novel is symbolized through Zubin Garg's songs, AR Rahman's music, love letters, modern bihu songs and the seething unconventional romances that occupy most of the narrative space. Mridul's rebellious manners, his melodious playing of the guitar and Zubin Garg's songs, his popularity with girls and his unconventional love affair with a Nepali girl Manju Mahatu makes him a modern young man in Pablo's vision. Moina peha is shown a transition between the two worlds -the young world of modernity and the traditional world of customary rules. She was not strong enough to make a firm choice between the two. Thus when she was forced into marriage without her choice into a family with confirmed ULFA connections, she being unable to decide her fate finally succumbed to death by consuming phenyl. The iconic figure of traditional norms, customs and propriety is Oholya Jethai who plays the draconian role of a Matriarch to maintain a respectable position of spinsterhood in a household full of sister-in-laws and their children. Even Pablo's mother being a lecturer of Cotton College and father an established civil servant could not escape the shield of

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superstition rigorously perpetuated by Oholya Jethai in the manner of living in the ancestral house in Hatimura. Yet Oholya too had an unconventional past with modernized manners of romancing a doctor in her hay days. But her out of the way manners despite being a traditional village girl brought her jilt and betrayal and consequently a life of perennial maidenhood. Another unconventional love affair in the eyes of the village community is the relationship of Pablo's uncle Prosanto, a lecturer in the local college of Mayong with a divorcee Onulupa teaching in the same college. To add further salacious gossip to their affair they had a living relationship a very crude and modern idea for a place like Hatimura. The spiciest representation among the romances is the short term clandestine affair between Pablo and a marriage guest and distant relation Anamika. For Pablo it was his maiden journey into unknown physical realms and lustful entourages, but for Anamika this adventurous game of lust during the wedding celebrations of Moina Pehi had fatal circumstances. The love story or rather the lust story which ended with the wedding and Moina pehi's death had tragic consequences for Anamika only to be revealed later. Anamika died because of wrong consumption of social medicine or folk medicine at an advanced stage of pregnancy. Both Oholya Jethai and Anamika surpassed the limits of traditionally forbidden realms or gendered boundaries of youthful desire for women. While the headstrong Oholya paid the price of life time ignominy and maidenhood which was a taboo in a rural setting, the flamboyant and carelessly adventurous Anamika paid the price of her life. This exhibits the gender restraints on women in traditional village set ups who have to pay heavy price for transgressing the conventional arenas of sexual freedom. The gendered realities and constrictive spaces of the rural society also brought innocent victims like the army- raped Mamoni and Moina pehi who committed suicide with the fear of being raped by the army as her in-laws to be had connections with ULFA.

Kashyap's narrative is a nuanced review and critique of his native culture amidst its socio-political turmoil in the light of the rural tenets

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of traditional ethos and the new and invading ideas of progressive modernity. Tilottoma Mishra in the introduction to her text *Writings from the North-East* talks about an Eurocentric concept of modernity derived from the Enlightenment on the literatures of the region which created a rupture between the past and present (Mishra xiv). The richness of folklore and the literary transcreation of the oral story telling tradition indeed establish Aruni Kashyap as a definitive voice from the North East. He is indeed among one of those from the North eastern region whose "history and civilization had been pushed to the margins for not conforming to the Eurocentric concept of modernity and thus took up the task of recreating their past and reinventing tradition so as to represent the present as a stage in the continuous process of marching from the past to the future" (Mishra xvii). Although Kashyap's narrative too creates a rupture between the past and the present, his representation of modernity rather than harping on a Eurocentric Enlightenment tradition falls in the line of the contemporary process of globalization. Pablo's Addidas bag, expensive Lee Cooper jeans are signs that mark his inclusion in the late capitalist globalized world despite his emotional connection to the traditional village of Hatimura where modern avenues of globalization has yet to start its process of development. Kashyap's story ends with two deaths casting a miasma of despair, but Pablo doesn't carry the potential of a tragic hero in his characterization neither has Anamika the vivacity of a tragic heroine for her death was not destined rather an error committed by the misuse of folk medicine which offers an ironic comment on superstitious rustic manners as intrinsic to folk tradition. Kashyap brings no final closure for the novel because the end of his story with Anamika only lays the edifice for a series of multilayered stories. A review by *The New Indian Express* makes a perfect rendering of the end of novel as captured in following words:

Closing the pages of the book, one is reminded that tragedies do occur, they may be relentless, that people who have lived full, vibrant lives will one day be consigned to the disappearing archives of memory... Like Marquez's Macondo, these are places which seem to

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exist only fleetingly, where stories are at once ephemeral and eternal. - The New Indian Express ■

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Reflection of Conflict situation in North-East writing in India

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India's North-East is called the landmark of most conflict ridden regions of India and South-East Asia. The North-East India comprises of Seven Sisters and one brother including the states like-Assam, Arunchal, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura. Sikkim is considered the only brother of the North-East. All these eastern-most region of India are saturated with the unity in diversity. Specially this area is ethnically distinct from other parts of India by the variation of culture, language and community. This region is distinguished by preponderance of the Tibbetto-Burman Languages.

The North Eastern region of India is a land of potentials and natural resources. However, it presents a complex situation that manifests contest and conflict at regular intervals. It is a site of armed conflicts inherently related with claims to power, control and legitimization by all those who are party to the conflict. The quest for ethnic identity is an expression of socio cultural, societal formation are the ingredients of the present conflict situations of the North-East and it is one of the most important concept of post-colonial literature. The North-Eastern region always feel that they are the 'other States of India. It is also said that the central Govt. looks The North-Eastern region separately like the step mother's eye. Here, I want to illustrate "The concept 'other' and self by Edward said's essay - 'Orientalism'. Central Govt. plays role as the subject 'self' and the North-Eastern region play the role as the object or the other. This paper tries to explore the conflict situations of North-East through the book Strangers of the Mist:

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The main objectives of the study are –

- To find out the root causes of the conflict situation of North-East people.
- To observe how the conflict situations are reflected in the writings of the North-East writers.
- To analyse why the particular region has to face so many unexpected conflict situation.
- To suggest some remedies to resolve the social unrest in North-Eastern state.

Methodology and Data source : The study is a combination of historical, descriptive, analytical methods and it is mainly based on various secondary sources such as books, Journals, newspapers, published and unpublished records etc.

In 1947, the decolonization of the Indian subcontinent and partition made this region entirely landlocked intensifying the isolation with China, Myanmar, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The borderline of North-East is considered the misshapen strip of land, with a narrow corridor consisting of 20km. wide at its slimmest which is referred as the chicken's neck. Indias, North-East is home to many ethnic groups, which are engaged in self preservation and movements for autonomy in many cases sometimes, these struggles have turned violent, leading to proliferation of armed insurgent groups, like the ULFA, NLFT, NDFB, NSCM (I-M), NSCN(K) and many such outfits all the insurgical groups are mushrooming and flourishing under the influence of social unrest, political corruption and ups down of economical condition; soon after the chino-Indian border in 1962 and in view of the growing insurgencies in the region, the security discourse has become predominant.

All of we have known that literature reflects the society and literature is the mirror of the society. The study of hotbed conflict of North-East late region really focused from 1980's through the different forms of literature memories, biographies and autobiographic of the ex-army generals, police officers, activities, ex-insurgencies etc. (b) Journalistic writings with detailed chronicling of the events, incidents

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and organizations involved in insurgencies and movements, (c) Scholarly and policy oriented writings by researchers, advisors and consultants; (d) Reports, vision documents etc. of the government the voluntary organizations and last but not the least (e) the literary works mostly in the regional languages.

So many prolific writers, they have showed the conflict about the north-east through their writings which that these are the important factors to be focused or to be highlighted in india as a whole, we can illustrate the name of the writers such as Udayan Misra, Tilottama Misra, Sanjeev Barua, Manorama Sarma, Gail Omvedt and others etc. The literature on ethnics consolidation at least till the late 1990's continues to be plagued by what in social science is known as 'primordialist fallacy'. In simple terms, given and unalterable deference was considered as a precondition of conflict.

Sanjoy Hazarika's book "Strangers of the Mist" is based on his personal experience. He wants to present a detailed chronicle history of the insurgency in the Northeast, the chronicle issue of illegal immigration, economic neglect and exploitation of resources while throwing ample light on the diverse culture. Geography and the abundance on natural resources in the region. Through this book, I want to highlight the conflict situations of Nagaland by his article "Nagaland 1000 years in a lifetime". The North-East is surely the one area of post-colonial India where the outbreak of insurgency has been more frequent than anywhere else in South Asia and where resource to armed rebellion has often been the first, rather than the last, option of a recalcitrant tribe or a large ethnic group. The border conflict between Assam and Nagaland is not a newly raised conflict, But the conflict of Nagaland raised after the decolonization period of Asia. The violation and insurgency have never been alien to this region after the independence till today. Naga insurgency is considered as the oldest in Asia in modern times. It is only the new millennium that, India's North-East enters the map of 'Global-terror'. The socio economic structure created to the requirements of a specific cultural belt that has now crystallized into a composite Naga Culture.

The British, after their conquest of Assam in 1826 and the Treaty

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of Yandaboo with the Burmese king, decided that they would not allow the tribes from the hills to continue with one of their favourite pastimes, raiding and looting plains villages and outposts.

The first British contract with Nagas was in 1832 when an army of 1,500 men, including 800 coolies, led by two English army officers visited the Angamie region. The Angamies resisted, fearing conquest, but the British managed to explore the area, feeding off attacks with the superior weaponry. Due to British's divided rule and policy, all the northeastern state has to face to many problems amongst themselves. The Naga people first refused to British's order not to carry the luggage and provisions of various expeditions. The Naga's attitude was simple "This is our land and we need not help you or to be paid for our help by outsiders." Because the British administrator uses the inhabitants of Naga Hills as their coolie. All it needed was a spark to ignite that anger.

3) Sanjoy Hazarika went to London for studying Journalism and printing, he met Angani Zapu phizo, the legendary chief of the Naga underground movements; In Sanjoy Hazarika's own description about phizo, we can see -

"The man who ran the most powerful insurgency in India at the time and whose people continue to defy India's military and political might nearly half a century after the first bullet was fired, was a little man, hardly more than five foot four or five inches tall, impeccably dressed in a dark, three-piece suit, sitting in an armchair and surrounded by what seemed to be thousands of books."

4) From his description we have known something about how powerful person he was and how he led the Naga people in against of Indian military.

5) Phizo was a man of great passion for the cause of Naga independence and bitterly opposed even the thought of Indian dominance in any sphere of the life of his people. His Naga National Council was sidelined by the heavily armed and ideologically separate National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) did cause him concern and bitterness.

6) Sanjoy Hazarika talked to Phizo, Phizo said to him that Assam

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like Nagaland did not belong to India. He fiercely commented— "The Assamese must get out of India what has Delhi done for you?" It has exploited your resources and one they will turn their soldiers and guns against you as they have done to us, he said. "Assam and Nagaland must be together, Otherwise they will separately together we can face India." Phizo was a far-sighted man. What he said it was happened both in Assam and Nagaland. Both of this state has to face so many political economic conflict in regarding Central Government's partial administration.

7) The Naga National Council (NNC), by unilaterally declaring independence a day before Indian gained independence from the British Challenged the claims of the post colonial Indian state to rule over the Naga Hills, that became part of the large province of Assam. The NNC entered into negotiations with the Indian government on the future states of the Naga Hills and when it appeared tat will the Naga aspiration for self-rule, it formed, 'the Naga Army' and started waging sustained guerrilla warfore against Indian forces. Several attempts at peace making with the NNC failed even as India carved out the separate state of Nagaland and gave it special status just after signing the 16 point agreement with the "Naga moderate groups' in 1960.

8) The NNC was first split in the late 1960's when the sema Naga tribal faction was co-opted by the Indian Administration and used against the 'Naga Army'. Much weakened by splits and surrenders, the bulk of the armed insurgency and signed an agreement with the Indian Government in the city of Shillong, in 1975. But the China-trained Naga rebel leaders, ISSAC chisi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, decried the Shillong. Accord as a 'sellout' formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) to carry on the armed insurrection until it signed a ceasefire agreement with the Indian government in June, 1997. The ceasefire has been followed by negotiations inside and outside India - but it is yet to lead to a settlement of what is easily South Asia's first Major and longest running ethnic insurrection.

9) The border conflict between Assam and Nagaland revolves around issue that is at the core of major disputes between Assam and four of its neighbours -ie. Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunchal and Nagaland.

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Some years bac, an official statement in the Assam Assembly provided the following statistics'. Over 76,886.12 hectares of land have been encroached upon. Nagaland alone has been accused of encroaching 66,241 hectares. Mizoram had encroached upon 1,98 Hectares while Meghalaya and occupied about 5,470 hectares.

Meanwhile, document used by either side of buttress their claims show how one-sided and myopic their views are. Each side blames the other unhesitatingly for all the trouble while claiming that it has done no wrong. One Nagaland Govt. report, without referring to the attack's of 1985, blames the other side for the unfortunate events that followed.

10) There is a pattern here-and in the disputes over territory that Assam also has with Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunchal Pradesh - that four the most port, the larger state (i.e. Assam, mother state) is at the receiving end and that major conflicts and struggles in the entire region are everland, its control, history and for identity formation and state extension.

Findings :

- From the above discussion the following findings are found -
- i) The NE region is the concept of post colonial construct.
 - ii) The Naga were honourable guerrillas. They are not like today's modern fighters.
 - iii) Subalteration policies of Central Government, are responsible for border conflict between Assam and Nagaland.
 - iv) Divided Rule and policy of British Govt. create specially the Naga conflict.
 - v) Naga conflict is the pioneer of all the north-eastern conflicts.

Recommendation :

The Central Govt. makes the definite demarcation for every state. Then the conflict between two states cannot occur. In this context, Govt. should become strict.

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Conclusion :

Sanjoy Hazarika's 'Strangers of the Mist' is a wonderful presentation about north-eastern insurgence conflict. He scientifically shows the root cause of the conflict which affects our society very badly. It is one of the best books through which the north-eastern conflicts are focused in the world. ■

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Transcreation of Tribal Folk Tales from the North East to English

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Transcreation has been the general mode of translation in modern Indian languages from the olden days. This term is applicable for the whole tradition of creative translation of great classics like *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* in the regional languages from Sanskrit. Transcreation can offer the best possible solution for the problems of culturally oriented literary texts. Transcreation in this context can be understood as a rebirth or incarnation (avatar) of the original work. The medieval transcreators like Tulsidas in the introduction of his *Ramayana* states that he is writing his *Ramayana* in the regional language on the basis of famous *Ramayanas* in Sanskrit and taking materials from elsewhere for his own mental gratification and pleasure.

Transcreation expands upon translation by focusing not so much on the literal text, but on discerning the emotional response of readers. It is about taking a concept in one language, and completely recreating it in another. Absolute fidelity to the text is secondary to eliciting the desired emotional response from the targeted audience. Because differences between cultures are so numerous, eliciting the same emotional reaction may also necessitate changes in the context of the text.

Literature around the world has emerged from the oral tradition of storytelling. These myths and legends when encapsulated in writing

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become part of literature where as those which are not are gradually forgotten and wither away. Students and scholars of English literature are familiar with British and French epics such as *Beowulf*, *Chanson de Roland* etc which can be considered as products of transcreation - mostly recordings of the songs of wandering minstrels and troubadours.

Myths and legends are often the foundation of many a great literature and even a cursory glance at the diverse folklore of North East India would reveal that there is no dearth of raw materials to supplement the emerging trend of North East Indian writing in English. In fact, some of the folk tales which have been in circulation among the tribes of this region are surpassingly vibrant and bear an uncanny resemblance to many European folktales. One of the pioneering works in this field is S.N Barkataki's *Tribal Folk Tales of Assam (Hills)*. Mr. Barkataki during his tenure as commissioner, Hills Divisions, Assam from 1961 to 1965, was able to collect many tribal folk tales from remote areas of the region due to the nature of his work. He later compiled them into book form where he has clearly stated the purpose of his endeavor,

"... the tales are likely to die out soon unless recorded..."

We have used Mr. Barkataki's book as our primary source of information while preparing this paper, which is not surprising given the fact that apart from him no such transcreated work is seen, and if there is any, it has not been published. It is through transcreation of authors like Mr. Barkataki that a minor community, like the Karbi for example, can reach out to the world and showcase their unique culture.

In his *Tribal Folk Tales of Assam*, Barkataki has compiled a total of one hundred and twenty nine folk tales from various well known tribes such as the Karbi, Khasi, Jayantia, Dimasas, Kachari and Garo as well as many lesser known tribes such as the Lushai, Lakher, Pawi, Thado-Kuki and Zeme-Naga. We have decided to focus mainly on the Karbi tales due to the physical and geographical proximity of this community to our place of habitation. Mr. Hem Barua, in his *The Red River and The Blue Hills* states that the Mikirs,

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"speak a language which may be called an intermediary between the Naga and the Bodo" Mr. Barkatakya has devoted thirty one pages to ten Karbi folk tales, two of which he borrowed from Edward Stack's book called *The Mikirs* (which was published in London in 1908) and the rest of which he transcreated with the assistance of Mr. Longkam Teron. These two books are possibly the only two books written on the subject. The Karbis, formerly known as the Mikirs, are one of the major indigenous communities of North East India. Though they mostly inhabit the hill districts of the state of Assam, significant numbers of Karbi people can be found living in the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. In times immemorial, their ancestors had entered present day India and Burma from Central Asia in one of the waves of human migration. The Karbis of Assam were originally plains dwellers, but oppression by the more martial races such as the Kacharis, Ahoms and the Burmese decreed that they should seek shelter in the deep jungles and high hills. Some interesting features which we observed in these transcreated tales have been mentioned below.

Similarities between European Fairy Tales and North East Indian Tribal Folk Tales :

Many tribal folk tales of this region bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Europe. The Karbi tale of Korhon Jungrecho seems like the tribal counterpart of the German fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel. As in the German fairy tale, the story begins with,

"Once upon a time a king and queen lived happily together and their union was blessed with a son and daughter. To the king's great sorrow, however, he lost his queen not long afterwards....."

He is left lonely and his children, still at a tender age, are left motherless. The king decides to remarry and the new wife proves to be a curse to the children. Her cruelty towards the children surpasses all limits and the king, unable to bear these atrocities yet helpless to punish his wife (who has magical powers), decides to abandon the siblings in the woods at nature's mercy. Upto this point of the story,

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the reader might be excused if he were to suppose that he was actually reading an English translation of the German fairy tale and not a Karbi folk tale - such is the unerring similarity between the two stories.

Fortune smiles upon the abandoned siblings and they find themselves at the dwellings of a giant monkey, the place is well stocked with food and other necessary provisions. They pass several months in hiding at the monkey's dwellings, the monkey being unaware that it was hosting two children in its house. As the provisions begin to dwindle, the monkey becomes suspicious and seeks the help of a 'Brahmin'. It's interesting that Mr. Barkatakya has used the word 'Brahmin', i.e. a Hindu priest. As we shall see later in this paper, the Karbis consider themselves to be the first Hindus. There was no love lost between the Brahmin and the monkey and the former, instead of assisting the monkey, chops off its tail and kills it. In the German fairy tale as well, the siblings Hansel and Gretel pass several months as captives in the hut of a blind witch as her slaves until they eventually manage to get rid of her by drowning her in a cauldron full of boiling water. How two cultures, so separated by time and distance could produce such similar stories is a great mystery and it is left to the reader's imagination to arrive at a plausible explanation. Later in the story, the girl Jungrecho is warned by her brother Korhon not to touch the beautiful white flowers borne by a nearby tree. In Korhon's absence, their old nemesis, their step mother, comes to their house and entices Jungrecho to pluck one of the forbidden flowers. The gullible Jungrecho plucks one and immediately collapses into a state of coma. This incident parallels an incident from another European fairy tale, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, where an evil queen fools Snow White into munching at a poison laced apple after which the beautiful damsel goes into perpetual sleep until rescued by a fair prince.

Another Karbi folk tale, *The Orphan and the King of Vices*, resembles the allegories of the Chaucerian and Anglo Norman periods of England in the sense that human virtues and vices have been personified and presented as characters.

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The tribal folk tales of almost all the tribes of the North East seem to employ animal characters with the power of human speech just as in the European tradition of the fables. Those of us who delighted in reading Aesop's fables (which are allegedly from Greece) such as *The Hare and the Tortoise*, *The Grasshopper and the Ant* etc and those of allegedly French lineage such as *Chanticleer and the Fox* (which was also recounted in the *Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer) will surely enjoy reading the Lushai folk story of *The Bear, the Tiger and the Monkey*, the Laker story of *The Porcupine and the Barking Deer*, the Khasi tale of *How the Dog came to live with Man*, the Dimasa story of *The Monkey and the Tortoise and the Zeme-Naga tale of A Tiger and a Jungle Cat*. Like the European fables, these tribal stories of animals may or may not have a didactic purpose, but never the less, they offer such variety and appeal with the direct nature of their narrative that they would have put Kipling's *Jungle Book* to shame had they been recorded and published in English first.

Portrayal of Tribal Mythology and Lifestyle

Literature in any form is a reflection of the lifestyle of the people to which it belongs and oral literature in the form of folk tales is no exception. Marshall Cavendish in his *Atlas of Man* says that 'cultural restraints which a language places upon perception impose distinctive patterns of thought upon its speakers.' George Orwell in his essay '*Politics and the English Language*' wrote that just as our thoughts can influence our language, language too has the power to influence our thoughts. It would appear that the best way to understand (and this is totally different from simply 'learning facts about') a community is to learn the language used by the people of that community. The Eskimos of Greenland have numerous descriptive terms to describe 'snow' around which their life revolves. The Nuer people of Sudan, primarily a nomad and cattle herding community, have hundreds of possible ways to describe a cow.

Now since this is not possible for everyone, the next best thing we can study to sample their way of life is their transcreated folk tales, for though these works are not in the original languages in

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which they have circulated for hundreds of years, they try to import the essence of the native languages as accurately as possible. In effect, it becomes like 'reading Karbi or Kuki in English'. Mr. Chandra Prasad Saikia, editor of Mr. Barkataky's book, says in the preface of the same that,

"These tales reveal the astonishing old cultural patterns of the hill tribes, their religious beliefs, their behavior and habits and customs. Popular stories are told primarily to provide entertainment, but as the fields of folk tales and social anthropology are not rigidly separated, we should be able to know a lot about the anthropological development of these people from the stories."

Let us now look at what we can learn about tribal religions from Mr. Barkataky's book. We are aware that due to the influence of European and American missionaries many tribal people converted to Christianity during the last century. Some like the Manipuri community have always maintained a Hindu heritage since time immemorial. As for the large majority of these tribes, we generally ascribe them to be animists and pagans by faith, or at least we believe they were so before the advent of Hinduism, Christianity and Judaism into their abode in the hills and plains of present day Assam and her sister states. In the book *The Misings—Their History and Culture*, edited by Dr. Jawahar Jyoti Kuli, Dr. Nomal Pegu describes the religious affinities of the Mising people,

"By faith, the Mising are worshipers of Donyi (Sun) and Polo (Moon)...."

Dr. Pegu further writes that they refer to the sun as their mother and the moon as their father which is contrary to the popular conception prevalent in most other communities where the sun is usually attributed with male characteristics. The early Egyptians had their Ra, the sun god, and the Greeks had their *Helios*, also a masculine entity. However, pagan faiths around the world have long embraced the idea that procreation is a female prerogative and therefore their most potent deities are often female. In this, the Celtic

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tribes of ancient Britain are very similar to our North Eastern tribes. A surprising discovery that we made during our reading of *Tribal Folk Tales of Assam* is that the Karbis have a folk story, similar in essence to the Biblical story of the Genesis, where they claim to be the first Hindus. This is the Karbi legend of creation. Two gods, Hemphu and Mukrang took counsel together for the creation of the world and with the assistance of many other gods and goddesses, they created the Earth. The first man's name was Bamonpo and he had two wives, one a Karbi, the other an Assamese.

At this point we would like to point out that polygamy was not taboo among the tribes of this region and a man could if he so wished, keep any number of wives depending on his status, livelihood and disposition. Dr. J.J. Kuli in his book *The Misings— Their History and Culture* has written that polygamy was not unknown among the Misings, provided a man could manage such a large family. However, the sons of all his wives could lay equal claim to his property by right of inheritance and this always left the possibility of conflict within the family. Thus, it was simply a matter of 'do it if you can'. Folk tales from various tribes of the North East tell us that polygamy was much common in practice than we think. However, cases of polyandry are unheard of.

Therefore, the Karbi tale of the legend of creation tells us about polygamy in Karbi society. The Karbi wife bore Bamonpo a son whom she named Ram and from the Assamese wife he had a son named Chaputi. Ram took a beautiful woman as his wife and the descendants of Ram and his wife were called Hindus. The Hindus, it is said, conquered the entire world and subsequently began to build a prodigious tower that would lead to their conquest of the heavens. The gods, fearing such an invasion, confounded their speech and scattered them to the four corners of the world. Hence arose all the various tongues of men. Anyone who has ever read the bible will recall that in the *Book of Genesis*, a united humanity of the generations following the Great Flood, speaking in a single language and migrating from the east, came to the land of Shinar. The King James Version of the Bible puts it as:

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"And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered aboard upon the face of the whole earth."

It is astounding to speculate that these people 'migrating from the east' could very well have been the 'Hindus' as described in the Karbi legend of creation.

