

## Ecological Understanding of the Space: Nature in North East Indian Poetry

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**ABSTRACT** The field of ecology has garnered substantial attention, propelled by mounting concerns over the relentless deterioration of the planet's ecological health. Different poets from Northeast India have passionately responded to the relentless destruction caused by the exploitation of nature. This includes disturbing the peace of natural environments, destroying indigenous habitats, endangering rare wildlife, and upsetting the delicate balance of landscapes and biodiversity. Nature does not only sustain and nourish the soul of these writers but also reminds them of their ethnic identity. Thus, harming nature in any way threatens their search for identity, even their very existence. The poems under examination exhibit a shared awareness of their connection to nature, embodying a writing style that vividly engages with the physicality of existence. They intricately intertwined themselves with nature, its landscapes, waters, and wilderness, forming a holistic realm where human consciousness intersects with the environment, fostering a profound sense of self-awareness.

### INTRODUCTION

The deterioration of ecological health is not merely a scientific concern; it is a deep ethical challenge that requires a rethinking of human rapport with the natural world. This understanding bestows upon one a unique responsibility to protect and preserve the intricate systems that sustain life on Earth. Conventional ecological studies often centre on specific ecosystems or species, but the present crisis demands a holistic approach that considers the interconnectedness of all living and nonliving components of the Earth. This necessitates the integration of knowledge from various disciplines of ecology, economics, sociology, and literature, to cultivate sustainable answers that are both scientifically sound and socially equitable. This concern has been passionately echoed by poets from Northeast India, whose works respond vehemently to the environmental destruction caused by deforestation and the exploitation of nature. These poets, hailing from regions like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Sikkim, Mizoram, and Manipur, vividly depict an intricate relationship between nature and human existence, intertwining their cultural and ethnic identities with the natural world. The poetry of Northeast India is distinct in its profound ecological consciousness, often portraying nature as more than a mere backdrop. It helps as a basis of motivation, identity, and nourishment for these

poets, whose articulations mirror an organic association with their surroundings. This paper explores how these poets articulate their environmental concerns and cultural heritage through their writings, offering a fresh perspective on the history of the area and culture. By listening different voices of poets like Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Saratchand Thiyam, Easterine Kire, Robin S. Ngangom, Rajkumar Bhubonsana, and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, this study aims to uncover the multifaceted connection between nature and people in Northeast India.

### METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative content analysis methodology to examine the selected poems from Northeast Indian poets. The study involves a close reading and textual analysis of the poems to identify recurring themes, symbols, and motifs related to nature and ecological consciousness. The primary texts include poetry collections and individual poems by prominent poets like Temsula Ao, Mamang Dai, Saratchand Thiyam, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Easterine Kire, Rajkumar Bhubonsana, and Robin S. Ngangom. The analysis is guided by an eco-critical framework, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the poets' responses to environmental degradation and their portrayal of the intrinsic bond between nature and cultural identity. This approach helps to illuminate the

ways in which these poets use their art to critique ecological destruction and advocate for the preservation of their natural and cultural heritage. Additionally, secondary sources, including literary critiques, scholarly articles, and historical texts, are utilised to provide context and support the analysis.

## RESULTS

*At the rate  
We're "advancing"  
We forget, there is no  
Place in space  
To leave behind  
Our footprints  
At any point of time.* (Changkija 1993:46)

The quoted voice of a poet from Nagaland has responded vehemently to the relentless onslaught of deforestation and the exploitation of nature, which include despoiling the tranquillity of natural settings, eradicating indigenous habitats, endangering rare fauna, and disrupting the intricate balance of landscapes and biodiversity. English poetry of India originating from the North East region is renowned for intricately encapsulating diverse facets of the region's ecology. It has become organic for the poets from this region to exalt the ecological magnificence of their surroundings and to exhibit a profound ecological consciousness (Chandra and Das 2007:35). In these poems, nature is often more than just a backdrop; it serves as a profound source of inspiration and plays a vital role in their artistry. Before Christianity arrived, the people of this region deeply revered Mother Nature, and this reverence is rooted in their poetry. The poets of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Assam share a deep connection with their natural surroundings, reflected in the rich ecological themes that permeate their works. Nestled in the Himalayas, these 'seven sisters' are closely tied to the land, and their poetry reveals the intricate relationship between nature and their lives. By exploring the poetry of the Northeast, one can uncover the multifaceted connection between nature and people, offering a fresh perspective on the region's history and culture.

