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

(Chankija 2003: 216).

Contemporary poetry in English from India’s Northeast has multi – faceted voices. It is an expression of an individual poetic self, and at the same time, it is the saga of the people of the region in general. It presents a vista of images of the mountains, hills, rivers, myths and legends, tradition and culture, and multi – ethnic people of the region. The subject matters it deals with ranges from geography to politics, myths and legends to ecology. Ecological concern is a notable characteristic of poetry from this part of the country. Identity crisis, a sense of alienation is some of the dominant features of contemporary politics in the Northeast. There has been a conscious use of ecology as a means for an assertion of identity in the works of the poets of this region. (Baruah 2012: 16).
Experimentation with style, technique, subject matters, or language is marked in the works of the contemporary poets from this region writing in Assamese, Bengali, Manipuri, English, or in any vernacular language of this region. Most of these poets seem to have extensive reading of modern world literature having “cut their teeth on Lorca, Seferis, Arghezi, Neruda and the hard-edged modernists of the Third World”. (Jenkins 1993: 67). Their poetry deals with the psychological and social difficulties of modern life and living and seems to be concerned of the subjective realities and predicament of their people in particular, and humankind in general. The eight different states of the region, although there has been marked a common tendency to club them under one tag, the ‘Northeast’, hugely vary from each other in tradition, culture, language, and religion. So it would be a grave injustice, especially in any academic discourse, to homogenize poetry, or any literary genre for that matter, from this region — a land inhabited by an assorted conglomeration of peoples with a mélange of traditions, cultures, languages and religions. But in spite of this diversity, it is possible to locate some common grounds, some shared values and concerns of these writers. Besides a number of issues like identity crisis, search for roots, or contemporary socio-political atmosphere of the region, it is the ecology of the region, and an ecological concern that predominantly seem to unite these multi-ethnic writers in a common platform. And this is primarily what this thesis tries to study. Speaking on the common thread of these poets Jayanta Mahapatra, the eminent Indian poet writing in English opines:

Undoubtedly it is poetry that unites us. It is the poets who will not keep us away from one another, who will not separate us. This is the strongest feeling one gets when one reads these poems from the very different regions of the North-east. (Mahapatra 2003: xi).
A reading of contemporary poetry in English from Northeast India makes one feel that there has been a conscious use of ecology in their works. It seems to play a pivotal role in their search for identity, root, traditional values culture, which they feel, is lost in the humdrum of modernization and urbanization. “Northeast India is one of South Asia’s last land frontiers and through much of the twentieth century these sparsely populated areas have attracted large-scale migration from the rest of the subcontinent. The protective discrimination regime…arose partly as a response to these demographic trends. Many of these tribal societies have been going through a process of transition from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, from clan control of land to commodification of land, urbanization, and cultural change associated with the process of ‘modernization’ (italics mine) (Baruah 2005: 185). That ecology plays a vital role to provide a common ground to these poets, or to bound them together can be seen in the overwhelming presence of nature in the works of almost all of these poets, sometimes imaginatively, sometimes romantically, but most of the time consciously. Their works also reflect their serious concerns of various ecological issues such as large-scale deforestation, coal and uranium mining, ethnic violence, insurgency and counter-insurgency operations — all that ultimately lead to the degradation of ecology. Their poetry strongly advocates preservation of ecology of the region as, they believe, it would be the way of preserving their land, their native tradition and culture, and above all, their identity.

It is seen that works of translation have been enriching Indian poetry in English since its formative years during the third decade of the 19th century. The
history of poetry in English from Northeast India is no exception. The journey can be said to be started in 1957, when in Assam, Praphulladatta Goswami published his translations of some of the Bihu songs, one of the most popular genres of Assamese folk songs under the title *Bihu Songs of Assam*. The next such venture was *Modern Assamese Poetry*, an anthology of poems in English translations of twenty-six Assamese poets published by Hem Barua in 1960. These were followed by quite a good number of translated works of high standard such as *Ancient Gongs* (1985), an anthology of Hiren Bhattacharya’s poems translated by Pradip Acharya, *Where Seas Meet* (1993), a collection of some of the lyrics of the maestro Bhupen Hazarika, or *Selected Poems of Nilamani Phukan* by Krishna Dulal Barua to name a few. Krishna Dulal Barua has received the Katha Award for translation in 2005.