The food habits of the tribes have been amply described here and the flesh of almost all the animals was consumed. In the Garo tale of *Chela Asanpa*, the Garo equivalent of the Greek Hercules, the prodigal Chela allows a gigantic python to crush a large stag in its coils. Once the serpent has done with the stag, Chela promptly kills the python, and carries both the carcasses with him to enjoy a lavish protein rich feast later. Squeamishness was definitely not part of the tribal mentality in so far as food was concerned. However, beef was and still is not acceptable to most Karbis. In the Karbi tale of 'The Orphan and his Uncles', the evil uncles are soundly beaten by village folk for selling beef. This is not surprising as they claim to be Hindus.

Indigenous medicinal remedies were prepared to cure bodily ailments and complication. From the Karbi tale of *The Orphan and the Giant*, we know that to this day, the karbi people believe that stomach ache can be cured by swallowing a preparation made from dry bamboo shoots. The Garo tale of *Delong* mentions a *Dikge Chipu*, a herb which can render snakebites harmless, *Samtha Gisin*, a jet black creeper which can rejuvenate health and vitality like the proverbial fountain of youth, and a peculiar herb by the name of *Dikge Mongera* which was the tribal version of the modern day Viagra. This herb is a potent aphrodisiac that can greatly enhance sexual vigour.

Conclusion :

It is quite disheartening that such a rich folk tradition has been left largely untouched by contemporary writers of North East India who prefer to write in English. If they feel that these stories would not be up to the European standards and hence best left to their own devices, they are indeed mistaken as we have shown in this paper

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that many of the folk tales are as compact and vibrant as their European counterparts, if not better. We cannot help feeling indebted to such British transcreation writers as Lieut. Col. John Shakespeare (*The Lushai Kuki Clans*), Mr. F. I. Sandy (*Legend of Old Lushai*), Mr. Nevill Edward Parry (*The Lakhers*), Col. Phillip Richard Thornhaugh Gurdon (*The Khasis*), Edward Stack (*The Mikirs*), and our most beloved Dr. Verrier Elwin who did pioneering works in the field of tribal folk tales of the North Eastern tribes. It is indeed sad that very few of our own writers from this region have cared to transcreate more of these folk tales into English which is a globally accepted language and would be very practical in displaying our rich tribal heritage to the rest of the world. This apart, there is a very human reason for their significance. In a region torn apart by ethnic violence, pioneers like S. N. Barkataky are needed more than ever before. Ethnic tensions have always been on the boiling point in the North East; violence is not a modern phenomenon here since inter tribal conflict was a way of life in the olden days. However, the advent of fire arms has alarmingly escalated these ancient underlying tensions. Our military has been making great sacrifices in the line of duty to keep the region relatively peaceful but somewhere along the line, one is always reminded of Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Iraq or our own brand of Maoist insurgencies in central and eastern India. How far can a military solution be effective in stemming violence that traces its roots back to deep seated racial misconceptions in the minds of the feuding factions is left to speculation.

We feel that the comparative method of cultural and language studies is the ideal method to understand our fellow men better, for in understanding there is liking, there is respect. In the contemporary socio-political scenario of the North East, nothing could be more necessary. Given the great variety of tribes and communities here, the effects shall definitely be spontaneous and far reaching. We usually tend to focus more on the customs, rituals and dress when we are studying a particular community, forgetting that more than anything else it is their myths and legends which are the truest reflection of their mindset. We hope that our paper shall somehow

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encourage researchers to tap into this almost untouched spectrum of tribal folk tales and that transcreation as a medium of cultural interpretation would receive its due recognition. ■

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Songs from The Other Life: The Quintessence of Contemporary English Tribal Poetry of North-East India

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"What cannot be said above all must not be silenced but written."

– *Jacques Derrida*

Northeast India is one of the most culturally vibrant regions of the Indian subcontinent. It is the amalgamation of people belonging to different ethnic groups, communities, cultures and faiths. A place renowned for its ethereal beauty and bewildering diversity, North East India is the home of over 166 tribes speaking a range of different languages and adhering to different customs, practices and beliefs.

The region is strikingly different from the rest of India. And for decades now, it has been continuously pushed to the margins as a nonconformity to the general norms and concepts of 'Indian-ness'. This marginalization leads to Northeast's exclusion from the Centre. A confined space is created where the marginalized and 'Otherised' Northeasterners are but 'voiceless subalterns' who are denied their history and identity. In an attempt at homogenization of a culture that is hugely heterogeneous, the mainland India not just segregates, but also denigrates the Northeast as a land of 'tribals'. Baruah (2005) rightly says that "'Northeast' is a representation of a forced homogenization or standardization that has resulted in a situation of deficit democracy." (p. 23)¹

The portrayal of Northeast is in a fashion that Homi Bhabha

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would call 'totalization of culture'. It points at a failure in understanding the diversity of the people of this place and their cultures. Similarly, the term 'tribal' also bears undertones of disregard of the sensitivities of an ethnic group. In differentiating the 'tribal' from the 'non tribal', often, a subordinate status is assigned to 'tribal'. More often than not, 'tribals' are viewed negatively. They are seen as uncivilized savages who are but a source of contamination. Prof. K.C. Baral (2006) argues that "the word 'tribe' is a stereotype, a construct, a product of colonial anthropology and is often politically exploited in our country under the constitutional provision of protective discrimination." (p. 57)² As literary genre, 'tribal literature of Northeast India' remains a contested terrain, for both the terms 'northeast' and 'tribal' hint at attempts to view the region in terms of the self/other binary.

Literature, like all art forms, shares a dialectical relationship with society, history and geography. Therefore, it goes without saying that the poetry produced in the Northeast, in all its magnificence, transcends from being mere literary pieces to being the voices of the gloriously diversified culture of the region. The works of the different poets are just as varied as the diversified backdrops that these poets hail from. It is almost as if the poets of Northeast write to bespeak of their uniqueness and distinctiveness, to subvert the constructed homogenous nomenclature and identity imposed upon them.

Nonetheless, certain unifying characteristics are found in the poetry of the region. Oral traditions, the quest for identity and selfhood, modernity, the hybridization of indigenous cultures as an outcome of colonization, modernity and advent of Christianity, a desire for cultural revivalism and the animistic philosophies of life prevalent in the region are some of the recurrent themes in the poetry of Northeast. Also, as the literature produced in a land plagued by years of terror and violence, the poetry of Northeast India is also to a large extent what Desmond Kharmawphlang calls 'terror lore'. Traces of fear, pain, anger and also of hope, endurance and faith are splattered across the poetry of this region. Besides, the poetry produced in this region is mostly mellifluous and lyrical. Enriching the poetic language are images, metaphors, allusions to indigenous myths and folklores. All these

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factors together have given tribal poetry of Northeast India a life and identity of its own that is very different from that of the poetry produced in the rest of India.

Literature, especially poetry, of Northeast India has acquired momentum in the last few decades. Many writers from the region have conquered the national and global platform and have stirred sensations with their radical and compelling compositions. Besides, attempts are also being made to resuscitate the literature written in the earlier times by re-critiquing them from novel perspectives. Some of the important names in Northeast poetry are Mamang Dai from Arunachal Pradesh, Nilamani Phookun, Anupama Basumatary and Hiren Bhattacharya of Assam, Robin S Ngangom and Saratchand Thiyam of Manipur, Meghalaya's Desmond Kharmawphlang and Easter Syiem, Mizoram's Mona Zote and Cherie L Changte, Tripura's Piyush Raut and Bijoy Kumar Debbarma and also Easterine Iralu, Monalisa Chankiza and Temsula Ao of Nagaland.

Temsula Ao is one of the most critically acclaimed writers of Northeast. A professor by profession, she has been the recipient of many awards including Padmashri in 2007 and the Sahitya Akademi award in 2013. Her most widely known works include two collections of short stories called *These Hills Called Home* (2006) and *Laburum for My Head* (2009) and an essay called *Henry James' Quest for the Ideal Heroine*. *Songs That Tell* (1998), *Songs That Try To Say* (1992), *Songs Of Many Moods* (1995), *Songs From Here and There* (2003) and *Songs From The Other Life* (2007) are some of her notable collections of poetry. An Ao Naga by birth, her works heavily reflect the cultures, traditions, practices and beliefs of the Ao people of Nagaland, a tribe with its own overflowing cultural archive. Though Temsula Ao deals with the issues concerning the Ao tribe in particular, in many ways, her works also capture the quintessence of the 'tribal poetry of Northeast India' in general. Reading through Ao's works is almost like reading through a cross section of the kind of poetry being written in this region.

Some of the salient features of Northeastern tribal poetry present

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in Temsula Ao's collection of poem *Songs From the Other Life* have been briefly discussed below, with examples from selected poems of the collection.

Tribal poetry of Northeast India laments the loss of indigenous culture, traditions, beliefs and history that has come to plague the tribal societies over the years. Tilottoma Mishra (2011) states that, "an intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiations with 'other' cultures is a recurrent feature of the literatures of the seven Northeastern states." (p. xiii)³ The writers of the land, through their writings, attempt a kind of "cultural revivalism". They attempt to overcome the culture shocks they have received by trying to revive and preserve the nuances of their histories and traditions in their works and also by proliferating their histories amongst the younger generations. And this is precisely what Ao does in *Songs From the Other Life*. The very name of the collection hints at this fact, for these are songs from an 'other life'- a life that once was, but is no longer continuing. In versified epigraph of the collection, which is named History, Ao clearly states her objective behind writing- "to redraft history." Temsula Ao (2013) writes:

"These Songs
From the other life
Long lay mute
In the confines
Of my restive mind
.....
.....
They now resonate
In words of new
Discernment
To augment the lore
Of our ancient core." (p.239)⁴

Northeast India is also a land with a rich and exquisite oral tradition. Histories, beliefs, saying, anecdotes and most importantly stories that embody all of these others have continued to be orally passed down to the younger generations. Orality and the collective

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memory are core components of every tribal society of Northeast. These stories capture the very essence of the people's identity. Ben Okri's words "We are part human, part stories" are very true in the case of the different ethnic groups of the Northeast. Here, every community is in possession of a vibrant story-telling tradition. There are bristling galaxies of stories archived in the collective memory of the people which to a large extent determine their ways of life and beliefs. These stories are a dominant influence on the literary creation of the region. Temsula Ao's *The Songs From Other Life* also draws heavily from these indigenous lores, myths and legends. Almost every poem in this collection is preceded by a brief stating of the story that the poem deals with. These help the non-Ao readers to understand the poems better. From the myth of origin of the Nagas from the six stones at Lungerteok, to the tales about the stealth of the Naga script, Ao delves into a number of folk tales. In *The Old Story Teller*, she writes:

"Story telling was my proud legacy
.....

I told stories

As though they ran in my blood
.....

and each story reinforced

my racial reminiscence" (p.240)⁵

Another significant feature of Northeast poetry is that it talks extensively about the issues pertaining to 'colonialism' and its impacts. Colonialism brought in concepts of 'modernity' and 'christianity' to the virgin lands of Northeast India. It led people to question and abandon their native faiths, beliefs and cultures. With modernity grew unchecked ambition and greed that soiled the chaste minds of the tribal folks. Tilottama Mishra (2011) states that "The invasion of an alien culture that lay exclusive claim to modernity and compel the indigenes to be apologetic about their own culture has been the subject matter of much of the writings from the region." (p. xix)⁶ Ao's *Songs From the Other Life* also deals with these issues. In *Blood Of Other Days*, a depiction of the process of colonization and

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its aftermath is also found. Ao writes:

"We borrowed their minds,
Aped their manners
Adopted their gods
And became perfect mimics." (p. 297)⁷

Many of her poems carry an undercurrent of skepticism about the supposed civilization and refinement of the tribals brought about by the colonizers. She is also skeptic about the stigma and derision that has come to be associated with the indigenous ways of life. In the poem *Blood of Other Days*, Ao also succinctly describes the advent of Christianity and the "hybridization of culture" that resulted out of embracing Christianity. She writes:

"Then came a tribe of strangers
Into our primordial territories
Armed with only a Book and
Promises of a land called Heaven
Declaring that our Trees and Mountains
Rocks and Rivers were no Gods
And that our songs and stories
Nothing but tedious primitive nonsense.
We listened in confusion
To the new stories and too soon
Allowed our knowledge of other days
To be trivialized into taboo.

.....
.....

We stifled our natural articulations
Turned away from our ancestral gods
And abandoned accustomed rituals
Beguiled by the promise of a new heaven." (p. 297)⁸

With modernity, there has grown amongst the young incredulity about the age-old societal practices. The dissensions of the youths of the Ao tribe and their irreverence for traditions find expression in *Night of The Full Moon*:

"The youth had prevailed in the huddle

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Where the new strategies were planned,
But some old ones are deeply disturbed
At what was resolved,
Because unlike such other nights
Tonight they walk
With no customary tributes
For their king." (p. 261)⁹

Identity politics are also at play in most of the tribal poetry of Northeast. The nationalist agenda of identity assertion is one of the primary aims of composing poetry in the Northeast. Haunted by feelings of rootlessness and ignominy, the poets of this region proudly vindicate their identities as tribes of Northeast. Temsula Ao is no exception. She is of the belief that despite external forces like 'modernity' which compel many to garb 'hybridized identities', the essence of the core remains unchanged. She seems to adhere to what Bhabha says in *The Location of Culture* (1991): "The effect of mimicry is camouflage... it is not a question of harmonizing." Ao, in the last lines of *Night of the Full Moon*, echoes a similar thought:

"We may have altered our name
But our person remains the same." (p. 266)¹⁰

Ao accepts that preservation of cultures in their pristine and undiluted state is an impossibility. She also acknowledges that this results in the alienation of identities and cultural chaos. And perhaps this is what she hints at in *Nowhere Boatman*. When she describes the ageless boatman as being stuck 'on the river between/ two irreconcilable worlds', she perhaps refers to the conflicts and indecisiveness occurring in the minds of people while choosing between their indigenous identities and their globalized counterparts.

The following quoted lines of *Nowhere Boatman* are powerful lines that evoke the need for restoring the lost identities of the tribes. She writes:

"A soul without status
Is how I see myself

.....
.....

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What advantage

.....
Of relocating well-defined souls
In preordained spaces

.....
An ageless, nameless
Indispensable anomaly."(pp. 246, 247)"¹¹

Animism is yet another significant feature of the tribal poetry of Northeast. The tribal worldview is that all objects of nature are endowed with souls. Animals, plants, rivers, mountains etc, are seen as having a spirit within. These spirits are believed to be in possession of not just human-like qualities but also supernatural powers. In the folklores of the various tribes, man is seen as living in perfect harmony with nature. More often than not, these spirits find a deity-like position in the pantheon. The disruption of the balance of nature, it is believed wrought disastrous consequences. These beliefs also find expression in the poetry of the region. And hence, they offer scopes for reading and analysis from the perspectives of ecocriticism.

Most tribal societies thrive in the lap of Nature and have close associations with the natural environment. Far away from the bustle of urbanization, these societies have lifestyles, rites and practices that are ecofriendly. Thus, it goes without saying that tribal literatures can be analyzed from the perspectives of Ecocriticism. In *Songs From The Other Life* as well, traces of Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism can also be found. These lines from *The Leaf Shredder* highlight how the women of the Ao tribe share an affinity with Nature:

"She remembers at times the vast forests
Where she roamed freely
Venturing into the darkest depths
Where even the bravest did not dare to venture.

.....
She talked to all the creatures

.....
She scoured the deepest forests...." (pp. 254, 255)¹²

Violence, as is believed, is a characteristic feature of the poetry

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of this region. As a region plagued by issues like militancy and insurgency, the violence latent in the land is often reflected in the poetry. However, Temsula Ao's *Songs from the Other Life* talks about a violence of another sort. She critiques the head-hunting tradition of the Ao tribe and empathizes with its victims. A believer in non violence, she says in the preface to *These Hills Called Home* (2006) "there are no winners, but only victims and the results can only be measured in human terms." (p. x)¹³ She dismisses the bloody pursuit of glory as "meaningless heroics" in the poem *Trophies*. The following excerpt from the same poem also echoes her cynicism with the head hunting games:

"These men.....
.....
Are an absurd lot,
Rejoicing over some ugly
Severed heads, stupidly unmindful" (p. 284)¹⁴

Many of emerging writers of the region who represents the new voice in literature of the Northeast have adopted English as their medium of expression and make use of the language of the colonial masters confidently. But, like Rushdie and Chinua Achebe, these writers too continue to use certain words from their native language repertoires. They resort to a *chutneyfication* of their own in order to retain the indigenous flavor in their poetry. Ao too sprinkles her poems with native words, myths and other cultural references. Her poems are splattered with Ao words like '*Lijaba*' (creator), '*Onger*' (Village chief), '*Genna*' (taboo), and '*Shunak*' (a traditional shawl). Thus she renders her poems distinct from the rest.

Easterine Iralu, another Naga writer, in her essay '*Should Writers Stay In Prison ?*' (2011) writes "We do not celebrate invisibility. We fear and reject invisibility."¹⁵ Temsula Ao's poetry has brought Northeast out of the shadows of nameless anonymity. It has captured the imagination of the nation and has, to a large extent, succeeded in doing away with the injustice meted out to the literati of Northeast. It has, to a large extent, triumphed in effacing the dismissive neo-colonial attitude of 'mainland India' towards the 'tribals' and the 'the

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tribal writings of Northeast'. Vindicating the inimitability and uniqueness of her land and people, Ao dismantles the 'colorless homogeneity' superimposed upon the region. Just as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* writes back to the empire, Temsula Ao, through her poems, writes back to the 'mainland India' wherein the tribal writings of Northeast are usually met with disdain and apathy. Besides, these poems, deconstructs and demystifies the 'tribal constructs' and the tribal worldview that regulates their life. The emerging writers from Northeast India bear the responsibility of projecting ethnic specificity as well as aesthetic universality and Ao, with all her powerful poetry, has succeeded in doing that. Her poems not only assert the distinctiveness of tribal literature of Northeast, but also have a universal appeal. ■

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Oral Literature and Culture : A North-East Perspective

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Oral literature is a term generally applied to spoken literary traditions such as folk tales, musical theater, proverbs, riddles, life histories, plays, epic poems and historical recitations. Unlike written literary genres, oral literature is conveyed or passed down to future generations by word of mouth, typically through memorization and recitations. It is considered as verbal art form.

Literature is a facet of a culture. Its importance is understood in terms of the culture from which it springs and its purpose is clear only when the reader understands and accepts the assumptions on which it is based, and develops an awareness of other cultures. Contemporary readers, forgetting the origins of western epic, ballads, dramatic forms, are inclined to regard literature as something written. Yet it is valued regardless of language and mode of presentation. In setting the ground work for my seminar topic, it is important to first discuss the oral tradition and its place particularly in the tribal world view. According to one of the most prominent contemporary practitioner of oral literature in Native America, Navarre Scott Momaday,

*"The oral tradition is that process by which
The myths, legends, tales and lore of a
People are formulated, communicated
and preserved in language by word
of mouth, as opposed to writing."*

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Oral literature, unlike that which is written, not only transmits an entire culture, it is more than a record of that culture, it is the creative source of the collective and individual selves. It offers a tradition of performances in which the performer and the audience are mutually engaged and through which the complex of native knowledge and belief is maintained. It is a living body and is in continuous flux, enabling it to accommodate itself to the real circumstances of a people's lives as it embraced all levels of human experience.

David Bleich's essay "The Materiality of Language and the Pedagogy of Exchange" in which he asserts that language in its materiality is a commodity of exchange, for a child learns the words from others and the same is continued through his/her school and college days or his/her life. "From the earliest moments of its use, language is being exchanged : offered; repeated re-offered, constituting a relationship. The actual words and phrases are taken from others, put into new contexts, sometimes changed, and then repeated. Although it may not seem that way to adults, the teaching and learning of language is mutual, collective and reciprocal, as well as individual. It is neither just reciprocal nor just individual but both" [Pedagogy 1.1 (2001) 117]. Bleich's assumptions on language can be extended to our understanding of oral literature or folklore as a "verbal art", for it can be placed in the context of language in exchange. Here I shall like to give one example underlining in what ways folklore is valuable and how has its study not only putatively significant but culturally loaded. J.L. Handoo in a comprehensive introduction to the volume "Folklore in Modern India" discusses the various ways that the folklore is entrenched in our lives whether it is religion, politics, nationalism, gender or mass culture. He maintains that both synchronically and diachronically, the "folk metaphors" are in circulation "in the actual regularities of Indian society and civilization....." (1998:1). Handoo firmly believes that "in these regularities, the folk and the non-folk or written forms have not contributed in a mutually exclusive manner; they have, in fact, been actively contributing together in shaping these processes, and in a highly interdependent manner; yet, I realize that the folk or oral forms

have, by and large, retained their characteristics perhaps due to the compulsions of historical and social conditions - both in terms of form and meaning, and more importantly function" (1998:1). The function of the folk have been ever expanding not only that the folk elements have been successfully grafted and embedded into Postmodern fictional narrative by way interrogating the normative but also being deployed for political and ideological purposes.

Birendra Datta in his article "Changing Functions of Traditional Narrative : The case of North East India" cites Bascom saying that "functions such as social authority, social control and cultural continuity are more intimately connected with myths, these are nonetheless brought into legends and tales" (1998:78). Exemplifying the use of myths in reconstructing ethnic identities for Political Solidarity in the North East among many tribal groups, Birendra Datta has underlined the importance of revisiting mythic lore specifically for political and ideological purposes. Datta maintains that the various tribal groups of the region have drawn freely from their stocks of traditional narrative lore in fostering their respective solidarity movements of various kinds :

"Thus the Karbis name their organizations and institutions after such legendary figures as Rangcina (The divine singer who taught the arts of poetry and music to the Karbis), Thong NKbe (the celebrated Karbi general of a Khasi King), and Rongpharbi (the legendary heroine who resisted Kachari oppression). Propagators of the currently raging Bodo self-assertion movement are eloquent about exploits of legendary Bodo heroes like Basiram Jahlao.

.....The Seng Khasi movement of the Khasis was started in 1899 with the object of saving Khasi traditional culture from being degenerated by the onslaught of Christian influence The leaders of the movement made use of Khasi mythology in building up the new look Khasi religion ... What is significant, if not intriguing, is that it is not only the followers of the traditional Khasi

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religion but also Christian Khasis, including the modernized and the sophisticated, who are equally if not more, concerned about the preservation of such myths and legends (1998: 84-84).

These two examples : one (from Handoo) a general framework within which verbal art functions in the socio-cultural context of India and the other (from Datta) in its specific particularity where it is deployed for ethnic and ideological politics clearly demonstrate that verbal art is not a fossilized resource locked up in an irretrievable past but a generative discourse that creatively links the past to the present.

All narrative is inherently a search for identity through story; the myth, the web of collective memories and ideas that create an identity are a part of the self. In most native culture like the Sub-Saharan African groups or the indigenous people of Australia, other tribal populations across the world but more so in Native America, this sense of identity was intimately linked to the landscape which is at once the place of origin, a source of sustenance, and a sanctuary for future generations, and has often played a significant role in a story or an outcome of a conflict. The continuity and accuracy of the oral tradition are reinforced by a sense of place. Momaday believes that man tells stories to understand his experience, and that life is a story, story is a real experience and name is the concentration and preserver of personal being. In a 1990 interview with Laura Coltelli, he said :

"That oral tradition which goes back probably to beyond the invention of the alphabet; the storyteller was the man who was standing with a piece of charcoal in his hand, making, placing, the wonderful images in his mind's eye on the wall of the cave, that's probably one of the origins of American literature. I have an idea that American literature really begins with the first human expression of man in the American landscape, and who knows how far back that goes; but it certainly antedates writing, and it probably goes back a thousand years or more."

In this verbal Universe, stories about the creation and emergence of human beings and animals continue to be told and retold or

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reshaped to meet the changing needs of the audience, and versions are added by contemporary storytellers. In the tribal worldview, for instance, the emergence into a precise cultural identity arise from the earth the natural springs which are not only sources of water but of continuance of life itself; the flora and fauna are but the integral parts of the human realm. The Earth as the Mother creator of all things also houses other forms such as the rocks which are imbued with being and spirit. According to the Ao tribe of Nagaland (NE India) their first forefathers emerged out of the earth at the place called Lungterok which literally translates as Six stones, as this Poem, Stone - People from Lungterok by Temsula Ao illustrates :

*Lungterok
The six stones
Where the progenitors
And forebears
Of the stone - people
Were born
Out of the womb
Of the earth ...
... The worshippers
Of unknown, unseen
Spirits
Of trees and forests
Of stones and rivers ...*

Thus rivers, mountains, waterfalls, rocks, forests are the abodes of spirits and often appear as characters in the lore. For instance, the Khasis of Maghalaya (NE Indian) locate a sacred space in the sacred grove, Khlaw Kyntang in Mawphlang. From ancient times this forest, surrounded by monoliths created in the memory of the dead elders, is believed to be the abode of deities with positive and negative powers which the tribe worshipped. All rituals were centered on such spaces and no Kingship could function without them. The Mawphlang grove stands undisturbed because it is believed to be the home of the Basa, the guardian spirit which takes the form of the Khla lum (tiger) and the bsein (Snake). While the tiger god is regarded

as the good spirit which protects, and brings about prosperity to those who invoke it, the snake is said to plague those who offend it by Picking or Cutting any plant within this forest, with afflictions. A review of literature of these culture reveals that the primordial landscape, the values and beliefs, the folklore embeddings and the challenges they face are all an intrinsic element of their ethos.

The Panchatantra in India has five books with eighty seven fables and magic tales compiled between 3rd and 5th centuries AD. The Purpose is to teach moral values of the sons of royalty, and these tales found their way to Europe through oral folklore channels by way of Persian and Arabic translations. Among the Khasis, there is a tale about the snail who with his astuteness beat the stag in a race to the weekly fair called Iew Luri Lura. The Mizos of Mizoram (NE India) are familiar with Chhura or Chhurbura, the simpleton through whose experiences one gets an insight into the life and beliefs of the people. Nepali Oral tradition is identified by hauntology or Dantyakatha which assumes that man and ghost are but the seen and the unseen aspects of life. Analogies are found in other cultures and this shows that the child and dreamer in us acknowledge that we are "Unfinished animals."