Poems of Mamang Dai, a renowned poet from Arunachal Pradesh are impressively pulsating

with tribal folklores and also minutely depict the ethereal splendour of the surrounding environment of Arunachal Pradesh. A former bureaucrat, she was awarded with the prestigious honour of *Padmashree* for her exclusive contribution to the volume of Indian poems in English. She has composed several poems and two novels, and nearly all of them deal with the natural, cultural and ethnic environment, their ancestral legends and folklores of her land. She composes poems dealing with the primal imageries of nature, the hills and valleys, the rivers, the clouds. Her poems repeat the conventional notion of the search for one's own roots, identity and also the search for a native land in its idyllic state of existence. Her response to Jaydeep Sarangi is worth quoting here- "I feel attached to the land—its features, rivers, the stories and villages. I am also looking at our epic narratives and myths. I think there is a lot for me to learn. How to be patient, how to be good natured" (Sarangi 2017). Being a native of Arunachal Pradesh, she has observed her land plagued with insurgency and has uttered her distress for this continuing battle. She calls her people to embrace their long-forgotten and often undervalued ethnic culture and identity, which are increasingly at risk of being lost. Her poems highlight the rich tapestry of local stories from these overlooked areas, exploring the intricate lives of tribal people. They blend history, mythology, and the customs of the *Adi* people, also known as the 'hill people'. Her poetry covers a wide range of themes, including tribal practices, unique superstitions, the intersection of tradition and modernity, memories, reality, and the essence of oral culture. Throughout these poems, the author strives to give voice to these 'peripheral people,' who are often suppressed by modern reality. The *Adi* people maintain an unwavering and unquenchable trust in the elements woven into their ecological surroundings and their peaceful coexistence with the world around them. In "Glimpses of Northeast" (*Oral Narratives and Myth*) Mamang Dai says that Arunachal Pradesh is an area of, "...great scenic beauty with snow peaks falling gradually southwards into pristine forests and valleys criss-crossed by turbulent rivers and streams. These water routes feed the mighty Brahmaputra River in the plains of Assam, providing a unique environmental world which

gives the state the honour of being the greenest parts of the country. The Himalayan region captures some of the world's heaviest rainfall and the result is an expanse of lush tropical forest where life breeds in myriad forms" (Dai 2009:4).

Dai's profound poetic landscape, nourished by the scenic beauty of nature, encompasses rivers, lush forests, and expansive mountain vistas, reflect the exotic essence of her homeland. In this region, nature is abundant and enigmatic, steeped in myths deeply intertwined with the sacred memories of the tribes. Dai's poems weave a mystical and grand narrative, blending the awe-inspiring mountains with the legends and folklore of the surrounding tribes, creating an ethereal and exotic tapestry unique to this province. In "An Obscure Place" the mountains contribute to the formation of a panoramic view to the whole territory. The very title of the poem connotes that the region and its inhabitants are not considered a part of the mainland of the country; they are treated as subalterns or as 'others', obscure, cornered, marginalised. The only remaining hope is the mountains, and the invocations and devotions of the individuals that 'pass on the slopes of the mountains'. The mountains, as symbols of firmness and optimism for the tribes, embody their hope for a better future. However, they also represent the uncertainties of an increasingly complex and changing society. This societal shift leads to the gradual erosion of their ancestral beliefs, traditions, and identity, as evident in the following lines:

*Nothing is certain  
There are mountains. Oh! There are mountains.  
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.  
But do not speak the victory yet. (Dai 2006a)*

In an impressive article, 'The Nature of Faith and Worship among the Adis', Mamang Dai reflects on how the dense forests, expansive mountains, and overall location influenced the realisation and insight of both herself and her tribe to which she belongs. She connects the perception of her people, including her own, with the broader natural world when she observes:

*My voice is sea waves and mountain peaks,  
In the transfer of symbols [...]  
I am the desert and the rain  
The wild bird that sits in the west. (Dai 2006c)*