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

There are translations also of the folk songs of some of the tribes of Northeast India like the Hmars, Ao-Nagas, Zos, Darlongs Apatanis, Noktes or the indigenous people of Tripura speaking Kokborak. A proper documentation and publicity would
draw a wide readership to these literary works and they would surely add a new dimension to the body of Indian Writing in English enlarging its existing domain. It is a worth-mentioning point here that although the works of some of the poets from this region have been included in the Post-Graduate English syllabus in some Indian universities like Nagaland University, NEHU, Delhi University, or IGNOU, it cannot be said even than, that these writers are receiving the critical attention they genuinely deserve.

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

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

I’ve known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

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

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

The river was the green and white vein of own lives

linking new terrain,

in a lust for land brother and brother

claiming the sunrise and the sunset,

in a dispute settled by the rocks

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

She again speaks of the river:

The river of dreams

penance and pilgrimage,

linking life’s designs ....
will your remember
the golden chain
that linked us
in a dream?  (ibidem 65)

Or,

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

Thus ‘river’ is a recurring image in Dai’s poetry.

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

The yellow mustard is a field of gold.

The slanting sun promises to return

tilting the day like a temptation….

Then ask the fences of love

About this enigma. (ibidem 56)

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

I thought you loved me.

How sad it is,

this spring sky,

the caresses of

mist and vapour

Why do wild birds cry? (ibidem 54).

Dai’s poetry can be read also with an ecofeminist perspective. In many of her poems and in her prose writings too, she draws sharp parallels between women and the external nature. It is felt that while speaking of the wretched condition of women she tries to speak about the degraded nature. Her concerns for the degeneration in ecology can be sensed from such treatments in her writing. In the following lines from
her poem “The Sorrow of Women” she talks about the marginalized women voice which is silenced and remains unheard by the patriarchal society:

My love, what shall I do?

I am thinking how I may lose you
to war, and big issues
more important than me.

… … … … … …

and they are talking about escape,
about liberty, men and guns,
ah! The urgency for survival.

But what will they do
not knowing the sorrow of women.

(Dai 2009: 90-91)

The narrative voice here can also be identified with the voice of nature. Men are at arms with each other for their own ‘survival’. This is essentially an anthropocentric, or androcentric to be precise, view that has been very much functional in widening the gap between the human world and the world of nature. Human beings are trying to decide the fate of the earth without paying any attention to what nature has to say. This attitude of the human world has been greatly responsible for the present ecological crisis. Dai, like most of the contemporary writers from Northeast India seems to address this issue through her writing.
Traditional values and recent ecological principles like Spiritual Ecology or Creation Spirituality teach us for harmonious co-existence with the world of nature. Traditional tribal societies have been living with nature with a sense of awe and wonder mystifying its overall entity. The following lines from a poem by Dai are reflective of this spirit and have an ecomystical perspective:

Without speech

we practiced a craft,

eaving imprints on sky walla

coding the trailing mist,

in silent messages

across the vast landscape (ibidem 13)

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

My brother, Oh! My brother!

Have mercy for our destiny. (ibidem 51)
This may well be treated as an appeal for mercy to the animal world on behalf of
human race for the injustice done to them by human civilization having an
anthropocentric world view. The use of this myth to express an ecological concern is
also seen in Yumlam Tana (1976- ), another important poet from Arunachal Pradesh.
In Tana’s poem entitled “The men and the Tiger” this tribal myth is again comes to

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

I know, from the faces that I meet

in these lives that have crumbled,

that the past lives in the eyes

that the jungle shows, sometimes….

The mountain knows

how we pressed our hearts against its earth.

We placed the shadows where they are,

in the leisure of dreams
the sky wind knows

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

This sentiment is further reiterated in these lines:

We left the tall trees standing.

We left the children playing.

We left the women talking

and men were predicting

good harvests or bad,

that winged summer we left,

racing with the leopards of morning.  (ibidem 22)

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

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

Which is not my language

You see, I am a Nyishi

A tribal claiming to be a man.