Indigenous cultures have an animate respect for all creation as sensible and powerful. The myths, ceremonies, songs, legends, folktales, oratorical skills bring the isolated self into harmony with the reverent mystery of things- a concept of wholeness and balance that the Navajo tribe of Native America calls hozho meaning beauty. These chants and lore emanate from such a principle. One cannot but make a special mention of the Bauls of West Bengal. The genre of these mystic minstrels is folk music but their songs which philosophise on love, the mystery of life, nature, destiny and the ultimate union with the divine, are not written. It is said that Lalan Fakir the greatest of all Bauls, had continued to compose and sing for decades and it was only after his death that people began to compile his rich repertoire. The dhohorie that forms an interesting Lokgeet of Nepali is a musical debate between male and female singers punctuated with wit and humour and is said to continue for days till a winter is declared.

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Proverbs, riddles, oratory and urban legends - the last being a recent development rooted in real events or fictitious ones - also form part of the oral tradition. Among the Nepalis the Gaon Khanay Katha or 'village devouring tales' are riddles which elicit responses from audience who offer villages in mock-trade for the correct answer. Momaday is of the opinion that oral literature is living speech. When it is reduced to writing, it loses its vitality; when you translate it, you freeze it. Much of its flexibility is lost in a passive reading of written texts. The oral tradition is however, tenuous because it is always one generation away from extinction. It is modern day "Word - senders" who take these voices from the past and send them into the future by 'telling their lives' and allowing them to be recorded. These cultures are centuries old. A written renewal of the tales, songs, prayers, myths, lore have evolved, but it is in remembering that, there is strength and continuance throughout the generations. ▣

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Land, Culture & the People : Images in English Poetry from India's North-east

Piklee Buragohain

Rupam Gogoi

Eminent journalist and an expert in Northeast India affairs Subir Bhaumik, in the preface to his book 'Troubled Periphery', has opined:

The North East has been seen as the problem child since the very inception of the Indian republic. It has also been South Asia's most enduring theatre of separatist guerilla war, a region where armed action has usually been the first, rather than the last, option of political protest. (Bhaumik xiv)

He has also mentioned at the very start of the preface to the book the divergent opinions given by David Ludden and Aditya Mukherji regarding the northeastern region of India. In Bhaumik's words Ludden's concern is :

....whether the North East challenges the separation of the colonial from the national. Or whether it raises the possibility of reorganization of space by opening up of India's boundaries. (Bhaumik xiv)

Mukherji does not accede to Ludden's opinion. Bhaumik states that he :

....challenged Ludden and the likes by insisting that Indian nation evolved out of a national movement against imperialism and did not seek to impose, like

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in the West, the master narrative of the majority on the smaller minorities in the process of nation building.
(Bhaumik xiv)

However, despite the strong stand made by the noted Indian historian his words incur the risk of not being followed in letter and spirit in the context of India's troubled northeastern frontier. The separatist tendency is almost as old as independent India and though the dynamics and driving forces behind insurgency has changed drastically over the years yet has not subsided. It is interesting to note that Mizo National Front is the result of Mawtam that had hit the Mizo Hills in the late 1970s which ultimately led to the creation of Mizoram. As things stand today much of the political unrest is because of the existence of a trend, as the separatist rhetoric goes that Mukherji has associated with the West and not India - the imposition of the majority's 'master narrative' on the people of the region. Paul Lyngdoh is one of the budding political leaders of Meghalaya. Acutely aware of the nightmares lashing his society, his poetry attempts to shake off his tribe out of its slumber. Deeply concerned about the rapidly changing patterns of social demography he wants his people to realize the hazard that is being posed by expressions as high sounding as 'national integration'. He has seen the truth that lies beneath these innocuous expressions in the form of influx of other cultures that have started to pose as threats for the natives. Lyngdoh's Meghalaya, Khasi Hills to be more precise, is no more the Scotland of the East the imperial rulers once boasted of it to be. Probably its beauty and the rich natural wealth has taken its own toll. Tourists and entrepreneurs gathered around Lyngdoh's home to leave behind their own foot prints. His for sale is a poignant account of how his land and people are being exploited by the 'outsiders' - a terminology that is debatable considering the application of it in case of the citizens as well. The poet, and his people, believe that in disguise of the need to create a pan-Indian identity what is being stealthily snatched is the unique socio-cultural identity of a tribe and hence he says :

For sale,

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This battered, autistic land with its lucre-laden earth,
Our precious minerals, medicinal herbs, rare orchids
And trees and fields and waters
All those, and all else.

(Ngangom, Robin S. & Kynpham S. Nongkynrith 171)

The angst of the poet is sharp and the desperation and discontentment has every chance of exploding in the form of armed rebellion. When home becomes 'unfamiliar', 'uniqueness' yields place to 'strangeness', the poet cannot but brood over the turn of events and act, as an artist as well as an activist. The desperation and the contemporary indecision makes it impossible for the poet to go to the root of his dilemma and seek a way out of it or to trace out whom to blame for the current state of affairs in a scenario where the issue of Khasi identity hangs precariously. In *Imported Nightmares* he says :

I do not know what saddens me more
The bitterness of a fellow poet
Disowned by the soil of his birth,
Or seeing my brothers importing nightmares
From that deathly valley
To haunt the happy sleep
Of our hills.

(Ngangom, Robin S. & Kynpham S. Nongkynrith 174)

Paul Lyngdoh's anxieties are many - commercial over-exploitation of his state's natural resources negating the expectations of the common people, marital relationships between girls of his tribe and men from the plains which obliquely implies that the plainsmen get a safe refuge and reap benefits of their spouse's property because of being a matrilineal society. He has derogatorily, coloured with angst, used expressions like 'pot belly' to denote those people. He wants to create a consciousness among the people regarding their 'tribal roots' and :

Our pride, values, work culture,
Our sense of shame, our collective conscience, (Dancing Earth)
For Sale reminds one of the large scale protests against Uranium

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mining at Domiasiat by students, social activists and ecologists - their apprehension being the ill impact of such massive scale mining. Domiasiat is another location of exploitation encouraged by mining lobbies and myopic policy makers without honouring the sentiments of the local people. One can witness a liberal presence of nature in the poems - whether it be in the native languages or English - in writings from Northeast and one reason might be the rich flora and fauna of the region which have become a part of the myths, legends and folk tales of the region. The practitioners of the indigenous tribal religions are animistic and their customs are rooted in the natural world. Even today amidst decay and degeneration in the natural world there remains certain rites that bind them closely to the forest resources. Mamang Dai's poem *Man and Brother* is based on the adimyth that man and tiger are brothers and killing a tiger invites wrath. It also focuses on the man-forest relationship and Dai's sentiment is akin to that of Lyngodh's tribesmen :

I go where the forest is unknown.
Under the sacred tree I will place my bow,
The night will be long,
The wild birds are restless
But I will wear my disguise
And wait.
Green intoxication
Fading swiftly to darkness
Alone I wait, wearing my amulet,
Waiting where I can hear best
Instructions from my ancestors.

(Dai 50)

It is for such a bond that exists between man and nature that an act like mining ores has been associated with the issue of a tribe's identity and existence. For most it is an environmental crisis but in northeast it is a threat to an entire tribe.

Uddipana Goswami shuttles between the region of her domicile and the Indian mainland in terms of the vantage point of the poet speaker. With a significant chunk of youth from northeast having started to travel towards the metros and other big cities seeking

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greater and better opportunities, we now have people who look at their home from the other side of the mainland-periphery divide. In case of India's northeast the space of segregation is the Chicken's Neck which acts both as a psychological as well as a political barrier between the region and the rest of the nation. Fed by media, internet, phone calls and letters to and from home they have their own image of the land they have left behind them which is watered by occasional visits to 'home'. Despite the spatial separation, Goswami's thoughts are rooted in the land of her birth which has of late caught the imagination of the mainland media and government agencies for reasons ranging from national security to international business to armed insurgency. The blurb of Goswami's we called the river red reads :

In times of political turbulence social upheavals, the individual cannot remain isolated. The poetic conscience comes to understand gradually that love and the agony of personal loss are not independent of the larger social, historical and political environment. And with this understanding comes a sense of responsibility - towards one's identity, community and nationleading up to the point where the personal entity is fused with the political identity. (Goswami blurb)

Rootedness is one of the prominent trails of a good number of poets from this region. The love for one's nation in the case of the patriotic responding from the Indian mainland is replaced by a concern for this region. Despite the heterogeneity of cultures there is a unifying factor that is not to be encountered in either the pan Indian discourses of the Indian mainland or even the separatist rhetoric in some provinces. 'Bohag is not Merely a season is Goswami's attempt to present her home in difficult times. Bihu is a magnificent unifier in Assam when cultural differences sink, at least for the time being and at such times the poet could feel the hardships of being at home in politically volatile times :

It is bihu back home

Perhaps there is bohag in the air

Perhaps death.

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Perhaps dhol-pepa-gagana sound

Perhaps bullets.

Perhaps the kopou is in bloom

Perhaps blood.

(Goswami 16)

Despite of all such odds she longs to be at home or in other words the feeling of safety attainable from being away from home gets weaker to the desire of getting back to home. Tell me who should I be ? possibly beings out the socio-cultural differences of the region in a realistic light. The tribal and non-tribal divide which can be sensed in the non-tribal states of the region has been clearly stated and this feature is enough to dissolve the veil of homogeneity woven about the people by the media or academia. Culture becomes so strong a public phenomenon that the private nuances are nowhere to be seen. In Fact what is seen is an amalgamation of the cultural ethos and political operations. She says :

Tell me who should I be ?

What shall be my identity ?

Born a Brahmin, raised a human being

And deprived of pork and beef,

Eating some of the tastiest meats on earth

For me has become a political act.

With every mouthful I am forced to remember

The deep divide between me and my 'tribal' friends.

(Goswami 55)

Very worried at the ethnic divisions visible in the region she thinks of a way out through a different medium - food. Very eager to bring in ethnic reconciliation Uddipana Goswami comments :

Can the way to ethnic reconciliation

Life through the stomach and in the taste buds ?

(Goswami 55)

Goswami's idea might appear out of the box but such concern can be traced in the book scrolls Pof Strife by Homen Borgohain & Pradipta Borgohain while talking about the refusal of a former Assam Chief Minister to taste the flesh of dog and the resultant intensification of the divide between the visiting delegates of Assam and the local Nagas.

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There are times that bring the people of the region together by dissolving the intraregional differences but the times are more often than not the times when somebody from the region is victimized through racial discrimination or prevented from enjoying certain constitutional privileges including liberty.

Yumlam Tana's *The Kurta and the Pyjama* raises the issue of tribal identity. Tracing subtle but visible cultural changes appearing in the Nyishi society of Arunchal Pradesh the poet starts with clothes, then talks about different religious faiths and then arrives at a plane from where he can witness the unseemly awareness of his tribal identity crafted by the those on the other side of the socio-political divide (being a tribal has to do more with politics than culture today). He asserts :

You see, I am a Nyishi

A tribal claiming to be a man. (Nongkynrih & Ngangom 13)

Desmond L. Kharmawphlang speaks of the insider-outsider divide which lies deep rooted in the minds of the people of northeast India. The disbelief and suspicion reach such extents that even marriages between girls of tribal communities and boys from the plains are banned thereby converting an individual (or familial) matter into an issue of social or even ethnic significance. Meghalaya has been the witness to many diktats preventing marriages between its women and men from other regions. Metropolitan is a unifying term but not for the Khasis who feel that a metropolitan culture will have adverse impact on their culture and tradition. This apprehension of the people along with the unwelcome arrival of plainsmen which Kharmawphlang equates with the British as being another group of oppressors have been excellently shown by the poet in *The Conquest* :

But in the wavering walk of time

There came those from the sweltering plains,

From everywhere

You stricken land, how they love

Your teeming soil, Your bruised children.

One of them told me, 'You know,

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Yours is a truly metropolitan city.'

(Nongkynrih & Ngangom 134 - 5)

Monalisa Changkija talks of the undersirable changes coming about in the landscape of her homeland in *Of a People Unanswered* and she is critical of the claims of the outsiders that progress and prosperity in her tribal homeland has been brought in by them. She expresses her unhappiness over their diktats on matters political as well as personal on how to lead her life and questions the genuineness of their concern :

But I wonder why you remain silent

When I say we are hungry

....

But I am more

Than a machine

Or a mass of molecules.

(Nongkynrih & Ngangom 216-7)

Changkija appears to voice the ruminations of the people of her region as regards alleged attempts to dilute their cultural identity.

That all is not well in Robin S. Ngangom's home is evident from his unease regarding the violent and unsavoury developments materializing in front of him. In Imphal he says :

There is something sadly inevitable

About this land, something inescapable,

Like a beast which stalks its own death,

Like an ominous prophecy

(Ngangom 63)

A war zone that Manipur has turned into today the cultural diversity of the state is of secondary concern as violence hardly leaves the people enough scope to celebrate their rich and diverse culture. In this eulogy on Pacha Meetei entitled to Pacha he says:

You only said : 'One's homeland is dear. I

Have not seen all of this land. I have not

Been able to tread the grass that grows there.

(Ngangom & Nongkynrih 206)

Deeply aware of the natural beauty and cultural richness of his home and its people Ngangom's grief at the decay of such values

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is evident in poems like *When you do not Return* where the symbolic 'you' which can be the sublime humane values or the elusive peace or a messiah whose departure has brought in all mismortunes to his people. Whatever be that 'you' the poet ends the poem by :

...Asking you
To return to the hills, on
Grey pages I send you happiness
Because it has left my home.

(Ngangom & Nongkynrih 200)

Thus the image is of a race where the populace is trapped between warring factions and dissenting political power centres resulting in a gradual fainting of the rich cultural heritage. The common people are helpless hostages in this murky web of events.

The poets under discussion appear to be intensely aware of the sense of otherisation among the people of northeast India. For many, a pan Indian culture is more a threat than a comforting homogenizing experience. However with an intense insider-outsider consciousness smearing the thought processes of the people the centralization marginalization dialectics also has an intra-regional essence in northeast. This leads to an attempt on the part of many to remain cocooned within their homes but the results are for all to see. It's the struggle for an exclusive homeland that most of the insurgent groups professing to represent various tribes are fighting for but again the power centres develop among the marginalized to add to the complexity. The poets have showcased the cultural richness as well as cultural diversity of the region and it is such a mosaic that beauty of art lies. The term 'north east' itself comes under the scanner as such a grouping might lead to the overlooking of the inherent diversity of the region but the grouping does appear to have some sense when we witness the lingering sense of dissatisfaction over the contemporary state of affairs, identity crisis and the sense of being different from mainland India that marks many poems composed by poets of the region. The public sector of culture (political, social, professional, economic, intellectual aspects) and the private sector of culture (emotional, sexual,

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domestic aspects) together determine the essence of a person's being. The case with northeast India seems to be an eternal tussle between forces from within and outside the region as well as between intra regional forces to shape the public sector of culture and the resistance provided against such an approach. The poets are very aware and have expressed their apprehensions over such a line of development. An in the community specific endeavours to preserve the aspects of the public sector of culture the intensely private nuances of culture are pushed to the backdrop thereby dissolving the fine line between the public and the private without the realization that culture is rooted in the people and then it grows to take the entire society into its folds. Amidst all odds the poets write on a region that they identify as their home, a home that they cannot leave despite all the hardships and trauma that socio-political developments sometimes inflict on them and the people that crowd the hills and the valleys. The Naga poet Nini Lungalang, in the poem *Going Home*, has beautifully presented this wish to get back to home and stay there whatever be the circumstances :

So I return to where I began,
I go, because I must :
I return to the dust of which I was formed
And the air that breathes life in me-
And yet - through the misty heights I see,
Your face strange now, shattered, refracted
In the prism of my tears. ■

(Nongkynrih & Ngangom 229)

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Women in Arupa Patangia Kalita's writings (*English Translations of Phelani and Dawn*)

Deepsikha Saharia

Arupa Patangia Kalita (1956), is a well known feminist voice of North-East India. She has three novels, nine short story collection, a children's novel and works of translation in English, Hindi, Bengali and Bodo. Her most famous works, *Phelani* and *Dawn*, have been translated into English by Deepika Phukan and Ranjita Biswas respectively. In this paper I would like to discourse on the English translations of these two novels of Arupa Patangia Kalita. The purpose of the study of her novels is to device facts about the social, economic, political condition of the state (Assam) during the insurgencies through stories recalled from personal experience and events of distant past. There is an insight into the psyche of the women characters that are torn on account of tensions, generated by the discord between the individual and the surroundings.

Arupa Patangia Kalita is a post colonial Indian writer of the North East. She has dealt with the Assamese society in its rich and varied customs and views the predicament of women in different dimensions. The current literary scenario in Assam is dominated by women writers who are unique and exceptional in their own ways - Anamika Bora, Monika Devi are some very young, talented writers in their stories, and they have absorbed the traumatic, gruesome reality of the period and place we are living in, and have used their pen as protest. Insurgency has changed the landscape of Assamese literature and a new genre almost of texts with this traumatic

experience as the backdrop has emerged in recent years. For the last over half a decade Assam is reeling under the pressure of an unending agitation. Immigration to Assam is considered to be the major cause of this problem. Communal riots and other factional feuds have very often disturbed the peace of the country and that of Assam in particular. Insurgency related violence continues in the north east Indian state of Assam.

Arupa Patangia Kalita writes with an intense sense of awareness for the cultural loss as a result of violence in Assam and tries to reconstruct tradition by providing space to the women which is denied to them by society. Her works provide these oppressed and marginalized women the space and freedom that is denied them by society. She says, "I'm a woman and hence I write about women in my society. In this uneven society that I belong to, I always feel I have a lot of say about women, as a woman.I take a gendered view of it. I have explored this in Singari Ghar also where I have written about women being used as ransom by the Ahom kings of Assam. In Sotalor Kathakata (Conversations in the Backyard), I have explored the plight of the windows in the colonial period."

Historically speaking, women in Assam had always played a significant role. The diverse genres like myth, legends, folktales, ballads, folksongs, proverb, riddles etc, show that the condition of women in Assam have been significant, inspite of the fact that Assamese society is primarily a patriarchal society. Participation in political life, including community decision making initiation, and active involvement in religious and cult life, have been enjoyed by women, despite existing patriarchal structures. Nineteenth century Assam, addressed the woman question clearly, forcefully and with considerable emotional fervor. Jaduram Deka Barua came down heavily on the tradition of suttee in a language suggestive not only of his deep sense of personal outrage but also revulsion against a savage practice treated as tradition.

It is impossible to understand the Assamese woman today without having perspective of her roles, functions and responsibilities she had traditionally held within the family (her role as a daughter,

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wife, mother etc.) Arupa Patangia Kalita portrays women who function within the traditional Assamese society. They challenge the unchanging docile and rural women who accept the male oriented societal norms without questioning it. While she accepts the significance of wife hood and motherhood, she also expresses the dilemma in the lives of the protagonists whose difficulties are instigated by the conflict between desired personal aspirations and endorsed societal norms. The women protagonists have problems, but try to solve them. She establishes the need for her traditional protagonist to fight against oppressive social and sexual codes within the society.

The novel 'Dawn' (Ayananta) is set in the years before independence, revolving around a young girl, 'Bina', growing up in a small Assamese town. The story traces are girl's eventful journey, who is forced to grow beyond her years, by the insensitive society and her insecure family. Bina is a spirited girl, a champion of underdogs and outcastes. She cannot withstand injustice, and as she grows up, is exposed to the evil practices of the world, she tries to improve other people's lives and her own fate by defying the age old customs, shaking off the rusted shackles of superstition, and tries to break the crumbling walls that strangulate the free spirit of a woman. Bina shares the centre stage with lots of strong women like Jashoda, Jeuti and Tagar. The novel ends with the promise of a new dawn.

Her writings can be thus read within a feminist frame work because it introduces gender as a fundamental category in literacy analysis, enabling the critic to see representation in texts as mediated by sexual differences - because as Elaine Showalter has argued - "A women's text generates its own experience and symbols which are not merely the reverse of the male tradition as simply an imitation or revision of the writings of her male predecessors but a multidimensional discourse embedded in both female and male traditions," since women's vision complements men's patriarchal view - both providing an enriched encounter. We see in her writings a continual need for deconstructing the stereotypical female images

created by both men and women writers and critics. The 'feminine gaze is' apparent in all her works. She is a postmodern feminist writer who relates to specific issues of women in the Assamese culture and society. The conflict between women's loyalty to a dominant patriarchal tradition and their compelling need to break through the conventional barrier has left the women in a double bind of mind, where a feeling of doubt and isolation, and a feeling of conviction and assertion, alternate with each other. As a matter of fact the women are caught between two cultures and hence, they are forced to lead a marginal existence after leading them to a dead end, into a culmination point of rootlessness and alienation leaving them exposed to a severe identity crisis. The modern Assamese women driven by a sense of logic and by an awareness of the spirit of the new gender role, contemplate embracing a different sensibility. Self fulfillment is an attainable dream; therefore they preserve their integrity and fulfill their need to exist as individuals in a society that still operates on a system of patriarchal conventions. In transmitting their own philosophy for living, women and their followers have redefined their old role definition. The writer is constantly referring to their philosophy in Dawn.

Arupa Patangia Kalita is referring to the past history and memory making historical judgments about contemporary issues, because it is only through knowledge of its history that society can have knowledge of itself to know the present. In this way one can be aware and familiar with other experiences and add to our life's knowledge and to make people bring about change in the socio cultural environment affected by it. Haunted by the past she writes with a view to enable her to bring desirable changes in the society, torn apart by ethnic conflicts insurgency and separatist movements. She also looks at the changes in values in the society brought about by modernization and use of technology and mechanization which has resulted in the demographic process of migration, the general migratory trend from rural to urban areas in search of lucrative employment. As a consequence of globalization, there have been changes in the political and economic domains, which has affected

the cultural realms.

All her women are progressive and they resist in their own small ways; be it 'Binapani' and 'Tagar' in Dawn or the group of women in Phelani. In Phelani, she addresses violence against women in conflict who face discrimination in various forms - sexual abuses, rapes, physical attacks, forced prostitution, exploitation and other forms of human right violation. She speaks of the women who have been the most vulnerable group to violence and abuse of human rights (basic rights like the right to food, clothing, shelter, health, education, gainful employment and permanent security) as a result of the socio political unrest in Assam. The novel 'Phelani' is based on real life events. The story revolves around the experiences of a woman Phelani. Her name means thrown 'away' - so called because as her mother lay dying in the burning riot torn village, Phelani was thrown into a swamp and left to die. But against all odds Phelani and thousands like her survived. The rootless inhabitants of the refugee camps and makeshift shanties, whose stories from the core of 'Phelan', are swept along by the wind and thrown onto new hostile terrain, but they cling on with tenacity to take root again and again. It is a story of courage, survival, of ethnic conflict and violence that tears people and communities apart in the most brutal savage way. The story exposes the bloody horror of ethnic violence, which uproot Phelani and her family. It describes people being skinned alive, their fingers fed to dogs; baby corpses split down the middle; of entire village being, massacred. It is an account of Assamese insurgency and militancy and a glimpse of a historical moment.

Phelani covers the tumultuous period of Assam history from 1983 to 1998. It starts with the Assam movement that continued between 1979-1985 and ends with the plight of the people affected by the violent activities of the united Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and other terrorist outfits of Assam with separatist tendencies. The writer also looked at the role played by surrendered ULFA member's popularly known as SULFA's She has, spoken about women thrown away like garbage, oppressed, marginalized rejected, but in this state also, vibrantly asserting life. And she glorify their

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existence. They are women from the lower class, living from day to day, and they continue to live ...

The Story of Phelani is based on real life events in Assam, that has seen insurgencies and agitations, ethnic killings and communal strife, violence and bloodshed through the late 1970s and up until the present. The novel recreates some of the most gruesome and devastating events that took place during that period both at the time of the anti-foreigner agitation and then later ethnic clashes between Assam's diverse communities. The writer says - "Blood soaked clothes were found from the bamboo clumps. The two bodies that were brought out from the septic tank were both devoid of hair. Then faces were half burnt.... These people have come from Siligurieven the weapons have come from SiliguriThe people were sure bad times were returning. These would be more killings and more deathsAnd then, curfew was damped in the town" (page 286-287)

As a result, an armed conflict can have a plethora of widespread repercussions for women within the family as well as the community. Women become victims of disrupted social networks within the community. They are often compelled to shoulder the financial responsibilities of their families in the absence of men, who are either active participants of the conflict as combatants or have been killed or gone missing. Furthermore, in situation of armed conflict when families are subjected to forced displacement, having to leave their hearth and home and more to a completely new environment for survival - women often find themselves worse off. In the North East the women being exposed to conflict of varying forms and degrees for several decades has made women of this region prone to multiple forms of violence - both physical and psychological. Women have also been subjected to varying form of gender based violence, including sexual assaults, coercion bodily harm and injuries and associated repercussion such as broken homes, single mother, domestic violence etc. All this has been narrated in 'Phelani, by the woman characters, through gossip and story telling. Ratna's Ma, Jon's Ma Moni's Ma (Phelani), Minoti Jaggu's wife, Kali boori,

Latu's Ma are such women who have faced violence, both physical and psychological. They sell 'moori' 'murhas' patched quilts, eggs, green vegetables for a living, since their men cannot give them a secure life at the backdrop of terrorism and rising social unrest, resulting in poverty, unemployment, illiteracy; leading the people towards anti-social activities. The growing social insecurity is shown. In such a scenario, women have been found to play a prominent role in rebuilding conflict ridden societies and social resources - women who have to put up a brave front to make ends meet; women who often have to straddle multiple roles, of a mother, a social activist and a breadwinner in their day to day lives, as they continue to live in a strife torn community. Apart from their day to day existence, these women undertake several activities in their efforts to rebuild their community, in trying to cope with the fallouts of a conflict, they have to organize themselves to fight against the proliferation of societal evils such as alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity flesh trade and the biggest threat of all HIV Aids. Rape as a weapon of armed conflict is visible in many towns and villages in the region most of these atrocities have been carried out by security personal who have been deployed in the region ostensibly with the responsibility of 'protecting' its population from the excesses of the non state armed actors.