The mountains and rivers not only give voice to the integral connection between nature and

the tribes but also empathise with the deep fear of bereavement and displacement creeping in the hearts of the people. Mamang Dai is very much conscious of the change, and the looming threat that is approaching near the native tribes due to the constant disagreements and the swelling pressures of industrialisation. According to Dai, the mountains and rivers are not just landscapes; they are the means through which the native people can give a voice to their subaltern consciousness continuously oppressed by the overarching discourses of the mainstream society. They are also the living oracle linking earlier with the present-day and also foretelling a near imminent. For the natives of Arunachal Pradesh, a life devoid of the mountains, forests and the rivers would possibly be a mute world, without anything aesthetic, holy and transcendental. In the poem "Birthplace" (*River Poems*), Dai articulates:

*We are the children of the rain  
Of the cloud woman,  
Brother to the stone and bat  
In our cradle of bamboo and vine  
In our long houses we slept,  
And when morning came  
We were refreshed. (Dai 2004:1-7)*

Dai's poetry prominently features Animism, establishing a profound connection with elements of the natural world such as trees, rivers, and stones, imbuing them with life and treating them as animate beings. Her work vividly portrays ecological elements through the lens of a true animist. This spiritual inclination is evident in her belief in gods, as depicted in her collection "The Balm of Time". Here, she openly professes her faith in spirits and the divinities inhabiting the jungle and the stream. In this verse, Dai articulates both her personal environmental concerns and her reverence for the ethnic divinities, those are intertwined with nature itself. By venerating nature as divine, Dai elevates it to a sacred status, underscoring the inherent supremacy of the natural world. This theme is further explored in "Small Towns and the River". In this poem she metaphorically equates little townships nestled along the stream to the abodes of deities, expressing the desire for communion with divine entities: "*In small towns by the river/we all want to walk with the gods* (Dai 2006b)." She revels in the dual essence of nature, honouring both its mystical and everyday facets,

delving into the myths surrounding the “forces of nature” and guiding readers towards enchanted forests and the rhythmic beats of magical drums. Through her poetry, she intricately weaves together landscape and nature, adopting a perspective that is part animist and part pantheistic. Her profound connection with the natural world is evident in her statement, “*I know where memory hides/in the long body of mountain,*” reflecting a deep understanding of the inherent interconnectedness between memory and the natural environment.

Another renowned poet who tries to give voice to the marginalised people of her region and unveil the intricate relationship of the tribes with the natural surroundings is Temsula Ao. Temsula Ao delves deep in the collective unconscious of her people and brings up those archetypes connected with the spirit of wildlife. In a well-known poem, ‘Blood of Others’, Ao says:

*We believed that our God lived  
in the various forms of nature  
whom we worshipped  
with unquestioning faith.* (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009)

Before the advent of Christianity the people of this region worshipped God whom they found ‘in the various forms of nature’. But this ‘unquestioning faith’ was shattered and ultimately taken away by ‘a tribe of strangers’, the preachers of the doctrines of Christianity, who were ‘Armed with only a book and promises of a land called heaven’ (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009). This led to religious colonisation, which drove the ancient cults of these tribes into oblivion thereby causing a severe blow to their ancestral identity. The tribes of Nagaland were severed from their roots as they were detached from their indigenous beliefs and values by the continuous and forceful imposition of Christianity, “Declaring that our trees and Mountains/Rock and Rivers were no Gods.” The writer uncovers hegemonic discourses of Western imperialistic policies left no stone unturned in stripping of all the glories of these ancient tribes:

*Stripped of all our basic certainties  
We strayed from our old ways  
And let our soul-mountain recede  
Into a tiny ant-hill.* (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009)

The poet has often given vent to her anxiousness when she finds the mindless destruction of the ecological surroundings. Just like Mamang Dai, Temsula has also given an alternative picture of her land which is otherwise presented as a land of terror and insurgencies. The symbol of lush green forests and the mountain reappears again and again in her poems and turns out to be a metaphorical depiction of the pride and grandeur of the native individuals. The devastation triggered to the ecological world, the jungles and highlands, directed towards the obliteration of pride and grandeur of these native tribes (Ao individuals). Also this destruction disturbs the ecological balance, which proves to be utterly fatal for the natives of this region. The anxiety of the poet may be traced from some under mentioned lines of “Lament for an Earth”:

*Alas for the forest  
Which now lies silent  
Stunned and stumped  
With the evidence  
Of her rape  
As on her breast  
The elephants trample  
The lorries rumble  
Loaded with her treasures  
Bound for the mills  
At the foothill.* (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009:21-31)

Nature has always been related from the ancient times to the mother, archetype as nature sustains and nourishes human race and this archetype recurs in both literary and non-literary texts from the historical times. Temsula Ao has compared the destruction of nature with the exploitation of women, especially the tribal women who are considered to be doubly colonised and marginalised. There are rape imageries in some quoted words from the verse “Cry, for the River”, which strongly connote and support the ideas mentioned above:

*Cry for the river  
Muddy, misshapen  
Grotesque  
Choking with the remains  
Of her sister  
The forest  
No life stirs in her belly now  
The bomb*

*And the bleaching powder  
Have left her with no tomorrow* (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009).

The ruthless mainstream society with their urbanising strategies has left a scar in the bosom of mother-nature and in the process of doing so, annihilated the identities, culture and tradition of the tribes, which shared an intrinsic bond with nature. The poems of Temsula Ao serves as a reminder of the incessant damages caused to the ecological surroundings, which stands vis-a-vis exploitation and marginalisation of women in the patriarchal society. Temsula's poetry also serves as a reminder to the young Ao people of today who have become oblivious of their relationship with their own tradition and also nature, how significant and refreshing it is and thereby tries to bring her native culture from the periphery to the centre. In another poem, "Stone People from Lungterok" she draws on 'tradition-rich imagery':

*Stone people  
The polyglots  
Knowledgeable  
In bird's language  
And animal discourse  
The students who learned from ants  
The art of carving  
Heads of enemies  
As trophies  
Of war  
Stone people  
The worshippers  
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.* (Ngangom and Nongkynrih 2009)

Through bringing an inanimate object to life and sharing its sorrowful tale, Ao critiques humanity's exploitative tendencies toward nature, highlighting a lack of ecological awareness and sensitivity. The expression of her poems may simply be associated with the idea of Vera Alexander's writing titled "Environmental Otherness: Nature on Human Terms in the Garden". There Vera Alexander notes "While decorative and rec-

reational, even paradisaal, the image of the garden also encompasses histories of displacement and violence: unwanted plants and animals are exterminated for the sake of aesthetic ideas, and many of the plants assembled in any garden have been manipulated and uprooted from their natural habitats" (Alexander 2020: 2).

Saratchand Thiyam, a modern poet hailing from Manipur, frequently addresses themes of violent struggle in his poetry. In his poem 'The Earth', Saratchand Thiyam expresses his concern regarding the impact of modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation on nature. The poem begins with Saratchand speaking to 'Mother Earth', that she appears to be inadequate to preserve her 'zoo'. He observes that while 'Mother Earth' typically holds everything rhythmically, this holding currently seems to be weakening, described as a 'slack' knot:

*Mother Earth!  
The zoo in your bosom today  
is slack in security.  
The long rope you had been  
preparing, twisting and twirling  
for ages upon your thighs  
has now been sucked  
into the dark abyss.* (Thiyam 1995)

In his poem 'Guwahati', Saratchand portrays the gradual detachment of people from their culture and traditional festivals due to industrialisation. The bustling activity of the tea gardens and oil-wells keeps people so occupied that they are unable to partake in *Bihu*, which holds significant cultural importance as the chief carnival of the state Assam:

*when you face those  
who are plucking tea leaves  
in tea gardens,  
who are plumping out mineral oil  
in oil-wells.*

...  
*you're crying  
for those who could not come and join  
your joyous Bihu dance.* (Thiyam 2014:41)

Easterine Kire is a poet of Nagaland. In the same manner, Kire's poem "For Justin-Pierre" vividly depicts an alarming scenario that one may confront in the near future if ecological destruction persists unchecked:

*Someday you will ask me  
why the birds no longer sing*



*and the flowers as sweet  
as I said they used to do.* (Kire 1982: 36)

The Northeast region has met with the construction of several hydro-electric projects, leading to significant ecological degradation. The bilingual writer Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih from Meghalaya, portrays the environmental decline of Umiam Lake, commonly referred to as *Dam Sait*. His poem, "An Evening by the Source of the Umkhras River," opens by unfolding the pristine and untouched state of the Umkhras River as it flows through the hills but concludes by depicting its polluted and filthy state as it passes through urban areas:

*Nobody cares that this limpid water,  
the bashful maidens, the tuneful pines  
are rolling down to the city  
where life itself wallows in the filth.*  
(Nongkynrih 2011:17)

Manipuri poet Rajkumar Bhubonsana has vehemently opposed the ecological damage caused by Loktak hydro-electric development in the poem "Should Light be Put Out or Mind Kept in Dark".

*Before Loktak Project came into existence  
it's said there was no light in Manipur  
Even after the commissioning of  
Loktak Project  
there is still no light  
on the other hand  
Loktak Project wastes paddy fields and fishes  
causes submergence under water  
spoils men  
takes away homesteads  
makes unavailable  
space for working  
causes resentment.* (Bhubonsana and Singh 2003:101-105)

Another renowned poet from the Northeast (Manipur) writing almost in the same vein is Robin S. Ngangom. In 1988, Robin's published his first anthology of poetry, "Words and the Silence". Since then Ngangom has become a renowned writer both in India and abroad. Another poetry collection, "The Desire of Roots," was published in 2006 by the Chandrabhaga Society in Cuttack. He believes that "the poetry of feeling which can be shared, as opposed to mere cerebral poetry" (Das 2013) (quotes in Das n.p). Ngangom's poems have a picturesque quality as he "paints elegiac vignettes of scenes and

locales seldom touched upon in Indian poetry, including Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Imphal and the hills and rivers of Northeast India. He brings alive the little-known legends and myths of this picturesque region, in poems that range from the quietly contemplative to the violently angry" (Das 2013) (quotes in Das n.p).

Harping in the same tune as the other poets of Northeast like Mamang Dai and Temsula Ao, Ngangom's poems depict the similar theme of the quest for their native identity or the search for the ancestral roots. The ancient myths and legends of Manipur, Mizoram, and Meghalaya recur again and again in the poems of Ngangom through, which he tries hard to bring this obscure world of Northeast into light and also to give voice to the previously suppressed people of the Northeast. The frequent bomb blasts and other fanatic terrorist activities in this region makes the poet anxious but still he helps one realise that the marginalised Northeastern tribes have preserved among themselves an intrinsic and distinctive spirit of accord between life and art, between nature and culture. Being concerned about the fate of his native land and his inability to do anything worthwhile to change the fate of his land, he moans:

*Day after day  
I've done nothing worthwhile  
Only I've chosen to tread  
the path of a versifier  
my heart still unknown  
by many.* (Ngangom 1988)

The themes that recur in his collection "Words and the Silence" are the mythical histories, the folklores and the legends of Manipur, the men and women of his land, the mountains, the rivers, the rice fields and of course the present insurgencies that threatens the very existence of these tribes. The hills of the natives of this land, the Khasis are known as the land of Seven Huts. Ngangom presents the alternative picture of his region in his poem, 'From the Land of the Seven Huts' where he paints a picture of the lush green forests and the hills showing his love for nature, his yearning to go back to the primitive state of existence and utterly criticises the urbanising strategies, which destroy this green world and turns it into a physical as well as metaphorical wasteland:

*We kill more than a hundred trees every month  
in our region of hills outstretched.*

*Will we not once more sit back in smoke laden  
long houses  
sling the birds of technological time and not  
be ashamed of our tribal ways?* (Ngangom  
1988)

The hills of Manipur and Meghalaya remind him of his indigenous identity and reiterate the archetypal notion of the search for one's own roots and also the search for a 'homeland' in its ideal state of existence:

*Solitary light  
on eastern hills,  
tender rivulet,  
evening bells,...  
Hills with spires of churches  
hills with rice-fields for siblings  
hills with genial steps  
where earth's tribes  
intercourse.* (Misra 2011)

This use of the local folklores shows that the poet's heart is working perfectly in consonance with the flow of the rivers, the wilderness of the mountains, greenery of the jungles, ancient ancestral rituals, long forgotten mythologies, tribal dances, rural communities and the people in it. Unfolding the various myths that strongly influence the lives of these hill people, these poems of Robin Ngangom are a sonorous and touching tribute to the human spirit. These poems also echo the lost tradition and the cultural dynamics of the people belonging to his native land.

