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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter three deals with plays. The states of Northeast India have plays written in their vernacular languages. Some of these states have rich tradition of theatre that dates back to centuries. But a few representative work of some of the
Manipuri and Assamese playwrights have been translated into English. This chapter tries to explore the ecological and ecomystical world in select plays by Manipuri and Assamese playwrights.

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

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

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

It is seen from this study that these writers seem to use ecology, in a conscious way, as a tool for acquiring an identity — an identity which is unique, legitimate and a powerful one. It is felt that the unique ecology of the region has been pivotal in shaping an aesthetic sensibility in these writers. Contemporary writing in English from India’s Northeast present before us a myriad, mesmerizing world of nature, and, at the same time, echo a conscious voice of resistance as well as assertion. It negotiates varied issues simultaneously — it fights against the stereotypical construct
‘Northeast’, asserts an identity, and tries to create a ‘space’ and a ‘place’ for itself amidst political and cultural hegemony. This study shows that the ecology of the region is one of their strongest weapons for all such negotiations. Their writing presents a critique of the colonial perspective of, and the colonial attitude towards, the environment. It is also a literature of resistance against what can be termed as neo-colonialism. Because of this consciousness of the ecological degradation and efforts of propagating ecological preservation in writing, this body of ecological writing can very well be said canonical.

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

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

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