Arupa Patangia Kalita writes on national issues, colonial and postcolonial politics and the dynamics of male-female relationships. She chooses to protest and dramatise the injustices against women in entrenched situations - the predetermined sex roles that leaves women in marginalized and disadvantageous position. Her novels are written on the assumption that women insist on liberation from patriarchal social structure and continuously looking for freedom from social and moral constraints. Her writing focuses attention on both the manifestation of a female sensitivity, a feminine reality, and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality. The concerted efforts of women to change their cultural situation and their enquiry into the meaning of gendered identities have been strengthened immensely in her writing. The writer is

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concerned for improving the quality of Assamese life and she warns against disintegration, as she is conscious of the complexities and dilemmas of Assamese culture in contemporary times in Assam.■

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Ecocriticism and Nature in the North-East Indian Poetry in English with special reference to the Poetry of Temsula Ao and Mamang Dai

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Ecocriticism : A New Approach

The study of ecology gains tremendous importance and warm reception from the writers, readers and the critics in our deteriorating environment and ecosystem in recent times. The study of ecology in the light of literature is termed as ecocriticism which is a new approach and the application of which bears great relevance and significance. Ecocriticism mainly deals with a critical reading of literary texts in relation to nature, culture and environment. The term ecocriticism is derived from the Greek origin which denotes the expression of judgment upon the writings delineating a relation between nature and man or effects of nature on man. Ecocriticism incorporates the aspects of culture, later on, in course of its development. As a whole, ecocriticism deconstructs the relationship between nature, culture and literature. Here Promod K. Nayar's observation that he places in his book "Contemporary literary and cultural theory is worth-mentioning.

Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs

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material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and approaches. (Nayar, 2013 : 242)

Later on, writers like Glen A Love, Fromm and Chery Il Glotfelty embraced ecocriticism warmly as an earth-centered approach to literary studies.

Though ecocriticism is only a twentieth century movement the study of it in the form of its relationship between man and nature back to the long past. The romantic movement of English literature during the nineteenth century was based on an approach to nature against the grip of materialism and industrialization of eighteenth century. William Wordsworth makes his quick acquaintance as nature poet to his readers. According to him 'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her' (Tintern Abbey). His faith in nature is deep and firm. Like Wordsworth all other romantic poets glorify nature and natural landscape in their poetry.

English poetry from North-East India is rich in covering different aspects of ecology of the region. The poetry of the region is marked by unique presence of nature in its variegated forms-from the simplest to the complicated. Nature catches not only the external jewelry but also the spirit and soul of the poetic creation of the poets. The abundance of nature poetry in this region is due to the fact that NE people, than others, have close proximity with nature. Since ancient times, animism and nature worship have been forming an integral part of the lives of North-East People. As such, the poets of NE India have shown great interest and indulgence to compose nature poetry for celebrating and restoring the ecological glory of the region. More often the poets make a search for identity on behalf of the tribes they belong to. Besides, the NE states are nested at the foothills of the Himalayan Mountain ranges and accordingly the whole region has become a source and inspiration for green writing.

Poetry in NE literature, enriched with nature imageries represents the rural sensibility and mostly excludes the urban din and bustle. The poets of the region have been attempting hard to lay bare the ruthless acts of deforestation and ecological disturbance.

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Such wild acts pose a serious question to the sustainance of life in NE states. Protecting nature from the ills of any kind means protecting the source of sustainance. In the region nature equally proves the source of an extension of identity and roots. Hence, harm to nature immediately affects the question of identity.

Nature in the poetry of Mamang Dai :

Mamang Dai, a celebrated poet from Arunchal Pradesh, tries a curious quest for identity in her poems as the great Indian novelist Anita Desai does the same in her novels. Mamang Dai, with a rural sensibility, makes nature a medium for conveying the question of identity. To her, nature is a space where an individual is able to identify himself. It is well-exposed in her poetry that one can dig out the ancestral roots from the spirits of trees, rivers or mountains. She writes about it in her poem "An Obscure Place."

The History of our race begins with the place of stories
We do not know if the language we speak
Belongs to a written past
Nothing is certain
There are Mountains, Oh ! There are Mountains
We climbed every slope, we slept by the river
But do not speak of victory yet.
(Misra, 2011)

To the poet 'Mountains' are not merely a landscape, rather they are a sphere of history. The mountains are the space where the poet wants the ancestral cord to lead her back to the uncertain past. The poet again says :

The words of strangers have led us into a mist
Deeper than the one we left behind
Weeping, like a waving grassland
Where the bones of our fathers are buried
Surrounded by thoughts of beauty : (Misra, 2011)

Mamang Dai here expresses her lamentation on how the natives of Arunachal Pradesh have broken away the age-old beliefs and prejudices of their ancestress at the advent of western thoughts of the Britishers. The thoughts of the strangers have led the natives

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to a state of haziness which is symbolized by 'mist'.

Mamang Dai is deeply concerned in her poems about the destruction of Flora & Fauna in NE states. Such a destruction serves as a metaphor of lost identity as nature in a holistic way represents the collective identity of the people of the region, and destruction of parts leads to the distortion of that identity. On this point the poet regrets.

See! They have slain the wild cat

And buried the horn-bill in her maternal sleep. (Misra, 2011)

Mamang Dai in her quest for identity has made splendid use of metaphors from nature like mystic mountains, rivers and forests, producing best of ecoliterature. In her poem "Voice of the Mountain", she says :

The other day a young man arrived from the village
Because he could not speak he brought a gift of fish
From the land of rivers

It seems such acts are repeated

We live in territories forever ancient and new
And also as we speak in changing languages

I also leave my spear learning by the tree

And try to make a sign. (Misra, 2011)

The young man who arrives the mountain with his offerings of fish evokes the traditional Tribal values of the region. The poet here has made a delicate portrayal of the communication between man and nature. On being offered 'a gift of fish' to the mountain the response of the mountain is to 'try to makes a sign' and as such the process is communicative. The mountain turns a spirit of the land and it is treated as a subject in the conglomeration of nature and culture.

In the poem 'Rain' Mamang Dai shows how the power of rain sweeps away her soul and leads it to get lost with the spirit of the jungle. The poet speaks of it in the following lines of the poem :

In the sound of the rain

Is contained

All the spirits of the jungle

Living, breathing

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Crushed, regenerated

Dark

Always watchful. (Misra, 2011)

Here rain merging with the spirits of the jungle soothes the poet's feelings. The poet's quest for identity can be well observed in her poem 'Remembrance'.

Why did we think

Deathless in memory

In trees and stones and the sleep of babies

Now, when we close our eyes

And cease to believe, god dies. (Misra : 2011)

Thus, Mamang Dai, Through her poems, echoes the proximity of the natives of Arunachal Pradesh with nature, forming a great part of ecoliterature. She also expresses her deep concern and lamentation at the worsening relationship between man and nature due to the materialistic ill-feeling of modern people.

Nature in the poetry of Temsula Ao :

Temsula Ao is a notable poet from Nagaland. Through her poems she takes up a curious search for the identity of the Ao people. Temsula Ao, like mamang Dai, makes excellent use of the metaphors of trees, mountains and animals. Her faith in nature is firm and gripping, and she confesses it in a very plain way in her poem 'Blood of Others'.

We believe that our God lived

In the various forms of nature

Whom we worshiped

With unquesntioning faith. (Misra, 2011)

But this faith of Temsula expressed in these lines was not only challenged and shaken with the intervention of Christianity but removed by a group of strange people who came to the land of Nagas :

Armed with only a book and

Promises of a land called heaven. (Misra, 2011)

With the advent of Christianity the natives of Nagaland had to cast away their ancestral age-old beliefs. She laments their condition

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in the lines :

Stripped of all our basic certainties
We strayed from our old ways
And let our soul-mountain recede
Into a tiny ant-hill. (Mishra, 2011)

Temsula is deeply concerned about the destruction caused to the mountains and lush wilderness. The recurrence of mountains in her poems bears the allegorical rendering of the glory of the Ao people. Hence the destruction of the mountains means nothing but the destruction of the glory of the Ao people. The destruction of such a kind brings about an ecological imbalance and thus it causes fatal harm to the tribe. It is in this connecting that Temsula utters the following lines :

Alas for the forest
Which now lies silent
Stunned and stumped with the evidence
Of the rape
As on her breast
The elephants trample
The lorries rumble
Loaded with her treasures
Bound for the mills at the foothill. (Misra, 2011)

Traditionally, the feminine image of nature places itself as a figure of mother nature. The figure of a mother refers to her role of a provider and protector of human life. But this nature of the mother, the sustaining power of life, suffers from phases of exploitation in our society.

In this regard she writes these lines :
Cry for the river Muddy, misshapen
Grotesque
Choking with remains
Of her sister
The forest
No life stirs in her belly now
The bomb

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And the bleaching powder

Have left her with no tomorrow. (Misra, 2011)

Here Temsula Ao compares the body of a woman and its violation with the landscape and its devastation. The imagery of rape of forests culminates to a barrenness of a womb. The 'bomb' and 'bleaching powder' have cleansed and left the river and the forest barren. Temsula speaks of the close relationship that Ao tribe has had with nature in the poem 'Stone People from Lungterok'.

Stone people

The polyglots

Knowledgeable

In bird's language

And animal discourse

The students who learned from ants

The art of carrying

Heads of enemies

As trophies

Of war

Stone people

The worshipers

Of unknown, unseen

Spirits

Of trees and forests

Of stones and rivers

Believers of soul

And its varied forms

Its sojourn here

And passage across the water

Into hereafter.

Thus, the poems of Temsula Ao highlight the growing ecological disturbances, deforestation and the excessive use of natural resources.

To conclude, we can say that nature forms an integral part of the poetry in North East India. Nature manifests itself in the poems in different forms, whether it be a spirit of the natives or the identity of the community. The poets of the region, particularly the two poets

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concerned, have shown different aspects of nature and culture and the effect of one on the other. An ecocritical outlook definitely helps us understand this intricate relationship between nature and culture. ■

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Violence as a Dominant Theme Extending Beyond Borders: A Study of Selected English Short-Stories from Assam Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura

Pramathesh Deka

Violence has been a recurring motif in Literature. It is emblematic of a disorder and chaos which jeopardizes thought processes and militates against happenings, which in turn is reflected in Literature and Art. Violence can deeply affect sensibilities, disturb the psyche and embed a deep seated urge to communicate and share whether in Literature, Films or paintings. Much of the discussion today in the Literature of North East India focuses on violence as thematic interest. The North-eastern states of India have gone through an intense sense of awareness of the cultural loss and recovery that came with the negotiations/ encounters with the 'other', 'majoritarian' cultures from either 'mainland India' or from beyond the India border, says Tilottoma Misra. The people of the North-East India have gone through a long history of negligence in their demand for economic and infrastructural development, denial of representation in the great Indian civilization discourse, betrayal in terms of political equality, marginalization of the local people by the continuing migration of people from outside.

Tilottoma Misra in her introduction to the anthology writes that it is not a coincidence that the dominant theme of the fiction writing of the region and those included in this collection happens to be that of violence perpetrated by various militant outfits as well as by the armed forces in their counter-insurgency operations. "Violence features as a recurrent

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theme because the story of violence seems to be a never-ending one in this region and yet people have not learnt 'live with it' as they are expected to do the distant centre's of power" (xix). Writers across the states of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura are deeply concerned about the brutalisation of their societies by the daily experience of human rights violations and the maiming of the psyche of a whole people by the trauma caused by violence. In Northeast India there amalgamates diverse ethnic and religious groups having different beliefs and customs. However, the land has been plagued by problems like unchecked militancy, insurgency, ethnic riots and killings etc. These rapidly suffusing violence has disrupted and paralysed normal life. Violence has been a way of life. This is what Temsula Ao writes about in her volume of short stories "These Hills called Home: Stories from a War Zone", the kind of violence which is historically and politically located. (Ao x)

The paper will study the short stories, both written in English and those translated into English, as published in *The Oxford Anthology of Writing from North-East India*, compiled and edited by Tilottoma Misra. It will concentrate on the short stories written by writers belonging to Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura to study the treatment of violence and terror particularly connected to insurgency, retaliatory operation by the armed forces and communal enmity.

Stories from Assam

In *Munni's Legs* by Atulananda Goswami, we see how a bomb blast on the railway track changes the entire otherwise peaceful environment into a tense one. An innocent girl of three years of age has to lose her life in the blast leaving a psychological shock to the retired person, the speaker of the story. The entire cabin of the train was infected by the mirth and sweet behavior of the little girl who was ready to share her piece of banana to her co-passengers. She rightly said that she did not want to grow up - to see the hatred and violence of the adult world. The story presents how Munni's mother, in her blood-draped cloths, frantically searched for Munni's legs carrying the lifeless body of the child in her bosom. She forgets to search for the whereabouts of her husband and her son. The speaker, in his depilated

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condition lying on the gass amidst mutilated bodies, is the only person she can complain "Somebody has stolen Munni's legs'. "Munni's legs were cut off just below her knees. It was difficult to make out how badly the mother was injured. Her entire dress soaked in blood, she ran about with Munni's lifeless body clutched to her bosom, searching for the man who had stolen her daughter's legs" (82). There is total annihilation of humanity and sympathy.

The Slaughter by Imran Hussain presents how a young lad, son of a retired school teacher, who could not kill a pigeon for meat, is transformed into a cold-blooded murderer. The father takes all the trouble in his bad health and unfavourable climate condition to get the pair of pigeons killed so that he can serve a good meal to his son returning home, presumably from his university hostel, and his companions. The reader is made dumbstruck to witness the brutality and violence met on the half-witted idiot Benga by the security personnel because his inability to speak Hindi and reply to their queries. The story presents that a public murderer does not have to carry a rough and virile personality, that he can be a soft voiced Sonti who touches his father's feet for blessings and behaves very obediently to his parents. As such, it makes difficult for general people to differentiate between a cold-blooded murderer and hard core terrorists from general public which turns the situation more tensed.

Halflong Hills by Kallol Choudhury presents the sense of terror lurking behind otherwise serene and beautiful landscape of Haflong. It presents the subdued anxiety that every person, especially employees hailing from outside Karbi Anglong, live their daily life with. All employees are forced to submit twenty percent of their salary every month at particular places. The underground leaders and the extremist are presented to be resolute and cruel and there is always a sense of anticipated doom lurking everywhere. People there have to live under constant atmosphere of terror, compromise and sacrifice. But at the same time, the top leader is shown to abide by Netaji's ideals and trying not to harm the country.

The Treasure Trove by Sekhar Das presents the pangs and hardship when a young engineer, the sole earner of a modest family,

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is kidnapped by an unknown insurgent group for no stated reason and his corpse is discovered heaped in the garbage. It presents how any peace loving and amiable person can become prey to terrorism and how people in the north-eastern region live under complete insecurity and uncertainty about their and their loved one's life. "AK-47 is but a Russian gun ! Russia is also an ally, a friendly nation. But why did my brother die of bullets from an ally's gun ? The corps was discovered after eight days, eight kilometers away from the hill station near the railway line, where the tunnel ends and poles start appearing" (151). Though the story is set in North-East India, particularly in Assam by hinting at the regional office of the firm the deceased worked for to be Guwahati, the story treats terrorism as a universal concern extending beyond geographical boundaries.

"They' means they. 'They' are present in the nooks and corners of the glove, with different names, with different identities. They, who can take the lives of the powerful people in authority as well as of the wage labourers at the bottom. They hard cut the throat of a cabinet minister of the south a few days back. One evening last December, they had hijacked a plane full of passengers, shunting them from one country to another in order to get their demands fulfilled. Didn't they want to blow up Ms Kumaratunge a few days back ? They are everywhere - in different geographical locales. Only their races are different." (152)

The story presents that the layman has understood all the motives behind terrorism and learned the tractics of living under violence and terror. People have started to take terrorism and failure of government agencies to curb it as granted. People have known for sure that they have to live amidst terrorism and violence and there is now way out :

"I have a knowledge of many things. I know both poetry and the chemical formula of an atom bomb.... Why only me, many people know these things. Why Talibans are Talibans; to which world does Osama Bin Laden belong? Who or what is behind the Ranbir Sena and the

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Sunlight Sena ? We all know whose blood is shed in the soil of Jehanabad, Palamu and Nalbari. We know. We understand everything." (153)

The story sums up the atmosphere of the entire north-eastern region in which terror and violence lurks behind the lush greenery and beautiful landscape. It opines that the natural scenery contains nothing but terror hidden inside it :

"The thick forests of the mountain range have become the seat of destructive weapons. Human language, human passions have died here long back. Only the venomous smell of the gunpowder prevails here; and the language of the bomb. No one listens to the little narratives of harmony, travel and togetherness." (162)

Stories from Manipur

In Nightmare by Yumlembam Ibmbcha, we see details of intense violence and violation of human rights of a peasant accused of having underground connections at the hands of security personnel. It is not proved which organization he has connection with or whether he has any connection at all. The man is brutally tortured, hit with the butt of the gun, kicked with heavy boots, his tongue being cut forcibly using a knife and buried alive in front of his little daughter. The little child pleads the uniformed personnel to leave her father lest he will die, but the personnel are shown to derive unknown animal pleasure out of the torture. The man, Chaoba is made to mimic the cry of a dog and cat kneeling down while security personnel rode his back one after another till he lies flat on ground. Security personnel, "each of the men was as big as the hills" and dressed in black uniforms seem to encroach upon the entire landscape, 'shouting thunderously', open firing with booming noise. However, the story presents the little child having only a nightmare. But the fact that her father was actually being abducted by security forces from their residence and there were no whereabouts of him for a long time hints that no one can deny the predicament of her father. "A child was accidentally shot dead in the gunfight on the road; an old woman was hit by a bullet while she was staying inside

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her house" (176). No one can ascertain the safety of their loved ones who are missing for long time.

In Tayenjan Bijoy kumar Singh's *The Mauled Cub* we find the condition of the womenfolk living under the shadows of violence, terror, insecurity, betrayal and human rights violation. Tombi, the young girl, is raped twice within the span of one single day by the two opposing parties - one by the leader of insurgent group belonging to her own community who took stealthy shelter at theirs, and then gang raped by three army personnel partaking search operation after there is an explosion in the locality. Women have been shown to live under utter personal sacrifice when Tombi is shown to hide her bruise and pangs of being raped from her mother lest this 'disturbing news put her mother in a state of delirium' who has already suffered a lot after her husband's death and son's abduction by security forces. People in Manipur are shown to live in terror amidst both the warring parties. They cannot refuse shelter to insurgent groups, cannot inform the police and their neighbours about it. If reported to police, they are harassed by police itself to have connections with insurgents. Army personnel can abduct a student of class X living with his family when a bomb blasts nearby without giving any reason and that youth does not return home even in next five years as has been the case with Tombi's elder brother.

Stories from Nagaland

The *Curfew Man* by Temsula Ao presents the predicament of people living under constant anxiety under the shadow of violence from both the insurgents and security personnel. Everything is presented to have plunged into a state of hostility between two warring armies; the one overground labeling the other as rebels fighting against the state and the other, operating from their underground hideouts and calling the Indian army illegal occupiers of sovereign Naga territories. "Caught between the two, it was the innocent villagers and those living in small townships who had to bear the brunt..." (229) Curfew is declared to keep situation under control. There are incidents when people carrying the sick to hospital or in search of doctors were stopped and subjected to humiliating searches causing even fatal

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delays. "There were several incidents where civilians were shot dead by the patrol parties after curfew and their deaths reported as those of underground rebels killed in 'encounters' with the army" (230). Human rights and privacy of the people are violated as government informers monitored the movements and conversations of families whose relatives are doubted to have joined underground groups. Public servants like doctors, teachers and lawyers are also monitored and often questioned. Government agencies also forced 'bad elements' of the towns to work so by either paying them handsomely or by threatening them to reopen old criminal cases. So people are being forced to work under cover by choice or by compulsion. It is reported how underground agents take forceful shelter at private residences and when discovered, the owner of the house is arrested and beaten up so badly that he dies out of injury.

Temsula Ao's another story titled Sonny presents how people in Nagaland live in uncertainty and mutual unreliability amidst rebels, supporters of rebels, police informers, double-crossed agents and security personnel. It shows how the cravings for power and position inside an insurgent faction lead toward cold blooded and brutal murder of a rebel leader with high ideals. There is a sense of subdued anxiety and mutual betrayal in the midst of which no person can live a peaceful life. There are 'inequalities and injustices of the repressive 'occupation' forces' which rural people wanted to eliminate. Army personnel were said to be "alien rulers who came and overturned their ancient way of life" (244). It presents the army violating human rights when

".....government forces blazed through the land like a wild fire, turning villages into burnt-out heaps and people into creatures herded into concentration-camp-like grouping zones. Families were separated, women were raped and killed and the men were forced to see the humiliations before they were either maimed for life or simply killed" (224)

Stories from Tripura

Nanda Teli by Haribhusan Pal presents how the simple, happy

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and carefree life of the rural Tripura has been turned off late into tensed existence under the shadows of terrorism and insurgency. And amiable petty businessman, Nanda Teli, is shot dead by unidentified gunman on his way home from his shop in the market unleashing a trail of tension, fear and terror in the entire locality. Even before the murder, people lived in intensely terrorized state. "The market, nowadays, closes before dusk. As evening wears on, it is deathly silence all around.... Whether there is urgency or not, everyone wants to return home in day light." (268) There is an atmosphere of terror and violence in the behavior met out to rural people by Bindu Riyang's elder son. Bindu Riyang's elder son brings 'different people' to their residence every now and then and his younger son spies on people and their conversations. And the result is the headline in the newspapers :

"Extremists Attack Totabari, One killed.... It is suspected that Nanda Kumar fell into the trap laid by the murders, when he was coming out from the market. His bullet-ridden body lay at the scene of incident in a pool of blood."(268)

Biman Choudhury's story the Riot presents the terror stricken rural Dhaka in the grasp of communal riot and violence. There are reports of carnage of '8 Hindus and 6 Muslims' following the incident of "a Hindu boy from his locality was chopped into pieces over that iron bridge" and thrown to the canal water when he was going to call a doctor for a patient. Hindu miscreants wait to prey upon "Lungi-clad souls" emerging out of the railway station making innocent passengers victims of unidentified murderers. There was an atmosphere of anxiety and violence where no one's safety is guaranteed.

Although all the stories have violence as their themes, they vary in their treatment as well as attitude. Out of the short stories studied above, those written in Manipur seem to present violence in most heinous manner, although the cause of terrorism and the consequent violence is not stated clearly. They seem to present neither the cause nor suggest any solution to the problem. Similarly, the stories from Assam too seem not to talk about the cause of the problems of insurgency and violence in the state. The feeling of betrayal and that

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of 'illegal' inclusion of Assam into British India after the Yandaboo treaty of 1826, (Misra, U 66) as felt by the insurgent group in Assam is never hinted at in the stories. Nor do they seem to suggest any way out of this mess. There seems to be mysteries behind insurgency and violence. Nobody can say beforehand what can happen the next moment. On the other hand, the curfew man by Tamsula Ao of Nagaland presents the cause and concern of the insurgency problem in the state. It presents that Indian nation state's forceful attempt to integrate the present day Nagaland into the Indian political territory hampering their ethnic structure and the Naga people's retaliation to such attempts to be the cause of the problem. It talks about how both the Naga insurgents and Indian army blame each other of violating each other's rules. Similarly the story Nanda Teli by Haribhusan Pal from Tripura presents that the cause of insurgency in the state is the unending migration of Bangla speaking population into the state turning the native Kokborok into minority in their own homeland.

So, it is evident that violence has been a dominant theme in the short stories written in and translated into English in the states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura. The entire region has been infested with the problem of terrorism and counter-terrorism which get reflected in literature produced in the land. The common people find themselves jeopardized in the midst of the surroundings which they cannot change or alter. The sensitive writers of the region depict their perceptions of the traumatic experience of a people living in the midst of terror and fear and yet cherishing hopes, as Tilottoma Misra hopes, that human values will triumph some day and a new dawn of peace would emerge out of this trial of fire. ■

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Symbolic use of nature in Some Selected Poems of Mamang Dai: A Study

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Nature and its objects form an integral part in North Eastern Indian poetry in English. The poetry of this region is marked by an abundance of unique presentation of natural objects in connection to the invocation to the spirit of nature. Mamang Dai, a celebrated poet from Arunachal Pradesh, glorifies the beauty and grandeur of nature and landscape of her state highlighting the relationship of man and nature. Her poetry dwells upon the combination of nature and the myths of her community. Nature in the forms of hills, rivers, old trees etc. occupy a significant place in her poems. These objects from nature serve as a means to explore the various aspects of the traditional life and belief of the people of the state.

The depiction of nature and its objects in literature is not new since we find it in literature of ancient times, classic and even religious books. *The Bible* tells the story of 'Garden of Eden' and *The Ramayana* depicts the forest where Rama was exiled. The sanctity and sacredness of hills is engrossed in ancient Indian mythology as it holds the Himalayas as the abode of Gods who spent long meditative years to know the eternal truth and the mysteries of life. The literature of all time, all around the world has treated nature in a unique way showing its different roles on the lives of people.