I am all humanity

With no geographical boundary

No social restrictions, no biological limitations

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

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

The blind waters all over

The darkness hides such mysteries

That even the colours of day

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

There has been a myth among different tribal communities, including the Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh that tigers and human beings are brothers. Although these two brothers have developed physical features different from each other, they are potentially same and united with one another. This myth is the manifestation of the philosophy, which in recent terminology, is known as Spiritual Ecology or Creation Spirituality. It inspires us to feel oneness with each and every object of creation. This sense of oneness would inspire the human world to honour the sacred in
creation. This philosophy considers the human soul as a part of the *anima mundi*, the soul of the world. It advocates the restoration of the age-old values of honouring the ecosystem so that instead of domination of nature by human beings both of them co-exist peacefully and with perfect harmony. The aforesaid Nyishi myth manifests this spirit, and also signifies the traditional attitude of the people of Arunachal Pradesh in particular, and Northeast India, in general, towards nature as well as their values and ideals of a peaceful coexistence with the world of nature. Tana, as a poet who is deeply rooted to his native tradition and culture, explores this myth in one of his poems and seems to re-invent a contemporary meaning in it. It shows his ecological concern as a writer. This re-creation of a world of his own exploring traditional myths and legends is also suggestive of his conscious use of ecology as a tool for obtaining a space for himself — a distinctive feature of contemporary writing from Northeast India. In that poem Tana, while exploring the myth also presents a picture of the ecology of his native land:

My brother, my mother nestled so fondly on her bosom

Singing lullabies in the night and

When away to the *jhum* fields in the mountains

We played various games around the house.

He was my playmate. He was my nurse.

And I was his soulmate in a world

Where my young mind could stretch

The length and breadth of imagination….
The Tsangpo flowing through the Dibang valley
And the plains of India
And Bangladesh
At last in the ocean finds the solace of brotherhood. (ibidem 14-15)

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

Nature is a major subject-matter of these poets. Yet a concern for ecology is rare in their works in comparison to the poets of the other states of the Northeast. (Das, N. 2004:8). But a mystical tone is heard in the works of some of these poets.
Bhupati Das is found to be one of such poets. In his first collection of poems *may I*, he deals with nature, its mysteries and the problems of human existence:

the lonely road

I walk it

alone

counting the dead leaves

falling

vibrations

of my thoughts

ripple thro’ them

and

make the dead leaves

alive

(Das 1998 : unpaginated)

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

she died

with it

my world
died

and

i stopped living. (ibidem)

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

at the lost horizon

the moon was dying

in the arms of the elusive god

the blood-red sun

came out afresh

ambushing the night

and the pregnant dream

undelivered

she cried out

god

why are you silent. (Das 2004 : unpaginated)

Poetry is English from Manipur have been enriched by the works of the poets like Rabin S. Ngangom, R.K. Madhubir, R.K. Bhubonsana, Kunjarani Longjam Chanu, Yumlembam Ibomcha, Thangjam Ibopishak, Raghu Leishangthem, Memchoubi, Saratchand Thiym, Ilabanta Yumnam etc. Of all of them Robin S.
Ngangom, the Shillong-based Manipuri poet can be said to be the most celebrated one. Robin’s poetry, like many of his fellow poets from the state is a kind of a nostalgic search for roots. There is a quest for identity through native tradition and culture. Tribal folklores and traditions have been explored through his poetry for asserting an identity that can be claimed as his own. Robin is also concerned of the problem of insurgency in the northeast in general, which, to a large extent, is responsible for the erosion of human values as well as degradation of the environment:

I hear a wicked war is now waged
on our soil, and gory bodies
dragged unceremoniously
through our rice fields….

I hear that freedom comes there, only
if escorted by army men

(Ngongom 1988: 10-11)

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

You, woman from southeastern hills,
cloud-covered mystery, gliding on rain,
deep drink of rice wine with eyes closed,
child of the dancing bamboo, unction

of ginger on the wagging tongue.

Your voice is soft because mountain streams

taught your heart. (Ngangom 2006:18)

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

How would they survive

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

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

Sister, I won’t allow you to go

Every road is reverberating

With the deafening utterance of boots.

Hide inside the house,sister

Don’t you go at all. (Thiyam 2003:104)
Since time immemorial human beings have been sharing a cordial relationship with nature. Their life has been in a close proximity with nature. The poet from Manipur celebrates the ecology of the land. A Manipuri poet Thangjam Ibopishak explores through the ecology of Manipur in his poem “Manipur, Why Shouldn’t I Love Your Hills, Marshes, Rivers, Fields, Open Spaces”:

Manipur, I love your hills, marshes, rivers,

Greenfields, meadows, blues sky.