Nitoo Das, a poet from Assam, skillfully portrays the coal-abundant town of Margherita, which emerged in the course of the colonisation of Upper Assam valley in the eastern province. This setting, intertwined with her ancestral roots, overlays the flooded Brahmaputra and its tributaries, adjacent to her native place, and the surrounding tea factories. Through her poetry, Das intricately weaves these elements together, offering a profound understanding of nature. In her poem 'Margherita', she embodies the ethos of ecofeminism, compelled to address the looming threat of ecological harm amidst the tangible aspects that surround her and also her interconnectedness with landscape and indigenous society. In Das's *Crowbite* (2020), her another collection, Das employs elements associated with ancient oral mores of Khasi people and mythologies for the symbolic motifs for constructing

the narrative of a bygone yet enduring civilisation. Poems like 'Mawphlang' evoke the sanctity of a timeless grove, where the trespassing act of plucking or taking forest fruit is met with resistance, and age-old trees serve as silent witnesses to the rapid intrusion of humanity into their sacred realm. In her poetry, trees emerge as companions, forming a kinship that she intimately inhabits. She articulates their names with familiarity, as though reciting a roster of cherished friends, depicting their active participation in native province, their embodiment, even the intricate connotations of their bodies. Her poem "The Tree that Knew Her" from *Cyborg Prov-erbs* is worth quoting here:

*Everyone says she should sit  
on other trees. The usual trees.  
She, however, loved the Maulsari,  
the Bokul, the Kirakuli with its white flowers  
that she stuck to her breasts with spit. Sometimes,  
she hid within its hollows... Sometimes, she  
grew into  
petals: so auspicious, so fierce.  
The tree knew her like it knew me: the quiet  
of home, remorse of a river, clap  
of birds' wings over a scarce island.  
Clap!  
And she reassembles herself  
outside the trunk —  
clavicle, calves, coccyx—  
until she becomes  
a pinprick of moondark* (Das 2017).

## DISCUSSION

"Authors have frequently used nature as a backdrop, a source of inspiration, or a metaphorical device to convey their environmental concerns, thus encouraging readers to develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world" (Rishma and Gill 2024). The poetry of the northeastern region of India, as explored through the works of prominent poets such as Mamang Dai, Temsula Ao, Saratchand Thiyam, and others, consistently reflects a deep engagement with the ecological, cultural, and spiritual landscapes of the region. These poets emphasise a profound connection with nature, often portraying the land itself as a living, animate entity, central to both personal identity and community life. Mamang Dai's works, particularly, evoke the mystical

beauty of her homeland, intertwining its natural landscapes with tribal folklore and rituals. In her poetry, mountains and rivers are not mere geographical features, but symbols of ancestral wisdom, spiritual connection, and resilience in the face of external challenges. Temsula Ao's poetry speaks to the devastating impact of ecological destruction, drawing parallels between the exploitation of nature and the marginalization of indigenous cultures. Through the metaphor of nature as a nurturing 'mother,' Ao critiques the destruction brought on by industrialization and the imposition of foreign ideologies, particularly Christianity. Saratchand Thiyam's critique of urbanization and industrialization reflects a broader regional concern for the preservation of cultural and ecological heritage, which is being increasingly eroded by forces of modernization. The ecological themes explored by these poets are further exemplified in the works of Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Rajkumar Bhubsana, and Nitoo Das, who also engage with issues such as pollution, deforestation, and the injury to the evergreen customs of life. Nongkynrih's depiction of the degradation of the Umkhrah River captures the tension between natural beauty and urban pollution, while Bhubsana's critique of the Loktak hydro-electric project reflects the ecological and socio-economic impact of development projects on the region's fragile ecosystems. Nitoo Das, through her portrayal of the town of Margherita and her ecofeminist lens, connects the exploitation of natural resources with the broader societal implications of ecological degradation. Through their poems, all these poets "expose the detrimental effects of pollution, deforestation, and climate change on vulnerable populations, raising awareness of environmental injustices. By giving voice to those affected, literature acts as a catalyst for social resistance through encouraging readers to recognize the urgency of addressing environmental disparities" (Rishma and Gill 2024).