The North eastern region with its varied flora and fauna is rich in natural beauty, where people belonging to different tribes and ethnic groups have deep attachment with various objects of nature which

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offer a scope for examining their ancestral roots, their identity and culture and belief systems. A close study of the writings on nature from this region will prove to be a ground for unveiling the various values associated with it and explore the role of nature in communal life of the region. For the people of the North-East, nature is not just a source of sustenance but it is a means of search for identity and roots. Through such natural objects as rivers, mountains, hills etc. one can find the ancestral roots as nature represents the collective identity of the people and its destruction implies the distortion of that identity. Mamang has drawn metaphors from nature like the mystic mountains, rivers and forests in her process of search for identity.

The hills and the rivers form a common theme of several writers of the North- Eastern region including Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao, who find it natural to write about hills with their loftiness and their imposing beauty. The image of the hill, river, cloud recurs in Dai's poems and they lead us to ancient myths and rich tribal folklores surrounding the natives of her state. Mountains are not merely a natural object but an integral part of the collective psyche of the natives of her state and a part of a continuing relationship with the environment. The poet intermingles their age-old tales and myths drawn from ancient oral tradition with these mountains. For Dai, the mountains become a record of history and a means to search the ancestral root.

In *The voice of the Mountain*, Dai says that the mountain is like an old man 'sipping the breeze' that is "forever young." The mountain recreates the memory of the past. Dai opines that the mountain can relate itself with the desert and the rain. It is also the bird that sits in the west. The mountain knows the rocks that shine in the shine, the clouds and the rain. There has been a cordial relationship between the mountain and the cloud as the mountain calls the cloud "this uncertain pulse that sits over my heart."

Arunachal Pradesh has been the land of several tribes with their indigenous lifestyles and the glorification of the mountains becomes an integral part of their belief system. The believes of these tribes in nature and its objects is very strong and deep-rooted.

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These tribes have inherited the indigenous faiths and practices from their ancestors which are intrinsically entwined with nature. The majestic mountains, forests and the environment shaped the collective consciousness of these tribes.

The mountain is like an oracle embodying the story of change yet bears the everlastingness of nature. In *The voice of the Mountain* the mountain narrates the story of its long existence as it tells "I have lived many lives" and the mountain claims to be omniscient who has witnessed many changes taking place on the earth. Thus it becomes symbolic of being a repository of traditions and the happenings of the past. Its voice is like sea waves and mountain peaks. The mountains are so old that they can "outline the chapters of the world." In the poem, the mountain presumes the role of a silent observer of the towns, the bank of the river, the activities of human beings, the birds, and other various land forms. It says "I am the place where memory escapes/ the myth of time/ I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain." The mountain relates the traditional tribal values prevalent in the area. It is a means of search for ancestral roots and a locale for intermingling of the past and the future. The man, in the poem, who visits the mountains to give offerings evokes the age-old traditional beliefs of the tribes who still adhere to their ancestral practices. The poet says,

"The other day a young man arrived from the village
Because he could not speak
he brought a gift of fish
from the land of rivers."

Thus the mountain becomes symbolic of being a repository of traditions and the happenings of the past. It remarks that the universe gives nothing but "a dream of permanence" and peace is a falsity. It reminds that peace is the outcome of long violence and disturbances. It also reveals the primordial relation between man and nature. Through these natural objects like the mountain, the natives can identify themselves and at the same time they serve as a means of continuation of ancient customs and practices which form an inseparable part of their collective psyche and living standards. There

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are several myths prevalent in tribal folklore related to the mountain like the other manifestations of nature.

In the poem *An Obscure Place* Dai describe the mountain as an embodiment of scenic view of the area. She tells that the people residing in the area climbed every slope and spent their nights by the river forced by the urge to find a new abode. On the slopes of the mountains, the prayers of the people go on. The poet recommends a stranger to look up to have a view of the majestic beauty of cloud formation which appears to be chasing ants. The mountains know all the hidden secrets. They can relate the past, the present and the future. The mountains not only provide a scope for realizing the proclivity of the people of the area but also embodies the fears in an increasingly changing world.

"yesterday we gave shelter to men

Who climbed over our hills

For the glory of a homeland." (An Obscure Place)

Mamang Dai, in the poem, says that the history of the people of her state is oral which is full of stories and myths. Her poem proclaims the myths surrounding the land masses and an emotional attachment with her birthplace. The history of the origin of their language is quite uncertain. She says "Nothing is certain." But they know the certainty of the mountains as they had long affinity with the hills.

"There are mountains .Oh There are mountains

We climbed every slope." (An Obscure Place)

The mountain has been personified in different shapes in Dai's poem- sometimes as a young man, at other times as a senior citizen or silent observer. In *The Voice of the Mountain* the mountain recalls how a young man came from the village with a gift of fish from the river. It has witnessed such offerings in the past. The mountains are certain and immutable like the rituals as the ritualistic practices never die. In the poem *Small Towns and the River* Mamang Dai writes about the transience of life and death and the permanence of nature. She writes:

"Just the other day someone died.

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In the dreadful silence we wept
Looking at the sad wreath of tuber rose.
Life and death, life and death,
Only the rituals are permanent."

In *The Voice of the Mountain* the mountain has been beautifully compared to a "woman lost in translation" who still survives with the ability to be happy and carry on. The mountain gives rise to several other natural processes as it carries wind to the mouth of a canyon and to the narrow gorge and throws sunlight even to the highest tip of the trees. Thus the mountains act as a source of emanation of force and protection which has been encysted in the believes of several tribes.

River form the dominant theme in Mamang Dai's *Small Towns and the Rivers* where river has been described as having a soul. It flows through her land with strong current during summer. The river knows the immortality of water as it receives the first drop of rain on the dry earth and the same water emerges on the mountain-tops as mists. She refers to her abode amidst the green and serene trees which remain unchanged in Summer or Winter. The rivers that meander through her state are profound and oracular articulating the confluence of various aspects of tribal lives with the existence of river. The rivers that form a congenital feature of the land evoke the spirit of the land and the co-existence of man in harmony with nature. Sometimes it becomes symbolic of angry outburst of nature as the poet writes;

"The river has a soul
In the summer it cuts through the land
Like torrent of grief." (Small Towns and the Rivers)

Thus, nature and its objects such as mountains, rivers, trees etc. form an integral part of several poems of Mamang Dai which plays a significant role on the lives of the natives of her state, their faiths, ritualistic practices and lifestyles. The local flavour of tribal myths and an emotional involvement with her land are interwoven in her works. ■

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(Re)defining Nature and Culture: An Ecofeministic Standpoint

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*"Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the
immense resources of the unconscious spring forth"*
– Helen Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976)

Nature and Culture - both these terms have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyze. In her seminal book, *What is Nature?* (1995), Kate Soper writes of our need to retain conflicting perspectives. There is a need to value our natural ecosystems and acknowledge our dependence on them without overlooking that 'nature' is a series of changing cultural constructions that can be used to praise and blame. In its most familiar meaning, 'nature' is what the earth is and does without human intervention. Ecocritics have looked into a variety of philosophical sources for ways of resisting the 'nature/culture' dualism and re-embedding human beings in nature.

Culture is a loaded term with meanings, evocative of multiple interpretations. The view that culture is produced by human beings and is therefore separate from nature bypasses the fact that all human culture resides in the natural world. We owe our very existence to its processes. Therefore, our every action toward the natural world is eventually an action toward oneself and toward one's culture. While culture refers to sets of 'personality traits, attitudes or values', it also refers to broader social processes, ideological positioning and

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collective representations. The poetics and politics of cultural representations address both these aspects of culture while mediating the interface between the two. The shifting nature and hybridity of identities challenge the stereotypes of representation, and compels us to identify difference as well as sameness, and difference within sameness.

Ecofeminism emerged in the West as a product of the peace, feminist and ecology movements of the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The term "Ecofeminism" was coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* [Feminism or Death] published in 1974. It was further developed by Ynestra King in about 1976 and became a movement in 1980, with the organization, in the same year, of the first ecofeminism conference - "Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 80s", at Amherst, Massachusetts, US (Spretnak 1990). According to ecofeminist Ynestra King: "Ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice... (it sees) the devastation of the earth and her beings by the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors as feminist concerns. It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our own bodies and our own sexuality and which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way" (King 1983). Ecofeminism asserts that all forms of oppression are connected and that structures of oppression must be addressed in their totality. Oppression of the natural world and of women by patriarchal power structures must be examined together or neither can be confronted fully. These socially constructed oppressions formed out of the power dynamics of patriarchal systems. In one of the first ecofeminist books, *New Woman/New Earth* (1975), Rosemary Radford Ruether, states that :

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping

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of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this [modern industrial] society (204).

Here, Ruether makes clear a central tenet of ecofeminism: earth and the other-than-human experience the tyranny of patriarchy along with women. Classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, naturism (a term coined by Warren) and speciesism are all intertwined. Ecofeminism is a multi-faceted challenging structure. By confronting systems of patriarchy, ecofeminism broadens the scope of the cultural critique and incorporates seemingly disparate but, according to ecofeminism, radically connected elements. Ecofeminists argue that patriarchal society's value and beliefs have resulted in the oppression of both women and nature. It ignores women's work, knowledge and 'situatedness'(Nayar, 2010). In her introduction to *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, editor Karen Warren asserts:

What makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism (i.e., the unjustified domination of nature) are feminist issues. Ecofeminist philosophy extends familiar feminist critiques of social isms of domination to nature (4).

Ecofeminism's constructive worldview replaces hierarchical dualisms with radical diversity and relationship, modeled on both biodiversity and the feminist emphasis on the strength of difference. Recent works by feminists Susan Griffin (1978) and Mary Daly (1978), Carolyn Merchant (1980), Ynestra King (1981), Ariel Kay Salleh (1984), Karen Warren (1987, 1990), Val Plumwood (1993) and others, highlight the fact that ecology is a feminist issue. The connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are highlighted in order to understand "why the environment is a feminist issue", as well as "why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns" (Gaard 1993, p. 4). However, there are disagreements about the nature of these connections and whether they are "potentially liberating or simply a rationale for the continued subordination of women" (King 1981, p. 12).

This perspective draws from the now famous article by Sherry B. Ortner, *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* (1974). The

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ecofeminists celebrate the relationship between women and nature through the popularization of ancient rituals centered on the Mother Goddess, the moon, animals and the female reproductive system. This prehistoric era, centered on goddess worship, was dethroned by an emerging patriarchal culture with male gods to whom the female deities were subservient. Nature was further degraded by the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, that replaced the nurturing earth with the "metaphor of a machine to be controlled and repaired from outside... The earth is to be dominated by male developed and controlled technology, science and industry" (Merchant 1992, p. 191). So these ecofeminists argue against the dominant view that women are restricted by being closer to nature, because of their ability to bear children. In fact, women's biology and nature are seen as sources of female power to be celebrated. Ecofeminism also has a spiritual side, encompassing many expressions of feminist concern with religion based on nature.

The idea that women are, because of their womanhood, spiritually close to nature is central to ecofeminist thought, and is manifested in many forms of (nature) religion -- both in the west and the east -- often in the form of worshipping the inner goddess that resides in women. The concept of gods and goddesses is also very much present in ecofeminist spirituality, and can be understood in two ways. On one hand both male and female goddesses can be present in the belief system, bringing together masculinity and femininity without the oppression of the female in traditional religion, and in society. On the other hand nature can be personified as a goddess, as Mother Earth. Spiritual ecofeminists, in Starhawk's words "[...] do not *believe* in the Goddess-- we connect with her; through the moon, the stars, the ocean." This shows that some sides of ecofeminism are deeply spiritual, concerned about the sacredness in nature and the holism of humanity and everything living. Especially women's connection to nature is seen as positive and transformational, a source of strength and celebration. If humanity can reaffirm its bond to nature, the hierarchies of difference and degradation can ideally be broken.

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Noted Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva invokes just this kind of notion about women spirituality and nature as she writes that 'women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practice. At one level, nature is symbolized as the embodiment of the feminine principle, and at another, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance' (1988:38 in Tomalin 2008). Shiva seems to be supporting the agenda that with the worship of something in nature or nature itself as divinity, 'naturally' the result will be a friendly and ecological way of life. Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1989) became a cult text for ecologists and ecofeminists, for instance, saw India as possessing a more environment-friendly culture.

Contemporary Indian English Writing from Northeast has multifaceted voices. It presents vistas of images of the mountains, hills, rivers, myths and legends, tradition and culture, and multi-ethnic people of the region. Identity crisis, a sense of alienation and migrancy are some of the dominant features of contemporary writings from Northeast. The writers of this region strongly advocate preservation of the ecology of their region to preserve their land, native tradition and culture, and above all, their identity amidst cultural and political hegemony.

Mamang Dai's *The Legend of Pensam* (2006) is a cobweb of stories beautifully tailored to portray the rich images and history of the Adi tribe. It provides a lyrical and a moving tribute to the human spirit. This novel deals with the ecology of Arunachal Pradesh by merging history, myth, tradition, memory and fiction together. The stories in the book revolves around the myths, legends, tradition and culture of the Adi tribe, one of the major tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, and re-invents that part of history which is yet to be explored. A world with ecofeministic ideals is vividly seen through the clash between tradition and modernity in the novel. The book explores the hidden facts of life and is a delightful mixture of myth, history, tribal beliefs and customs of the Adis, literally called "hill-people". It has, indeed, wide range of themes ranging from tribal practices, superstitious beliefs, human and the spirit world, tradition and modernity, memory and reality and the essence of orality. Through these stories the

author tries to give voice to the 'peripheral people' who are often marginalized. Surviving in the heat and humidity of the Siang valley, the Adis accept things unquestioningly. They still practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world. In the book, Mamang says, "In our language, the word 'Pensam' means 'in-between' which suggests the middle-ground. It is the small world where anything can happen and everything can be lived." Recounting the various legends that influence the lives of the hill people, this book is a lyrical and moving tribute to the human spirit. It also reflects upon the lost history and the cultural dynamics of the Adis.

The book recounts the historical developments in the tribal areas with the advent of the Britishers. Rakut's father, Lutor, and many others worked under the Migluns. The elders were brainwashed and dominated by the Migluns into considering themselves inferior to the Migluns and were forced to stifle their energy and determination. The early decades of the twentieth century were times of great upheaval, where the killing of Noel Williamson in 1911 by an angry Adi suggested that there existed a communication gap between them. Many people were killed and since the Abor expedition of 1912, the whole of the Siang valley had been under the control of the British administration. Images of violence and brutal killings also find a place in the narrative. We see how an elderly man from the Migu clan slaughtered two women and how Kamur kills his own children as if he had been under a spell. In 'Daughters of the Village', Arsi says, "In my next life I shall be born a bird". She longs to break free from the routine rustic life and to enjoy life to its fullest.

The love relationship between Nenem and Captain David Ferguson takes us to a different plane altogether. It is an enigma how, despite all their differences, the two strangers were drawn to each other in the forlorn hills. When they parted, Nenem said to herself, 'No one dies of love. I loved him, and now I am enough of my own.' Years later, when she resigns to her fate and gets married to Kao, things have changed. She had dreamt of raising up her family and living amidst her own people. But few years later, after the

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disastrous earthquake had claimed numerous lives and property, she faints one day and passes away. In the later part of the narrative, conflict goes on between tradition and modernity. With modernity, came issues of burglaries and murder. Their houses were not safe anymore. Electric poles and land were stolen. Forests were being cut and logs floated away down the river. New fences marked old territories and it seemed a curtain had fallen over the old villagers. What was once sacred, the old sense of joy was being lost. Towards the end, Raket says, 'We are peripheral people. Everywhere, people like us, we turned with the world. Our lives turned, and in the circle who could tell where was the beginning and where the end? We are just peripheral people, thinking out our thoughts!' Thus, Mamang Dai, in her novel historicizes the cultural context of the people and attempts to give them a voice which would transcend across boundaries. She also shows the intricate relationship that exists between nature and women and laments how man has destroyed nature with the coming of modernity. She also questions man's brutal violence on women, the patriarchal setup and how man has demolished the ecological balance of the society.

Temsula Ao's *Laburnum for My Head* (2009) is a collection of short stories that embrace a gamut of human emotions thereby depicting an in-depth understanding of the human condition. Temsula Ao in the first story "Laburnum for My Head" says that "Standing beyond the southernmost corner of the vast expanse of the old cemetery - dotted with concrete vanities, both ornate and simple - the humble Indian laburnum bush erupts in glory; with its blossoms of yellow mellow beauty. Here, in this chapter, we find a strange obsession of a woman named Lentina and her desire to have some laburnum bushes in her garden. Unable to successfully grow the much admired yellowish laburnum flowers on her garden during her lifetime, she wants to have one over her grave.

The way the laburnum flowers hung their heads earthward appealed to her. In this theme story, the protagonist is totally surreal, able to transcend her husband's death with ease but not her obsession with the laburnum tree. Temsula Ao rightly stated that

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"nature has a way of upstaging even the hardest rock and granite edifices fabricated by man". Lentina's strange obsession with the seasonal laburnum tree revolves throughout the story. Her longing for this beauty of nature can be also be read as her defiance of the patriarchal set up of the society. One day her husband began to show signs of a strange disease and passes away quietly one night. He being a respected and prominent member of the society; his funeral services were long and elaborate. Lentina could envisage that he would surely be given a grandiose headstone over his grave. Standing among the assortment of headstones surrounding her husband's grave, she pondered on "man's puny attempts to defy death; as if erecting these memorials would bring the dead back to life." Lentina promised herself that when her time comes she would not want any such attempt at immortality; instead she would yearn for laburnum trees planted on her grave. Later on, we find Lentina and Mapu, her trusted driver surveying the cemetery for empty spot. Lentina frees herself from the social construct of the society by choosing her grave-site herself before death and denying the already earmarked space beside her husband thereby freeing herself from the patriarchal hold. Finally settling on a spot on the southernmost tip of the cemetery, she proudly says to Mapu, 'This is my spot, I want to be buried here when my time comes.' She desperately longed for a place 'where there will be nothing but beautiful trees over my grave'. This shows her close bonding with nature and environment. She also questions the authority of the Town Committee over 'ownership' issue of the plot of land she bought from Khalong. Later on, she donates that piece of land to the Town Committee, and not to the Church with certain terms and conditions. Towards the end her dreams come true and the buttery yellow flowers bloomed over her grave. Thus ends the story of the unsung heroine who cherished a passionate wish that a "humble laburnum tree should bloom once a year on her crown". At the end, Ao notes "... only one laburnum tree bedecked in its seasonal glory, standing tall over all the other plants, flourishing in perfect co-existence, in an environment liberated from all human pretensions to immortality".

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The second story of this collection, "Death of a Hunter", provides yet another dimension to the "human/nature" relationship. The hunting season was on and the hunter, Imchanok was busy oiling his much used gun. The practice of hunting and head-hunting is a dominant theme in the Ao-Naga narratives. Now, this hunter called Imchu was a well-trained and skilful expert who had killed many wild animals - from mammoth elephant who destroyed several acres of farmland, monkeys and wild boar thereby earning a reputation of skilled hunter in the entire locality. Following government's orders he killed the wild elephant. After the kill, he felt some kind of terrible remorse in his heart looking at the "unblinking, unseeing eye of his adversary, lying there so helpless" as though "the dying animal were trying to convey some message to his destroyer which remained frozen in time..." This realisation haunted him for a long time. Here, we see man's selfish attempt in destroying nature, thereby secluding animals from nature. Again when a pack of monkeys ate his grain and tried to attack the villagers, Imchu charged from the front and killed the huge male monkey. The monkey stood there protecting his family, until he toppled over the ground with a groan and lay there motionless, dead. Man's brutal attack on unarmed animals shows his supremacy and his dominant instinct over others. After killing the monkey, all Imchanok could do was advance to the grimacing animal and shout, 'So, you wanted to destroy me by stealing my paddy, did you? Look at you now. You scared and bullied my womenfolk; where are yours now? Another male will take them over while I cut up and feed my people with your flesh'. Imchanok was adamant and thought that 'hunting was a necessary supplement to gathering food for an increasingly large family.' Tangchetla, his wife is very understanding; she even refused to eat the monkey feast and ordered to distribute the remaining meat to the relatives and neighbours. In the above encounters Imchanok imagined himself at "the centre of the eternal contest between man and animal for domination over land".

Lastly, when he shot the bear, he felt a deep remorse within. Soon after the kill, he was taken ill and took to bed complaining of severe headache. He would shriek out in his sleep crying, with

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Tangchetla at the vicinity. She took great care of him during those days; she even suggested Imchu to go to the exact place 'from where he had fired his gun and ask for forgiveness from the creature so that Imchanok's nightmares would end'. Both of them visit the place and later on he was cured and his nightmares vanished. Though Imchu returned to normalcy, but his mind 'went back constantly to the day that he had stood in the stream holding the boar's tooth and how, before leaving the forest, some inner urge had compelled him to enact the strange ritual.' These instances reflect on the magnitude of violence men had caused to nature and animals. We also see his domination over women, as inferior and weaker sex. The fact that men may also display symptoms of 'weakness' is never acknowledged in the true sense of the term. At last it was Tangchetla only who supported and encouraged him to admit to his guilt and even repent for it.

From the above analysis of the different stories by Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao, we come to realize that with the stereotypes of violence, human callousness, survival struggle, backwardness and poverty that the Northeasterners face all over the country, what is often overlooked are some of the remarkable features of this region, one of the foremost being the wonderfully open presence of women in almost every facet of human life and the richness of ecodiversity. Since time immemorial, women were constituted as the 'Other' and the 'marginal'. Following the Subaltern thesis, Gayatri Spivak in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" raises the problem of working the history of colonial women. She interrogates the significance of women's voice and agency during the colonial era. Women's historiography has always been a contested domain and these writers from Northeast try to recover women's voices and their subjectivities in reproducing an alternative history and challenge the very notion that "history is male and women are outside it", to which Gerda Lerner forcefully argues that "women have a history; women are in history" (1979:169). These writers from Northeast have succeeded, to a great extent, in discovering their voices and identity as women and gendered subjects. ■

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Ecology and Identity · An Analysis of The Poetry of Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao

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Nature and literature has been working together down the ages. The concern for nature and its deteriorating environment has been the subject of representation in literature. This awareness for ecosystem finds expression in a new branch theory known as Ecocriticism. This theory aims at critical reading of texts in relation to environment and literature. The Northeastern states of India are the mixing pot of culture where rituals, customs, heritage, lifestyle, faith and beliefs of various people are assimilated. Legends, myths, values, rituals, customs, beliefs, cuisine, language, art and crafts all serve a form of ethnic identity in the Northeast India. Environment, too serves as a source of ethnic identity in different regional cultures. Most of the North-East Indian writers are inherent in representing an ecological concern in their writings. Nature has been the subject of poetry in North-East India. The wilderness of this region is always explored by the poets. Keeping in line with the theme of the seminar this paper analyses the poetry of Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao, the two representative poets of North east India especially writing in English. These poets explore the ecological world of this region and uses ecology as a means for assertion of identity. Mamang Dai, a poet from Arunachal Pradesh in her poetry describes how the close relationship of the natives with nature and wilderness is diminishing day to day. Temsula Ao, a poet from Nagaland not only shows concern for destruction of nature, but also gives an eco-feministic view of nature. Their works assert that the present ecological crisis is leading

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to political, economic and social crisis.

We are living in a world of rapid cultural and technological development leading to constant global ecological crisis and India's Northeast is not an exception. Because of the present ecological crisis people have become more and more concerned about deteriorating environment. The concern for nature and its deteriorating environment has been the subject of representation in literature. This awareness finds expression in a new branch theory known as Ecocriticism. This theory aims at critical reading of text in relation to environment and literature.

Nature is an important aspect of literature. Representation of nature is as old as recorded literature. We find this representation from the Hebrew Bible to the present day literary texts. It is evident that literature of Northeast India is constantly marked by the charisma of nature. A majority of people living in this region earn their living through cultivation and live in a deep association with nature. Nature is not just a basis of livelihood for most of the people of northeastern states, but it also offers from their identity. Therefore, nature has a vital role to play in the literary works of this region. With the growth of global ecological crisis many of the Northeast Indian writers present an ecological concern in their writings.

This paper will attempt to analyze some of the selected poetry of Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao, the two representative poets of Northeast India from an ecological point of view. These poets explore the ecological world of this region and uses ecology as a means for assertion of identity. Apart from the poets analyzed in this paper there are other noteworthy poets who also have shown concern for nature. Among them some of the representative poets are Yumlum Tana, Lakhyahira Das, Dayananda Pathak, Robin S. Ngangom, Anjum Hasan, Monalisa Changkija, Gambhini Devi, Sarat Tham Thiyam.

Glen. A love once said, 'the most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world.'¹ Nature and Literature has been working together since the ages. Representation of nature in literature is not new. Earlier, there is only representation, but today

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with representation there is a critical perception, interpretation and construction of 'Nature'. As such literature and environment is inseparable. Therefore it needs a medium and a toll to express that people think about nature, their opinion and ideas about the changes in nature. Thus literature is the medium and 'Ecocriticism' is the tool of expression.

'Eco-criticism originates in a bio-social context of unrestrained capitalism, excessive exploitation of nature, worry definitions and shapes of 'development' and environmental hazard."2 it not only points out the critical writings which scrutinize the relationship between literature and physical environment, conducted theoretically to perceive how a cultural text can create awareness but also to 'look in to the politics of development and construction of 'nature'."3 Ecocriticism looks at the representation of nature and literature 'Paying attention to the attitudes towards nature and the rhetorics employed when speaking about it"4

Environmental issues, either favorable or unfavorable affect the lives of people across the globe. Thus the relation between man and nature is inseparable. Literature accentuates this relationship of man and nature and their interdependence. Literature, thus, plays a public role of reconstructing our understanding of reality (nature) which is far beyond entertainment and consumption.