Why shouldn’t I love them?

I never had a quarrel with them,

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

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

Loktak Project wastes paddy fields, fishes

Submerges by water

Ruins people

Deprives people of homes

Denies people of working space

Gets on one’s nerves. (Bhubonsana 2003:75)
A mystical sense regarding nature as well as a sense of belonging to it is also pervading in their poetry:

Hill, you and I have seen

only upheaval since our birth.

When I was torn from the universal womb

I echoed your silent cry.

(Nangom 1994:39)

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

planned a visit to the city

bamboos sprang up from pavements

like a welcoming committee….

Only the bamboos watched in silence

too used to the antics of men.

(Nongkynrih 2003:159)

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

In Mawsyanram the cloud capped hills

Spiralled into a questioning loneliness
Mawsyanam truly was a wonderous sight;

(Guha 2003 :125)

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

How could the sweat and tears of my forefathers escape these hills to form silent rivers on the plains of the Surma?

(Kharmawphlang 2003:136)

The poets have been exploring through the folk-tales, myths and legends of the Khasis, the indigenous people of Meghalaya. These myths and legends show that nature has traditionally been an integral part of culture of this tribal community. It also reflects their age-old ecological consciousness conceptualizing what presently known as Deep Ecology. In Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih’s poetry there seems to have a conscious use of these tribal myths and legends that reflects his ecological concern as well as becomes a means of asserting an identity. Nongkynrih’s poem “Ren” is based on a Khasi folk story about a fisherman called Ren who is said to have fallen in love with a river nymph, and eventually, to have followed her into the river. And thus
they are united both physically and spiritually. This folk tale celebrates the nature-human relationship that bears an ecomystical sense in it. That nature is a living entity with a deeply mystical aspect can be marked in the following lines of “Lucia”, a poem by Almond D Syiem:

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

    (Syiem 2003:173)

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

    Draped in the hill’s Sunday attire,
    you have seen summers come and go
and still cling to mother earth’s womb,

obscure, like the famed tiwdohmaw of the hills.

Today, a cacophony of voices

rouse you every morning---

from the love–calls of the ancient thrush

to be happy laughter of children,

newly arrived,

playing cricket on a makeshift ground. (Lyngdoh 2003:146)

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

The barren hills

that bear the pockmarks

of miners and a foolish people

that burn and cut at will,

looks as unremarkable

as half-naked little brats. (Nongkynrih 1992:24).

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

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

The impact of such practices will be the same in the entire Northeastern region of India. Because of its rich natural ‘resources’ India’s Northeast has been the target of the colonial/neo-colonial gaze that has been adversely affected the ecology of the region. Recent technological developments have accelerated the pace of degeneration in the ecosystem of the region. Contemporary writing from the region has a strong voice of protest against such ecocides and propagates an ecosophy that advocates ecological preservation sticking to the native traditional values. This is what makes the writing of these postcolonial ecological writers from Northeast India canonical.
This exploitation of nature is also the exploitation of women since these poets celebrate nature in the image of the mother. Ecofeministic ideals find expression in their poetry where nature and women become synonymous. Desmond L Kharmawplang’s poem “Pictures” reflects this spirit:

Lightning is happily licking the clouds,
and a light drizzle falls.

Your hair is wet, damp clothes
delicately sculpt your body. (Kharmawphlang 2003:135)

Almond D Syiem’s “On top of a Hill” also echoes this ecofeministic sentiment:

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

Esther Syiem, another notable poet of Meghalaya explores through a Khasi legend in order to present the nature- women relationship. According to the legend, the father of a beautiful girl organized a race for all her suitors who were to run up the hills, and the winner would marry her. The legend has a tragic end where the boy
favoured by the girl, even after winning the race, could not marry her as he died owing to sudden exertion at the moment of victory. The girl decided to remain on the hill to mourn his death and her fate forever. In the said poem the girl speaks to her father:

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

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

   The sons became men, royal in stature
   Having wisdom gifted by the gods
   They came to rule the misty hills;
   To dwell in pinewood mansions
   Where carpets of clouds
   And cloaks of rain
   Conserve the forests of the Khasi hills. 
   (Warjri 2003: 190).
These poetic expressions are also reflective of the varied aspects of the ecology of the land.

