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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### LITERATURE AND ECOCRITICISM: A STUDY OF SELECTED NORTH-EAST INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

Shurhonuo Tsurho<sup>1,2</sup>

1. Ph. D. Scholar, Nagaland University.
2. Department of English, Nagaland University.

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#### Abstract

Ecocriticism calls for a universal concern and awakening. While the concern for Nature births ecocentrism with Nature as its priority, the opposite stands for anthropocentrism which stands for a man-centred concept. Through the various writings of Temsula Ao, D. Kuolie and Mamang Dai, it is evident that themes such as ecological depletion and exploitation, cultural shift, grief over Nature's eroding state, and the glorification and might of Nature are the most common trends. The aim of the writers in projecting their homeland as their ideal place is justified by their concern for its ecology and their observation of change upon their lands with the change of time.

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#### Introduction:-

The term 'ecocentrism' is used in ecological political philosophy to represent a nature-centred system of value. It can be best understood when we put in the difference between the core value or priority of the concept.

For this, we take the term 'anthropocentrism' which is to imply that humanity is placed at the centre of everything and places the other forms of life as subordinate to human beings or are only considered resources for the sustenance of human life (Kerridge 537). It interprets or regards the world in terms of human values and experience. This is something relevant in our present society where Nature is tarnished due to the selfish ways of mankind in exploiting its rich resources such as coal, minerals, oil, natural gas and flora and fauna while creating hazardous consequences to the environment for forms of life on earth, including human beings. Anthropocentrism is a major concept in the field of environmental ethics and environmental philosophy where it is considered to be the root cause of problems created by human actions within the ecosphere.

Thus, we see that anthropocentrism stands as an opposing idea that challenges and also destroys Nature whereas ecocentrism deals with the consideration of Nature and the environment as the most crucial things for the survival of all living things on earth. Ecocentrism can be simply understood as 'life-centred'.

Concepts such as 'industrocentrism' (which is a threat or opposite to anthropocentrism and ecocentrism and which could harm both humans and nonhumans alike) and 'techno-centrism' (values centred on technology) exist which points to the fact that threats, as well as awareness towards Nature, exist side by side ("Ecocentrism").

In its application to literature, however, we see that ecocentrism acts its way as a stream of thought within environmentalism in exploring the ecosystem in a piece of literature and how it is treated.

Writers like Lynn White Jr. considered Christianity as the most anthropocentric religion because of the command given by God that man should have dominion over the whole creation of God (Kerridge 537). While we also see in famous works like John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the glorification of Nature and its ecosystem through the grand and extraordinary comparisons between the ecosystem and the characters involved, such as comparing Satan to a Leviathan or his sword which could be considered gigantic when compared to "the tallest pine Hewn on Norwegian hills" as the pine would only look like a "wand" (1.292-94); or when he compares the fallen angel to the thick "autumnal leaves" of Vallombrosa (1.302-03). In the epic poem, we see the ecosystem used with all its might and greatness in its treatment of comparison. According to ecocriticism in literature, Nature should not be used only as a minor aspect of the text or simply be used as a background or setting.

More precisely, it is seen from the work of Lawrence Buell, a rough idea of checking a text and how it is "environmentally oriented" (Kerridge 537). Firstly, it is important to realise and also accept that the environment or the ecosystem is present not only as something subordinate to mankind but as an entity which plays a role in the creation of human history. Secondly, it is also crucial to remove the interest of humans as more important than Nature. Literature must also prove its role in contributing to the interest of the environment and also in revealing the active or habituating features of the environment.

In this study, the readers shall see the exploration of Nature or the ecosystem in the works of some of the North-East poets through the use of Ecocriticism and understand how the environment is 'centralised' based on the points given by Lawrence Buell and from some other perspectives. It is an attempt to present the importance of pressing towards "the centrality of ecological thinking to literary studies" (qtd. in Malpas 157).

In the selfish nature to gain more, human beings have done "ruthless exploitation of earth's natural resources" (Sebastian 1) and other unethical ways of achieving their wants. Considering Nature as something which can be totally exploited without its voice to defend itself, one can see the poem, "Lament for Earth" by Temsula Ao in her work *Songs that Tell* which exposes the cruelty meted out to her land:

Alas for the forest  
Which now lies silent  
Stunned and stumped  
With the evidence  
Of her rape. (21-25)

Her ecofeminist perspective brings out Nature as a woman whose exploitation is compared to an act of rape. As there exists a general idea that 'women are closer to Nature' (Showalter 324) and that men are seen as authoritative figures controlling both women and Nature alike, we see the anatomy of the woman's body being polluted and destroyed:

As on her breasts  
.....  
Loaded with her treasures  
Bound for the mills  
At the foothills (26-31)

While elephants once roamed on her "breast" now deforestation has led to lorries carrying logs; once the rivers were free and unpolluted, now no life exists in her "belly" due to the intense fishing through bombings and contamination of the bleach powder from washing clothes. Mother earth's rich resources have been exposed while her lushness and sap are destroyed.