This relationship of man and nature is perceptible in the poetry of Northeast India. We find the image of nature in the poetry of almost all the poets of his region. Legends, myths, values, rituals, customs, beliefs, cuisine, language, art and crafts all serve a form of ethnic identity in the North-East India. Environment, too serves as a source of ethnic identity in different regional cultures. Before the advent of Christianity, the indigenous people of this region worshipped Nature as their gods and goddesses. Thus nature is the root of their culture and tradition. Northeast poetry presents a constant urge of going back to their native tradition and upholding their identity. In doing so, they emphasized on the conservation of ecology of their region which is deteriorating day by day in the humdrum of modernization and urbanization. The poets of this region strongly encourage on the

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conservation of nature in order to preserve their native traditions, cultures, rituals, customs and above all their identity.

Living in an age of constant ecological crisis, Mamang Dai, a celebrated poet from Arunachal Pradesh offers an ecocritical analysis in her poems that examine the intricate relationship between man and nature. In the poem 'The Rain', Mamang Dai says :

In the sound of the rain
Is contained all the spirit of the
Jungle. Living, breathing,
Crushed, regenerative
Dark always watchful.

Through this poem, Dai shows the inseparable relation of man and nature. The spirit of life is possible only in the midst of nature. With the image of the 'rain', Dai suggest that water is the source of life in 'all the spirit of the jungle'. Here 'spirit' suggest the inhabitants of jungle including the humans. The poem exhibits the proximity of the natives of Arunachal Pradesh with nature.

Mamang Dai poems landscape the past and the present with recurrent images rooted in nature. With the image of trees, rivers, mountains she goes back to the past in order to find her ancestral roots which is fading away in the lights of development. All her poems lack urban interest.

We are the children of the rain
Of the cloud woman,
Brother to stone and bat
In our cradle of bamboo vine
In our long houses we slept... (Birth place)

This poem of Mamang Dai represents our relation with nature. It is believed in her community that everything - rocks, stones, trees, hills have life. She dreams of a peaceful paradise of nature where the cloud, the bat, the rain and humans are in absolute harmony. She further says :

Recognition was instant
As clan by clan we grew,
And destiny was simple

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Like a green shoot
Following direction
Like the sun and moon. (ibidem)

Here we find Dai's constant urge of going back to her ancestral roots. The traditional belief of Adi community is reflected in this poem. The community worship Donyi - Polo, literally meaning, the Sun and the Moon. She says that their 'destiny was simple' - to follow the ancestral roots without floating in the waves of modernization.

Mamang Dai has written a collection entitled River poems where she pens down her varied feelings and emotions remembering her ancient land, mysterious environment, the tribal culture. In the poem "Missing Link", she remembers the past which traces the identity of her people.

The river was the green and white vein of our 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 (Missing Link)

She becomes nostalgic when she remembers her past days in her homeland. She laments at the fact that the 'lust for land' has vanished their association with nature. The link with nature is the missing link that the poet is talking about. In the vanished land the fragrance of flower is replaced by the odor of gun powder.

The poet is concerned about the destruction of the serenity of nature in the webs of modernization and globalization. Her concern is seen in the poem "Small Towns and the River". Small towns suggest growing materialism and the river suggests the nature. The poem reflects that small towns remind the poet of death - the death of the beauty of nature. She further says 'Small towns grow with anxiety/ for the future'. Thus we see that Mamang Dai is aware of the harm that environmental degradation would cause to her people. In the poem 'Remembrance', she laments for the present condition of her people where the relation between nature and man is decreasing day by day.

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Why did we think gods would survive
Deathless in memory,
In trees and stones and the sleep of babies;
Now, when we close our eyes
And cease to believe, god dies. (Remembrance)

This beautiful excerpt of Dai magnificently portrays that nature is on the verge of extinction. In their community nature is equivalent to god. Here god suggests nature. She laments that capitalism and consumerism has killed nature and nature lies dead in our memories. In this poem we also see a quest for identity when she further writes:

We dwell in the mountains and do not know
What the world hears about us.
Foragers for a destiny,
All the days of our lives
We share at the outline of the hills,
Lifting our eyes to the invincible sky. (ibidem)

Mamang Dai becomes the representative of her community. She says that mountains are her dwelling place, but the act of deforestation has taken away her dwelling place. In the poem 'Days' she remembers those days where there was a sense of jolliness among the nature. But today this jolliness is nowhere to be found. Everything is dull.

Sparkling clear cold
Laughter among the trees
In the snow frozen villages
There were those days. (Days)

Here Mamang Dai warns us the threat of deforestation. The 'laughter among trees' is silenced by the very act of deforestation. She warns her community against the anthropogenic activities which would one day completely destroy her homeland. "The colours of the morning", "The afternoon's golden chain" is already fading away.

Mountains are the omnipresent metaphors in her poetry. In her poetry mountains play an important role in the quest for understanding the interaction between nature and society. The name 'Arunachal Pradesh' itself represents the Sanskrit meaning of 'the Land of Dawn

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lit Mountains.'

The history of our race begins with the place of stories.
We do not know if the language we speak
Belongs to a written past.
Nothing is certain.

There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains. (An Obscure Place)

Here mountains are not only just a landscape, but it is their past, present and future. It is through mountains that individuals identify themselves. She further writes :

The words of strangers have led us into a mist.
Deer than the one we lift behind
Weeping, like the waving grassland
Where the bones of our father are buried
Surrounded by thoughts of beauty. (ibidem)

The ancestral cord has broken down with the advent of the British colonizers. The poet laments that her people have departed from the age-old beliefs, customs and rituals which in turn leads to their crisis of identity.

Temsula Ao, a major poet of Northeãst from Nagaland also invokes the intricate relationship of man with nature and vice-versa. In 'Blood of others' she writes :

We believed that our gods lived
In the various forms of nature
Whom we worshipped
With unquestioning faith.

Temsula Ao shows how the people share a special bond with Nature. Her poem takes us back to a period where paganism is the religion of the Naga people. For them, nature is God and harming nature means offending God. Thus a harmonious relation between nature and man was seen before the advent of Christianity. She further writes :

Then came a tribe of strangers
Into our primordial territories
Armed with only a Book and
Promises of a land called heaven. (blood of others)

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With the advent of 'a tribe of strangers' their ancient belief got shaken and they were influenced by the outsiders to change their beliefs and customs. The poet laments the fact that 'We borrowed their minds,/ Aped their manners,/ Adopted their gods/ And became perfect mimics.' Like mamang Dai, Temsula Ao also gives a voice to her concern for the loss of their identity. She says 'the trees and mountains/ Rocks and river' which are their gods; today they have become a 'primitive nonsense'.

We shuffled our natural articulations
Turned away from our ancestral gods
And abandoned accustomed rituals
Beguiled by promise of a new heaven. (ibidem)

The poet feels that her own people have denied identifying themselves - the real selves. They have just swept away with the tides of modernization forgetting their history. Ao says that 'Grandfather constantly warned/ That forgetting the stories/ would be catastrophic:/ We would lose our history,/ Territory, and most certainly,/ Our intrinsic identity.' We see that Ao takes the responsibility to pass the ancestral history to the next generation who have gone very far from their history. She writes in her poem, 'Stone People from Lungterok'

Lungterok
The six stones
Where the progenitors
And fore bears
Of the stone people
Were born
Out of the womb
Of the earth

The poem identifies the place of their origin where their ancestors emerged from the womb of the Earth. 'Stone People' collectively refer to the ethnic community. They are the 'worshippers/ of unknown, unseen/ spirit/ of trees and forest/ of stones and rivers'. Like Mamang Dai, she also shows her concern for the ecological disturbances. Temsula Ao's concern can be seen through these lines.

Alas for the forest
Which now lies silent

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Stunned and stumped (Lament for Earth)

The forest lies barren and silent with the increasing anthropogenic activities. In "The Old Story Teller" she says "warriors and were-tigers/ came alive through the tales/ As did the various animals/ Who were once our brothers/ Until we invented human language/ and began calling them savage." Today, we forget that we are just a species like others. The lushness and the beauty of nature have been destroyed and thus she laments for Mother Earth.

Alas for this earth
Thus ravaged
Stripped of her lushness
And her sap
Her countenance
Furrowed and damaged
Like a fading beauty. (ibidem)

In her poetry Nature has always been associated with feminine gender and thus her poems give a hint of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism regards that the oppression of women and nature are interconnected. Nature is always considered as feminine. The destruction of nature is linked with the oppression of woman. The patriarchal culture of man destroys nature. Temsula Ao thus writes :

Alas for the forst
Which now lies silent...:-
With her evidence
Of her rape
As on her breast
The elephant trample
The lorries loaded with her treasures
Bound for the mills at the forest. (ibidem)

The Mother nature who is a provider, protector and giver of life is raped by the patriarchal anthropogenic activities of the society. It is said that man is to culture and woman is to nature. Thus the culture of modernization has destroyed the treasures of Mother Nature. The lush green forest is silent. The only voice that is heard is the voice of the lorries in which the treasures of Mother Earth are carried for the

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mills. The forest is replaced by the mills of the material world. Thus excessive use of natural resources for materialistic gain has destroyed the serenity of nature.

We see that nature is an integral part of Northeast Indian poetry. We see similarities in both the poets while representing nature. Both of them share the ecological glory of their respective regions - Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Nature serves a metaphor of lost identity and the destruction of nature will collectively distort their identity. In glorifying the evergreen beauty of hills, rivers, mountains, forest, they have also showed their concern for nature by talking against the ills of modernization and urbanization. By highlighting the effort of the poets this paper has tried to analyze the ecological consciousness present in the poetry of Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao. ▣

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Reporting north-east : A study of Siddhartha Deb's Surface

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Media Plays a very important role in the especially in the democratic countries where it has immense power. In India, media is also known as the fourth estate along with Legislature, Executive and Judiciary. Media not only presents facts but also gives interpretation of those facts; it formulates opinion of the public and propagates ideas and ideologies. Media is conceived to be the only pillar that represents the public by guarding their interests, bringing them to forefront, reporting on failings and lapses of the government and other bodies exercising governing power. The media has therefore been rightly described as the Fourth Estate. However, India's Northeast till remains trapped behind a veil of selective silence for the rest of the country and the outside world. The general perception is that the engagement of the mainstream Indian media - both print and broadcast - with the Northeast stands marginal. This fact becomes even starker when compared to extensive coverage that events, even conflicts in the rest of the country (or 'mainland' India) receive. This indifference that influences Government attitudes as well as the media is unsated and remains an accepted framework of reference towards the region, this paper attempts a reading of Siddhartha Deb's second novel surface which traverses the journey of a journalist from Calcutta, Amrit, to the region to do a series of stories for a national daily and explore if the area is rich in the possibility of setting up a new edition for the paper that he works.

The story unfolds with Amrit being assigned to go to the region

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to seize the 'untapped opportunities' (3) by launching a new edition of a crumbling Calcutta daily named Sentinel. Speaking to Amrit about how the paper has been functioning with regards to news from the region, Sarkar, the managing director of the daily reveals.

We had been sending a dak edition to the region for thirty of forty years. In the morning, well before the first shift came in, ne solitary subeditor sat with the paper and prepared the dak edition, transforming outdated news into fresh, relevant information by the simple expedient of advancing the datelines by a end adjusting all references to 'today', 'tomorrow' and 'yesterday' in the reports. (4)

A revelation that leaves even the otherwise indifferent Amrit surprised for a moment. However the episode cannot be ignored as an aberration or an exaggeration for this how the mainstream media has been functioning in regards to the North-east. There seems to be a definite lack of media interest in North-east India which can also be reflected in the article 'North-east India : Through the Prism of the National Media' (2007) by Amit Sengupta. The article states the most of the dailies with multi-editions and news channels shockingly have only one journalist to cover the entire north-east region. Some, like NDTV, have two journalists while the rest are content with their single man/ woman army left to cover the vast territory. The dailies like the Times of India, Hindustan Times have a couple of journalists while barring a few like The Times of India and the Telegraph, the other papers do not have their own editions in the region or a dedicated northeast page. The audiovisual media does not have a dedicated northeast edition in their busy 24x7 ceaseless broadcasting frenzy. This dip-in-dip-out sort of reporting where journalists are parachuted in to report from a region and airlifted out after the job is done, where there is never a separate cell to plan out a definite scheme of action, what can be expected is only are therefore questions of apathy, incomplete reports and selective engagements.

Internationally media has grown to be a corporate entity that is highly ad driven and has its own list of choice and preferences. The picture is not much different with India. When Sarkar discloses his plans for the region, those intentions are completely mercenary. After

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the initial talks with him, the only phrases that Amrit could recall were 'markets', 'subscribers' and 'captive audience'. An article, 'Fourth Estate on sale' (2009) in Economic and Political Weekly argues how the Indian media is selling its soul to the market and forfeiting its claim to be an independent estate. Not to forget that the region has the potential to pitch in with ad revenue if approached and it is this aspect of the region that attracts Sarkar to the region. When Amrit was interested in doing a few serious investigative stories, Sarkar admonishes him telling to forget about his plans. What he wants was colorful pieces, things about local festivals, wildlife sanctuaries, shopping and things like that. He further adds 'Find out if they're planning adventure tourism. If not, suggest it to them. Then do a story on it. Look we have to pull in advertisers.' If the media becomes a slave to the market Northeast may never get the needed space in the media. Often, the coverage of the northeast remains trapped in stereotypes. With its conflicts, its tribes and its underdevelopment, this is India's area of darkness, an area of little interest to the media and to those responsible for governance and more generally in the greater cultural space of the country. In metropolitan India, the dominant image of the Northeast still remains that of a wild frontier. For most Indians, and in effect most of the Indian media, this characterization is not even regarded as insensitive. Hence it comes to no surprise that whenever the region gets reported, it is either due to its insurgency and violence or for its exotic appeal. As the story develops, we come to know that what attracts Amrit to the region is not the task assigned by the Sentinel. Amrit sets his own little scheme into motion, using the chance to obtain an assignment from a German magazine. In the Sentinel's archives, he finds a photograph of a porn actress who was paraded in front of the media by an insurgent group and then shot as an example of what might become of one who indulged in 'corrupt activities encouraged by Indian imperialism'. The magazine sends him an advance and tells him that it wants an 'exemplary story', 'a portrait of the mystery and sorrow of India through the story of the woman in the photograph'. It is ironic here that the story which excites him and propels him eventually to move to the region

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is found in the archival morgue of the Sentinel, the place where the unwanted stories are dumped into, a fate that most reports from the region have to share. While thinking about the possible reasons for the rejection of the story, Amrit recounts.

'Too far', I remembered one of the editors saying to me at a lunch when I asked him why we covered the region so poorly; it was the cry of the self important city dweller, of a man who had no interest in anything that did not touch him directly, concerned only with the rules of his job and his prospects for promotion and the hierarchy that dictated what was news and what was not. (71)

As a reporter from the region, Arijit Sen says 'It has been my sad lot to observe that the routine briefing of deaths that I receive from the army every week does not qualify as news in the media, and often it does not even make the television ticker scroll.' The same apathy echoes in the novel in Robiul's decision to snap all ties with the sentinel. Robiul working as a stringer for the paper had to time and again put up with Sarkar's decision to ignore his stories of the region as just unimportant to the paper. Tired of a decade of work in which the paper had disregarded 'his best efforts in the same way that his region was ignored by India' (41) he decided to resign. As Amrit views the incident in retrospective he observes that things would probably have been different had Robiul been a Calcutta boy, someone from a well known family.

Prasun Sonwalkar in 'Mediating otherness : India's English - language press and the North east' (2004) examines how India's English language press views issues from the northeast and argues that news is heavily influenced by socio-cultural factors and journalists' notions of 'us' and 'them'. He goes on to comment how general awareness on the northeast region and its people is minimal in the Indian public sphere and the lack of its coverage in the national English press leads to little public agenda or pressure on the central government to solve critical issues faced by this region since last many decades. Thus showing how lack of media interest can also lead to lack of Government interest. Amrit too shows the same mindset initially, that of a detached observer, having nothing in common with the

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region or the people. However as the tale of self discovery unfolds he realizes that things are not that different here from anywhere else. He becomes obsessed with the photograph, wondering who the woman was, who photographed the scene, what she really did to deserve execution, who were the executioners. As he prepares to leave Calcutta, he meets a German writer, Herman, who thinks Singh should pursue a story of the woman. Herman offers to help Singh get it published in one of his employer's publications Singh's friend and retired stringer for Singh's paper, Robiul, tells Singh that the photograph came from another reporter in the region. Robiul knows only that the group taken credit for the execution is a shadowy extremist group called MORLS - Movement Organized to Resuscitate the Liberation Struggle. And so begins Amrit's journey into the heart of an area of darkness that is either neglected or treated with brute force by the government in New Delhi. As we accompany Amrit on his journey through this troubled, perplexing land, we realize that *Surface* is as much a political thriller as a searching examination of a part of India that is rarely written about which also stresses on the active role that media can play in the nation building process giving importance to the Northeast India. ▣

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Weaving the Political into the Narrative of Personal: The Stories of Assam in English Language Fictions

Pallabi Konwar

Literature from Assam has always dealt with the political and socio-historical identity of Assam as a state and also its inclusion in the independent India. The six year long 'Assam Movement' (1979-1985) and the simultaneous emergence of the secessionist armed rebel group 'United Liberation Front of Assam' are two of the most significant chapters in the state's recent socio-political history. The birth of ULFA in 1979 heralded the subsequent tumultuous socio-political atmosphere of Assam, be it the constant conflict between ULFA and the Indian State, then later the Army oppression on the poor village people of Assam in the guise of Laws such as Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) etc, the dejected ULFA's attacks on the State Government, the infamous secret killings of the family members of ULFA allegedly aided by the State and eventually the peoples' disillusionment with both the regional party politics of Assam and the growing negative impact of the armed rebellion of ULFA.

In light of these events, the present paper aspires to engage with the emerging trend of politically conscious fictions written in English on the backdrop of Assam's recent socio-political history and will focus on the novels, *The Collector's Wife* (2005) by Mitra Phukan and Aruni Kashyap's *The House with a Thousand Stories* (2013).

Mitra Phukan has carved out a niche for herself in the literary realm of Assam and of India as a novelist, as an author of children's

books, a columnist and a translator. With her debut novel *The Collector's Wife* Phukan tells the story of Rukmini Bezboruah, the District Collector's wife. As the title of the novel suggests Rukmini's identity has been dictated so much on the terms of her being the 'wife' that she seemed to have lost her individuality while being a trophy wife for her husband Siddharth. The otherwise perfect upper middle class existence of Rukmini and Siddharth is marred by their inability to become parents. In an interview Mitra Phukan has revealed that Rukmini's childlessness symbolises those decades of Assam's history, where with the student's non-cooperation movement and the activities of different militant organisations, life was stagnant and the times were barren. But later Rukmini does become pregnant, so that brings hope. (Phukan in an interview with Nabish Alom, 2012).

In the narrative of the novel among the chaos of different armed rebel groups and their activities Rukmini spends a relatively sheltered life fighting her own demons of loneliness for being trapped in a loveless marriage and is a mute spectator to the happening of her town until the day when the political battle rushed inside the comforts of her sheltered existence. The narrative of the novel is strewn with incidents of kidnapping, extortion, bandhs and the protests against illegal immigrants by the student unions. Significantly Phukan uses a self-invented name to refer to the dominant Militant outfit in Assam as MOFEH, the "Movement For an Exclusive Homeland". Incidentally Rukmini meets Manoj Mahanta, also an English Literature graduate but employed as a car tyre salesman. Their conversations become an escape from her monotonous existence for Rukmini and soon they embark on a relationship. Rukmini finds herself pregnant with Manoj's child but before she could tell him, he was kidnapped by militants along with a wealthy tea-planter. Fate finally delivers its fatal blow when her husband Siddharth succumbs to the injuries of the militants' bullets while accompanying the police in a rescue operation for Manoj, the confrontation also takes Manoj's life. This was the moment Rukmini realised that, "... the monster had suddenly entered her very home. She had seen its macabre dance all around her these past two years... Foolishly, she had thought herself, and

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her life to be outside the pale of the monster's attentions." (Phukan: 337) The violence surrounding the state has a way of affecting the lives of everybody; nobody is beyond its reach.

The House with a Thousand Stories, set in 1998 and 2002 deals with the horror of the secret killings of the family members of ULFA Cadres in Assam's recent hushed up history (1998-2001). Told through the perspective of an upper middle class college teacher, the narrative goes back and forth in time to depict the Army oppression and exploitation of innocent village people of Assam's interior and shows how the younger generation is affected by the repressive control of the state and also an increasingly violent and wayward armed rebellion. The narrative of the novel is divided between 1998 and 2002, both the times the young protagonist Pablo visits the ancestral home of his father in Mayong, first for a funeral and after for a wedding. The narrative constantly shifts between these two events and slowly brings in the subtext of the wide spread covert fear of SULFA, the secret killings of the relatives of ULFA rebels and the omnipresent military coercion and oppression in the state by the central government. Unlike Phukan Kashyap does not shy away from directly referring to words like 'Guptohotya' (Kashyap: 68) and actual incidents of such brutalities as the killing of the entire family of former Central Publicity Secretary of ULFA, Mithinga Daimary.

Aruni Kashyap belongs to the generation of Assamese youths who have seen the consequences of the clash between the Indian state and the armed secessionist rebel groups. Though sometimes accused of glorifying the armed struggle of the rebel groups by some critics and readers alike, Aruni is neither advocating for the cause of armed struggle nor he is romanticising the idea of one. Rather he is appealing for reconciliation through talks and dialogue. A brief look at the non-fictional writings of Kashyap will reveal his intense engagement with the socio-political atmosphere of Assam and, also his critique of the state's representation and reception in the national media. In one of his essays "Where the Sun Rises: The Peripheral Imagination, Writing the 'Invisible' India" Kashyap writes about his influences and choices while writing about Assam. He acknowledges

the inspiration he received from Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and the second was Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. Ghosh's style of writing in his travelogues can also be traced in Aruni's writing. His style is engaging and draws even an unfamiliar reader of the discourse to his narrative.

The House with a Thousand Stories has received rave reviews and is an important text which openly talks about a dark period of Assam's history where human rights violations were at its peak. In his article "Assam's Disappeared, India's Shame" published in *The Hindu* Kashyap talks about the choice of the subject for his first novel and explains how he had to tone down the anger at the brutalities perpetrated both by the state and the armed rebels on the common people of Assam in his novel, so that the novel can depict the resilient spirit of the people of Assam. Kashyap argues that his fiction is not merely a portrayal of the victimised image of the state, but its life story in spite of all the oppressions and turmoil. In fact the L shaped 'house with seventeen windows but no ventilators' (Kashyap: 61) has many more stories to tell, each of the character has their own story.

In the context of critiquing the literary influences and narrative structure of the novels there are some concerns which need to be addressed. For example, *The Collector's Wife*, could have done with a far better editing process as the three hundred and forty nine page long novel tends to test one's patience at times. Also some of the plot turns seem clichéd and haphazard, such as Siddharth cheating Rukmini with her colleague Priyam. Same can be said for *The House with a Thousand Stories*, as the 'lust story' of Pablo and Anamika seem a bit forced in the narrative structure. The major influence of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* can not be ignored in Kashyap's novel. Kashyap draws many elements from Roy's novel, right down to the last passage where the doomed lovers Anamika and Pablo consummate their relationship just like Roy's Ammu and Velutha. Moreover who can ignore Oholya-jethai's uncanny similarity with Baby Kochamma, both old spinsters with gossips of their unrequited love of the past that haunt them for eternity.

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What works in favour of both the novels is the writers' sense of place and setting. The fictional small town of Parbatpuri in *The Collector's Wife*, is a conglomeration of different cultures, not necessarily inhibited by a purely geographically located Assamese population. There are occasional references to characters from various cultures and ethnic identities, and also people from other states who came to Assam and stayed on for financial and business purposes. With its nearby tea gardens, elite clubs for officers, the DC's bungalow from the British era, the small but busy marketplace, the college and the press, Parbatpuri represents a place in Assam located at the threshold of modernity and successfully meets the demands of the story. Similarly Pablo's ancestral home at Mayong and his hometown Guwahati is intrinsic to the narrative of *The House with a Thousand Stories*. Readers were drawn to Mayong for the allure of its association with myths and mystery, but instead they stayed on witnessing the real story; Mayong's gradual transformation from tradition to modernity: with its newly established colleges, 'revolutionary lovers' and the breakdown of large joint families. When the family of the surrendered militant Hiren was killed by masked gunmen the entire village of Hatimura descends into hushed panic. When his parents came to take him away immediately after the incident, Pablo thought about the people living in the village, "I could go to Guwahati, even to Delhi if I wanted to, or to London. What about the people here, his own people?" (Kashyap: 105). Modernity with its urban spaces and an English speaking globalised world offers a refuge, a rural Mayong can not.