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

For sale

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

our precious minerals, medicinal herbs, rare orchids,

and trees and fields and waters,….

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

our cumbersome anachronistic tribal roots…..

our pride, values, work culture,

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

It is seen in the works of the writers from Northeast India that there is a continuous urge of going back to the native tradition in search of roots. These writers strongly advocate preservation of their own culture and tradition, which they seem to believe as a powerful way of asserting their own identity amidst cultural and political hegemony. In doing so, they also emphasize on preservation of ecology, as ecology of
their region and their self-identity seem to be synonymous in their perception. The above lines from Lyngdoh’s poem strongly exemplify this particular consciousness of the writers from Northeast India. This certainly opens up new avenues of studying this body of postcolonial ecological writing from Northeast India.

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

A Khasi is a man, who once a year,

sport a *muga-mulberry* turban,

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

*at weiking or pomblang*

who once a year, speaks of these great festivals

and the teaching of his great ancestors.

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

(Nongkynrih 2004:29)
Mizoram has a rich tradition of oral literature. Folk songs sung in the hunting ground, in the battlefield, during harvesting festivals, or dirges sung at the loss of near and dear ones constitute a rich part in the corpus of Mizo literature. Love, patriotism, nature, revolution are some of the recurring themes of these songs. Some of these songs, such as the songs of Laltheri, has powerful social message that redefines the relationship between the village chiefs and their subjects. (Zama 2011: 207-208). Such a rich tradition of oral literature is naturally a constant source of inspiration for the present generation of poets from Mizoram.

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

Thin-skinned October
With its cold religious air
Eyes of coal
Veins of ice
And the dark – enfolded insects
Go to sleep insects
Go to sleep.
O Allah she thinks of Jesu
When out of the honeycomb of right
Church drums busily advertise
The high percentage of faith (Zote 2003:204)

An ecomystical tone is heard also in the poems of Ramdinthari:
For us the fogged lights of green leaves
and the thick lamp-post of crushed boulders
are antipodes where we build our huts;
(Ramdinthari 2003:197)

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

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

Sitting by the piano,

Lost in the symphony of timeless Time.

The soft breeze caresses your hair

While you play for no audience

But the velvet blackness of night.

I become the keys your fingers awaken,

I am the rain that dances with life.

(Chhangte 2011: 73)

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

Raising my voice in my own way,

To speak out about wretched life of women,

I’ll always wonder at the ultimate goal,
Of perceiving our Heavenly King face to face.

Bowed down and suffering … (Biakliana 2011: 78)

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

Let us rise up with justice,

Let us act together jointly, (ibidem 79)

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

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

Demystify me.

I would rather be woman

Than shadow or idol.

Flesh and blood

With human failings,

And also human failings. (Chhangte 2011: 75)
This is a very important issue that these lines try to address. It also leads to a recent critical stance in the field of ecocriticism. According to feminist argument, ‘womanhood’ is a social construct and the role of women is determined by patriarchy. Radical ecofeminism believes that a woman is either worshipped as a mother who creates and sustains life, or mystified as a wonderful ‘object’ that satisfies the sexual desire of men. Janet Biehl, a Social ecofeminist envisages a society “in which all aspects of human nature — including sexuality and the passions as well as rationality — are freed”. (Biehl 1988: 7). Cherrie’s poem “Plea” seems to suggest a dismantling of such patriarchal archetypes.

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

Ecology of their native land forms a central theme of their poetry. They celebrate the hills, mountains, rivers and forests of their land and are greatly
concerned of the destruction of these, which has degraded the ecology. This ecological concern is seen in all of these poets:

The rivers are running red,

The hillsides are bare

And the seasons

Have lost their magic. (Ao 1995:49)

Monalisa Changkija also shows this ecological concern:

Yes, I’ve seen own rice fields

turn into factories and hills

reduced to barren brown

our rivers have dried

and our once sparkling fish

lie dead on sandy banks. (Changkija 2003:216)