In comparing the concept of Nature to a woman, we also see the poems from Nagaland by Duovituo Kuolie whose dedication and devotion to Nature are justified through the glorification of its beauty. Though ecofeminism is quite implicit here, we understand the poet's use of objects such as a 'rose,' the 'moon' or even the 'Dzükou valley' as correlating them with women as these subjects are archetypal symbols themselves and mostly representing feminine entities.

Regarding its implementation of ecocriticism, it is direct as it makes the ecosystem, the flora and fauna, its main object or target for its glorification. We see that the poet is in full adoration of the substances given by Mother

Nature. In the poem “Wind, The West Wind” we find the poet in full awe of the great wind as the wind “fed our ancestors” with its innocence and “purity”:

Wind, wind, wind of the Nagas,  
 You fed our ancestors with your purity  
 Since the beginning;  
 Led them to stand on their own. (1-4)

The whole poem “The Japfü Peak” itself celebrates the beauty and might of the peak and how it protects its people from the “wrath of gigantic tempest”. We also see the poet’s deeper understanding of Nature even through a small object such as a rose. It is the “beauty” of the rose that cannot be consumed. Yet, it is a “treasure” for the eyes, while its “cosmetic aroma” is set to “caress the (its) beauty” for its aesthetic olfaction effect. We also find regret in his poem “The Day of God” where he laments the moral distortion of the Nagas as he sees how the people “pollute” their land “for vain glory”:

True, on such a beautiful land  
 There’s bloodshed penetrated by loveless acts;  
 It is truly the act of the Nagas!  
 They pollute the land for their vain glory: (21-24)

While poets like Kuolie celebrate Nature in the form of mountains and valleys through some worth mentioning places such as Dzükou Valley and Japfü Peak in Nagaland, poets like Mamang Dai share an equal concern for her state, Arunachal Pradesh and its ecosystem. The poet expresses her emotion through images and metaphors drawn from Nature. But at the same time, she is also hopeful that the world is also changing, reviving itself from its ways to a sustainable ecology. Dai’s poems also use the ecosystem, such as the “mountain” to explore myth and culture. Her reverence towards mountains as sacred which is a source of wisdom and an instrument in tracing the history of the people and the place can be seen in her poems, “An Obscure Place,” “The Voice of The Mountains” and “Small Towns and the River.” This pantheistic approach towards Nature is seen dwelling in both their poems. In Dai’s poem “An Obscure Place,” we see a wide vision of the whole mountain and its forms of life dwelling inside the mountain’s hair. The mountain is considered all-knowing and is also a place for refuge and a safe haven for its people:

An obscure place haunts the hunter,  
 .....  
 Yesterday we gave shelter to men  
 Who climbed over our hills  
 For glory of a homeland, they said, (11-17)

In the poem “The Voice of The Mountain,” she picks up the mountain as a metaphor for the mysterious power: “From where I sit on the high platform / I can see the ferry lights crossing / criss-crossing the big river” (1-3). The mountain stands as an immortal and omniscient being passing through every generation that had come through and thus speaks with different tones, sometimes as a young man, and sometimes as an old man. Thus, it utters “In my life I have lived many lives”. She also reveals to the readers the many natural processes that occur and how the wind is carried through, while the sun rays fall even to the highest tips of the trees: “I am the place where memory escapes/the myth of time, / I am the sleep in the mind of the mountain” (52-53). These are the memories which the mountain carries. The memories of the things she saw around her, the river with all its natural surroundings and the feelings which were created in the process. It is the memory of her place, her people and the wild curiosities in her mind which makes her feel nostalgic for her childhood days as she “remembers the river’s voice”. For these reasons, Dai is also called a river poet. These are what remain in her mind as “myth” and “mystery”.

Pantheism is one of the most prominent elements in Northeast writings, especially in poetry. We have seen this in the works of D. Kuolie and Mamang Dai and even in the works of Temsula Ao as she uses the concept of creation related to divine intervention through the “Lungterok People”.

Lamentation for the ruin and disturbance of the ecosystem is also found in the works of Temsula Ao, Kuolie and Dai as they see deforestation and the loss of life and pollution in their own respective states or regions.

Ecocentrism is evident in the works of all these poets as they are seen either in adoration or full reverence towards Nature or in centralising the sustenance of the ecosystem as something which deserves more attention for the balance of all the living forms on earth.

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