In a way both the novels in discussion uses transgression as a motif and explanation of the tragic consequences of the characters. For both the narratives these metaphorical motifs are employed to somehow explain the mindless violence of the state and the suffering endured by the common people because of it. Fiction can not be a chronological documentation of historical events. Even overtly politically conscious fictions like *The Collector's Wife* and *The House with a Thousand Stories* have to be more than that and that is why both Mitra Phukan and Aruni Kashyap use a variety of ways such

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as: fate, rumour, gossip, superstitions to bring a balance of politics and literary aesthetics in their narratives. When Rukmini finds out about the death of her husband and Manoj, before blaming the rampant incidents of extortion and violence committed by the militants she accuses fate,

She had been a fool, she thought hazily, to have imagined that she could get away with it. That it was going to be okay. That she could carry one man's child, and expect another to be the father. Her audacity must have tempted Fate, who, in a fit of irritation, had decided to destroy both men. (Phukan: 348)

Kashyap also uses this motif when he talks about the village people reverently avoiding to step on the ground where the mutilated body of the brother of a ULFA militant was found. Long after, when Pablo heard about Anamika's painful death in a pool of her own blood, while trying to abort the baby conceived out of wedlock; Pablo thought about her crossing the forbidden spot once unaware of the incident.

What both of these novels have achieved through their effortless narrative flow is the portrayal of a day to day reality of the state. Without adhering to a rigid ideology the texts present the multilayered view of the politically volatile situation of Assam's contemporary history. The political undertone of the novels does not compromise the literary value of the texts as mere documentations of historical events as some of the other novels of this genre of conflict literature tend to fall prey to. Although the militant and military atrocities are at the core of the narrative, other pertinent issues such as patriarchal control over women's body, gender issues, moral policing, the societal hierarchy among different ethnicities within the Assamese society have also found a space in the novels. A close reading of both the novels will reveal how through English language fictions the stories of Assam are being presented, evidently to a wider readership. Kashyap has talked about his obsessive use of glossary while writing about Assam in English in his initial works, but he confesses how slowly he let go of this habit of trying to desperately explain Assam and the north-east to the world beyond.

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Now it is also intriguing to talk about defining the English language writings from the north-east India and distinguishing it from the already established genres such as Indian Writing in English. One may ask why such deliberate distinction? Though essentialist, may be one can not completely do away with such a term. Tilotamma Misra, in her introductory remarks for the *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India: Poetry and Essays* has dwelt on the use of this term which although attributes an illusory socio-cultural homogeneity to all the states of the region based on their geographical proximity, nonetheless also functions as a term which have come to represent the peripheral position of the states it includes in relation to what one might call the 'mainland India'. Misra opines that in many instances geography does become the history, and north-east India is one of such instances. The act of writing (including fictional writing) cannot be confined only to the aesthetic, it's inherently political. In the context of the present discussion both the writers, Aruni Kashyap and Mitra Phukan seem to engage with the term north-east with a little caution in their interviews and essays. For example Phukan in her article "Growing feminine gaze: women writers of Northeast" writes,

There are certain linkages that make the term "writers in English from the Northeast" a valid one. These writers have gone to English medium schools, and have often pursued their higher education outside the region. Those who go to these schools "think" in a certain way, are trained to write in a certain way, have read similar books in their formative years in schools and colleges. They often belong to the better-off strata of their societies. This economic reality makes their "point of view" a middle class one. They "know" life outside the region, as well as within. (Phukan, 2012)

Although this statement by the writer can be contested for its sense of generalisation, nonetheless we have to accept that some of the facts stated in the comment are true for many of the writers from north-east who have chosen English as their medium of creative expression. Aruni Kashyap in an interview with Murali N.

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Krishnaswamy published in *The Hindu* talks about how initially he did not consider himself a 'north-eastern writer'. After coming out of Assam to pursue his higher studies in Delhi he realised how a homogenous 'north-eastern identity' is imposed on the people of the region due to popular but vague perceptions and how he slowly began to identify with this very identity as a writer.

Writing in English has its many advantages, regardless of how much we glorify or advocate writing in the language of our dreams, our mother tongue. By writing in English a writer immediately gains a much larger readership, possibility of a world-wide appreciation, his/her position in the literary mainstream and what not. Questions of representation and target readership are also inherently associated with these 'new literatures' in English. Needless to say, that the narrative of the novels in discussion also gets affected by their language. The protagonists of the two novels, Rukmini and Prachurjya Medhi Aka Pablo belong to a certain upper middle class section of the society with easy access to the English language. There is a certain life style, ethos and way of looking at life that come along with this class identity and both the writers have exploited this to first identify with a possible pan-Indian or even a cosmopolitan English reading readership and then narrate their 'Assamese stories' in English to readers in and beyond Assam. As Kashyap says about naming his protagonist 'Pablo' in an interview,

I wish I could explain why Pablo is called 'Pablo'... I called him Dhonti, he didn't turn back. I called him Noyonmoni, he remained quiet. But when I called him Pablo, he turned to face me with a smile on his face.
(Kashyap, 2013)

As bilingual writers, proficient both in English and Assamese, this newer generation of writers from Assam have the best of both worlds and their role is crucial in telling the stories of Assam to the world. These novels are very significant as being among the first of their kind to tell Assam's story in English. True they have to shoulder the responsibility of representing Assam but that is a challenge every writer has to face whether willing or not. ■

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Writing the 'Self': The Female Psyche in Jahnvi Baruah's Rebirth

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Patriarchal notions of gender construct, performance and roles have always found their representation through fictional writings. Male writers have often, if not always, (mis)represented the female consciousness in their writings. Their writings have given much focus on the male consciousness; and female psyche is arguably given minimal importance. The literary canon of any language tends to be dominated by male authors. Proper female representation is rare, because of prejudice against women writers and their literary output. The act of writing requires elements like time, space and financial security among other things and that made it an indulgent activity for the women in a patriarchal society. And eventually if women do write, they are scrutinised along the lines of gender and not their work itself. In a way writing by women, about women becomes an act of self assertion. Going against the long standing male dominated political consciousness female writers have started to focus more on gynotexts -by giving a conscious and concentrated attempt towards representing the female psyche, (re)valuing the female experience. Such representations of female psyche demand for constructing one's self and identity. Female writers from North East, particularly from Assam have also engaged in issues pertaining to status of women in the society and have given adequate cognizance to such question. Be it the fiercely bold and nuanced writings of Indira Goswami and Arupa Patangia Kalita or more recent writers writing in English like Mitra Phukan. These writers wonderfully differ from each other in their

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portrayal of transgressive and memorable women characters like; Saudamini (*The Blue Necked God*, 2013), Giribaala (*The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* 2004), Rukmini (*The Collector's Wife*, 2005) and Felanee (*Felanee*, 2011). In this rich tradition of Assamese female writers writing about women, Jahnavi Barua is a welcome recent addition, who with her very first novel *Rebirth* (2010) has impressed readers and critics alike with her treatment of some immensely relevant topics concerning the position of women in India.

Rebirth is the story of Kaberi and her psychological journey. It is the story of complex interior landscape of the protagonist's mind towards self realisation and eventual liberation. The novel resonates because it is not didactic or preachy; rather it is a story to which a reader can relate to, it's a story which lingers on the mind of the reader long after they have closed the book. The review of the novel in *The Hindu* by Sharanya Manivannan reads,

...there are books that wander in without bells on, as quiet as the comfort that fills the heart while watching the day's first or last light from one's own window, alone but for the succour of a cup of tea. Perhaps that is the analogy that comes closest to expressing the peace that Jahnavi Barua's Rebirth brings. (Manivannam, 2011)

What is significant about the narrative of *Rebirth* is that it strikes one as such a real story, without introducing any melodramatic passage the book creates a world where the problems faced by the women of the novel rings true. The novel begins in medias res, in the middle, at a point when the protagonist is expecting and her connubial relationship is on the brink of a rupture. In an interview published in *The Hindu* Jahnavi Baruah explained the reason behind the peculiar portrayal of Kaberi's rebellion which may come across as surprisingly quiet,

Traditionally, Assamese society has placed great emphasis on - among other things - moderation, restraint and resilience in all spheres of life. In keeping with this, expressing any emotion too loudly is not something that is encouraged. While things are changing rapidly, politics and globalisation have played their part

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in impacting traditional behaviour; I do believe that coming from that region has partly resulted in my writing being the way it is. (Barua, 2011)

What the author says holds true not only for Assamese society but may be other societies in India as well but what is worth noting is the nature of the expectations that come from the assigned gender roles for the women in the society, which have always put them in a submissive state. Many stories go unheard, many complaints unattended, many struggles and humiliations shrugged off as part of the deal for being a woman. *Rebirth* slowly remove the veil from some of these uncomfortable questions, which are denied their due importance in a hypocritical society which preach different sets morality for the male and female. Significantly enough the way the writer presents the narrative - it is axiomatically not a sympathy seeking cry for a wronged woman, or an overtly melodramatic sob story. But instead, it is a novel that addresses these silences where the voices of women should have been expressed emphatically. Thus the novel takes a shift from androtext to gynotext where focus is pertinently given on writing the self of the female consciousness. Kaberi's constant communication with her would-be-born child is endearing, her slow progress as a writer inspiring and her keen sense of observation is engaging. As avid reader Kaberi's ideas of love, respect and relationships are seriously questioned ever since Ron, Kaberi's husband begins to show his indifference and it reaches its climactic edge when he betrays her after getting to know about her pregnancy. More than the first two thirds of the narrative follow the conventional trajectory of Kaberi's life where she is willing to accept her infidel and violent husband. She believed in reconciliation. But towards the end Kaberi starts wondering whether her whole life was a lie, a charade. It is heartening when she asks Ron if he ever loved her and he says,

"There are more important things than love, Kaberi." to which she replies, "No, Ron... There are few things more important than love." (Rebirth, 174)

Though primarily Kaberi's story, *Rebirth* also deals with women from different walks of life, they come from diverse backgrounds but

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somehow come together in their shared conflict against stereotypes and their own personal pigeonholes. Destabilizing the stereotypes and breaking free is not easy, even for the apparently unapologetically rebellious Preetha and the curiously privileged elite Sonia. Preetha seems to be fiercely rebellious and independent for the most part of the novel. Her easy dismissal of her husband Sunder is significant matters of their life and her over protectiveness for her child Tarun who suffers from down's syndrome-all of these according to Kaberi contribute to Preertha's apparently hardened exterior, which is not penetrable by any kind of outside influence. But towards the end of the novel we know that her difficult motherhood with an unfortunately ill child is not the only thing that triggered Preetha's somewhat accusing individuality. It comes as a shock to the reader when it is Preetha who questions Kaberi's right to choose between her infidel husband and her independence. Preetha says to Kaberi,

"Do you really have a choice? How will you manage financially? Who will support you?... Don't you think you are being just a little selfish, Kaberi?... The child deserves to have a father... He deserves that name and protection." (Rebirth, 200)

The narrative of Rebirth takes a significant shift after Kaberi is informed of her father's death and the setting is changed from Bangalore to Assam. Kaberi was never very close to her alcoholic father and his death could not stir any renewed emotion of sympathy in her heart for him. The sounds of hushed up fights of her parents coming from their bedroom that she heard as a child were always on her mind, she thought her father hit her mother just like Ranjit hit her. One night her mother reveals to Kaberi the secret world of their failed marriage. This is a significant point in the narrative and after that Kaberi for the first time confides in her mother that Ranjit hits her. Her mother is greatly disturbed but could not offer her a solution, after all life of a single mother is not easy in a patriarchal society like India. The individual ambitions and will of female does not get priority before the collective consciousness. Although Kaberi, Kaberi's mother Preetha and Sonia each of them inhabits distinctly different social spaces, their

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stories come together in their shared struggle and helplessness in a society where they are bound by the socially constructed gender roles assigned to them. Be it a simple middle aged woman from Assam or a modern woman from a cosmopolitan city like Bangalore, walking out from a marriage is never an easy choice or decision for a woman. Marriage is still a dictatorship for husbands like Rahul and Ranjit.

The discussion of female consciousness and the self reflected in the novel will remain incomplete without mentioning the absent-present Joya, Kaberi's best friend. Joya governs Kaberi's crucial thoughts whenever she faces a dilemma. Kaberi often wonders what would Joya have had done if put in her place. Priyanka Kakoti in her essay "The Avatar in Jahnvi Barua's Rebirth" has elaborately dwelt on the character of Joya functioning as an alter ego of the protagonist Kaberi:

In Rebirth, Joya is Kaveri's (sic) avatar. Just like the computerized graphical avatar, Joya is not Kaberi's reflection but she is everything which Kaberi is not. She represents Kaberi's alter ego, someone from whom she is both alienated and identical at the same time.

(Kakoti: 484)

The narrative from the very beginning tries to bring the issue of personal space of an individual both in terms of psychological space and the inhabited physical one. Where does a woman really belong? Identity and the sense of belonging to home goes together, home defines the self in so many ways. But in India a woman's sense of home and therefore identity is conditioned to change, what was once 'home' becomes 'strange' after marriage and the 'strange' becomes 'home'. So there is always a lingering sense of alienation. In a way the search of some sort anchor to life is also crucial in forming the idea of the self. For the major part of the novel the author does focus on Kaberi's ongoing struggle with these ideas. She always compares and contrasts both of her worlds, the pre-marital one in Assam and her post-marital home in the distinctly different Bangalore. Kaberi's long deliberation on mending her broken marriage is a battle of choosing between the identity independent of her marital status; should she go back to the comfortable façade of being an obedient wife or emerge

asserting her self-identity.

Rebirth is not merely about the motherhood of Kaberi but also about her birth as a writer. The baby in her womb and the children's book that she is preparing are about to come into existence to the physical world simultaneously. This is a very crucial aspect of the novel; how the novelist Jahnvi Barua has so beautifully and effortlessly merges together the birth of a human child and the birth of a book. Since what is writing if not the act of giving birth; painful yet liberating and it works like a therapeutic cathartic tool, where the very act of writing symbolises transgression and anticipates change. While Kaberi's child will finally bring love to her desolate life, her book will bring her an independent identity as a writer and also the much needed financial independence. The act of writing can also be viewed as a tool of self-discovery, of being a medium through which Kaberi can 'talk' to her unborn child.

However apart from the novel's largely engaging premise what really may bother one as a reader is the possible future of Bidyut and Kaberi together which the novelist hints at towards the very last pages of the novel. This kind of an ending to what until then was a woman's journey towards independence and self discovery falls in the illusory trap of aspiring to be a conventionally ideal romance, which clearly the rest of the novel is not. And it is better that the novel is not conventional; not in its narrative technique, not in its treatment of the subject matter, not in its setting or character depiction. So why take the easy way out by introducing an element which will give the narrative a predictable happy ending in what is otherwise a much nuanced gynotext. It was Kaberi's struggle, and would have been better left that way without reducing it to another 'finding love' story. This part of the novel seems to be reductive and subversive of the main theme of the plot. Another significant drawback of the intensely personal narrative is the arguably less represented male voice in the novel. Whatever we know of the male characters is from Kaberi's monologue with her yet-to-be-born child; this first person narrative sometimes hinders the just character representations for the males present in the narrative.

Apart from some of its limitations, Jahnvi Barua's attempt at creating alternate modes of identity construction for the protagonist

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Kaberi gives the novel *Rebirth* a refreshing treatment. A woman's consciousness often tends to be tethered to the male of the family, whether it's a father or a husband. But what *Rebirth* does is subvert these age old perspectives at looks at ways through which a woman idea of the self can be reconstructed from a different and independent view point. A woman should not be and is not merely the roles she plays in the family— a wife, mother, or daughter. She is an individual, with her own personal goals and ambitions. But more often than not she is only looked at as a woman and not as a human being. Considerations of gender construct and identity comes far before the human idea. That is why the story of *Rebirth* is the story of transgression and the story of female self and consciousness; where a woman is beyond and much more than the social roles she portrays. ■

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Impacts in the Writings of Temsula Ao

Madhabi Lata Devi

India's North-East is a vast region which witnesses many varied and miscellaneous issues and problems those attract and haunt the ordinary people in general and some prominent writers, poets, poetess, novelists etc in particular who come forward to discuss through their writings expressing their repentance and personal views for solutions of such problems and issues to share these social concerns with the people of the society through their creative writings. Temsula Ao has often portrayed the real image of tribal life, contemporary activities, the close relationship amongst the human beings, ethos of Naga people, beauty of nature etc in her writings on one hand and simultaneously Ao's great concern with the loss of identity, insurgency, struggle for freedom, various social issues like domination over women, destruction of nature's gifts and erosion of nature's riches and wealth in all aspects by the people for their self interest etc. are also very beautifully depicted in her writings in a lucid manner on the other hand.

Methodology :

Using of methodology in the paper is entirely secondary. Necessary help is taken from text books, reference books, articles, journals, literary journals, etc. During the course of study of the presentation analytical method is being followed.

Discussion:

Love for Nature and Relationship of woman and Nature:

Ao's collection of short stories titled with '*Laburnum for My*

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Head' conveys vividly and brilliantly the different states of human condition by way of portraying various aspects of men and women's life and their struggle for existence that reveals the writer's great confidence and deep thoughts of understanding, deep concentration to bring the stories in so-called real life. Here, in the story we have seen the role of a woman character who is known as *Lentina* and her desire and passion to plant a laburnum sapling in her own garden that will flower in the garden lifetime. She also wants to have one such plant over grave also. Ao has thus successfully presented the inter-relationship of the women and nature. *Lentina's* efforts to survive the plant so-called 'laburnum' time and again without feeling any desolation and anguish and growing of the laburnum flower plant at last shows the real picture of love for nature. Ao also tries to present a beautiful Portrayal regarding the deep patience of a woman who without losing her heart has tried to plant the laburnum that blooms yellow in colour because the laburnum flowers have appealed to *Lentina* of their beauty and also because of her humbleness to their nod of hanging their heads earthward and thus her expectation has come to be fulfilled when the living and surviving one young tree of laburnum on *Lentina's* plot has flourished and wonder of wonders with a small spring bearing few yellow blossoms out of the two laburnum trees planted there which one has decayed and died that *Temsula* expresses in a deep pathetic mood in her story.

Here one can see that nature and women are closely connected; human beings cannot live without nature and nature without the nurture of human beings thus, the reminiscent memory of *Lentina* will be flourished and conveyed to the people by the laburnum flowers as long as it survives.

Relationship in between human being and Nature and Domination over nature:

Temsula Ao's second story named, '*Death of a Hunter*' also depicts the human-nature relationship in which *Tangchetla* representing as a woman character showing her understanding, caring and love of nature. In this story, Ao has talked about men's selfishness

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in securing his materialistic and self interests by means of perpetuating bogus explanation and thereby justifying his cruel measures and harmful activities against calm and quiet nature is vehemently protested. It is fact that in the story Ao has narrated the negative aspect of human being that leads him for destruction of the nature (flora and fauna, elephant, monkey, boar etc) when *Imchanok* (husband of *Tangchetla*) has turned his profession to a skilled hunter and thereafter he has used to hunt elephant, monkey, boar etc one after another without any feeling of love and sympathy to them and in true sense, he may be termed as the cruel hunter of nature. He never thinks that the animals also have the equal right to stay alive, to move, to eat, to take care of their family, friends, and their young ones like human beings on this earth. The animals must move from here and there in search of their food, if the human being tries to debar them from their food, movement they will try to create tremor and become furious. So the human being must not think that the entire earth is made for them only. At last, Ao depicts the pity picture of the hunter in the mood of repentance for his past ill activities destroying the beauty of the nature and thus the hunter, at last has buried the boar's tooth, the dismantled gun and the '*cruel nature*' of a hunter of *Imchanok* inherent in him.

In her writings it is clearly revealed the lamentation of the writer regarding the domination of the women and the domination of nature by men which is quite crucial feminism and environmentalism.

Women Issue:

Temsula Ao is very much concerned with trouble and insecurity faced by woman in the patriarchal society owing to the domination by man for self interest. In her collection of Story '*Three Women*' represents three different generations. Ao has discussed the thoughts and feeling of women. In our patriarchal society, woman has to suffer a lot from man only because of the domination over them as and when a man desires so, a woman has either to accept it or surrender and here the question doesn't arise for a woman what are their likes and dislikes.

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Thus, Temsula Ao has presented the scenario of the power of sacrifice, enduring spirit inherent in woman and nature even after continuous processing of domination and torture on woman and nature who live in the patriarchal society which the writer laments deeply and silently memorizing the inhuman traits prevailed in the society that brings to great issue.

Insurgency & its affects :

Temsula Ao is well concerned with those problems of insurgency faced by the people of the society both mentally and physically, specially the insecurity of woman and children both from the Armed forces deployed by the govt. and the outfit militants in the society owing to their harassment in different ways by demanding of money, seeking for shelter to hide themselves from the Army, torture to the woman, kidnapping of children on one hand and torturing physically the members of the family, assaulting the women during the course of the Army operations on the other hand and thus she has talked clearly about these unfortunate incidents in her collection of another story titled with '*A Simple Question*'.

In this story *Imdongla's* character has been portrayed by Ao as a very worldly-wise and just literate woman who have grown up in such a family who has been well conversant about the history, tradition and politics of the village where discussions about these were daily held because her father has been a gaonburah of a village on one hand and again, her role as a woman has been showed as a very responsible wife, caring, well understand, courage and perfect woman of the society whose husband has also been a gaonburah whose name has been *Tekaba*. The story shows here specifically the presence of mind, intelligence and bravery of *Imdongla*, who fazes an army officer with a simple question that compels the officer to release her husband. Once *Tekaba* has thought to resign from the post of gaonburah but it is only *Imdongla*, his wife has changed his thought and make him understand the situation that his resignation will not solve the problem faced by *Tekaba* and her family members along with other villagers. As such, *Imdongla* has advised him to feel

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courage and no fear otherwise every one of the village will call you a coward.

When the military operation on the basis of some important clues faced by *Imdongla*, 'She could jolt the moral sense of the captain what is wrong and what is right putting the simple question, "What do you want from us?" Thus Temsula Ao has portrayed the picture of the story in a very logical manner that a simple village woman acting courageously in such situation where male person has failed. Besides these, she has been able to negotiate the gap between the male world of underground and the socially constructed male world of military.

So, the role of *Imdongla* as a woman has been portrayed brilliantly and every issue and situation has been shown to be solved successfully and the real picture of harassment created by the underground and military in the present society and the sufferings endured by the innocent people.

Ao's another story '*The Jung'e major*' from '*These Hills called Home Stories from a War Zone*' also exposes the brilliant character of a woman named *Khatia* to save her husband named *Punaba* from the vicious claws of the soldiers and at last her efforts to bring her underground husband whose aim and object has been to set free his motherland, to regain the loss of identity and fulfill other legitimate right from the control of state mechanism into over ground. In this story Ao has successfully presented *Khatia* to be wise, knowledgeable, intelligent and responsible wife so far and as a result her husband has been able to turn into a normal life surrendering his underground activities and thus could become a mechanic under the State Transport Deptt .

Temsula Ao in her collection of short stories Titled with '*These Hills Called Home : Stories from a War Zone*' has brilliantly depicted the demand preferred by the Naga people for their legitimate identity, their right and end of injustice. In this story book Temsula Ao has described particularly about the ordinary Naga people who have to face the violence, torture and the like frequently and how the security forces deployed by the state mechanism have displayed brutal and

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inhuman torture to stop their voice on one hand and how they try to rescue their right and realities from the hands of the said mechanism on the other hand. Temsula Ao's most writings involve in women-who have to bear the burnt of violence.

Violence:

In the story '*The Last song*' Temsula has portrayed mainly the vast difference of thoughts of human beings and that is the love with each other, understanding and structural feelings to be owned by human beings but on other side the thinking of demolition and annihilation of normal human beings by a group of inhuman beings for their self interest Ao has presented here the picture of women being tortured, tormented and molested by the later group of society what is so-called 'arrogant Indian army'. In her story ,Ao gives emphasis on nature so she expresses as:

*"She tells them that the youngsters of today have forgotten
How to listen to the voice of earth and the wind."*

Temsula Ao in her poem entitled '*An Old Tree*' has depicted in symbolic manner the sufferings faced by an old tree . The old tree laments that when he becomes old the birds leave to visit him, even the squirrels have shied away . Because they know that he is nothing but an old tree of no use. The tree laments and feels very sad to see the pathetic condition for what is going to happen to all old trees. Here the poet sketches the picture of human beings what will happen in near future when they will become old. The poet feels fear thinking that nobody will respond to her one day when she becomes old.

In some poems of Temsula Ao, we find that the poet has been hurt bitterly seeing the exploitation and destruction of nature done by men and thus the resources of nature has become ruined gradually. This pathetic condition of the nature has haunted to the poet deeply so she tries to protest in the voices and verses through her poems.

Again, Temsula proves herself to be a 'hill poet' with several references to mountains and rocks. "Stone-People from Lungterok" is a folk based poem. Lungterok refers to the six stones .According to myth six human beings burst out of six stones (Lung means stone

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and Terok means six). It is supposed that the forefathers of Nagas are termed as Stone People and they are the worshippers of 'Ecology'.

Temsula Ao appeals to the people through her poems written based on mountain, hills, stones, forests, rivers etc., that they are the gifts of God. We must not harm and destroy these resources. She realizes the importance of those natural gifts. Here the poet shows the mountain as an element of the ecological symbolic, the altitude of man's glory and his triumph. In short, the decay of nature is decay of human beings.