Nature and Women become synonymous in many occasions in their poetry. Nature is tortured and exploited like a woman tortured and exploited by the patriarchal society. Such ecofeministic treatments add a powerful dimension to the
works of these poets. In one of her poems entitled “Lament for Earth” in her collection *Songs That Tell*, Temsula Ao presents the Earth as a woman who is raped and has a bleak future ahead:

No life stirs in her belly now

The bomb

And the bleaching powder

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

These lines echo the philosophy of Cultural ecofeminism. Cultural ecofeminism is a response to the exploitation, domination and devaluation of women as well as nature by the patriarchal society. It believes technological development, which is essentially masculine, is responsible in degrading and ruthlessly exploiting the ‘feminine’ nature. The above lines can very well be interpreted as referential to woman and also to nature in a broader sense. It should be kept in mind that ‘bomb’ or ‘bleaching powder’ that mars the possibilities of a ‘tomorrow’ are great threats to the environment, and are the by-products of so-called technological development. Such concerns for ecology using the principles of recent ecocritical theories are predominantly seen in the works of the contemporary writers from Northeast India. This is what seems to make their writing canonical.
These poets are ecomystics in many occasions. They believe in a peaceful co-existence with nature. It has been traditionally believed that the mountains are the ancestors of the Naga people. In a poem entitled “On Puliebadze” Nini Vinguriau Lungalang expresses this traditional belief and emphasizes on living ecologically. Such sentiments reflect the ecomystical world of these poets:

Stern sentinel trees silently guard

The secret pulse that throb beneath the skirts

Of ancient ancestress Puliebadze.

Walk with care: for here is holy ground,

Let not your footfall sound further

Thaw the crisping crush of twig or leaf!

Let then the wisps of mist that stroke

The flanks of old Puliebadze. (Lungalang 1994:46)

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

I haven’t materialized these lines

by the sleight of my hand.

Reclaiming them from sliding land
I’ve lifted them from
the forests, the lowlands,
the grain fields, the cliffs.

(Bhandari 2003:72)

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

What could be more explosive:

The city’s lonely man

Or

the bomber’s lonely briefcase abandoned at some junction?

Memory’s tree, lush branches

aden with fruits

where are the roots? (ibidem 75)

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

Bhandari’s poetry portrays the landscape of Sikkim. This portrayal of the natural landscape becomes instrumental in providing an impression of the ecology.
The following snapshot from “Ganktok, January, Night”, a poem by Bhandari, is suggestive of the ecology of the region:

Between snow-capped trees,

a smooth black road hurries down.

… … … … … … … …

Clouds conspire with undemocratic rains
to spoil the harvest.

… … … … … … … …

All the beauty of the village
lies in the paddy hay stacks.

(Bhandari 2009: 29)

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

Across the wind-filled pass of Nathu

In the valley of the orange country

Lives the mother of my child-to-be.

Tell these tidings of a rootless trader.

Tell her I’ll come speeding on my Yarcund mare
If a year-end business should prove fair.

Oh father of my child, come soon!

Today your son has uttered your name.

You left on the eve of the last peach blossom

And now their fallen hues collect about my bamboo gate.

… … … … … … … … …

Maybe when you return you can take me along too.

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

(Ladakhi 2009: 158-159)

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

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

This environment,

This resentment,

This huge stomach,

This pain,

In the pollution-filled milieu,
To repeat the same story,

Is growing in my womb,

This foetus again.

(Rai 2009: 239)

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

Villages and towns were deserted

By the terror and disturbances,

Every window was closed

In the main road of the street.

Openly, he, as a hungry lion

Had torn my body into pieces.

(ibidem 238)

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

According to Judith Ress, the renowned ecofeminist, the basic premise of Cultural ecofeminism is the belief that women are morally superior to men. They have superior values like nurturance, compassion, kindness, peacemaking etc. Therefore, it is mainly women who can build a better society with their superior values. This principle of Cultural ecofeminism can be marked in the character of the girl in
Sudha’s aforesaid poem. She seems to have compassion and fellow-feeling even for the wife and the children of the very man who rapes her:

The night I was raped,

Yes, that night,

His wife, baby in her arms, was

Crying speechlessly.

(ibidem 238)

In the poem the raped girl asks herself a question:

‘Instead of men

Why animals as pets?’