The shared aspect among these poets is "their awareness of the changes in the immediate ecological surrounding vis-a-vis the lifestyle of the people" (Anupama 2014). The animistic approach of the poets reveals an intricate understanding of nature as both a physical and metaphysical presence that governs the lives and practices of indigenous communities. The

poets highlight how the destruction of nature represents not only the loss of ecological balance but also a severance of spiritual and cultural ties with the land. The destruction of the environment is often depicted as a direct consequence of modern development, which threatens both the ecological integrity of the region and the very identity of its people. As traditional beliefs, practices, and lifestyles are increasingly displaced by forces such as religious colonisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation, these poets express a profound sense of loss. The shift from indigenous spiritual practices—such as animism and the reverence for nature as sacred—to the imposition of foreign ideologies is a source of great concern. The poets lament the gradual abandonment of ancestral ways, which were intricately connected to the natural world and express fear for the future of a people whose identity is becoming increasingly marginalised and forgotten. The poetry often explores the theme of resistance and the call for reclamation of indigenous traditions. The poets urge their communities to reconnect with their roots and to resist the forces that seek to erase their cultural heritage, where the poets call for a reinvigoration of the spiritual and ecological practices that once governed their relationship with nature. The issue of marginalisation is also central to the poetry of the region. The poets frequently speak to the experience of being 'othered,' whether by the mainstream Indian society or by the forces of globalisation and development. Nature, in these works, is often depicted as a refuge for the marginalised, offering both solace and strength. The poets highlight how the land, despite its exploitation, continues to bear witness to the struggles and resilience of its people, serving as a silent yet potent force of memory and identity.

## CONCLUSION

Nature holds a fundamental trait in the poetry emerging from the Northeastern states of India, with poets from different regions exhibiting distinct attitudes and approaches towards it. The poets have tried to present an alternative picture of their motherland, a land of flora and fauna and the native people existing in perfect harmony in their ecological surroundings, which



has become a part of their identity and their very existence. Additionally, certain poets address contemporary issues by reflecting on nature through the lens of the violent incidents affecting the region. Despite these varied perspectives, a shared theme among the referred writers is their acute consciousness of the ecological deviations in their native surroundings and how these changes intersect with the lifestyle of the local populace. It calls for a commitment to environmental stewardship and recognition of the intrinsic value of the natural world in sustaining cultural and ethnic identities. By giving voice to the marginalised and often unheeded communities of Northeast India, these poets not only preserve their cultural legacy but also add value to the global discourse on environmental conservation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Forthcoming research may dig deeper into the poetic traditions of individual Northeastern states to explore the unique environmental concerns and cultural nuances that shape their literary output. It would be worthy enough to relate the eco-poetry from Northeast India with global eco-critical works, particularly those from other indigenous and marginalised communities. This evaluation could uncover shared themes and distinctive responses to environmental degradation, opening a broader, global understanding of the intersection between nature, identity, and literature. Researchers may also benefit from engaging directly with the communities represented in the poetry to comprehend the lived experiences behind the literary expressions. Fieldwork and interviews with poets and indigenous groups could offer firsthand insights into the environmental and cultural struggles that shape their literary works. Future investigation should also explore how these literary indicators could enlighten environmental and cultural preservation policies. Advocating for integrating native ecological knowledge and cultural heritage into environmental policies could strengthen both environmental stewardship and cultural preservation. Widening the space to other art forms, such as visual art, music, and folklore from the area, could also share a multidimensional reflection of how ecological consciousness permeates various cultural expres-

sions. This holistic approach would extend the interpretation of nature's role in shaping the region's cultural individuality.

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