Conclusion:

Temsula Ao has conveyed the voices of women for their ancestral rights and their subjectivities in her writings. She feels very sad thinking that the Naga people have been depriving of their legitimate rights, their ancestral identity and due to these problems they have to involve themselves into the underworld to regain their rights. The brutal torture and killings of the innocent people prevailed in the Naga society by the military forces and the state mechanism has been portrayed deeply by the writer. Temsula Ao is too grievous to tolerate the inhuman destruction of the nature done by the people. ■

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Attitude Towards Anthropocentrism in Temsula Ao's *Laburnum for My Head* : An Eco-critical Evaluation

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Temsula Ao is a Naga woman writer who has to her credit a limited but multifaceted range of literary works that inspires sundry critical approaches to be applied on it. Her collection of short stories entitled *Laburnum for My Head* offers an imaginative account of diverse privileged focuses of human life. Apparently the collection bears some random snapshots of the daily life of the Naga people; yet her delineation of the ways in which their lives get conditioned, stands as a testament of her idolization of nature. They exhibit her approach towards the intrinsic nature of the human being and its condition and also her concern for the way life stands under the threat of modernizing forces. From a critical frame, it can be said that Ao in the stories does not merely present a limited anthropological edition of human being; her use of the various natural objects and phenomena in hand-in-hand relationship with them reflects the indispensable eco-centric characteristic of her idea of human life and condition. This paper tries to study Ao's presentation of the human life in an interpersonal relationship with nature. It also tries to explore her idea of being human as reflected in the stories from the perspectives of anthropocentrism and eco-centrism. It endeavours to argue that Ao, in the form of the celebration of human civilization, taking the Nagas as a metaphor for the entire humanity, offers a critique of it. Thereby it tries to consider Ao's unheralded Eco-philosophy and attribute eco-

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consciousness to her, a tribal writer with a deep sense of sylvan contact of nature. It tries to find out the environmental values available in the stories. It applies Eco-critical and analytical methods for investigating Ao's realistic projection of the human life and its condition in the context of *Laburnum for My Head*. The study covers those stories from the anthology which offer instances of Ao's antagonistic attitude towards anthropocentrism.

A text is a product by the author about the world, which opens up the vistas of different dimensions for different critical disciplines. Eco-criticism, being such a branch, argues for an earth-centered approach to literary texts. The world therefore, for the Eco-critics, becomes not just the society with culminating stamps of human civilization, rather a world of the entire ecosystem with various species in unceasing interconnections with each other. It woke up at the very concept of the stress under which the earth's life support is at the turn of the modernization of human life and started greening in the 1980s and the 1990s. The pursuit of the Eco-critics centers round the exploration of the relationship between man and nature in order to make it as harmonious as possible by examining the environmental issues which include the causes of the ecological degradation and the crisis itself.

The detected reason behind the ever increasing ecological crisis is the advancement of human culture. A pioneering figure in Environmental History, Donald Worster says, "We are facing a global crisis today not because of how ecosystems function, but rather because of how our ethical systems function." (Worster: 27) With a challenge to the excessive importance to the anthropos, neglecting the earth as merely a stage on which they act, Eco-criticism analyses the literary texts, taking environmental consciousness at its back, with a purpose of finding out ways of understanding the condition of the ecosystem in them. It studies the discourse between human and nature where the former, with their diverse progressive culture suppress nature forgetting their very dependence on it and the latter is made silent. The alienation leads to a drastic change in human interaction with nature. Eco-criticism carries an assumption that the

natural world is a base to human culture i.e. the source of materials for the human progress whether economically or culturally and it is at the same time the duty on the part of the human beings to preserve and take utmost care of it. But change occurs in the self-understanding of the human beings and with the exceeding importance on anthropocentrism, all other species of the universe have become products to be dominated by the human beings. Bio is replaced by anthropo. Timothy Clark says, "Ecological problems are seen to result from structures of hierarchy and elitism in human society, geared to exploit both other people and the natural world as a source of profit." (Clark: 2)

The very nature of the stories in Temsula Ao's *Laburnum for My Head* seems anthropocentric in its customary focus on the human life. Inherently humanistic in her concerns, her way of portraying the human beings in their own conditions exhibits her imposition of some ethical forces to them. The collection contains eight stories concentrating on the lives of people from diversified social groups such as, women of well-to-do families, hunter, servant boy, villagers, and illiterate woman and so on. The ideas in the stories are multicoloured. In the title story there is the depiction of a lady's unstoppable obsession with the laburnum tree, in the second, *Death of a Hunter* there is a prestigious hunter who finally kills the hunter within him, the third, *The Boy who Sold an Airfield* gives the account of a boy's witty duping of unsuspecting villagers, the fourth, *The Letter* equates the struggles of a dead insurgent and innocent villagers, *The Three Woman and Sonny* enter into the feminine situation, psychology and feelings, *A Simple Question* is about the power of an illiterate woman's question and *Flight* reveals a caterpillar that finds wings to set itself free from the human clutches.

With a critical bent of mind, it can be said that behind Ao's portrayal of human life therein lays her moral impetus. Quite evidently she projects humanity as a part of nature as nature is the "sum total of the structures, substances and causal powers that are the universe" (Clark: 6) The nature in her stories in *Laburnum for My Head* stands for the Nature of the wilderness and that of the humanity as well

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which can lead any critical reader to an unannounced concern for the crisis of nature. Therefore an Eco-critical reading of her stories can make up an arena of an exciting and ponderable intersection of issues. This paper covers a study of the way the nature of human life is represented in the stories by focusing on the author's use of the Nature. It also tries to explore the role of those natural objects and phenomenon in the plot of the stories. It studies the connection between the human culture in the stories and the physical world. It is an Eco-critical interpretation of Temsula Ao's collection *Laburnum for My Head* with a view to giving it an environmental value. As far as the purpose of this paper is concerned it strictly limits itself with the relevant stories, still the other stories are also employed for its dissection because of the portrayal of human life.

"Stories live in every heart; some get told, many others remain unheard -stories about individual experiences made universal by imagination; stories that are jokes, and sometimes prayers; and those that are not always a figment of the mind but are, at times, confessions. Because stories live in every heart, some get told, like the ones on these pages..." (Ao, Laburnum for My Head)

Temsula Ao begins her *Laburnum for My Head* with the above foreword emphasizing the nature of the stories within. Nevertheless, whether in the attire of individual or communal confession, the stories in Ao's collection offer evocative expression of human life as in dual relationship: one in the societal relation while the other in relation to nature. Her exposition of the eventual progress of human life helps a critical mind to enter into an insightful reading of the impact of such a development on the natural environment. The anthropo in her stories cannot be read in solitude; one should not miss her undefined concern for the fluid condition of the identity of nature in the modern socio-cultural context. Lentina and Mapu in *Laburnum for My Head*, Imchanok in *Death of a Hunter* and Johnny in *Flight* are supportive personas while entering into the hidden intricate environmental issues in the stories.

Nature remains incomplete without the conceptualization of the human beings. Right from the growing importance of nature to the

unmanageable ecological crisis the idea revolves round the anthropo. Lynn White in his essay, 'The Historical Roots of Ecological Crisis', brings light into the exploitative attitude of human beings. He says, "Quite unintentionally changes in human ways often affect non human nature." (Glotfelty & Fromm: 4) He attacks Christianity for its anthropocentric teaching in Genesis 1: 26 which provide men with the right to have dominion over all other creatures on the earth. In this process of dominion there is a cycle of hegemonic structure which forces nature to become silent. However, the nature that is made silent is not the talking and acting nature; it is the entire collective branch of the ecosystem, the responsibility of whose safety is endowed to human beings, as the branch Anthropocentrism itself says, "Anthropocentrism has provided order and structure to human's understanding of the world while unavoidably expressing the limits to that understanding." (Boddice: 1) What people do about their ecology is dependent on what they think about themselves in relation to the things around them. Although Anthropocentrism is considered a challenge to Eco-centrism, yet the former is at the same time very useful and ineluctable, since human beings are inherently anthropocentric because Anthropocentrism does not study the anthropo in isolation. Bruno Latour points out that human beings are in unavoidable relationship with phusis, oikos, logos and polis, which refer to nature, kinship, reasoning and human culture respectively. So it is an ontological condition to be anthropocentric. In order to get rid of such a developing crisis in the environment one is to provide human beings with the ethical knowledge about themselves.

An appealing cry for the place of ethics in human culture can be dug out of the stories in Ao's *Laburnum for My Head*. *Death of a Hunter* offers a version of self-realization on the basis of understanding. Imchanok is at first shown as quite appreciative of his vocation of a hunter, but he started tottering and having hallucinations in course of time. The killing of an animal is an achievement for him, whereas after the killing of the huge elephant, "The sense of accomplishment that he used to enjoy after every kill was missing." (Ao: 29) He felt to be an unfortunate one to be assigned a task of killing an animal

which has been disturbing the villagers. He says about himself, "But why did it have to be *he* who was placed, in this particular instance, at the centre of the eternal contest between man and animal for dominion over the land?" (Ao: 29) The succeeding paragraphs of the story bear human beings' exploitative attitude to nature. Imchanok's railing at the dead monkey shows his disgust with all the brutalities applied on the carcass of it. The action of the animals also bears a hint of human-animal conflict and the rebellion of the latter as a consequence of the former's abuse of the jungles and the forests. Imchanok's character unveils the lack of co-ordination between the two and the chain of invading actions on the part of the human. Imchanok's surprising action towards the end shows the possibility of alternative innovations replacing the brutal hunting of animal. He finally, "buried the boar's tooth, the dismantled gun and Imchanok, the hunter." (Ao: 40) The story bears an idea of the impact of the modernizing activities of human being on the wild life. As per Heideggerian Eco-philosophy which deeply inspired Eco-criticism runs, there is always an essential material difference between mere material existence and the revelation of being or the thing-ness of the thing. Heidegger says that in order to live, one is to show himself up as an entity occupying a space on earth. According to him to be a being is to clearing. Heidegger calls the human beings the reasonable creatures and adorns them with an implicit duty to let the things of the universe disclose themselves in their own unique and inimitable way. His philosophy appeals to the humans to gather an ethical consciousness to let the natural objects to have free life. A study of the text on non-human makes it a study of humanity in some sense.

In *Flight* the caterpillar becomes an instrument to human amusement. Contrary to Heideggerian Eco-critical ideals, here Ao clearly shows how a caterpillar is forced into a meaning and identity to suit the purpose of a little boy. In the entire collection this story despite being a small one, manifests Ao's distinct concern for nature. Here she makes the caterpillar the narrator and puts light on the human conception of beauty. In response to the women's reaction to it, the caterpillar utters to itself, "Was it fear I heard in that voice, or

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was it disgust?" (Ao: 104) Ao here laughs at the mature human beings' lack of environmental teaching to their young ones. Instead of reprimanding his son, Johnny's father allowed him to lock a caterpillar in a small box inside their house. The caterpillar itself expresses its worry, "I was beginning to panic; may be this was going to be my last day" (Ao: 104) and finally its catastrophic condition, "As Johnny entered his bedroom and proceeded to prepare this strange space for my new life I felt as though I was being transported to another world." (Ao: 105) Ao in this story appears as a spokesperson of the natural environment, trying to enter into the exploited, unnoticed and silent region of nature. Whereas her way of entering into this domain is the how the human beings lead their lives objectifying nature to suit their instrumental values.

In *Laburnum for My Head* Lentina's uncontrollable desire for the Laburnum tree and her longing to have one beside her burial ground becomes impressive for any eco-critical lens. Her wish goes against the traditional practice of erecting headstones with as precious material as possible. Ao stresses on the immortality of nature in the very beginning of the story, "But nature has a way of upstaging even the hardest rock and granite edifices fabricated by men." (Ao: 1) Instead of being encouraged for her flora-consciousness, Lentina is frequently insulted by her husband and family members at gatherings. However Lentina does not bother to break the boundaries of her society as far as the fulfillment of her desire for the laburnum is concerned. What she wants is to attain immortality not by means of any precious headstones at her grave but by the sanctified contact of nature. In her search for the proper ways to fulfill her long standing desires she breaks the hierarchical societal ladder. Mapu, despite being a little educated driver shows respect to his mistress' wish wholeheartedly. He is never seen laughing at her wish; instead he helps her in fulfilling her desire. In this story there are possibilities of human consciousness for the preservation of nature. Sometimes marks of intellectuality become blur in this emergence of ethical concern for nature.

While concentrating on the human life Ao deals with human behavior which is cultured and civilized. Sometimes she displays an

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ironic account of this best creature of the universe while at others she celebrates it as with the help of personas like, Lentina and Imchanok. She uses a dialogic narrative to reflect the height of the culmination of human progress and culture. Except *Laburnum for My Head*, *Death of a Hunter* and *Flight* there is no account of humanity in direct communion with nature. Yet while studying the anthology critically the other stories are equally important to find out whether there is any difference in Ao's presentation of human life in behavioral pattern. It is also helpful in studying whether Ao in the other stories sounds Anthropocentric. *The Boy Who Sold an Airfield* shows the profit-making transactions among human being. *The Letter* shows the awareness of the young villagers to fight against oppression and extremism. While *Three Women* carries the hint of female suppression and the hierarchical setup of the society. Here Ao presents nature as a supportive system to the materialization of the relationship between Lipoktula and Medemla. The story bears the idea of equality and the place of humanism in the lap of nature. The idea of the nothingness in womenfolk is also there in *A Simple Question and Sonny*. Men's abandonment of the female and self-consideration as the superior agency of the societal ways make their attitude similar to nature. Most of the females are silent and this makes man grow with more superiority complexes. That is why women like Lentina finds comfort at the sight of nature and wants to become buried in nature.

In environmental discourse the tussle between Anthropocentrism and Eco-centrism occupies a predominant position. Anthropocentrism is the placing of humanity at the center of the universe including the whole lot of the domain of the non-human world; while in Eco-centrism instead of the human beings the priority is given to the entire ecosystem. For a pair of Eco-critical eyes there is the need of a deconstructive attempt at Anthropocentrism as the ecosystem has no centre in the universal sense. According to it, it is not only the non human entities that get an identity in relation to the human being; whereas the same is to be applicable in case of the human beings. This paper takes a stance between both the centers and applies it in

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Temsula Ao's stories. However both Anthropocentrism and Eco-centrism cannot completely be labeled the safest way to deal with nature as both of them revolve round a fixed centre. In the form of deconstructing the other both of them do not create a centre less entity. Yet what can be found in Temsula Ao's *Laburnum for My Head* is not either deep anthropocentric or eco-centric concern for the world. She shows human life in an undeniable relationship with nature. Lentina, Imchanok, Pokenmong are all members of the Naga community. Although the way they lead their lives is that of their community yet their lives become metaphors for the universal manhood. The title story shows the Nagas as being benefitted by the modern Christian contact and at the same time their contradictory behavior to the natural objects around. She gives voice to the Naga culture with its hierarchical setup in the stories. Her Nagas may be fictionalized but they never go beyond the context as far as a fruitful discussion from Eco-critical perspective is concerned.

Temsula Ao is not an established Eco-philosopher to her right. Her works focus the Naga community particularly that of the Ao people. Ao sounds anthropocentric in the stories in the sense that she accepts the superiority of the human being to all other species in terms of ability. Yet she hints that to be able is to be responsible, not to be cruel exploitative masters. She does not celebrate a stubborn idea of anthropocentrism with no ethical sense. She supports anthropocentrism as long as it is in communion with nature with the sense that humanity is a part of the natural atmosphere. What gets reflected is her love of anthropocentrism with humanistic concerns. A cry for humanism can be found in the stories although the rationality that is emphasized is not to establish a master-like superiority over the universe like that of the Classical Greek humanism. Ao shows how the non-human world is valued for the sake of its utility in the human world disregarding the natural balance making their existence comfortable on the earth which is caused by the ecosystem - a center less sphere of natural interdependencies: of life forms as they relate to each other and their shared environment. The human history itself is closely related to the natural history.

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In the turn of the twenty-first century, it is very important for the entire humanity to understand the condition of the natural environment and proceed for its rescue. The first step towards this is to understand the situation and conceptualize the problem. It is quite considerable that literature with its verbal and non-verbal expression cannot execute any bold actions against environmental crisis. However in order to make out of the problem and spread the awareness among the intellectuals, literature can play a pivotal role. Temsula Ao, being no Eco-critical writer or activist, demonstrates through her stories in *Laburnum for My Head* her intermittent ecological worry. The modes and concerns in the stories literally look at the eventful human life which is not isolated. A meaningful life is always in relation to the environment whether social, political, economic, historical and scientific or that of the nature. After reading Ao's *Laburnum for My Head* from an Eco-critical standpoint, it cannot be summarized that she directly shouts out at the human beings for their never-ending negligence and exploitation of the natural world. Contrarily she expresses her care using a way of studying the human life in relation to that of his environment both socio-cultural and natural. Therefore it can be argued that the stories reflect the unannounced eco-critical concern of Temsula Ao. Through the stories, Ao does not provide the readers with any reforming in the ecological crisis; in fact her stories can offer a helping hand in understanding the situation. Some stories show novel perspectives in the environmental crisis, while some others offer the eventual emergence of eco-consciousness among the human beings. ■

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Manifestation of Socio-cultural modes : A study on the Selected stories of Temsula Ao and Indrani Raimedhi

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The 'North-East' in the words of Ngangom and Kynpham is "*is a blanket term that has been used to imply a homogeneous province, a single political domain, inhabited by kindred people with a common history*". (Ngangom, 2009:ix)

The North-East region is a region inhabited by people of mosaic races, cultures and sub-cultures. But the region is neglected from the mainland which leaves a feeling of alienation for the people. But the phenomenal writers like Temsula Ao, Indrani Raimedhi, Jahnabi Barua, Dhruva Hazarika etc. have through their writings expressed concerns for the region. Their stories are filled with elaborate detail of the region.

Temsula Ao who hails from Nagaland generally grapple up with issues relating to a woman's identity in the context of patriarchy. In the story "Laburnum Over My Head" she portrays a lady named Lentina who wishes to make herself immortal by having a laburnum bloom in her burial instead of a headstone. It is the journey of a woman who in spite of all the obstacles such as the disapproval by the Town Committee for the plot of land overcame all the obstacles.

The interruption of Lentina to the Chairman gives a glimpse of his anger who 'resented being cut off in the middle of the speech'. This can be observed in the context where the society disapproves a woman asserting for her own rights. On the contrary, there is Babu the male servant who helped her in her mission.

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'A strong willed woman and her faithful servant were thus drawn into an unusual bond based on trust and loyalty'. (Page 17, Laburnum for my Head)

So, we find exceptional cases too where a man supports a woman unconditionally in the quest of her identity.

The Laburnum thus symbolizes a tree full of vibrant colours which indicates the myriad colours in a person's life. It is a struggle for the autonomy of land, tireless efforts of a woman. The headstone was considered a mere materialistic possession but the laburnum tree was celebrated in the story. Her triumphancy is indeed noteworthy. Lentina's identification with the laburnum grew with her as she felt their vibrant colours.

*'yellow flowers for what she thought was their femininity'
(Page 2, Laburnum for my head).*

The femininity in this context was related to the way the flowers were in a bending position.

The 'Death of a Hunter' Imchanok the hunter felt a sense of guilt after he killed the boar who destroyed their paddy fields. Imchanok whose relentless efforts moulded left him heartbroken at the end. Here Imchanok in the truest sense of term was concerned for his family as the paddy fields were their only source of livelihood. He was caught in a whirlpool of sympathetic and symbiotic concerns. His previous encounter while killing the monkey who destroyed their paddy fields was represented by a drastic change in his attitude towards animals. His hesitation to bring paddy from the fields of the half-way hut is represented in the following line:

'Soiled by a pack of monkeys and tainted with the blood of the leader' (Page 33, Death of a Hunter)

But at the same time he was concerned for his own family, who beared dire consequences and somehow had to find a solution. No matter for the sake of his family, he had done a significant deed. But within himself his feeling of morose was represented through the dismantling of the gun and burying it with the boar's tooth. It is indicative of the hunter who buried his own passion of hunting. He

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discovered his most inner self which was reluctant to shoot animals. The last line of the story bear testimony to this fact:

'And in the gaping wound of the earth he buried the boar's tooth, the dismantled gun and Imchanok the hunter'(Page 40 Death of a Hunter')

'Three Women' there is a quest for identity among them, the commonalities of their struggles giving the story a sense of belongingness. Their harsh realities is the unique factor which binds them in a 'strange trio'. Martha regarded her mother and granny as her own family members. But life turns into a somersault when she discovers that her mother is not Medemla. The dark secret revealed by Medemla as regards her adoption into the family, the way her father refused to accept her as his daughter in the hospital. Here the cruelty of a father to accept a girl child is prevalent, the stigmas still attached in a patriarchal society.

'What will I do with another girl? Do whatever you want; I don't want to see her ever, she who has killed my wife'..(Page 68, Three Women)

The death of Martha's mother was due to certain complications arising due to delivery. But the father cursed his newborn daughter for it. Thus, there is lack of conscience in the father and biasness involved with male child. If the child would have been a boy these outburst of anger would not have been shown at all.

Medemla's courage is praiseworthy who despite of being an Ao-Naga and a nurse in the same hospital adopted Martha defying the notions nonchalantly. Martha's features also did not bother her but instead she found solitude.

'Dark as a bat with, distinctively aboriginal features'
(Page 69, Three Women)

Martha's granny Lipotkula on the other hand was a rape victim who confided this secret. But this past haunted her when she found that her daughter Medemla wanted to marry with Imsutjen, the son of Merensashi(Merensashi was the man who raped her years ago and Medemla was their illegitimate child).

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'I would publicly announce that he had fathered Medemla in the hut and that his blood ran in her veins'. (Page 76, Three Women)

So her motherly instincts came into the limelight when she took the bold step of approaching Merensashi to stop the marriage else she will reveal the truth to the whole village. Thus, it can also be studied in the context of a woman who has the courage to take a firm stand for her daughter.

'The baby's wet and slimy contours as it surges through the passage produces such a sensuous effect on Martha that she will always remember it as more sublime than the transient ecstasies of sex'. (Page 79, Three Women)

There is a beautiful description of Martha's marriage and she delivering a child. Her struggle for twelve hours pushing the baby and the pleasure of motherhood is evident in the lines above.

Indrani Raimedhi who hails from Assam, writes sensitive stories with strong characters dealing mostly with a woman's location in a patriarchal society. It has a vast imagination, deft handling of the plot.

'House by the River' is a story which goes down memory lane. It portrays that in the materialistic world, there is still a corner in our heart :

*'that is forever childhood'(Page 10, House by the River).
'The brass thalis are gone so are the sooty enormous pans. And the wooden ladles. The squat jars of pickles. Here are plastic plates, pressure cooker, water that did not have to be lifted on a bucket tied to a rope.'(Page 13, House by the River).*

There is vivid elaboration of Assamese village, traditional delicacies the way a guest is received with love and affection. At the same time the way in which modernization replaced certain ways of life in villages. But nevertheless, there is a satisfaction of which the grandchildren receive through the delicacies of their Aita's rice cakes and with jiggery and sesame seeds.

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The marriage of her mama with a Naga lady was not welcomed by her Aita who had a conservative outlook as regards marriage. There is the narrator's sense of disillusionment when she goes back to her Aita's house in contemporary times which was structured by a different familial set up and cultural milieu.

There is a glimpse of the writer in her teens infatuated by her Mama's friend imagining herself in—

'Diaphanous pink sari, with gold sequins.' (Page 18, *House by the River*)

She was heartbroken when she came to know that he is going to get married. So there is a glimpse of a girl in her teens who craves for her 'prince charming' weaving a tapestry of thoughts.

The natural process of ageing is also described as her Koka once a full spirited man became frail. The offering of a gamocha by his grandchild was also an illusion for him. He felt as if his mother is calling him.. She felt to console him in that life is fragile in the line:

'That childhood was a country, which once you got out of, they never let you in again.' (Page 20, *House by the River*)

'The Nameplate' is about the plight of Arunav Barua and his lover who were college soulmates. Their desire of building their dream home but in vain. The disapproval of their relationship led to their elopement. The lady was a journalist by profession.

But incompatibility which grows over the years in their relationship rose. The turning point came when she expressed that in their house there should be a joint nameplate. Arunav's reactions were:

'So much for your journalism'. (Page 66, *The Nameplate*)

She strongly felt that she should not be merely an object but she too had her reputation as a journalist. But he instead obdurately sent her divorce papers for ego clashes over the years. Such an audacity left her dumbstruck. She felt how affirmation of a woman's identity in a patriarchal society is confronted by obstacles.

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Due to such a state of rejection, she met with an accident which took away her life. Arunav Barua felt guilty due to trivial matters for which he lost her. He felt that if ego did not breed in their relationship he would have been with his lady love. He recalled the college memories he treasured:

'He could still smell her hair and sweetness of her breath on his face'(Page 68, The Nameplate).

In 'Kaikeyi' the story portrays the dominance and carelessness of a patriarchal society. Gobind the husband of Renu brings in the second wife Minoti to protect her from being married to an old man. The possessiveness of Renu is manifested in the form of alienating Minoti from her husband.

'She slept in a straw pallet next to the dheki'(Page 133, Kaikeyi)

Renu was very worried when Minoti was pregnant as she felt that Mohan her son was the legitimate heir to the property not Minoti's child. So her devising a plan to kill the child was her fury against the injustice meted out to her and Mohan by Gobind. So with a witch's advice she left a glass of milk for Minoti to drink.

'She warmed the milk and and poured the contents of the packet and stirred into it.'(Page 135, Kaikeyi)

But Minoti turned the tables on Renu :

'Oh Baideu. I didn't drink the milk. Mohan came home. He was very hungry.'(Page 136, Kaikeyi)

There is display of metaphor at the end of the story where Gobinda arrives after enacting the role of Dasaratha in the play where Ram was sent to exile. He being satisfied with his role returned happily but found his son dead. He moaned over the body of Mohan. He watched the two women and posed a rhetorical question:

'Which one of them was Kaikeyi'? (Page 136, Kaikeyi)

The message of the story is not to critique Renu as much as the system of patriarchy and Gobind. Gobind could have found other solution to save a girl rather than marrying her creating rivalry between

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two women. He could have controlled his sexual urges. Being Renu's husband he broke the sacred mutual bond and trust leading to such premonitions.

So this paper throws light upon the society in which we live in. At the same time there is voice for change. These writers Tamsula Ao and Indrani Raimedhi explores the culture and position of woman. ■

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