(ibidem (239)

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

Contemporary poets in English from Tripura have been greatly contributed to the large body of writing in English from India’s Northeast. Bhaskar Roy Barman (1950- ), Niranjan Chakma (1951- ), Jogamaya Chakma (1960 - ), Kalyanbrata Chakraborti (1940- ), Krittibas Chakraborty, Sefali Debarma (1957- ), Chandra
Kanta Murasingh (1957-), Pijush Routh, Gombhini Sorokhaibam (1971-) are the poets presently writing from Tripura. They too talk about ecology, myth and legends of their land. The ecology of the land comes to life in the following lines from Krittibas Chakraborty’s poem entitled “Tripura”:

One day they left beyond the dawn towards the woods

The green corn of jhum and

Terrain flowers greeted them

They started living in the silent hills

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

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

A tree’s also just the same-

Will take birth, grow, spring leaves, spread branches

will bear flowers, will hang fruits….

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

So I, where no love is bred in hearts,

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

( Sorokhaibam 2003: 262)
These lines can be read also from an ecofeministic standpoint. The silencing of the tree as well as of the girl is suggestive of the silencing both of nature and women. Such ecofeministic ideals can be seen also in such expressions like:

A girl from the hills, Manirung Reang, is now naked,

Hanging from the top most branch of a tree.

The ferocity

Of the civilized interprets the spell of gloom and silence,

In dense Ampura forests, only the wind whispers.

(Chakraborti 2003:243)

The plight of the Chakma refugees finds poetic expression in the poetry of Niranjan Chakma and Jogamaya Chakma, the two representative Chakma poets from Tripura. Their poetry echoes the subaltern marginalized voice of pain and suffering. In order to appreciate their poetry it is necessary to have an understanding of the Chakma ethnic crisis and the very situation the Chakma people find themselves in. These displaced people, who are in a continuous search of a ‘home’ of their own, constitute the marginalized, subaltern voice. They have been raising their voices for a ‘space’ in the national discourse. The predicament of these people can be better understood from the following observation made by Nigamananda Das:
The Chakmas and their fellow tribespeople have been made homeless by the selfish migrants from the plains. They have been made refugees in their own land. The intruders have snatched away their rights, land and livelihood and have made them beggars in the midst of plenty inherited by them. Their refugee state of life and all sufferings have made them lament of their fate … (Das 2012: 19).

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

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

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

(Chakma 2009: 77)
Insurgency and counter-insurgency operations have been ravaging the entire Northeast region politically, economically, socially, culturally, and even ecologically. Niranjan Chakma juxtaposes the serenity of the natural landscape of the region and the acts of violence on it. The following lines from one of his poems entitled “When Debate Has No Room” show how the region, its environment, and the life and living of its people have been disturbed by violent activities:

Grass leaves here

clad in pungency of gunpowder;

Lies the spiritless body of a gang raped

hill woman on the lobby of a Jhum Tong.

And of course,

The frantic movements of

some aberrant youths, up for autonomy

Completely changes the meaning of …

Hither and thither

Dirty tricks of gunpowder traders everywhere.

Terror grips you often,

Conscience takes the other way then.

(Chakma 2003: 239).
Niranjan’s poetic self seems to ponder over the the plight of his native people and it laments for their predicament. He sings for these people who have either been driven out of their land or have become refugees in their homeland. In the poem “The Words will be Uttered Boldly”, he says:

Because,

They are displaced

From their homeland

By the intruders,

Their dew-wet

Courtyard inundated

With tears,

Their survival’s tide

Has been seized by

The midnight lamentation.

(Chakma 2003:240)

The impact of political or social violence on the environment and ecological degeneration due to this seem to be of serious concern for Jogamaya Chakma, another
notable Chakma poet from Tripura. She portrays a contemporary picture of Northeast India in one of her poems entitled “The War Dress”:

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

In tree after tree, in creeper after creeper

In root after root

There are diseases,

Of sabotage and pangs of uprooting.

(Chakma 2009: 74)

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

Women are valuable goods in the market

Women’s relation with men

Are the most bought and sold

The market rates of the day are in the news

When food comes in dressed-up dishes
The market hots up

All the relations of human beings are then

Put up for auction — yes

Even the poems and their bodies.

(Chakma 2009: 75)

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

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


